ANDREA VESTRUCCI

Theology as Freedom

Dogmatik in der Moderne

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Mohr Siebeck

Dogmatik in der Moderne

Edited by

Christian Danz, Jörg Dierken, Hans-Peter Großhans, and Friederike Nüssel

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Theology as Freedom

On Martin Luther's "De servo arbitrio"

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The topic of this book has deep roots in my life. I am not sure whether time is an indicator of the right to speak about a topic,[1] but certainly it is the evidence of an abiding and consummate passion.

This passion began when, as high school student, I first came into contact with the *querelle* between Erasmus and Luther, and with the problem of relating human freedom to divine freedom. Many years later, this interest flourished in my second doctoral dissertation in systematic theology, defended last year at the University of Geneva. Finally, this same passion has come to full fruition in this book, a complete rewriting of that dissertation.

My positions and ideas benefited considerably from criticism and advice from Hans-Christoph Askani, both during and after the dissertation. I matured in ways I could only hope for, thanks to the attentive freedom he granted me. My scientific debt to him is incalculable.

It is a true pleasure for me to express my profound gratitude to the Academic Society of Geneva, and in particular to its President, Patrizia Lombardo.

I am also particularly grateful to Günter Bader, Patrice Canivez and Ghislain Waterlot for their essential observations and comments during the defense.

This book benefited from numerous scientific exchanges and collaborations during the last five years. Forgetting too many, I would like to thank Andrew Benjamin, Davide Bigalli, Christophe Chalamet, Frédéric Chavel, Andreas Dettwiler, Michel Grandjean, Van Harvey, Ágnes Heller, Peter Murphy, Manfredo de Oliveira, Renato Pettoello, Anselm Ramelow, David Roberts, Mahendra Roopa, and Jonathan Sheehan. I am the only addressee for any criticism.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mohr Siebeck, and in particular to Katharina Gutekunst, for their patient and professional assistance.

Alessio Pirastu has helped and supported me far more than I deserve.

In memoriam Joana Borges Mesquita, Yves Clerget, and Angela Cortelezzi.

Palo Alto, California, August 2018   Andrea Vestrucci

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[1] See Mann, "Joseph Novels": 9. Discussing his *Joseph-Roman*, Thomas Mann states that his interest in Egyptian mythology began in elementary school.

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Note on Citations

In this book, modern sources are always referenced by their abbreviated titles. The following cases might call for a more detailed explaination.

For the works by Martin Luther, I indicate only the volume of the Weimarer Ausgabe (WA) followed by the page and line numbers. If more than one work appears in the same volume, I differentiate each work with a letter after the number of the volume, according to the order of appearance of each work in the volume. For instance, Luther's *erste Bearbeitung* of the *sieben Bußpsalmen* is indicated as WA 1a, the *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* is indicated as WA 1b, and the *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute* is indicated as WA 1c. The bibliography at the end of the book displays each of Luther's referenced works along with its respective WA volume.

Desiderius Erasmus's *De libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio* is abbreviated as *Diatribē*.

Finally, I refer to the three *Critiques* by Immanuel Kant as *KrV*, *KpV*, and *KU*, respectively.

Introduction

Theology *is* freedom.

This bold statement results from analyzing one of the most important and controversial works of Christian theology: Martin Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. In this book, I argue that *De servo arbitrio* manifests, and evidences, the very freedom distinctive of theological discourse.

Of what does this freedom of theology or *as* theology consist? And how is this relationship between freedom and *De servo arbitrio* possible?

Let us begin again.

1. A First Look

Freedom is one of theology's subjects. Theology speaks about divine freedom, human freedom, and their interrelation. Theological anthropology, moral theology, soteriology, theodicy – all of these are examples of theological discourses dealing with the issue of freedom.

Theology might speak about freedom in ways that are unconventional or unexpected, or even in ways that are seemingly absurd. This is how Erasmus of Rotterdam, in his *De libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio* (1524), judges the position that Martin Luther defends in his *Assertio* (1520): Luther's negation of the theological relevance of *liberum arbitrium*[1] is absurd.

Luther's reply, *De servo arbitrio* (1525), does not retract this "absurd" position. Rather, Luther's work engages the legitimacy of Erasmus's charge of absurdity.

My reflection focuses on the fact that a judgment of absurdity is rejected. Rejecting a judgment of absurdity means stating that the principles or conditions of the distinction between absurdity and meaningfulness are inadequate. Where these conditions should see meaning, they see only absurdity. Thus, *De servo arbitrio* questions the validity of the conditions for the formulation of

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[1] In this book I leave this term in its Latin version. Translating it (for instance, as "free will," or "free choice"; see also *infra*, Ch. 1 note 11) would mean losing the immediate and intuitive semantic connection to its conceptual twin, the "*servum arbitrium*" (usually translated as "bondage of the will"). As I will clarify shortly, this connection between the two concepts is of fundamental importance.

meaningful propositions about freedom. When they are applied to theology, these conditions are *limited*.

As we will see, this questioning of the conditions' validity pertains *only* to theology. For this reason, theology *itself* is freedom. Theology challenges what is deemed to be unquestionable, being assumed as the ground or foundation of every possible questioning. In sum, theology is the freedom *of language* to reconsider language's logical *forms*.[2] *De servo arbitrio* applies this situation – this formal freedom – to propositions about freedom.

This is my point: *De servo arbitrio* does not merely present a concept of freedom opposed to the one defended by Erasmus. Rather, Luther's work operates upon the forms of meaningful conceptualizations of freedom[3] – forms that Erasmus assumes (and defends) as axiomatically valid. *De servo arbitrio* is a very particular *meta*-discourse: usually, a meta-discourse presents the methodological foundations of a set of propositions (such as the set of propositions on freedom); instead of doing this, Luther's work presents the theological *limitation* of such foundations. In this way, *De servo arbitrio* helps to demarcate the specific place of theology among the other expressions of human intelligence.

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[2] To understand my use of the term "form," consider the following definition: "*Materie* ist das datum, was gegeben ist […]. Die *Form* aber, wie diese data gesetzt sind, die Art, wie das Mannigfaltige in Verbindung steht" (Kant, *Vorlesungen*: Ak XXVIII 575). I assume this or that word (for instance, "*liberum*" and "*arbitrium*" or, in general, "freedom" and "*x*") to be the "matter," and the logical rules connecting words in a meaningful way (in our case, in the concept "*liberum arbitrium*", or "freedom = *x*") to be the "form." Therefore, a form is the condition of the meaning of a concept. I will shortly outline three formal languages (or logics) of freedom the validity of which *De servo arbitrio* questions.

[3] By "operating upon" the forms or logics of conceptualization I mean handling, reshaping, reworking, modifying these forms. *De servo arbitrio* reshapes (or modifies) the forms of conceptualization of freedom. This modification is intrinsic to the questioning of these forms' validity. To question the validity of a form means that the form is object of investigation. This investigation happens on a level that includes the form: this level is called "meta"; for instance, a language can be object of a *meta*language, or a logic can be object of a *meta*logical investigation. Given that the form is object of such "meta" investigation, this form is no longer the *condition* of both the investigation and the meaning resulting from this investigation. More precisely, the form under investigation is no longer the ultimate foundation of this meaning: it is *object* of (re)foundation. From this it follows that to question the validity of a form corresponds to change its logical status, thus, to modify this form – to *operate* upon it. As I will analyze in the book, this operation upon the forms assumes a peculiar shape in theology (at least in the theology of *De servo arbitrio*): it corresponds to the use of a form in a way that expresses this form's limitation; in particular see *infra*, Ch. 2 sections 6 and 9.

2. Absurdity and Paradox

My analysis begins with a trivial observation: *De servo arbitrio* responds to Erasmus's *Diatribē*. This means that *De servo arbitrio* does not merely repeat that *liberum arbitrium* does not exist: this was already done by Luther five years earlier, and it was already rejected by Erasmus as absurd. Therefore, Luther's work does not simply present a way of thinking about freedom that is opposed to the way that Erasmus defends (*liberum arbitrium*); rather, it must now respond to Erasmus's accusation of absurdity.

Luther's response cannot simply present a counter-criticism of absurdity against Erasmus, because thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium* indeed makes sense. Were this not so, then no charge of absurdity could have been formulated against Luther's negation of *liberum arbitrium*.

Thus, the reply that *De servo arbitrio* presents to Erasmus's criticism is more refined. It argues that thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium* makes sense *except* in case we aim to consider freedom theologically; it applies to all discourses except theological discourse.

This distinctiveness of theology concerns the fact that theology is the language that deals with divine revelation. As I will analyze, *De servo arbitrio* Luther warns against formulating a theological proposition on the basis of a condition assumed as axiomatically valid means subordinating divine revelation under this condition, thus lowering revelation to human discourse. It follows that a coherent theology questions the axiomatic validity of all conditions.

Thus, for Luther, Erasmus's position is not absurd, but theologically wrong, because it measures divine revelation with conditions of meaning assumed as unquestionably valid – such as the formal language (or logic) founding the meaning of *liberum arbitrium*.[4]

This validity questioning is different from invalidating a single condition and replacing it with another one, usually one considered more fitting or more effective than the previous one. Rather, the validity of every condition is at stake here. In other words, *De servo arbitrio* focuses not on *which* form of conceptualizing freedom shall be used, but on *how* this form must be used, how a form is assumed coherently with the theological presuppositions.

Given that this applies to all conditions, theological propositions on freedom are based on the same "old" conditions, *but* assumed in the theological way: as

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[4] *De servo arbitrio* can be considered an occasional polemic writing (see Schwarzwäller, *Theologia crucis*: 39–40; Kolb, *Bound Choice*: 16–17), as many other treatises by Luther (see Tranvik, "Works": 603). Yet the relevance (and complexity) of *De servo arbitrio* concerns its systematic contribution (see Herms, "Gewißheit": 50). As I will analyze, this contribution is the introduction of a disruptive *quaestio juris* in theology. In other words, *De servo arbitrio* attacks indeed Erasmus's position; however, what matters is to understand the *scope* of this attack. The theological fallacy that *De servo arbitrio* criticizes does not refer to the concepts (of freedom), but to the validity of these concepts' conditions.

non-axiomatically valid. Consequently, these theological propositions are operations upon their *own* conditions. In sum, *De servo arbitrio* presents modifications of the conditions of meaningfulness from *within* these conditions.

This is evident from the title of Luther's work. The concept of *servum arbitrium* is built on the concept of *liberum arbitrium*. In *servum arbitrium*, the noun "*arbitrium*" is qualified by the opposite of the adjective "*liberum*." The result is an oxymoron, a sort of mockery of *liberum arbitrium*. Thus, *servum arbitrium* is not simply a concept of freedom opposed to the concept of *liberum arbitrium*, because the formulation of *servum arbitrium* is based on the conditions of formulation of *liberum arbitrium*.[5] Thus, it is not that there are two different conditions for the two concepts; rather, the same condition is assumed in two opposing ways: as axiomatically valid (concept of *liberum arbitrium*) and as object of operation (concept of *servum arbitrium*).

This is a situation of self-reference: a condition of meaning is used to formulate its own theological limitation. Therefore, Luther "solves" the problem of how to deal theologically with the foundations of thinking by *creating* this very problem. Thinking theologically means questioning the foundations of this thinking; it means forcing the forms of this thinking to modify themselves. The outcome can only be a *paradox* – but, as I will clarify, a peculiar paradox, a paradox that is theological, and not simply logical.

This book analyzes the paradoxical modifications of the forms of conceptualizing freedom in *De servo arbitrio*. By doing so, it confirms that *De servo arbitrio* indeed posits more than the "absurdity" of the *Assertio*. Luther's work maps out what happens to the logics that found a non-absurd proposition (and the corresponding charge of absurdity) when they are subjected to the theological "center of gravity": divine revelation. *De servo arbitrio* expresses the *freedom* of these logics to question their own postulates.

3. From a Conceptual to a Formal Approach

It follows that the distinction between Erasmus's position and Luther's position is much more complex than simple opposition of two concepts of freedom.

The two theologians do not understand each other and their collision is left unresolved because their positions do not lie on the same level. Erasmus's position lies on the conceptual level and concerns the conceptualization of freedom, while Luther's position lies on the formal level and relates to the conditions of the conceptualization of freedom. Erasmus overlooks the *quaestio juris*; he does not address the method of conceptualizing freedom. Luther's reply,

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[5] This is also proven empirically. Thinking about *servum arbitrium* invariably leads to thinking about *liberum arbitrium*. But not vice-versa: we can (and do) think about *liberum arbitrium* independently from any reference to *servum arbitrium*.

on the other hand, poses and tries to answer the *quaestio juris*. The object of Luther's discourse is the *method* upon which Erasmus's position is based.[6] Consequently, it also includes the methodology of Luther's own previous position in his *Assertio*.

Thus, Luther's position lies on the *meta* level. This is why the concept of *servum arbitrium* implies the concept of *liberum arbitrium*, but not vice-versa: the concept of *servum arbitrium* is a *meta*-concept of freedom.

I would say that Luther's position includes both similarities to and departures from Cassirer's description of Goethe's scientific approach. In Cassirer's words, Goethe "hat das Problem in ein Postulat verwandelt."[7] Luther operates in the opposite way: he turns the postulate into a problem. He dares to transform what is considered unquestionable into an issue to be investigated, and thus modified, transformed from within, and turned into a paradox. This is not for intellectual *divertissement*, but because the very grasp of the relationship between human and God depends foremost on that formal questioning.

The approach discussed herein is not only based on the passage from the conceptual to the meta-conceptual; more importantly, my approach states that precisely this passage is the main contribution of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. *De servo arbitrio* does not articulate the negation of freedom; it articulates the negation of the theological legitimacy of prioritizing the logical conditions of thinking freedom over divine revelation. Nor does *De servo arbitrio* provide for the destruction of such forms. On the contrary, it establishes a specific approach to them: a *theological* one.

As such, *De servo arbitrio* does not present a method of doing theology: it presents *theology as method*. It affirms and expresses theology's task of reconsidering the validity of the formal languages that found and validate concepts and discourses (on freedom). *De servo arbitrio* is the expression of theology *as* freedom – freedom to effect such paradoxical inversion between postulate and problem.

Hence, this book is not concerned with a prescriptive discourse about how theology should think (about freedom). Rather, I am interested in the *fact* that

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[6] Luther never wrote a proper reply to Erasmus's further response, the two books of *Hyperaspistes*. The "official" reason was bad health conditions; see Kolb, *Bound Choice*: 14. I wonder whether another reason could also be the fact that Erasmus's *Hyperaspistes* I and II are founded upon the same methodology that Luther had already invalidated in *De servo arbitrio*; see *infra*, Ch. 1 section 2, in particular note 18. Luther did reply to Erasmus in a letter, which has not survived; see Kolb, *Bound Choice*: 14; see also Massing, *Fatal Discord*: 682–683. Rosin, *Reformers*: 97–102, claims that Luther's *Annotationes in Ecclesiasten* (WA 20) contain a reply to Erasmus. I add to that Luther's commentary on the Letter to the Galatians (WA 40.1); see *infra*, Ch. 2 section 3.

[7] Cassirer, *Freiheit*: 326. Cassirer continues: "Für ihn gilt es in der Erkenntnis der Welt wie in der des eigenen Ich, daß wir sie durch Betrachtung niemals, wohl aber durch Handeln erlangen können."

there is a theological position (Luther's) which poses a problem for the conditions according to which freedom makes sense. In light of this fact, I ask *why* there is a problem, and *how* this problem relates to these conditions. In sum, my aim is to understand how a paradoxical operation upon the formal languages of freedom can be carried out. This aim can only be accomplished by analyzing the relationship between the respective outlooks of Erasmus and Luther towards the validity of the conditions of meaningfulness.

Nor I am interested in establishing who is right between Luther and Erasmus. It is irrelevant to ask whether Luther is right or wrong, because the principles that Luther reshapes are methodological, therefore they are also principles of distinction between right and wrong. Therefore, the answer to the question "Who is right?" is simply a matter of arbitrary perspective *on* the principles. More precisely, asking that question would imply that it is possible for both Erasmus and Luther to satisfy the same criterion (one negatively and the other positively), but this is impossible in light of the gap between the levels of these two positions. Thus, I am interested in analyzing how these two levels are interconnected, and how the level "meta" is theologically relevant; how another way of dealing with the meaningful conceptualization of freedom is logically *possible*, and why this other way is theologically *necessary*.

The time has come to take up the same challenges engaged by Luther's *De servo arbitrio*: to access new regions of theological speculation and new understandings of the rapport between human and God by daring to challenge the validity of our logics of freedom.

4. Three Languages of Freedom

What are these formal conditions of meaningful propositions about freedom, the methodological principles that Erasmus takes for granted, and whose unquestionability Luther rejects?

Erasmus's argument postulates the validity of thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*. He reinforces this position with two *argumenta ad absurdum*: if this validity is negated, then the relevance of the norms and commandments is negated (first argument), along with the idea of human self-education (second argument). So, we have a threefold argument.

I demonstrate in this book that each part of Erasmus's argument is based on a specific formal language of freedom, a specific logic of conceptualizing freedom in a meaningful, non-absurd way. The method of Erasmus's argument is to assume one of these three logics positively, and the other two negatively (as principles of the two *argumenta ad absurdum*).

The logic of conceptualizing freedom that Erasmus positively assumes is the *modal* language of freedom. The other two logics are the *deontic* language of freedom and the *typological* language of freedom. It is upon *each* of them that

De servo arbitrio operates. These formal languages are the protagonists of the three parts of this book, one for each part, respectively.

1. *Modal Language of Freedom*. According to this language, freedom has meaning as the unconstrained actual or potential realization of a possibility; or, negatively, it is the lack of impediments for realizing a possibility. The language is *modal* because it is built upon the modal operators of possibility and necessity by way of associating freedom with possibility, so that freedom is negatively related to necessity. Necessity can be understood as physical or normative constraint. In the first case, freedom coincides with the lack of impediments to a specific motion.[8] Thanks to this language, the conditions of prison and slavery are negative: both constitute deprivations of one's freedom; and running, flying, et cetera are used as metaphors of freedom. In the second case, freedom coincides with the lack of coercion towards a specific action. All political and social freedoms are based on this.[9] On the other hand, the operator of possibility introduces the concept of "choice." Choice implies the contemporary availability of a plurality of possibilities, all potentially realizable.[10] Therefore, the modal language of freedom is the condition for conceptualizing freedom as the determination of a single *reality* out of a whole system (or world) of possibilities. In other words, this language negates determinism.

2. *Deontic Language of Freedom*. According to this language, freedom has meaning as the realization of a norm. The language is deontic because it uses the deontic operators of obligation (deontic necessity) and permission (deontic possibility). In the deontic case, and contrary to the modal case, freedom coincides with being determined normatively. Freedom is the fact that a norm is the principle of determination of the will. Thus, the "choice" of *not* being normatively determined (that is, infringing the law) deontically corresponds to a lack of freedom.[11] However, instead of opposing modal and deontic languages, it is more correct to consider them in relationship to one another: deontic language

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[8] This also includes the mechanistic conception of freedom, such as in Hobbes, *De Cive*: I–III; VIII, 2–9; IX, 9.

[9] For instance, the famous "four freedoms," freedom of speech (or of expression), freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear, have meaning according to the modal language of freedom. Also, all political struggles for the equality of minorities are claimed to be fights for the freedom of such minority by the application of this language (freedom of vote, of education, of marriage, et cetera). The same is true of movements of independence, secessionism, or autonomy when they are understood as movements for freedom (or, rather, for the freedom of the party or cluster demanding its autonomy).

[10] This does not mean that all possibilities share the same degree of attainability: it may be that one possibility can be realized more easily than another; yet, all possibilities are, to some extent, within reach, so that all of them can become reality. Thus, modal "freedom" means choosing between two or more physical options, or between the accomplishment and the infringement of a norm.

[11] Unless the infringement is carried out for the sake of another norm perceived as higher than the one broken.

operates according to the model of modal language. A norm expresses a *non-modal necessity*, because according to the norm there is only one option that can be realized: what the norm prescribes. Yet, modally speaking, this "one option" is still a possibility, since its opposite (the infringement of the norm) is also possible. Therefore, the deontic language of freedom is the condition for conceptualizing freedom as "second nature," as formulation and realization of a system of laws (deontic necessity) distinct and parallel to the system of *natural* laws (modal necessity): the normative system of laws.[12]

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[12] I think the highest expression of this second formal language of freedom is Kant's effort (in his second *Critique*) to approach the issue of freedom not in light of the existence of the good person (as he does in his *Grundlegung*: BA 1–2, Ak IV 394), but instead in light of the *fact* that there are principles of determination of the will (see *Id*., *KpV*: A 35, Ak V 19) – that is, in light of the *Faktum* of practical reason, the fact that there is another way of thinking *other* than the theoretical one (the normative way, or deontic language). This is a paradigmatic shift: instead of deducing the norm from the good, thinking the good from the norm (see *ivi*: A 110–111, Ak V 62–63). Freedom is the condition according to which this "second" use of reason exists, and it is known and understood as the determination of the will's necessity (as *causa noumenon*; see *ivi*: A 97, Ak V 55; see *infra*, Ch. 8 section 3). More precisely, freedom is the autonomy of practical reason in its transcendental activity, as *pure* practical reason, defined by the fundamental law of pure practical reason (or "categorical imperative"; see *ivi*: A 54, Ak V 30–31). For this reason, freedom is "transcendental" (see *Id*., *KrV*: A 803 B 831, Ak III 521–522; *KpV*: A 173, Ak V 96–97): it is the *ratio existendi* of the principles of this *noumenal* causality (that is, of norms as the sole principles of determination of the will). As such, transcendental freedom is completely "other" from nature and the system of phenomenal necessity (while *practical* freedom, the *empirical* assumption of a norm, is still a natural thing; see Schönecker, *Kants Begriff*: 85–92, in particular 86; again, see *infra*, Ch. 8 section 3). Additionally, Hegel's conception of right is based on the distinction between a legality of nature and a legality of freedom: right is, at the same time, the *logical* way according to which the will thinks about freedom (which is, in turn, the will thinking the will's *own* freedom in prescriptive terms, that is, the will *wanting* to be free will: see Hegel, *Grundlinien*: § 27, 34), and the *reality* of this thinking, the manifestation of this free self-reflection of the will upon itself (see *ivi*: § 29, 34). So, the system of right is at the same time the *condicio sine qua non* of the *reality* of freedom, and the *condicio sine qua non* of the *conceptual* expression of freedom. Right is a "second nature" (see *ivi*: § 4, 14), the "law of nature" of the freedom of the will (see Riedel, *Studien*: 63), a form of legality determined by a *negative* reference to the natural legality (see Becchi, *Hegel*: 205–207). Hence, freedom is *real* as right, that is, as a will that determines itself independently of natural determination (see Hegel, *Encyclopädie*: 415). I will also mention the concept of freedom as the *evolution* of the right towards its fulfilment: in this sense, freedom is the Constitution, the norm that founds and validates all constituted norms. Freedom is *legislation on the legislation*. This is Rousseau's conception of freedom as *volonté générale* (see Rousseau, *Du contrat social*: IV, 2), a form of "second nature" which, contrary to this or that specific system of right, is universal, not formally (as a form of thinking), but normatively, as *meta-norm* (see *ivi*: I, 7, the famous "on le forcera d'être libre"). Another step in this direction is the coincidence between the meta-normative *criteria* of validation and the meta-normative *operation* of validation: this is what Habermas proposes in his *Diskursethik* (see Habermas, *Faktizität*: 203–206). On the issue of the meta-norm, see *infra*, Ch. 6 section 5.

3. Typological Language of Freedom. According to this language, freedom has meaning as biconditional relationship between particularity and universality, between life and concept (of this life). This is the relationship: a life manifests and formulates its own concept, the law to which it belongs; and viceversa a concept, a law, can be understood only in this living incarnation. This biconditional connection is called "type."[13] The *aesthetic* nature of this language is evident: freedom is the power of self-creation, creation of something that is the universal law of itself, as in the case of aesthetic legality.[14] So, the typological language of freedom is the condition for conceptualizing freedom as mutual conditionality of life and law, personality and destiny, existence and meaning. Freedom is being, and simultaneously stating to be, a *modus loquendi et vivendi*. I identify and discuss three sub-forms of this language: 1. Freedom as aesthetic self-education, or as the correlation between a life informed by a virtue and a virtue understandable only through its living expressions[15]; 2. Freedom as self-election, as in the existential choice (a contingent determination is chosen as the meaning of an existence),[16] or in the

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[13] I refer here mainly to Kant, *KpV*: A 119–127, Ak V 67–71, and *KU*: § 59, Ak V 351–354. The "type" is the symbol that builds an analogical relationship (a proportion) between two entirely different things in light of the identity of their forms (on analogy, see Kant, *Prolegomena*: § 58, Ak IV 357–360; *Id.*, *KrV*: A 179–180 B 222–223, Ak III 160–161, Ak IV 122–123). See also Lukács and his theory of the typical (*The Historical Novel*); the influence that Neo-Kantianism (in particular Emil Lask) had on Lukács's early conception of aesthetics should not be neglected. See *Id.*, *Heidelberger*; see also Feenberg, "Reification": 175–177. See *infra*, Ch. 9 section 2.

[14] I follow here Cohen's conception of aesthetic legality: see Cohen, *Ästhetik*: 74–78. For an analysis of aesthetic legality, please see Vestrucci, "Music": 47–48.

[15] I refer here principally to Schiller's concepts of "Anmut" and "Würde," based on an aesthetic relationship between moral law and the will: see Schiller, *Anmut*: in particular 282–287; for a more exhaustive analysis of this issue, and its confrontation with Kantian ethics, please refer to Vestrucci, "A unidade."

[16] There is a thread that runs from Kierkegaard to contemporary positions, such as that of Ágnes Heller. Freedom is life endowed with meaning. This is based on choosing not between many options, as in the modal case, but a single option: the unchosen determinations of one's life – such as one's physical and psychological treats, or the contingencies of life. What could not be an object of a choice is now this object of choice, what was received is now transformed into a realization – into self-realization. Some examples: the election of a person as one's spouse, as the other half of one's life (a commitment, a meaning, that the Seducer will never be able to understand) (see Kierkegaard, "Diary"); the capacity of making binding choices as evidence of a fulfilled personality in equilibrium between its aesthetic specificity and its universal ethical dimension (see *Id.*, "Equilibrium": in particular 482–483); the capacity to make promises and keep the given word, thus giving authenticity to one's life (see Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie*); the choice of oneself as good person, as this specific, *aesthetic*, aspect of goodness (see Heller, *Morals*: chapter 1), or as a unique person, as work of art (see Heller, *An Ethics*: part two). These themes will be taken back in *infra*, Ch. 10 sections 5–7.

retrospective self-destination[17]; and 3. Freedom as archetype, as repetition of fixed mythological-psychological-literary patterns.[18]

These three formal languages are logics of freedom because they set the rules for the predication of different classes of concepts of freedom: modal, deontic, and typological. In fact, the first two languages refer to specific branches of logic. As such, there are theorems for each language: for the modal conceptualization of freedom, necessity and freedom exclude each other; for the deontic conceptualization of freedom, a norm implies its realizability; and for the typological conceptualization of freedom, the formulation of meaning and the object of meaning are co-conditioned.

These are the logics, and the theorems, that *De servo arbitrio* questions and reshapes.[19]

5. Criticisms and Clarifications

My approach may provoke some criticisms. I will try to respond to them.

First, the criticism of anachronism. While outlining the three formal languages of freedom, I referred to authors that lived and wrote much later than Erasmus and Luther. It might be argued that it is absurd to establish a connection from these authors to Erasmus and Luther. This criticism disregards that these languages are *formal*; they are the logics of every possible discourse on freedom, past, present, and future, including Erasmus's (and, consequently, Luther's) discourse, and the discourse of those after them. Therefore, the order of things must be reversed. This or that historical discourse on freedom is not the *ratio existendi* of such forms, but their *ratio cognoscendi*, and vice-versa, the forms are the *rationes existendi* (the answers to the *quaestio juris*) of the meaningfulness of historical discourses on freedom. The forms are the functions, and the historical languages are the value of these functions.

Clearly, it is possible to ask what originates first, the forms or the "matters," the conditions of conceptualization or the historical concepts of freedom. And yet this question is sterile, because both opposing answers are based upon a

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[17] I refer here principally to Schopenhauer, "Transcendent Speculation."

[18] Here, I refer mainly to the conception of freedom issued from the remarkable synergy of the geniuses of Karoly Kerényi, Carl Gustav Jung, and Thomas Mann around the connection between the typical, the mythical, and the psychological. This synergy is analyzed in *infra*, Ch. 12 sections 2 and 3.

[19] It is notable that these formal languages have different degrees of self-evidence. The modal language of freedom is certainly the most intuitive, and the typological one is perhaps the most counterintuitive because of the biconditional relationship between *who* speaks and *what* is said. This confirms that Luther does not attack an intuitive method of thinking about freedom in order to replace it with a counter-intuitive one, but it is precisely their function as methods and meters of meaningfulness to be attacked.

petitio principii (or, more correctly, on an analytical judgment): the priority of the form over the matter is claimed in light of its logical *apriority*, and the priority of the matter over the form is claimed in light of its *temporal* precedence. Thus, what matters is the mere fact that the "priority-question" is posited: asking this question already entails distinguishing between the two sets "form" and "matter", and associating the formal languages to the first set, and the historical discourses about freedom to the second set. Again, what matters is not the priority of one set over the other, but their relationship to one another.

It might also seem that my approach is biased by a too strong Kantian approach. Speaking of conditions, forms, et cetera might project the idea that I am gluing terms from transcendental philosophy over Luther, thus invalidating my interpretation. I properly answer this criticism in a section of Chapter 3, but I would like to anticipate it here. First, my approach is not transcendental, but "meta," because Luther's *De servo arbitrio* works in a "meta" way. Terms such as forms, conditions, et cetera are borrowed by logic, not by transcendentalism. The fact that Kant's philosophy (and that of Cohen, Lask, among others) also speaks "meta" (or, perhaps, that we can speak about "meta" today because of Kant) is simply the evidence of this philosophy's fundamental relevance in the history of philosophy. Second, speaking from a transcendental perspective implies that an operation *upon* conditions (such as Luther does) would be impossible, because the validity of transcendental conditions cannot be questioned. As I stated before, this questioning is possible only from a theological perspective. Thus, my reference to forms, conditions, et cetera is *not* transcendental; it is *theological.* My book focuses not on the formal conditions of the conceptualization of freedom, but on their *theological* situation, on their application to theological propositions of freedom.

The third criticism I anticipate concerns an overcomplication of Erasmus's position. After all, the two *argumenta ad absurdum* are in support of the defense of *liberum arbitrium*. So, why introduce more than one form of freedom? The answer is that Erasmus's position itself is multi-layered: realizing a norm (the first *ad absurdum*) means not only realizing a possibility, but realizing a *prescribed* possibility; and self-education (the second *ad absurdum*) means not realizing a possibility, but thinking and manifesting a synthetic unity of possibilities. Hence, a discussion of the three formal languages of freedom is necessary to recognize and engage the otherwise neglected complexity of Erasmus's position: each step of his argument against Luther opens a new aspect of conceptualizing freedom. This also signifies that Luther's position jeopardizes the steadiness of the *whole* meaningfulness of freedom, not just one layer of it. This speaks to the worth of Erasmus's work, of his having understood the depth of the formal repercussions that Luther's "absurdity" entails.

A last criticism: the charge of apologetics. My discussion on the relationship between the logics of freedom and theological discourse *on* them might sound apologetic. It may seem to claim that theology is superior to both philosophy

and the logics sustaining philosophical speculations. The relationship between theology and philosophy transcends the limits of my work; yet I am compelled to dispel this apologetic shadow. My argument is *not* based on a supposed superiority of theology over philosophy, nor does it aim to prove such superiority. Such superiority is an illusion, for it confounds the distinction between theology's and philosophy's "meta" operations and their relations to the forms of discourse.[20] Consequently, and once again, neither Luther's discourse nor Erasmus's discourse is superior to the other, because they are based on two different approaches to the logics of freedom.

6. How the Book is Organized

In light of what has been presented so far, I have organized the book in three parts: each part focuses on one of the three logics of freedom and on Luther's operation upon this logic.

Each part is divided into four chapters. The chapters that occupy the same position in each part (that is, first, second, third, and fourth chapter of each part) fulfill the same function.

The first chapter of each part (respectively, Chapters 1, 5, and 9) is a sort of *pars destruens*: it focuses on one of the three aspects of Erasmus's argument, on Luther's invalidation of this specific layer of Erasmus's criticism, and on the arguments underlying such invalidation.

The second chapter of each part (Chapters 2, 6, and 10) is a sort of *pars construens*: it analyses Luther's *positive* proposal, how he modifies each of the three formal languages of freedom in light of the rejection of their priority over divine revelation. The chapters occupying the second position in each Part mark the passage from the conceptual to the formal level, from theology as the conceptualization of freedom to theology as freedom to reconsider the validity of the logical conditions of conceptualization.

The third and fourth chapters of each part (Chapters 3 and 4, 7 and 8, 11 and 12) concern specific themes related to the topics analyzed in the two previous chapters. In particular, these last two chapters of each Part reformulate some classical conceptual difficulties in *De servo arbitrio*: the *Deus absconditus*, justification, and predestination.

Each part is structured as follows. The First Part is organized as a circle. It begins and ends with the *Duplik*,[21] the rejoinder, against the (incorrect) criticism that *De servo arbitrio* is "pro determinism." Chapter 1 opens with

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[20] More on this in *infra*, Ch. 2 section 8 and Ch. 8 sections 9–12.

[21] The inspiration for this term came from Lessing, *Duplik*. Much of my work is a formal *Duplik* to the criticisms against *De servo arbitrio* that focus only to the conceptual level, overlooking the formal level of Luther's work.

Erasmus's main criticism and Luther's counter-argument: rather than being either pro- or contra-determinism, for Luther it is a matter of negating the consistency of the modal language associating freedom with the realization of a possibility. This is the basis for the formulation of the two paradoxes about divine and human freedom. Chapter 2 analyzes the formal conditions of such a paradox: it touches upon gnoseological issues, such as the distinction between *perfecte nosse ac videre* and *certo apprehendere*, and methodological issues, such as the status of theology as *nova lingua*. It ends by articulating the scope of Luther's "Copernican revolution" within theology. Chapter 3 compares these conclusions with interpretations of Luther derived from some theological paradigms. Given the plurality of theological voices, this part is entitled "A theological polyphony." Chapter 4 returns to the meaningfulness of the paradox of freedom and the response to the charge of determinism by addressing one of most difficult topics in Luther's work: *Deus absconditus*.

The Second Part opens with the first of Erasmus's two *ad absurdum* arguments: if Luther's position was right, then norms – and, consequently, divine commandments – would become irrelevant. Chapter 5 treats Luther's negation of the axiomatic deontic implication between a norm and its realization. Chapter 6 analyzes the condition for Luther's operation upon deontic language: the inversion of priority between deontic language and the divine promise of forgiveness. This leads to the analysis of the *secundus usus legis* and the relationship between Law and Gospel. Chapter 7 narrows this operation by focusing on the case of justification: this includes a discussion of the limits of opposing forensic, effective, and ontological concepts of justification. Chapter 8 addresses the complex topic of the relationship between Luther and Kant, limited to their opposing treatments of the implication between deontic obligation and modal possibility. Rather than proposing a direct confrontation with Kant, I concentrate on the reception of the Luther-Kant issue: I outline and address the aporia in the secondary literature concerning the use of the same primary sources to both negate and affirm a relationship between Luther and Kant.

The Third Part opens with Erasmus's second *ad absurdum*: if Luther were right, then self-education and the consequential logic of merit and reward would be negated. Chapter 9 analyses Luther's rejection of Erasmus's criticism by deepening the theological negation of life's self-election. Chapter 10 focuses on Luther's idea of a theological meaningfulness of life. This topic is analyzed from three different perspectives: the relationship between life's story and the contact with divine revelation; the distinction and relationship between salvation and damnation; the discussion about the possibility, and the limit, of applying existential terminology to Luther. Chapter 11 treats the topic of predestination as basis for Luther's paradoxical inversion of merit and reward. This chapter also discusses the theological relevance of theodicy, with a discussion of some positions by Iván Karamazov. Chapter 12 has aesthetics as its protagonist: this part focuses on the *language of literature* as the source of

creation of typological conceptualizations of life. Here I present a dialogue between Luther's interpretation of the stories of Jacob and Esau and their archetypical reinvention by Thomas Mann. Finally, I hint at Luther's conception of the figure of Judas Iscariot.

The conclusion synthesizes some of the main results and opens up further directions for investigation.

It is now time to conclude this introduction. *De servo arbitrio* is waiting.

First Part

Freedom as Dependence on Divine Revelation

The First Part focuses on Luther's theological operation on the modal language of freedom, the language that founds the conceptualization of freedom as *liberum arbitrium*. In Chapter 1, I examine Luther's rejection of Erasmus's criticism, and Luther's paradoxical position on freedom; in Chapter 2, I analyze the theo-logical relationship between human conditions of meaning and divine revelation in *De servo arbitrio*, and the formal function of paradox in Luther's position; in Chapter 3, I distinguish my position from some paradigmatic interpretations of Luther; and in Chapter 4, I discuss the function of the concept of *Deus absconditus*.

Chapter 1

A Void Name

This book begins *in medias res*. The seed of the *querelle* between Luther and Erasmus on the theological meaning of freedom is rooted in their initial intellectual agreement.[1] This divergence occurs not only between two conceptions of freedom, but primarily between two conceptions of theology.[2]

1. Erasmus's *satis probabilis sententia*

De libero arbitrio διατριβή sive collatio (1524), Erasmus's rather restrained[3] attack upon Luther, focuses mainly on a passage of Luther's *Assertio omnium articulorum* (1520).[4] In this passage, Luther asserts that everything happens

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[1] This agreement concerned specifically the importance of the *bonae litterae*, and the rejection of the cultural narrowness of monasteries, for the sake of a cultural and ecclesiastical renovation; see WA Br 1: 133, letter number 57 (letter to Georg Spalatin, 18th of January 1518); De Michelis Pintacuda, *Tra Erasmo e Lutero*, 43–44. In their 1519 correspondence (for Luther, see WA Br 1: 362, letter number 163, 28th of March 1519; for Erasmus, see *Opus epistolarum*: III, 605, letter number 980, 30th of May 1519), the two thinkers even planned to meet. This meeting never took place. For an analysis of the deterioration of this agreement, see De Michelis Pintacuda, *Tra Erasmo e Lutero*, 45–51; Bornkamm, "Erasmus und Luther"; McSorley, *Luthers Lehre*: 258–259; Trinkaus, "Introduction": xxiii–lxx; Grane, "Erasmus und Luther"; Kolb, "Erasmus and Luther": 449–451.

[2] Already in 1517 Luther criticized Erasmus's theological inclination to favor the *humana* over the *divina*. See WA Br 1: 90, letter number 35 (letter to Johann Lang, 1st of March 1917); De Michelis Pintacuda, *Tra Erasmo e Lutero*: 41; Forde, *Bound Choice*: 12; Trinkaus, "Introduction": xxvii; Alfsvåg *The Identity of Theology*: 5. On the other hand, Erasmus is afraid that Luther's vehemence could endanger the delicate process of the renovation of the Church, bringing it to ruinous conclusions; for instance, see Erasmus's admonition to Luther in *Opus epistolarum*: III, 606, lines 44–51; see also De Michelis Pintacuda, *Tra Erasmo e Lutero*, 45–46. Leo X's bull *Exsurge Domine* against Luther confirms Erasmus's fears.

[3] For an account of Erasmus's hesitation in writing his *Diatribē* for the sake of the preservation of peace within Christianity, see Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*: V, 177, letter number 1334 (letter to Jean de Carondelet, 5th of January 1523): "Summa nostrae religionis pax est et unanimitas. Ea vix constare poterit, nisi de quam potest paucissimis definiamus, et in multis liberum relinquiamus suum cuique iudicium."

[4] It is the 36th article: WA 7c: 142–149; and (in Luther's German translation of 1521) WA 7d: 445–450. The passages where Erasmus's *Diatribē* refers to Luther's *Assertio* are: I a 1; II b 8; III a 17; III b 7.

out of *necessitas absoluta*; it follows that *liberum arbitrium* is a fiction or label to which no reality corresponds.[5]

In contrast to Luther's position, Erasmus presents a *satis probabilis sententia* (a "sufficiently probable opinion") on *liberum arbitrium*. This *sententia* is based on the definition of *liberum arbitrium* as the force of human *voluntas* that allows one to either pursue or divert from what leads to eternal salvation (I b 10).[6] This definition implies that both actions of moving towards or away from eternal salvation are available and realizable: both of them are *possible*. Thus, none of them is necessary.[7]

However, Erasmus emphasizes that these two possibilities do not share an identical extent. In order not to fall into a Pelagian or Neo-Semipelagian position,[8] he affirms that this "vi[s] humanae voluntatis" is ineffective ("inefficax") to accomplish the good by itself, being darkened by sin (II a 3–4).[9] Thus, it needs the assistance of divine grace in order to begin and complete its effort towards salvation (II a 10, 12).[10]

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[5] See WA 7c: 146,6–8: "Male enim dixi, quod liberum arbitrium ante gratiam sit res de solo titulo, sed simpliciter debui dicere 'liberum arbitrium est figmentum in rebus seu titulus sine re'. Quia nulli est in manu sua quippiam cogitare mali aut boni, sed omnia (ut Viglephi articulus Constantiae damnatus recte docet) de necessitate absoluta eveniunt." Erasmus quotes this passage in II b 8.

[6] In Erasmus's words: "Porro liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere". All *loci* from *Diatribē* are in the text.

[7] In *Hyperaspistes* I: 632, Erasmus emphasizes the distinction between the *satis probabilis sententia* and his definition of *liberum arbitrium*: "Sed primam opinionem, quam ajo probabilem, confers cum mea definitione, interim exclusa opinione eorum, qui per opera moraliter bona, sine speciali gratia, putant Dei bonitatem provocari ad conferendam gratiam. Atqui sic temperavi definitionem, ut huic quoque sententiae, quoniam damnata nondum est, pateret locus." It follows that Erasmus's definition is a set that can include more than one *sententia*. Thus, the *sententia* that Erasmus presents in *Diatribē* is not *certa*, but *satis probabilis*, because it is not the only possible: any *sententia* that, by following the definition, presupposes the realizability of both possibilities x and $\neg x$ ("salvation" and "damnation"), is potentially valid. A Pelagian *sententia* could also meet the definition, but it must be rejected because it is not theological, since it dismisses God's role. Therefore, Erasmus's position is based not on a specific *sententia*, but on a logic for formulating and validating theological *sententiae* about *liberum arbitrium*. This logic allows to apply only the operator of possibility to the two variables (x, $\neg x$); consequently, the application of the operator of necessity is impeded: according to this logic, neither of the two variables is necessary. I expand upon this logic in *infra*, section 3, and Ch. 2 section 1.

[8] According to McSorley, Erasmus fails to correctly understand the problem with the Pelagian and Neo-Semipelagian positions, in both his *Diatribē* and *Hyperaspistes*. See McSorely, *Luthers Lehre*: 268–270.

[9] Thus, Erasmus's definition of *liberum arbitrium* applies *in full* only to supralapsarian condition: II a 2.

[10] I will expand upon Erasmus's division of divine grace in three, or four, in *infra*, Ch. 12 section 1.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the *vis* of *liberum arbitrium* is entirely annihilated: it is not "exstincta" or "nulla" (II a 3; II a 8) because it can (and should) cooperate with divine grace (III a 13; IV 7). Divine grace plays the *first* and *main* role in salvation ("principalis causa"), and human *voluntas* plays a secondary ("minus principalis") role (III c 4). Thus, human contribution is still present, although this contribution is strongly limited, utterly secondary, almost, but not entirely, nothing (IV 8).

The force of *liberum arbitrium* is compared to the unsteady steps of a little child who, by itself, proceeds towards the fruit shown to it by its loving father (IV 9–10). God shows the way, initiates the movement, but it is up to the human being to keep walking on the path; it is up to us to willingly persevere in realizing the good that God presents to us (II a 3; III b 2 and 3), according to our abilities (III b 5). Hence, human *voluntas*[11] is not completely inactive (III c 1). It can accept and, consequently, reject divine grace (III c 3). It agrees (or not) with divine grace, it turns itself either towards or against salvation (II a 18; III a 3; III c 6). These elements constitute Erasmus's *satis probabilis sententia*: although with different contributions, divine grace and human *voluntas* are the two causes of the same, indivisible act.[12]

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[11] What is the relationship, and the difference, between *voluntas* and *arbitrium*? The answer to this question could fill a monograph. In *ST*: I, 83.4, Aquinas compares the pair *voluntas* and *liberum arbitrium* to the pair *intellectus* and *ratio*. As *intellectus* simply assumes something (the principles), while *ratio* arrives from the principles to the conclusions, similarly *voluntas* is simply the recognition of something as an object of desire, while *liberum arbitrium* chooses the means for the realization of this object of desire. Thus, Aquinas concludes, as *intellectus* and *ratio*, so "voluntas et liberum arbitrium non sunt duae potentiae, sed una." Hence, Aquinas neither separates *liberum arbitrium* from *voluntas*, nor he includes the former within the latter (as argued in Kahn, "Discovering Will": 242 and 250 in relation to Augustine, *Lib.*: II, 1). This oscillation in the relationship between *voluntas* and *liberum arbitrium* affects also Erasmus's definition: *liberum arbitrium* seems to be an aspect (a "vis") of human *voluntas*, thus to be included within *voluntas*; yet, *liberum arbitrium* is associated with choice; see *Hyperaspistes* II: 338–339, possibly replying to WA 18: 664,18–22 (in Erasmus's original text: "Mihi videtur liberum arbitrium dici voluntas ad eligendum libera"). Finally, concerning *De servo arbitrio* the connection between *liberum arbitrium* and choice is both embraced (see Małysz, "Freedom": 508–509) and reconsidered (see Sievers, *Bestimmtes Selbst*: 157 note 51). In light of this semantic ambiguity, I simply follow the occurrences of *voluntas* and *liberum* (or *servum*) *arbitrium* in the authors' texts, thus focusing entirely on the logic grounding their arguments.

[12] See Erasmus, *Diatribē*: IV 8: "[...] ad idem opus individuum simul concurrant duae causae, gratia dei et hominis voluntas, sic tamen, ut gratia sit causa principails, voluntas secundaria." Erasmus synthesizes the *satis probabilis sententia* also in II a 12, although with more emphasis on the negative aspect: "Ergo, qui longissimi fugiunt a Pelagio, plurimum tribuunt gratiae, libero arbitrio pene nihil nec tamen in totum tollunt: negant hominem posse velle bonum sine gratia particulari, negant posse incipere, negant posse progredi, negant posse perficere sine principali perpetuoque gratiae divinae presidio. Horum sententia satis videtur probabilis, quod relinquat homini stadium et conatum et tamen non relinquit, quod

Erasmus also presents two other *sententiae* (II a 12). He calls the second one "durior" (harder) than his "satis probabilis." This opinion stresses that *liberum arbitrium* is able only to commit sin, and that divine grace alone effects the good in the human being.[13] The third opinion is "durissima," the hardest one; it claims that *liberum arbitrium* is an "inane nomen," and that it is God alone that operates both the evil and the good in us. Therefore, according to this *durissima sententia*, everything happens out of "mera necessitas" (II b 4, 7, 8). According to Erasmus, this last opinion mirrors Luther's position.

Erasmus's defense of his *satis probabilis sententia* (and consequently, his rejection of the other two *sententiae*) is founded upon two aspects, one positive and the other negative. The positive aspect concerns the method upon which he bases his *sententia*. The negative aspect concerns two arguments *ad absurdum*. In this Part, I will focus on the methodological aspect; in the remaining two Parts, I will focus on the two arguments *ad absurdum*.

Erasmus's method is built on four negative points. First, Erasmus rejects the arrogance of investigating things that God wanted to keep in obscurity (I a 7; I a 9); the most obscure thing is precisely *liberum arbitrium* (I a 1). This arrogant investigation can only lead to blasphemous conclusions (I a 9). Second, Erasmus negates the validity of the exegetic approach consisting of reading Scripture literally, with no lens of interpretation (III a 17; see also III b 8). According to Erasmus, this approach culminates in the deduction of false contradictions within Scripture (I b 10), or it modifies the meaning of some scriptural passages according to one's desired position (I a 4). Consequently, the third negative methodological point is the rejection of assertive propositions (*assertiones*) that disregard what Saints, Fathers of the Church, and conciliar and pontifical decrees have established (I a 2; I a 9; I b 1; I b 2; I b 5; I b 7; III a 17; III b 4; III c 11; IV 17). This leads to the fourth and final point: Erasmus negates the validity of any theological *assertio*, of any position that answers not to the authority of Saints, Fathers of the Church, and conciliar and pontifical decrees, but only to the Spirit. According to Erasmus, this attitude is but the way to justifying an arbitrary position (I b 7); formulating *assertiones* means opening the way to a conflict between interpretations, each of them claiming its own exclusive validity (I b 4).

These four negative points correspond to four positive methodological principles for formulating theological statements: renouncing to investigate what God wanted to keep obscure; acknowledging that the meaning of Scripture is not self-evident (I b 4); submitting one's opinion to the authority of Saints, Fathers of the Church, and conciliar and pontifical decrees; and taking care not to formulate an arbitrary position. Thus, for Erasmus, the fallacy of Luther's

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suis ascribat viribus." As Erasmus clarifies in *Hyperaspistes* I: 628, this *sententia* is issued from Augustine and Aquinas.

[13] According to Erasmus, the second *sententia* is Karlstadt's; see *Hyperaspistes* I: 630.

position is that it negates the validity of the *axioms* (IV 16) constituting the method of formulating theological propositions. Because of this, Luther's position ends in incomprehensible paradoxes[14] whose only quality is the creation of chaos within the Christian word (I a 6; IV 17).

For Erasmus, these points constitute the method for validating all theological propositions and rejecting any enigmatic, incomprehensible, or dangerous positions (IV 16). Thus, the procedure for the application of Erasmus's method is the *collatio* and comparison of positions pro and contra *liberum arbitrium*. Both types of positions are issued from Scripture, so the problem of *liberum arbitrium* primarily concerns the *meaning* of Scripture on *liberum arbitrium* (I b 3). The opposition between pro and contra *liberum arbitrium* must be subjected to Erasmus's fourfold method; the result of this operation is the confirmation of all scriptural *loci* pro *liberum arbitrium*, and the clarification that all *loci* apparently negating *liberum arbitrium* are objects of misinterpretation. Therefore, Erasmus's *satis probabilis sententia* is not only the result of this methodological procedure (*collatio*); also, given that this *sententia* is itself a non-absurd, non-incomprehensible opinion (since it belongs to the set of positions pro *liberum arbitrium*), it *proves* the validity of Erasmus's own method.

There is a circularity here. I will expand upon this in the next chapter. Now, let us turn to Luther's position.

2. Three *sententiae* Become One

In his *Assertio*, Luther negates the theological validity of thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*.[15] As such, this work speaks not only about freedom, but also about formulating theological concepts of freedom; it is a sort of meta-discourse. Consequently, Erasmus's *Diatribē* is also a meta-discourse. Erasmus defends the relevance of thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium* and presents two absurd conclusions that would follow from negating this relevance.

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[14] In his *Diatribē*, Erasmus uses the term "paradox" negatively, as something incomprehensible, exaggerated, that does violence to common sense. It is irrelevant that Erasmus also recurs to paradoxes in his other writings (for instance, in the *Moriae encomium*). In fact, not only does Erasmus "[meet] [the paradoxes] with reluctance" (Bader, "Luther's *Theologica Paradoxa*": 146), but also, and more importantly, the paradoxes he uses have a *rhetorical* function (see *ivi*: 147–149). As I will analyze in *infra*, Ch. 2 section 9, Luther makes a completely different use of the paradox: paradox plays a *formal* function in his argumentation.

[15] In his *Assertio*, Luther blames the perversion of language occurring in Christianity: what is black is called white, and vice-versa. This perversion encompasses not only the theological concept of freedom (the *liberum arbitrium* is not considered a source of mere evil, as it should be), but also the role of the papacy. Those are the false teachings prophesized in 1 Pet 2:1, the doctrines of the Antichrist. See WA 7c: 148,33–149,7; WA 7d: 446,5–8; 449,9–10; 450,4–7.

However, the meta-discursive nature of Luther's and Erasmus's arguments is implicit, because it is subordinate to the conceptual level; it follows (respectively) from the negation and the affirmation of *liberum arbitrium*.

De servo arbitrio, Luther's reply to Erasmus's *Diatribē*, opens to an explicit meta-discursive scenario: it directly questions the validity of the method that Erasmus assumes and takes for granted. The primary object is no longer *liberum arbitrium*, but thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*. Thus, Luther introduces a counter-point for each of Erasmus's methodological points.

Concerning Erasmus's first point (not investigating theological obscurity), Luther distinguishes between God and Scripture. The obscurities concern the former (*Deus absconditus*), not the latter (606,11–12).[16] Thus, passing to Erasmus's second methodological point (the meaning of Scripture is not self-evident), Luther argues that Scripture is clear in itself (*claritas scripturae*), and it does not need any rhetorical tool to make it compatible with a specific idea, such as the existence of *liberum arbitrium* (609,4–5; also 700,12–18). Consequently (third point), all authorities other than Scripture have at least a secondary validity (604,36–38), and thus their validity shall never be taken uncritically (605,1–4). Finally (fourth point), this confirms the *pervicatia asserendi* (603,3), the constant adherence to and affirmation of doctrine (603,12–14) as the correct theoretical and spiritual attitude of Christians (603,28–29).

Rather than a mere juxtaposition of a method against another method (and thus of a *sententia* against another *sententia*), Luther's position reflects upon what means speaking of "method" in theology. It is not the opposition between an axiom and another axiom; rather, it is an investigation of the theological legitimacy of considering something an axiom. Luther is introducing a complex and uncomfortable *quaestio juris* in theology.

In order to arrive at this deeper level of Luther's reflection, I shall proceed gradually. I begin from a specific aspect, which already contains the seed of this *quaestio juris*: Luther's criticism of Erasmus's distinction of three *sentientiae* (667,15–670,38).

According to Luther, the three opinions are actually *one*: the third, *durissima*, includes within itself not only the second, *durior*, but also the *satis probabilis*. This means that for Luther, Erasmus's position is an aspect of Luther's position.

First, Luther sees an ambiguity in Erasmus's *satis probabilis sententia*: *liberum arbitrium* can turn towards the good, but it is unable to do so without divine grace. This *sententia* entails at the same time a "yes" and a "no" (667,31–34). Either human will is effective for salvation, or it is ineffective alone (611,16–24). And if it is ineffective alone, then the only possible

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[16] All references to *De servo arbitrio* are in the text, with indication of page and lines from the 18th volume of the Weimarer Ausgabe. In the notes I indicate also the volume (WA 18).

conclusion is that *liberum arbitrium* alone is able only to sin (second, *durior* opinion), it is a slave to sin (668,15–20). So, the first *sententia*, the *satis probabilis*, is included within the second.

Similarly, the second *sententia* is included in the third: given that *liberum arbitrium* is a slave to sin, it is not "*liberum*" at all, because by itself it can only turn *away* from good (636,1–6). Stating simultaneously that one has the power to turn towards either the good or the evil, and that this power can only sin, is a contradiction between name and predicate (*oppositum in adiecto*: 636,12). Erasmus's prudence in defining *liberum arbitrium* ends in incoherence: the *liberum arbitrium* that he defends is not what he defines (668,3–4).[17] It follows that no reality corresponds to the term "*liberum arbitrium*" (670,33–38). The only thing that remains is its void name: an *inanis vox* (666,8–9).[18]

Of course, it can be acknowledged that humans have a sort of mastery of things that are inferior to them, a *ius utendi* for actions that are theologically neutral, that do not participate either in damnation or salvation; for instance, drinking, eating, et cetera (638,5–7; 671,37–38, 752,7–8). Here, Luther seems to extend the meaning of *liberum arbitrium* beyond Erasmus's definition: *liberum arbitrium* is the force (*vis*) that can turn not only towards salvation or damnation, but can also "turn freely in every direction, and this force does not surrender nor is subject to anything" (637,9–10: "libere […] in utrunque se vertere, neque ea vis ulli caedat vel subiecta sit"). For Luther, this is the common meaning attributed to it.

As we will see more in detail by the end of this Chapter, Luther goes as far as to negate *liberum arbitrium* in this extended meaning as well. This is a corollary of the negation of human *liberum arbitrium* with regard to God (781,8–13). In fact, were this human *ius utendi* also applied to divine things, then God would be submitted to human *arbitrium* (662,6–12). Either one has power over God, or one's powers are nothing before God (751,23–24). Theologically, only the second option stands; otherwise, the powers of *liberum arbitrium* would be divine (664,12).

It follows that *liberum arbitrium* shall be understood theologically in an *antithetical* way, in line with the antithetical way Scripture speaks about the relationship between human and God (771,18–19; 776,21; 779,11–14; 782,27–28). Given that human *liberum arbitrium* is powerless in divine things, then *liberum arbitrium* can do nothing for salvation (664, 31–665,1). And given that there is no neutral position between salvation and damnation (669,20–22; also

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[17] Erasmus is like Proteus (602,1; 668,14): elusive and ambiguous. On this similitude see Bader, *Assertio*: 142–143; Boyle, *Rhetoric and Reform*: 79–81.

[18] See also WA 18: 637,19; 647,25–26; 670,25–26.35–38; 671,1–3; 720,22–23; 756,7; 769,28–29; 779,1–2. Erasmus rejects Luther's *reductio* of the three *sententiae* into one in *Hyperaspistes* I: 628–636. The argument reiterates the distinction between the three opinions; see in particular *ivi*: 632. In that section Erasmus speaks of four *sententiae* because he adds the Pelagian position, which he firmly rejects.

779,15–17), then nothing of what *liberum arbitrium* can produce is neutral, for it is sin in God's eyes (665,6–13; 752, 14–15).[19] It belongs not to heaven, but to earth (781,17–19). So, given that, per antithesis, one belongs either to God or to Satan (670,4–10), thus the *arbitrium* is never *liberum*: it is the realm over which Satan rules (707,10–11).

Therefore, Luther rejects Erasmus's position because it is vague and imprecise. Erasmus's imprecision consists in presenting an unclear distinction between the human role and the divine role. Erasmus is keen to attribute the primary role to God – or, in negative terms, to acknowledge the weakness of human *liberum arbitrium*. Yet no matter how "principalis" is God's action, and how "minus principalis"[20] is human *arbitrium*, God is nevertheless only one of *two* participants. In Erasmus's *sententia* God is not the *sole* principle of salvation, the *sole* master over divine things. This is equivalent to saying that God is not entirely God without some human contribution. One is saved not only for God's initiative but *also* because one wants to; thus, one's sin is not invincible and the guilt not ineradicable. If it is so, then, asks Luther, *quo bono* Jesus Christ, his revelation, his sacrifice, his resurrection? (676,11–12; 686,36–38)[21]

Luther opposes Erasmus's imprecision with an antithetic sharpness. Erasmus formulates a sort of equilibrium between God and human by applying a meter that determines God's primacy and human's secondariness. Luther annuls such equilibrium by rejecting *any* meter according to which human beings and God can be compared. Underestimating the absoluteness of God's power means neglecting God (614,12–16) – and vice-versa: affirming the absoluteness of God's power means rejecting all sorts of participation. It is no longer possible to attribute something both to God and to the human being, not even the large majority to God and the small minority to human. Everything concerning divine things, not least salvation and damnation, shall be attributed to God alone (614,20–23).

Therefore, for the sake of theological coherence, the reality (and not simply the name) of *liberum arbitrium* shall be attributed to God, and to God alone (636,27–637,3):[22]

Sequitur nunc, liberum arbitrium esse plane divinum nomen, nec ulli posse competere quam soli divinae maiestati. Ea enim potest et facit (sicut Psal. canit) Omnia quae vult in coelo et in terra. Quod si hominibus tribuitur, nihilo rectius tribuitur, quam si divinitas quoque ipsa eis tribueretur, quo sacrilegio nullum esse maius possit. Proinde theologorum erat ab isto vocabulo abstinere, cum de humana virtute loqui vellent, et soli Deo relinquere, deinde ex

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[19] This is strictly linked to the exclusion of the *adiaphoron morale*. See *infra*, Ch. 6 section 3.

[20] I use here Erasmus's terminology; see III c 4.

[21] I expand upon the relationship between invincible sin and divine forgiveness in *infra*, Ch. 6 section 3.

[22] See Jüngel, "Zur Freiheit": 139–140.

hominum ore et sermone idipsum tollere, tanquam sacrum ac venerabile nomen Deo suo asserere.[23]

3. The Theological Paradox of God's Freedom

Luther's theological re-application of *liberum arbitrium* from humans to God entails the modification of the logic that founds and validates thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*. I call this logic "the modal language of freedom."

According to this language, freedom has meaning as the condition of realization of a possibility among at least two possibilities. In Erasmus's definition of *liberum arbitrium*, these two possibilities are salvation and damnation. It does not matter if the realization of one possibility is easier than the realization of the other[24]; what matters is that both are realizable, or that the realization of none of them is necessary. Being unnecessary, this realization is free; it is conditioned by *liberum arbitrium*. This is even clearer in Luther's extended meaning of *liberum arbitrium* as *ius utendi*. According to this meaning, the possibilities are many ("utrunque," "every direction"), and all are potentially realizable because the *vis* of *liberum arbitrium* is "ulli […] subjecta," subject to none.

Thus, freedom is conceptualized through the application of the modal operator of possibility to two or more variables. The operator of possibility is negatively related to the modal operator of necessity; to state that an event is possible means stating that the opposite of this event is not necessary. Formally:

$$\Diamond p = \neg\Box\neg p$$

That is, the possibility of *p* has the same truth value of the negation of the necessity of ¬*p*.[25] For instance, stating the possibility of salvation corresponds to stating that damnation is *not* necessary.

Therefore, using the modal language of freedom, or thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*, means ruling out any positive application of the operator of

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[23] My translation: "It follows that *liberum arbitrium* is clearly a divine name, and can be applied only to divine majesty. In fact, as the book of Psalms sing, this majesty can and does 'everything it wants in heaven and earth.'[Ps 135:6; the KJV translates: "Whatsoever the Lord pleases, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth"] Attributing it to human being would mean attributing divinity to her or him, and there is no greater sacrilege. Hence, theologians should abstain from using this term when speaking of human virtue and leave it to God alone; furthermore, they should delete it from human mouth and discourse, and claim it as sacred and venerable name for God alone".

[24] Following the *satis probabilis sententia*, it is "easier" to accomplish sin because sin is a matter of absence: the lack of assistance from God's grace.

[25] Vice-versa: $\Box p = \neg\Diamond\neg p$.

necessity.[26] This is why Erasmus rejects Luther's introduction of the term *necessitas*.[27]

From the perspective of the modal language of freedom, Luther's re-attribution of *liberum arbitrium* from humans to God ends with a paradox (630,20–22; 634,14–15): *liberum arbitrium* is no longer connected to the operator of possibility, but to the operator of necessity. This paradox applies to both human and divine situations, because it refers to the relationship between human *arbitrium* and divine *arbitrium*.[28]

I begin with the paradox of God's *liberum arbitrium*. In God's case, *liberum arbitrium* is the condition of the realization not of a possibility (or some possibilities), but of *all* possibilities. God operates "omnia in omnibus" (614,9–12; 685,21–22; 709,10–11; 718,30; 732,19; 1 Cor 12:6). Divine *liberum arbitrium* coincides with the omnipotence of God's *potentia actualis* (718,28–31; Gen 17:1). Thus, God's *voluntas* is irresistible (717, 21–22; Rom 9:19); everything is submitted to God's *potentia* and *voluntas* (717,36–718,3; Rom 11:36). The

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[26] This is the structure of the modal conceptualization of freedom: if the operator of possibility is applied, then freedom = T; if the operator of necessity is applied, then freedom = F. In other words, the application is positive only for the operator of possibility, and negative for the operator of necessity.

[27] It is not my interest here to argue whether Erasmus and Luther are compatibilists or not – that is, whether they stress or negate a compatibility between *liberum arbitrium* and determinism. Both options are issued from the same position, consisting of the application of modal logic to freedom, either in a positive way (compatibilism) or in a negative way (incompatibilism). Rather, what interests me is to understand how Luther treats this logic in theology, that is, what specifically constitutes a theological (and not modal) understanding of *liberum arbitrium*. Thus, it is indeed possible that Luther's extended definition of *liberum arbitrium* (the *ius utendi*) implies the principle of alternate possibilities (also called "PAP"; see Kraal, "Necessitarian argument": 94 note 14), but this is irrelevant. Both positions pro or contra the "Frankfurt's demon" (that is, the example in support of the compatibility between moral responsibility and non-alternate possibilities) imply a determinist or an indeterminist point of view, respectively (see Kane, *Free Will*: 87), and thus the application (with opposed terms) of the *same* logic. In sum, as I will touch upon in the next section, it is a matter of arbitrary choice between two elements of an antinomy.

[28] In WA 18: 634,14 Luther speaks of "Alterum paradoxon"; thus, he has two paradoxes in mind. Apparently, this *alterum paradoxon* is identical to the first *paradoxon* of WA 18: 630,20–22: everything we accomplish is a product of necessity and not of *liberum arbitrium*. Yet, in the first *paradoxon*, the necessity is connected to God's *voluntas*. In the second *paradoxon*, the necessity is considered in relation to the human condition, as *necessitas immutabilitatis* (see *infra*, Ch. 9 section 4). Therefore, we have indeed two *paradoxa*: on one hand, God's *voluntas* is the principle of determination of human beings (including human "*liberum*" *arbitrium*); on the other hand, everything happens out of sheer necessity, and nothing happens out of *liberum arbitrium*. Yet, these two paradoxes belong to the same argument; the second paradox, concerning reality, is the consequence of the first paradox, which concerns the dependence of reality upon God's *voluntas*. Thus, as I will argue in the next two sections, the second paradox is not a defense of determinism because it has a theological meaning, not a modal one.

whole world depends on God's *liberum arbitrium* (631,21–23; Ps 145:14; 1
Sam 2:6–8; Luke 1:52). God "liberum sese reservavit super omnia" (685,23–
24).[29] This confirms that *liberum arbitrium* can be attributed only to God, be-
cause only divine *arbitrium* satisfies the definition "subject to none."

Luther connects God's *voluntas* to divine *praescientia*.[30] Divine *scientia* and
voluntas are both immutable ("incommutabilis," "immutabilis"; 615,22–23),
because this is God's nature: "Si volens [*sc*. Deus] praescit, aeterna est et im-
mobilis (quia natura) voluntas, si praesciens vult, aeterna est et immobilis (quia
natura) scientia" (615,29–30; see also 716,18–19, where Luther quotes from
Erasmus's *Diatribē*).[31] Immutability means that nothing external mutates
God's *voluntas* or God's *scientia*.[32] On one hand, God's *voluntas* is the rule of
everything; no rule can be found for it (712,32–35) or formulated (632,23–26;
784,9–13). On the other hand, God's *scientia* concerns what God's *voluntas*
realizes. Hence, it is connected to God's omnipotence (718,20–21.26.31). Be-
cause divine *scientia* also concerns what God *will* realize, it also applies to the
future; it is *praescientia*.[33] Therefore, everything happens not only because
God wants it, but also because God foresees it (717,24–25). Both God's
praescientia and *voluntas* are conditions for the events to be, because they are
both immutable.[34]

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[29] This leads directly to the *Deus absconditus*. See *infra*, Ch. 4.

[30] I will closely analyze the issue of *praescientia* in *infra*, Ch. 11 section 4. I translate this
term as "foreknowledge," or "prescience," in order to maintain the meaning of "*scientia*."

[31] My translation: "If [God] foreknows by wanting, the will is eternal and immutable (for
it belongs to God's nature); if [God] wants by foreknowing, the knowledge is eternal and
immutable (for it belongs to God's nature)."

[32] God's *voluntas* has no impediments because God's *potentia* has no impediments: what
God wants to act, *is* (615,33–34: "Voluntas enim Dei efficax est, quae impediri non potest,
cum sit naturalis ipsa potentia Dei"); and God's *scientia* cannot be deceived, thus it is infal-
lible (615,35: "Deinde sapiens, ut falli non possit"; see also 719,25–26).

[33] For this reason, Luther invariably uses both terms of *scientia* and *praescientia* in WA
18: 615.

[34] Immutability means *atemporality*. God being *natura* immutable means that the tem-
poral distinction between past, present, and future (past, present, and future events) does not
apply to God. This relationship between immutability and atemporality is supported by the
fact that Luther also uses the term "*immobilis*" (615,29.30); Aristotle famously defines time
as connected to motion (*Phys*.: 219a 9–10), or more precisely, as a number of motion (220b
14–221a 9; see Annas, *Aristotle, Number and Time*, for an analysis of the extent and limits
of a connection with the Aristotelian notion of number in *Metaph*. I). On the connection
between immutability and atemporality, see also Alfsvåg, "With God all Things are Possi-
ble": 45. Thus, that God's *scientia* is immutable means that there is no distinction between
scientia and *praescientia*, for there is no distinction (from God's perspective) between "non-
prae" and "*prae*." Divine *scientia* concerns the totality of events, this totality is fruit of di-
vine *voluntas*, and divine *voluntas* is the rule of itself (being immutable); thus, being an
object of divine *scientia* is necessary *and* sufficient condition for this object to be. It is indeed
possible that Luther's correlation between *praescientia* and *voluntas* is influenced by

It follows that possibility disappears. From the theological perspective, there is only one possibility for events to be: as God wants and foresees them (better: as God wants them *because* God foresees them, and vice-versa). "Non autem impedita voluntate opus ipsum impediri non potest, quin fiat loco, tempo, modo, mensura, quibus ipse et praevidet et vult" (615,35–616,2). Having only one possibility at disposal means that the events are necessary. Thus, Luther concludes: "Ex quo *sequitur irrefragabiliter*, omnia quae facimus, omnia quae fiunt, etsi nobis videntur mutabiliter et contingenter fieri, revera tamen fiunt necessario et immutabiliter, si Dei voluntatem spectes" (615,31–33, emphasis added).[35] Everything *is acted* by God (753,35), including human *voluntas* (614,22–23). Therefore, God's *voluntas* imposes a *necessitas* (the necessity of *itself*) upon human *voluntas* (630,19–24; 716,32–34; 717,3–11).

The paradox consists of this: a modal concept of freedom (God's *liberum arbitrium*) is no longer formulated and understood through the application of the operator of possibility, but through the *rejection* of such operator, and the application of the operator of necessity. This is impossible within the boundary of the modal language of freedom. According to this language, freedom has meaning as a condition of the realization of something understood as possibility, not as necessity. However, the modal language of freedom is still in place, given that it is still a matter of speaking about *liberum arbitrium* (this time for God). Thus, attributing *liberum arbitrium* to God means that the modal language of freedom is simultaneously overcome and conserved; it is modified.

This modification consists in subordinating the logical priority of the modal language of freedom under a specific concept of freedom: God's *liberum arbitrium*. As already mentioned, the modal language of freedom applies the operator of possibility to a variable (the event to be realized). From this application, a modal concept of freedom is formulated (for instance, "*liberum arbitrium*"). In the theological case, the situation is inverted: we have a seemingly modal concept of freedom ("God's *liberum arbitrium*") that forces us to rethink which operator to apply to the variable. Thus, theologically, the logical

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Lorenzo Valla's *De libero arbitrio* (see for instance Kraal, 2013: 418–419). However, this does not mean that Valla's and Luther's works defend the same position. It seems to me that this connection has more to do with the fact that the two concepts are *by themselves* (that is, analytically) interrelated. For instance, this interrelation is even present in Kant, *Religion*: B 179, Ak VI 121 note. I will return to Valla's case shortly.

[35] My translation: "It irrefutably follows ["sequitur irrefragabiliter"] that if you examine God's will, then everything we do, everything that happens, although it may seem to us to happen in a mutable and contingent way, nevertheless happens in a necessary and immutable way". It seems to me that Kraal's analysis of WA 18: 615,12–616,2 (in *Id*., "Luther's Necessitarian Argument"), although a bit convoluted (it organizes Luther's argumentation into ten claims, and then divides these claims into five premises and ten conclusions; see *ivi*, 83–85 and 87–88), neglects some aspects of Luther's argument, for instance omnipotence and the difference Creator/creature; thus, Kraal's criticism (in *ivi*, 87) against Kolb's use of the argument "*Creator*" in Kolb, *Bound Choice*: 52–55, might be considered misplaced.

priority of the operators becomes conditional – it depends on the concept. This confirms that the theological modification of the modal language of freedom consists of the inversion of the logical priority between the modal operators and the concept of God's *liberum arbitrium*.

This inversion is possible only by assuming that the concept of God's *liberum arbitrium* does not depend on the modal language of freedom. Luther's previous citations clarify that this concept derives from Scripture. Scripture says that God "operetur omnia in omnibus," that everything is submitted to God's power, that God's *voluntas* is irresistible. Even immutability is deduced by the trust in God's promises (619,1–15; Rom 3:4; 9:6; 2 Tim 2:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 11:6). Without immutability (thus, without *praescientia* and necessity), God's promises, the Gospel, and faith itself are annihilated (619,16–18[36]; 716,5–9).

Therefore, the implication "divine *liberum arbitrium* → necessity" (the "*sequitur irrefragabiliter*" from the last quotation) is valid only from the assumption that the concept of God's freedom *exceeds* the structure of the modal language of freedom.[37] God's freedom is not a modal concept, but a theological one. The implication is valid *theologically*, not logically, and for this reason, it is paradoxical from the standpoint of the modal language of freedom – that is, from assuming the formal priority of modal operators over the concept of freedom. Thus, the inversion of priority between concept and operators shows the *limitation* of the modal language of freedom when it comes to think about *liberum arbitrium* in a theological way.[38] This leads into the topic of the next Chapter: divine revelation does not depend on a formal language.

For the moment, it is important to deduce that the necessity associated with God's omnipotence is not modal, but *theological*: when an event is thought in connection to God's *liberum arbitrium*, then it can be thought *only* through the application of the operator of necessity.[39] Thus, Luther's negation of Erasmus's defense of human *liberum arbitrium* in light of the immutable omnipotence of God's *voluntas* does not indicate which modal operator is best applied, necessity or possibility. Rather, it is the questioning of the legitimacy, fitness, and adequacy of these operators when applied to theological discourse.

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[36] Text: "Itaque fides Christiana prorsus extinguitur, promissiones Dei et universum Evangelion penitus corruit, si doceamur et credimus, non esse nobis sciendam praescientiam Dei necessariam necessitatemque faciendorum."

[37] Therefore, Luther's "necessitarian argument" is not either biblical or philosophical, but both: the philosophical understanding of necessity is re-thought in light of the biblical message, and vice-versa, what is revealed is applied to the logic at the basis of thinking in modal terms. See for instance McSorley, *Luthers Lehre*: 286.

[38] Vice-versa, affirming (as Luther does) that human *liberum arbitrium* is just a mere name to which no reality corresponds means affirming that the operator of possibility is just a logical tool to which no *theological* understanding of modal freedom corresponds.

[39] This leads to the concept of "necessitas immutabilitatis." See *infra*, Ch. 9 section 4.

4. Beyond Determinism

This leads us to consider the irrelevance of conceiving Luther's position as deterministic.[40] Determinism is a conception of reality according to which all events belong to a system of necessity, so that everything that is real is the necessary effect of a cause. Thus, determinism belongs to modal language.

This means that defending determinism is *formally* identical to defending the modal concept of freedom: determinism and (modal) freedom are based on the application of modal operators in opposing ways. For this reason, there is no superior criterion able to reconcile the opposition between them; this opposition constitutes an antinomy of reason.[41]

Is Luther's position determinist? Apparently it is, because he states that everything happens out of necessity – the specific necessity that is inferred from thinking about God's *liberum arbitrium*. However, stressing that Luther is determinist means neglecting the relationship (and thus the distinction) between modal and theological languages; it means assuming the discourse of Luther as modal, and *not* as theological. Luther does not state that everything happens out of necessity; rather, he states that *if* this "everything" is considered *theologically*, then it happens out of necessity. In sum, Luther states that conceptualizing God's freedom entails thinking in terms of necessity.

To elucidate this intricate point, I present here a different perspective on the theological concept of necessity. Instead of focusing on the aspect of freedom, this perspective focuses on the aspect of necessity.

Were Luther's concept of necessity deterministic, then it would be possible to formulate the law of this necessity. Stating that everything is necessary means that there is a regularity in how everything occurs – from the same cause can follow only the same, necessary effect.[42] This regularity is described by the laws of nature. Thus, thinking in determinist terms means that it is possible to identify such laws.[43]

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[40] The examples of this conception (often presented as a criticism against Luther) are innumerable. See, for instance, Chantraine, *Érasme et Luther*: 116; Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*: 44 and 100. See also the majority of authors summarized by Schwarzwäller in his *shibboleth*; see also Kraal in "Free choice, Determinism". Saarinen, in "Luther and the Reading of Scripture": 196 conceives Luther's position as "an extremely soft variant of determinism," because "it basically only holds that everyone who keeps the same course in their actions acts by necessity"; however, the meaning of this "keeping", and thus of Luther's use of "necessity," depends entirely on the reference to the *immutabilitas* of God's *voluntas* and *praescientia*.

[41] See Kant, *KrV*: A 444–451 B 472–479, Ak III 308–313.

[42] I am aware that causality does not necessary imply necessity; the evidence of this is the *statistical* nature of the laws of nature. However, this confirms the notion of "regularity."

[43] The opposite is not the case: the disposition of finding, formulating, and testing laws of nature does not necessarily imply a deterministic conception of reality. It is irrelevant that the laws of nature are not necessary since necessity is not the predicate of laws, but of the

In the theological case, necessity is related to freedom (a very unique one: God's freedom). This freedom is the source of the necessary reality of everything: omnipotence. Given that this source is free, it is self-determined. God's *voluntas* is submitted to no other condition than itself[44] (712,32–38).[45] Thus, God's *voluntas* establishes its own law – more precisely, it establishes *itself* as its own law. Therefore, it is impossible to deduce a *law* of this necessity, because such a law would coincide with God's *voluntas* itself. No other concept of this law is possible. In sum, given that the source of necessity is *free*, it is *unforeknowable*, and thus no law of this necessity can be known.

This leads us to the aspect of foreknowledge. In order to be able to know the law according to which God's *voluntas* imposes itself upon the world in a necessary way, we should know as God knows. We should *foreknow* – we should have *praescientia*. One could say that we do have a scientific form of *praescientia*; we can foreknow an event as the effect of a cause. For instance, we can predict when and where a solar eclipse will happen, as Erasmus says in III a 5.[46] Thus, our *praescientia* is possible thanks to the law connecting cause and effect (for instance, the laws of astronomy). This means that scientific "foreknowledge" depends on (and follows from) the existence of empirical causality. We *discover* the laws connecting cause and effect; we do not create them. "Scimus non ideo eclipsin venire, quia praescitur, sed ideo praesciri, quia ventura est" (716,11–12).

Vice-versa, as seen in the previous section, divine *praescientia* is connected to divine *voluntas*, the supreme cause of everything, including all possible causes. It follows that divine *scientia* precedes any possible cause, and thus it precedes the distinction between cause and effect; everything (either cause or effect) is the effect of divine *voluntas*, and, consequently, of divine *scientia*. Therefore, divine *praescientia* concerns the synthetic determination of the totality of all causal relationships. Given that we formulate a law of nature in light of the relationship between a cause and an effect, then the law determining

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content that the laws formalize. We can imagine other worlds in which our laws of nature do not apply, but this still presupposes that other laws are in place there.

[44] See Herms, "Gewißheit": 29.

[45] This passage was already mentioned in the previous section. I quote here its entirety: "Deus est, cuius voluntatis nulla est caussa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipsa est regula omnium. Si enim esset illi aliqua regula vel mensura aut caussa aut ratio, iam nec Dei voluntas esse posset. Non enim quia sic debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est, quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit. Creaturae voluntati caussa et ratio praescribitur sed non Creatoris voluntati, nisi alium illi praefeceris creatorem." I will return to this important quotation when I discuss the *Deus absconditus*, *infra*, Ch. 4 section 7.

[46] See *infra*, Ch. 11 section 4.

this relationship is unknown by definition. This seems to imply that there is no "theory of everything" in theology.[47]

In sum, for us to know the law of God's *arbitrium* means either that this *arbitrium* is no longer *liberum*, or that our knowledge coincides with divine foreknowledge. Both options are theologically fallacious. Thus, the law of this necessity can be known *only* as God's *liberum arbitrium*. It is impossible to synthesize a legalism of God's freedom that differs from the tautological affirmation of this freedom itself.

This lack of legalism confirms that Luther's concept of necessity is not modal but theological. It also confirms that the theological concept of necessity is built upon the *modification* of modal language. Thinking about God's freedom means reconsidering the theoretical expectations built on modal language – in this case, the expectation of formulating the laws of this necessity. Therefore, the attribution of the label of "determinism" (or "metaphysical determinism"[48]) to Luther ignores that Luther's discourse is not a negation of the modal concept of freedom. Rather, it is an operation upon the formal language of the modal concept of freedom. The central issue is not the structure of reality, but the theological rethinking of the conditions according to which the structure of reality is thought.

I return for a moment to the theological lack of legalism for God's *liberum arbitrium*. God's *voluntas* introduces a necessity according to unknowable laws – it is *free*. The epistemological repercussions of this result are enormous: God's freedom can certainly be *thought*, but it cannot be *known*, which means that it can be thought only as *abscondita*. The concept of *Deus absconditus* expresses the limitation of the conditions of understanding and conceptualization of God's freedom according to modal language. At the same time, the concept of *Deus absconditus* is the deterrent against any confusion between the modal concept of freedom and the theological concept of God's freedom.

The complex issue of the *Deus absconditus*, and its relationship with the *Deus predicatus* (for instance 685,1–686,12) will be addressed after all aspects of the paradox on freedom are touched upon.[49] I anticipate it now only to demonstrate that I am very aware that the discussion of God's freedom leads inevitably to the *Deus absconditus*.

5. The Theological Paradox of Human Freedom

I return to Luther's re-application of *liberum arbitrium* from human beings to God. The paradox of conceptualizing God's freedom in terms of necessity

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[47] I will further discuss this issue *infra*, Ch. 2 section 5.
[48] See Ferrario, "Nascondimento": 97–98.
[49] See *infra*, Ch. 4 sections 1 and 7.

leads to another paradox – more precisely, another aspect of the same paradox. For this paradox, the protagonist is *human* freedom.

I begin with Luther's rejection of Erasmus's reprise of the scholastic distinction between *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis* (III a 9). According to the first concept, human action is necessary in a *conditional* way. This condition is God's *voluntas*. If God wants something, then this something necessarily happens. According to the second concept, human action is necessary in an *absolute* way; everything is necessary in itself, regardless of that which conditions it. Thus, in the first case necessity is conditioned by God's *voluntas*: it concerns the implication between God's *voluntas* and human action; in the second case necessity is unconditioned – it concerns not the implication, but the "*consequens*" itself.[50]

According to Erasmus, the human situation refers to the first kind of *necessitas*, not the second one. Given that God had prescience of betrayal by Judas (condition), Judas necessarily betrayed (conditioned necessity); but it was not necessary for Judas to betray unconditionally, or absolutely; in other words, "betrayer" is not the analytical content of the name "Judas." Due to this distinction, Erasmus thinks to reconcile divine freedom and human freedom.

Luther negates this distinction (617,7–19). Stating, as Erasmus does, that the *necessitas consequentis* does not apply to humans means affirming that human *essentia* is not necessary – hence, that no human being is God. But this is irrelevant; the exclusion of the *necessitas consequentis* does not negate that everything is necessarily determined by God, since the essence of everything depends upon God's *voluntas*.[51] This leads to an important correction: even human *ius utendi* over inferior things, the last debris of human *liberum*

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[50] See Aquinas, *ST*: I, 19.3. Formally, the distinction between the two *necessitates* is the following: "*necessitas consequentiae*" is $\Box(p \rightarrow q)$; "*necessitas consequentis*" is $p \rightarrow \Box q$ (see Rocci, *Modality in Argumentation*: 165). On one hand, "necessity" concerns the form of the sentence; necessity refers to the logical connection between protasis (premise, condition) and apodosis (conclusion, conditioned). It is "necessity of the consequence," or of the implication (of "→"). On the other hand, "necessity" concerns the apodosis alone: it refers to the determination of the consequence. It is "necessity of the thing consequent," the necessity of the object (of "*q*"), not of the implication. See Boniolo and Vidali, *Strumenti*: 48.

[51] Luther's argument is a *ponendo ponens*: it turns the protasis (God's *voluntas*) into an affirmation, and hence annuls the distinction between the two necessities. The *necessitas consequentiae* states that if God wills *x*, then *x* necessary happens. Luther poses God's *voluntas*; thus, it follows that everything happens necessarily. In sum, given that God's *voluntas* is immutable, if we consider the relationship between the world and God's *voluntas* (as Luther states: "si Dei voluntatem spectes," 615,33), the world can only be as it is. It follows that we can indeed imagine other possible worlds in which Judas did not betray, but these worlds are not *theologically* possible. Theologically, we only have one version of Judas's story, because this story depends on God's revelation in and as Jesus's narration, in which Judas figures as betrayer. I elaborate upon this issue in *infra*, Ch. 12 section 6, by considering literary reinventions of Judas's story.

arbitrium, is submitted to God's *liberum arbitrium* (638,8–9). The human be-ing has neither power in divine things – such as salvation – nor sovereignty over earthly things (746,32–35).

There is no possible determination beyond or outside of God's *voluntas* and *praescientia* (786,2–6). Human action can be theologically conceptualized only in reference to the theological necessity inferred from God's freedom. Thus, affirming human *liberum arbitrium* means negating God's freedom (762,37–763,1); it means negating the *theological incompatibility* between the predications of human freedom and of God's freedom.[52]

This seems to contradict the previous affirmation that *liberum arbitrium* is slavery to Satan. Is one a slave to God, or to Satan? Here Luther's discourse develops three levels. First, one is subjected to theological necessity. Second, one is ruled by Satan when using *liberum arbitrium*. Third, antithetical to the second, one is ruled by God when God effects salvation in her or him (634,20–21). This antithesis constitutes the famous image of the human *voluntas* being the steed of either God or Satan (635,17–22).[53]

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[52] Luther's rejection of the distinction between *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis* is why his position diverges from Valla's. According to Valla it was necessary for Judas to betray because God foresaw the betrayal (*necessitas consequentiae*) (Valla, *De libero arbitrio*: 18, 205–209). However, for Valla, this does not mean that Judas did not have the power not to sin; Valla denies that *necessitas consequentis* applies (*ivi*: 28–29, 400–413). Judas could act otherwise; thus, he wanted to sin. Luther rejects this distinction: Judas had no possibilities to do otherwise. Again, this rejects the perspective of other possible worlds (in which Judas would not have betrayed) because any other possible world is still subjected to this same necessity introduced by God's *voluntas*; thus theologically (and *not* logically) any other possible world is identical to *this* same world. This does *not* mean that Judas was forced to betray against his will. Luther agrees with Valla that divine foreknowledge has nothing to do with a *necessitas coactionis*: for Luther, the *necessitas* is *immutabilitatis* (more on this in *infra*, Ch. 9 sections 4–6). Kraal, in "Valla-Style Determinism": 404–405 mentions Valla's distinction between possibility and necessity; from this he acknowledges Valla's and Luther's similar rejection of the *necessitas coactionis*. For a similar interpretation see Lindhardt, "Valla and Luther". This interpretation seems not to take into account Luther's negation of the distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *consequentiae*. It is very hard for me to find a similarity between Luther's position and the position described by the following quotation: "Valla takes free will and divine foreknowledge to be rationally recon-cilable on the basis of a distinction between what 'can' happen and what 'will' happen" (*ivi*: 408). The distinction between "can happen" (in possible worlds) and "will happen" (in this world – that is, in light of the actual conditions established by God) corresponds to the dis-tinction between *necessitas consequentiae* and *necessitas consequentis*; thus, following Lu-ther's position, it must be rejected. Moreover, this interpretation seems to overlook Valla's religious skepticism concerning the possibility of rationally grasping the apparent incompat-ibility between *liberum arbitrium* and *praescientia* (it is also important to emphasize that Valla uses the term "*providentia*"); see, for instance, Wright, *Two Kingdoms*: 68–69, with reference to Valla's other texts, such as *De vero falsoque bono*.

[53] On the sources of this famous image, see Adam, "Die Herkunft des Lutherwortes," and McSorley, *Luthers Lehre*: 309–313.

There is an apparent incoherence between the first and the third levels: according to the first level, God presides over every possible determination of human beings (which includes damnation and salvation); but according to the third level, God presides over salvation alone. This contradiction is solved by the clarification that also Satan is subjected to God's omnipotence (709,18–22).[54] Thus, being the steed of Satan is an aspect of being subjected to theological necessity.

Then, being a slave to Satan does not simply mean acting according to *liberum arbitrium*, because this is a void name: human *arbitrium* is not *liberum*. So, being a slave to Satan means being *deluded* that one's *arbitrium* is *liberum*. It means thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium* – or, vice-versa, it means *not* thinking about freedom in a theological way, not acknowledging one's own slavery to God (679,24–33). The realm of Satan is connected to *liberum arbitrium* (707,10–11) because this is the perspective from which it is logically impossible to think in terms of theological necessity.

Thus, there is a mutual exclusion between being the steed of God or Satan because being the steed of Satan means that it is impossible to *think* that one is the steed of God. In other words, these two servitudes (to God and to Satan) are antithetical because they refer to modal language in antithetical ways; on one hand as theologically modified, in the case of servitude to God; and, on the other hand, as non-modified, in the case of servitude to Satan.

Through the concept of servitude under Satan, Luther states that the position opposed to his own position has meaning (the non-modified modal language produces indeed meanings). However, this meaning is theologically *wrong*; it is the fruit of a non-theological use of the modal language of freedom.[55]

This relationship between the two slaveries is essential to understanding Luther's paradox concerning human freedom. The first paradox, on God's freedom, consists in applying the operator of necessity for thinking about God's freedom. In a specular way, the second paradox consists in considering human slavery to God as *freedom*: "… per spiritum eius servi et captivi sumus (quae tamen regia libertas est)" (635,15–16).

Slavery to God is emergence from a situation of theoretical *Unmündigkeit*: the delusion of calling "*liberum*" what can only be theologically thought as "*servum*." The emergence from such *Unmündigkeit* is the freedom of

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[54] See Jüngel, "The Revelation": 133, 135. See also Kärkkäinen, "Evil, Love": 222.

[55] The three discursive levels are interrelated in this way: the *logical* slavery to God, the modification of modal language of freedom in reference to the concept of God's freedom, is the requisite for the formulation of both (1) the theological rejection of the unmodified modal language (unmodified language thought as *logical* slavery to Satan), and (2) the antithesis between the two slaveries.

conceptualizing freedom in relation to the modification of modal language. Therefore, freedom concerns the formulation of the theological paradox of freedom.[56]

6. Looking at *De libertate christiana*

Before expanding upon this relationship between freedom and formation of the theological paradox, I will first compare *De servo arbitrio* with Luther's 1520 treatise *De libertate christiana* (in both the Latin and German versions). Although the reference to this text transcends the scope of the clash between Luther and Erasmus, a short analysis of the important treatise on freedom is essential to clarify the specificity of *De servo arbitrio*.

The concept of freedom that Luther presents in *De libertate christiana* consists in the coincidence between sovereignty over everything and everyone and servitude under everything and everyone.[57]

These simultaneous statements of sovereignty and servitude do not constitute a paradox, but a contradiction.[58] This contradiction requires reconciliation. The treatise solves this contradiction through the anthropological conception of a simultaneous presence of two parts within the human being: one spiritual and one corporal.[59] The aspect of sovereignty is associated with the spiritual part, and the aspect of servitude is associated with the corporal part.

Sovereignty and servitude constitute one single relationship: the spiritual part rules over the corporal part, and the corporal part is slave under the spiritual part. More precisely, the spiritual and the corporal reverse the positions of servant and of ruler. The sovereignty of the spiritual part is the annulment of slavery to human laws as means of salvation,[60] and the servitude of the corporal part is the annulment of the egoistic mastery over the spiritual part and the other human beings, following the example of Jesus.[61]

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[56] Jenson thinks that slavery to God is freedom and slavery to Satan is not freedom, because in the former case, God shares with us "his own freedom" (Jenson, "An Ontology of Freedom": 252). I would rather answer that slavery to God is the logical freedom to conceive slavery as freedom. The ontological proposition depends on the modification of the logical elements of this proposition (that is, which modal operator apply to freedom). I will further discuss the ontological paradigm in *infra*, Ch. 3 section 3.

[57] See WA 7a: 21,1–4; WA 7b: 49,22–25.

[58] See WA 7b: 49,26; 50,11.

[59] For a discussion of the relationship between the anthropological and theological positions in *De libertate christiana*, see *infra*, Ch. 9 section 6.

[60] See WA 7a: 24,36–25,4; 28,19–23; WA 7b: 53,29–33; 58,4–9.

[61] See WA 7a: 30,15–30; 35,9–19 [Phil 2:5–8]; 35,25; WA 7b: 60,2–9; 62,2; 64,14–23; 65,10–14; 65,32–66,6.

This double passage from servitude to sovereignty and from sovereignty to servitude is due to the spiritual wedding with Jesus Christ.[62] This wedding is based on the "froelich wechsel und streytt,"[63] the "participatio suavissima et iucunda permutatio"[64] between the believer's soul and Jesus Christ. Thanks to this "joyous exchange," sin, death, and hell pass from the soul to Christ: they are engulfed by Christ,[65] and the soul is free from them. Vice-versa, grace, life, and salvation pass from Christ to the soul: the bride receives from the groom the participation in his reign over the spiritual things, and his priesthood on spiritual things. Thus, the servitude to Jesus Christ is sovereignty because the soul participates in Jesus's freedom from all worldly things,[66] and from the religious mimicry of temporal submission.[67]

The concept of freedom in *De libertate christiana* is based on the re-inter-pretation of the concept of sovereignty. The concept of sovereignty is no longer understood in an intuitive way (as kingship, as ruling "super omnia"[68]), but in a counter-intuitive way: sovereignty is "servitude" – spiritual dependence on Jesus Christ and servitude of the corporal part towards the spiritual part. This reformulation of the concept of sovereignty is possible because of the reference to the peculiar sovereignty of Jesus Christ, the King crowned not by gold but by thorns: Jesus's sovereignty consists in abolishing the distinction between king and vassals.[69]

This connection between servitude and sovereignty is completely absent in *De servo arbitrio*. Here, human freedom enjoys no aspect of sovereignty. There is only one *absolute* sovereignty: God's sovereignty. Even the human's limited power over worldly things is, from a theological point of view, the effect of the slavery to God's omnipotence.[70]

Yet, rather than contrasting Luther's two treatises, I find a complex relation-ship between them.

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[62] See WA 7a: 25,27–34 and 26,4–7; WA 7b: 54,31–37.

[63] WA 7a: 25,34; see WA 7b: 55,7–8; see Jüngel, "Zur Freiheit": 136.

[64] WA 1c: 593,30.

[65] See WA 7a, 25,38–26,1: "vorschlundenn und erserfft werden"; WA 7b: 55,16: "absor-bta sunt."

[66] See WA 7a: 27,5–11; WA 7b: 54,21–26.

[67] See WA 7a: 28,26–37; WA 7b: 58,12–22. Although Erasmus would probably agree with Luther's 1520 inspired afflatus for a freedom related to the faith in God – and hence to the communion with Jesus Christ's freedom from death and sin – he would never have agreed with Luther's deduction of the aspect of *theological* (and *not* deontic) freedom from the law. For an analysis of this, see *infra*, Ch. 5 sections 5 and 6.

[68] WA 7b: 57,9.

[69] See Jüngel, "Zur Freiheit": 142.

[70] Thus, the image of the nuptial relationship between human being and Christ, and the disproportionate exchange of dowry (death, sin, and hell from the former to the latter, and grace, life, and salvation from the latter to the former) are also lost; see *infra*, Ch. 2 note 23.

Let us consider the two positions, "freedom = sovereignty as servitude" (*De libertate christiana*) and "servitude under God = freedom" (*De servo arbitrio*). Let us assume them valid at the same time, as in a sort of system of equations. The result is "sovereignty as servitude = servitude under God"; the modification of the intuitive concept of sovereignty coincides with submission under God. In other words, submission under God means thinking about sovereignty in spiritual and not corporal terms. The paradox of freedom (*De servo arbitrio*) enables the conceptualization of freedom in relation to the opposite of the non-spiritual, "worldly" concept of sovereignty (*De libertate christiana*).

This is why *De servo arbitrio* does not speak of sovereignty: not because it contradicts *De libertate christiana*, but rather because *De servo arbitrio* is propaedeutic to *De libertate christiana*. By presenting the paradox of servitude as freedom, *De servo arbitrio* expresses the condition according to which the theological reinterpretation of sovereignty is possible and explicable. Thus, the paradox in *De servo arbitrio* is not something that will be resolved or explained, for it expresses the method implied by an argument about freedom that wants to be theological, such as in *De libertate christiana*.[71]

There is no contradiction between the two treatises because they are not on the same level – they do not have the same function. *De libertate christiana* refers to the *reality* of freedom as the independence of the spiritual part from worldly aspects; *De servo arbitrio* refers to the *meaning* of freedom as the object of a paradoxical operation.

This confirms that *De servo arbitrio* is not a treatise on Christian freedom; rather, it is a treatise on the method according to which theology conceptualizes freedom. *De servo arbitrio* sees freedom as independence from the usual non-theological conditions of thinking "freedom," and hence as dependence upon the paradoxical equation "servitude under God = freedom." In sum, *De servo arbitrio* expresses the freedom of theological discourse to formulate concepts (such as the concept of freedom) in light of servitude under God.

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[71] This is (certainly involuntarily) confirmed by Jenson, "An Ontology of Freedom": 251, who recognizes an echo of the vocabulary of *De libertate christiana* in the formula "*regia libertas*" (635,16). The absence of any reference to sovereignty in *De servo arbitrio* makes this more than an echo; it is the source of the vocabulary of sovereignty as servitude.

Chapter 2

Freedom of Paradox

I transition now to the investigation of the conditions of Luther's paradox of freedom. In this chapter, I discuss how Luther's theological operation upon the modal language of freedom is possible, and what this operation entails.

1. *Petitio principii*

I begin by returning to the methodological distance between Erasmus and Luther.

Every intellectual *querelle* on a topic aims to determine what the truth on that topic is. Truth is determined by connecting a statement to a condition of truth through the application of a criterion of truth.[1] Erasmus's *querelle* with Luther is no exception: it concerns the truth of theological statements on *liberum arbitrium* (I a 2). According to Erasmus, the criterion of this truth is the comparison with what Scripture says: a statement on *liberum arbitrium* must be compared to Scripture in order to be proven true (I a 3). This means that Scripture is the condition of truth of theological statements. If Scripture seems to state contradictory affirmations concerning *liberum arbitrium*, then this condition must be integrated with other conditions: the *decreta* of the Church (I a 4) and the positions of the Saints and the Fathers of the Church (I a 5, I b 4).

For Erasmus, the validity of these three conditions (Scripture, conciliar and papal decrees, and opinions of the Saints and the Fathers) is unquestionable because of their *sanctity* (I b 8). A source that is not saintly cannot be a condition of theological truth: this is why Erasmus recognizes no other authorities than these three sources. This includes *Erasmus himself*; even when Scripture, Church decrees, and patristic positions say things that are not fully

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[1] The most famous criterion of truth is probably the *adequatio intellectus ad rem*. See Jüngel, "Value-Free Truth": 192. In this case, the criterion consists in connecting ("*adequatio*") a proposition ("*intellectus*") with a state of things, that is, with reality ("*res*"). According to this criterion, a proposition is true if its content describes an actual state of things, a reality, something that happened or happens. Thus, in this case "*res*" is the condition according to which the proposition is true. See the famous passage on the naval battle in Aristotle, *Int.*: 9, 19 a 23–38.

understandable, Erasmus willingly defers to them (I a 4).[2] Therefore, Erasmus posits the formulation of *assertiones* as the worst possible danger and rejects it, because it elevates one's particular opinion (such as Luther's) to a general *decretum*, thus prioritizing an individual position above the three conditions of truth (I a 4).

However, Erasmus's skepticism is problematic. The problem concerns the insufficiency of Scripture alone as the condition of theological truth. As mentioned, Erasmus acknowledges that although the majority of scriptural passages affirm *liberum arbitrium*, there are other passages that apparently negate it. Yet, this contradiction within Scripture evaporates through the *collatio*, the comparison of these passages to council and papal *decreta* and what Saints and Fathers of the Church wrote. This operation reveals our misinterpretation of Scripture when we judge that certain passages in it negate *liberum arbitrium*. Hence, Scripture is not contradictory, since every scriptural passage affirms *liberum arbitrium*.

A contradiction entails that two opposing things are stated simultaneously ("*x*" and "¬*x*"); in our case, "*liberum arbitrium* exists" and "*liberum arbitrium* does not exist." Erasmus annuls this contradiction within the Scripture by concluding that the negative statement ("¬*x*") is, in reality, the result of an incorrect interpretation of the affirmative statement ("*x*"). Scripture gains consistency in light of the application of the language according to which we think in terms of (and thus, affirm) *liberum arbitrium*: the modal language of freedom.[3]

Thus, Erasmus's declaration of skeptical *epoché* is misplaced. *Epoché* would mean that the scriptural passages negating *liberum arbitrium* would enjoy *at least* the same validity as the passages affirming it, and therefore could never be dismissed as mere misinterpretations. But Erasmus rejects the validity of the passages negating *liberum arbitrium* in light of the positions (Saints, Fathers, decrees) that affirm *liberum arbitrium*. Thus, Erasmus never doubts that the language according to which the concept of *liberum arbitrium* makes sense and is affirmed could be invalidated. The validity of this language is *never questioned*, since the scriptural passages that would negate its validity (the passages affirming "¬(*liberum arbitrium*)") are re-interpreted in light of this language.

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[2] In *Hyperaspistes* I: 270, Erasmus reiterates his skeptical position: "[C]aeterum Ecclesiae Catholicae decreta, praesertim ea quae generalibus Synodis prodita sunt, et Christiani populi consensu comprobata, tantum apud me ponderis habent, ut etiamsi meum ingeniolum humanis rationibus non assequatur quod praescribit, tamen velut oraculum a Deo profectum sim amplexurus, nec ulla Ecclesiae constitutio a me violabitur, nisi necessitas ipsa legem relaxet." See also *Id.*, *Hyperaspistes* II: 749.

[3] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 3. Affirming the existence of *liberum arbitrium* implies the assumption of the language according to which *liberum arbitrium* makes sense. Thus, given that, according to Erasmus, Scripture affirms *liberum arbitrium*, it speaks according to the language of *liberum arbitrium*.

It follows that the issue of the *querelle* is not the truth about *liberum arbitrium*, but Scripture's *compatibility* with the modal language of freedom, the language of *liberum arbitrium*. If Scripture is interpreted as incompatible (or not fully compatible) with this language, then it turns out to be contradictory: it simultaneously affirms and negates *liberum arbitrium*. But if we read Scripture through the lens of this language, it becomes clear and consistent. It becomes *meaningful*. This means that Scripture is submitted to the language that founds and validates thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*: this language is assumed as the condition of the meaning of Scripture.

This is acknowledged by Erasmus himself: the *querelle* concerns the meaning of Scripture (I b 3). However, this results in a vicious circle: Scripture should prove that the language logically implied in any affirmation of *liberum arbitrium* is theologically valid, but Scripture can perform this function *only* if all of its passages are compatible with this language – only if Scripture speaks according to this language. Therefore, the language of *liberum arbitrium* is theologically consistent because its *application* to Scripture solves a contradiction within Scripture, thus giving it consistency and soundness.

This is the fallacy called *petitio principii*: Erasmus's position makes the object of theological validation (the language of *liberum arbitrium*) the condition of this validation. In other words, Erasmus's *petitio principii* consists of subordinating a condition of truth (Scripture) under a condition of meaning (language of *liberum arbitrium*). This subordination is not fallacious *per se*; but it is fallacious in Erasmus's case, because in this case this condition of meaning (language of *liberum arbitrium*) is supposed to be the object of that condition of truth (Scripture).

Therefore, it is the modal language of freedom, and not Scripture, that is unconditionally, axiomatically, and also theologically valid. It is this language, not Scripture, that Erasmus assumes as the condition according to which any possible theological discourse on freedom makes sense (given that even Scripture makes sense thanks to it).[4] Scripture's function as a condition of theological truth becomes apparent: it depends on its measurability by the *metron* of thinking in terms of *liberum arbitrium*. Scripture is valid only if it falls into the extension defined by this language, or only if it is an element of the set called "affirmations of *liberum arbitrium*." Consequently, for Erasmus, Luther's position is absurd because it falls outside the boundary defined by the modal language of freedom.

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[4] See the end of the *Diatribē*: "Dicat aliquid: ad quid valet liberum arbitrium, si nihil efficiat? Respondeo: ad quid valet totus homo, si sic in illo agit Deus, quemadmodum figulus agit in luto, et quemadmodum agere poterat in silice?" (IV 15). This is the scream of scandal against the negation of human dignity, one aspect of which is the affirmation of *liberum arbitrium*.

Erasmus does not make his personal position a doctrinal one. Yet his position is nevertheless fallacious, because it assumes unconditionally the validity of that which is object of questioning. Thus, Erasmus's *petitio principii* clarifies a fundamental point: that, at a closer look, the *querelle* with Luther concerns neither the truth of theological statement on *liberum arbitrium* nor the meaningfulness of Scripture. Rather, it concerns Erasmus's method of solving the *querelle*; it concerns whether or not a condition can be unconditionally valid in the theological discourse on freedom.

2. *Claritas scripturae*

Luther's reply covers two different levels. The first level refers to the relationship that Erasmus establishes between Scripture's obscurity and the language of *liberum arbitrium.* The second level transcends Erasmus's *Diatribē*: it concerns the relationship between Scripture's *claritas* and the foundation of human thinking.

I begin with the first level. Luther emphasizes the incompatibility between the claim that Scripture is obscure and the reference to external authorities. He points out that if Scripture is obscure, then it must be obscure also for those interpreters assumed as guides by Erasmus in his own interpretation of Scripture (660,5–7). Therefore, Scripture's obscurity is simply Erasmus's opinion, since it is not shared by those interpreters; otherwise, Erasmus's reference to them would be contradictory (660,14–15).

Moreover, the authority of external sources (Fathers, Saints, decrees) depends upon the affirmation of Jesus Christ, not of *liberum arbitrium* (642,2–6). Therefore, if Scripture is obscure (or clear only when affirming *liberum arbitrium*), then there would be no meter for judging such authority (656,8–10). Consequently, by affirming *liberum arbitrium*, they negate the source of their own authority (661,10–12; 630,16). In other words, if the authority of Scripture is subjected to the authority of such interpreters, then there is no criterion for judging their interpretations, their clarity (656,6–11). This results in a *regressio ad infinitum* from authority to authority (655,22–25).

Because of this, it is precisely their ideas and interpretations that lack authority, that are arbitrary. They are only able to further complicate the issue, to hide Scripture's clarity by interpreting it, by introducing the confused and contradictory idea of *liberum arbitrium* (645,7–10; 648,23–31). It is not by repeating a void name (*liberum arbitrium*) that this name gains reality: it remains a mere sound (644,20–645,1; 647,25–26).

In light of this, Luther rejects Erasmus's assumption that the meaning of the Scripture is not clear: if Scripture is "necdum […] lucida satis," not *already* clear enough (652,26–28), it will be *never* clear. Scripture is *already* clear,

otherwise God would not have had any need to give it to us (655,25–27). But in what does this *claritas* consist?

Luther agrees that Scripture contains passages that are obscure and difficult to understand. However, this obscurity is not attached to Scripture, but to our ignorance (606,22–24). All of these obscurities are apparent due to grammatical reasons (606,30–31). They become clear when we consider that the whole Scripture, in all its clear and less-than-clear passages, affirms only one thing. This is *not,* of course, *liberum arbitrium.* This is Jesus Christ: "Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenes?" (606,29). Scripture is clear because every passage refers to Jesus Christ and professes simply and clearly that the Son is made human, that God is one in three, that Christ has suffered for us because of our unforgivable sins and will reign eternally (606,26–28; 608,1–2.6–7).

This introduces a distinction between the level of the *grammata* and the level of the content of Scripture[5]: what is clear is not Scripture itself, but Jesus Christ as the content of the whole Scripture. What is clear is God's *verbum within* Scripture.[6] In other words, nothing in Scripture is obscure or ambiguous because it has been clearly revealed by the divine *verbum* (the *claritas externa*: 609,12–14). And, conversely, understanding the *grammata* has nothing to do with understanding the *verbum*; understanding the latter requires God's Spirit (the *claritas interna*: 609,5–12). So, the clear content of Scripture makes this *claritas* understood in light of the coincidence of Jesus Christ with divine *verbum*.[7]

This is central to understand the relationship between divine *verbum* and human *verbum*. Luther establishes an opposition between the two. Divine *verbum* is not the product of human powers of knowing and thinking; it is the Word *of God* (663,20–22). It is not contained in any human teaching – not even in the writings of the highest and most intelligent intellects (663,27–29). It is not the conclusion of a syllogistic argumentation (673,6–10).[8] For this reason,

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[5] This distinction between letter and spirit of Scripture is particularly relevant for biblical translation. See Bielfeldt, "Luther on Language": 199, referring to WA Tr 4: n. 5002.

[6] See Beisser, *Claritas*: 81, 85.

[7] Besides the quoted passage from *De servo arbitrio* (WA 18: 606,29: "Tolle Christus e scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies?"), see: WA 10.1: 158,16: "… das Christus das wort selbst ist"; WA 11: 223,1–2: "Sic in tota scriptura nihil aliud est quam Christus vel apertis verbis vel eingewickelten worten"; WA 40.1: 12–18: "Ideo qui sine verbo Deum colere aut ei servire vult, ut Paulus ait, non vero deo, sed ei, 'qui natura Deus non est,' servit. […] Extra Christum enim nihil est nisi mera idolatria, idolum et falsum figmentum de Deo"; WA 42: 8,24–25: "Pater per Filium, quem Moses verbum vocat, creat coelum et terram ex nihilo"; WA 56: 414,15–17: "universa Scriptura de solo Christo est ubique, si introrsum inspiciatur, licet facietenus aliud sonet in figura et umbra."

[8] The nouns – the *grammata* – of Scripture, although written by human beings, are not arrived at through any principle of deduction; they are divinely inspired. See Althaus, *Theologie*: 50–51. See WA 10.1: 92,6–7.

it is the fruit not of deduction, but of *revelation* (663,25–26).[9] Hence, revelation is known only through the influence of the Spirit (663,36–38) (*claritas interna*). Consequently, human reason alone, even of the sharpest brains, was unable to formulate Jesus Christ (*claritas externa*) as the "way, truth, life, and salvation" before God's revelation in and as God's *verbum* (778,29–37; see also 659,8–17 and 759,2–6). Thus, to be obscure is *liberum arbitrium*, fruit of human reason (655,26–27); it belongs to a space that has nothing to do with Scripture's *claritas* (656,21–25).

Therefore, the clarity of Scripture concerns the distinction between divine *verbum* and human *verbum*; *qua* revelation and not deduction, divine *verbum* does not depend upon any human authority (631,20–21). Consequently, human reason is an inadequate means of measuring what God has revealed (707,22–24).[10] The more human powers are amplified, including intellectual powers, the more acute this conflict (626,12–16). This is an *aut/aut*: the theses, positions, dogmas, and axioms belonging to human tradition are the negation of the theses and positions belonging to divine revelation (627,34–37).

Thus, the question in the *querelle* is not how Scripture can be clear and meaningful, but how divine revelation relates to human *verbum* and reason.

3. Scandal and Folly

This relationship between human *verbum* and divine *verbum* covers two scenarios: 1) human judgment of divine *verbum*, and 2) divine judgment of human *verbum*.

The first scenario is divided into two alternatives. According to the first one, the Word of God is judged as "scandal and folly" (659,10–16; 698,6–8; 707,24–26; 759,12–13.21–22; 1 Cor 1:23). This judgment is the result of a misunderstanding: Jesus Christ and the Gospel, the highest and best of everything, are considered the lowest and worst of everything (708,39–709,1). Everybody abandons Jesus (650,23–25); God, source of truth, is called a liar (780,21). According to the second option, instead of affirming that the Word of God is scandal and folly, human begins attribute to it a meaning compatible with the

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[9] I consider the terms "revelation" and "divine *verbum*" (or "Word of God") to mean the same thing, but from two different perspectives. The term "divine *verbum*" pertains to the theological level: it underscores the distinction between itself and the human *verbum*, and, from this, the distinction between God and human being. The term "revelation" relates to the logical level: it emphasizes the distinction between a truth based on the conditions of foundation and validation, and a truth independent from any foundational condition.

[10] It is important to emphasize that for Luther reason is misleading only when it works "beyond the perspectives and horizon of the empirical, spatiotemporal world" (Grosshans, "Reason and Philosophy": 232). Thus, reason is useful when confined to non-divine topics. In other words, the limits of reason are *theologically* defined; see *ivi*: 234.

expectations of reason; this leads to a rejection of literary interpretation, and to the application of tropes and other rhetorical tools to restore human meaningfulness to God's revelation and actions (707,19–32; 708,34–39).

These two alternatives of rejection and forced inclusion are based on a *partial understanding* of the Word of God. Concerning the option of "scandal and folly," the Word of God is not "Word" – it is absurd and has no meaning. Thus, it is assumed to be independent from the human conditions of meaning. Concerning the option of artificial compatibility with reason's expectations, the Word of God is not "of God". It is assumed to have sense only if subjected to the human conditions of meaning – only if it depends on the same conditions as any human "words" or discourses.

What is missing is the *simultaneous affirmation* of both aspects, "Word" and "of God" – meaningfulness *and* independence from the human conditions of meaning. Thus, the two alternatives are formally identical: they result from the application of human forms of meaning to divine revelation. In both cases, a *verbum* that is divine is translated into human meaning. The light has come to the world, but the world did not recognize it (658,31–659,2; 776,4–9; John 1:5–10).

Now I will address the second scenario: the divine *verbum* judging human discourse. Again, this is a negative judgment. The world – and with it, the most refined intellectual powers – cannot be the origin of divine revelation, nor can they formulate its meaning by themselves (628,9–12). Given that divine revelation is not the fruit of a deduction from some canons and principles, then human canons and principles are limited. Therefore, human canons and principles lose their validity before God's *verbum* (630,7.9).

Thus, the inadequacy of reason's judgment of the Word of God is one with the Word of God being revelation and not deduction. The Word of God poses and establishes the limitation of human theoretical powers by presenting itself as divine, thus as irreducible to human reason.[11] In other words, revelation's negative judgment of the canons and principles of human reason is one with the event of revelation; the Word of God enters the world in order to introduce not peace, but conflict among human things and human theoretical security (626,8–12). The Word of God enters the world to judge and renew the world (626,26–27).

Therefore, the opposition between human theoretical powers and divine *verbum* is not due to a "malfunction" of the former. Rather, this opposition defines these powers theologically: human reason as such is folly before the Word of God (709,8). Scripture reveals that the validity of all possible human judgments

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[11] This is the *claritas* contained within Scripture: it consists in being the condition of both the internal judgment of the single person of the doctrines and opinions, validated according to the Spirit, and the judgment uttered externally, as an aspect of the public ministry of the Word of God; see WA 18: 653,16–28.

is subordinate to the Word of God (631,21–23).[12] Therefore, not only is the Word of God the superior authority in this conflict (630,6– 8), but also it establishes *itself* as this superior authority. In other words, the epistemological distance between divine and human *verba* is established *by* divine *verbum*.[13]

Erasmus's position reflects this general opposition between human and divine *verba*. Erasmus bases his position on the claim that divine *verbum* depends upon the human canons (631,16–17). Erasmus tries to enlighten what is already light, a light that overcomes all other lights (653,28–31).[14] Therefore, Erasmus's judgment of absurdity results from an inversion of formal priorities: Scripture is judged according to human meters of meaningfulness, instead of allowing such meters to be judged and renewed by what God reveals. Erasmus writes for the sake of concord between Scripture's *claritas* and *liberum arbitrium*; yet the Word of God came precisely to undermine such concord, to reveal the frailty of a peace based upon neglect of the Word (626,34–40). Therefore, Erasmus's judgment of absurdity against Luther is formally identical with the judgment of scandal and folly (707,12–19.25–26).

Consequently, Luther turns from the compliance of divine *verbum* with some conditions – the language of *liberum arbitrium* – to questioning the validity of these conditions before divine *verbum*. The issue is no longer whether Scripture affirms or negates the language of *liberum arbitrium*, and consequently, whether and to what extent Scripture is meaningful according to this language. Instead, the issue is whether *thinking* according to the language of *liberum arbitrium* is compatible with Scripture's *claritas*. Given that such *claritas* does not depend on any condition, then the issue concerns the theological legitimacy of assuming a condition, such as the language of *liberum arbitrium*, as axiomatically valid.

This poses a difficulty. Given that divine *verbum* is its own epistemological condition, then it seems to be a sort of hieroglyph with no Rosetta Stone. How is it possible for divine revelation to be understood, unless it depends on human

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[12] This explains what was introduced in the previous chapter: the Word of God is the authority according to which the theological re-application of modal language has meaning and can be formulated.

[13] I interpret this as the epistemological consequence of the hermeneutical self-foundation of Scripture. See Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 67–68.

[14] Luther returns to this criticism of Erasmus when he discusses the difference between faith and reason in WA 40.1: 361,1–11: "Fides dicit sic: Ego credo tibi deo loquenti. Quid loquitur? impossibilia, mendacia, stulta, infirma, abhominanda, heretica, diabolica, – Si rationem consulis. Ut Abrahae dictum, quod generaturus ex emortua carne Mulieris filium, – hoc erat stultum, ridiculum etc. Quia deus, quando obiicit articulos fidei, talia etc., Ut: filius dei incarnatus homo deus est; ille mortuus. Si ista vera, – Monstra sunt, dicit ratio; dicit ista diabolica. Fides hanc rationem occidit et mortificat istam bestiam quam coelum et terra non possunt occidere nec omnes creaturae. Illa sic dicit de deo: quae ipsa eligit, placent deo. Si deus loquitur, est diaboli verbum, quia non videtur ei congruere. Sic Erasmiani metiuntur dei maiestatem secundum rationem."

conditions of meaning and is thus formally identical to human *verbum*? In other words, how can divine revelation reveal the limitation of the human conditions of meaning, unless it belongs to these conditions?

4. *Sub contrario*

I analyze the issue of the revelatory limitation of human *verbum* in two steps. The first step concerns the gnoseological aspect; the second concerns the aspect of meaning. Each step is in turn divided into three topics. Each topic corresponds to one of the next six sections.

I begin here with the gnoseological aspect, and I divide it into the following three topics: the *sub contrario*, the *assequi*, and the explication of the paradox of freedom from the gnoseological perspective.

The first topic concerns the fact that divine revelation is *known* as that which contrasts with and challenges our methods of *knowledge*. Luther synthesizes this with the concept of "*sub contrario*" (633,8–11.14–15):

Non autem remotius absconduntur, quam sub contrario obiectu, sensu, experientia. Sic Deus dum vivificat, facit illud occidendo; dum iustificat, facit illud reos faciendo; dum in coelum vehit, facit id ad infernum ducendo. […] Sic aeternam suam clementiam et misericordiam abscondit sub aeterna ira, Iustitiam sub iniquitate.[15]

At first glance, this is the formulation of the method according to which God's *opus* can be known: this method is based not upon how things are expected to appear (giving life as giving life, justification as justification, mercy as mercy), but upon consideration of the opposite of these things (killing for giving life, imputation for justification, wrath for mercy).

It seems that the upheaval and renewal that the Word of God introduces into the world (and into human knowledge) consists of a counter-intuitive method of knowledge. But is this truly the case in *De servo arbitrio*?

In Luther's *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* (1518), the *sub contrario* is indeed such a method: the method of the so-called *theologia crucis*.[16] In the *Disputatio*, Luther distinguishes between two gnoseological attitudes in theology. One attitude aims to know *directly* the *invisibilia Dei* ("virtus, divinitas, sapientia, iusticia, bonitas, etc.")[17] by considering God's works to be the expression of such *invisibilia*. The other aims to know God's *invisibilia indirectly*, through

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[15] My translation: "Also, it is not possible to hide more profoundly than under a contrary appearance, sensation, or experience. So, if God gives life, he does it by killing; if he justifies, he does it by making guilt; if he leads in heaven, he does it by condemning to Hell […]. God hides his eternal goodness and mercy under eternal wrath, the justice under iniquity."
[16] See WA 1b: 361,31–362,33.
[17] *Ivi*: 361,35–36.

the *visibilia* of revelation.[18] The *sub contrario* applies to these *visibilia*: they must be known as the *opposite* of what would be their direct, expected expression. God's glory is not expressed in manifestations of glory, but in self-humiliation; God's majesty is not expressed in manifestations of majesty, but in ignominy, and so on.

These two gnoseological attitudes (direct or indirect knowledge) define two methods of theology: *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis*. On one hand, we have the method of a *prima facie* rapport with God, based on the presupposition that God's works comply with our gnoseological expectations (*theologia gloriae*). On the other hand, we have the method of a *secunda facie*, or a counter-intuitive rapport with God, based on the negation of gnoseological compliance – essentially, based on the opposite of what our gnoseological expectations would be (*theologia crucis*).[19] So, according to the first method, theological knowledge is founded and validated by a *direct* use of conditions of knowledge. According to the second method, theological knowledge is founded on the *sub contrario* use of these conditions.

It follows that the *sub contrario* consists in a theological operation upon the non-theological use of the conditions of knowledge.[20] The *theologia crucis* assumes Paul's "Word of the Cross" (1 Cor 1:18–31) as method of theological knowledge; it is called *theologia crucis* precisely because it is based on the event of the Cross.

In *De servo arbitrio*, the scenario differs. Here, the *sub contrario* does not focus only on the Cross: it applies to God's action in general. God acts *sub contrario* not only in the *visibilia* of the Cross, in Jesus Christ, but in all possible manifestations of God's *voluntas*. Thus, the *sub contrario* is the form of God's action in general.

Thus, the difference is that in the *Disputatio Heidelbergae habita* the *sub contrario* is the principle of distinction between a correct way and an incorrect way of using the conditions of knowledge (respectively: counter-intuitively and intuitively). In *De servo arbitrio*, there is no longer a distinction between a correct and an incorrect way, because the *sub contrario* is no longer a gnoseological *Sollen*, a method that *should* be applied. Rather, it is a theological *Sein*, the *Sein* of the "remotius absconditur"; it states that God's *opus never*

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[18] See Loewenich, *Theologia crucis*: 27.

[19] According to Thaidigsmann, "Kreuz und Wirklichkeit": 90, most commentators of the *Disputatio* forget to analyze the last four theses, the 25th through the 28th, that are supposed to complete the theoretical aspect of the *theologia crucis*, and the practical aspect of the realization of the law and the relationship of human beings with God's love. These two aspects of the issue are discussed in the next two Parts, respectively.

[20] See Kim, *Theodizee als Problem*: 46–47; Korthaus, *Kreuzestheologie*: 101; Platow, *Vor Gott*: 117–118. Again, Thaidigsmann, "Kreuz und Wirklichkeit": 95 emphasizes that the *theologia crucis* touches upon two different "*Problemreichen*": the gnoseological aspect and the ontological aspect. I hint at the relationship between them in *infra*, Ch. 3 section 3.

complies with our gnoseological method, whether intuitive or counter-intuitive.[21]

Thus, in *De servo arbitrio* the *sub contrario*, instead of being the specific method of theological knowledge, is the acknowledgment of the theological *limitation* of any possible method of knowing God – even the most counter-intuitive method. Every method of knowledge is insufficient because the object of theological knowledge lies always under the *sub contrario* of what is expected, whether intuitively or not.[22] God is *always* hidden, *absconditus* – even if we aim to know God according to the most counter-intuitive method.

This is a radicalization of the *Disputatio*: in *De servo arbitrio*, the *sub contrario*, instead of validating a specific method (the *theologia crucis*), invalidates the presupposition that a valid method exists and can be applied, when it comes to theological knowledge. Thus, in both works we have an operation upon the conditions of knowledge, but in *De servo arbitrio*, this operation is only negative: the *sub contrario* means that every condition fails when it is applied to God.[23]

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[21] The difference between the 1518 and the 1525 treatises is confirmed by Loewenich, precisely in reference to the *Deus absconditus*. As Loewenich emphasizes in *Theologia crucis*: 27–29, the *Deus absconditus* of the *Disputatio* is the condition for God to be known and the object of theological knowledge: God is *absconditus sub contrario*. In the first version of his study, Loewenich interprets the concept of *Deus absconditus* of *De servo arbitrio* in continuity with the formulation of 1518 (see *ivi*: 37–39). But in Nachwort to the fourth edition, he writes: "Der Deus absconditus in der Deutung der Ezechielstelle [Loewenich refers to WA 18: 682,26–683,10, where Luther discusses Ezek 18:23–24, 31–32] ist nicht eine Ercheinungsweise des Deus revelatus, ist nicht der Deus crucifixus, sondern scheint ein Deus absolutus, ein Deus per se zu sein, mit dem wir kein commercium haben" (*ivi*: 204). This points to a change in perspective between the *Disputatio* and *De servo arbitrio*: in the latter, the *Deus absconditus* no longer refers to the fact that God is inaccessible from a *prima facie* gnoseological standpoint and is thus accessible from the standpoint of *sub contrario*. Rather, God is *absconditus* beyond any distinction between non-*sub contrario* and *sub contrario* methods. God is *absconditus* in an absolute way, for any use of our conditions of knowledge, intuitive or counter-intuitive. Therefore, it is no longer the object of *theologia crucis* (see *ivi*: 30). Interestingly, also Müller, "Zur 'voluntas dei abscondita'": 157–158 presents a distinction between *Deus absconditus sub contrario* (as in the *Disputatio*, I would say) and *Deus absconditus in maiestate* (as in *De servo arbitrio*), and without reference to Loewenich's work; see in particular *ivi*: 158: "Der *deus absconditus sub contrario* verweist auf die Art und Weise, in welcher Gott mit dem Menschen kommuniziert, während mit der *voluntas dei abscondita* eine echte, und d.h. wechselseitige, Kommunikation nich möglich ist, sondern allein Anbetung und Verherung." On the *Deus absconditus*, see *infra*, Ch. 4.

[22] This is the gnoseological application of Augustine, *Sermo 117*: 3.5; see also 2.3.

[23] This further clarifies the relationship between *De servo arbitrio* and *De libertate christiana* outlined in *supra*, Ch. 1 section 6. According to *De libertate christiana*, what is theologically sovereign appears as the *contrarium* of the intuitive idea of sovereignty. True potency is not manifested in power, but in frailty (2 Cor 12:9; WA 7b: 57,15–18), its symbol not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns. The concept of spiritual sovereignty is not only understood as the *sub contrario* of the concept of worldly sovereignty; also, it abolishes the

This radicalization of the *sub contrario* negates the reduction of revelation to a method or the source of a method, as it was the case in the previous methodological assumption of the Pauline Word of the Cross. Otherwise, there would be at least *one* method that is compatible with divine revelation.[24] This conveys the idea that, instead of switching from one method to another, theological knowledge is the modification of the methodology of knowledge.

5. *Assequi*

To clarify this idea, I turn to the issue of the "*assequi*." Responding to Erasmus's skepticism, Luther writes (605,6–14):

Christianus vero anathema sit, si non certus sit et assequatur, id quod ei praescribitur: quomodo enim credet, id quod non assequitur? Nam tu illud hic assequi dices, quod certo quis apprehenderit et non Sceptico more dubitaverit. Alioqui quid est in ulla creatura, quod ullus homo assequi possit, si assequi id sit, quod perfecte nosse ac videre? Tum enim nec locum haberet, ut aliquis simul quaedam assequi et quaedam non assequi posset, sed unum aliquid assecutus, omnia assecutus esset, puta in Deo, quem qui non assequitur, nullam partem creaturae unquam assequitur.[25]

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validity of the concept of worldly sovereignty. Thus, the *sub contrario* has the function to modify theologically the concept of sovereignty. *De servo arbitrio* explicates this function: the *sub contrario* is not the method of understanding revelation, but the method of understanding the effects of revelation on the methods of knowledge. Again, *De servo arbitrio* presents the formal level upon which the position presented in *De libertate christiana* is based.

[24] Considering the Word of the Cross as the center of faith or theology means homogenizing it to human "wisdom" – that is, to the need for a center. This means negating the Word of the Cross: the Word denounces this need for a center of knowledge, this priority of human wisdom over God's wisdom, as "foolishness". Resolving or smoothing out the tension in the text means passing over "not only the meaning of the text, but also whatever is working itself out within the text, what bothers and torments it […]. It is 'wisdom' as the world's principle that provokes and – at the same time – irritates Paul's reflection; what he is talking about is the shaking of that wisdom, in that shaking lies the ground of faith. There is no reconciling of these two principles. That fact is the 'message.'" (Askani, "Paradox": 357).

[25] My translation: "Be damned the Christian who is not sure about and does not understand what is prescribed to him: how would he believe what he does not understand? Now, you would say that with 'understanding,' you mean what one learns with certainty and does not doubt in a skeptical way. Besides, if understanding means knowing and seeing in a perfect way, then what is there in a creature, that man can possibly understand? Also, it would not be the case that one at the same time understands something and does not understand something else; but once a single thing is understood, then everything is understood – for instance in God. If one does not understand God, one never understands any part of creation."

Despite the intricacy of the text, one thing is clear: Luther speaks about "asse-
qui," "certo apprehendere," and "perfecte nosse ac videre." What is less clear
is the relationship between these three forms of knowledge. In particular, the
question is whether the *assequi* coincides with the *perfecte nosse ac videre*.

As always, the opinions of commentators are divided between an identifica-
tion or a distinction between the *assequi* and the *perfecte nosse ac videre*.[26]
There are difficulties in both options. Were the *assequi* identical with the *per-
fecte nosse* (first option), then nothing would be known. (Consider the rhetori-
cal question "what is there in a creature, that one can possibly know?" The
implied answer is: nothing.) Were they not identical (second option), it would
be necessary to find a criterion to distinguish when the *assequi* is *perfecte nosse*
from when it is a *certo apprehendere*, but Luther does not present any criterion
for this distinction.

Jüngel, who defends the distinction between *assequi* and *perfecte nosse ac
videre*, emphasizes Luther's use of the subjunctive (*haberet*) as limitation of
the identity between *assequi* and *perfecte nosse*. Luther does not undermine the
powers of knowledge *in toto*;[27] he simply states that our knowledge is not a
perfecte nosse. But this interpretation is still a conjecture, although it is cor-
roborated by the proximity of Luther's position to Aquinas's impossibility of
the deduction of everything from the knowledge of God.[28]

Therefore, instead of trying to understand what Luther has claimed, let us
focus on the structure of this *perfecte nosse ac videre.* It describes the possibil-
ity of deducing the knowledge of everything from the knowledge of a single
thing ("unum aliquid assecutus, omnia assecutus"). Hence, it concerns not sin-
gle things, but the *relationship* between things, between the *omnia* and the
unum.

This relationship consists of the fact that the knowledge of the *omnia* is con-
ditioned by the *unum*. I know the *omnia* if I know the *unum*. The *unum* is the
condition of knowledge of the *omnia*, and thus it enjoys an epistemological
status different from that of the *omnia*: it is epistemologically unconditioned –
or, it is conditioned only by itself.

It results that the *perfecte nosse ac videre* is indeed a form of human
knowledge: the *deductive* one. The knowledge of the *omnia* is contained *inten-
sively* within the *unum*, it is potentially implied by the knowledge of the *unum*.
This is analogous to geometry: all possible theorems of a geometry are derived
from the axioms defining this geometry, so that all possible theorems (the *om-
nia*) are already potentially "contained" within the few axioms (the *unum*).
Every theorem of a specific geometry (the *omnia*) are formulable in light of the

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[26] Jüngel, in "… unum aliquid assecutus": 55–58, presents an analysis of the secondary
bibliography on the subject. See also *Id*., "Quae supra nos": 221.

[27] See *ivi*: 65–66.

[28] See Aquinas, *ST*: I, 12.8.

system of axioms (the *unum*) defining this geometry. Conversely, if no axiom is known, then the geometry cannot be known.[29] Thus, the *unum* has the same function as an *axiom.*

The fact that Luther does not speak of theorems but of *creation*, of physical reality, does not change the form of the relationship between *unum* and *omnia*. In Luther's case, the *unum* is the element from which one can deduce the knowledge of the synthetic totality of creation.

This is confirmed by the negative translation of the inference "unum aliquid assecutus, omnia assecutus." When posing "unum aliquid non assecutus," the conclusion is "omnia non assecutus" (the everything is not known), and not "non omnia assecutus" (which implies "sed aliquid assecutus"). In other words, negating the *unum* does not entail that I only know some things, and not everything; rather, it means that I do not have access to the totality of things, to the synthetic unity of all things as "part of the creation" ("ullam partem creaturae"[30]). If the axiom is unknown, then it is impossible to know the totality of interactions among all things as elements of a synthetic whole (of a system, of a "geometry"). But this does not negate that I still know single elements of this whole in their analytic distinction.

Thus, this *unum* is similar to the so-called "theory of everything": according to the intuition of Laplace, every past, present, and future event can be known through knowledge of gravity and classical mechanics – in other terms, by knowing the position, the velocity, and the interaction of everything at a given moment, we would be able to deduce every future event, and thus know everything.[31]

Luther negates this deductive knowledge, this *perfecte nosse ac videre*. Again, this does not mean that one does not know single events. Rather, it means that one cannot know these events as parts of the set called creation, and not as isolated elements.[32] Again, this is similar to geometry. It is possible to know single objects of a geometry without knowing the axioms of the geometry (for instance, to know intuitively a geometrical figure); yet, without knowledge of the axioms, it is impossible to know these figures in their synthetic unity, or

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[29] A possible objection: Luther also speaks of "ac videre" – not only to know, but also to *see*. I answer by referring to the etymology of the term "theorem."

[30] Here the term "creatura" is used in the meaning of "creation."

[31] See Laplace, *Essai philosophique*: 14: "Une intelligence qui, pour un instant donné, connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée, et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule les mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers et ceux du plus léger atome: rien ne serait incertain pour elle, et l'avenir comme le passé serait présent à ses yeux."

[32] A possible objection: does speaking of creation not entail already knowing the creation as a whole? No; it simply means thinking about creation, and not necessarily knowing the structure of the synthetic relationship between all parts of creation.

as elements of a geometry – because, with no axioms, there is no definition of any geometry.

Given that this knowledge is impossible (at least according to Luther), then there is no such "theory of everything" concerning creation. Consequently, the axiom of this theory is not known. Now, this axiom allowing for knowledge of such synthetic unity would be God. Therefore, the conclusion is *not* that we do not know God. Rather, the conclusion is that we do not know God *as such axiom*. What Luther says is that God is not the axiom founding a deductive knowledge.

6. Freedom to Know Paradoxically

It follows that divine revelation does not provide such an axiom. Therefore, divine revelation is independent from the deductive inference "condition of knowledge[33] ⊢ knowledge" or "*unum assecutus* ⊢ *omnia assecutus*." Not only is divine revelation not the conclusion of a deduction[34]; it also does not formulate the condition (the axiom) for a deduction.

This is indeed a knowledge: the knowledge that divine revelation is unconditioned by the requirement of deductive foundation and validation.[35] Therefore, theological knowledge concerns not divine revelation (the supposed "*unum*") but the relationship between divine revelation and the requirement of foundation and validation. This relationship is one of *limitation*. From the theological perspective, this requirement, and the structure that satisfies it, are limited because they cannot produce divine revelation; no foundation and validation can be equated to divine revelation.[36]

This statement seems to be a deduction: it is inferred from assuming the distinction between divine *verbum* and human *verbum*, and the irreducibility of the former to the forms of the latter. Therefore, the inference about the

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[33] An axiom is functionally identical to a condition of knowledge; an axiom does not need to be formulated in order to be valid. For instance, hyperbolic geometry is not based on an axiom built on the negation of Euclid's fifth postulate. Rather, this negation (and thus the negative of the fifth postulate) is the consequence of the constitution of such geometry. See Pettoello, "Un nuovo mondo": 17–18.

[34] See *supra*, section 2.

[35] I will expand upon this issue in *infra* Ch. 4, sections 6–8. I anticipate here my position: theology is a meta-axiomatic system. Its "axiom" (called "divine revelation") functions as invalidation of the validity of all possible axioms.

[36] This is why we can say: "Nulla in mundo pax sincera sine felle; pura et vera, dulcis Jesu, est in te"; Vivaldi, *Nulla in mundo pax sincera*, RV 630. Only in and as divine *verbum* is the peace complete (see John 14:23–27), because in all other cases, peace (that is, truth) must be founded and validated.

theological limitation of the requirement and the structure of foundation and validation applies to its own structure. It is a *self-referential* inference.

Self-reference qualifies a *paradox*. Theological knowledge is paradoxical because it simultaneously overcomes and maintains its own foundational structure: this structure founds the theological knowledge about this structure's own theological limitation. Thus, the paradox follows from a change in priority, from the foundational structure to divine revelation: the *axiomatic validity* of the structure is theologically subordinated to divine revelation. Divine revelation is the source of *knowing* this structure as limited, and thus the validity of this structure is theologically conditioned upon divine revelation.[37] This is why the world is no longer the same following contact with divine revelation (626,26–27); the validity of the forms of knowing the world is no longer the same.

Therefore, theological knowledge is simultaneously a metaknowledge: it presents the theological conception of knowledge as dependent upon divine revelation in order to know the limitation of knowledge's own forms. Theology conceives knowledge as the recursive system that considers its own structure as what is *not* divine revelation.

This helps us understand the meaningfulness of the paradox of freedom as slavery under God – our starting point. The theological self-reference of knowledge is the theological *freedom* of knowledge. Knowledge is theologically conceived as free to *receive* the revelation of the limitation of its own formal structure. This is not freedom *from* the theological limitation of the formal foundation of knowledge; this move would equate knowledge with divine revelation, thus impeding any theological conception of knowledge. Rather, this is the freedom to paradoxically recognize knowledge as what cannot be divine revelation. This is the freedom of knowledge to be dependent upon divine revelation in order to know its own theological limitation.

This freedom is called – or rather, calls itself – *faith*. Faith is the *certo apprehendere* not *about* divine revelation, but *from* divine revelation *about* the limitation of this *apprehendere*. Faith is the confession – the knowledge – that we do not know Jesus Christ *without* Jesus Christ, that we do not know divine revelation *without* revelation (779,3–6), and that we need divine revelation in order to know this dependence of our knowledge upon divine revelation. It is the confession of the need for divine revelation in order to *know*, to *ascertain*, that our knowledge is not divine revelation.

Faith is not the satisfaction of the need of an ultimate knowledge; faith is not certainty in the sense of *securitas*.[38] Rather, it is the certainty that theologically knowledge has nothing to do with *securitas*, since no condition (no

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[37] This change in priority is the formal aspect of the *conversio* operated by the Word of God (659,31).

[38] See Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 170.

foundation) of certainty can apply to divine revelation. In sum, faith is the certainty of always having to learn from divine revelation.[39]

Thus, faith is the theological self-reference of knowledge; it refers to what is unseen (633,7–8), not by seeing it, but by attesting that it is unseen. What is not seen continues to be unseen, because it allows the faculty of seeing to reconsider its powers. The *summus gradus* of faith is to question what is assumed to be axiomatically valid (for instance, the non-contradiction: 633,15–21).[40]

Luther expresses this through the image of the three *lumina*: *naturae*, *gratiae*, and *gloriae* (785,26–38). The *lumen naturae* – the conditions of knowledge – is unable to enlighten the Word of God, and thus it rejects the Word as scandal and folly. The *lumen gratiae* is the light received from divine revelation about the fact that that which transcends our powers of knowledge will be unveiled in the *eschaton* and as the event of *eschaton*. As such, the *lumen gratiae* invites us to acknowledge that God's *incomprehensibility* is due to the limitation of our powers of knowledge.

The *lumen gloriae* is this final, full unveiling. The fact that the *lumen gloriae will* be, and is not yet, means that the *lumen gratiae* reveals that the *lumen gloriae* transcends our conditions of knowledge. Thus, the *lumen gratiae* reveals that our knowledge is theologically limited, no matter the method or the condition. The *lumen gratiae* is the light *not* of knowing God, but of constantly *seeking* God – of constantly invoking the dependence of knowledge upon divine revelation.[41]

Thus, divine revelation is not the object of investigation, but the principle, the *lumen*, in light of which human forms and structures are re-considered as dependent on divine revelation, and thus as theologically limited.

7. *Nova lingua*

How is it possible to *formulate* this theological self-reference? This corresponds to asking how theology speaks. I analyze this issue in the following three sections, by considering: the status of theology as "*nova lingua*"; the theological limitation of metalinguistic forms; and the paradox of freedom conceived from a metalinguistic perspective.

Confronting the issue of theological conceptualization means analyzing the specificity of theological language. What differentiates theology from all other uses of language?

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[39] Faith is the certainty of always being children, theologically; see Jüngel, "… unum aliquid assecutus": 69.

[40] I will expand upon the issue of *fidei summus gradus* in *infra*, Ch. 11 section 1.

[41] This means that faith is a gift of God (675,12–13).

Before applying this question to *De servo arbitrio*, it is interesting to consider how recent Luther scholarship has tried to define Luther's conception of the specificity of theology. Two positions can be identified: one based on semantics (and specifically on metaphor), and the other on syntactics (and specifically on a new syllogistic inference).[42] Each of the two positions holds itself as having clarified what Luther meant by calling theology "*nova lingua*" – a new language apart from all other spheres of language – in some of his later *Disputationes* dating from 1537 to 1539.[43]

I focus on one example taken from Luther's *Disputatio de sententia Verbum caro factum est*. In this dispute, Luther responds to Sorbonne theologians[44] by presenting the distinction between philosophical and theological syllogism. He considers the syllogism: "Omnis homo est creatura. Christus est homo. Ergo Christus est creatura."[45] Luther attributes the specificity of theology to the fact that this syllogism is true in philosophy, but false in theology. This syllogism shows the incompatibility between the philosophical major premise and the theological minor premise.[46]

The two scholarly positions interpret this incompatibility – and thus Luther's concept of "*nova lingua*" – differently. According to the semantic position, theological language is based upon the attribution of a new meaning to the words; theological language is metaphorical.[47] This also applies to the syllogism. The meaning of the term *homo* experiences a semantic shift from philosophy to theology.[48] On the other hand, the syntactic position states that theological language depends on new rules of inference[49] – for instance, the

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[42] Regarding the first position, I refer mainly to Bielfeldt, "Luther, Metaphor" and "Luther on Language," and for the second option mainly to White, "Luther's View." Bielfeldt ("Luther on Language": 217–218 note 81) places his position alongside Jüngel's (*Gott als Geheimnis*), Saarinen's ("Metapher"), and Wabel's (*Sprache als Grenze*); yet there are remarkable differences between them, as Bielfeldt himself is keen to acknowledge (see *Id.*, "Luther, Metaphor": 126–130). I will reference the difference between his position and Jüngel's at the end of this section.

[43] These are: WA 39.1b; WA 39.2a; WA 39.2b. The term "*nova lingua*" appears in WA 39.1b: 231,28–30 and WA 39.2a: 5,35–36.

[44] Or perhaps to d'Ailly and his conception of a reformation of logic to fit theology; see Bielfeldt, "Luther, Metaphor": 133 note 32.

[45] WA 39.2a: 10,4–5.

[46] Therefore, for Luther, it is a question not of logic's reformation, but rather of acknowledging the illegitimacy of applying any logical structure to what is formally independent from it.

[47] See Bielfeldt, "Luther, Metaphor": 126–130.

[48] See WA 39.2a: 19,31–35. See also Mattes, "Luther's Use of Philosophy": 135–138. According to Bielfeldt, "Luther, Metaphor": 124, and also *Id.*, "Luther on Language": 203, this semantic shift is due to the *communicatio idiomatum*.

[49] See White, "Luther's View": 203.

validity of the syllogism depends on conditions that differ from the conditions of validity of the usual, non-theological syllogism.[50]

The two positions justify themselves and criticize each other from both historical and theoretical perspectives.

From the historical perspective, the semantic position justifies its proposal in light of Luther's supposed reference to the *via antiqua*.[51] Vice-versa, the new-syntactic position affirms the supposed nominalistic influence on Luther's theology and conception of language.[52] Moreover, it claims to avoid any anachronism.[53] A further criticism is that both positions may be charged with historical incompetence.[54]

It would seem that the Luther of *De servo arbitrio* cannot easily be associated with either of the two *viae*. On one hand, one point of divergence from Erasmus is Luther's rejection of all patristic *auctoritas*. On the other hand, Luther distances himself from the subtleties of the "*moderni*" (663,10–11), such

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[50] This concerns the rejection of the analytical connection between terms (the term "*homo*" analytically contains the term "*creatura*" and thus the qualification of not-being-Creator). See WA 39.2a: 12,27–30. See also White, "Luther's View": 215 note 99.

[51] See Bielfeldt, "Luther on Language": 212.

[52] See White, "Luther's View": 206.

[53] For instance, by considering extensionalist who allegedly intensionalist (Luther). See *ivi*: 200; see also Bielfeldt, "Luther on Language": 211.

[54] For instance, Oberman ("Review of Graham White": 698) highlights White's mistaken Latin transcription of d'Ailly (in *Luther as Nominalist*), thus calling into question White's self-claimed fundamental discovery of a new relevant source in Luther (see, for instance, White, "Luther's View": 199–200). Moreover, Bielfeldt ("Luther on Language": 210–211) indirectly answers White ("Luther's View": 201) with regard to the supposed lack of importance of metaphor for Luther. In any case, I wonder whether Lutheran scholarship truly benefits from such self-proclaimed discoveries of supposedly true sources of Luther. I do not mean that such sources should not be sought; rather, I mean that no such claim should be taken or presented as definitive. Given the temporal and intellectual distance between Luther and us, and given that his paradigms, language, and vocabulary are no longer ours, the allegation (White, "Luther's View": 200) or self-allegation (Bielfeldt, "Luther on Language": 211) of anachronism is superfluous. All historical reconstructions are somehow anachronistic; thus, the task is not avoiding anachronism, but limiting it. This means acknowledging the distance between past and present paradigms, and avoiding a homogenization between the two. The possibility of anachronism means that it is indeed possible to see a continuity between past and present paradigms (for instance the presence of the nominalism/realism alternative in the history of philosophy). Limiting such anachronism means integrating this continuity with the distance between past and present. In sum, acknowledging this distance means understanding these paradigms and their modification in time – structuring the progression of time that we call history. Thus, thanks to history, we become aware of our present theological paradigms and their limits, and come to know how to re-consider (and maybe overcome) such limits. It is precisely due to the reference to the theological past that we can understand our theological present; the theological past is the past of our theological present. Luther speaks from his time to our time, and about our time. Truth in history is a regulative idea; it cannot be an end in itself, but the means to understand the present.

as the distinction between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta* (715,2; 719,14).[55]

Thus, the theoretical perspective is more relevant. The syntactic position claims that the semantic position is affected by the application of a Neo-Kantian paradigm to Luther: according to this interpretation, the *nova lingua* is based upon exceptions to the transcendental principles of language (these exceptions being the theological metaphors). Yet there is no evidence that these exceptions can *only* be metaphors.[56] Therefore, instead of law-exception, the syntactic position speaks of law-*modification*: theological discourse is specified by an *ad hoc* formalization of inferences[57] based on the modification of the normal deductive structure.[58] This avoids the formulation of heretical conclusions; the truthfulness of dogmatic statements is based upon this modified inferential structure.[59]

Yet, these reflections are criticized by the semantic position. First, the syntactic position does not present any explanation of "how human beings can come to know the different, non-standard inference patterns"[60] of theological syllogism. Second, the syntactic position seems incoherent: religious truths and the criteria of non-heretic statements refer to a syllogistic structure, thus theology depends on the syllogistic form of philosophical language.[61]

These mutual criticisms are overcome by a more refined position on theological metaphors. According to this position, metaphors concern not words, but propositions.[62] Metaphors are based on *analogy*, the rapport between the

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[55] See Oberman, *The Dawn*: 27; Mattes, "Luther's Use of Philosophy": 123–124; Kärkkäinen, "Nominalism": 704–705. See also Biechler, "Gabriel Biel": 124–127 concerning the difference of *De servo arbitrio* from Biel's conception of *liberum arbitrium*. I analyze Luther's rejection of the distinction between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta* in *infra*, Ch. 4 section 5.

[56] See White, "Luther's View": 200–201.

[57] In *ivi*: 203, White quotes Luther in asserting that the analytical connection between "mother" and "impure woman" is no longer valid.

[58] See *ivi*: 207.

[59] See *ivi*: 188, 202.

[60] Bielfeldt, "Luther on Language": 211.

[61] See *ivi*: 209. The negation of the usual, *prima facie* syllogism is irrelevant because the problem concerns precisely the fact that theology is still based on an inferential structure of language defined philosophically (regardless of whether this structure is *prima* or *secunda facie*), thus theology is subordinated to philosophy.

[62] Here I consider Jüngel's position. See Jüngel, "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 146–147; 155. Bielfeldt, in "Luther, Metaphor": 127, criticizes Jüngel's position for the fact that it is based on an "ontological" position, a position implying the existence of an "underlying similarity between the finite and the infinite." I honestly do not see how this criticism can apply to Jüngel.

forms of mutually irreducible elements.[63] Thus metaphors are not new words, but non-*prima facie* formal relationships between words.[64] This resolves the dichotomy between semantics and syntax. On one hand, metaphor is not the result of an exception from principles of language because it is indeed based on a structure called *analogy*. On the other hand, analogy impedes the dependence of dogmatic truths upon a specific structure of inference precisely because it maintains the distance between language and God.

In fact, because human language is worldly, it is *inadequate* to express God.[65] Only analogy can say God as mystery without denaturing or negating this mystery in and under this saying.[66] In other words, metaphorical language, based on the analogical form, expresses human language *distancing* from itself[67]; it is language's indirect[68] affirmation of its *inadequacy* before divine revelation.[69] Analogy is the form of specificity and validity of theological language[70]; theology is based on metaphorology.[71]

8. *Inopia formarum*

Yet, neither is the analogical position exempted from problems. This position assumes language as conceptually inadequate; consequently, analogy is the only possible structure of language when it comes to saying God. This implies that there is at least one *adequate* structure that does not negate but underscores such conceptual inadequacy: the analogical structure.

This incoherency also affects the two previous positions, the metaphoric and the new-syllogistic. In all cases, the definition of conceptual inadequacy (*inopia verborum*, or lack of words) is connected to a specific form of language:

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[63] See Kant, *Prolegomena*: § 58, Ak IV 357–360; *Id*., *KrV*: A 179–180 B 222–223, Ak III 160–161, Ak IV 122–123. See also Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis*: 361–362; White, *Talking about God*: 183–184.

[64] See Jüngel, "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 147–148.

[65] See *ivi*: 156.

[66] See *Id*., *Gott als Geheimnis*: 386.

[67] See *Id*., "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 153.

[68] Indirect, not because analogy is an "inauthentic" discourse (see *Id*., *Gott als Geheimnis*: 396 note 17), but because the relational aspect of analogy is not found between what is signified but between the *forms* of what is signified. All direct affirmations of language's failure before God (as in the *theologia negativa*) are the affirmations of its success – the success of stating its own failure.

[69] This is the condition of expressing God not as a definite thing, as an object of language already in the world (and thus belonging to the world), but rather as the "*x*" that constantly returns to the world. See *Id*., "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 156.

[70] See *Id*., *Gott als Geheimnis*: 382–384; "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 147 note 13.

[71] See *Id*., "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 153, 157. See also Buntfuß, *Tradition und Innovation*: 158–160.

metaphorical, analogical, new-syllogistic. This means that language is indeed adequate – not in its conceptualizations, but in the formal determination of conceptual inadequacy. In sum, language is adequate as *metalanguage*, as language on language's conceptual inadequacy.

In other words, adequacy passes from the conceptual level to the formal level. Any possible formulation of a language's *inopia verborum* (conceptual inadequacy) implies a *copia formarum* (abundance of forms, or formal adequacy); it is always possible to metalinguistically determine the form of such *inopia verborum* in an adequate way, because this formal adequacy is the condition to *say* this *inopia verborum*. Language may lack words, but precisely *because* of this, precisely because this "lacking words" *is said*, language never fully lacks words.

This points to a serious issue: the ultimate loss of the inadequacy. The conceptually inadequate language complies with the metalinguistic definition of this inadequacy. Therefore, it speaks *adequately* to its own metalinguistically-defined inadequacy. At the formal level – the level of metalanguage – the conceptual inadequacy of a language is this language's *specific adequacy*.[72] From the formal, metalinguistic perspective, there is no difference between conceptual inadequacy and conceptual adequacy; in both cases, there is a metalanguage that *adequately* founds and validates a use of language (standard, metaphorical, analogical, new-syntactic, et cetera).

This metalinguistic adequacy is incongruent with the premises of theological conceptual inadequacy. This inadequacy, and thus the need for a new use (a *theological* use) of language, is due to the fact that – in the case of theology – language deals with a unique object: divine revelation. The revelation that "*verbum caro factum est*" is why the usual semantic or syntactic uses of language are inadequate. Therefore, the conceptual inadequacy is derived from the contact with divine revelation – in other terms, this inadequacy is theological.

The fact that this inadequacy is metalinguistically founded and validated entails an overlap between metalanguage and divine revelation. Divine revelation plays the same function as any metalinguistic foundation and validation: it invalidates the standard use of language, and validates a new use of

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[72] Almost paradoxically, this is true even in the case where this "specific adequacy" is silence. In fact, silence implies a metalanguage prescribing the silence; as such, this prescription refers only to the conceptual level and not to the formal level of language. The silence of language corresponds to the voice of the language about this silence. This is indirectly confirmed by Jüngel (*Gott als Geheimnis*: 347): language falls silent because something else is speaking. Theologically, this "something else" is divine revelation. Therefore, speaking about language's silence means considering this "something else" as a language. The metalinguistic definition of language's silence coincides with the application of language's own standard to divine revelation.

language.[73] Thus, divine revelation becomes a metalanguage among other met-alanguages. This is the incoherence: instead of human language being inade-quate, divine revelation becomes *adequate to human language* by meeting the standard of being a metalanguage.[74]

The solution to this incoherence is the extension of the theological inade-quacy to the metalinguistic level. Divine revelation does not merely reveal the inadequacy of this or that use of language (semantic or syntactic standard uses of language); it reveals the inadequacy of the metalinguistic foundation and validation of any use of language. Therefore, preserving the distinction be-tween human *verbum* and divine *verbum* means stating that divine *verbum* has the priority over the formal aspect of language: the metalanguage. Considering a *verbum* that is divine means considering metalinguistic foundation and vali-dation as *limitations* of language, as what make it human *verbum* – or the *ver-bum* that is not divine.

Therefore, language's *copia formarum* is language's *theological inopia*. Theologically, language is incomplete because it is *formally* complete (through the "meta" aspect of language), and it is inadequate because it is *formally* ade-quate (adequate for *itself*); that is, because it is not able to see its own incom-pleteness *by itself*. Language needs divine revelation to see its own *copia for-marum* as language's *inopia*.[75] Thus, theology is not a language founded and validated by a new, specific metalanguage. Rather, theology is the reflection on language's theological situation: a situation of *inopia formarum*, of formal limitation.

It follows that language's anthropomorphism is "als ein Mangel emp-funden"[76] (it is language's inadequacy) not when human language deals with divine revelation, but as that which enables the distinction, and thus the

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[73] One confirmation of this consists of the idea that Scripture is informed by an assumed metalanguage: Scripture speaks according to this or that metalanguage; thus language can, and shall, also speak according to the same metalanguage. For instance, in the case of met-aphor, see Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis*: 391 and 394. See also *Id*., "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 145 and 151.

[74] This incoherence is twofold. It concerns not only metalanguage's "vertical" function of providing a foundation and validation of a use of language; it also concerns metalan-guage's "horizontal" function of invalidating any other metalinguistic foundation and vali-dation of the same use of language. This function is at the basis of the clash between semantic and syntactic perspectives on theology. Given that all metalanguages fulfil this invalidating function against each other, then the invalidation is *relative*: it is valid only from the per-spective of the assumed metalanguage. This is incongruent with the theological absoluteness of divine revelation over any possible foundation and validation of language's adequacy. For more details, allow me to refer to Vestrucci, *Metalanguage and Revelation*.

[75] See Bachmann, *The Thirtieth Year*. Her "Wittgenstein" becomes aware that only a new language can provide an adequate means for communicating with God – and yet, because all languages are human, this new language is destined to remain a dream.

[76] Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis*: 354.

relationship, between human language and divine revelation. Divine revelation is not an object of inadequate conceptualizations, but the principle of comprehension of human language as anthropomorphic.[77]

Returning to the syllogism: Each human being is a creature; Jesus Christ is a human being; Jesus Christ is a creature. It does not matter what structure of language (new semantics, new syntax…) explains the falseness of this syllogism, because regardless of the structure, what matters is the affirmation of the theological limitation of syllogism.[78] The invalidation of the syllogism is not the validation of a new structure of language, but rather, it is the evidence of theology's operation upon the metalinguistic (metalogical) validity of syllogistic structure. Therefore, the specificity of theology does not refer to this or that new structure, but it refers to the *specific* (meta-)assumption of the same old (or even new) structures.[79] Theology assumes no matter which structure as the means for expressing the theological limitation of this structure itself.

Luther's operation upon the modal language of freedom refers precisely to this. The modal language of freedom is one of the possible metalanguages of freedom. Thus, Luther's operation upon the modal language of freedom belongs to this inversion of priority between metalanguage and divine revelation.

Were this inversion not applied, we would return to the equation between metalanguage and divine revelation. Specifically, God's freedom would be considered an object, or concept, defined by the metalanguage called the "modal language of freedom." In sum, the formal priority of metalanguage over divine revelation is the source of the two fallacious theological attitudes analyzed in section 3: the "scandal and folly," and the attribution of artificial, biased meaningfulness to divine revelation.

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[77] In other words, divine verbum is not an object which resists passively to any attempt of conceptualization (such as music, or mathematical formulas), but rather it actively shows, by its own being revelation, the necessary anthropomorphism of language, and thus language's theological limitation.

[78] See WA 39.2a: 4,32–33.

[79] I apply to the metalinguistic level the famous thesis 24 in WA 39.2b: 94,25: "Non quod novam seu aliam rem, sed nove at aliter significet rem [.]" It would tentatively follow that the "same things" of which philosophy and theology "are different kinds of knowledge" (Dalferth, *Philosophy and Theology*: 77; see also Mattes, "Luther's Use of Philosophy": 137) are not merely "things" (concepts?), but any possible element belonging to the set "metalanguage"; in other words, the distinction between philosophy and theology would concern not which metalanguage is used to signify things, but *how* the metalinguistic level is considered. However, I think that any generalization on the distinction between philosophy and theology is dangerous, since it is based on a specific (not to say arbitrary) idea of both terms; for instance, in my perspective, philosophy is defined as a meta-reflection – the reflection on the methodology and the fundamental concepts of the different kinds or fields of reflection.

9. Freedom to Say "*servum arbitrium*"

The theological limitation of the metalinguistic function of foundation and validation permeates Luther's reply to Erasmus's criticism of arbitrary absurdity. Erasmus rejects Luther's position in the *Assertio* because, according to Erasmus, Luther elevates a mere subjective position to a *certissima et fermissima* (603,24) assertive proposition, neglecting Erasmus's methodological axioms of cogent discourse on freedom.

By defending the self-validity of the *assertio*, of the "constanter adherere, affirmare, confiteri, tueri atque invictum perseverare" (603,12–14) until death (603,31), Luther questions the theological relevance of any metalinguistic condition of validation of propositions about freedom.[80] The *assertio* rejects not a specific method of validation, but the aptness of the process of metalinguistic validation in theology.[81] Thus, it makes no sense to either question or defend the validity of the *assertio* by referring to something other than the *assertio* itself.

The operation that the *assertio* performs on the metalinguistic level is self-referential. In fact, this operation should be conducted without the assumption of a new metalanguage, otherwise the *assertio* would reiterate what it aims to invalidate: the priority of the metalinguistic level over divine revelation in theology. In other words, the *copia formarum* would not be a theological *inopia*. Therefore, it follows that the *assertio* operates upon its *own* metalanguage. This means that the *assertio* does *not* annul its own metalanguage – otherwise, no *assertio* would be possible whatsoever. Rather, the *assertio* annuls the axiomatic *validity* of its own metalanguage. The *assertio* expresses the theological limitation of its own form: it is a use of language confessing *its own* dependency on divine revelation.[82]

Again, self-reference means paradoxicality. In the *assertio*, a metalanguage is used to produce a concept that expresses the annulation of this metalanguage's axiomatic validity. Thus, the concept produced has the purpose of

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[80] A metalanguage is a condition of validation, since it presents the form for the formulation of correct (founded and validated) propositions.

[81] Rather than "rhetoric to defeat rhetoric" (Boyle, *Rhetoric and Reform*: 90), *assertio* expresses the theological limitation of the *form* of rhetorical constructions. Thus, theology does not "ought to *outdo* all other rhetoric" (Hobson, *The Rhetorical World*: 69); rather, the validity of the condition of *any* possible rhetoric is under theological examination. I think this other quotation from Boyle is closer to my perspective (although the "meta" nature of *assertio* is still neglected): "Luther's true rhetoric is not rhetoric but rather […] a theo-logic in which the assertive rather than the persuasive denotation of *logos* is established as the root of theology" (Ead., *Rhetoric and Reform*: 88).

[82] *Assertio*, being an aspect of *confessio* (see Bader, *Assertio*: 189–193), plays the same role as the *confessio* of faith (see Reinhuber, *Kämpfender Glaube*: 17), and thus it is the expression of the dependence on revelation (see Bader, *Assertio*: 170).

expressing not a meaning, but the limitation of its own condition of meaning. In the case of the metalanguage called the "modal language of freedom," the modal operators are used not in compliance with the metalanguage, but to express the dependence of this metalanguage upon divine revelation – or in other words, the theological limitation of the modal language of freedom. The paradoxical use of the metalanguage is why the metalanguage is simultaneously overcome and maintained.[83]

The result of this operation is the concept of *servum arbitrium*,[84] the *assertio* that the *arbitrium* is *servum* under God's freedom. The concept of *servum arbitrium* is not an absurdity, because it is not properly a concept of freedom: it is the outcome of the theological annulation of metalanguage's axiomatic validity. The modal operators are applied in a paradoxical way, because this is the only way to express the theological inadequacy of the form, the logic, in which the operators work.

Therefore, Luther's position is meaningful (non-absurd) *because* it is paradoxical, because it aims to express the meaning that is implicitly *negated* by the non-paradoxical position: the theological limitation of the conditions of non-paradoxical meaning. In other words, the concept of *servum arbitrium* is meaningful not on the conceptual level, but on the metalinguistic level, because it refers not to freedom, but to the axiomatic validity of the metalinguistic condition of meaningful conceptualization of freedom that Erasmus assumes. Vice-versa, Luther's discourse can only be absurd, in Erasmus's eyes, because it rejects the axiomatic assumption of the condition of meaningfulness Erasmus applies to Scripture.

Thus, Luther's discourse does not lie on the same level as Erasmus's discourse: it concerns, engages, and eventually rejects the axiomatic assumption of the *method* upon which Erasmus's discourse is founded. This axiomatic

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[83] Theological paradox is different from non-theological paradoxes (for instance, the paradoxes of the liar, of Achilles and the tortoise, of the sorites; see Bader, "Luther's *theologica paradoxa*": 142). A non-theological paradox is the result of a system reflecting upon the limit of its own specific condition (respectively: binary truth, measurability of space, vagueness). On the other hand, a theological paradox, such as Luther's paradox, is the fruit of a system reflecting upon the limitation of every possible condition, given that no condition is a condition of divine revelation. In sum, theological paradox is language dealing not with its own quirkiness, but with what is assumed to be independent of the forms of language: divine revelation.

[84] It is known that Luther takes the term "*servum arbitrium*" from Augustine, *C. Jul.*: II.8.23; see WA 18: 665,10–11. Yet, Luther transforms this one-time occurrence in Augustine into the expression of an operation upon the language of *liberum arbitrium*. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that, whilst Augustine speaks of *liberum arbitrium captivum* and *liberum arbitrium liberatum*, Luther only speaks of *servum arbitrium*; he negates the qualification of *arbitrium* as *liberum* (see Büttgen, "Enslaved judgment": 256; see also McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*: 232). For Luther, the *arbitrium liberatum* would be the *arbitrium* that acknowledges its not being *liberum*.

validity is inconsistent with the theological premises – that is, with the uncon-
ditionality and priority of divine revelation over the foundational level of lan-
guage (including the language on freedom).[85]

The clash between Erasmus and Luther does not concern opposing concepts
of freedom, but rather the opposing assumption of the metalanguage founding
and validating a conceptual meaning – in our case, the modal concept of free-
dom.[86] Thus, Erasmus's position is right in itself: by assuming the priority of
the modal language of freedom, it is impossible for Scripture to negate *liberum
arbitrium*. But this position becomes wrong in the face of Luther's position,
when this priority is turned upside-down. According to Luther, thinking about
freedom theologically corresponds to *rethinking* the validity of all conditions
of meaningfulness of freedom.

It follows that Luther can only say "*servum arbitrium*": there is no other
alternative from the assumption of divine revelation as formally unconditioned.
Thus, upon a closer look, this unfreedom is *freedom*. This is *not* freedom *from*
the theological limitation of language, or *from* a supposed inadequacy that af-
fect the rest of language. This limitation, this inadequacy, also affects theology
as part of human *verbum*. Theology is not a language "before Babel."[87]

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[85] It is misleading to qualify the *querelle* between Erasmus and Luther as an "eternal
theological dilemma" (see Ravasi, "L'eterno dilemma"), because there is no common level
between the two positions from which to judge the *querelle* to be a "dilemma." There would
be a dilemma only if Luther's position were reduced to a conceptual one – the mere negation
of *liberum arbitrium* – that is, only if *De servo arbitrio* were considered identical to the
Assertio omnium articulorum. Yet, once again, Luther's position questions the validity of
the metalanguage that structures Erasmus's position. Thus, there is no dilemma because the
two positions do not intersect: one is built upon the formal unconditionality of some condi-
tions of conceptualization, and the other upon the effort to reconsider this formal uncondi-
tionality in light of divine revelation. Thus, it is incorrect to state that "chacun des deux
hommes a rejeté les thèses de l'autre" (Arnold, "La querelle": 569), because the two rejec-
tions do not occur on the same level: Erasmus rejects a concept (or: the negation of a con-
cept); Luther rejects a method of conceptualization. Hence, the rejection is not mutual. The
distinction between Erasmus's *collatio* and Luther's *assertio* confirms this non-mutuality.

[86] My position is the formalization of Bader's position. Luther does not place his "Rede
de servo arbitrio […] neben und gegen die Rede des Erasmus." Rather, he lets it arise "durch
die Rede des Erasmus" (Bader, *Assertio*: 137). My position explicates the form of this "ent-
stehen durch" as operation upon the axiomatic validity of the conditions of Erasmus's dis-
course. As Bader emphasizes, interpreting one discourse "neben und gegen" the other is
partial because it considers both discourses formally equipollent; it does not appreciate that
Luther engages the formal conditions Erasmus assumes.

[87] In other words, for Luther "there is no pure, abstract alternative to everyday language
and its way of thinking." (Ringleben, "Theological Language": 407). Theology does not
present an alternative; rather, it speaks *from* an alternative that is already there: divine reve-
lation. Therefore, the "alternative" (novelty, specificity) of theology concerns the possibility
to consider the metalinguistic conditions of language (including theology) as limited in light
of divine revelation. The conditions are theologically limited because their theological

Rather, this is freedom to *see* this limitation, to see language as human *verbum* in light of divine *verbum*.[88] It is not simply the arbitrary freedom to say a paradox; it is the freedom of the paradox *to be meaningful*, to express the dependence of language upon divine revelation in order to formulate the *inopia formarum* of language.[89]

This freedom is what makes theology *nova lingua*: it is language beginning (or beginning *again*) from divine revelation. Thus, theology is *nova lingua* because it is not a specific language, but it is a specific *situation* of language: language is theology when it considers its own formal foundation and validation as limitation – as what is not divine revelation.

There are many linguistic confessions of language's limitation – all formulated, founded, and validated by language. Language's non-contradictory confession of limitation can only be theological.

10. Luther's "Copernican Revolution"

Luther's *De servo arbitrio* is the result of the coherent and radical assumption of the priority of divine *verbum* over human *verbum*.[90]

This is the "Copernican revolution" in *De servo arbitrio*: not the passage from a standard use to a theological use of language and concept of freedom, but rather the passage from the axiomatic validity of the forms of conceptualization to their theological limitation. Luther's revolution consists in the freedom to no longer consider the "earthly" coordinates as the meter of meaning, but as dependent upon a new center: divine revelation.

This new center no longer lies *on* these coordinates, like the zero in the cartesian plane or the sun in the Copernican system; it lies *outside* them. The center is *eccentric* to the coordinates – it does not depend on them, and it cannot be measured by them.[91] Yet this center (divine revelation) is indeed the point

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definition depends upon contact with divine revelation – or, as I analyze in *infra*, Ch. 10 section 1, upon "assumption" of divine revelation.

[88] This limitation can be interpreted as the formal sinfulness of language. See Bader, *Assertio*: 180. See also Małysz, "Sin": 151.

[89] This confirms that revelation is not the satisfaction of a need (for instance, the need for the perfect language), but the revelation of language's constant need to return to revelation.

[90] Perhaps it is for this reason that *De servo arbitrio*, alongside the Catechism, was so cherished by Luther; see WA Br 8: 99,7–8, letter number 3162 (letter to Wolfgang Caputo, 9th of July 1637). If the Catechism is the foundation of the Church, then *De servo arbitrio* presents the foundation of theological discourse. In any case, this confirms that we should always be careful in defining the place of *De servo arbitrio* among Luther's other theological works; see Lohse, *Luthers Theologie*: 185.

[91] This logical eccentricity is the condition for stating the eccentricity of human being before God. On human theological eccentricity, see Joest, *Ontologie*: 237 and 249; see also

from which these coordinates, and thus the gravity of language, derive, depend, and can be evaluated. This entails a modification of the coordinates. They can fit this center of "unfitness" only by being applied in such a way that expresses that they *do not fit the center*.

What results from this operation, if wrongly interpreted as mere application of these coordinates, can only be judged as utter absurdity. However, this judgment of absurdity is wrong, because it is issued from a situation that is no longer: the center and source of the coordinates no longer belongs to them. This can only be expressed paradoxically; thus, the paradoxical use of the coordinates is not absurd – it expresses a new situation of the coordinates.

Luther's revolution is much more than the mere passage from an "anthropocentric" theology to a "theocentric" theology. The terms "anthropocentric" and "theocentric" refer to the priority of one of the two poles of religious relationship over the other – respectively, human being and God.[92] "Theocentric" theology would be a theology that transfers the logical center of theological discourse from human being to God; "God," instead of "human being," is placed in the nominative case, and "human being" occupies the oblique case.[93]

However, "theocentrism" is simply a form of "anthropocentrism," just on a higher (formal, meta-) level. The transfer of the logical center from human being to God still happens *within* the "coordinates" – the conditions – of human language. Precisely because I can define a *correct* way of doing theology – the "theocentric" way – then human *verbum* and its metalinguistic conditions are still the center around which the relationship between human and God is organized.

Luther's Copernican revolution does not simply concern the organization of the coordinates. It concerns the principles defining the organization itself, the forms according to which space (that is, language) is organized.

Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*: 12–13. One can think about one's own eccentricity only in light of the theological eccentricity of one's logical coordinates. In other words, the theological understanding of human *verbum* as what is *not* divine *verbum* is the condition for human self-determination as *not* the creator (see Herms, "Gewißheit": 35). In *infra*, Ch. 9 and 10 I will expand upon the "elective affinity" between life and its meaning – and thus upon the theological re-formulation of life's meaning in light of divine revelation.

[92] See Watson, *Let God*: 34–37: "[J]ust as Copernicus started with a geocentric, but reached a heliocentric conception of the physical world, Luther began with an anthropocentric or egocentric conception of religion, but came to a theocentric conception. In this sense, Luther is a Copernicus in the realm of religion. […] Expressing the difference in specifically religious language, we may say: in egocentric religion, man chooses or 'elects' God; in theocentric religion, God chooses or 'elects' man."

[93] For instance, prayer as request ("human need → God") becomes prayer as gratitude ("God → human being"). Other examples (following *ivi*: 36): salvation according to human canon, or salvation as dependence upon God; divine justice as satisfaction of human expectations, or reformulation of the concept of justice from divine justice.

As such, Luther's revolution in theology differs from those of Copernicus and Kant. The Copernican revolution (I would say: the Copernicus-Galileo-Newton revolution) is the change from a non-inertial to an inertial frame of reference. Kant's revolution is the change from a non-transcendental to a transcendental frame of reference. These two revolutions light the way for the formulation of universal laws. The laws defined within an inertial frame of reference are valid for any possible inertial frame of reference; the laws defined within the transcendental frame of reference (pure *a priori* forms) are valid for any possible transcendental subject.

In Luther, the revolution is not a paradigm shift. Rather, it concerns the validity of the instrument "paradigm" (regardless of which paradigm is assumed); it concerns the steadiness of any method of formulating laws – in our case, any metalinguistic condition of meaning. Luther does not shift the frame of reference from "non-theological" to "theological"; rather, he introduces the passage from the validity of any metalinguistic frame of reference, to the limitation of any frame of reference.[94]

This is Luther's revolution: revolution not *of* language's organization, but *upon* language's organization. It is not a shift of the center of linguistic gravity from man to God, but from language to divine revelation.

The first kind of revolution – the paradigm shift – happens *within* human language, within the structure of coordinates, and within the conditions of the formulation of laws as the substitution of one way to formulate laws for another.

The second kind of revolution, Luther's revolution, happens *upon* human language, upon this structure of coordinates, as paradoxical freedom to subordinate such coordinates under divine revelation.

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[94] All three revolutions are the crowning moments of historical processes. For Copernicus, it is the process of moving towards the modern conception of science: it begins with Giordano Bruno and leads to Galilei and Newton. For Kant, it is the process towards the distinction between physical and metaphysical speculations; it begins precisely with the modern conception of science, and it leads towards the modern philosophical question of the legitimacy of knowledge. For Luther, it is the process towards the condition for the definition of the indefinability of God, the theological limitation of reason, and the role of paradox. Luther's contribution in this process consists of coherent reflection on the theological situation of language struggling to say the distinction between human being God, human *verbum* and divine *verbum*. One may see the legacy of this process in Pascal (concerning the limits of human theoretical powers; see Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 102; see also Askani's reference to Pascal in "Paradox": 358), Hamann (concerning the critique, or metacritique, of reason; see Lüpke, "Metaphysics and Metacritique": 180; Terezakis, "Is Theology Possible"), and Kierkegaard (concerning the radicalism of thinking about human religious situation; see Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*: 269–282). More on Luther and Kierkegaard in *infra*, Ch. 10 sections 5 and 6.

Chapter 3

A Theological Polyphony

In order to clarify my interpretation of *De servo arbitrio*, I compare my perspective to the interpretations of Luther resultant of four theological paradigms, "grammars," or "geometries" of theology: subjectivism, transcendentalism, ontology, and dialectics.

1. Subjectivism

I begin by returning to the issue of Luther's "Copernican revolution," this time as the object of criticism. According to this criticism, Luther's theology is the affirmation of his own subjective existence, and his "Copernican revolution" is the progression from human submission under God to the supremacy of the individual over God.

Hence, this is a two-fold criticism. First, Luther's thinking is interpreted as answering to a *private* issue: "reaching the tranquility of conscience for the fact of feeling saved."[1] Luther's theology is the theoretical reaction to Luther's own "existential laceration,"[2] the expression of a "metaphysical egoism."[3] Second, and consequently, Luther's revolution is interpreted as the passage from the primacy of an objective idea of God to the primacy of the *subjective* conscience and its solace: the revolution consists of giving the believer's subjectivity an objective relevance, thus subordinating the cause of believing (God) under the effect of this cause (this single believer)[4].

This two-fold criticism can be criticized. Concerning the first aspect – the private character of Luther's theology –, Luther's position is not the scream of a rebellious and self-imposing subjectivity; rather, it aims to restore the subordination of the human to God in matters of faith. In this respect, Luther's position is indeed "anthropocentric," not in the sense of making human being the center of theological speculation, but rather in the opposite sense of unveiling the constant contamination of theological issues with human theoretical expectations and practical interests.

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[1] Borgonovo, "Alle sorgenti": 375 (my translation).
[2] *Ivi*: 377 (my translation).
[3] Maritain, *Trois réformateurs*: 54 (my translation).
[4] See Borgonovo, "Alle sorgenti": 377.

This is eminently evident in *De servo arbitrio*, in Luther's theological effort to demystify the hidden *a priori* validity of some human forms of meaning before divine revelation. In sum, Luther's position is "anthropocentric" for its object, not for its end; it denounces human theoretical and practical insufficiency before God, it is the courageous denunciation of all theoretical "anthropomorphizations" of God.[5]

This leads us to the second aspect. Luther's revolution is not based on a subjective ground, but on a very precise formal ground: that no human being, not even Luther, is entitled to say what the truth *on* God is. Therefore, the rejection of the authority of the Papacy and of the Fathers of the Church is not the affirmation of an impertinent subjectivism; on the contrary, it is the demystification of all human authorities in the relationship between human and God. Luther's revolution is the effort to bring all human theoretical authorities into question.[6]

Hence, Luther's supposed "infallibility" in interpreting the sacred text[7] has nothing to do with the arbitrary formulation of dogmas, but rather it refers to the certainty of the fallibility of human knowledge on God. Thus, it refers to the challenge that theology presents for human theoretical infallibility.[8] Nobody has authority, for there is no authority other than God's.

This has repercussions on the relationship between faith and reason, and, in particular, on the interpretation of Luther's theology as based on a dismissal of reason.[9] A mere opposition between faith and reason would mean that faith is unreasonable, or that faith finds truths that are opposed to reason. This echoes Erasmus's criticism of absurdity. In Luther, it is a matter of using reason's principles in order to understand the scope of their own applicability and validity in theology. Luther's theology is a theoretical labor which is more

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[5] Therefore, it is correct to say that the problem of Luther's theology is the *certitudo* about God's justice (see Borgonovo, "Alle sorgenti": 375 and note 8; 380; 381 note 26) if and only if we understand this *certitudo* not in terms of *securitas* (see *supra*, Ch. 2 section 9), but in terms of *insecuritas*, in terms not of solace of the conscience but rather of agitation or desperation of the conscience (see *infra*, Ch. 5 section 1). Mimicking Luther's antithetical form of argumentation, if Scripture is endowed with *claritas*, then nothing else is theologically endowed with *claritas*; again, faith's *certitudo* entails that only Christ is the truth, and thus every other source of "truth" is henceforth delegitimized.

[6] Consider the quotation: "For Luther, after all, the point does not lie in an exact and nice presentation of the scholastic approach, but in the rejection of the approach as such. Because the starting point is wrong, the whole pursuit is aimless and wrong" (Vercruysse, "Luther's Theology": 541). Being the contrast methodological, it ends with the submission of human method to God – it is a form of *conversio*: "It is directed towards the destruction and annihilation of the self-sufficiency of a self-centered human being in order to convert him to God" (*ivi*: 545).

[7] See Borgonovo, "Alle sorgenti": 381.

[8] See Herms, "Gewißheit": 26–27.

[9] See Borgonovo, "Alle sorgenti": 381.

demanding than the "patient, logical thinking"[10]; it is a logical thinking *about* logical thinking itself before the "scandal and folly" of divine revelation. Luther's faith is never about liberation *from* reason (otherwise it would be impossible to understand, for instance, the distinction between *primus* and *secundus usus legis*[11]); rather, faith is the liberation *of* reason from the unconditionality of reason's principles and conditions.

The rejection of a mere opposition between faith and reason in Luther is indirectly proven also by the conclusion that such "opposition" would lead to "a reason claiming its own absolute autonomy: no other rule for it outside itself."[12] This conclusion is the opposite of Luther's theological approach in *De servo arbitrio*. Considering no *human* authority – no condition of meaningfulness – to be the ultimate judge in religious issues, such as the issue of human freedom before God's freedom, does not mean that all uses of these conditions are arbitrary, and it does not mean that *assertio* is the self-validating scream of the *Schwärmer*. On the contrary, it means that this use is theologically re-originated and re-thought by placing divine revelation over these conditions.

Luther's position is a rigorous and coherent reflection upon the consequence of considering all authorities subordinate to the authority *soli Christi*, and hence theologically limited. Thus, faith in Luther is not an autonomous position independent from all objective theoretical authorities.[13] Rather, it is the awareness that there is no valid authority unless it *ceases* to be authority in theology.

Luther's "Copernican revolution" is the negation of any theoretical anthropocentrism in theology; it transfers the validity of the coordinates according to which we know and think from the principles of reason to God's revelation. It displaces the center of the epistemological and logical "cosmos" from human conditions to divine *verbum*. In sum, there is no "metaphysical egoism," no

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[10] *Ibid.* (my translation).

[11] On this see *infra*, Ch. 5 sections 3–6.

[12] Korn, "Aux origines": 346 (my translation).

[13] Benedict XVI, in "Spe salvi": § 7, reiterates this interpretation. His reply that faith is not a subjective conviction but an objective proof (*elenchos*) posits, almost paradoxically, my perspective: faith is the evidence that all objective conditions of proof are no longer unconditionally valid. In short, Ratzinger overlook the fact that Luther's position refers to the conditions of formulation and validation of all possible "objectivity." This is indirectly confirmed by the assimilation of Luther's position into the transcendental position, both being (allegedly) subjectivist. Although one might find an affinity between Ratzinger and Luther concerning the "received character" of theological truth (see Corkery, "Luther and the Theology": 127–128), Ratzinger's interpretation of Luther's "radically personalized act of faith" (*ivi*: 135) leads to a significant difference "with regard to […] ecclesiology" (*ivi*: 136). On the (mistaken) association between Luther's and transcendental subjectivism, see also Hacker, "Das Ich": in particular 35; Halbfass, "An Uncommon Orientalist": 15. This misunderstanding of Luther's position is indirectly proven by the misunderstanding of the transcendental position. Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 151–152 presents a criticism of Hacker.

sclerotization of the subject over God in Luther; rather, there is the constant effort of making human *mendicant* conditions kneeling before God.

I feel urged to dispel the incorrect conclusion that I am equating this subjectivist perspective with a Catholic approach to Luther. This is not the case. Rather, subjectivism is one of the paradigms of Luther interpretation, and some of the representatives of this paradigm happen to be Catholic. This means that there are Catholic interpretations of Luther that do not belong to this paradigm,[14] or that use this paradigm in a positive way[15]; and there are non-Catholic interpretations of Luther that belong, more or less explicitly, to this paradigm. I will now consider these two possibilities.

First, an ecumenical dialogue between Catholicism and Lutheranism – in particular, in light of the *Joint Declaration* – can be supported by a subjectivist interpretation. The reason it was impossible for the council of Trent to accept Luther's positions is a difference in conceptual frame: on one hand, a frame informed by Scholastic tradition and reasoning *in abstracto*; on the other hand, a frame focusing on the experience of the believer and tempted person[16] and on the self-understanding of the subjective condition of faith.[17] This difference is ecumenically assumed as the opportunity for a synergy between Lutheranism and Catholicism on the subjects of soteriology and theological anthropology.[18] According to this perspective, the reference to the *simul iustus et peccator* allows for the integration between the ontological approach of the Catholic perspective and the theological formulation of the experience of sin within personal existence.[19] However, it seems to me that speaking of two different logics[20] would lead one to consider the *querelle* between Erasmus and Luther to be a "theological dilemma." As I demonstrated in the previous Chapter, such an interpretation is at least debatable. Thus, maybe the ecumenical dialogue between Lutheran and Catholic theological approaches could be conceived also as a dialogue on the different considerations of the relationship between formal conditions and divine revelation.[21]

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[14] A notable example is McSorley, *Luthers Lehre*.

[15] For an excursus on the Catholic interpretations of Luther through history, see Marshall, "Luther among the Catholics."

[16] See Maffeis, "*Simul*": 143.

[17] See *ivi*, 152. See also Mattox, "The Catholic Luther": 21, for a comparison between Luther and Aquinas.

[18] This approach would correspond to an "ecumenism of difference"; see De Mey, "Luther and Vatican II": 115. At the same time, there are Lutheran voices who praised the *Lumen Gentium* in light of some points of similarity between Lutheran and Catholic approaches; see *ivi*: 121–123.

[19] See See Maffeis, "*Simul*": 155, 161–163.

[20] See *ivi*: 159.

[21] See Blaumeiser, "Teologia del paradosso": 49.

Second, the subjectivist perspective might be also present in the Protestant interpretation of Luther. I limit the discussion to one instance. Loewenich writes: "[Die Anschauung vom Deus absconditus] ist […] der Ausdruck einer abgründigen religiösen Erfahrung Luthers. Es ist die Erfahrung der schlechthinnigen Lebendigkeit und Unerforschlichkeit Gottes, die Luther *trotz* der Offerbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus tief empfunden hat."[22] I see a problem in the "*trotz*." Emphasizing the fact that the reflection on *Deus absconditus* is subjectively based risks overshadowing the scope of this reflection. As I will analyze in Chapter 4, God's hiddenness is formulated not in spite of God's revelation, but rather because of revelation, and *from* revelation. Thus, the concept of *Deus absconditus* does not merely concern the conceptualization of Luther's personal experience; rather, it concerns the logical form of the rapport between theological inferences and divine revelation, the source upon which theology formulates its concepts.[23]

2. Transcendentalism

I shall now examine the opposite paradigmatic position. According to this position, Luther's theology presents a specific *transcendental principle* of theological knowledge. Rather than a proper criticism of Luther, it is a matter of attributing to Luther a theological position borne of transcendental philosophy.

Within the limits of my research, it is impossible even to outline the intricate connection between theology and transcendental philosophy, for instance in the relationships between authors such as Cohen and Natorp, on the philosophical side, and Herrmann and Barth on the theological side.[24] For this reason, instead of speaking directly about this theme, I will take an *indirect* approach; I refer to an interpretation of this complex theme.

This interpretation is part of the theological program of the so-called Finnish School. The Finnish School is a theological *Kreis* in contemporary Lutheran scholarship that formed around the figure of Tuomo Mannermaa (1937–2015), the late Professor Emeritus of Ecumenical Theology at the University of Helsinki. The Finnish *Kreis* is devoted to the reintroduction of the ontological perspective and vocabulary in Lutheran scholarship. According to the Finnish school, the return to ontology in theology would adhere to Luther's "authentic" position.[25]

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[22] Loewenich, *Theologia crucis*: 204–205 (emphasis added).
[23] More on this in *infra*, Ch. 4 sections 6 and 7.
[24] Among the ocean of references, I can indicate: Kluback, "Friendship"; Fischer, *Revelatory Positivism?*
[25] See Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 2–3.

I will expand upon the Finnish School in the next section. Here, I focus on the position of Risto Saarinen, one of the key figures of the School. According to this position, some of the most influential twentieth century interpretations of Luther are based upon the application of the transcendental paradigm to Luther's theology. This claim is one of the aspects of the theological program of the Finnish School; the novelty of its proposal consists precisely in unveiling and rejecting the Neo-Kantian-biased reading of Luther and the consequent neglect of Luther's ontological vocabulary. Thus, the positive aspect of the Finns' proposal is the restoration of the supposedly correct interpretation of Luther through the reintroduction of ontological categories.[26]

Saarinen affirms that the main protagonists of modern protestant theology, from Ritschl to Hermann to Barth, are influenced by transcendental philosophy – in particular, the philosophies of Lotze and Cohen.[27] According to Saarinen, these theologians understand the relationship with God in transcendental terms; they focus on God's immanent effects (this hints at Lotze's influence).[28] Thus, the theological method becomes analogous to the transcendental method: in both cases we have an *a priori* process of validating propositions (this hints at Cohen's influence).[29] It is not my purpose here to discuss this interpretation.[30] My aim here is to use this interpretation in discussion of the risk of misinterpreting *my own* position on Luther's *De servo arbitrio* as transcendentalist, in light of my use of terms such as "conditions," "forms," et cetera.

I proceed *ad absurdum*, by assuming that my position does belong to such a transcendental paradigm. In this case, my position would be the following: Luther would propose a positive method of knowing and conceptualizing freedom. The result would be the formal identity of his position with Erasmus's position: both positions would be based on two methods diametrically opposed in what they prescribe, but identical in the fact that each *does* prescribe something – the correct way of synthesizing theological concepts of freedom.

Yet this is not the case, thanks to Luther's paradox. The paradox evidences that for Luther, there is no such thing as a positive theological method for conceptualizing freedom. Speaking in transcendental terms, I would say that freedom is theologically unconceptualizable in terms that presuppose the transcendental validity of its conditions of formulation.

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[26] For an introduction to the Finnish school, see Mannermaa, "Why is Luther"; Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: Chapter 12, "Finnish Luther Studies: a Story and a Program."

[27] The possibility to conciliate Lotze's and Cohen's views on the transcendental can be debated; see Gigliotti, *Avventure e disavventure del trascendentale*: 132 note 213.

[28] See Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken*: in particular 13–25 for Lotze. For a synopsis of Saarinen's thesis, see also Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 5–9.

[29] See Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken*: 51–56.

[30] For criticisms of this interpretation, see Mogk, *Die Allgemeingültigkeitsbegründung*: 18–19, in particular note 86 (concerning the interpretation of Hermann); and Oakes, *Reading Karl Barth*: 28–36, 55, 112 (concerning the interpretation of Barth).

I can imagine another misinterpretation of my position: that for Luther, theological statements would be based on a transcendental principle of *paradoxical* knowledge and conceptualization. But this possibility must also be rejected. This is a sort of transcendentalist variation of the theme of the *theologia crucis* as *Erkenntnisprinzip*, or as principle of theological knowledge.[31] This interpretation assumes the *sub contrario* as principle of knowledge, in addition to the usual, non-theological, transcendental principles of knowledge.

There are two scenarios: either the *sub contrario* is formally equivalent to a transcendental principle, or it introduces a re-application of the transcendentals. I see incoherencies in either case. On one hand, it is hard to understand how it would be possible to switch *ad libitum* from one transcendental principle *x* to the transcendental principle called "*sub contrario*"; being transcendental, both are necessary laws of knowledge (both define specific methods and fields of knowledge), thus they are equally legitimate to apply to the same object (God) – clearly, with different results.[32] On the other hand, concerning an hypothetical *sub contrario* application of the transcendental principles, it is hard to explain the method according to which one negates one kind (non-*sub contrario*) of application and validates the opposing kind of application (*sub contrario*), given that this method is formulated precisely on the basis of transcendental principles.[33] For these reasons, this interpretation of my position must be rejected as well.

From knowledge, I turn to conceptualization. Here the issue concerns whether *De servo arbitrio* formulates a transcendental principle of synthesis of theological concepts of freedom. Of course, this principle would be, at the same time, the method of Luther's investigation. This deduction is apparently connected to my affirmation that the *assertio* in *De servo arbitrio* is at the same time the consequence and the expression of the theological situation of the modal language of freedom.

Does my interpretation equate Luther's position to a transcendental speculation? Apparently so: the formulation of transcendental principles (as

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[31] The transcendental interpretation of the *Erkenntnisprinzip* of the *theologia crucis* is also criticized by Finn scholars: see Kopperi, "Theology of the Cross": 159–161.

[32] In other words, the claim that theology has supposed "exclusive rights" on God ends to be illegitimate.

[33] This serves to criticize the criticisms presented by White against the semantic position in theology (see *supra*, Chapter 2 section 7). According to White, the relevance of metaphor is biased by a (supposed) transcendental conception of language: according to this conception, language is formed entirely by transcendental laws. Thus, the effort of finding a fitter "new language" to express God can only end in focusing on exceptions to these laws. These exceptions are arbitrarily identified with the metaphoric use of language (see White, "Luther's View": 200–201). Yet, even if it were true that the metaphoric position in theology was biased by a transcendental view of language, then precisely because these laws are transcendental, it would be impossible even to conceive of an exception to these laws.

principles of synthesis of every possible judgment) is the conceptualization of what makes conceptualization possible. In other words, this formulation concerns the principles that determine the possibility of "formulating propositions," and hence that also determine this formulation itself. This is the coincidence between method and object of transcendental speculation that characterizes Neo-Kantianism[34]: the method according to which the philosophical investigation is conducted coincides with the object of investigation.

In order to determine whether my position on *De servo arbitrio* follows this transcendental pattern or not, I proceed once again *ad absurdum*. I assume that it is indeed the case that *De servo arbitrio* presents a transcendental principle of theological conceptualization. In light of what was analyzed in the previous Chapter, I think that there are two possible options: this principle would be either divine revelation, or faith.

Yet both cases culminate in a series of incoherencies.

First, transcendental principles are transcendentally necessary; if divine revelation were transcendental, then it would be impossible (transcendentally illicit) *not* to assume it as a principle of knowledge. In other words, everybody would believe – everybody would have faith.[35]

Second, transcendental principles are not deduced from anything because they are the constitutive elements of human intelligence – and of human *culture*.[36] They are independent from any external revelation, thus excluding both divine *verbum* (as this revelation) and faith (as human participation to this revelation).[37]

Third, from the previous point, it is deduced that transcendental principles are compatible with human reason. If divine revelation were transcendental, then it would belong to the structure and conditions of human reason. Similarly, if faith were transcendental, then it would preclude questioning the formal unconditionality of this structure.

Fourth, transcendental principles define the boundary of all possible knowledges and conceptualizations within a theory or a discourse (such as the discourse on freedom). If divine revelation were transcendental, it would be impossible for it to judge such boundary as limited. If faith were transcendental, it would be impossible for it to be the confession of such limitation.

Therefore, my interpretation of Luther's aim in *De servo arbitrio* is *not* transcendental. This is precisely *because* my interpretation is affected by an

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[34] See Gigliotti, *Avventure e disavventure del trascendentale*: 96–134; see Poma, *Hermann Cohen*: 86–87.

[35] If faith were transcendental, then it would be difficult to see it as God's gift; see *supra*, Ch. 2 section 6.

[36] See Cohen, *Religion und Sittlichkeit*; see Poma, *Hermann Cohen*: 160–161.

[37] It is important to emphasize that Cohen distinguishes the sphere of religion from the sphere of the transcendental autonomy of logic, ethic, and aesthetic; see Cohen, *Der Begriff*: 135.

apparent transcendental terminology. My terminology *appears* transcendental because it considers *De servo arbitrio* an operation *upon* transcendental conditions, or, more precisely, an operation upon the *transcendentalism* of conditions, upon the *a priori* validity of the principles of knowledge and conceptualization. The assumption of the theological priority of revelation is already the exclusion of a transcendentalist approach.[38]

Consequently, what matters is not the epistemological self-foundation of theological conceptualization through the coincidence of method and object. Rather, what matters is the effort to formulate the theological situation of transcendental foundation. This consists in conceiving the transcendental conditions as theologically limited, as the boundary of what is not divine *verbum*.

Terms such as conditions, forms, principles, et cetera, are neither the protagonists of my interpretation of *De servo arbitrio* nor, of course, it is the protagonist of *De servo abitrio* itself. The focus is rather on the relationship between divine revelation and what can be considered transcendental (such as the terms conditions, forms, et cetera). Due to this theological (not philosophical) perspective, the transcendentals no longer play a foundational role. More precisely: their foundational role is subordinate to divine revelation. The transcendental conditions of foundation are reconsidered as limited in light of divine revelation. The consequence of this is the formulation of the *assertio*.[39] Thus, interpreting my position as transcendental means having misunderstood my conception of Luther's overcoming of the transcendental position through the formulation of a theological operation upon it.

Finally, I respond to a further criticism: that the mere reference to transcendentals (whether philosophically or theologically, as foundational principles or as limited) entails bias. Luther did not speak in transcendental terms, nor could he possibly have any idea of what transcendental conditions are. This is plainly true, yet not relevant. Transcendental philosophy is one of the possible ways to address the issue of formal foundation. For any possible discourse, it is possible to formulate a meta-discourse defining the formal foundation (for instance, the method) of that discourse. What Luther does with Erasmus's argument is simultaneously similar and different: his effort is not to define the foundations of the meaning of freedom, but to *re*-define from a theological perspective the validity of the principles or axioms founding the meaning of freedom. Therefore, my view is that Luther's discourse is indeed formal, but *not* formal-transcendental: it is *formal-theological*.

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[38] It is possible to speak of the theological conditionality of all transcendental conditions because the absoluteness of divine revelation has nothing to do with transcendental unconditionality: it is *theologically* unconditioned from the structure itself of *transcendental* unconditionality.

[39] This confirms that the contrast between Erasmus and Luther is not equipollent because it is the contrast between theological "transcendental"-based judgments and theological revelation-bound judgments.

3. Ontology

I turn now to the *pars construens* of the Finnish School: what they propose as a reaction to the supposed Neo-Kantian paradigm in modern Luther scholarship. I cannot fully elucidate the proposal of the Finnish school within the limits of my research. However, a comparison of my position with that of the Finnish School is important for its potential to clarify some points of my interpretation of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*.

As stated in the previous section, the criticism of the transcendental paradigm in theology is the negative part of the Finns' theological program. The positive part is the reintroduction of *ontology* into Lutheran scholarship.

According to the Finnish School, the Neo-Kantian approach transfers the theoretical attention from things in themselves to the relationship between things; specifically to the *effects* of the objects of knowledge upon the subject of knowledge.[40] This scheme also applies to theology: due to the Neo-Kantian influence, theology deals not with God, but only with the effects (*Wirkungen*) of God upon human being.[41] From the Finnish perspective, this produced the dismissal of the role of ontology not only in Luther scholarship,[42] but also in theology as such. Theology lost interest in answering ontological questions and in formulating ontological predications.[43] Thus, the position of the Finnish School is not only historical (on the interpretation of Luther) but also theological. Specifically, the re-introduction of ontology into Lutheran theology would help to build a fruitful ecumenism, especially with the orthodox Church.[44]

Concerning Luther scholarship, the Finnish School claims that the Neo-Kantian influence reduced Luther's concept of the "real presence" of Jesus Christ in faith ("in ipsa fide Christus adest"[45]) to the *a posteriori* effects of God upon us. Luther is anachronistically made a post-Kantian, an anti-metaphysical theologian.[46] According to the Finns, this is a mystification of Luther's authentic position. The exclusion of ontology from theological research impedes assessment of what constitutes the authentic aspect of Luther's theology –

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[40] See *ivi*: 5.

[41] See Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken*: 229; see also Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 9.

[42] See Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 1–2 and 12.

[43] See Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 184. See also Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 2.

[44] See Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 183–184 and 197–198.

[45] WA 40.1: 229,15. This is a sort of "key word" for the Finnish School, the flag under which the different positions issued from the teaching of Mannermaa meet. See Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 14–15; *Id.*, *Christ present*: 49–50.

[46] See for instance Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics": 130; Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 187–188; see also Witte, *Doctrine*: 2, III.

namely the ontological, *real-ontic* presence of Christ in the believer,[47] the *theosis* of the believer.[48] Consequently, understanding what Luther *truly* meant by speaking of the *unio cum Christo* implicates the reintroduction of ontological speculation into theology, and thus the dismissal of any Neo-Kantian influence in the Lutheran theological tradition.[49]

In the interest of presenting a clearer picture, I follow the distinction between two ontological models: relational ontology and substantial ontology. The first model concerns the analysis of the being in light of its relationship with other beings;[50] the second model concerns the analysis of the being in itself, as substance.[51] The question is which of the two models includes Luther's ontology. Assuming a relational ontology would mean to focus once again on the *Wirkungen*. Yet, the Finns do not lean towards a substantial ontology; in fact, the opposition between the two ontological models is conceived as the result of the Neo-Kantian influence.[52] Thus, the "real-ontic" presence of Jesus Christ in the believer, the "*unio cum Christo*," is a mix of relational and substantial elements.[53] It is neither describable as substance through ontological terms, nor does it refer to some "effects" of God upon the believer.[54]

Positively, this union consists of God's recreation of human being. God reduces the human to nothing in order to recreate her or him. God can create *ex novo* because God creates *ex nihilo*.[55] This does not mean that the individual is destroyed; what is destroyed is the effort of making oneself God (that is, to justify oneself).[56] The union with Christ is the believer's participation in the *passio*. The "context"[57] of this is found in Luther's *theologia crucis*: human *theosis* is hidden under the opposite; the Cross annihilates the believer in order for the believer to participate in Jesus Christ.[58] In sum, the *unio* is Jesus Christ

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[47] The German term "real-ontisch," used by Mannermaa in the German edition of his *In ipsa fide Christus adest* (see Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben*: 21, 26–36) is translated in the English edition as "ontological."

[48] See Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 10. See also *Id.*, "Justification and *Theosis*": 27.

[49] See Stjerna, "Introduction": xiii–xv.

[50] Such as in Ebeling, where the relational ontology is based on Luther's understanding of the *coram*-situation. See Menacher, "Gerhard Ebeling": 321.

[51] See Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 9.

[52] See Raunio, "The Human Being": 29. See also Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 13.

[53] See Raunio, "The Human Being": 30. Vaino, in *Id.*, *Justification and Participation*: 12 note 36 dissociates himself from both ontological models.

[54] See Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 2 and 11.

[55] See Juntunen, *Der Begriff*: 244–245.

[56] See Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 10; *Id.*, "Justification and *Theosis*": 39.

[57] See *ibid*.

[58] See Mannermaa, "Freiheit als Liebe": 10: "Wenn der Mensch durch das kreuzestheologische Geschehen in sich selbst zunichte geworden ist, […] wird [er] eins mit dem Wort und bekommt so Anteil an Christus bzw. an Gott selbst." See also *Id.*, *Christ Present*: 19.

being present in the believer.[59] According to the Finns, this conception is supported by Luther's idea of "happy exchange" in *De libertate christiana*.[60] However, the theme of the real presence of Christ in the believer is not only in some works by Luther; it permeates "every aspect of the Reformer's thinking from its beginning all the way to his final commentary on Genesis."[61]

In this section, I test whether my position on Luther's *De servo arbitrio* is affected by the same flaws that, according to the Finns, affect contemporary Lutheran theology: the neglect of the relevance of ontology in theology – the oblivion towards the ontological perspective in Luther.

This seems to be the case, since my position aims to speak formally, not ontologically, and aims to speak about concepts, about Luther's treatment of the conditions of such concepts, and not to speak about realities such as the real-ontic presence of Christ in the believer.

I answer this possible criticism with a question: what are the conditions, the principles, and the method of the re-introduction of ontological categories in theology, and specifically in Luther scholarship?

Let us proceed gradually by starting from the beginning: by seeing what "ontology" means. The Finnish school thinks of ontology very generally as "theological"[62] in other to avoid "reference to any philosophical (Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian, existential) ontology."[63] However, ontology is not – at least, no longer – a neutral term, precisely for the presence of multiple "ontolo*gies*," multiple meanings and perspectives on ontology in the history of philosophy. Thus, I wonder whether aiming to speak of ontology with no reference to a tradition does not mean taking *already* a position within the plurality of ontolo*gies*.

This also applies to the Finns. Their ontology is based on a clear theoretical claim: the rejection of the exclusivity of relational ontology. This implies that the position of the Finnish School must present something that overcomes the limits of relational ontology. The *unio cum Christo* presupposes a relationship with Jesus Christ, via the Spirit's indwelling within the human being[64]; yet, the Finns emphasize that this relationship is not exhaustible by relational ontology because it does not concern the effects or attributes of Christ, but the presence of Christ. However, for Luther this relationship concerns indeed a transference

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[59] See Mannermaa, Christ Present: 39: "The 'old self' of the Christian dies and is replaced by the person of Christ. Christ 'is in us' and 'remains in us.' The life that the Christian now lives *is*, in an ontologically real manner, Christ himself."

[60] See *Id.*, "Why is Luther": 18. In other words, what the Finns translate as "happy exchange" is the ontological bound with the person of Jesus Christ; see Vaino, "Faith": 140: "Christ himself is the righteousness of the Christian."

[61] Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 11 note 10.

[62] See *ivi*: 12.

[63] See Raunio, "The Human Being": 28 note 2.

[64] See Mannermaa, *Christ Present*: 73.

of certain properties between the two poles (the believer and Christ).[65] Thus, the predicate of the *unio cum Christo* can only refer to the properties characterizing the two poles and thus constituting their *unio*. Moreover, this reference to these properties concerns their *transference* from one pole of the *unio* to the other pole, thus it concerns indeed the *effect* (of transference) that this relationship produces upon these properties. In sum, it is impossible to speak of the *unio* without considering the transformation this *unio* represents in human life, and thus the *effects* of this *unio*. Otherwise, the *unio* risks to be a void word to which no possible content applies.[66]

However, I do not explore this possible criticism further, because it simply concerns the undecidability between different points of view on the branch of philosophy called ontology, and of its sub-branches (amongst which relational ontology). Moreover, Luther's belonging to a specific ontological model, or even to none of them, seems to be a very intricate matter.[67]

For these reasons, I prefer to focus on another, more relevant issue. This issue concerns the distinction between a philosophical ontology and a theological ontology. Stressing that theology should speak in ontological terms implies a compatibility between ontological and theological discourses; the relationship between these two uses of language called theology and ontology is assumed to be unproblematic. I do not think this is the case – precisely *because* we are dealing with Luther's theology.

Let us assume that it is indeed unproblematic for theology to use ontological categories taken from ontology. It follows that it is necessary to determine a principle of distinction between the theological use and any other use of these same ontological categories. In the case of the Finns' position, this principle

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[65] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 6, my synopsis of the "froelich wechsel und streyt" in *De libertate christiana*.

[66] It seems to me that this is implicitly confirmed by the Finns themselves when they connect the *unio* with effective justification (see Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 10) – that is, with the life transformation determined by the presence of Christ. On effective justification, see *infra*, Ch. 7 sections 2, 3 and 8.

[67] Bayer, in *Id*., "Philosophical Models of Thought": 18, argues that "What is characteristic" of Luther is "the *distinction* Luther makes between the trinitarian-theological, christological, and soteriological realms, in which we do no think at all 'in the category of substance but of relation' [here Bayer quotes from WA 40.2: 354,3–4] and the realm in which the 'being-in-itself' of the thing, and therefore substance ontology, prevails" (see also *Id*., *Theology the Lutheran Way*: 107). Bielfeldt, in *Id*. "Freedom, Love": 24, seems to present a different perspective: "As has been richly documented [Bielfeldt refers to Ebeling], Luther's ontology is relational in that human beings are not autonomous beings eternally related to God, but exist *coram deo*; their being is constituted in internal relatedness to God." Saarinen, in *Id*., "Relational Thinking": 251, emphasizes the scarce presence of the terms "relatio" and "relativus" in Luther's texts; at the same time, he points out that the Finnish Luther scholars' criticism to relational ontology "while valid in large part, is insufficient to prove that the discovery of Luther's relational thinking would be simply illusory" (*ivi*: 260).

must distinguish the claim that the presence of Christ in the believer corresponds to a "reality"[68] (as real-ontic, ontological presence) from all other ontological claims of reality; otherwise, any reality-claim is theological, or the real-ontic presence of Christ is not theological. According to the Finnish School, this principle is the *theologia crucis*, the switch from a human-based understanding of God (and a human-based justification) to a Cross-based understanding of God. Hence, the Finns interpret the *theologia crucis* not as the negation of any ontological investigation in theology, but as the negation of the "theologian of glory's prideful attempt to seek the *summum bonum*."[69]

Yet I see a problem here. The *theologia crucis* is the method that delegitimates the theological possibility of a direct knowledge of God for the sake of an indirect knowledge. Therefore, it seems to me that an ontological statement would be incongruent with this methodological position concerning indirect knowledge. An ontological statement concerns the reality of beings, as in the statement "real-ontic presence." Considering the *unio cum Christo* an ontological statement implies knowledge of this *unio*, the knowledge of the fact that there is indeed an ontological presence of Jesus Christ in the believer. Thus, it seems to me that speaking of *reality* of a being ("real presence") means knowing this being *directly*.

Two arguments can be presented to resolve this potential incoherence. The first emphasizes that this unity between Christ and the believer remains hidden until the Last Day.[70] The second emphasizes that the usual ontological categories fail whenever they are applied to theological issues.[71] I see issues in both arguments.

The first argument stands in opposition to the possibility of an ontological statement; if the object of the ontological statement is hidden, then it is not clear how it is possible to speak of knowledge of this object's reality.[72] Vice-versa, affirming the reality of a being implies at least the possibility of the epistemological foundation and justification of this affirmation. In sum, either the presence is not hidden and the ontological statement of its reality is possible, or it is hidden and no ontological statement is possible whatsoever.

I pass to the second argument. Affirming that the usual ontological categories are inadequate for theological discourse means that the ontology must be modified in order for its categories to be applicable in theology. Thus, the distinction between a theological use and a non-theological use of ontological

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[68] See Stjerna, "Introduction": xi.

[69] Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 3; see also Juntunen, "Luther and Metaphysics": 132.

[70] See Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 11.

[71] See *ivi*: 2; it is the idea of a "regional ontology" which is valid in theology but not in philosophy.

[72] Stating that something is hidden means indeed affirming its presence, yet it also means affirming that this presence cannot be object of knowledge. I can think about this "something," but precisely because I can think about it (as hidden), I cannot know this "something".

categories depends on an operation upon the categories applied in the formulation of ontological statements. Indirectly, this confirms my position on *De servo arbitrio*: as much as Luther's position on freedom is an operation on the language of freedom, so is Luther's position on ontological issues an *operation* upon ontological language.

Therefore, I wonder whether, instead of reading Luther's position to be ontological, it would not be more cogent to speak of Luther's *theological* position *on* ontology as a questioning of the theological validity of ontological categories.[73] In other words, instead of a theological ontology, we would have a theology about the *limits* of ontology. This reflection also serves to confirm that the theological use of ontological categories is not as linear as it might appear *prima facie*. It can be argued that theology speaks ontologically by operating upon the structure of ontological meaning.[74]

In synthesis, my point is that the position of the Finnish School invites to question about the methodological and epistemological conditions of an ontological perspective in theology.[75] I think this is somehow coherent with their criticism of Kant. I emphasize that Kant rejected not metaphysics as such, but dogmatic metaphysics,[76] the metaphysics that produces arbitrary speculations with no method. Thus, Kant welcomes, and even uses,[77] a metaphysics that is methodologically founded.[78] Moreover, *Kritizismus* introduced the effort of reflecting upon the limits of judgments; this is the effort of asking the methodological question (thus, also of questioning one's *own* method) against all self-

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[73] This would also resolve the issue of how the use of ontological language can be harmonized to *theologia crucis*.

[74] The difference between my position and the position of the Finnish School consists of the difference of priority between the ontological and the formal. Ontological propositions depend on a formal language founding and validating such propositions as elements of the set "ontological propositions." My position concerns Luther's effort to unveil the theological limitation of formal presuppositions; instead of founding theological language, they are the object upon which theology works. My position avoids mixing theology and ontology – or, more precisely, avoids reducing theology to ontological speculation.

[75] A situation that has continued recently: see Wengert, "Review" and Billings, "Contemporary Reception": 168–170. For instance, how is the real-ontic presence distinct from an effect of God upon us? On what epistemological basis is it possible to distinguish between an effect of God and the ontological reality of God in Himself? What is the distinction (if any) between God's effect and *posteriora Dei*?

[76] See Kant, *Prolegomena*: Ak IV 367.

[77] See for instance Kant, *Metaphysik*: Ak VI 205, 214–218.

[78] The bibliography being too vast, I limit myself to the first book I have at hand: Suppes, *Probabilistic Metaphysics*, Introduction. I can add: Kant welcomes and uses a metaphysic that is not only based on a rigorous method, but that is method *itself*: metaphysics should apply not to the transcendent principles of things (for no progression in knowledge is possible whatsoever, if knowledge concerns what lies beyond experience; see Kant, *Prolegomena*: Ak IV 368), but to the principles of any synthetic knowledge *a priori*; it should be *criticism* (*ivi*: 377).

legitimation.[79] I think that an attempt to reconsider the positive aspects of *Kritizismus* would allow to refine the ontological position in theology by enriching it with a methodological and epistemological enquiry on the theological use, or modification, of ontological categories.[80]

This also applies to the Finnish School's claim about the "authentic" Luther. As I mentioned in the previous Chapter,[81] any possible interpretation of Luther, no matter how "authentic" or "inauthentic," is anachronistic; it is issued by people influenced by questions, paradigms, and languages that are not Luther's. Thus, the effort against being anachronistic might lead to an unaware anachronism, or to a hermeneutical *Künstlichkeit*. For instance, attributing an ontological vocabulary to Luther risks undermining the distinction of Luther's theology from other ontological approaches in theology, for instance in the sixteenth century debate between Lutheranism and Catholicism.[82]

Moreover, a claim of "authenticity" might result from reading a complex and multifaceted thinking such as Luther's through the lens of formulas (such as "real presence of Christ" and "ontological union with Christ"). This approach risks either ironing out the interesting incoherencies, mutations, and evolutions of perspective that make Luther's thinking alive,[83] or selecting only the passages that fit the scheme.[84] For instance, it would be interesting to see

[79] The Finnish school is certainly correct in criticizing the transcendental paradigm (and also the psychological paradigm: see Kärkkäinen, "Evil, Love": 227), but this same critical regard should be applied to the ontological paradigm. The criticism against the transcendental paradigm is based not upon an intrinsic incoherence or limitedness of transcendentalism, but upon the fact that it excludes reference to ontology in general (and thus also in theology). This seems to me to be a *petitio principii*: all paradigmatic propositions are formally identical – they are all paradigms) – and thus it is fallacious to criticize one of them in light of another one.

[80] It seems to me that Bielfeldt makes such an attempt: he connects Luther's ontology with Luther's *nova lingua* – clearly within the "new semantics" position. See Bielfeldt, "Martin Luther and Ontology": 18–19. Yet, this means that the problems with the new semantic position also affect his praiseworthy effort to define the structure of Luther's ontology.

[81] More precisely, note 50 in *supra*, Ch. 2.

[82] As explained in section 1, from a Catholic perspective, the possibility of an ecumenical synergy between Catholic and Lutheran theologies may consist in the fact that Luther does not use ontological categories to think about justification (see Maffeis, "*Simul*": 138, 148–149, 154–155). Therefore, assuming the Finnish ontological perspective would imply a reconsideration of the critical positions of Catholic theologians (for instance, the council Fathers) towards Luther, of Luther's reactions to Catholic criticisms (Leo X and Erasmus included), and even of the positions of modern Catholic theologians. This applies not only to ontology, but also to sanctification (see *ibid*., 137–138). I will return to the difficulties concerning sanctification in Ch. 7 and 10.

[83] See Schwarzwäller, "Verantwortung": 146.

[84] See Schumacher, *Who Do I Say*: 130–139, 143.

how the concept of *Deus absconditus*, the God with whom we have no *commercium*, fits into the ontological program.[85]

4. Dialectics

I transition now from a position claiming a union with the divine to a position that understands the relationship between human and God as distance. I turn to dialectical theology and its understanding of Luther. Again, I am forced to narrow the scope of my analysis; I refer to Barth's *Römerbrief* II. I examine this work for two reasons: first, because Luther plays a significant role in it; and second, because in the next chapter I will analyze the Luther of Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* emphasizing the difference between it and *Römerbrief* II (in particular, that which concerns the *Deus absconditus*).[86]

In *Römerbrief* II, Barth refers to Luther in support of the thesis of the distance between God and human being. First, this concerns the *negative* function of faith[87]: faith deals with the "*Finsternis*"[88] of what cannot be embraced; it participates in the desperation of the cross.[89] This has repercussions on the conception of religion; religion is founded on the abyss between human being and God.[90] Faith is not something safely established, but is rather something

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[85] Saarinen, "Luther and the Reading of Scripture": 196–197, mentions the *Deus absconditus*, yet without connecting it to the ontological view; he considers it as evidence of the juxtaposition between philosophy and theology.

[86] Within the limits of my research, I cannot expand upon the debate on whether *Römerbrief* II belongs to dialectic theology, nor upon whether Barth himself belongs to it. See, for instance, Oakes, *Reading Karl Barth*: 10–12. Thus, I simply refer to the fact that the Luther of the *Römerbrief* II is not the Luther of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. This change in the interpretation of Luther indeed evidences a change in Barth's theological paradigm. In this section, I quote some passages of the *Römerbrief* II as explications of Barth's first reading of Luther. In the next chapter, I will analyze the *Dogmatik*'s interpretation of Luther.

[87] See *Römerbrief* II: 113: "[D]ie Rechtfertigung allein durch den Glauben. Durch den Glauben: sofern nämlich […] der Glaube sich demütig der Wirklichkeit seiner ganzen seelisch-geschichtlichen Erscheinungsform, sofern er sich als positive oder negative menschliche Haltung zugleich seiner reinen Negativität Gott gegenüber bewußt ist, sofern sein Wesen in jener kritischen Linie liegt, die den Religiosus Luther von dem Religiosus Erasmus […]."

[88] *Ivi*: 352.

[89] See *ivi*: 131–132.

[90] See *ivi*: 235: "Religion ist alles andere als Harmonie mit sich selbst oder gar noch mit dem Unendlichen. Hier ist kein Raum für noble Gefühle und edle Menschlichkeit. Das mögen arglose Mitteleuropäer und Westler meinen, solange sie's können. Hier ist der Abgrund, hier ist das Grauen. Hier werden Dämonen gesehen."

inadmissible,[91] based on a distance that cannot be bridged by any effort.[92] God rules the world in ways that are paradoxical,[93] and the reason for this remains unseen.[94] Thus, God's revelation defies our habits of thinking[95]: it is *sub contrario*.[96] God's "yes" to human being is built upon the "no" of God's inaccessibility.

Wohl verstanden: Nur daß es *dieses Subjekt* (Deus absc.) ist, das dieses Prädikat (Deus revel.) hat, kann Inhalt des Römerbriefs, der Theologie, des Gotteswortes im Menschenmund sein. [...] Das andere aber: daß dieses Subjekt (Deus absc.) *dieses Prädikat* (Deus revel.) hat, d. h. aber der Geist selbst, die Fülle der göttlichen Wahrheit, die Existentialität des göttlichen Ja, *das* steht nicht im Römerbrief, *das* wird weder gesagt noch geschrieben, aber wahrhaftig auch nicht "getan", weil *das* überhaupt nicht Gegenstand menschlichen Bemühens sein kann. Tritt *das* ein, dann hat nicht der Mensch, sondern Gott geredet und gehandelt; dann ist das Wunder geschehen.[97]

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[91] See *ivi*: 240: "Religion selbst, aktive, kombattante, scharf geladene, nicht-ästhetische, nicht-rhetorische, nicht-fromme Religion, die Religion des 39. Psalms, Hiobs, Luthers und Kierkegaards, die Religion des Paulus wird sich gegen diese Verharmlosung ihres Ernstes mit nicht minderer Zähigkeit immer wieder zur Wehr setzen: sie weiß sich selbst durchaus nicht als Krönung und Erfüllung wahrer Menschlichkeit, sondern als den bedenklichen, störenden, gefährlichen, als den schließenden und eben darum heimlich offenen Punkt im Kreise der Humanität, als das allen Begebenheiten in der Welt, allem Tun des Menschen gegenüber Unbegreifliche, Unerträgliche, Unannehmbare." Concerning grace and the correction of its post-Luther softening, see *ivi*: 416: "Gnade ist die Axt an der Wurzel des guten Gewissens, dessen sich der Bürger in Amt, Beruf und Politik so gerne erfreuen möchte, und das ihm die menschenfreundliche Weichheit des modernen Luthertums immer wieder zu verschaffen weiß. Kein tolleres Mißverständnis als das, zu hoffen oder zu befürchten, Gnade könnte ein Ruhebett für 'Theoretiker' und Mystiker werden. Kein hinterlistigerer Verteidigungsversuch des mit Recht um seine Existenz besorgten (moralischen!) Menschen als der, angeblich um jenes lutherische Mißverständnis zu vermeiden, Ethik auf innerweltliche Zweckbegriffe, statt auf den Begriff der kritischen Negation aller Zwecke, auf Güter und Ideale, statt auf die Vergebung der Sünde zu begründen."

[92] See Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*: 227: "The 'hole in the middle' continued to be empty. God's Word is never at our disposal."

[93] See Barth, *Römerbrief* II: 406: "Ja, 'wunderlich,' paradox und unerhört ist die Art und Weise, in der sich das Regiment Gottes in seiner Kirche auswirkt."

[94] See *ivi*: 294–295.

[95] See *ivi*: 14, quoting *De servo arbitrio*.

[96] See *ivi*: 18.

[97] *Ivi*: 408. Barth continues (*ivi*: 408–409): "'Vernünftig geschaut' wird in den Werken Gottes seine Unanschaulichkeit und 'erforscht' wird in den Tiefen Gottes seine Unerforschlichkeit (1 Cor 2:10). Gott erkennen heißt anbetend stillstehen vor ihm selber, der in einem Lichte wohnt, da niemand zu kann. Immer wieder gerade vor der verborgenen Tiefe seines Reichtums, seiner Möglichkeit, seines Lebens, seiner Herrlichkeit! Immer wieder gerade vor der verborgenen Tiefe seiner Weisheit, seiner Gedanken, seiner Gerichte und Wege, seines Ganges von hier nach dort! Immer wieder gerade vor der verborgenen Tiefe der Erkenntnis, mit der er uns erkennt, bevor wir ihn erkennen, mit der er uns nicht losläßt, die wir immer ohne ihn sind! 'Wie unerforschlich sind seine Gerichte und wie unbegreiflich seine Wege!'

In other words:

Direkte Erkenntnis dieses Gottes? Nein! Mitwirkung bei seinen Beschlüssen? Nein! Möglichkeit, ihn zu fassen, zu binden, zu verpflichten, in ein reziprokes Verhältnis zu ihm zu treten? Nein! *Keine* "Föderaltheologie"! *Er* ist Gott, er selbst, er allein. *Das* ist das Ja des Römerbriefes.[98]

Apparently, this echoes my interpretation of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. This concerns the theological idea of "man's incapability of knowing God or speaking his Word,"[99] and thus the impossibility for a human being to have God at his disposal, even theoretically. In *Römerbrief* II, this impossibility is conceptual; it is impossible to grasp the Word of God in a concept. In other terms: "There is no similarity between our word and God's Word."[100] Hence, the believer is a *Bettler*,[101] in dependence on God's will.[102] Therefore, it is the Word of God to reveal its own irreducibility, it is God that reveals God's own distance from human. The metaphor of the *posteriora Dei* is said *by God*, not by Moses (Exod 33:17–23).[103]

However, I see a problem in this theological approach, and consequently in this reading of Luther. Barth endeavors to attribute to God a correct definition by rejecting the reducibility of God to an element of an opposition – for instance, the opposition between *Jenseits* and *Diesseits*. All these oppositions are human-based, and thus they cannot frame God. God is irreducible to these oppositions. God is beyond ("*über*") the opposition between *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* (2 Tim 4:17),[104] beyond the definition of beyond. The "yes" of the *Römerbrief* II is beyond the opposition between yes and no.

Nevertheless, this is still a definition of God. Excluding the application of all opposing *differentiae specificae* (God is neither *x* nor *¬x*) means applying nevertheless a *differentia specifica*. God is defined as that to which no *differentia specifica* applies. Dialectical theology affirms the irreducibility of both the Word of God and the distance of God, but this implies that the Word of God

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Warum Erwählung? Warum Verwerfung? mußten und müssen wir immer wieder fragen und mußten und müssen immer wieder die eine Antwort hören: Darum weil Gott nicht Gott wäre, wenn er nicht unerforschlicherweise verwerfen, unbegreiflicherweise erwählen würde, wenn er sich nicht in der großen Verborgenheit seines Schreibens von Sieg zu Sieg als Gott erweisen würde: als der, der sich aller erbarmen will und wird."

[98] *Ivi*: 409.

[99] Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*: 228.

[100] *Ivi*: 226.

[101] See Barth*, Römerbrief* II: 275.

[102] See *ivi*: 439: "Gottes Wille 'soll vorgehen über alle gute Werke und Liebe, die ich dem Nächsten tun könnte; und wenn ich könnte alle Welt selig machen auf einen Tag und wäre nicht Gottes Wille, so soll ichs doch nicht tun' (Luther)."

[103] In *infra*, Ch. 4 section 5, I will further discuss this relationship between revelation and hiddenness.

[104] See Barth*, Römerbrief* II: 271.

and God are elements of such affirmation. The Word of God is reduced by dialectical theology to "what is irreducible," and God is made close as "what is distant." In sum, Barth aims to "locate God beyond the realm of any and every conceptuality readily available to us, whether through a *via negativa* or a *via eminentiae* or a *via causalitatis*."[105] But this is still a *via*; it is still a *conceptual* location.

Dialectical theology is built upon the assimilation of both God and the Word of God into the boundary defined by a specific structure of language: the *dialectical* structure. God and the Word of God constitute one of the two poles of the structure of the dialectic (the other being human being and human "word," that is, human conceptualizations). Hence, God and the Word of God are indeed conceptualized in light of their insertion *within* such structure; therefore, their meaningfulness *depends* on this structure.

This is an example of the metalinguistic issue analyzed in Chapter 2[106]: the assumption of a metalinguistic position as the adequate position for expressing an inadequacy. The invalidation of all non-dialectical recognitions of the distance between human and God implies the unquestioned, axiomatic validity of at least one metalanguage: the dialectical one. This metalanguage is assumed as the condition for God to be related to human forms of thinking and conceptualizing.[107]

My position differs because it concerns not the conceptual declaration of the distance between the two words, but the theological inversion of priority between the metalinguistic conditions of conceptualization and divine revelation. In other words, my position focuses not on the validation or invalidation of concepts of God, but on the theological reconsideration of the metalinguistic requirement of the validation of concepts. It follows that divine revelation is not simply beyond human language, or distant from it, but it embraces the totality of human language, every possible conceptualization in every possible form (dialectical, ontological, transcendentalist, subjectivist, metaphoric, newsyllogistic, et cetera) as what is *not* divine revelation.

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[105] McCormack, *Karl Barth*: 248.

[106] See *supra*, Ch. 2 section 8.

[107] This issue is not solved by inverting the order of the parts of the dialectic. Barth, around 1930, switches this order by making the "no" subordinate to the "yes," instead of the other way around. This marks the passage of Barth's thought "beyond a critical form of dialectic" (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*: 225). It is no longer the "no" of the distance that is the condition according to which the "yes" of revelation can be understood; rather, the "yes" is the condition according to which the "no" makes sense. "The No is subordinated to the Yes and cannot be studied for itself" (*ivi*: 226). Yet, the issue does not concern the specific form of the dialectic, but the dialectical structure itself. In each case (the "yes" over the "no" or the "no" over the "yes"), the Word of God, and God, are elements of such a dialectical relationship. Therefore, the two are formally equivalent.

So, instead of speaking about divine revelation being inaccessible, it is a matter of speaking about human language being *already fully accessed* by divine revelation. Instead of making divine revelation the object of human language, even negatively,[108] it is a matter of considering language, in any form and conceptualization, as the object of divine revelation. There is only one outcome: every possible metalanguage, every possible condition of conceptualization operates by expressing its own theological limitation.

Human language applies not to the Word of God, but to the validity of its structures (the dialectical structure included): theologically, this validity is already subverted by contact with divine revelation. Human language is theology not when it says the "no" of the Word of God – the impossibility to say divine revelation – but when it says its own "no" towards language itself – the impossibility (or theological illegitimacy) for language to be divine revelation.

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[108] It seems to me that dialectical theology is a refined form of *theologia negativa*.

Chapter 4

Theology *coram Deo abscondito*

I return now to the paradox of freedom in *De servo arbitrio*. Following up on the second Chapter's clarification of the relationship between revelation and the conditions of the meaningful, non-paradoxical concept of freedom, I will expand upon what was analyzed in Chapter 1: the negation of the possibility of formulating any law for God's *voluntas*.

This negation leads to the difficult issue of the *Deus absconditus*. The difficulty is that God's freedom seems to also affect divine revelation. This would entail the theological contradiction of an opposition between God and divine revelation, or a partial validity of the latter.

In order to present this complex topic as clearly as possible, I have organized the chapter as follows. I begin by analyzing Luther's introduction of the *Deus absconditus* in *De servo arbitrio*, and I outline the theological contradiction it appears to entail. Then, I discuss the positions of Barth, Ebeling, and Jüngel on this topic; by comparing these positions and further elucidating Luther's position in *De servo arbitrio*, I illustrate the important function fulfilled by the concept of *Deus absconditus* in theology.

1. A First Look at *De servo arbitrio*

As I explained, Erasmus claims that some parts of Scripture are inaccessible. Luther, however, emphasizes the distinction between God and Scripture; the inaccessibility refers to the former, not to the latter. Scripture is clear, but there are many things in God that are *abscondita* (606,12–13). Because the clarity of Scripture depends on the fact that in every part of it Jesus Christ is present, the previous distinction entails a distinction between a *Deus predicatus* and a *Deus absconditus*.

The first one is the *Deus* "predicatus et cultus" (685,10), the God that "nobis cognitus est et nobiscum habet commercium" (685,11–12). It is the God connected to revelation, "indutus et proditus […] verbo suo" (685,16). The second one is the *Deus* not *predicatus*, not *revelatus*, not *oblatus*, not *cultus* (see 685,4–5) – it is God "in maiestate et natura sua" (685,14). With this God, we have no *commercium*: "Relinquendus est igitur Deus in maiestate et natura sua, sic enim

nihil nos cum illo habemus agere, nec sic voluit a nobis agi cum eo" (685,14–15).

This lack of *commercium* refers to God's *freedom*; contrary to the *Deus predicatus*, the *Deus absconditus* "liberum sese reservavit super omnia"; this "omnia" includes God's *verbum* (685,23–24). "Multa facit Deus, quae verbo suo non ostendit nobis. Multa quoque vult, quae verbo suo non ostendit sese volle. Sic non vult mortem peccatoris, verbo scilicet, Vult autem illam voluntate illa imperscrutabili" (685,27–29).

Therefore, the theological concept of God's freedom connects to God's hiddenness. God is *absconditus* because God's *voluntas* is "imperscutabilis" (685,29) and "incognoscibilis" (686,1). As discussed in Chapter 1, this is because no power or cause or reason is superior to God's; otherwise, we would be no longer talking about God. It is impossible to *know* such *voluntas*, to answer the questions on the "quid", the "cur", and the "quatenus" (686,2), and on why God wants and acts in a way and not in another way (631,32–37) – precisely because it is impossible to formulate a reason or condition of God's *voluntas* (632,23–26; 784,9–13).

In sum, the distinction between *Deus predicatus* and *Deus absconditus* consists of the fact that it is impossible to place anything over the *Deus absconditus*. In fact, the *Deus predicatus et cultus* can always be overcome by something else (for instance, the Antichrist; 685,8–10; 2 Tess 2:4). Given that this is the *Deus* that is preached and is the object of cultish worship, it is always possible to substitute the *Deus predicatus* with another object of preaching and worship, to place an idol on the altar of the *Deus predicatus*. In other words, it is always possible for us to pass from a cult to another cult, from one religion to another religion.

This does not apply to the *Deus absconditus*. Because we have no *commercium* with the *Deus abscondius*, and because the *Deus absconditus* is not framed by any revelation or any *verbum*, it cannot be the object of any cult or preaching. If the *Deus absconditus* were to be revealed, preached, or worshipped, then it would no longer be *absconditus*, but *predicatus*. Therefore, "nihil potest extolli" over the *Deus absconditus*, and "omnia sunt sub potenti manu eius" (685,13–14). It seems that the *Deus absconditus* describes a sort of "observer effect" in theology; whenever I prepare myself to know God, I come to know only one aspect of God – the "predicatus et cultus" aspect.

Luther's position risks (or arouses suspicion of) incoherence. This incoherence concerns the role of divine revelation. Given that I cannot know what God wants in and *because* of God's freedom, there is no epistemological necessity for God's *voluntas* to adhere to or to conform with what is assumed as God's self-revelation. On the contrary, God's *voluntas* can be in conflict with God's revelation. This would constitute a conflict *within* God – a *deus contra deum* – along with overshadowing God's revelation and thus Jesus Christ. God's own revelation in and as the Word made flesh would be a *partial* revelation at best,

and at worst an illusion,[1] a lie. In sum, the concept of *Deus absconditus* not only poses a theological (Christological) problem, but also seems to negate the relevance and consistency of theology as a whole.

2. Barth

This is the direction of Barth's criticism on Luther's *Deus absconditus* in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. In spite of the continuity and coherence between *Römerbrief* II and the *Dogmatik*,[2] an interesting difference between the two works can be observed on the issue of the *Deus absconditus* in Luther.

Barth focuses on Luther's warnings against all attempts to speculate on God in his majesty. According to Barth, such warnings cannot be considered compatible with Luther's consequent advice to refer only to God's revelation (685,29–31, 689,22–24). Barth thinks that this advice is negated by the very condition of its formulation: the introduction of the *Deus absconditus.*

More specifically, Luther says that Jesus Christ is the meter of distinction between what we should know and not know about God.[3] Jesus Christ is the limit of our theological knowledge. Yet, for Barth, saying that Jesus Christ opens the way to only one aspect of God (the *Deus incarnatus*) and not to God as a whole, means that there is always something beyond revelation to which we have no access. This "something" is the *Deus absconditus*. This argument lowers Jesus Christ to a partial, relative truth about God.[4] Instead of admonishing us to focus only on Jesus Christ, this risks inviting the dismissal of Jesus Christ as something artificial, abstract, and irrelevant.[5]

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[1] See Loewenich, *Theologia crucis*: 34.

[2] See McCormack, *Karl Barth*: 244–25.

[3] See Luther, WA 18: 689,24–25: "Per hunc [*sc.* Jesus Christ] enim abunde habet [*sc.* humana temerarietatis], quid scire et non scire debeat."

[4] See Barth, *KD*: II.2 § 32, 71: "Die Frage nach dem Wesen und Inhalt dieser voluntas maiestatis will Luther abgewiesen und unterdrückt haben: Nec nobis quaerendum, cur ita faciat, sed reverendus Deus, qui talia et possit et velit [Barth quotes from WA 18: 690,1–2]. Wie aber läßt sich diese Frage abweisen, wie soll es eine vertrauensvolle Zuwendung dem Deus incarnatus gegenüber geben, wenn eine von seinem Willen verschiedene voluntas maiestatis hinter und über ihm nun immerhin festgestellt und festgehalten wird? (Und gerade der Darstellung des allmächtigen Waltens dieser voluntas maiestatis hat ja Luther im Kampf gegen Erasmus jene ganze Schrift gewidmet!) Bedeutet ihre Feststellung nicht als solche trotz aller damit verbundenen Warnungen und Verbote, daß die Offenbarung Gottes nur seine relative Wahrheit ist? Wird die Frage nach dem verborgenen Gott sich nicht allen Warnungen und Verboten zum Trotz eines Tages durchsetzen als die Frage nach dem eigentlichen Gott?"

[5] See *ibid.*: "Wird die Frage nach dem Wählen dieses eigentlichen Gottes nicht auch da beunruhigend im Hintergrunde stehen bleiben, wo man sich, jenen Warnungen und Verboten entsprechend, an den Deus incarnatus halten will? Hat und behält der Verweis auf Jesus

Barth connects this issue to the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. The affirmation of a *Deus absconditus* coincides with the affirmation of God's *potentia absoluta* against God's *potentia ordinata*: because God is *absconditus*, God's *potentia* cannot be *ordinata* because the condition of its order cannot be known. Therefore, God's *potentia* can only be *absoluta*. For Barth, *absoluta* means *inordinata*, in the sense of arbitrary, capricious, and depending only and entirely on God's secret will.[6] Thus, this *potentia* is obscure, unintelligible, and unpredictable. Again, the introduction of the concept of *Deus absconditus* results not in adherence to the *Deus revelatus*, as Luther claims and would expect, but in the lowering of *potentia ordinata* to an inconsistent, irrelevant topic. Speaking about *Deus absconditus* means that there is no order for God's power, no assurance of salvation, and no confidence in God's revelation.[7]

Barth's solution to this theological danger is twofold. First, he aims to lead the *Deus absconditus* back to the *revelatus*. Second, he rejects all references to a *Deus absconditus* distinct from the *Deus revelatus* as mere idolatry.

These two steps are interrelated. Barth negates the theological legitimacy of speaking of *Deus absconditus* in light of God's revelation. Given that revelation is of God (in both meanings of the genitive), God's revelation is the revelation of and about the *hidden* God. Therefore, revelation must be assumed as the meter of God's relationship with us. One must assume that there is nothing left before and beyond God's revelation; there is no *Deus absconditus* lurking behind God's own revelation.[8]

Christus nicht notwendig etwas Krampfhaftes und Künstliches, solange er von der Feststellung einer anderweitigen voluntas maiestatis faktisch begleitet ist?"

[6] See *ivi*: II.1 § 31, 608–609: "Es läßt sich nicht leugnen, daß Luther von seinem Deus absconditus gelegentlich so geredet hat, als ob er darunter die so verstandene potentia absoluta oder vielmehr: inordinata verstanden hätte. Aus der Wundermacht neben oder hinter der im Rahmen einer gewissen Regelmäßigkeit betätigten ist jetzt eine Willkürmacht neben oder hinter einer sich zufällig entsprechend dem wirklichen Werk Gottes betätigenden Ordnungsmacht geworden."

[7] See *ivi*: II.1 § 31, 609: "Es ist klar, und das hat gerade Luther wohl gesehen (darum ging es letztlich in seinem ganzen Streit gegen die spätmittelalterliche Theologie), daß es, wenn es mit der nominalistisch verstandenen potentia absoluta seine Richtigkeit hätte, so etwas wie Heilsgewißheit und damit auch irgend so etwas wie einen kontinuierlichen Halt und Trost im Leben und im Sterben nicht geben könnte [...]. Es ist aber nicht ebenso klar, inwiefern Luther diese Not damit wirklich überwinden zu können meinte, daß er den Rat gab, sich um den Deus absconditus so wenig als möglich zu kümmern und sich ganz an das zu halten, was er als Gottes opus proprium bezeichnete, an den Deus revelatus, an den in Jesus Christus gegenwärtigen Gott also. Wie kann man das ernstlich und wirksam tun, wenn nun doch, wie es in Luthers Lehre vom Gesetz geschah, die Behauptung einer ganz anderen Existenz Gottes als Deus absconditus, wenn nun doch die Behauptung einer im Hintergrund immer noch wirklichen potentia inordinata nicht verneint, sondern aufrecht erhalten wird?"

[8] See *ivi*: II.1 § 27, 236–237: "Aber eben weil Gottes Offenbarung, ist sie nun weiter auch rechte und zuverlässige Offenbarung. [...] Sie ist die Offenbarung des verborgenen Gottes.

This integration of the *Deus absconditus* into the *Deus revelatus*[9] entails the dismissal of the *potentia absoluta*. God's revelation is the revelation of God's *potentia absoluta* as *ordinata.* Contrary to Luther, speculations on God in his majesty are avoided not by stating this majesty as *abscondita*, but by recognizing this majesty as already manifest in and as God's revelation. The focus on the *Deus revelatus* does not result from the impossibility of knowing the divergence of God's *voluntas* from what is revealed – a divergence called "*Deus absconditus*." Rather, the focus on the *Deus revelatus* is deduced from the fact that revelation is the fruit of God's *voluntas*.

It follows that the concept of *Deus absconditus* is theologically illicit since it clashes against the *reality* of revelation.[10] Affirming an omnipotence different from the omnipotence revealed means denying that God's revelation is God's omnipotence already manifest – and at the same time, it means neglecting what God has already decided in and as God's revelation.

This allows Barth to turn Luther's argument upside down. The *Deus absconditus* is no longer the condition that impedes all reduction of God into an idol. As explained in the previous section, this is Luther's position. On the contrary, according to Barth, the *Deus absconditus* is itself an idol. In fact, the *Deus absconditus* is an idea about God that is detached from God's revelation. Therefore, this idea is entirely the fruit of human speculation. This unrevealed, disembodied God, this Logos that has nothing to do with Jesus Christ because is something more than Jesus Christ, is a human-made God – an idol.[11]

[...] Es ist gerade die Verborgenheit, in der er hier offenbar wird, nur das Merkmal der Gnade seiner Offenbarung, mit deren Erkenntnis unsere Erkenntnis Gottes anfangen muß und von der sie sich auch nie entfernen darf. Es bleibt aber in Gottes Offenbarung kein verborgener Gott, kein Deus absconditus hinter seiner Offenbarung zurück, mit dessen Existenz und Wirksamkeit wir dann über sein Wort und seinen Geist hinaus gelegentlich auch noch zu rechnen, den wir hinter seiner Offenbarung auch noch zu fürchten und zu verehren hätten. So könnte es in gewissen Zusammenhängen bei Luther manchmal aussehen. Im Zeugnis der heiligen Schrift aber sieht es nicht so aus. Gott ist auch hier Gott und also Geheimnis, aber eben in diesem Geheimnis begegnet und gibt er sich dem Menschen, ohne sich vorzubehalten, ohne daß wir nun doch auch noch eines Anderen zu warten hätten."

[9] See also *ivi*: I.1 §8, 348.

[10] See *ivi*: II.1 § 31, 610: "Wir werden also der nominalistischen These auch in der von Luther vertretenen Form gegenüber sagen müssen: daß in dem, was Gott in Freiheit gewollt und getan und also gekonnt hat, gerade seine potestas absoluta als potestas ordinata endgültig und verbindlich sichtbar geworden ist, so sichtbar, daß es uns nicht mehr frei steht, sondern verboten ist, mit einer sachlich anderen Allmacht als eben der, die er in seinem tatsächlichen Wollen und Tun betätigt hat, zu rechnen, als ob Gott auch anders zu wählen, zu tun und zu können vermöchte, als er es nun eben getan hat."

[11] See *ivi*: IV.1 § 57, 55: "Wir würden unter dem Titel dieses λόγος ἄσαρκος doch wieder einem Deus absconditus und dann bestimmt irgend einem selbstgemachten Götterbild huldigen."

Barth, by overturning Luther's deduction of the relevance of *Deus revelatus* from the *Deus absconditus*, also overturns the distinction between God and idol. The *Deus absconditus* is no longer the principle of understanding this distinction; rather, it is what defines the idol alone.

Consequently, and in contrast to Luther (although Luther is not explicitly mentioned), Barth transforms Luther's impossibility of worshipping the *Deus absconditus* into a prescription. Again, for Luther, the *Deus absconditus* cannot be worshipped, because such worshipping would turn what is *absconditus* into what is *predicatus*. For Barth, on the contrary, the *Deus absconditus* can be worshipped because it is an idol; therefore, it should *not* be worshipped, because worship has nothing to do with idolatrous stupor before what we do not know.[12] For Barth, the *Deus absconditus* is human's self-substitution for God precisely because this *Deus* is beyond God's revelation, and hence beyond the limits of human knowledge.[13]

3. Ebeling

Ebeling discusses Barth's position on the *Deus absconditus*. According to Ebeling, for Barth the *Deus absconditus* is theologically problematic because it undermines "die im Evangelium gründende Heilsgewißheit" – it stands as "Verrat am Evangelium."[14]

According to Ebeling, for Barth, the principle upon which the legitimacy of theology stands or falls is that "Christus allein ist die Offenbarung Gottes im Gegenstatz zu allen Versuchen einer Gotteserkenntnis vom Menchen her."[15] Therefore, the concept of *Deus absconditus*, being one of these "Versuchen," has no relevance for theology. In other words, Ebeling thinks that Barth solves the issue of the *Deus absconditus* by subsuming the concept of God's freedom under the concept of God's revelation.[16]

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[12] See *ivi*: III.4 § 53, 109–11: "Gemeint ist doch nicht etwa die Zuwendung zu einem Deus absconditus in seiner nackten Majestät, doch nicht etwa der bekannte Götzenkult des 'Heiligen', das als solches, in seiner Fremdheit und Abgezogenheit, in seiner Negativität das fascinosum und tremendum wäre, dem der Gottesdienst und dem das Gebet (in Form einer letzten feierlichen Erstarrung) eigentlich zu gelten hätte!"

[13] This interpretation of the *Deus absconditus* is the negative aspect of the passage from a No towards what can be known and said by humans, the No which founds all Yes of the Word of God towards humans, to a "Yes which is beyond any dialectical tension" (Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*: 227).

[14] Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 478.

[15] *Ivi*: 546. See also *ivi*: 567.

[16] See *ivi*: 477: "Wie den Begriff der Furcht Gottes will Barth auch den der Verborgenheit Gottes nicht etwa streichen, vielmehr in den der Offenbarung integrieren. Und so nun auch den Begriff der Freiheit Gottes."

Ebeling disagrees with this solution, from both historical and systematic perspectives.

From the historical point of view, Ebeling attacks Barth's assumption of the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* as directly connected to the issue of the *Deus absconditus* in Luther. In fact, Ebeling argues that this nominalistic distinction does not apply to Luther's position.[17] I will expand upon this important remark shortly.

From the systematic point of view, according to Ebeling, the *Deus absconditus* is not opposed to divine revelation, nor it does undermine the theological centrality of revelation. For Ebeling, revelation and hiddenness are interconnected, because revelation itself is the expression of God's self-concealment under the opposite. Revelation is connected to the *sub contrario*; it is "die Konzentration auf das Kreuz, auf Wort und Glaube, Darstellung und Vollzug der *absconditas sub contrario*."[18]

These considerations lead to a negation of the non-Christocentric nature of the *Deus absconditus*. According to Ebeling, Christocentrism does not mean thinking that what is opposed to Christ undermines our faithful and theological certainty. Rather, Christocentrism means leading what is opposed to Jesus Christ back to the God revealed in and as Jesus Christ. This also includes the *Deus absconditus*.[19] For this reason, Ebeling is able to apply Barth's own position against Barth's argument here; to exclude the *Deus absconditus* from the theological discourse is a failure to take divine revelation fully into account. Therefore, it is the exclusion of the *Deus absconditus*, and not its inclusion, that evidences an "ins Dunkle spekulierende ratio."[20]

At the same time, the acknowledgment of the theological (and Christological) relevance of the *Deus absconditus* is "die Abkehr von all dem, was die ratio und der Unglaube hier suchen und zu erkennen meinen, von dem Hochmut und der Verzweiflung, in die der Mensch dabei gerät, hin zu dem Wort der Verheißung, das in Jesu Mensch geworden ist."[21]

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[17] See *ivi*: 569. See also Bof, "Barth e Lutero": 322.

[18] *Ivi*: 570.

[19] See *ivi*: 571: "Die Zumutung, in allem, was geschient, auch dem Fürchterlichsten, Gott am Werke zu sehen, also nicht theoretisch von einer potentia Dei absoluta zu träumen, sondern sie als seine tatsächlich ausgeübte potentia zu verstehen und dennoch diesen völlig unbegreiflichen Deus absconditus als den in Christus offenbaren Gott zu glauben, ja mehr, die Zusage, ihn als solchen glauben zu dürfen, das ist gewissermaßen der Abglanz des Glaubens an den Gekreuzigten."

[20] *Ivi*: 569.

[21] *Ivi*: 571.

4. Jüngel

Jüngel, in speaking of Ebeling's position, states that "die Auskunft verwirrt."[22] According to Jüngel, it is not clear whether Ebeling's discourse on the *Deus absconditus* refers to the human experience of God, or to God himself. More precisely, it is not clear whether the concept of *Deus absconditus* is the result of the hypostatization of a divine subject from a divine effect towards the human being, or whether that concept expresses an intrinsic opposition within God, a *deus contra deum*, or "Gott gegen Gott."[23]

This criticism negatively presents Jüngel's position on the *Deus absconditus*. Like Barth, Jüngel criticizes Luther's connection between the warning against the speculation on God's hidden *voluntas*[24] and the admonition to focus the theological gaze exclusively upon the "revealed and proclaimed God."[25] In other words: "The hidden God and the revealed God seem to stand in contradiction of each other, so that in the end, it is not *evil against God* but *God against God*: *nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse*. As if God 'in himself,' or God 'in his majesty and nature,' could be someone other than the revealed God!"[26]

Yet, according to Jüngel, it is Luther himself who re-establishes the correct priority of God's revelation over God's majesty, in particular in his focus on the Word of God as the (self-) definition of God.[27] Therefore, God in his majesty coincides with the God "who is hidden in the light of his being."[28]

Therefore, Jüngel distinguishes between two aspects of hiddenness. The first aspect refers not to the darkness of God, but to God being light. God is inaccessible to us because of God's splendor, God's glory: "the absolute invisibility of God is, therefore, the expression of the excess of light that God essentially is."[29] It follows that the measure of God's *commercium* with human beings is precisely the honor that human beings bestow upon and express towards God's glory.

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[22] Jüngel, "Kirche und Staat": 185 note 38.

[23] See *ivi*: 186: "Gegen die zweite Seite dieser Alternative spricht die Behauptung: 'So geglaubt, ist der Deus absconditus … gewissermaßen die Nebelschwaden in der Welt, die den Deus revelatus … verfinstern' [in Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 572]. Gegen die erste Seite der alternative spricht, daß Ebeling ohne Vorbehalt von einer 'Erfahrung der Deus absconditus' spricht. Was gilt nun?"

[24] Jüngel, "Hiddenness": 135.

[25] *Ivi*: 136.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] Jüngel refers to Luther, WA 18: 685,23.

[28] For Jüngel, this is the correct interpretation of Luther: "Only when we take that as the real emphasis of what Luther says about the hidden God […] do we understand Luther properly" (*ivi*: 136).

[29] *Ivi*: 124.

The second aspect of hiddenness is that God conceals God's splendid hiddenness in the flesh of Jesus Christ. Thus, the first hiddenness is the *object* of the second hiddenness, and the second hiddenness is an operation upon the first one; it is a sort of meta-hiddenness. This operation is God's revelation: "The primary hiddenness of God […] is identifiable only in the secondary, worldly hiddenness of a quite particular human life. So, it is pertinent to say that this secondary hiddenness of God, which is identical with his revelation, is the concealing of the hiddenness of God."[30]

It follows that, for both Jüngel and Ebeling, the hiddenness is related to the *sub contrario*, with the difference that for Jüngel the *sub contrario* is God's "second hiddenness." Revelation is the concealment of God's glory under its opposite; it is "second hiddenness" because it is the hiddenness of the hiddenness of God under a work which appears to be the opposite of this revelation, a work foreign to God, an *opus alienum*. This *opus alienum* is the death of Jesus Christ; it is the crucifixion.

In Jesus Christ, the relationship between God's distance from us and God's closeness to us is turned upside down. Due to God's closeness to us in and as Jesus Christ, God's distance (the "first hiddenness") is experienced as the impossibility of excluding God's closeness, because God's closeness is greater than all possible distance.[31] So, the *sub contrario*, the apparent contradiction of the suffering and death of Jesus's crucifixion as the expression and revelation of God's glory, is the revelation of the correspondence of God to God.[32] Consequently, the second hiddenness does not concern the divine subject, as in a *deus contra deum*. Rather, this hiddenness concerns God's work; more precisely, God working the evil – with death being the worst evil.[33]

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[30] *Ivi*: 129. The same position is expressed in *Id.*, "Gottesgewißheit": 239.

[31] See *Id.*, "Gottesgewißheit": 258–259: "Jesus Christus ist demgegenüber nach dem Urteil des christlichen Glaubens der Weg zu Gott, weil sich in diesem Menschen die Dialektik von Gottesferne und Gottesnahe genau umgekehrt darstellt. [Gott] wird in Jesus Christus, im Glauben an ihm, erfahrbar als die uns inmitten noch so großer Ferne immer noch naher kommende Macht. [...] Dass die Menschheit und das glaubende Ich über Gott trotz so unerhörter Annäherung gleichwohl nicht verfugen kann, dass es die inmitten noch so großer Ferne immer noch größere Nahe Gottes ist, die sich in Jesus Christus und durch ihn ereignet, das ist eben eine Naherbestimmung der Nahe Gottes."

[32] See *Id.*, "Hiddenness": 130.

[33] See *ivi*: 136–137: "It is theologically illegitimate to infer from an *opus alienum* of God which works everything in everyone without difference, that there is a *deus absconditus* whose majesty incites terror. Rather there is one activity of God which specifically forbids one from drawing inferences about God himself. That is the insight to be gleaned here. The assertion that we can only know God by his action is correct. But it is valid only in so far as we actually know his action. And we only know his action on the basis of the revelation of his glory under the antithesis of the cross, thus on the basis of that action which as such is our salvation. But then the shadow of ambiguity may not also be cast over God himself. And for just this reason we speak of the dark hiddenness of God only in view of his work, more

Therefore, the issue of God's hiddenness should not be related to God, but to God's *work*. Instead of speaking of *Deus absconditus*, Jüngel speaks of *opus dei absconditum*.[34] Jüngel connects the hiddenness to the impossibility of answering the theodical question; this hiddenness, this *opus dei absconditum*, is *already* the answer to any problem of theodicy. This answer is not the formulation of an explication of evil, as theodicy aims to do. Rather, the answer is the revelation of the connection between God and evil; every possible theological speculation on evil begins with the axiom "God is love."[35]

Given that the contradiction between death and eternal life, between evil and salvation, exists not as *deus contra deum* but as revealed correspondence of God to God,[36] the revelation of God's power in the death of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the non-contradiction between God revealed as and in Jesus Christ (God revealing God's power beneath an appearance of death and evil) and the fact of evil as *opus dei absconditum*.[37]

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specifically in view of his *opus alienum* which includes everything that seems to contradict his revelation. We must therefore say: God's opus proprium, his merciful agency, reveals the divine subject, the divine essence, God himself. God himself is not hidden, but only his *opus alienum*, his activity which allows evil and which even uses evil." On death, see *ivi*: 130: "To us, death seems to be the greatest of all evils. And because we cannot cope with the evil of death, there also remains for us an ugly great ditch between all other evils and life, between suffering and life, which causes us to ask: 'Why?' and 'What for?'" See also *Id.*, "Gottesgewißheit": 253 and 258 note 8.

[34] See *ivi*: 130–131.

[35] See *ivi*: 142–144: "The light which is shed on this distressing fact [of the evil] by the cross of Jesus Christ and from the gospel of Easter however does not yet explain the fact. The fact itself, the raw facticity of evil in the world, remains dark. The light which falls on it does not illuminate this dark fact, but rather enlightens us, illuminating the fact that the God who suffers and in this way conquers death […] is nothing other than love. […] Whether, then, the certainty that 'God is love' enables us to endure the question of evil as an unanswerable question (and this means enduring the hiddenness of divine activity in the history of our being, in short, enduring the *opus dei absconditum*) or whether the question of evil in the world which is ruled by God destroys the certainty that God is love – in both cases the question remains a question full of risk. Dogmatics does not release from this risk, but rather makes one aware of it. And dogmatics does indeed do that, and does it precisely by beginning with the certainty that God is love."

[36] See *ivi*: 142: "There is only one, but one decisive, connection of God and evil. And that is the cross of Jesus Christ, the fundamental fact of Christian faith: that God conquers evil in that he suffers it himself."

[37] See *ivi*: 143–144: "The risk which lies concealed within human inquiry into evil springs from the hiddenness of God's *opus alienum*. One who through God's revelation has become certain that God is love, will certainly also trace the *opus dei absconditum* back to the revealed will of God. He or she will proceed from the assumption that if God works everything in everyone and is thus also at work in evil, the *opus dei absconditum* is then consistent with the love of God in a way which is hidden from us. And he or she will have faith that the *opus dei alienum et absconditum* does not reveal a contradiction in God. […] Love cannot be hidden to itself."

Jüngel's interpretation of the *Deus absconditus* differs from that of both Barth and Ebeling. It differs from Ebeling's interpretation because it transfers the focus from God to God's *opus*. It differs from Barth's position for the same reason; Jüngel preserves the distinction between *opus alienum* and *opus proprium* as the only field in which it is theologically legitimate to speak of God's hiddenness.

The difference between the three authors also pertains to the issues of evil and salvation.

For Barth, the *Deus absconditus* must be excluded from theological discourse because it impedes the theological consistency of election and salvation – in short, the *Deus absconditus* is *extra* theology.

For Ebeling, the *Deus absconditus* constitutes the structure of revelation itself, thus sustaining the theological reference to Jesus Christ. This is how theology must orient itself in light of the human sinful condition; the *Deus absconditus* is *ex ante* theology.[38]

For Jüngel, the *opus dei absconditum* is the concept at which theology arrives (and against which it clashes) when theology aims to investigate the source and meaning of evil. Thus, this concept evidences that the answer to the theodical question of God as the source of evil is not a matter of dogmatic theology.[39] In other words, the concept of *opus dei absconditum* is *ex post* theology; it follows from the reflection upon God as love.

Despite this multi-faceted divergence of positions – or rather, *because* of this divergence – one thing is clear: the problem of the *Deus absconditus* is remarkably complex. Three of the most prominent theologians of the twentieth century struggle to explain this problem, and to recover the steadiness of theology itself from such problem. Each of them formulates a different answer. It is inevitable that one becomes even more confused. This invites us to ask the following question: why, after all, is the *Deus absconditus* a problem? What is truly at stake here?

The answer to this question is even further complicated by the fact that for each theologian, the issue of *Deus absconditus* is connected to the issue of

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[38] See Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 570: "Von Christus kann nicht anders die Rede sein als so, daß zur Sprache und zur Erfahrung kommt, wann ihm in dieser Welt widerspricht, und darum dasjenige, was uns auf Christus angewiesen sein läßt, was ihn für die Welt notwendig macht."

[39] See Jüngel, "Hiddenness": 141–142: "It is questionable whether theology would do well to follow Barth's thesis that the origin of nothingness and thus of evil lies in the act of divine negation and repudiation. The ancient human need for an explanation of evil and so for a justification of God in the face of evil, the ancient human need not only to pose, but to solve, the question of theodicy, does not in fact stop outside the sacred halls of dogmatics. Dogmatics cannot ignore this ancient need. But neither can dogmatic satisfy it. And dogmatics should not act as if it could do so. Dogmatics must not even want to satisfy this ancient human need."

theodicy, although in different ways. After all, Luther himself introduces the concept of *Deus absconditus* by answering (or rather, by confirming) Erasmus's perplexity as to whether God is the cause of evil. However, for the sake of clarity, I concentrate only on the supposed incoherence in Luther's position. I will address the connection between the *Deus absconditus* and theodicy later, in Chapter 11.[40]

5. A Different Perspective

I begin by approaching the issue indirectly. I focus first on the distinction between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta.*

Ebeling is right: Luther rejects such distinction as one of the nominalistic *inanitates verborum* (719,14–17).[41] This rejection implies that the divine *potentia* which is the object of revelation is somehow connected to the divine *potentia* which is detached, separated, *abscondita* from revelation; both *potentiae* belong to the same divine *potentia*.[42]

This connection of the two *potentiae* is indirectly confirmed by Erasmus himself, when, in *Hyperaspistes* II, he criticizes Luther's position because it makes human salvation object of God's *potentia absoluta*. According to Erasmus this is absurd because human salvation is the object of divine revelation and, consequently, of God's *potentia ordinata*, whereas God's *potentia absoluta* lies outside revelation.[43]

Now, *prima facie* it is precisely this connection of the two *potentiae* that presents a problem: as already quoted, according to Luther God simultaneously wants (*potentia absoluta*) and does not want (*potentia ordinata*) the death of the sinner (685:27–29; Ezek 18:23, 32). Yet, when examined more closely, this connection is the first step in overcoming the *deus contra deum* impasse. In fact, connecting the two *potentiae* means acknowledging that revelation speaks not only of God's *potentia ordinata*, but also of God's *potentia absoluta*. Yet, by definition, God's *potentia absoluta* relates to the content of divine *voluntas* that is *not* object of revelation. Therefore, it follows that revelation does not

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[40] I synthesize here what I conclude about theodicy in Ch. 11: the *Deus absconditus* is not only the evidence of the exclusion of the question of theology from the horizon of legitimate theological discourse (as Jüngel wants), but, more radically, it evidences theology's duty *not* to satisfy this question. It is theology's duty to question the reasons for and the legitimacy of the theodical question, and of any theodical expectation of an answer.

[41] On Luther's rejection of Eramsus's distinctions, see also WA 18: 715:1–3.

[42] I would tend to identify this "synthetic" divine *potentia* as God's *potentia actualis* (WA 18: 718,29–30). See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 3.

[43] See Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* II: 693. I further discuss the relationship between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta* (in its negative qualification as *potentia inordinata*) in *infra*, Ch. 11 sections 2–3.

merely reveal the content of God's *voluntas*; at the same time, revelation also reveals that the content of God's *voluntas* is *never entirely an object of revelation*. In sum, the *commercium* we have with God concerns the fact that we never have a *complete commercium* with God.

This is indeed Luther's own position: it is God who reveals that our access to God and to God's decision over human beings and the creation is limited (606,13–16: "sicut ipsemet dicit de die extremo"). It is Paul who continuously refers to the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge, which cannot be scrutinized (Rom 11:33; 606,5; 607,18–19; 712,25–26; 718,2–3 [indirect quote]; 784,14–15). And given that God's revelation is *itself* expression of God's *voluntas*, then it is God who *does not want* God's own *voluntas* to be the object of speculation (631,8–15).

It follows that the lack of *commercium* with God is wanted *by God*. It is the fruit of God's *voluntas*, and consequently, a product of God's freedom: "Deus *voluit* ea vulgari, voluntatis vero divinae rationem quaerendam non esse" (632, emphasis added). "Quatenus igitur Deus sese abscondit et ignorari a nobis *vult*, nihil ad nos" (685,5–6, emphasis added). Luther presents the same connection between God's *voluntas* and *Deus absconditus* in 718,1–3, in reference to Matthew 6:10, the "Thy will be done": God's *voluntas* can only be accepted, not blamed, because it has no rule. It is the rule of itself.[44]

This clarification opens up a different perspective from which to address the issue of the *Deus absconditus*. We know about the inscrutability, incomprehensibility, and inaccessibility of God's *voluntas* precisely *from* God's revelation. Divine revelation is the revelation that God's voluntas is *abscondita*. We know about the *Deus absconditus*, and we say "*Deus absconditus*," because "*Deus absconditus*" is one of the contents of divine revelation.

This relationship between divine revelation and *Deus absconditus* might seem trivial, but it is not. In order to grasp its non-triviality, I refer once again to Jüngel. According to him, the starting point in the *Deus absconditus* is that the *absconditas* implies that God is not "locked up within himself,"[45] that God reveals himself, that God is light. The event of revelation presupposes a "before" and an "after" of revelation, and the hiddenness is connected to the former; "before" the revelation, God was hidden.[46]

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[44] The same for the famous "quae supra nos nihil as nos" (605,20–21; 685,6–7); how could we know that something is beyond the powers of our reason, besides that this "beyond" reveals itself as such? I note that the famous Latin motto is also one of Erasmus's *Adagia*; see Erasmus, *Adagiorum*: 96 number 569. For an analysis of the use of the motto in *De servo arbitrio*, see Müller, "Zur 'voluntas dei abscondita'": 150–155.

[45] Jüngel, "Hiddenness": 123.

[46] See *ivi*: 125: "The concept of the hiddenness of God is rather the first insight which the self-revealing God gives of himself. In the process of revealing himself, God is revealed as the God who has until now been hidden in the light of his own being."

What Luther says in *De servo arbitrio* sheds new light on the matter. Jüngel's connection between God's hiddenness and the "before revelation" is possible due to an element that precedes even what is "before" revelation: revelation itself. Clearly, revelation precedes the "before" in a formal, not temporal way: revelation is the condition according to which we can think and speak about revelation, and consequently, about what is temporally "before" revelation as this "before". Therefore, the *Deus absconditus* is not what comes before revelation, but what is contained and presented by revelation. In other words, the mere possibility of formulating the concept of *Deus absconditus* in theology (even as this "before revelation") implies its presentation by and within God's revelation.

Jüngel's position on the *Deus absconditus* exemplifies the mistake of overlooking the foundation of the concept of *Deus absconditus*. Any attempt to solve the problem of the theological coherence or incoherence of the *Deus absconditus* comes second, because it follows from the investigation of the *formulability* of such a concept.

My perspective on the *Deus absconditus* results from switching the attention from the signified to the signifier, from the *Deus absconditus* as God to the *Deus absconditus* as concept. In other words, this perspective results from no longer focusing on the concept's meaning, but on the concept's *possibility*. The question is no longer "What is the *Deus absconditus*?" but "How do I arrive at this concept and ask the 'what' question?" For Luther, the answer to this "how" is divine revelation.

6. *Deus absconditus* as Meta-Concept

The fact that the concept of *Deus absconditus* is inferred from divine revelation helps to completely rethink the relationship between *Deus absconditus* and revelation.

The concept of *Deus absconditus* does not invalidate the contents of divine revelation, it does not invalidate what divine revelation says about God. In fact, if we assume *per absurdum* that the *Deus absconditus* does invalidate revelation, then, given that the *Deus absconditus* is formulated in light of divine revelation, revelation would "invalidate" itself. Consequently, the very formulation of the concept of *Deus absconditus* would imply the invalidation also of the concept of *Deus absconditus*: its formulation negates its formulation. Therefore, the standard interpretation according to which the *Deus absconditus* invalidates revelation ends in a vicious circle. The relationship between *Deus absconditus* and revelation must be rethought.

The question is this: if the concept of *Deus absconditus* does not invalidate revelation, what else might it possibly invalidate? The answer is twofold. First, the *Deus absconditus* applies not to revelation but to the concepts inferred from

revelation. Second, it does not invalidate these concepts, but it forces us to reconsider the claim about their validity. In other words, it re-defines the type of inference that produces these concepts.

Formulating the concept of *Deus absconditus* means acknowledging that what we infer about God from revelation *might* be wrong. In other words, stating that God is hidden corresponds to stating that our premises (divine revelation) are true (otherwise, we return to the previous vicious circle), and at the same time, that there is no guarantee that our conclusions inferred from these premises are true.

However, this does not mean that our conclusions inferred from divine revelation are *not* true. Rather, it means that they are only *likely* to be true; their truth is probable, *hypothetical*. It follows that our inferences from divine revelation are not deductions. The conclusions inferred from a deduction are either valid or invalid, not hypothetical. Inferring a conclusion that is only hypothetical corresponds to reasoning in an inductive way. Thus, the concept of *Deus absconditus* makes clear that the inferences from divine revelation are *inductions*.[47]

Therefore, the concept of *Deus absconditus* does not give rise to an epistemological aporia in theology because it does not invalidate what is inferred from divine revelation. Simply, it states that any possible inferential conclusion has the *probability* of being true, precisely *because* their premise (divine revelation) is assumed as true.[48] The attribution of a negative epistemological function to the *Deus absconditus* follows from misinterpreting the *Deus absconditus* as the negation of the truth (and thus of the non-hypothetical reliability) of divine revelation. This interpretation is incorrect because it does not consider

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[47] Theological inference is inductive and not abductive (the other form of probabilistic, hypothetical inference) because it produces concepts that are claimed, or expected, to be universal, thus to be *rules* of our thinking about God. On the other hand, abductive inference ends with the formulation of *cases*, and not of (probabilistic) universal statements; see Peirce, *Partial Synopsis*: 96; and *Id*., *Deduction*: 619–625. Peirce (in *Id*., *The Logic*: 245–251) individuates the origin of abduction in Aristotle, *An. pr.*: II, 25, although this conjecture might be objected (see Flórez, "Peirce's Theory": 171–172).

[48] A possible objection to my claim that theological inference is inductive may concern the fact that inductive inference begins with statistic data. Thus, claiming that theological inference is inductive would mean to claim that the truth-value of the information provided by divine revelation is merely statistical. Once again, this corresponds to saying that the *Deus absconditus* undermines the reliability of divine revelation. I reply to this criticism with two arguments. First, it is not at all necessary for an inductive inference to begin with statistic data; for instance, it can begin with punctual observations from the regularity of which a rule is inferred (see Mill, *A System*: 306–307). Second, it is precisely the theological conceptualization that has a statistical approach to the information provided by revelation. For instance, given that the scriptural *loci* that associate God and "father" are more numerous than the *loci* associating God and "mother," theology infers the concept of God the Father. This attitude is similar to Erasmus's position as analyzed in *supra*, Ch. 2 section 1.

that the formulation and affirmation of the *Deus absconditus* presuppose the truth of revelation.

Thus, the *Deus absconditus*, instead of invalidating the conclusions inferred from divine revelation (our concepts of God), prevents the inferred concept of God from being assumed and considered as results of a deduction, or as theorems. These concepts must be assumed and considered only as *hypotheses*.[49]

It follows that the concept of *Deus absconditus* impedes the concepts inferred from divine revelation to have the *same truth value* as divine revelation (the premise of the inferences). In fact, a theorem has the same value as the premises (axioms) from which it is inferred. Hence, considering the concepts inferred from revelation as theorems would correspond to placing them on the same level as divine revelation. In other words, it would correspond to considering divine revelation as an element of the same set that the inferred concepts belong to.

The claim that divine revelation belongs to the same set of the inferred concepts of God (and thus has the same truth value of these concepts) contradicts the fundamental assumption of theology: that there is a divine *verbum* distinct from human *verbum*.[50] This distinction concerns the validity of the two *verba*: theology assumes the validity of human *verbum* to be subordinate to the validity of divine *verbum*, precisely because theology is the language that speaks *from* the contact with divine *verbum*.[51]

Therefore, from a theological perspective, placing divine revelation on the same level as the inferred concepts of God would correspond to lowering divine *verbum* to the status of human *verbum*. The concept of *Deus absconditus* impedes this by narrowing the truth value of the inferred concepts down to a probabilistic one, in other words by making the conclusions inferred from divine revelation hypothetical.

It follows that the concept of *Deus absconditus* plays an important function in theology indeed: it allows theology to be coherent with its assumptions. It impedes the theological risk of considering divine revelation as a part of human conceptualization. This is why Luther connects the *Deus absconditus* to the theological focus on revelation: the *Deus absconditus* compels respect for revelation as the origin and limit of any theological conceptualization (being conceptualization from revelation).

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[49] This confirms that to formulate the concept of *Deus absconditus* means acknowledging that it is not possible to infer a *law* of God's *voluntas* from divine revelation. See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 4.

[50] I expand upon this theological assumption in *infra*, Ch. 10 section 1.

[51] As discussed in *supra*, Ch. 2 sections 7–9, theology is *nova lingua* because it is human *verbum* dealing with a *verbum* that does not depend on language's forms, and thus is the evidence of the formal limitation of human *verbum*.

This harkens back to the unconditionality of divine revelation from the deductive requirement of foundation and validation.[52] It is because of the concept of *Deus absconditus* that divine revelation cannot be measured by and subordinate under this requirement.

Sure, the concept of *Deus absconditus* leaves open the question about the criterion for distinguishing which inferred conclusions are more likely to be true. However, this is not a defect, but the evidence of the specific function of the *Deus absconditus*. The concept of *Deus absconditus* does not concern the contents of the inferred conclusions, since it attributes the *same* hypothetical truth value to any possible content. Thus, given that the concept of *Deus absconditus* leaves the contents of the inference out of consideration, it focuses on the *form* of the inference: it concerns the definition of the structure that allows the formulation of any possible content.

In other words, the *Deus absconditus* fulfills not a (negative) epistemological function, but a (positive) logical function: it defines the type of reasoning behind the formulation of theological concepts. As such, the *Deus absconditus* establishes the logical foundation of conceptualization in theology – a conceptualization that is inductive-probabilistic and not deductive-axiomatic.

From these analyses, it follows that the *Deus absconditus* plays a *meta-conceptual function*. For every possible concept inferred from revelation, the *Deus absconditus* automatically attributes to this concept a hypothetical validity, thus mitigating the risk of elevating this concept to the level of divine revelation. It is the concept against the "excesses" in theological conceptualization. It represents a sort of "sub-routine" allowing the system (theology) to operate within its limits, or not to produce a "short-circuit" with its presuppositions.[53]

In other words, the concept of *Deus absconditus* plays a meta-conceptual function because it applies to the inferential structure that formulates this concept itself. The concept of *Deus absconditus* is the conclusion of an inference that the *Deus absconditus* defines as inductive: therefore, even the concept of *Deus absconditus* has a truth value that is only probable, or hypothetical.

This confirms what was touched upon in the previous section: the *Deus absconditus* has relevance not as what is signified (that is, not for what the concept says), but it has relevance as signifier (that is, it has relevance for its relationship with the other theological concepts). The *Deus absconditus* does not stress that God *is* hidden; otherwise, it would implicitly affirm its own being as a theorem. We would then return to a self-invalidation, a vicious circle. Instead, the *Deus absconditus* stresses that there is a gap between divine

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[52] See *supra*, Ch. 2 sections 5 and 6.
[53] I hark back to this in *infra*, Ch. 11 section 4.

revelation and inferred concepts (*including* the concept of *Deus absconditus* itself): it emphasizes that no inferred concept is divine revelation.[54]

This confirms that the *Deus absconditus* is indeed a concept that is void, without content. This is because the content of this concept is not a meaning, but a logical function. The *Deus absconditus* re-establishes the theologically legitimate relationship between conceptualization and revelation by leading the former back to the latter, thus impeding the validity of the concepts from being placed on the same level of the validity of revelation.

This harkens back to the important issue of the idol. Another divinity can be placed over the *Deus revelatus*, but not over the *Deus absconditus*. In the first section I called this the "observer effect" of the *Deus absconditus*. Whenever the *Deus absconditus* is the object of language (whether affirmed or negated), it is no longer *Deus absconditus*, but *predicatus*. This confirms that the *Deus absconditus* has relevance as logical function: the *Deus absconditus* represents – conceptually – the fact that conceptualization is theologically legitimate if it does not create a conceptual idol, or if it does not claim to place revelation on the same level of the theological concepts of God.[55] As such, it is not the concept of *Deus absconditus* that introduces an idol in theology, but every concept whose validity does not comply with the meta-conceptual function of the *Deus absconditus*.

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[54] In other words, the meta-conceptual function of the *Deus absconditus* does not consist in affirming the impossibility of saying anything about God (see for instance Meyer-Rohrschneider, *Aufgehobene Verborgenheit*: 148). As I argued, this position negates itself: it implies that there is at least *one* concept that can be deduced from revelation, and, thus, that is a theorem. In sum, it implies that it is indeed possible to affirm something sound (revelation-like-valid) about God: "*absconditus*." Rather, the meta-conceptual function of the *Deus absconditus* is not to negate, but to *reconsider* the validity of every possible conceptualization in theology – including the concept of *Deus absconditus*.

[55] Jüngel, "Metaphorische Wahrheit": 146 and 149, speaks of the idol ("*Abgott*") by connecting it to the distinction between God and world, or God and language: the condition for distinguishing a discourse on an idol and on God concerns the fact that, according to Jüngel, God is said catachrestically, or analogically. In accordance with the criticisms I presented in the second chapter on the analogic position, my position on the distinction between idol and God differs from Jüngel's: the idol is the object of conceptualization, while the latter is neither the object of indirect (analogical) conceptualization, nor is it unconceptualizable (as in the usual interpretation of the *Deus absconditus*). Rather, God is what re-founds conceptualization. The distinction between idol and God refers to the fact that the idol is fully included in metalinguistic structures (all of them, whether catachrestic or non-catachrestic), while God reveals the limitation of all possible metalinguistic structures.

7. Revelation and *Deus revelatus*

I return to the three theologians. Each of the three positions begins by acknowledging an uneasiness, a difficulty: speaking of *Deus absconditus* means creating a conflict within God, a conflict between God's revelation and God's freedom. The three theologians find some solutions to this uneasiness: Barth by excluding *Deus absconditus* from theology, Ebeling by stating the unity of *absconditas* and revelation in the faith in Jesus Christ, and Jüngel by moving the theological attention from God to the two kinds of God's *opus*.

I cannot help but notice a striking similarity between the discomfort of each theologian with the possibility of a *deus contra deum*, and Erasmus's discomfort before the scriptural passages negating (only apparently, according to him) *liberum arbitrium*. In both cases we find a judgment of unclarity: on one hand, Scripture is unclear, and on the other hand, Luther is unclear.[56]

I would "plagiarize" Luther's response to Erasmus: the judgment of unclarity is the expression of a resistance against the dismissal of some theoretical presuppositions and expectations. In the case of Erasmus, it is the axiomatic validity of the modal language of freedom. In the case of all three theologians, it is the validity of theological concepts. Luther solved the first unclarity by making the validity of the language of *liberum arbitrium* dependent upon revelation, and not vice-versa. Similarly, the unclarity and uneasiness with the *Deus absconditus* are solved by considering the validity of any possible conceptualization not equipollent to the validity of divine revelation.

Thus, the solution to the problem of the *Deus absconditus* is an inversion of formal subordination. Divine revelation is not at the service of the requirement of deductive validation: it is neither the starting point (an axiom, a first theorem) nor the conclusion (a theorem following from axioms) of a deductive inference. Thus, it is this requirement that is theologically subordinated to divine revelation; this requirement operates *from* revelation, not upon it.

As such, the concept of *Deus absconditus* confirms and reminds theology that its conceptualizations do not concern God, divine *voluntas*, or divine *potentia*, but the formal dependence of the structure of conceptualization upon revelation. Revelation is not the light that is seen[57] by some concepts, but it is the light (*lumen gratiae*) that allows us to acknowledge the fact that we do not see (for we *will* see, thanks to the *lumen gloriae*). As such, the *Deus absconditus* reminds theology that all concepts are limited because they are concepts from revelation, and thus subordinated to it.

For example, Barth fears that introducing the *Deus absconditus* would mean deducing the revocability of God's covenant (*Bund*) with human beings. For

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[56] See Jüngel, "Hiddenness": 136: "Certainly at this point Luther is anything but unambiguous."

[57] See Luther, WA 18: 689,20–21; 1 Tim 6:16.

this reason, he states that God's covenant is irrevocable[58]: God's freedom in making the covenant is "bestimmt und gebunden"[59] by this covenant itself. This fear is understandable: given that the covenant founds the relationship we human beings have with God, withdrawing this covenant would mean negating religion. Yet this fear forgets its own origin: divine revelation – that is, God's formulation of the covenant. Without revelation, it would be impossible to speak of the covenant, and thus also of *Deus absconditus*, as I have shown. Therefore, the possibility that God would negate the covenant is annulled by the fact that we speak not only about the covenant, but also about the possibility of the negation of the covenant, since both presuppose the covenant. In sum, the covenant would be negated not by the concept of *Deus absconditus*, but only through ceasing to assume a revelation. Thus, the fear of the *Deus absconditus* evidences the fallacy of not considering the logical priority of the covenant (revelation) over any concept of this covenant.[60]

Thus, the three theologians struggle to solve a problem that is only apparent if considered in light of theology's assumption of the subordination of human *verbum* under divine *verbum*. The *Deus absconditus* reminds us that there is always the risk of attributing a theological concept the same validity of divine revelation, and thus of dismissing the theological primacy of divine revelation for the sake of the need for certainty for our concepts.

That this risk is always lurking in theology is expressed precisely by the uneasiness that the concept of *Deus absconditus* produces. The concept of *Deus absconditus* "reveals" that it is always possible to claim that theological concepts are theorems, and that because this claim is a mystification of divine revelation, it is not logically compliant with the assumptions of theology.

Thus, the *Deus absconditus* is not part of a *deus contra deum*, it is not in antithesis with the *Deus revelatus* (the collective noun for all inferred concepts of God), because the *Deus absconditus* is not itself an object of antithesis. Rather, it *introduces* the antithesis between *Deus revelatus*[61] and revelation, or between two forms of claim about the logical validity of our theological conceptualizations.

According to the first form, we have a claim that prioritizes deductive foundation and validation over revelation. In this case, theology produces concepts

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[58] "Unwiderruflich": Barth, *KD*: II.2 § 32, 6.

[59] *Ivi*: 53.

[60] This reflection on the dependence of the concept of covenant upon the assumption of revelation is not at all negated by the possibility for this covenant to be negative – that is, to be rejection and not election. Even rejection is still under God; more correctly, the meaning of being rejected by God also evidences the dependence of the expression of this meaning upon revelation. This will be expanded upon in *infra*, Ch. 10 section 2 and Ch. 12 section 7.

[61] "Revelatus" is the adjective used by Barth; "predicatus" is the adjective used by Luther. I stick to the former, since it expresses better the mystification that affects the *prima facie* interpretation of the issue of the *Deus absconditus*.

about God and speaks about the *Deus revelatus*, and these concepts are considered equipollent to the source of their formulation (revelation). Thus, revelation is assumed to be compatible with them.

According to the second form, we have a claim that prioritizes revelation over deductive expectations, thus letting these expectations (and the deductive structure of validation) be affected and re-considered in light of revelation. In this case, everything stated as *Deus revelatus* enjoys an epistemological status that is only hypothetical: it is not like revelation, but only a probabilistic (thus, potentially false) approximation of it.[62]

Therefore, the need for and requirement of certainty, so "dangerously" threatened by the concept of *Deus absconditus*, are what eclipse the clarity of Luther's position. Luther could not be clearer: there can indeed be conflict between the concepts of God's *potentia* and God's *potentia* in itself. As for the issue of Scripture's clarity, Luther's clarity consists in an operation upon the conditions of certainty. Thus, Luther's unclarity disappears if we realize that what is theologically relevant is not what is conceptualized, but rather how we consider our claim of conceptualization's validity. What is theologically relevant is not the certainty about some concepts of God's freedom (no matter how *absconditia* or *revelata*), but that God's freedom introduces a problem, discomfort, an uneasiness upon our formal coordinates of conceptual certainty.

Thus, the theological solution to the problem of the *Deus absconditus* consists in the fact that there is *no* solution, or, alternatively, the solution coincides with the fact that *there is* a problem. The presence of a problem is the evidence that conceptualization is theological. Theology is language that rethinks the metalinguistic conditions of conceptualization in light of divine revelation, including the requirement of validation.[63] Therefore, the *Deus absconditus* is the product of language representing in a concept its own theological situation. The concept of *Deus absconditus* is what makes it possible to state (712,32–38):

Deus est, cuius voluntatis nulla est caussa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipsa est regula omnium. [...] Non enim quia sic debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est, quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit. Creaturae voluntati caussa et ratio praescribitur sed non Creatoris voluntati, nisi alium illi praefeceris creatorem.[64]

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[62] This is evident in the problem of evil; evil presents a problem because God's justice and mercy are expected to be compatible with our ideas of justice and mercy. Luther shows that the opposite is the case: it is our ideas of justice and mercy that must be remodelled by the revelation of God as just and merciful. I will expand on this in *infra*, Ch. 11 sections 1–3.

[63] Thus, the issue of the *Deus absconditus* is not "*pre*-theological" (Mjaaland, *Hidden God*: 107), because theology itself concerns the validity of "the *conditions* speaking or not speaking about God" (*ibid*.).

[64] My translation: "He is God, and for God's will there is no cause or reason that can be prescribed to as rule and measure, given that there is nothing that is equal or superior to God,

"Plagiarizing" Pascal's "*ne timeas, modo timeas*,"[65] I would say that all three theologians struggle to solve a problem; yet precisely the fact that there is a problem means that there is no problem *for theology*. The presence of a problem is the most crystalline expression of the "problem" that theology represents within language: theology is the kind of language that questions the axiomatic validity of its own forms and presuppositions in light of divine revelation. And vice-versa, the attempt to solve this problem evidences that there is at least a risk of incoherence: the incoherence of considering divine revelation a result of human forms of reasoning and a means for satisfying our need of certainty.

Therefore, theology should not be afraid of considering these paradoxical positions (such as the ones of *De servo arbitrio*) as they are: uncomfortable and uneasy.[66] As Luther does not smooth out the *prima facie* absurdities in Scripture (and the *querelle* against Erasmus is the evidence of this attitude),[67] neither should we iron out the asperities in theology. By formulating paradoxes, Luther is telling us that only by considering such problematic positions – such paradoxes – in their striking uneasiness, can theology fully perform its function. The only "risk" for theology in not edulcorating Luther's paradoxes is losing the chance to learn about theology's peculiar freedom among the other uses of language: the freedom to operate upon axiomatic presuppositions through contact with revelation. Thus, the uneasiness surrounding the concept of *Deus absconditus* is the evidence of the *health* of theology.[68]

Theology cannot help but be constantly *coram Deo abscondito*, because it is human *verbum* constantly facing its limitation and dependence upon divine revelation. In a word, the concept of *Deus absconditus* is theology's self-reminding of being theology.

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but God's will is the rule of everything. [...] What God wants is right not because God shall or should want so, but vice-versa: what happens must be right because God wanted so. It is possible to prescribe a cause and a reason for the will of creatures, but not for the will of the creator, unless you place before him another creator."

[65] See Pascal, *Pensées*: 785 Lafuma / 776 Brunschvicg, quoted by Askani, "Paradox": 358.

[66] See, for instance, Ferrario, "Nascondimento e rivelazione": 108.

[67] See also Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 72–73.

[68] Therefore, the concept of *Deus absconditus* does not introduce an anti-Christological position; on the contrary, it is eminently Christological. I think that the urgency to respond to the fear that Jesus Christ could be eclipsed by the concept of *Deus absconditus* (for instance, by producing a *damnatio memoriae* of the *Deus absconditus* from theology, or by affirming Jesus Christ as superior to the *Deus absconditus*) evidences a fear that is anti-theological. It is the evidence that Jesus Christ is considered the *best* way, not the *absolute* way – that Jesus is the best satisfaction of our need for certainty, and thus that Jesus is conditioned by this need of ours.

8. An Attempt of Formalization

For the sake of clarity, I will try to translate into formal terms what I have argued so far. There are three concepts involved: the concept of *Deus absconditus*, the concept of *Deus revelatus*, and the concept of divine revelation. I symbolize them respectively as "DA," "DR," and "Rev." The complexity of the issue of the *Deus absconditus* is due to the multiple combinations of these three members. The solution to this issue is found in their correct combination.

According to the *prima facie* interpretation of the issue, the *Deus absconditus* implies the negation of the pair (Rev, DR). Note that at this stage, there is no explicit distinction between Rev and DR. DA applies indiscriminately to both concepts.

$$\text{DA} \rightarrow \neg \text{ (Rev, DR)}^{[69]}$$

Now, the pair (Rev, DR) characterizes theology. Theology is the language Θ that assumes a divine revelation (Rev) and that formulates concepts of God (DR) accordingly. Thus, *prima facie*, DA represents a direct threat to theology:

$$\text{DA} \rightarrow \neg\Theta$$

In the previous pages I have considered three solutions to this issue. Barth's solution is straightforward: the negation of DA implies the affirmation of the pair (Rev, DR), and, from this, of the possibility of theology.

$$\neg\text{DA} \rightarrow \text{(Rev, DR)} \rightarrow \Theta$$

Ebeling connects DA with the *sub contrario* (considered as a method of Θ). I represent the *sub contrario* (divine power hidden beneath an appearance of powerlessness) as a negation of negation: $x = \neg (\neg x)$.

$$\text{DA} = \neg \, (\neg \text{ (Rev, DR)})$$

Jüngel distinguishes between a "primary hiddenness" (DA) and a "secondary hiddenness" (Rev, DR). The "secondary hiddenness" applies to the "primary hiddenness." This meta-hiddenness is what characterizes theology:

$$\Theta : \text{(Rev, DR)} \rightarrow \neg\text{DA}^{[70]}$$

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[69] Alternatively, if instead of an implication we formulate the identity DA = ¬DR, we have the following *modus tollens*: Rev → DR, ¬DR ⊢ ¬Rev.

[70] Alternatively, if we define DA as "before revelation," we have ¬ (DA ∧ (Rev, DR)) ∧ (DA ∨ (Rev, DR)); or, shorter: DA ⊕ (Rev, DR).

Given that the difficulty with the *Deus absconditus* (and these three different solutions) is the consequence of the overlap between Rev and DR, then the solution to this problem lies in clarification of the distinctive relationship entertained by DA with these two variables.

The first step is to acknowledge that DA is issued from Rev:

$$\text{Rev} \vDash \text{DA}$$

This presents a problem for the *prima facie* interpretation of the *Deus absconditus*. The first implication DA $\rightarrow \neg$ (Rev, DR) is rejected, at least partially: DA cannot imply the negation of Rev. Therefore, DA can only negatively apply to DR – but how?

The easiest option would be to deduce that DA implies the negation of any concept of God:

$$\text{DA} \rightarrow \neg\text{DR}$$

This implication is false, since DA is also a concept of God. In other words, DA is an element of the set DR that contains all elements x issued from Rev. These elements constitute Θ.

$$\text{DR} = \{x: \text{Rev} \vDash x\}$$

This clarifies the distinction between Rev and DR: the two cannot be placed on the same level (as in the pair (Rev, DR)) because the latter is inferred from the former.

Now, back to the application of DA to DR. It is deduced from the preceding that an element (DA) applies to the set (DR) it belongs to. This echoes the concept of *servum arbitrium*; as analyzed in Chapter 2 section 9, this concept is element of the set "modal language of freedom," and it applies to its own set.

In the present case, DA applies to DR by connecting every element of DR with the ultimate undeterminability of this element's object (God). It results that the truth value of every element of DR is only probabilistic. Therefore, DA does not negate that DR is inferred from Rev. Rather, it negates that DR has the same truth value of the source from which DR is inferred: Rev. In other words, DA establishes that no element of DR is a theorem of Θ.

$$\text{DA} \rightarrow \neg \, (\vdash_\Theta \text{DR})^{71}$$

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[71] I underline the difference between $\neg \, (\vdash_\Theta \text{DR})$ and $\neg \vdash_\Theta \text{DR}$: the former negates that DR is a theorem; the latter disproves DR.

This is the same to say that the truth value of DR is only hypothetical.

$$DA \rightarrow h_\Theta DR$$

And given that DA is inferred from Rev, then Rev entails that everything inferred from it is not a theorem, but a hypothesis of Θ.

$$Rev \vDash h_\Theta DR^{72}$$

In sum, DR can only be a set of theological hypotheses. Consequently, either DR is a theorem and therefore it does not belong to Θ, or DR belongs to Θ and thus there is no definitive proof of it.

It follows that including DA within Θ might entail the idea of theology as a *meta-axiomatic system*. Theology assumes an axiom (Rev) that does not do its job: instead of proving theorems, it excludes from the system it founds (Θ) every possible axiomatic proof.[73] Thus, theology operates *upon* axioms; it reconsiders their fitness and adequacy for proving the elements of Θ.

This confirms that the concept of *Deus absconditus* perfectly fits the purpose of Luther's *De servo arbitrio*: questioning the axiomatic validity of some condition of validation. In this chapter, it was the question of the condition of validation of the modal meaning of freedom. It is time to examine the other conditions of freedom's meaningful conceptualization upon which *De servo arbitrio* operates.

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[72] Alternatively, the same conclusion can be attained through the negation of a *modus tollens*. Let us assume DA → ¬DR and Rev ⊨ DR; it seems it must be inferred that Rev ⊭ DA. But this is false, since we acknowledged that Rev ⊨ DA. Therefore, either DA → ¬DR is false or Rev ⊨ DR is false. If Rev ⊨ DA and DA → ¬DR, then Rev ⊨ ¬DR; but this is empirically false (we do formulate concepts of God from revelation). Thus, the only option is that DA → ¬DR is false: DA does not imply the negation of DR. Therefore, DA implies that DR is hypothetical: DA → h_ΘDR (h_Θ = theological hypothesis). Hence, Rev ⊨ h_ΘDR, which corresponds to Rev ⊨ ¬ (⊢$_\Theta$DR).

[73] The axiom is "Rev" – that is, the definition of a set, not an element of this set. Divine revelation is constituted by many words. It is true that "the diversity and polysemy of these words cannot be reduced to *the* single Word of God as an axiomatic principle of revelation" (Wolff, "Word of God": 477). However, the "axiom" I am talking about is not this or that word, but the *form* of all these words; this form is the condition for these words to be considered parts of divine revelation – in other words, this form is the common ground of all these words as elements of the set "divine revelation." Formally: Rev = {Scripture} or Rev = {sacred texts} (I remark that for Luther Scripture is sacred because Jesus Christ is everywhere present in it, not vice-versa; see *supra*, Ch. 2 section 2). Therefore, the polysemy of the different sacred words can be appreciated precisely in light of their being specific elements of a set.

Second Part

Freedom as Bond with the Divine Promise

In the First Part, I introduced some elements of novelty in the interpretation of *De servo arbitrio*; in particular, the overcoming of the deterministic interpretation through showing that Luther's position operates on the modal language of freedom; and the clarification of the positive function fulfilled by the concept of *Deus absconditus* in theology.

However, what I think to be truly novel in my analysis of *De servo arbitrio* is introduced in this Part and the Third Part. In these two Parts I analyze topics that transcend modal language – that is, the deterministic perspective (whether positively or negatively understood). These aspects are: in this Part, the issue of norms and commandments; in the Third Part, the issue of life's meaningfulness.

In this Part, I focus on the first of Erasmus's two arguments *ad absurdum*. According to Erasmus, assuming Luther's position entails the absurd negation of the realizability of norms, and thus the irrelevance of divine commandments.

The discussion of this *ad absurdum*, and Luther's response to it, compels us to consider another language according to which freedom is conceptualized and is meaningful. This is the language that, instead of connecting freedom to the realization of a possibility, connects freedom to the realization of the "ought," the *Sollen*. This leads to a change in logic; instead of a meaning of freedom based on modal logic, we have a meaning based on *deontic* logic.

In Chapter 5, I focus on Luther's rejection of a theorem of deontic language, and on the formulation of the human condition of sin.[1] In Chapter 6, I analyze the relationship between the divine promise of forgiveness and deontic language, and the relationship between Law and Gospel. In Chapter 7, I present some reflections upon the semantic complexity of the concept of justification. In Chapter 8, I expand upon the relationship and the distinction between Luther and Kant with regard to their conception of morality in religion.

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[1] It is important to underscore that the analysis of Luther's operation upon the deontic meaning is strictly connected to the analysis of the rethinking of the merit of acting according to (or in defiance of) norms. The issue of merit is the object of the Third Part of the book. The separation of these two topics mirrors the distinctive relationship between their elements: the reflection upon the action, and the reflection upon life. Thus, even if this separation of topics may seem unnatural, it is necessary for an exhaustive analysis of each aspect.

Chapter 5

Sollen, *Sein*, and Sin

1. "Ought" Implies "Can"

As mentioned in the Introduction, Erasmus reinforces his criticism against Luther with two arguments *ad absurdum*. According to the first argument, Luther's negation of *liberum arbitrium* is untenable because a defense of this position would result in the negation of the relevance of all commandments present in Scripture (II a 16).

Erasmus refers to hypothetical imperatives, such as "if you want *y* …, then do *x* …" (II a 17; Deut 30:10; Matt 19:17, 21; Luke 9:23; John 15:7), and negatively, to the imputation of the violation of commandments (such as in Rom 2:4; II b 1–2). Both cases imply the possibility of determining one's own action according to or in violation of the commandments. Therefore, for Erasmus, the fact that commandments, menaces, and negative imputations make sense is evidence that human actions are not determined by God. Otherwise, the action of following or infringing these commandments would not be imputed to the human actor (IV 3). Moreover, Gods would speak two different words: on one hand, a word of unforgiving justice – since God would punish what cannot be acted otherwise; on the other hand, a word of unjust mercy – since God would forgive what no merit can be attributed to (IV 7).

In this argument *ad absurdum*, Erasmus's position seems much more cogent than the previous affirmation of the existence of *liberum arbitrium.* In this case, the argument is not based upon a mere affirmation of a condition of meaning (the modal language of freedom). Rather, it refers to a specific form of *thinking*: thinking in normative terms. In other words, this form of thinking is the capacity to formulate and understand norms.

More precisely, the mere affirmation of *liberum arbitrium* is a weaker argument, because it is always possible to negate the existence of the *liberum arbitrium*, to affirm that we are not free (in the modal sense). The modal language of freedom may be assumed or not; for instance, I may not assume it, and thus I assume a deterministic position. On the other hand, Erasmus's first argument *ad absurdum* is stronger because it is based upon the *fact* that there are norms, laws, and prescriptions that make sense to us, and that we assume or not in our everyday life. It is a fact that some specific propositions have a normative meaning – that is, they are *Sollen*. Thus, it is impossible to negate this fact –

the fact that we think in normative terms. It is impossible to negate the existence of the level of the "ought," of the *Sollen*.

Better, negating this fact, this aspect of human thinking, would entail the negation of two fundamental aspects. First, it would entail the negation of the distinction between a *Sollen* and a *Sein*, between an "ought" and a "being," between a prescriptive, normative statement and a descriptive statement. Second, it would entail the negation of the fact that a normative statement implies the realizability of its content.

These two aspects are related. The distinction between normative and descriptive statements is that the former do not indicate a state of things, a "being" past, present, or future. Rather, they indicate what state of things *should* be. In sum, a prescriptive statement, unlike a descriptive one, is the reason for a state of things (the "being" object of a prescriptive statement) to be. This state of things *is* because it is realized as the content of a norm. Thus, a normative statement (a *Sollen*, an "ought") implies that the state of things either *can* or *cannot* be.

This leads to the second aspect: the formulation and understanding of a *Sollen* implies that the action indicated by this *Sollen* can indeed be realized. If the object of the norm transcended the horizon of possibilities of the person the norm refers to (the actor), then the *Sollen* would no longer be valid. In a formula: *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*.

Or course, there can be a normative sentence whose content lies beyond realizability. For instance, the imperative "Fly!" This sentence still takes the form of a *Sollen*; we all understand the imperative "Fly!" But this sentence cannot be considered a *Sollen* precisely because the option between "can" and "cannot" fly is nonexistent; the action of flying does not fall within the set of human empirical possibilities.

The relationship between these two aspects (the distinction between description and prescription, and the realizability of the prescribed action) is formally based upon the interrelation between the two components of any normative statement: the descriptive content and the prescriptive content. These are called, respectively, the frastic and the neustic of the normative statement.[1] For instance, for "Don't smoke!", the frastic is the action of not smoking, and the neustic is the insertion of this action not into an indicative sentence ("You do not smoke" or "Nobody smokes"), but into an imperative one ("!").

The simultaneous presence of these two components, frastic and neustic, is the basis for our thinking in terms of *Sollen*, or for our formulation and understanding of normative statements. This simultaneous presence is synthesized

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[1] See Hare, *The Language of Morals*: 17–18.

in one of the theorems of deontic logic,[2] the logic of normative statements. This theorem is the implication "ought → can," or formally,

$$OBp \rightarrow \Diamond p$$

This means that a *Sollen* logically implies the *possibility* of the *Sein* it prescribes (the frastic). This can be expressed by the motto *A debere ad posse valet consequentia*.[3]

Erasmus's *ad absurdum* argument is built upon this implication. As discussed in Chapter 2, a judgment of absurdity depends upon a condition of non-absurdity. In this case, this condition is the implication "ought → can." The *ad absurdum* argument works because of the axiomatic assumption of this implication.

Again, this argument renders Erasmus's position much more solid than the axiomatic assumption of the modal language of freedom. In this case, the condition of non-absurdity is no longer just an aspect of modal logic that can be accepted or rejected (for instance, by being deterministic). Here, this condition is part of a structure of thinking – the normative structure. Negating this condition would mean negating this structure.

Thus, Luther's affirmation of "necessitas absoluta" is invalidated because, according to Erasmus, it negates a whole set of facts: the normative facts. It negates that norms, obligations, prescriptions, laws, imperatives, and commandments are formulated and understood not as *Sein*, as descriptions, but as *Sollen*, as things to do – indicating not the existing states of things, but the states of things that *should* be.[4]

Thus, it is necessary now to further elucidate the relationship between this deontic way of thinking and Erasmus's main argument, which is based on the axiomatic assumption of the modal language of freedom, or the language of *liberum arbitrium*.

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[2] See Milz, *Der gesuchte Widerstreit*: 182 note 222: "In der modernen deontischen Logik gilt das Theorem 'Sollen setzt Können voraus' als elementare Bedingung eines vernünftigen, d.h. realisierbaren Normensystems." See also Martin, "Ought but Cannot": 102.

[3] See White, "'Ought' implies 'can'": 1. See also Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*: 236.

[4] The strength in Erasmus's criticism is indirectly confirmed by Aquinas. In *ST*: I, 83.1, Aquinas deduces the existence of *liberum arbitrium* from the self-evident meaning of normative facts, of *Sollen*. He writes: "Homo est liberi arbitrii, alioquin frustra essent consilia, exhortations, praecepta, prohibitions, praemia et poenae." This is the argument pro *liberum arbitrium* upon which Aquinas bases his response to the scriptural passages seemingly negating *liberum arbitrium* (Rom 9:16; Prov 21:1; Phil 2:13; Jer 10:23; Sir 15:14).

2. The Deontic and the Modal

Erasmus's first argument *ad absurdum* is at the same time distinct from and related to the assumption of the language of *liberum arbitrium*. This relationship concerns the fact that the modal operator of possibility still plays a fundamental role; the deontic implication connects an action (the object of the "ought," the *p* in OB*p*) to the very possibility of realizing this action ($\Diamond p$). The difference lies in the fact that this time the modal operator of possibility is inserted into the deontic language. It is no longer negatively connected to the operator of necessity, but is positively connected to the deontic operator of obligation (OB*p*); more precisely, the modal operator of possibility depends on the deontic operator of obligation operator.

Thus, in this situation, modal possibility has sense in light of the deontic obligation. The possibility of *p* being realized is no longer intrinsic to the *arbitrium,* but is the "consequence," the "effect," of a *Sollen* – or, more precisely, of an *arbitrium* determined by a *Sollen*. Possibility is not determined modally, but deontically – by a *Sollen*.

This brings us to the issue of freedom. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the concept of freedom as *liberum arbitrium* is built upon the operator of modal possibility and the rejection of the operator of modal necessity. According to the modal language of freedom, freedom is the condition of the realization of a possibility – a realization that is unconditioned by any necessity, or more precisely, by any law of necessity.

On the other hand, in the deontic language the operator of modal possibility depends upon the operator of deontic obligation; *if* OB*p*, *then p* is possible. This means that deontic language considers the realization of the modal possibility only in light of the obligation. Thus, the realization of the possibility is deontically conditioned by the *Sollen*. Consequently, the *Sollen* is the condition of the determination of this possibility; it performs the same function as a law of necessity, but this necessity is not modal – it is deontic. This necessity is expressed not as a law of nature, but as a normative law, or as a *Sollen*.

For the sake of clarity, let us compare how the modal and the deontic points of view posit the same thing: the obligation OB*p*. From the modal standpoint, OB*p* determines a modal possibility: *p* is possible, or, formally, $\Diamond p$. This perspective entails that also ¬*p*, the opposite of *p*, the non-realization of OB*p*, is possible. In fact, the obligation can be ignored or even infringed. From the deontic perspective, the situation is quite different; the possibility of not realizing OB*p* is *nonexistent*. OB*p* has the frastic "*p*" – thus, only the realization of the frastic is entailed by OB*p*. In other words, only *p* belongs to the set of possibilities implicated by OB*p*.

Simply put: from the modal perspective, if *p* is possible, then ¬*p* is also possible. In other words, *p* and ¬*p* have the same value: "possible", or "$\Diamond$." If the statement "*p* is possible" is true ($\Diamond p$ = T), then the statement "¬*p* is possible"

is also true ($\lozenge \neg p = T$). From the deontic perspective, things are different. In this case, the affirmation of an obligation excludes the affirmation of the opposing obligation. If OBp = T, then OB$\neg p$ = F. Therefore, only p can be associated with OBp. In other words, p is the only possibility that has a positive value in OBp.[5] The evidence of this is that the realization of $\neg p$ – the infringement or neglect of OBp – is the frastic of *another* obligation (usually called "sanction"). In sum, the deontic perspective recognizes only one possibility: the realization of the frastic of the obligation.

Speaking of "only one possibility" means speaking of necessity. As I discussed in Chapter 1, stating that the realization of the opposite of a possibility is impossible is equivalent to stating that this possibility is no longer a possibility, but a necessity. (Formally: $\neg \lozenge \neg p = \square p$.)

Therefore, from the deontic point of view, OBp does not determine a possibility; it determines a necessity. Of course, this necessity has no meaning whatsoever from a modal point of view. Modally speaking, it is always possible to act otherwise than prescribed and to infringe the obligation; it is always possible to realize $\neg p$. Yet, deontically, it is the possibility of the non-realization of p (or the possibility of realizing $\neg p$) that has no meaning. Thus, deontically speaking, p is determined in a necessary way ("necessary" in a deontic meaning).

Given that this necessity is not modal, but deontic, it is the object not of a descriptive statement but of a prescriptive statement. Therefore, the statement "p is necessary" is translated in deontic terms as "p *should* be necessary"; the deontic necessity consists in the fact that the frastic *should* be realized. This means that the *Sollen* is deontically understood as the formulation of the law of a necessity that is not modal, but deontic. Vice-versa, from the deontic standpoint, the non-realization of a *Sollen* is *not* considered a possibility because it is the negation of a *deontic* necessity.

Therefore, in the deontic case, we no longer deal with an *arbitrium* that is "*liberum*" in the modal sense; we no longer conceive freedom in terms of independence from any formulation of a law of this freedom. On the contrary, from the deontic perspective, the law of freedom is formulated and formulable precisely *because* it does not belong to modal language, or because it is not a law of modal necessity, but of deontic necessity – an obligation.

It follows that we are no longer dealing with the language of freedom as *liberum arbitrium*, but with another language altogether. This language is at the same time different and similar to the language of *liberum arbitrium*. It is

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[5] Of course, it is possible to imagine a contradictory system of norms, wherein both OBp and OB$\neg p$ figure. But even this extreme case does not negate that an obligation considers only the realization of its own frastic. In fact, the simultaneous coexistence of OBp and OB$\neg p$ within the same civil or penal code implies that it is necessary to have a specific obligation for each of the two opposed possibilities, p and $\neg p$. *QED*: an obligation assigns a positive value only to one possibility: the realization of the obligation's frastic.

similar because it still connects freedom to the realization of a modal possibility. It is different because this modal possibility is defined and determined by a deontic obligation. As I have just demonstrated, contrary to the language of *liberum arbitrium*, this language connects freedom not to a possibility, but to a necessity that is not modal but deontic. It follows that freedom is the determination of a system of necessity which is deontic, or in other words, non-modal. Therefore, this "other language" is the deontic language of freedom.

The deontic language of freedom is analogous to the modal language of freedom. In both cases, there is an opposition between the operator of modal necessity and another operator. In the case of the modal language of freedom, the operator opposed to modal necessity is the operator of modal possibility. In the case of the deontic language of freedom, the operator opposed to modal necessity is the operator of *deontic* necessity ("obligation," OB). Thus, for both languages, freedom is thought as independence from any law of modal necessity. But in the modal case, this independence is built upon the exclusivity of the operator of modal possibility. In the deontic case, this independence – or freedom – translates as the dependence upon the law of deontic necessity, the *Sollen*. Freedom is thought deontically as the realization of deontic necessity – as realization of the frastic of an obligation.

In other words, the deontic language of freedom does not negate modal possibility. Simply stated, the deontic language of freedom does not assume modal possibility as an independent operator, but as a variable implied by the operator of deontic obligation. In sum, in the deontic language of freedom, the operator of possibility is the "dependent variable" because it depends on deontic obligation, the "independent variable." Thus, freedom is deontically thought precisely as this "independent variable" status of deontic obligation: according to the deontic language of freedom, freedom is the fact that a necessity that is non-modal but deontic is formulated and understood.

This analogy between the two languages of freedom mirrors the analogy between modal logic and deontic logic, the logics underlying these languages. Both logics are built upon the same structure, consisting of an operator of necessity and an operator of possibility – which are called modal necessity and modal possibility, and deontic necessity and deontic possibility. Usually this "deontic necessity" and "deontic possibility" are translated as "obligation" and "permission," respectively.

Yet, upon a closer look, this translation makes sense because we assume the standpoint of modal necessity, thus considering deontic operators to be built upon the model of modal logic. But from the standpoint of deontic logic itself, the operators are indeed operators of necessity and possibility. If, hypothetically, the distinction between deontic logic and modal logic did not exist, or if we were able to think only in prescriptive terms but not also in descriptive terms, then what we call "obligation" and "permission" would be called "necessity" and "possibility." In that case, the *Sollen* would be the formalization

of a system of necessity *tout court* – given that there would no longer be a distinction between deontic and modal necessity. In other words, the *Sollen* would be the law of nature.[6]

From this reflection, it is deduced that the deontic language of freedom is not opposed to the language of *liberum arbitrium*; it is simply another language of freedom. Deontic language does not negate freedom as a modal possibility. It simply does not conceive freedom in modal terms; it thinks about freedom in its own terms, in deontic terms. It conceives freedom as linked to the *Sollen*.

This simultaneous similarity and difference between the two languages of freedom is the reason why Erasmus refers to this language only in *negative* terms – that is, in an *ad absurdum* argument. The recourse to deontic language is appropriate because both modal and deontic languages of freedom negatively connect freedom to the operator of modal necessity. However, Erasmus's argumentation in his *Diatribē* is structured on the modal language of freedom, the language of *liberum arbitrium*. Thus, Erasmus can only apply deontic language due to this negative similarity. In sum, it is precisely because there is a similarity between the two languages that Erasmus's recourse to deontic language is consistent with his argument.

3. Luther Negates the Implication

Despite the ample theoretical repercussions of the absurd negation of thinking in prescriptive terms, Luther does not change his position. On the contrary, his response is the rejection of the very foundation of Erasmus's argument *ad absurdum*; Luther negates the implication "ought → can."

Luther starts by radicalizing the distinction between sentences in the imperative mood and sentences in the indicative mood. These two kinds of sentences are grammatically distinct. So far, so good. However, in light of this grammatical distinction, Luther infers that it is fallacious to deduce an indicative from an imperative (677,21–36; 728,31–35).

Luther gives examples of commandments and norms from the Bible. He considers two kinds of commandments. On one hand, he considers hypothetical imperatives – that is, commandments in the form "if *x*, then *p*," where "then *p*" is a conditional obligation (conditional, because it is conditioned by the *x*). For instance: "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt 19:17).[7] In this case, the hypothetical imperative does not imply that the apodosis can be realized (690,31–691,19). The other form of imperative is the non-hypothetical one. Luther considers "stretch forth thy hand" (Sir 15:16) and "make you

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[6] See Kant, *KpV*: A 36, Ak V 20.

[7] Other examples quoted by Luther are: Matt 16:24, 25, 19:21; John 14:15; 15:7. These are the same passages mentioned in Erasmus's *Diatribē*: II b 1.

a new hart and a new spirit" (Ezek 18:31). According to Luther, Erasmus seems to know less than a child when he claims that such imperatives imply the possibility of laying down one's hand, or of making a new heart and spirit for oneself (701,23–27).

Therefore, from the radicalization of the distinction between indicative and imperative moods, Luther arrives at the central point: the negation of the implication "ought → can": "Non enim admittenda est illa sequela: Si volueris, ergo poteris" (675,22). An imperative indicates only that an action ought to be done; it does not say anything about the *possibility* of realizing the content of the imperative, and even less about the capacity of the subject to realize this content (678,33–35).[8]

The issue transcends the grammatical level[9] and reaches the logical level. The negation of the deduction of an indicative from the content of an imperative coincides with the negation of the logical implication of a modal possibility from the frastic of an obligation. Luther negates that a modal possibility logically depends upon a deontic necessity; he negates that the modal possibility can be an element of deontic language. More precisely, he negates that the modal possibility is the variable that depends on the independent variable represented by an obligation.

Thus, Luther is not simply stating that there are *some* imperatives that are endowed with an unrealizable frastic, and that these imperatives thus do not make deontic sense. In other words, he is not merely confirming the *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*. Nor Luther is negating the implication between "ought" and "can" for specific cases, or *a posteriori* – that is, he is not negating the implication in light of a specific frastic that lies beyond the spectrum of modal possibility. Rather, and more profoundly, he invalidates the implication *a priori*, for any *Sollen*; there is no *Sollen* that implies its realizability. Thus, Luther is doing something radical: he is dismantling the basis of the entire level of the *Sollen*.

However, this does not mean that Luther is negating our thinking in normative terms. Luther is not negating deontic language. On the contrary, he is affirming the specificity of deontic language even more radically. It is precisely this radicalization of the specificity of the deontic that makes possible the radicalization of the distinction between imperative and indicative moods. Thus,

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[8] The fact that Luther negates not a modal statement about a possibility or impossibility, but the connection between this modal statement and an obligation, is confirmed by the fact that "*volueris*" does not refer to the general faculty of desiring, but rather to the *voluntas* of realizing commandments ("*mandata*"), in light of the discussion on Eccl 15:16 in WA 18: 672,5–6.

[9] For instance, Schulken, *Les efficax*: 134–137 tends to base the interpretation of the contrast between Erasmus and Luther only upon the difference between the grammatical and logical levels.

Luther's discourse transcends the grammatical level precisely *because* it radi-
calizes the grammatical distinction.

In light of this radicalization, Luther does precisely the opposite of negating
deontic language; he negates that the deontic, normative way of thinking has
something *formally* in common with the descriptive way of thinking at all. The
negation of the implication between "ought" and "can" culminates in an even
wider separation between the two spheres of the *Sollen* and the *Sein* – and thus,
in an even starker distinction between the modal and the deontic.

Therefore, Luther's invalidation of the implication "ought → can" leads to
the modification of deontic language. This means that Luther's position is not
only negative – it is also positive. It is not only a matter of rejecting the logical
connection between obligation and realization of the frastic; this negative as-
pect also gives rise to a positive aspect: the effort of defining and circumscrib-
ing a *non*-deontic meaning of the *Sollen*.

This does not mean that the definition of a special set of obligations is char-
acterized by the formal independence from the implication "ought → can."[10]
This conception is fallacious, because there is no such a thing as a deontic
meaning implying the negation of the implication.[11] Therefore, Luther is not
introducing a *specific Sollen*; rather, Luther is introducing a *specific way* of
thinking about the *Sollen*. Luther is investigating whether it is possible to con-
ceive a way of thinking in deontic terms that does not depend on the logical
theorem "ought → can." More precisely, Luther is investigating a new way of
normative thinking based upon a change in the structure of deontic logic.

So, this non-deontic meaning does not apply only to some *Sollen* and not to
others; rather, the whole sphere of the *Sollen* is object of rethinking, in light of
the rethinking of one of the principles of this whole sphere's logical ground.
More explicitly, it is not that some "duties" have a deontic meaning that is
based upon the negation of the implication "ought → can," because the nega-
tion of this implication means that the whole deontic meaning is the object of
rethinking, of modification.

In sum, Luther is not introducing a *secunda lex*; he is introducing a *secundus
usus legis*.

4. Divine Commandments

Before analyzing this *secundus usus* – this non-deontic way of thinking about
the *Sollen* – it is important to determine why Luther negates the implication

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[10] Martin, in "Ought but Cannot": 103 and 126, calls these duties "infinite ideals."
[11] In *ibid*. Martin thinks of these "infinite" duties to convey a "normative" insight on
human condition. This function seems to me to be not normative, but at least gnoseological.

"ought → can," and consequently, why he introduces another way of thinking about the *Sollen*.

The reason for this negation is the divine commandment. Divine commandments are sentences in the imperative mood; yet they are different from all other possible imperatives in that they are not the result of human proclamation or promulgation. They are proclaimed and promulgated by God. Divine commandments are imperatives that are objects of divine revelation; they are revealed imperatives. Therefore, the meaning of divine commandments cannot depend on the implication "ought → can." Otherwise, they would be identical to human obligations, subjected to human understanding and expectations (673,1–17). To quote an excerpt from this passage (lines 13–17):

[S]i interrogem, unde probetur significari vel sequi voluntatem inesse liberam, quoties dicitur: Si volueris, Si feceris, Si audieris? Dicet: quia sic videtur natura verborum et usus loquendi exigere inter homines. Ergo divinas res et verba metitur ex usu et rebus hominum, quo quid perversius, cum illa sint caelestia, haec terrena?

Given that divine commandments are revealed by God, they do not depend on the principles of meaningfulness of human imperatives. They do not depend on the theorems of deontic language. This entails that deontic language is no longer sufficient to provide a system able to understand the *Sollen* as a whole, in all its expressions. Divine commandments are unconditioned by this system.

This confirms the conclusion of the previous section; divine commandments are not merely a peculiar kind of *Sollen* defined by the negation of the implication "ought → can." Were this the case, then it would always be possible to formulate other, new "divine commandments" by simply formulating and understanding imperatives through the negation of the implication. Deontic language would suffice, because divine commandments would depend upon a counter-intuitive version of it.

Thus, it is the other way around: the negation of the implication is introduced in light of a *Sollen* that is assumed to be unconditioned by deontic language. Divine commandments are not the result of deontic language; they are the starting point for questioning the adequacy of deontic language, and thus the validity of its theorems (including the implication "ought → can").

However, the questioning that divine commandments introduce does not entail the negation of deontic language. After all, divine commandments are still imperatives; they still belong to the set called "*Sollen*." Deontic language, the language of thinking and understanding the elements of this set, is still in place. Therefore, instead of negating deontic language, divine commandments demonstrate that deontic language is *limited*. Deontic language is indeed the only system that understands the *Sollen*. Nevertheless, this system is insufficient if it applies to that *Sollen*, those imperatives, called "divine commandments."

This means that the classical distinction between law and commandments, *Gesetz* and *Gebot*, does not apply here – at least not in *De servo arbitrio*. Luther says that the law applies to everybody, gentile or Jew (761,15–19); thus, it is not simply a matter of ritualistic rules (764,13–34). The norm he has in mind is the norm that is not abrogated, but is "valente et regnante" (765,3–4). It refers to the normative system shared by everyone, including gentiles (777,1). Moreover, the power of sin affects both Jews and gentiles (760,19). Hence, Luther intends the whole set of the *Sollen*, with no internal distinction.[12]

Divine commandments have a special status not because they constitute a special *Sollen*, but because they force a reconsideration of the *Sollen*. They force a questioning of the theorems of deontic language, the logical conditions for thinking about the *Sollen*. The meaning of the *Sollen* is borne anew from revelation (676,11–12.32–33; 686,37–38), as a reflection of the limitation of the language of the *Sollen*. Therefore, the limitation of deontic language is valid only from the theological perspective.

The negation of the implication "ought → can" is Luther's way of formulating this limitation. Through this negation, Luther introduces the theological way of conceiving the *Sollen*. Thus, the theological perspective on the *Sollen* concerns the theological limitation of deontic language. This reflects the distinction between the two *usus legis*. According to the *primus usus*, the *Sollen* is understood deontically. Thus, the theorems of deontic language are valid, including the implication "ought → can." According to the *secundus usus*, the *Sollen* is understood in light of the theological limitation of deontic language. Thus, this theological understanding is based on an operation upon the theorems of deontic language.[13]

Therefore, the theological reflection upon the *Sollen* is not a specific philosophical or ethical reflection. It does not concern what a norm is, or the best or the right thing to do. Rather, it is the reflection upon the fact that the principles of any distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, must be recalibrated in light of the existence of divine commandments. In other words, the *secundus usus* applies to the *primus usus*.

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[12] This is not intended to negate the distinction between *Gesetz* and *Gebot*, but to acknowledge the "oscillation" of such distinction in Luther's theology. See Wöhle, *Luthers Freude*.

[13] It can be questioned whether the *tertius usus legis* has any relevance whatsoever, not only to the argumentation of *De servo arbitrio*, but perhaps even to Luther's theology as a whole. See Althaus, *Theologie*: 238, regarding the difference with Melanchthon. See also Hesselink, "Law and Gospel": 152: "Luther may teach a third use of the law but it is definitely a minor motif." Being aware that the secondary literature is split on this issue, I take this prudent interpretation of Hesselink's as correct.

What Luther states about Paul[14] can be applied to Luther himself. Like Paul, Luther speaks of divine commandments in a way that is "longe aliter" from the

[14] An analysis of the relationship between Paul and Luther lies beyond the scope of this study. I will limit myself to a short remark. The relationship between Luther and Paul is connected to the theological *Zeitgeist* from which this relationship is conceived. Thus, not only the structure and themes of a specific theological perspective influence the interpretation of this relationship (see Holm, "Beyond Juxtaposing Luther": 159–160), but the study of this relationship also introduces modifications into the theological perspective. This entanglement between the historical and the systematic makes it difficult to arrive at a neutral interpretation of this relationship. For instance, Bultmann interprets Paul with regard to the difference between existence outside the faith and existence within the faith, the two existences defined respectively as the claim of having realized the law and the reception of the gift of grace (see Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen*: 264). Käsemann interprets Paul's conception of the pious Jew as a self-sanctifying human being (see Käsemann, "Rechtfertigung und Heilsgeschichte": 127). The New Perspective considers Bultmann's analysis to be the prototype of the misinterpretation of Paul and of exegetical bias (see Frey, "Das Judentum": 56), because of Bultmann's entanglement between Paul and Luther. However, precisely due to the effort to reject this entanglement, the New Perspective is also *not* neutral. For instance, according to Wright, Luther represents the central negative figure that the exegetical effort of the New Perspective intends to eclipse (see Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness*: 1169). Sanders opposes Paul and Luther on "justification" (see Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*: 492). This connection between Paul and Luther is particularly relevant in this Chapter of my book, because the topic of the law is one of the main points of an either positive or negative relationship between them. Luther's "*lex*" is different from Paul's "*nomos*"; it is not the mosaic law given by God to Jews, also known by gentiles (see Wilckens, *Der Brief*: 66–67; Lohse, *Der Brief*: 210–211). Nor does it function as Jewish ethical definition in the Diaspora (see Dunn, *The New Perspective*: 89–110). However, the voices constituting this interpretation of the *nomos* are multifaceted, and thus this interpretation is questionable (see Frey, "Das Judentum": 59–60). Another object of discussion is the fulfilment of the law, with particular emphasis on the *simul* of the *Römervorlesungen*. The New Perspective (but see also Lohse, *Der Brief*: 225–225) sees in the *simul* the main point of difference between Paul and Luther (see Holm, "Beyond Juxtaposing Luther": 178 note 54). It is debatable whether the fulfilment of the law is present in Luther. Some have attempted to find a (partial) parallel between the Paul of the New Perspective and Luther, precisely in reference to the realization of good works; see for instance Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 217–219; see also Saarinen and Nelson, "Law": 86–88. In *infra*, Ch. 10 section 1, I show that the issue of the fulfillment of the law is indeed present in *De servo arbitrio*, although not in the sense of a *tertius usus legis*. Nevertheless, this question on the exegetical consistence of Luther's interpretation of Paul is of relative importance in my study. What interests me is outlining Luther's theological operation on the conditions of the meaning of freedom in his *De servo arbitrio*. Therefore, what matters to my analysis is what Luther said, and not whether what Luther said is biblically correct. Moreover, it is indeed difficult to determine what constitutes an exegetically correct interpretation of Paul, not only due to the impossibility of making a complete "*epoché*" of the *sensus proprius* (see Holm, "Beyond Juxtaposing Luther": 178 note 54), but also because the theoretical and theological world from which Paul is interpreted is itself shaped by Paul's theology. Theologically speaking, we are always already in the shadow of Paul; we can see his figure only in backlight from the boundary of our theological position and *Zeitgeist* – a boundary shaped by Paul's theology.

usual meaning of the norm (766,22), precisely because it is a matter of understanding deontic language theologically.

5. The Condition of Sin

What is the content of this "longe aliter"? I return now to Luther's theological operation upon deontic language, and in specific to the negation of the implication "ought → can." From this negation, Luther deduces a positive implication: the *Sollen* is theologically understood as the *negation* of the realization of its frastic. Thus, theologically speaking, the obligation *cannot* be realized – it is impossible to realize the frastic (676,39; 766,20).

Luther gives some examples. The central one is the commandment of love. According to Luther, this commandment is the condition for the realization of all other commandments (Matt 20:40). Given that it is impossible to love God with all of one's heart, it is also impossible to realize all other commandments. Thus, all commandments express not what is possible to do, but, rather, what is impossible not to do – namely, the realization of the commandment itself (681,20–34; also 684,11–13).

Another example: the commandment "Thou shalt not covet" (Rom 7:7). This commandment does not prescribe ceasing to covet, but expresses the fact that "not coveting" is *not* a reality, precisely *because* it is the frastic of a commandment and not the content of a description – that is, "not coveting" is not a reality precisely because it is prescribed. In other words, "not coveting" is understood as what *should* be realized, not as what *is* realized. Thus, the commandment expresses that the opposite of the frastic is the case: human beings do only covet (767,10–18). Thus, from the negation of the implication "ought → can," Luther deduces that the "ought" implies the unrealizability of the frastic of the "ought."

It is important to emphasize that this deduction is fallacious. Luther goes from saying that it is not self-evident that the *Sollen*'s frastic can be realized, to asserting that the *Sollen* renders the frastic unrealizable. The fallacy lies in the fact that the negation of the implication between *Sollen* and modal possibility does not entail the affirmation of the new implication between *Sollen* and the negation of this modal possibility. It is one thing is to say that nothing guarantees that a possibility can be realized; it is another thing is to say that it is guaranteed that a possibility cannot be realized.

Returning to formalization helps clarify this. From

$$\neg\, (\mathrm{OB}p \rightarrow \Diamond p)$$

Luther deduces that the obligation implies that the frastic cannot be realized.

$$OBp \rightarrow \neg \Diamond p$$

The formalization makes clear that this deduction is based on an illegitimate commutation of the operator "negation," "$\neg$," from the whole implication to an element of the implication (the modal possibility of realization, or $\Diamond p$).

However, this fallacy does not invalidate Luther's argument; rather, it confirms its consistency. This fallacy clarifies that Luther does not negate deontic language; he simultaneously conserves and overcomes deontic language. The conservation of deontic language consists in the conservation of the structure, or the skeleton of the implication "ought $\rightarrow$ can." The overcoming refers to the modification of the rapport between the elements constituting this structure.

This modification is the following: that the opposite to the frastic is *necessarily* realized. As I have shown, from the negation of the implication "ought $\rightarrow$ can," Luther deduces that the frastic cannot be realized. This means that there is no other possibility than the non-realization of the frastic. Once again, to speak of only one possibility is to speak of necessity. Thus, the non-realization of the frastic is a necessity. The negation of the implication "ought $\rightarrow$ can" leads to a reformulation of the implication. An obligation implies the *necessity* that the *Sollen* is never realized.

The "longe aliter" of the theological perspective on the *Sollen* is this: the *Sollen* is the expression of the fact that "Omnes declinaverunt, Totus mundus est reus, Non est justus quisquam"[15] (763,21–22; Rom 3:10–12, 19; see also 761,1–6; 763,12–13; 768,27–28).[16] It is the expression of the human *condition of sin* (710,7–8).

Again, formal representation of this passage clarifies the argument. First, Luther affirms that the "ought" implies that the realization of the frastic *p* is not possible:

$$OBp \rightarrow \neg \Diamond p$$

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[15] Hence, Luther presents a literal interpretation of Paul's passages, in harsh contrast to a "juridical" interpretation (such as Kant's) based on the circumscription of the "omnes" and "totus mundus" of the sole people undetermined by a moral intention. On this point, see *infra*, Ch. 8.

[16] The evidence that Luther is transcending conditions of practical sense is that this "omnes" is not to be interpreted practically as the ones who are unjust (as Kant does in *Religion*: B 39, Ak VI 38–39), but literally as everybody (757,20–758,33), so that Paul "omnes sub iram mittet, omnes impios et iniustos praedicat" (758,10–11). This difference of interpretation is *in nuce* the distinction between Luther's position and Kant's position, as discussed in *infra*, Ch. 8.

The non-possibility of *p* means that the opposite of p is necessary:

$$\neg \Diamond p = \Box \neg p^{17}$$

Therefore, the "ought" implies that the opposite of the frastic *p* is always realized:

$$OBp \rightarrow \Box \neg p$$

The realization of the opposite of the frastic means the violation of the "ought." Thus, the "ought" implies the necessity of its own violation.

It is important to underscore the change of modal operator from possibility to necessity. The obligation is no longer connected to modal possibility, but to modal necessity. Luther's modification of the deontic language parallels the modification of the modal language of freedom: the introduction of the modal operator of necessity.[18] As before, the application of the modal operator of necessity has meaning only from a theological perspective. In this case, it is the evidence of the theological modification of the implication "ought → can." Once again, the necessity is not modal, but theological.

Given that deontic language is conserved only skeletally (that is, only in the form of the implication between *Sollen* and *Sein*), there is a parallel between the deontic and the theological perspectives. From the deontic perspective, the possibility of realizing the frastic ($\Diamond p$) is translated in terms of *deontic* necessity. As I explained, the "ought" implies only the possibility of realization of the frastic, denying the possibility of non-realization. From the theological perspective, the $\Diamond p$ is translated in terms of *theological* necessity; the "ought" implies *only* the possibility of realization of the *opposite* of the frastic.

The introduction of the operator of necessity means that sin is a *condition*. The violation of the "ought" is not extemporaneous; it necessarily occurs at every instance, at every attempt to realize the "ought." Therefore, the introduction of necessity negates the *Sollen* as deontic necessity: the *Sollen* is no longer the principle of determination of the *Sein* called "realization of the frastic."

Yet, at first sight, the condition of sin, as a descriptive sentence, is indeed determined by a normative sentence – the imperative. Even in the theologically modified implication ($OBp \rightarrow \Box \neg p$), sin is the second element of the implication, the implied element, the dependent variable, which is related to an independent variable that is indeed in the imperative (for instance, "Thou shalt not covet"), not in the indicative ("Thou only covet").

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[17] As mentioned in *supra*, Ch. 1 section 3, $\Diamond p = \neg \Box \neg p$, so $\neg \Diamond \neg p = \Box p$, and thus $\neg \Diamond p = \Box \neg p$.

[18] It is a specification of the theological necessity, discussed in *supra*, Ch 1, sections 3–5, as necessity conceived from the theological standpoint in light of the dependence on God's *arbitrium* (638,9–11, 10–13; 672,8–19).

However, upon a closer look, this determination, this implication, does not concern the *Sein* of sin, the reality of the second element of the implication. As I have shown, the *Sollen* determines *only* the possibility of realizing the frastic; the *Sollen* expresses a deontic necessity. Thus, sin cannot possibly be the *Sein* determined by the deontic necessity of the *Sollen*. Sin is not introduced into the world by the *Sollen*. The *Sein* of sin is independent from the *Sollen* (767,2–8).

Given that sin is not derived from the *Sollen*, sin pre-exists the *Sollen*. Hence, the implication is somehow inverted: the *Sollen* depends on sin. But how? What does the implication between *Sollen* and sin mean?

6. The Theological Limitation of Deontic Language

The *Sollen* is the deontic necessity of the realization of the frastic: it conceives only the Sein of this realization. Thus, sin is precisely what is excluded by the *Sollen* from the field of possibilities. For this reason, sin cannot depend on the *Sollen*, because the *Sollen* is the deontic necessity that sin is not.

This means that the *Sollen* implies the sin negatively, as impossibility – that is, as the negation of the Sein determined by the *Sollen*. The deontic exclusion of sin from the field of possibilities determined by the *Sollen* implies the negative nomination of sin. Thus, sin, being the impossibility of realizing the *Sollen*, is known through its reference to the *Sollen* – and only in this way. By implying that only the realization of the frastic is possible (772,26–27; 782,14–15; see also 742,16–21), the *Sollen* makes it possible to think about the sin as impossibility, as not a Sein (679,31–37). Thus, the *Sollen* "depends" on sin because it is the principle of nomination of sin.[19]

This is the *secundus usus*; theologically, the *Sollen* names sin. It makes the blind being able to see the condition of sin (677,7–21; 695,5; 766,8–12, 24–30). In other words, sin is the theological relationship between human beings and the *Sollen*.[20]

Thus, what matters theologically is not that the *Sollen should* (deontic language) be realized, in order to avoid the sin. Rather, what matters is that the

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[19] This seems to imply that, at least in *De servo arbitrio*, the *primus usus legis* has no theological function, contrary to what is stated in the second *Disputatio* against the antinomians in WA 39.1b: 485,16–24. See Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit*: 72–73. This change of position is unsurprising: "Luther displayed remarkably different attitudes toward the law depending on the exegetical context and his own disputes with both Rome and Protestant antinomians" (Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*: 99 note 91). This case reminds not to overlook the argumentative specificity of different facets of Luther's thought; see Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 543.

[20] See Ebeling, *Dogmatik*: 15.

Sollen deontically implies the realization of its frastic. This is already enough to name the sin, regardless of the action that is realized (764,5–12).[21]

This is the reason why the *Sollen* expresses (theologically) the servitude of the *arbitrium* under the sin. The *arbitrium* is *servum* of sin because it is *deontically* determined by a *Sollen* (668,15–16; 671,12–13).[22] Thus, moral zeal is not meritorious; the zealous person ignores that the realization of the *Sollen* coincides (theologically) with sin, with the negation of the *Sollen* (765,14–17; 777,1–3). In other words, the zealous realizes only the deontic letter of the *Sollen*, not its theological spirit.[23]

Therefore, the concept of sin expresses the theological limitation of deontic language. The nomination of sin coincides with the exclusion of sin from the field of possibilities, and the exclusion of sin coincides with the nomination of sin. Thus, deontic language cannot solve the condition of sin, precisely because it names it.[24] Therefore, the limitation of deontic language concerns the definition of the *good*.[25] By determining only the *Sein* of the realization of the *Sollen*, deontic language implies a theoretical blindness about sin as condition (674,1–4).

Luther's operation upon the deontic language is precisely the opposite of an *abrogatio legis*, the negation of deontic language. Only if the *Sollen* is still conceived as determination of what should be accomplished (as non-sin) can the *Sollen* play the theological function of naming the sin.[26] Deontic language

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[21] See also WA 8: 59–127.

[22] Conversely, see Ebeling, "Zur Lehre": 65: "Gesetz ist […] nicht eine Idee oder eine Summe von Sätzen, sondern die Wirklichkeit des gefallenen Menschen."

[23] Bultmann, in *Theologie* and "Gnade und Freiheit," attributes an existential value to the relationship (either positive or negative) between human being and the commandment. The inclinations of either assuming the norm or violating the norm correspond respectively to an inauthentic existence and an authentic existence, in which authenticity is conceived as accepting God's gracious gift of salvation. I discuss the theoretical difficulties of this existentialist interpretation and the risk of falling into a "psychologizing attitude" (see Wilckens, *Der Brief*: 114–115) in *infra*, Ch. 10 sections 5–7 and Ch. 12 section 4.

[24] I see an interesting parallel with the relationship between language and sin in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. From the bite of the forbidden fruit, language itself was corrupted. This corruption manifested in negative, ambiguous, or sinful meanings for words that, in the linguistic purity before the Fall, held only a positive or neutral meaning. See Milton, *Paradise Lost*: the discourse of Adam to Eve (IX, 1067–1098), in contrast to the previous description of the couple (IV, 305–318 e 736–775). As in Luther, sin affects language, and the acknowledgement of a sinful condition follows from a modification of the usual meaning of words. Yet, while Luther assumes this logical connection between sin and language in the case of deontic language, Milton relates it to language in general.

[25] See Gogarten, *Luthers Theologie*: 143–144: "Luthers Meinung ist, daß es nicht nur das sittlich Böse ist, sondern ebenso, und sogar eigentlich, das sittlich Gute, in dem sich diese Abwendung des Menschen von Gott und dem, was Gottes ist, ereignet."

[26] This is why deontic language is simultaneously conserved and overcome, and why the deduction of the "→ ¬can" is not fallacious; deontic language is theologically used to *negate*

has theological relevance precisely because it is *only* according to this language that it is possible to say and know that every realization of the *Sollen* is sin (738,36–739,1).[27]

This confirms that the theological meaning of the *Sollen* does not consist of the introduction of a new *Sollen*. The *same Sollen* has two functions.[28] On one hand (*primus usus*) the *Sollen* determines the deontic necessity of the realization of the frastic. On the other hand (*secundus usus*), the *Sollen* names the theological *Sein* of sin precisely in light of its deontic function. This confirms that the *secundus usus* is the reflection upon the *primus usus*.[29] For this reason, it is *secundus*; it is possible in light of the *primus*, because the *Sollen* holds its deontic meaning within the civil and social spheres of life (*coram hominibus*).[30]

The awareness of sin as condition entails the *abyssus desperationis* (719,10; also 766,28–29). Nobody can accomplish the commandments *theologically*; thus, no one is saved from the theological charge of guilt (622,2–3). Even the saintliest one dwells in doubt about whether or not her or his work is just (783,22–28). This despair is the psychological manifestation of the theological aporia of deontic language. Human beings know (deontically) what to do, but any realization of this "what" is (theologically) irrelevant. Everyone despairs, not just because of the impotence against sin, but foremost because no solution can be found within the language of the *Sollen*.[31]

In conclusion, Luther negates Erasmus's argument *ad absurdum* in light of the theological limitation of the language founding Erasmus's judgment of absurdity. This confirms the different levels upon which the two positions are based: Erasmus's argument refers to the fact that Luther's position violates the conditions of Erasmus's position (the implication between deontic obligation

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the freedom whose meaning is formulated by this language itself, as relationship with a deontic necessity.

[27] This marks a change from Luther's *Assertio* of 1520. There, Luther's deduces the human sinful condition from the *psychological* resistance to do the good (see WA 7d: 447,30–36). In *De servo arbitrio*, the argument is not psychological; sin as condition is deduced from the theological reflection upon deontic language.

[28] See Ebeling, "Zur Lehre": 67: "Denn auch für Luther sind beide, der usus civilis wie der usus theologicus, insofern in Gal 3:24 angelegt, als es dasselbe Gesetz ist, das im coercere delicta und im ostendere delicta am Werke ist."

[29] The theological function of the *Sollen* refers to its *primus usus*. See Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 565: "Gesetz ist also für Luther nicht bloß dieser oder jener Kodex von Geboten, es wird vielmehr von seinem immer und überall sich vollziehenden Wirken her verstanden und so auf jeden Fall auf Gott bezogen, der darin der Sünde der Welt entgegentritt."

[30] See Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit*: 13–14.

[31] In *Hyperaspistes* II: 394–395 Erasmus thinks that Luther's conception of self-despair is a "hyperbole." This confirms once again that Erasmus does not understand that this despair, although psychological, has no psychological cause. Indeed, it has a formal cause: it manifests the theological *aporia* of deontic language.

and modal possibility). Luther reacts to this charge of absurdity by invalidating one of the theorems of deontic language.

In light of this, Erasmus's position is *false* from Luther's standpoint; it does not recognize the distinction between the deontic meaning of the *Sollen* and the theological reflection upon deontic language. In other words, Erasmus considers divine commandments identical to any other *Sollen,* thus reducing the theological discourse on the *Sollen* to any deontic discourse.

Chapter 6

Promise as Forgiveness

1. The Theological Meaning of Forgiveness

The human being, enlivened by sin alone, despairs. This despair is the mani-
festation of guilt, and this guilt is absolute, irremediable, ineradicable.[1] *Totus
mundus est reus*.

This negative judgment of guilt is one with the condition of sin; it is the fruit
of the same operation upon deontic language. The concept of absolute guilt
makes no sense deontically. According to deontic language, guilt is never ab-
solute, because any negative judgment (any imputation for the non-realization
of the *Sollen*) is still based upon the possibility of realizing the *Sollen*. Given
that a *Sollen* implies its realizability, then a charge of guilt refers only to a
single non-realization, and not to a condition of unrealizability of the *Sollen*.[2]

Thus, speaking of absolute guilt, of a guilt which is the sole and only possi-
bility, results from the theological modification of deontic language. This mod-
ification affects not only the implication "ought → can," but also the deontic
judgment that human beings produce upon themselves. Given that the *Sein* the
theologically modified deontic language knows from the *Sollen* is the *Sein* of
sin, then the relationship between human beings and the *Sollen* constantly car-
ries a negative charge. Theologically, human beings are in a state of irremedi-
able guilt, and for this reason, they despair.

Given that this guilt is absolute, irremediable, and total, human beings des-
pair totally; there is no possibility for this negative charge to be annulled or
suspended. However, from a theological standpoint, it would be more correct
to say that human beings are *finally* able to totally, fully despair (632,29–
633,6). This total, full despair demonstrates that the deontic necessity of the
realizability of the *Sollen* leaves space for the theological necessity of the un-
realizability of the *Sollen*. Because of this, the negative charge of guilt is no
longer a matter of a judgment upon a specific action, but a matter of a judgment
upon the condition of not realizing any possible *Sollen*. Total, full despair is

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[1] On the issue of radical evil, see *infra*, Ch. 8 sections 2 and 6.

[2] In this part, I focus on the action of realization (and non-realization) of a *Sollen*, and not
on the other, fundamental aspect: the *engagement* in the effort of constantly realizing the
Sollen, of living in compliance with the *Sollen*. This change of perspective, from the action
to the totality of life, is the object of the next Part.

the appropriate psychological reaction to this judgment. This confirms that this despair is the consequence of the theological limitation of deontic language; given that the *Sollen* always presents the sin by excluding it (as non-frastic), sin is known to exist. This situation cannot be resolved by what constantly shows and refers to sin's presence.

In light of the condition of sin and the judgment of absolute guilt, a hypothetical positive judgment would be possible only by annulling the *consequentiality* between the negative situation (non-realization of the *Sollen*) and the judgment upon this situation. In other words, the positive judgment can only be non-consequential, non-bonded, free, *gratuitus* (in the Latin meaning). It can only be a judgment of abolition of the condition of sin – a judgment of forgiveness for the condition of guilt. It is a judgment of *gratia*.

The irremediability, the absoluteness of the theological condition of sin is connected to the bestowment of *gratia*. It is precisely because one is *unworthy* of a positive judgment, or because the discharge is not consequential, that one is subjected to the judgment of *gratia*, of forgiveness. Through theological awareness of the sinful condition, one arrives at divine grace (736,32–36). Divine grace is granted not for merit, but for demerit (738,25.31.32),[3] precisely in light of the overcoming of the consequentiality between realization (of the *Sollen*) and judgment (upon this realization).

It is the theological conception of the human situation (as condition of sin) and human theological despair that pushes the sinful one to cry for God's grace (644,6–7), and to be *open* to receiving the divine word of consolation for his miserable condition (684,6–7). God's consolation coincides with God's forgiveness (683,22–25) as a gratuitous offering of "misericordia, vita, pax, salus" (683,19) "per Christum crucifixum" (692,22). In light of the absoluteness and irreversibility of the sinful condition, this gratuitous forgiveness can be only the miracle of miracles (Matt 9:5).

Only God, having the power to make something out of nothing,[4] has the power to forgive who is (and knows to be) beyond forgiveness (683,35–684,3). And, given that God's revelation is the source *not* of the condition of sin, but of the knowledge and awareness of this condition, only God can help the one whose heart is broken (679,29–31) because of this awareness.

It is important to understand what it means for forgiveness to have a theological meaning. The first step is to analyze the connection between forgiveness and deontic language.

Usually, the judgment of forgiveness is understood as the negation of a negative deontic judgment (a judgment of charge); for a deontically negative situation (non-realization of a *Sollen*), a judgment of discharge is formulated

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[3] The logic connecting merit and reward is further discussed in *infra*, Ch. 10 section 3. The matter of grace is elaborated upon in *infra*, Ch. 12.

[4] See WA 1a: 183,39–184,10.

instead of a judgment of charge. For this reason, it is called a judgment of *gratia*; because it is not bound by the judgment of charge – it refers to something that, deontically speaking, should *not* be forgiven.

However, precisely because of this negative connection to deontic language, this meaning of forgiveness is still thought as a deontic concept. It still depends on deontic language. Formally, the power of *gratia* (forgiveness, pardon) depends upon a situation that *should* be judged negatively – that is, a situation that is conceived in deontic terms. This is why, empirically, many constitutions and codes of law include the regulation of the power of *pardon*; they establish who holds this power, in which special circumstances it should and can be manifested, who wields it, et cetera.

Thus, the usual meaning of forgiveness still belongs to deontic language, although only negatively. There would be no forgiveness without a situation of charge and the consequential, expected judgment of charge (or imputation)[5]. Forgiveness is forgiveness of something that is deontically defined. In sum, forgiveness, as it is usually intended, depends *negatively* upon a situation of violation of a *Sollen*, and therefore still implies the assumption of the realizability of the *Sollen*. It is still built upon the implication "ought → can." Thus, what has been analyzed so far is the *deontic* meaning of forgiveness, precisely because of this negative connection between forgiveness and deontic language.

It is clear that this deontic meaning of forgiveness cannot be the theological meaning of forgiveness. This theological meaning should be based upon the negation of the deontic implication "ought → can." Divine *gratia* in the situation of total, irremediable guilt is something entirely different from the deontic concept of forgiveness. In the case presented by Luther, the bestowment of forgiveness does not refer to the violation of a *Sollen*, and thus, it has nothing to do with the negation of the negative judgment upon this violation. Rather, it refers to the impossibility of realizing the *Sollen*. It refers to the theological concept of sin.

In the usual, deontic case, the *gratia* is based on the negation of the judgment (of guilt) for an action (of violation). Thus, in the deontic case, the *gratia* is still the object of a negative consequentiality; the *gratia* is given *because* a judgment of guilt (a charge) is expected. *Gratia* is the negation of this expectation: it is the negation of the judgment of guilt.

In the case of the condition of sin, of absolute guilt, the situation is different. Given that divine forgiveness concerns not an action deontically understood (the violation of a *Sollen*) but the theological concept of sin, then divine forgiveness is not the negation of the deontic expectation of a judgment of guilt. Theologically, forgiveness is not the negative, unexpected consequence of something (an action, and the corresponding judgment), because it is not conditioned (not even negatively) by any deontic element.

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[5] I expand upon the concept of negative imputation in *infra*, Ch. 7 sections 5 and 6.

Therefore, the theological meaning of forgiveness does not depend upon the negative assumption of the deontic consequentiality between action (of violation) and judgment (of guilt). Rather, in the theological case this consequentiality is *annulled*: the theological meaning of forgiveness corresponds to the annulation of the deontic implication between action and judgment.

It follows that divine forgiveness is *formally* unconditioned; it is the condition, the source of its own meaning. In sum, given that this despair is the fruit *not* of the deontic language, but of the *secundus usus*, then this *gratia*, this forgiveness, can only be the object of divine revelation. As such, forgiveness is not merely the only possible response to the situation of sin. More profoundly, forgiveness is the condition in light of which it is possible to think about sin, and thus about the theological limitation of deontic language.

2. Promise as Origin

In order to better understand the annulation of the deontic consequentiality between action and judgment, and thus the counter-intuitive inversion of sin and forgiveness, it is necessary to expand upon the form of this forgiveness.

God's consoling forgiveness of the sinful human being takes the form of the *promise* (682,15, 619,1–3,16–21; 663,12–18; 682,15; 714,18–20; 772,40–773,1; 783,37).

A promise founds a relationship. This relationship is the bond between the promisor and the promisee. In our case, divine promise founds the relationship between God and human being, between the one who reveals the forgiveness of the condition of sin for the non-realizability of the *Sollen*, and the one who is subjected to the *Sollen* and the condition of sin. Thus, the divine promise of forgiveness creates a bond between the one who makes the pact to keep the given word, and the other who recognizes herself or himself as the true recipient of this word, acknowledging that the promise is formulated *to* and *for* her or his condition of sin and despair.

Divine promise concerns the forgiveness of the condition of sin. This means that the promise concerns what deontic language cannot solve nor formulate. Thus, the bond with the promise implies the overcoming of deontic language. This harkens back to what I have discussed in the previous section: divine forgiveness is unconditioned precisely because it is not conditioned by the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. Given that the promised forgiveness refers to what cannot be otherwise – that is, the condition of sin – the promise of forgiveness entails the exclusion of a deontically conditioned forgiveness.

The emphasis to divine promise clarifies the unconditionality of divine forgiveness: divine forgiveness is not the consequence of something precisely because it comes in the form of a *promise*, and *not* of a judgment. Sin is the object of this promise of forgiveness, and *therefore* it cannot be the object of deontic

realization. In other words, being the recipient of the promise means that sin is not solved by the realization of the *Sollen*, that it cannot be exhausted by the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. Vice-versa, without the bond of the promise of forgiveness sin can only be considered to be solvable by realization of the *Sollen* – that is, solvable *outside* this bond of promise. Without promise, it would be impossible for sin to be understood and to have sense theologically: it could be understood and have sense only deontically.

This reflection opens to a new scenario: the reception of God's promise is the *origin*, the foundation, of the theological perspective on the *Sollen*. The divine promise of forgiveness is not the negation of a deontic expectation (of a judgment of charge); rather, it leads to a *new expectation*. It establishes the fact that any possible deontic expectation must be theologically re-formulated and reshaped in light of divine promise.

This re-formulation concerns the *limitation* of deontic language. Given that the promise of forgiveness implies the unrealizability of the *Sollen*, the promise overcomes the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*, thus showing the limitation of deontic language. Therefore, the promise *modifies* deontic language: it is the condition of the previously analyzed theological operation upon deontic language.

This harkens back to the issue of divine commandments. As analyzed in Chapter 5, the awareness of (and reflection upon) the limitation of deontic language derives from the contact with divine commandments. Therefore, the bond with the promise is the source, the origin, of not considering divine commandments as *Sollen*. The bond enables the understanding that divine commandments are not conditioned by deontic language. As such, divine commandments, by revealing this limitation of the deontic language, always and constantly lead back to their *formal* source: the bond of promise.

In other words, by substituting the relationship between *Sollen* and human being with a relationship between promisor and promise, the bond demonstrates that the relationship between human and divine commandments is not deontic, but theological. It is not a matter of realizing the *Sollen*, but of not considering the relationship with God as a relationship with a *Sollen.*

More emphatically, the bond impedes the reduction of God to a *Sollen*, and vice-versa, it impedes to divinize a *Sollen.* It impedes making God's forgiveness dependent upon deontic language, and thus attributing to it the form of a judgment. The bond is the principle according to which any consequential relationship between situation and expected judgment is rejected and overcome.

Therefore, forgiveness is not the deontic consequence of anything, but is *gratia*, because the bond of promise annuls the consequentiality between *Sollen* and forgiveness. And given that the bond of promise is created by the promise of forgiveness, the promise of forgiveness – the expression of forgiveness as

promise – is confirmed as the *origin* of both speaking about this promise and living within this promise.[6]

In sum, the promise of forgiveness is *divine* and not human not just because it is not the consequence of anything deontically understood – including any rule of justness or worthiness.[7] Rather, the promise of forgiveness is divine because it is the *origin* of the theological understanding of the *Sollen*. Nothing precedes the promise; thus, everything follows from it, including the reflection *upon* the promise, and the reflection upon life within the bond of promise.

The relationship between the promise of forgiveness and deontic language is a case of the formal priority of divine revelation over the conditions of meaning (in this case, the conditions of the deontic meaning). As much as divine revelation is the starting point for the recalibration of the limits of language and conceptualization in light of this revelation, so the revelation of the promise of forgiveness – the revelation of a judgment that is *gratia* and does not follow from anything deontically understood – is the starting point for the recalibration of the limits of deontic language.[8]

This means that the *passivity* that is implied in receiving the promise (as much as in receiving divine revelation) is the beginning of the operation on the forms of language. In other words, passivity is *formal*; it is the passivity of entering into contact with something that formally does not depend on some conditions (limits). This passivity entails the *activity* of dealing with this "something"; this activity is the effort of reconsidering the validity of those conditions, and the assumption of those limits. The passivity of receiving the revelation is the origin of the movement of rethinking the foundation of meaning and conceptualization.[9]

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[6] I will discuss the union of life and concept (of this life) in light of divine revelation in *infra*, Ch. 9 sections 5 and 6.

[7] Again, on the relationship between merit and reward, see *infra*, Ch. 9 sections 3 and 5 and Ch. 10 section 3.

[8] According to my point of view, the *ontological* understanding of the human relationship with God follows from this bond of promise. The concepts of the ontological union with Christ, of the "real-ontic" presence of Christ within the believer, and of the believer's "*theosis*" (again, all distinctive points of the Finnish school; see Mannermaa, "Theosis"; see *supra*, Ch. 3 section 3) can be thought in light of the incompatibility between deontic language and bond of the promise of forgiveness. This would avoid the assumption of the *tertius usus legis*. The scenario of an ultimately and definitively sanctified human being, a being that accomplishes the commandments perfectly, is absent at least in *De servo arbitrio*. *De servo arbitrio* presents a human being in constant doubt of its own morality, in conflict with herself or himself, and in ignorance about her or his election (on the rejection of a deontic meaning of sanctity, see *infra*, Ch. 10 section 1; on election, see *infra*, Ch. 11 section 5). Thus, God and human being are connected *because* the bond built upon the accomplishment of divine commandments is no longer.

[9] I consider this my little contribution to the discussion on the theological meaning of the concept of "passivity"; see Stoellger, *Passivität aus Passion*.

In the first Part of this book, the revelation of divine omnipotence forces us to rethink the modal language of freedom; in this second Part, the promise of forgiveness forces us to rethink deontic language and the meaning of the *Sollen*; and finally, in the third Part, the revelation of (and as) election forces us to rethink the structure of the self-meaningfulness of life. In other words, the freedom that is theology, the freedom that *De servo arbitrio* manifests, is precisely the activity of questioning formal conditions (such as the ones that sustain Erasmus's arguments) in light of the passive acknowledgment of what does not depend on such conditions.

3. Sin and Forgiveness

The previous reflections prompt further clarification of the relationship between sin and forgiveness.

Apparently, the human condition of sin and the divine promise of forgiveness seem to be interconnected within a sort of system of causality. The *Sein* of the promise seems to be the consequence of the *Sein* of the sin, and the *Sein* of the sin seems to be a sort of cause that determines the effect of forgiveness. So, it seems that where there is the *Sein* of divine forgiveness, the *Sein* of sin must be inferred.

Yet, this image of a causal relationship between sin and forgiveness is a mistake, because it substitutes modal language for deontic language. Divine forgiveness and the condition of sin are not concepts belonging to modal language. They result from the theological modification of deontic language. Thus, they are concepts belonging to theological language; they are expressions of the theological limitation of deontic language. It follows that the interconnection between sin and promise cannot be one of causality. Rather, this interconnection is based on the theological rethinking of the validity of the implication "ought → can."

As I have shown, this rethinking depends on the bond of the promise of forgiveness. Therefore, the possibility of thinking about this relationship between sin and forgiveness, and the possibility of excluding all seemingly causal consequentiality between sin and forgiveness, also depends on the bond created by the divine promise of forgiveness. From being the promisee, one begins to deduce the concept of sin as a condition – of sin's *Sein*, and of absolute guilt.

This means that the relationship between sin and forgiveness is reversed. Forgiveness is not the consequence of sin, it is not sought *because* of sin; rather, it is sin that is known and acknowledged as a condition *because* of the bond of promise. It is because of this bond that the condition of sin makes sense as *Sein*

and not as *Sollen*.[10] One acknowledges one's sinful condition *from* – and not *for* – the revelation of God's promise of forgiveness.

Sin and forgiveness are the respective contributions of human being and God to the bond of promise. This means that sin is the object of the bond – not in the sense that it originates from the bond, but in the sense that it can be conceptualized *because* of the bond, due to the fact that there is a promise that does not depend on deontic language. Thus, *conceptually*, sin and forgiveness are each the echo of the other; but *formally*, from the promise of forgiveness it is deduced that there is a situation that deontic language cannot solve by itself: sin.

So, one acknowledges one's need for a forgiveness that is not deontic not from the condition of sin, but from the fact that one is a promisee, that the bond of promise exists. Sin is the need for (and thus, the absence of) forgiveness, and the need for (and absence of) dependence upon divine revelation (782,13–25).[11] Thus, this need presupposes divine revelation. In sum, this need exists and is felt *because* of the revelation of the promise of forgiveness.

As discussed in the previous Part,[12] divine revelation does not satisfy a need (in this case, the need for forgiveness); rather, one discovers the need for revelation through contact with revelation. In this case, one is aware of her or his own condition of sin because this is what the divine promise of forgiveness implies and expresses about her or him.[13]

In other words, the bond with the divine promise of forgiveness does not restore hope after the sin. Rather, the bond founds hope, it *creates* hope, it reveals what hope is: the promise of forgiveness. There is no hope *before* the promise of forgiveness, precisely because the promise of forgiveness introduces sin, desperation, and thus hope.

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[10] See WA 42: 107. See also Małysz, "Sin": 172: "Sin becomes sin only in the fact of God's goodness."

[11] Sin is human theoretical *independence* from God. See John 16:8–9. See WA DB 7: 7–8 [Preface to Romans]. See also Ebeling, *Lutero*: 126: "True atheism is not the abstract negation of God's existence, but the negation of one's own order to God, the negation of one's existence as God's creature. Unfaithfulness is the fundamental sin of man" (my translation). Two levels of sin can be distinguished. On one hand, the deontic level: sin is defined as violation of a *Sollen*, and it is defined theologically as the *impossibility* of realization of the *Sollen*. On the other hand, the formal level: sin is not knowing God, not having a relationship with revelation.

[12] See *supra*, Ch. 2 section 6.

[13] Thus, forgiveness is not a general attribute, a sort of "analytic" proposition included in the subject "sinner," something that can be potentially applied to anyone, something that functions as a sort of *apokatastasis*. Rather, forgiveness has sense only for those who are within the bond of promise. Thus, it is the promise of forgiveness to define the "anyone" (as "anyone in the bond of promise") and, thus, the "sinner," that is, the set to which it refers. In sum, forgiveness is not a predicate of this "anyone", but, on the contrary, the "anyone" is the predicate of forgiveness.

It follows that the bond of promise is why all forms of cooperation for the sake of obtaining forgiveness are rejected (772,11–21). In fact, cooperation implies deontic consequentiality in the form of a "hypothetical imperative"; if I want to obtain forgiveness, I must realize *x*.

The rejection of this consequentiality includes even the forms of *negative* cooperation, for instance the desperation for the impossibility of cooperation. Desperation is not conditioned by the willingness to be cherished and thus obtain forgiveness.[14] Desperation is theological (and not deontic) meaning as an expression of the limitation of deontic meaning; it arises from the awareness of the lack of deontic resources through contact with the promise of forgiveness. Desperation occurs *because* the promise of forgiveness is the basis upon which the condition of sin has sense. In sum, there is no cooperation for obtaining forgiveness, precisely because forgiveness is the object of promise.

These reflections confirm that Luther is not an antinomian. As hinted in the previous chapter, Luther's argument does not culminate in an *abrogatio legis*; what is negated is not the *Sollen* as such, but the theological validity of the

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[14] One notices a modification within Luther's conception of preparation for grace (see Aquinas, *ST*: II.1, 109.6; 112.3), from an early synergistic conception (for instance, in the commentary to the Psalms) until its dismissal in later writings, at least since the *Römervorlesungen* of 1515–16 (see Miegge, *Dieta di Worms*: 138; Kröger, *Rechtfertigung und Gesetz*: 35; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*: 192–193). According to others, this dismissal has already been implicit since the *Disputatio* of 1517 (See Lillback, *The Binding of God*). This modification consists of this: in the earlier texts, Luther presents a sort of "law of humiliation" in continuity with medieval spirituality (see Bizer, *Fides ex auditu*: 31; Whiting, *Luther in English*: 48), while in the later works he claims a clear "abdication of human sovereignty in order to confess God's sovereignty" (Subilia, *La giustificazione*: 132, my translation). In light of this, the uncertainty of historical and empirical normative performances makes room for the certainty of God's promise, as realized in the event of Christ and the revelation of God's justice (see Bayer, *Promissio*: 276). Perhaps a closer reading of Luther's text would help to clarify this matter. It is impossible to provide a full analysis here, which would require too wide a detour from *De servo arbitrio*. Yet, some punctual quotations would contribute to an understanding of the position taken in *De servo arbitrio*. In his *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513–16), Luther writes: "[I]ustitia Dei est tota hec: scilicet sese in profundum humiliare" (WA 3: 458,4); "[Q]ui ei per fidem adheret, necessario sibi vilis and nihil, abominabilis and damnabilis efficitur" (*ivi*: 462,29–30); "Iudica me Domine, id est da mihi veram humiliatem et carnis mee mortificationem, meiipsius damnationem, ut sic per te salver in spiritu" (*ivi*: 466,36–37). Already in the commentaries on the Psalms, self-humiliation is not the prerequisite for the deliverance of God's judgment, but rather the manifestation of God's justice. God's judgment *coincides* with damnation in order for human beings to be open to salvation. Thus, even in the commentaries on the Psalms, despair and humiliation do *not* cause forgiveness, but follow *from* contact with God's justice; see Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*: 50–67. The *syntheresis* should be correctly interpreted as carried out by man who can only "'ask,' 'seek,' 'knock' and cry out in faith for a virtue that he does not possess" (Kling, *The Bible*: 135). In terms of my reading of *De servo arbitrio*, God's promise of forgiveness entails the revelation of the condition of sin and absolute guilt.

formal language constituting the meaning of the *Sollen*. Were the *Sollen* negated, then the theological meaning of the *Sollen* would also vanish. It is possible to formulate the theological concept of sin as condition precisely because the *Sollen* still has deontic meaning; it still implies the deontic impossibility of sin (the deontically impossible negation of the frastic).

In other words, the negation of the *Sollen* would mean that the human being is in a deontically neutral condition: one's actions are neither good nor bad, given that they are not defined by a *Sollen*. This is still the affirmation of the priority of deontic language (in a negative form) over the bond of promise. This is not a theological position because there is no dependence, and thus no limitation, of deontic language upon this bond. Thus, Luther's position is the negation of the *adiaphoron morale* not because everything one accomplishes can be either good or bad, but, on the contrary, because everything one accomplishes is enlivened by sin (736,15–17; 742,15–21). In sum, because everything one accomplishes is thought in light of the bond of promise.

Therefore, Luther's position is neither antinomian nor deontic. From the antinomian perspective, forgiveness has no sense at all; from this perspective, there is no relationship with the *Sollen*, and thus, there is no condition of sin to be forgiven. From the deontic perspective, forgiveness has sense as a *negative consequence* of the *Sollen*, as the negative expectation of a judgment in light of the inference "ought → can." From the theological perspective, forgiveness is deduced neither from the validity nor from the invalidation of deontic language. Forgiveness is *gratia*; there is nothing from which to deduce it, precisely because it is object of promise, and not of judgment. The promise of forgiveness, and the bond it creates, makes visible the limitation of deontic language, limitation that stems from the non-consequentiality of this promise itself.[15]

4. The Realization of the Promise

This clarification of the relationship between sin and promise also clarifies the relationship between the theological modification of the *Sollen* and the promise of forgiveness. At first sight, there is an antithesis; theologically, the *Sollen* is a word of condemnation because it speaks to and about those who do not consider the *Sollen* theologically, but deontically. Vice-versa, the promise of forgiveness speaks to and about those who do assume this theological perspective and know about the condition of sin (684,8–11).

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[15] In any case, this does not mean that Luther's position in *De servo arbitrio* is identical with his position, ten years later, in the dispute against the antinomians: see *supra*, Ch. 5 section 6.

This has the same structure of the antithesis between slavery under God and slavery under Satan.[16] In both cases, the antithesis presupposes the theological operation upon a formal language. In one case, speaking of slavery under Satan implies the modification of modal language. In the other case, speaking of condemnation and sin implies application of the theological perspective upon deontic language. And given that the theological perspective is introduced by the bond of promise, the antithesis between the word of condemnation and the word of forgiveness is included within the promise of forgiveness.

Thus, *temporally* (in the time of human existence, and in the history of humankind[17]), the law has been given *before* the promise, as Moses came before Jesus, mirroring the path leading from absolute condemnation to Christ (766,30–31). However, formally, the promise of forgiveness *precedes* the absolute condemnation (772,40–773,1; Rom 4:9–12; Gal 3:17–18).[18]

This means that although *temporally* the realization of the promise refers to the *eschaton* (the end of history), *formally* the realization of the promise coincides with establishing the bond of promise. It is the bond of promise that gives meaning to the time of realization of the promise. It is this bond that constitutes the anticipatory meaning of the promise. Within and because of this bond, it is possible to speak of the time between the condition of sin and the realization of the forgiveness of this condition.

In other words, the future of the *eschaton* has sense in light of the presence (and *present*) of the bond with revelation[19]; the concept of the end of history has sense because the end of history is *already* contained within the bond of the promise. This bond is the foundation of the meaning of an end of time – the end of the time spent waiting for (and expecting) the realization of the *Sollen*; the bond is the source of the meaning of forgiveness *qua gratia*, as independence from deontic consequentiality, thus, as independence from deontic *temporality*. Thus, the promise of forgiveness is *already* forgiveness, not because forgiveness is indeed there, but because the future of forgiveness has sense and can be understood as such only in light of the bond of promise itself.

Given that this promise is *God's* promise, it is an expression of God's freedom as *potentia actualis*.[20] This introduces a profound distinction from the usual human concept of promise. The realization of human promise is submitted to contingency and is therefore uncertain, just as the realization of a *Sollen*.

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[16] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 5.

[17] History is strictly connected to the expression of law. See Ebeling, *Lutero*: 124–125.

[18] In other words, given that human ignorance of the condition of sin and divine condemnation is the object of revelation, this ignorance is *overcome* through the relationship with divine revelation.

[19] For this reason, it makes sense to speak of *simultaneity* between present and future within the bond of the divine promise of forgiveness. See Iwand, *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*: 62–65.

[20] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 3.

God's promise is one with divine omnipotence, the realization of *omnia in omnibus*; therefore, what is promised in not only possible, but is *necessary* (619,1–3,16–21; 714,18–20). Nothing can impede the accomplishment of God's *voluntas* (716,13–15).[21] Thus, it is impossible for the object of divine promise *not* to be realized.

This means that divine promise, contrary to human promise, is *not* a *Sollen*. It is not God's commitment towards the realization of the content of the promise at a time *x*, different from the time *y* of the expression of the promise. Rather, God's promise is a *Sein*; it is not the declaration of a possibility, but of a necessity – the *theological* necessity entailed by God's freedom. Hence, there is no distinction between the formulation and the realization of God's promise; because the realization depends only on God's freedom, it is necessary.

Yet, this reflection on realization misses the main point. This point is understanding how is it possible to formulate this reflection, this theological deduction about the necessary realization of the divine promise of forgiveness. The answer is that this deduction is possible in light of God's revelation. God's promise is already realized in the moment of its formulation, not because of some conceptual deductions from the qualities of God's *potentia*, but, rather, because of the fact that the promise is the origin from which I can speak of this promise, and thus, of the time between promise and realization. The promise of forgiveness is already *consummated* (*vollbracht*)[22] – not empirically, but formally, because it is the foundation of any possible speculation upon it.

This is parallel to the image of the three *lumina*. The *lumen gloriae*, the *eschaton*, cannot yet be known. However, it can be *thought* – and it can be thought because of the *lumen gratiae*, the revelation of the limitation of human knowledge. Thus, the *eschaton* as not-yet-known-time, as limit of knowledge, has sense in light of the *lumen gratiae*, in light of the revelation, or, more precisely, in light of the bond of dependence upon this *lumen*, upon divine revelation – a bond created by this *lumen* itself.

It follows that the divine promise of forgiveness is not the revelation of the structure of God's *voluntas*; it is not the "law" or rule of God's justice. It is not the principle according to which God's justice is comprehensible, and hence, foreseeable – for instance, as counter-intuitive justice, as forgiveness no matter what one does. This would be indeed the situation if divine forgiveness were understood in *deontic* terms – that is, if forgiveness were understood as dependent upon the deontic expectations of a judgment of charge.

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[21] Luther's text: "De praescientia Dei disputamus; huic nisi dederis *necessarium* effectum praesciti, fidem et timorem Dei abstulisti, promissiones et minas divinas omnes labefecisti atque adeo ipsam divinitatem negasti" (emphasis added). This issue of the necessity of God's prescience as connected to the general issue of God's freedom will be discussed in *infra*, Ch. 11 section 4.

[22] See Bach, *Johannes-Passion*: Aria "Es ist vollbracht."

But this is not the situation; rather, it is the meaning of the *Sollen* to be re-founded by the promise of forgiveness. Again, divine revelation is not a counter-intuitive method of knowledge and of conceptualization. The order of priorities shall be inverted: it is not divine revelation that is at the service of the methodological foundations of human *verbum*; divine revelation shows the *limitation* of such foundations, and thus it compels to reconsider the validity of such foundations.

In other words, the divine promise is not the negation of the *Deus absconditus*. Rather, it is the *confirmation* of the *Deus absconditus* – when this concept is grasped in its meta-conceptual function. The formal aspect of the divine promise is the confirmation of the fact that from a theological perspective we think and spoke *from* God, and *because of* God. The bond of promise specifies this general issue for the case of deontic language; it clarifies that in theology we do not think deontically, rather we think *about* (the theological limit of) deontic language: theologically, we conceive the *Sollen* in light of the divine promise.[23]

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[23] If we overlook the formal aspect of both *Deus absconditus* and God's promise, then the two concepts are incompatible: the *Deus absconditus* (conceptually interpreted as God's absolute freedom) is free also to break God's self-binding promise. This (supposed) incompatibility can be solved by emphasizing the character of *incompleteness* of the divine promise; see Walter, "Promise": 214: "The light of glory here shows that for all the power of promise, God's work in it is not yet finished. Here Luther embraced the important qualification that only when God's promise is fulfilled in the eschaton in the light of glory, can we resolve the contradiction between the light of promise and the light of reason," this latter being interpreted as the principle of formulation of a "radically free God who may act against the ways that God has bound." (It could be remarked *en passant* that the concept of *Deus absconditus* operates precisely *against* the *lumen naturae*; see *supra*, Ch. 4 sections 6 and 7.) However, the "incompleteness" solution is not able to present a proper distinction between human promise and divine promise; see *ibid.*: "In other words, the character of a promise is that no matter how certain it is, however strong its assertions are, as a promise it still is weak. The promise is weak because it has not yet reached its fulfillment." On the contrary, considering the formal aspect of both concepts of *Deus absconditus* and divine promise helps to *annul* (not just to solve) their incompatibility. Divine promise reveals the limitation of the expectations related to the promise: divine forgiveness, the content of the promise, is the invalidation of any deontic concept of forgiveness. This confirms that the divine promise specifies the meta-conceptual function of the *Deus absconditus*: as the *Deus absconditus* invalidates the deductive inference in theology (see *supra*, Ch. 4 section 6), so the divine promise of forgiveness invalidates any *deontic* deduction. Thus, the distinction between divine promise and human promise refers precisely to the formal aspect of the former: divine promise is divine not because (conceptually) it is not submitted to any empirical event, but because (formally) it introduces a new meaning to promise. In other words, both the *Deus absconditus* and the divine promise focalizes the attention to the (re-)foundational aspect of divine revelation. If we want to keep the image of "incompleteness," then we can say that the divine promise *founds* its own incompleteness: to reveal that the promise will be realized in the *eschaton* means that the promise will *never* be realized within time (otherwise the *eschaton* would be identical to any other future empirical events, and, thus, it would not

Therefore, the promise of forgiveness is not the satisfaction of the need for a concept of God's justice. It is not that a concept of justice is divine because it is counter-intuitive – for instance, because it connects forgiveness to what cannot be forgiven. Rather, a concept of justice is divine because it is the principle of *modification* of our conceptualization of justice. God's justice is the re-creation of justice itself; it is the principle upon which the validity of any possible conception of justice and of any possible use of deontic language is re-formulated.[24]

5. Law and Gospel

What I have discussed up to this point is centered upon the distinction between the word of Law[25] and the word of Gospel (680,23–25; 692,19–20), or between the word of condemnation and the word of consolation.

As I hinted in the previous chapter, this distinction is, for Erasmus, absurdity; this distinction would entail that God has two words, one opposed to the other. Luther responds by stating that Erasmus's position is mistaken: it assimilates the word of promise into the word of law (680,27–28; 698,16–20). This is why Erasmus is unable to understand that the distinction between menace and promise is not a contradiction, but rather a formal relationship.

Once again, this relationship is defined and established by the bond of promise. Therefore, the distinction between the two words is not absurd because both words belong equally to divine revelation; they are both elements of it. In other words, the revelation of the condition of sin and the revelation of (and as) the promise of forgiveness (663,12–18) do not contradict each other because the antithesis between them is embraced and founded by the word of forgiveness itself, in light of the bond with divine promise.[26]

Consequently, the word of Law has sense for one who sees herself or himself as the addressee of the promise of forgiveness, as a sinner. On the other hand, the word of Gospel has sense not for one who seeks another, renewed system

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require a different kind of *lumen*). I expand upon this in *infra*, Ch. 7 sections 5–7, where I connect the divine promise of forgiveness to the theological concept of justification.

[24] Saying, as Gogarten does, that God's justice "ist nicht eine Gerechtigkeit, die mit menschlichen Begriffen zu beurteilen ist" (*Luthers Theologie*: 136) means that the application of such concepts is reconsidered in light of God's justice.

[25] I am forced to use the word "Law" instead of the word "*Sollen*" (perhaps more complex, but less ambiguous) because the matter of the relationship between the two words is traditionally discussed using the term "Law."

[26] Again, this touches upon the issue of the *Deus absconditus*: there is a contradiction between *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus* only through the inversion of priority between conceptual inferences and divine revelation. See *supra*, Ch. 4 section 6.

of *Sollen*,[27] but for one who is the recipient of God's promise, for one who is bound by it.

Given that the meaning of the word of Law depends on the bond with God's promise, and the Gospel coincides with the revelation of this promise, it seems that the Gospel "is *eo ipso* the distinction between Law and Gospel."[28] In other words, the Gospel, the word of the promise of forgiveness, has priority over the word of menace; it includes the word of condemnation within itself.

This inclusion of Law and Gospel within the Gospel must be understood as *formal*, not as conceptual. In other words, such inclusion does not mean that the Gospel annuls God's menace by making it subordinate to God's forgiveness, thus annulling the *Sollen* under God's grace – this would mean returning to the antinomian fallacy. This "phagocytosis" of the Law within the Gospel is wrong because it contemplates only a *conceptual* connection. If it were the case, Erasmus's criticism would indeed be correct, because there would be a contradiction within God's revelation.

However, this is *not* the case from Luther's perspective; in Luther, there is no overlap between the two words. Rather, the conceptual *distinction* between them *depends* on their relationship to revelation – this conceptual distinction can be thought and expressed in light of the bond of promise. Therefore, the

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[27] See Ebeling, *Lutero*: 127.

[28] *Ivi*: 108, my translation. For Ebeling, the distinction between Law and Gospel is the formal ground upon which the separation between Barth and Luther is irreducible. See Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 538. In my view, this distinction is a "variation of the theme" of Barth's general criticism of the fundamental distinction between *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* (see *supra*, Ch. 4 section 2), given that the latter risks undermining the certainty of revelation. Barth criticizes Luther for what seems to him to be the absorption of the Law into the Gospel, which would leave Christian life in lawlessness and arbitrariness. Without discussing Barth's theology, I simply emphasize that Barth's criticism of Luther's juxtaposition of Law and Gospel (*KD*: II.1 § 30, 407) is similar to Erasmus's position. The word of Law (or the revelation of the function of the law) is contained *within* the Gospel, and the wrath of God is part of God's love. Both the function of the law and the wrath of God find place within God's revelation, within the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But this does not mean that the Gospel is the vessel of a normative form; see Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 550–551. There is neither opposition (they are not "Fremde"; Barth, *KD*: II.2, § 37: 619), nor fusion. Law and Gospel are not opposed because the revelation of the theological function of the law is part of the Gospel. Nor are they melded together, because the function of the law is *not* deontic. The term "Law" in the formula "word of the Law" is *not* a *Sollen*, because the meaning of this "word" is based upon the overcoming of the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. I think that the theological unity between the word of the Law and the word of the Gospel is at least present in *De servo arbitrio*, not as "Zusammenhang von 'Rechtfertigung' und 'Recht'" (Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 476), but rather in light of the differentiation between the word of Law and the conditions of deontic language – a differentiation expressed by the Gospel itself. There is a connection between the "ignoscens pater" and the "iustus iudex" (see Barth, *KD*: II.1 § 30, 429) *only* if the latter is understood in *non-deontic* terms.

conceptual distinction between the two words implies the formal inclusion of the two words within the promise of forgiveness. The Gospel makes possible the distinction between the word of the Law and the word of the Gospel.

In sum, conceptually, each of the two words has its own "*Grenzen*,"[29] but the *definition* (and the expression) of these limits is made possible by contact with revelation in the form of the bond of promise. Thus, the two words have meaning because this meaning depends on and is grounded by the Gospel.

Therefore, it is not that the word of Law is absorbed by Gospel; rather, the connection between Law and Gospel (the "*und*"[30]) has sense in light of the Gospel's formal – not conceptual – priority. It follows that the Gospel is the formal *ex ante*, the origin of the conceptualizability of the theological meaning of both Law and Gospel (of both sin and forgiveness), and consequently, of their relationship.[31]

This relationship is antithetical. Both words have sense in their mutual reference; one calls for the other in the *negation* of the other. The *Sollen* cannot be realized, and forgiveness cannot be founded upon the *Sollen*. Thus, the relationship between Law and Gospel is thought in light of the theological modification of deontic language, and this modification is possible in light of the bond of divine promise – that is, in light of the Gospel. For this reason, there is an "*und*" and not a "*gegen*" between Law and Gospel – because the "*gegen*" follows from the "*und*," and the "*und*" is presupposed, and thus expressed, within all reflections upon the "*gegen*."

Once again, the risk of antinomianism is avoided; the Gospel does *not* annul the Law. On the contrary, it gives the word of Law its *theological* meaning. The Gospel clarifies the distinction between a word of the Law deontically intended and a word of the Law theologically intended. Thus, the antinomian position is false because it is limited to the conceptual level (the content of the Gospel against the content of the Law); the antinomian position forgets that this conceptual level depends on the formal element that founds the relationship between the respective contents of Law and Gospel.

It follows that the Gospel is not a meta-norm. A meta-norm is a kind of *Sollen* that is applied to other *Sollen*, and, as such, fulfills the function of the criterion of judgment of these *Sollen*. It might be the case that the word of Gospel is understood as a meta-norm – as word *about* the word of Law. But this interpretation is incorrect; considering the Gospel a meta-norm means making it a *Sollen*, and thus, making it dependent upon the structure of deontic sense. Thinking of the Gospel as a judgment of the word of Law means neglecting the distinction between the conceptual level and the formal level.[32]

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[29] See Iwand, *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*: 27.
[30] See *ivi*: 31.
[31] Formally: Gospel $\vDash$ (Law $\wedge$ Gospel).
[32] More on this in *infra*, Ch. 8 section 12.

The Gospel does not fulfill the function of the conceptual annulment of the *Sollen* precisely because the Gospel has the function of giving theological, non-deontic meaning to the word of Law. The Gospel is not a *Sollen* superior to all other *Sollen* – it does not judge the *Sollen*, nor does it annul it (it is not pro-antinomianism), because it is the ground for the theological operation upon the *Sollen.*

The Gospel is neither a *Sollen* nor a meta-*Sollen*; it contains neither a deontic message *nor* a meta-deontic message. Otherwise, both the formal unconditionality of the Gospel *and* the theological operation upon deontic language would be impossible. The Gospel is not a *viaticum*, an *encheiridion* containing all *Sollen* and illustrating all virtues that must be followed – nor does it negate all *Sollen* and virtues by substituting itself for them. Were this the case, then the Gospel would carry the same formal value as any treatise of morals, and it would lose its priority over the deontic condition of the formulation of such treatise.[33]

On the contrary, the Gospel is the revelation that no *Sollen* is the law of or the condition for God's justice precisely because the Gospel reveals that any *Sollen* is theologically meaningful in light of the relationship, the bond, with the Gospel itself.

6. Freedom to Be Responsible for God

This leads us to the concept of divine justice. A meta-norm also functions as a condition of a meta-judgment, judgment on a judgment. A judge – in this case, God – is considered just or unjust according to a meta-norm. Thus, a meta-norm is the condition of formulation of a concept of justice.

Now, given that the Gospel has no meta-normative function, there is no basis for a meta-judgment of God's justice. In other words, the concept of God's justice coincides with the Gospel itself. The "justification" of God depends upon God's revelation.[34] This is to say that God's justice, the promise of forgiveness, is the only possible concept of itself; it is the only possible basis for a judgment of it.

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[33] This "ethicization" of the Gospel is, according to Ebeling, the result of Barth's statement of the Law as a form of the Gospel. See Ebeling, "Karl Barths Ringen": 562–567. Another similarly critical interpretation of Barth's reduction of the Law to a form of Gospel can be found in Małysz, "Sin": 156 and 174 note 39. Interpreting the Gospel to have the form of the Law means making it compatible with deontic judgment, and thus, considering it the evidence of God's benevolence. Małysz, on the contrary, states that the Law is comprehended within the Gospel, "which interprets it" (*ivi*: 161). In my own words, I would say that the Gospel makes possible its theological interpretation.

[34] See Subilia, *La giustificazione*: 128–129.

Of course, theoretically it is always possible to propose a variety of concepts of God's justice. The best concepts seem to be counter-intuitive, such as: "Justice not following the *cuique suum*,"[35] or "Justice deducing from a violation a verdict of acquittal," or "Justice as forgiveness of what is unforgivable." But are these conceptualizations exhaustive?

Were they exhaustive, then God's justice would comply with these concepts, and it would be possible for us (as formulators of these concepts) to foresee God's justice.[36] This would mean that God's justice is submitted to such conceptualization, and is judged according to it. If God's justice is in contrast with this criterion, then God is unjust.

This scenario is the *breaking* of the bond of promise. The bond affirms the priority of itself (as *gratia*); thus, any theological concept follows from it (foremost, the concepts of Law and Gospel, and condemnation and forgiveness). It follows that any concept of God's justice is either exhaustive but negates its formal origin, or the concept of God's justice is compatible with the bond but not exhaustive.

No concept of God's justice can tell us anything more about God's justice than what God has already revealed as *iustitia salutis* (758,31–33) – as the promise of forgiveness.[37] There is no meta-norm for God's justice other than God's justice, and there is no possibility of bridling God's *voluntas* within the boundaries of deontic language; either divine justice is, formally speaking, the rule of everything (these conceptualizations included), or it does not belong to God (712,32–38).[38] The foundation of a theological discourse on justice is

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[35] On the "*cuique suum*", or formal concept of justice, see Perelman, *De la justice*, and Kelsen, *Reine Rechtslehre*: 611–754. On this issue, see *infra*, Ch. 8 section 7.

[36] This is another variation of the *Duplik* against Barth's criticism of Luther's distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* – a distinction which, for Barth, leads one to consider the *potentia absoluta* as *inordinata.* See *supra*, Ch. 4 sections 2 and 3. The fact that God's power (which, in our present case, is understood in the terms of "God's justice") is not and cannot be subsumable under a system of rules (either of nature or of meta-norm – there is no difference) does not mean that this power is arbitrary. In fact, justice can be considered arbitrary only in light of a discrepancy between what justice *should* be (following a meta-norm of justice) and what this justice *is* (possibly but not necessarily following this meta-norm). In sum, justice is arbitrary if it does what it should not do: if it violates a meta-norm of justice. But this situation is inapplicable to God's justice, precisely because it is impossible for it to be submitted to a meta-norm of justice.

[37] Attributing a concept to God's justice would imply that revelation becomes superfluous after having received its message. Again, this is precisely the opposite of what the bond of promise represents and manifests.

[38] See also 784,9–15: "Si enim talis esset eius iustitia, quae humano captu posset iudicari esse iusta, plane non esset divina et nihilo differret ab humana iustitia. At cum sit Deus verus et unus, deinde totus incomprehensibilis et inaccessibilis humana ratione, par est, imo necessarium est, ut et iustitia sua sit incomprehensibilis, Sicut Paulus quoque exclamat dicens: O altitudo divitiarum sapientiae et scientiae Dei; quam incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius et investigabiles viae eius [Rom 11:33]." See also Iwand, *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*: 51:"Die

God's justice itself. Any formulated rule of God's justice coincides with the subordination of all possible rules of justice (including this conceptualization) under the revelation of God's justice.

The theological fallacy of applying conceptualizations of God's justice to God's justice itself derives from the unconditionality of the source of theological concepts: the bond of promise, the bond with God's justice. Given that God's justice is the supreme meter of all meters of judgment of the forms of justice (708,7–9), God is just not according to our standards, but only according to his justice (John 8:15). God's justice is either the only concept of justice, or it is entirely lost, transformed into a lie (780,21).[39]

Conversely, from the theological standpoint, all concepts of God's justice are based upon human conditions, upon the primacy of deontic language, upon the consequentiality between the realization of the *Sollen* and judgment itself. Thus, all concepts are the negation of God's justice (767,37–40). God's justice is what annuls the primacy of the consequentiality of the judgment, and so everything that is judged according to such consequentiality is *unjust* (767,42– 768,2). Negatively stated, "Quicquid extra fidem hanc est, negat esse iustum coram Deo" (768,15–16).

Thus, as these quotations exemplify, the conceptualization of God's justice can only be the reshaping of the language of the judgment of justice (including God's justice) in light of God's justice itself. There are two sources of the meaning of justice: the law and faith (768,26–40). The latter operates theologically upon the former; thus, there is no justice other than God's justice. Either all other (human) concepts of justice depend on God's justice, or they are concepts of sin.[40]

This means that we are responsible not only *before* God, but also *for* God.

We are responsible *before* God because we are responsible for the effort of submitting the conditions of deontic meaning to a process of modification (which corresponds to the *negation* of their axiomatic validity) that allows these conditions to be theologically relevant, to formulate theological concepts.

At the same time, we are responsible *for* God, for the effort of finding the equilibrium between the risk of speaking and thinking outside the bond of promise, and the cowardice of ceasing to speak and think about God in light of the priority of divine revelation.

This balance informs Luther's operation upon the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. This operation is the effort to find the best possible use (and thus, the limit) of this meaning in order to be able to express the subordination of any

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Gerechtigkeit des Glaubens ist für alles, was wir begreifen und denken können, juristich wie religiös, inkommensurabel."

[39] Negatively: "Unglaube wiederum heißt: […] Gott messen an dem, was wir für Recht und Unrecht, für möglich und unmöglich, für nützlich un schädlich, für gut und böse halten." Iwand, *Glaubensgerechtigkeit*: 13.

[40] See Krodel, "Luther – an Antinomian?": 79. See also WA 12: 675,13–676,4.

possible deontic formulations (any *Sollen*, any concept of justice) under the revelation of God's justice.

This leads to a theological rethinking of the deontic meaning of freedom. The freedom that Luther emphasizes, the freedom that is implied by the bond with the divine promise of forgiveness, is not the freedom *of* the *Sollen*, the freedom of being determined by a non-modal, deontic necessity. Nor is it freedom *from* the *Sollen*, the *abrogatio legis*, the freedom of an absolute arbitrariness, the *adiaphoron morale*. We are always related to the *Sollen*; the distinction between the imperative and the indicative is part of our thinking. The theological meaning of the *Sollen*, the word of the Law, makes sense precisely in light of this theological preservation of the *Sollen*, and it makes sense *as* the negation of the *Sollen* as deontic necessity.

Therefore, the freedom conveyed by the bond of promise is the freedom not from the bonds of the *Sollen*, but from the bonds of the *deontic meaning* of the *Sollen*. It is the freedom of thinking *theologically* about sin and forgiveness by questioning some conditions and theorems of deontic language. It is the freedom to use these conditions as means for grasping the meaning of divine promise, and for acknowledging the situation of the bond with the divine promise in its primacy. It is the freedom to be bound by divine promise, to be bound to think about the *Sollen* and deontic freedom as limited by, dependent upon, and thus re-formulated by the divine promise of forgiveness.

Chapter 7

The Complexity of Justification

1. Two Aspects of Justice

The previous analyses lead into the issue of the conceptualization of God's justice. I begin with a distinction between two aspects of justice. This distinction will be present in the rest of my work. I call these two aspects of justice "imputative justice" and "retributive justice."[1]

Imputative justice corresponds to the formulation of the verdict. It concerns not only the determination of culpability or innocence of the defendant, the confirmation or negation of the charge, but also the *gradus imputationis*, the *degree* of guilt or discharge – for instance, whether all charges are confirmed, or only some of them, or none of them.

The second aspect, retributive justice, usually follows the first, and it corresponds to the formulation of the sentence. It concerns the determination of the punishment or reward in compliance with the verdict.

These two aspects of justice are distinct not only from a "temporal" or "causal" perspective, given that the retributive aspect follows the imputative aspect, and that the imputative implies the retributive. Additionally, they are "functionally" distinct in light of the fact that different juridical entities are appointed to execute the function corresponding to each aspect. In the typical scenario of common law, the imputative aspect defines the function of the jury, and the retributive aspect defines the function of the judge.

In this Chapter and the next, I will focus on the aspect of imputative justice. In Part Three, I will focus on the aspect of retributive justice. Part Three will also feature discussions of the relationship between these two aspects of justice. My conclusion is this: theologically, the relationship between the two aspects of justice concerns the reversal of their usual order. *De servo arbitrio*

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[1] The name "retributive justice" might sound ambiguous in English, given that there is only a negative meaning of the word "retribution," as attribution of a punishment. As I will show, this second function of justice does not deal necessarily with punishment (God's wrath), but also, and foremost, with reward (God's mercy). This is not far from reality; the second moment of judgment, when the "retribution" is to be defined by the judge, may even include a "reward" for the defendant – for instance, a compensation in the case of an unjust accusation. I ask the reader to bear in mind that with the use of the adjective "retributive," I do mean not only the negative aspect of retribution, but also the positive aspect of reward.

presents a paradoxical conception of justice that is based on retributive justice as preceding imputative justice – but more on this later.

This Chapter and Chapter 8 will expand upon two related issues concerning the imputative aspect of justice. In this chapter, I will analyze the issue of justification – or, more precisely, the theological concept of justification. In the next chapter, I will analyze the relationship and distinction between Luther's *De servo arbitrio* and Kant's *Religion* on the conception of God's justice.

2. The Semantic Overabundance of Justification

The theological concept of justification is remarkably complex, especially from a Lutheran perspective. First and foremost, this complexity is due to an overabundance of meanings attributed to this concept.

This is why, in the previous chapter, I approached the issue of God's justice via the path of the promise of forgiveness, instead of through the *via maestra* of the concept of justification. I wanted to avoid the implicit ambiguity of this concept while speaking of *De servo arbitrio*. Now it is time to face this ambiguity: the semantic overabundance of the concept of justification.

I distinguish between three meanings of the theological concept of justification. These meanings are: the forensic meaning, the effective meaning, and the ontological meaning.

The *forensic* justification concerns God's declaration of human righteousness, the divine attribution of the status of *iustus* to a human being. This meaning of justification refers to the divine judgment of the individual. This judgment happens *foro coeli* – outside of the individual. It might be stated that the forensic meaning results from the synthesis between the aspect of *imputatio* (the judgment about the accomplishment of the commandments) and the aspect of *reputatio* (the judgment of the life of the individual).[2] (More on this in section 7 of this Chapter.) In any case, it is important to emphasize that the forensic meaning of justification is distinct from sanctification; it has nothing to do with the movement of moral improvement, nor with the manifestation (and not just imputation) of the status of *iustus*.[3]

The *effective* justification corresponds precisely to this aspect of manifestation, of *being* (and not simply being declared) *iustus*. According to this meaning, divine justification makes the sinner effectively *iustus*; it concerns not the imputation of righteousness, but the *living condition* of righteousness.[4] Therefore, contrary to the forensic meaning, the effective meaning of justification is no longer based on the extrinsic attribution of a judgment, but rather, it refers

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[2] See Preus, *Justification*.
[3] See McGrath, "Forerunners": 223.
[4] See Peura, "Christ as Favour": 42.

to some elements intrinsic to the individual. It corresponds to a change within the individual.[5]

The *ontological* meaning of justification is proposed by members of the aforementioned Finnish School.[6] This position aims to overcome some fallacies allegedly affecting both forensic and effective forms of justification. As discussed in Chapter 3, these fallacies refer to a supposed Neo-Kantian influx in theology. According to this perspective, modern theology has focused mainly on God's effects upon the believer, neglecting the element of God's presence in the believer. Because of this, some representatives of the Finnish School think that the effective aspect of justification has lost its "ontological content in Lutheran theology."[7] Consequently, justification became *existential*.[8] An existential conception of justification must be rejected, according to the Finns, because it focuses not on the being of the redeemed, but on the believer's self-understanding and self-insight. In sum, justification is reduced to a mere psychological matter,[9] a matter of "'just words' and belief."[10]

For some representatives of the Finnish School, the solution to this problem is the restoration of the aspect of the *ontological realism* of justification. This aspect concerns the real presence of Christ in faith. "God changes the sinner ontologically, in the sense that he or she participates in God and in his divine nature, being made righteous and 'a god.'"[11] In light of the emphasis on the real, ontological presence of the divine in the believer, this interpretation of justification closely resembles the concept of sanctification,[12] or even divinization.[13]

Given that, within this ontological meaning, justification is not a matter of external imputation, but a matter of change in the justified, it would perhaps be more accurate to also qualify the ontological meaning of justification as part of

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[5] See Vainio, *Justification and Participation*: 15.

[6] See *supra*, Ch. 3 section 3.

[7] Peura, "Christ as Favour": 46.

[8] See Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 187–188.

[9] See Peura, "Christ as Favour": 47.

[10] Stjerna, "Introduction": xi.

[11] Peura, "Christ as Favour": 48.

[12] See Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis*": 38; Mannermaa, *Christ Present*: 49.

[13] See Mannermaa, *Christ Present*: 43–46 and 53–54. See also Vainio, "Justification": 74, where Vainio uses the term "deification." According to Mannermaa, it is Luther who suggests this synthesis between justification, sanctification, and divinization: "At least on the level of terminology, the distinction, drawn in later Lutheranism, between justification as forgiveness and sanctification as divine indwelling, is alien to the Reformer." Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis*": 38. Along with the connection between justification and sanctification, there is the connection between justification and divinization. This is confirmed by the "analogical" relationship between partial divinization and partial justification. See Mannermaa, *Christ Present*: 28–30 and 58–61.

the semantic set "effective justification".[14] Subsequently, we would have two versions of the meaning of effective justification: an effective-existential justification, and an effective-ontological justification.

Nevertheless, I see a potential ambiguity in this distinction within the effective meaning of justification between effective-existential and effective-ontological justification. On one hand, speaking *in abstracto*, effective justification can be neither existential, nor ontological; it can concern a modification of the condition of the believer (and not just a modification of the believer's self-understanding), and that modification may not automatically entail the presence of Christ in the believer.[15] On the other hand, speaking *in concreto* – that is, assuming hypothetically that Luther's conception of justification is effective – the application of both ontological and existential terminology to his understanding of this "effectiveness" could be considered anachronistic.[16] Therefore, for the sake of clarity, instead of referring to a distinction within the effective meaning of justification, I will continue to distinguish between an effective meaning and an ontological meaning.

3. The Overlapping of the Historical and Systematic Aspects

The complexity is amplified by the fact that each of the three positions on justification claims to be supported by the same historical source: Luther. Each position claims that the meaning of justification it defends corresponds to *Luther's* idea of justification.

According to the "forensic" party, it is Luther's concept of justification that is forensic; the assumption of juridical language is the result of a gradual modification of his theology between 1513 and 1525, when he abdicates his

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[14] For instance, Saarinen in *Luther and the Gift*: 212, speaks of "this effective or 'union with Christ' view of justification."

[15] For instance, the modification can be thought as the effect of a (divine) judgment.

[16] The first occurrence of the terms "ontology" and "existential" appears after Luther. See Lamanna, "Sulla prima occorrenza del termine 'Ontologia'," and Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*. Beside this historical pedantry, what I feel urged to emphasize (as in *supra*, Ch. 2 section 7, note 54) is the arbitrariness of accusing some positions of anachronism. Both "existentialist" and "ontological" interpretations of justification can be accused of historical inaccuracy; therefore, the "ontological" position can be subjected to the same criticism that it levies against the "existentialist" position. I can imagine a possible reply: reading Luther's justification as ontological means applying a model of thinking that can easily precede the first occurrence of the term "ontology." For instance, we speak of ontology in Plato, or in Aristotle, et cetera. However, this reply can be perfectly applied also to the "existentialist" perspective. In sum, no historical interpretation is neutral. Thus, instead of negating a perspective and a tradition of interpretation for its supposed historical incorrectness, it would be perhaps more fruitful to understand why this or that perspective and tradition of interpretation flourished and continues to flourish.

conception of justification as progression towards righteousness and adopts a "doctrine of definitive justification"[17] as imputed righteousness.[18] The association of Luther's position with the forensic meaning of justification is also emphasized in the reference to the *querelle* with the Catholic Church in the dawn of the Reformation. Were Luther's concept of justification effective and not forensic, internal and not external, then perhaps there would be no theological argument for Luther's contrast with sixteenth century Catholic theologians.[19]

According to the "effective" party, Luther conceives justification as effective, and thus intrinsic to the individual. This party argues that the conception of imputative, forensic justice is more "Melanchthonian" than "Lutheran" because it is difficult to find a distinction between individual regeneration and justification in Luther.[20]

Finally, the "ontological" party interprets Luther's concept of justification as the ontological union with Christ, a sort of "theotic" condition of the "sanctified" human being.[21] This interpretation is based on the relationship between the divine "*favor*" of forgiveness of sin and the divine "*donum*" that God makes of himself for the believer.[22] Thus, forgiveness has to do with the real presence of Jesus Christ in the believer, which is God's gift.[23]

However, there seems to be not a complete agreement among the Finns about the relationship between the *favor* and the *donum*.[24] One theory is that the *donum* and the *favor*, God's self-giving and divine forgiveness, are mutually interconnected, for it is precisely this interconnection that enables the ontological dwelling of Christ within the believer.[25] The other option is that the *favor* establishes the *donum*; God's dwelling in the believer depends on God's initiative.[26] But this priority must not be interpreted in a "forensic" way; it does

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[17] Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 288.

[18] See Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 292. For an analysis of the evolution of Luther's idea of justification, I refer to *ivi*: 273 and 289–294, where the author connects Luther's modification of his position on justification to the progressive establishment of the hermeneutical function of the categories of "Law" and "Gospel."

[19] See Maffeis, "Simul iustus": 137–138.

[20] See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*: 238–239.

[21] See Vainio, *Justification and Participation*: 13–14.

[22] See Mannermaa, "Why is Luther": 14.

[23] See Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis*": 33–34. From this point, Mannermaa deduces the "theotic" aspect, that is, the fact that "the believing subject becomes a participant in the 'divine nature.'" *Ivi:* 33. See also Mannermaa, *Christ Present*: 19–22.

[24] See Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 10.

[25] See Mannermaa*, Christ Present*: 57; Peura, "Christ as Favour": 54–58; Reid, "Luther's *Finnlandisierung*": 191.

[26] See Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 195: "I am more inclined to grant God's merciful favour a conceptual primacy over the donum, the effective fruit. I believe that a gift can only be identified as gift if we know the intention of the giver. Thus, divine mercy and benevolence in a way precedes divine gifts."

not mean that the aspect of "recipient" is rejected in the name of the exclusivity of the aspect of "beneficiary."[27] I will discuss the relationship between *favor* and *donum* further in section 7.

This short survey suffices to show an overlap between the historical aspect and the systematic aspect. A study of Luther's idea of justification coincides with the theoretical analysis of the correct meaning of the concept of justification. In sum, each of the three of meanings of justification conceives itself as the most Lutheran *because* it is theologically the most fitting, and at the same time, each of the three parties "justifies" its meaning of justification on the basis of the historical adherence to Luther.

This overlapping between the historical and the systematic is problematic because both aspects deal with purposes, requirements, expectations, and methods that are difficult to harmonize.

The historical aspect entails a study of the sources of Luther's doctrine of justification, and it requires the most neutral (that is, non-specious, non-partisan) interpretation of justification in Luther's theology. This requirement is satisfied by an objective approach to Luther's works – that is, by a study conducted in order to ascertain the degree of continuity and evolution within the course of his theology. As such, the historical approach dismisses all attempts to artificially homogenize Luther's position by overlooking the evolutions (and incoherencies) in his idea of justification as his thought developed.

On the other hand, the systematic aspect concerns the cogency and the relevance of the doctrine of justification. Thus, it requires a conceptualization of justification that is as clear, distinct, and coherent as possible in order for this concept to serve as the central *articulus* within the systematic organization of theology, or as the mark of the *differentia specifica* of protestant (or maybe just Lutheran) theology. Moreover, the systematic aspect concerns the discussion about the consistency and relevance of the centrality of this *articulus*, and thus, it confirms, or improves, or rejects such centrality.

This distinction between the historical and systematic aspects is not a con, but a pro – at least in principle –, because it gives each aspect its legitimacy and specificity. On one hand, the historical aspect implies the difference and the continuity between past and present, giving the past relevance in light of its understanding as "past" from the standpoint of a "present." Thus, no historical research is unaware of the conditions from which it originates – that is, of

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[27] See *ivi*: 199: "Because the work of Christ in justification is, in Mattes's view [that is, in the 'strictly forensic' view] reduced to Christ 'for us', our union with Christ only highlights our role as beneficiaries," and 201: "My transaction to you can only be a gift if my intention is favourably gratuitous. In this very specific and limited sense, there is a conceptual priority of favour over the gift. […] Adherents to forensic justification readily affirm the primacy of merciful favour, but they fail to see the dynamics of one's being both recipient and beneficiary. Adherents of effective justification grasp this dynamic, but they do not see the fine differences between the concepts of favour and gift."

the conditions of the present. This research is a "present" investigating its *own* past.

On the other hand, the historical data gives steadiness to the theoretical effort of theology's self-foundation, thus allowing the latter to avoid the risk of arbitrariness. This applies specifically to issues such as a central *articulus* from which the wholeness of theology is supposed to be deduced (or, at least, to be led back to).

Thus, both the overlapping and the mutual exclusion between the historical and systematic aspects may seem dangerous. It seems that the two aspects can indeed provide a solid ground for investigating justification if they are in dialogue – if each of them informs the other with its own specific approach, results and methodologies. Because of their relationship, both aspects are constantly aware of the risk of minimizing the complexity and richness of historical data (in our case, of Luther's theological thought) for the sake of a forced systematic harmonization.[28]

This approach can help in addressing "systematic" questions, such as "Which is the correct meaning of justification?" or "Which one plays the function of central *articulus*?" Or even more profound: "Is this function still actual?" These questions can be properly addressed not only by reflecting upon a specific *systematic* situation (for instance, the present theological debate on justification), but also, and foremost, by being open and "free" enough to see what historical data can say about this situation.

4. Justification in *De servo arbitrio*

Within the limits of my argumentation, the historical data I assume is Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. It is interesting to focus on this specific work, because *De servo arbitrio* is one of the least-used sources in analyzing Luther's concept of justification.[29] As such, it is a good benchmark for demystifying specious and partisan readings. Moreover, as I have already emphasized,[30] the importance of this reference is stressed by Luther himself, who considered *De servo arbitrio* one of only two of his works worth saving from the fire.

One reason for the absence of *De servo arbitrio* in the literature on justification might be the fact that the noun "iustificatio" only appears five times in the text, and all five references are on the same page (771,1.5.22.25.27). However, the vocabulary semantically connected to the concept of justification

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[28] This is one of the main criticisms of the Finnish "ontological" conception of justification (see Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 307–310).

[29] See Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 293.

[30] See *supra*, Ch. 2 section 10.

("iustificare," "iustificati," et cetera) appears more often, and that appears most often on pages 771–773.

The first reference to justification is an example of God operating *sub contrario*: "Sic Deus dum vivificat, facit illud occidendo; dum iustificat, facit illud reos faciendo. (633,10). The second entry has a rhetorical purpose, instead of a theological one; it is a quotation from Matthew 12:37 that Luther uses against Erasmus (659,36).

The third reference (693,2) is theological. Luther discusses the distinction between the Old and New Testaments: if the Old Testament is the word of Law and menace, the New Testament is the word of the promise of forgiveness, and of *exhortations*. Exhortations incite those who are *already justified* ("iam iustificatos") to continue bearing the fruits of the Spirit, to continue believing. This means that the *iustificati* experienced a "renascentia, innovatio, regeneratio" (693,8–9) through the Spirit, and the exhortations help in enduring such *renascentia*.

It can be deduced that Luther distinguishes between a situation *before* and a situation *after* the *iustificatio*. However, it is important to emphasize that the *renascentia* is not a modification of the human condition; it is not a sort of anthropological revolution of the status of the sinner – even the justified ones are still flesh, *carnales*, and hence impious. (735,30–31)

The next reference takes the attention away from God justifying the human and towards the human considering God just or unjust. More precisely, it refers to the incoherent human judgment of God's action: God is considered just if God saves those who deserve to be saved, and justifies those who would deserve to be condemned (730,16–34). The incoherence refers to the fact that God's action is understood to be simultaneously in compliance with and divergent from the implication connecting the accomplishment to the judgment of the accomplishment. In fact, this implication is invoked only in the case of divine reward; God shall acknowledge the merits of whom God is judging. In the case of divine retribution, the implication is not applicable; the sinner shall not be condemned. According to Luther, if God is praised when God justifies who does not deserve to be justified, then it would make sense to also praise God when God punishes one who does not deserve to be punished. Luther writes: "utrobique enim par iniquitas, si sensum nostrum spectes." (730,33–34)

The incoherence that Luther attacks here is based on the scholastic distinction between the merit *de condigno* and the merit *de congruo*.[31] These terms refer to two different conceptions of the relationship between accomplishment and the corresponding judgment. According to the merit *de condigno*, the accomplishment is perfectly adequate to meet expectations; thus, the merit is proportional to the worth of the accomplishment. According to the merit *de congruo*, the accomplishment is *in*adequate with respect to expectations; thus, the

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[31] I will expand upon this issue in *infra*, Ch. 9 section 3.

reward is bestowed not upon the accomplishment per se, but upon the evaluation of the person's life intended as *synthetic unity* of all possible accomplishments.[32] In sum, a sinner who should be condemned according to the merit *de condigno* is saved according to the merit *de congruo*.

Luther rejects this distinction because the two kinds of merit are based on the same logic of consequentiality between accomplishment and judgment: in both cases a reward (divine justification) is given in light of a merit, whether sufficient or insufficient. The merit *de congruo* is identical to the merit *de condigno* because the merit *de congruo* is also sufficient to obtain God's justification (770,4–10). For both strict, quantitative worth (*de condigno*) and broad, qualitative worth (*de congruo*), it is a matter of worth – that is, of merit. Therefore, because it is a matter of merit, human accomplishment has logical priority over the judgment of it. God's judgment is expected to acknowledge human merit, and to reward it. It follows that justification is no longer given *per gratiam*, because it is a reaction to human action. God's judgment complies with human expectations of reward; God's initiative *follows* human initiative (769,25–32). God's justification is expected to *conform* to such logic of inference between merit and reward (729,24–730,2).[33]

In light of this incoherence, Luther stresses that divine justification does *not* adhere to human merits (730,20.24; 784,7). Commenting on Romans 3:20–28 and Galatians 3:10 (763,32–33; 765,20.24–25.29; 767,32; 768,7; 773,32), Luther underscores that justification is not the consequence of any human accomplishment (763,31–764,34), because only condemnation ensues from the realization of the commandment (764,4–10).[34]

This means that the logic of merit through works is insufficient for understanding the *gratuity* of justification: "Gratuita iustificatio non fert, ut operarios statuas, quod manifeste pugnent, gratis donari et aliquo opere parari" (771,5–6; see also 771,20–29). This is precisely what the Gospel says: justification is *unconditioned*, precisely because it comes from God (769,32–34; 770,38).

In sum, justification is *divine* because it is unconditioned by any condition, concept, or form of justice (784,9–11). Divine justification is not subjected to the human meaning of justification.

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[32] This idea of divine judgment – based on the capacity of God to see the infinite human progress towards the good as unity – is also present in Kant, *Religion*: B 55, Ak 48. I will return to this in the next chapter.

[33] The relationship between merit and reward is further discussed in *infra*, Ch. 9, 10, and 11.

[34] This is because, as seen in *supra*, Ch. 5 section 6, the realization of the *Sollen* implies the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*, and thus, it corresponds theologically to the perpetuation of the condition of sin.

5. Two Ways of Justification's Unconditionality

This short survey shows that divine justification is unconditioned in two different, yet interconnected ways: in a semantic way, and in a formal way.

The semantic way focuses on the meaning of justification. Divine justification is unconditioned because nobody can accomplish anything for it. No merit can be attributed, not only in the case of the infringement of the commandment, but also, and foremost, in its realization (772,32). Were the opposite the case, were God's justification to be led back to human meters of justice – and specifically, to the connection between merit (regardless of whether the merit is *de congruo* or *de condigno*) and reward – then God's action towards humans would follow some principles of justice, such as those in Justinian's *Corpus iuris civilis*, or the fifth book of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (729,20–21). This would pervert the correct order of priority between God and human being (729,13–730,2). Theologically, it is illicit to "expostulare" (729,15), to claim to place something over divine revelation in light of the revelation that divine justification is *gratuita*.

The "expostulare" is the theoretical attitude imposing upon God's justice a human meaning of justice – specifically, a concept of justice that asserts consequentiality between merit and reward. This attitude is what defines the "iustitiarii" (783,28).[35] *Iustitiarii* are those who base their own justification upon the realization of commandments. They implement the inversion of priority between human and divine initiative; they deduce divine justification from human action, making divine justification *dependent* upon human action. Therefore, being impious coincides with forcing divine justification to comply with a conception of justice, thus considering oneself and one's works through the logic of implication that connects accomplishment to merit, and merit to (divine) reward (772,4–11).

This leads to the *formal* unconditionality of divine justification. Here, "unconditionality" does not refer to the meaning of justification, but to the condition of the formulation of that meaning. It refers to the fact that the theological concept of justification does not belong to the set "imputative concept of justification."

The imputative concept of justification is negatively related to imputative justice. Imputative justice interprets a *Sein* (an action, a behavior, or conduct) deontically; it establishes a connection between a *Sein* and a *Sollen*. The *Sein* is either the realization or the non-realization of the frastic of a *Sollen*. In the case of non-realization, the *Sein* is the object of a judgment of negative

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[35] See Gogarten, *Luthers Theologie*: 304.

imputation.[36] By symbolizing the negative imputation upon the non-realization of "*p*" (frastic of OB*p*) as "NegImp ¬*p*," we have:[37]

$$\text{OB}p \rightarrow \Diamond p, \text{OB}p \wedge \neg p \vDash \text{NegImp } \neg p$$

It is evident that the negative imputation is inferred from the *Sein* (¬*p*) of the violation of a *Sollen* (OB*p* ∧ ¬*p*).[38]

Justification ("Just") is built upon this negative imputation. It is the negation of the negative imputation.[39] The imputative concept of justification (Just$_{imp}$) can be formalized as:

$$\text{Just}_{imp} = \neg \,(\text{NegImp } \neg p)$$

It is confirmed that the imputative concept of justification complies with human expectations of imputative justice in a counter-intuitive way: the expectation of a negative imputation is needed in order for the positive imputation called "justification" to be formulated and to have meaning.

From what analyzed, it follows that the negative imputation is based on something that precedes the imputation itself. This "something" is the object of the negative imputation, the object that is expected to be judged negatively: the *Sein*, deontically understood as non-realization of a *Sollen*. Given that the positive imputation is negatively connected to the negative imputation, the positive imputation is conditioned by two things: the action (of non-realization), and consequently, the expectation of negative imputation.

Theology conceptualizes justification differently. The theological concept of justification refers to something (divine justification) that is not conditioned upon something other than itself. Divine justification does not follow from human initiative, and therefore, it does not depend upon the deontic interpretation

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[36] As mentioned in *supra*, Ch. 5 section 2, this judgment is the *Sein* of another *Sollen* called "sanction."

[37] This is a *tollendo tollens* on OB*p* → ◊p.

[38] The inference from *Sein* to imputation does not concern the inference between *Sollen* and imputation. This inference can proceed intuitively from the *Sollen* to the sanction, or (counter-intuitively) from the sanction to the *Sollen*. In the latter case, the *Sollen* OB*p* is valid because the *Sein* ¬*p* (violation) is sanctioned (for instance, see Kelsen, *Reine Rechtslehre*: 60–64, 72–80, 152–162, and 191–195). In other words, the imputation can be interpreted to have logical priority over the validity of the obligation. These variations in the inference are not relevant for the analysis of the theological concept of justification. What matters here is simply the relationship between *Sein* and imputation, not between *Sollen* and imputation: both negative imputation and the imputative concept of justification need an object (a *Sein*) to refer to and judge.

[39] As discussed in the previous chapter, in reference to the theological concept of forgiveness, from a non-theological, "imputative justice" perspective a positive *imputatio* is formulated *because* a negative *imputatio* should be formulated.

of a *Sein*. This means that divine justification is the meter of itself; it is unconditioned. It is *gratia*. For this reason, Luther establishes the relationship between divine justification and *faith* (775,13–16). Thinking about justification theologically coincides with believing in the revelation of justification as absolute *gratia*.

It follows that the theological concept of justification does not depend on the conditions of the conceptualization and thinkability of justification based on imputative justice.[40] In other words, conceiving justification theologically corresponds to the effort of formulating a concept of justification that does not depend upon the inference of an imputation from an action.

6. The Process of Imputation

To expand upon this inference between action and imputation, I begin by clarifying an important element purposely left unmentioned in Chapter 5. The frastic of a *Sollen* determines the corresponding *Sein* (action, behavior, or conduct) in general, not specifically. That is, an obligation does not present the description of every possible punctual accomplishment of it. Rather, the *Sollen* embraces *synthetically* all possible accomplishments, analogous to the way that a law of nature is the synthetic formalization of all possible events submitted to this law.

For instance, in the obligation "Do not smoke," the frastic "Not smoking" indicates neither the place where nor the time when the action of no smoking should be accomplished. It would be useless to update this obligation every day, or at every place, or for every actual or potential violator (this would require a list of all smokers).

It follows that the realization of the *Sollen* is the specification of its frastic in a singular, unique action. This operation inserts the frastic into a set of contingencies that the frastic does not and cannot indicate – since, again, we are talking about imperatives, not indicatives. These contingencies are, for instance, a specific actor, a specific moment of accomplishment, a specific place, some specific circumstances, et cetera. This is why there are moral dilemmas, conflicts between "oughts": given that the *Sollen* does not say anything about the specific situation, more than one *Sollen* can fit the same situation.[41] In other words, the same situation can be deontically interpreted in a plurality of ways.

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[40] Similarly, considering Jesus Christ a judge in the sense of imputative justice means making Christ a terrible judge (778,13–16) because divine justification is substituted with a judgment of imputation that can only be one of condemnation.

[41] This case is exemplified by the famous dilemma of Benjamin Constant concerning whether it is preferable to tell the truth and reveal to an assassin the presence of the assassin's target, or to tell a lie and save a human life. In his *Des réactions politiques*, 74, while arguing

Therefore, there is no one-to-one ratio between frastic and the action of realizing the frastic. The action is not equal to the frastic, but to the *sum* of the frastic and the situation – that is, all "boundary conditions" that occur in the determination of the action. Thus, there is no certainty that the realization will indeed correspond to the frastic, nor that, once accomplished, the realization will indeed correspond to the frastic.[42]

This uncertainty in the realization also affects the judgment of the realization. Given that the action never overlaps perfectly with the frastic (since it contains more than the frastic), the judgment of the correspondence between "being" and "ought" – action and frastic – is neither automatic nor immediate. Rather, the judgment of imputation is the fruit of a trial, of a process of evaluating evidence and witnesses. In sum, the connection between a case and the norm is the result of an inductive process connecting the empirical specificity of the action to the deontic generality of the *Sollen*.[43] Due to this inductive nature, there is no absolute certainty of the judgment of imputation; otherwise, the process of trial would also be superfluous. This is why there can be different verdicts for the same case.[44]

Given that the imputative concept of justification depends on the negative imputation, this inductive process of imputation and this uncertainty are also intrinsic to justification. In other words, the same action can be considered justifiable for some boundary conditions and not justifiable for other boundary conditions. Luther is perfectly aware of this uncertainty. The *iustitiarii*, the

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about the fact that an absolute and isolated assumption of a duty would turn "toute société impossible," Constant criticizes "un philosophe allemand" who asserted the unconditioned validity of the duty to tell the truth, even when telling a lie would be the reasonable thing to do. According to Constant, the solution to the dilemma is this: "Dire la vérité n'est donc un devoir qu'envers ceux qui ont droit à la vérité. Or nul homme n'a droit à la vérité qui nuit autrui" (75–76). Kant replied to Constant in *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*. Apparently, this "philosophe allemand" was identified as Kant himself (see Kant, *Lügen*: Ak VIII 425), although nothing indicates that Kant had defended such a position before (see Benton, "Political Expediency": 138 note 11). Kant bases his reply on the function of the duty of truth-telling in the political contract, and thus, on the priority of this duty over other duties (see Kant, *Lügen*: Ak VIII 426–427). I analyzed this *querelle* in Vestrucci, *Il movimento*: 44–46.

[42] The realization of an "ought" has only a circumstantial and not an absolute validity, precisely because this validity depends on something (the "ought") that defines the accomplishment in general, and not specifically. An action can indeed be the realization of a *Sollen* for the actor, but nothing assures that every possible observer would judge the same. This is the reasoning at the basis of Goethe's famous motto: "Der Handelnde ist immer gewissenlos, es hat niemand Gewissen als der Betrachtende" (Goethe, *Maximen*: 241).

[43] In Vestrucci, "*Cuique suum*", I analyze this hermeneutical nature of the *imputatio* and I present a possible formalization for this "uncertainty principle" inherent to imputative justice.

[44] For instance, when the same case passes from the first degree of judgment to the second degree of judgment (the appeal).

ones who seek justification through realization of the *Sollen*, are constantly in doubt about whether God would approve of this realization (783,24–27).

The position of the *iustitiarii* exemplifies negatively the way how justification should *not* be thought theologically. On one hand, divine justification is not dependent upon the deontic evaluation of a *Sein*. On the other hand, the uncertainty affecting imputative judgment depends on the gap between the specificity of the *Sein* and the generality of the *Sollen*. It follows that conceiving justification theologically means dismissing the uncertainty related to imputative justice. It means thinking about a justification ("divine justification") that does not satisfy the need for certainty concerning justification, precisely because this need depends on the inference of imputation from a *Sein*, deontically understood. Divine justification can only be thought as the *negation* of this need for certainty.[45]

Thus, the independence of divine justification from the inferential structure of imputative justice leads to the invalidation of the imputative structure when this structure is applied to divine justification. Imputative justice cannot synthesize a justification (called "divine justification") that is absolute *gratia*, a justification independent from the inference of an imputation from an action.

Therefore, applying the structure of imputative process to the theological discourse on justification produces a fallacy: either the resulting concept of justification does not correspond to its object (divine justification), since it is a concept of justification conditioned by a *Sein* and, thus, by a negative imputation; or the resulting concept is not theological.

It follows that the theological concept of justification constitutes an operation upon imputative justice. Thinking about justification theologically means rethinking the conceptualization of justification from the *gratia*, the unconditionality, of divine justification.[46]

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[45] Divine justification does not satisfy the need for justification, because this need has sense only in the semantic framework of imputative justice. Therefore, divine justification creates the need for divine justification – I would say: divine justification is the revelation of the need for a justification that does not answer to any need. Therefore, divine justification does not satisfy a need; rather, it is its own need. This confirms the theological limitation of the imputative framework: imputative justification can satisfy the need for justification always *ex post* (that is, because of the non-realization of a *Sollen*) and never *ex ante*. The effort of formulating a theological concept of justification corresponds to the effort of expressing the perpetual dissatisfaction of the need for justification.

[46] Justification is connected to a negative imputation. This is also valid for the theological concept of justification. Yet, theologically, the concept of justification does not follow from a negative imputation, since (divine) justification is assumed to precede any *Sein* deontically understood. Thus, theologically, the relationship between justification and negative imputation does not proceed from the negative imputation to justification but from justification to negative imputation. Thinking about justification theologically means conceiving justification as the origin (and not the consequence) of a negative imputation. Given that divine justification does not refer to a single action (since, again, it follows from *no* action), the

7. From *absolutus* to *subiectus*

This reflection clarifies the function of the theological concept of justification.

The imputative concept of justification, as much as every judgment of imputation, is definitive. For precisely this reason, this judgment is sought by the *iustitiarii*; it is the ultimate discharge of the *iustitiarii*'s guilt (or fear of guilt). Once the judgment is formulated, the justified one is no longer under judgment; she or he is free to leave the *forum*. Yet, leaving the *forum* means ceasing to be related to it. Imputative justification is a moment; it is the conclusion of the process of imputative judgment.

This leaving the *forum*, this being the conclusion, are the opposite of the theological concept of justification. Theologically, justification has nothing to do with the verdict of "*Absolutus!*", given that the only thing to be "*absolutus*" is the divine power of justification itself, and not the justified one. Therefore, from the theological standpoint, the judgment of justification is transformed into "*Subiectus!*" The one that is justified is constantly *subiectus*, constantly *in* the forum, constantly in a sinful situation – precisely because divine justification is *gratia*, it is unconditioned by any action. In other words, the *renascentia* of the *iustificatus* does not mean that one is no longer bonded to sin. Rather, the *renascentia* means that one becomes aware that sin is not an action, but a condition.

This echoes the analysis of the bond of the promise of forgiveness in the previous chapter. At that point, I used the concept of the promise of forgiveness, not because it is better to substitute a cold juridical image with a loving, consoling one,[47] but rather because the concept of promise, instead of implying the idea of discharge, conveys the idea of the constant reference to the bond that the promise institutes, and thus the constant return to this bond. The concept of the promise of forgiveness intuitively presents the fact that conceiving

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negative imputation that it connected to it applies to *every* possible action. Therefore, the theological concept of justification thinks about divine justification as the foundation *not* of the certainty of justification, but of the theological *certainty of sin* – that is, of the *secundus usus legis*. From this, I tentatively present the following formalization of the theological concept of justification (Just⊖): Just⊖ ⊨ (OBp → □¬p). Three things must be noted. First, the relationship between action and imputation is reversed. Justification is not connected to any action not only because it precedes action, but more importantly, because every possible action is judged *in light of justification* (it is judged as sin). Second, the formula is specular to the imputative concept of justification – it has the same elements (justification and the implication between *Sollen* and *Sein*), but the order of the elements is inverted: divine justification logically precedes the implication. Third, the theological concept of justification semantically entails the *secundus usus*; this means that the theological concept of justification introduces a (new) metalinguistic relationship between imputation and obligation (or, more precisely, it modifies the standard metalinguistic relationship).

[47] See Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 269, 272.

justification theologically means never leaving the *forum*, and always referring to the *forum*.

I consider this from the perspective of deontic freedom. From a deontic point of view, freedom is the realization of a *Sollen*. The violation of a *Sollen* is the negation of this freedom. Thus, the negative imputation is meant to restore deontic freedom, and imputative justification restores deontic freedom in an immediate way, with no charge. Thanks to justification, one is *absolutus*, leaves the *forum*, and can continue to be deontically free (free to realize other "oughts," other *Sollen*).

From the theological point of view, divine justification is not at the service of deontic freedom. Given that it does not depend on the action of violation, it does not depend on deontic freedom, either. Instead of entering the stage in order to restore deontic freedom, divine justification enters the stage (that is to say, it is revealed) because it is free – it is absolute *gratia*. Therefore, divine justification subordinates deontic freedom to itself. One is constantly *coram foro*, *subiectus*, because one is constantly subjected to the divine freedom to give justification.

This theological negation of deontic freedom is the affirmation of the *formal freedom* to rethink the priority of deontic freedom over justification. It is the formal freedom to conceive justification as *gratia*, as unconditioned by the structure of imputative justice – and consequently, to rethink the validity of this structure in light of a specific object, a specific justification: divine justification.

This confirms that the theological concept of justification questions the application of the structure of imputative justice to produce concepts of justification that are compatible with their object (divine justification). Therefore, conceiving justification theologically means affirming that the formal language that conceptualizes justification has undergone a modification, because theologically, it can operate only from (and thus is dependent upon) divine justification. In sum, theologically there is no "before" and "after" the *forum*, or before and after divine justification, because the *theological thinkability* of justification depends on the reference to a justification that is formally unconditioned.

This reflection clarifies the nature of the operation effected by the theological concept of justification upon imputative justice. The theological concept of justification fulfills a *meta-conceptual* function. It limits the validity of any possible concept of justification that is considered to be an adequate conceptualization of divine justification. This meta-conceptual function consists in representing, in every theological conceptualization of justification, the formal

superiority of divine justification *qua* origin of the process of thinking about justification theologically.[48]

This hints at the conclusion of the previous chapter: the theological concept of justification prevents God's justice from being subsumed under (and made adequate for) human forms of justice. The theological concept of justification is possible through rejecting the adequacy of God's justice according to the structure of imputative justice – that is, only through subordinating under divine justification the supposed priority of the conditions of thinkability and conceptualization of justification.[49]

8. Addressing the Historical Complexity

The previous reflections help to better understand both the historical and systematic aspects of the issue of justification.

The historical aspect concerns the question of which of the three meanings of justification is espoused by Luther.

In light of the previous references to imputative justice and imputative justification, the forensic definition seems to be closest to Luther's position. But this proximity is not due to the fact that the theological concept of justification is a kind of forensic justification. Rather, it is due to the fact that the theological concept of justification is an operation upon the conditions of the thinkability of forensic justification. The theological concept of justification is the expression not only of the theological limitation of the condition of the non-theological concept of justification, but also of the fact that the only concept of justification compatible with such limitation corresponds not to a concept, but to the operation of dismantling the imputative structure, the logic upon which any forensic meaning depends.

This has repercussions on the other two meanings of justification: the effective and the ontological.

The meaning "effective justification" focuses on Luther's reference to the *renascentia*. But again, this *renascentia* does not mean that one becomes suddenly *iustus*, because being *iustus* means being *absolutus*, thus no longer being *peccator*. On the contrary, both aspects of *iustus* and *peccator* depend on divine justification. This is confirmed by the fact that Luther rejects any distinction

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[48] This meta-conceptual function of the theological concept of justification is already expressed in the tentative formalization of the theological concept of justification, as in note 46, and specifically in the fact that the theological concept of justification formulates a meta-linguistic statement of semantic entailment.

[49] For this reason, some (for instance, Gregersen, "Ten Theses") think that the relevance of the doctrine of justification is detrimental to the relevance of the message of and as divine revelation, not only in the case of theology in general, but also in the case of Luther scholarship.

between the terms of *imputare* and *reputare* – that is, between the concepts of imputation (concerning the realization of the "ought") and consideration (concerning the "being" of human life). More precisely, Luther considers the verbs *reputare* and *imputare* as synonyms.[50] For instance, he uses both in the same passage when he analyses Romans 4:4–5 and 4:8.[51]

The exclusion of this distinction confirms that Luther does not consider the *iustificatus* as *iustus* in imputative terms, or as discharged. On the contrary, the *iustificatus* is justified precisely because the imputation (the relation to the "ought") is not annulled, but rather, elevated to a *theological* meaning in light of the reference to divine justification. As already mentioned, the *iustificatus* is constantly subjected to the power of God's judgment (God's wrath[52]), constantly within the *forum*, constantly "*Subiectus*!"[53]

Finally, I analyze the ontological meaning by returning to the relationship between *favor* and *donum*. As discussed earlier, the representatives of the Finnish School present two options for this relationship: either the *favor* is superior to the *donum* (because it clarifies that what is received is indeed a *donum*), or the two aspects of *favor* and *donum* are equipollent (because the real presence of Jesus Christ in the believer depends upon their interrelation). I see difficulties with both options.

The first option neglects that it is the *fact* of the *donum* that allows one to *know* about the donor; the *donum* creates the relationship between one who receives and the one who gives.[54] Therefore, the *provider* "depends" on the *donum* in order to *be* such provider, and to be acknowledged as such.[55] The *donum*, the revelation of and as justification, creates the bond, and thus, it is the source of thinking about God as justifier and about the human being as

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[50] On the lack of semantic distinction between *imputare* and *reputare*, see Scott Clark, "*Iustitia imputata*"*:* 280 note 48.

[51] See WA 18: 772,11–18: "Altera est fidei iustitia, quae constat non operibus ullis, sed favente et reputante Deo per gratiam. Ac vide, quomodo Paulus nitatur verbo reputandi, ut urgeat, repetat et inculcet. Ei (inquit) qui operatur, merces non reputatur secundum gratiam, sed secundum debitum, Ei vero, qui non operatur, credit vero in eum, qui iustificat impium, reputatur fides eius ad iustitiam secundum propositum gratiae Dei. Tum adducit David itidem de *reputatione* gratiae dicentem: Beatus vir, cui non *imputavit* Dominus peccatum etc." (emphases added).

[52] See Peura, "Christ as Favour": 62. Wüthrich, "On Justification": 244 presents an indirect (and probably unaware) answer to the attempt of the Finnish School to reconcile a Lutheran conception of justification with an orthodox conception of *theosis* by stating the impossibility of synthesizing the two.

[53] Again: for Luther, *renascentia* coincides with having faith, and thus with justification, not with sanctification (see Wengert, *Defending Faith*: 308 note 294). Therefore, it is not a question of a supposed ontological transformation intended as passage from a situation of sin to a situation of sanctity (see Bielfeldt, "Ontology": 11).

[54] See Askani, "Rechtfertigung": 142.

[55] See *ivi*: 144.

justified. It is precisely because divine justification is unconditioned by the structure of imputative justice (it is theologically *gratia*) that it is a *donum*; and, vice-versa, it is precisely because it is a *donum* that it is the source, the origin, of my theological thinking about it as *gratia*.

However, this does not mean that the *donum* has priority over the *favor*. Rather, it means that there is no distinction between *donum* and *favor*. This is a sort of radicalization of the second option; the aspect of the change (*donum*) coincides with the aspect of the judgment (*favor*). The two aspects are not simply interrelated; they are one and the same. It is impossible to speak theologically of justification (*favor*) without considering it as a *donum*, as *gratia* – that is, without considering the *favor* as (formally) unconditioned, as ab-solute. The meaning of the *favor* is based on nothing other than itself; thus, it is *donum*.[56]

Similarly, it is impossible to think about the change (the *renascentia*) as something distinct from the bond created by justification, given that the change *is* this bond. The change is the fact that divine justification is now the source of rethinking the structure of consequentiality that shapes the non-theological meaning of justification. In sum, the change is the fact of thinking about justification *theologically*, *from* divine justification about the theological limitation of the inferential structure of imputative justice, and not to think about divine justification from the structure of imputative justice.

9. Addressing the Systematic Complexity

This clarification leads us back to a discussion of the systematic aspect.

All three meanings of justification are somehow limited. Each one speaks of "justification," and in each case it is a matter of a specific meaning of the concept of justification. Yet, as discussed already, formulating the theological concept of justification means operating upon the structure of the non-theological conceptualization of justification. This operation consists of making such structure conditioned, dependent, and re-moved by divine justification – by what would be, in the standard situation, the object of this structure.

It follows that it is theologically irrelevant which of the three meanings of justification is the right one, which one better says *what* divine justification is. Rather, what matters theologically is *how* the conceptualization of justification (regardless of which meaning) is conducted, and *how* a concept of justification can say the absolute and unconditioned *gratia* of divine justification.

This "how" corresponds to the assumption of God's initiative as unconditioned by, and thus having *priority* over, the structure of conceptualization of

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[56] Consequently, concerning the theological meaning of justification, it is also not clear to me how the beneficiary is truly distinct from the recipient.

justification. It corresponds to expressing and attesting, through and within each possible conceptualization and meaning of justification, that such conceptualization of justification is moved by the absolute, un-sourced, un-originated freedom of God.[57] This freedom is divine justification. In other words, any possible theological concept of justification expresses that its own possibility (the possibility of formulating the concept of divine justification) depends on what is unconditioned by any meaning of justification.

In sum, what is theologically relevant is the meta-conceptual function of any possible theological concept of justification, a function that a concept of justification fulfills with regard to the conceptualization of justification. By stating the unconditionality of divine justification from the structure of every possible conceptualization of justification, the theological concept of justification makes us aware that, theologically, the language of justification must constantly affirm its own dependence on divine *gratia* alone, and thus, it must constantly negate its being in compliance with the structure of imputative justice.

More precisely, this meta-conceptual function consists in the rejection of the *formal* "*self-justification*" of any possible theological concept of justification. By formal "self-justification," I intend the validation of a concept through the application of the conditions of its formulation. The theological concept of justification affirms its own *non*-self-justification, since this formal procedure implies the unaltered, unchanged preservation of the priority of the conditions of the thinkability of justification. Thus, the structure of any possible meaning of the concept "justification" is the *object* of the theological concept of justification.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, this discourse seems paradoxical – a concept operating upon its own conditions generates a loop. But again, this loop is due to the fact that the operation upon the conceptual level is possible only through use of the conditions of this conceptual level. For the theological concept of justification, the conditions for conceptualizing justification are applied in light of *a* justification (the divine one) that is *not* produced by these conditions. Thus, the paradoxical outcome is avoided because the purpose of the theological conceptualization of justification is the formulation of the limitation of the conditions of this conceptualization. These conditions are theologically limited because they cannot produce a concept of justification as *gratia*, as unconditioned from any condition of conceptualization – and thus, as the source of the conceptualization of justification.

It follows that all three meanings of divine justification are limited because they focus on the conceptual aspect, neglecting the "meta" function of the theological concept of justification. All three "parties" refer to the structure of imputative justice, since all three use the term "justification." Therefore, the

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[57] See Askani, "Rechtfertigung": 152.

problem is that all the three neglect the theological modification of the language of imputative justice because all the attention is focused on the effort to formally "justify" a specific meaning as an exhaustive meaning of divine justification. This is what equates all three positions: all of them are formally identical because they equally assume *not* divine justification, but the structure of the conceptualization of justification (regardless of the specific meaning) as unconditioned, absolute. Precisely because of this formal identity, there is no criterion apt to ultimately decide between the three meanings.

At the same time, this formal interchangeability (I would say: undecidability) between the three meaning clarifies the solution to the issue. It is not divine justification that is forensic, or effective, or ontological. Rather, it is *our understanding* of divine justification that is forensic, or effective, or ontological.

This is exemplified by the famous debate between Ritschl and Holl on whether justification is a synthetic judgment or an analytic judgment.[58] According to Ritschl, the predication of justification has the form of a synthetic judgment; justification is not implied in the subject of the predication, since human being is not "*recht*" in itself, but is *made* "*recht*," or recht-*fertig*.[59] According to Holl, justification has the form of an analytic judgment; the subject is predicated in light of its justification; thus, it is "*recht*" for the sake of God's judgment.

The very fact of an interchangeability as about which of the two forms of judgment divine justification belongs to is, again, the evidence that each position makes divine justification dependent either on the analytic form, or on the synthetic form. Each position considers the conditions of either synthetic or analytic judgment of justification as unconditioned. Thus, determining which form of judgment is God's justification means determining which form of judgment is *our conceptualization* of God's justification. It is *not* God's justification, but *Ritschl's* or *Holl's* formulation of the concept of God's justification that is synthetic or analytic.

10. Beyond the "*articulus*" Complex

My perspective on the formal aspect of the theological concept of justification, and from this, on its formal function, also helps to address the issue of justification as *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*."[60]

I claim that the central role played by the theological concept of justification within theology does not refer to the fact that this concept is a sort of "theory

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[58] See Härle, "Rechtfertigungslehre"; Rostagno, *Doctor Martinus*: 78–87.

[59] Again, this implies a semantic distinction between the *imputatio* and the *reputatio*, which can elicit criticisms, at least in reference to *De servo arbitrio*.

[60] For a survey on the sources of this motto, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*: vii note 1.

of everything," an "axiom"[61] from which all possible "theorems" of theology are deduced and systematized. Rather, this centrality refers to the fact that this concept affirms that any theological concept of justification must attest to the superiority of divine justification to all conditions of the conceptualization of justification. As such, it is perhaps the clearest example of the formal freedom that characterizes theology: the freedom to invert the priority between divine revelation and "self-justified" axioms of conceptualization.

I exemplify this by referring briefly to Jüngel's position on justification. Jüngel seems to conceive of the doctrine of justification as a method for grasping theology in synthetic unity, a sort of axiomatic structure apt to found and validate all other theological statements. He writes:

> Wer Skopus und Fundament erfaßt, der hat das Ganze [*sc.* of the truth of the Gospel] erfasst. […] Um das *Ganze* zu erfassen, muß man also keineswegs *alles* erfassen, was zu diesem Ganzen gehört. Eines genügt. Denn Skopus und Fundament sind ein und dasselbe, nämlich die Rechtfertigung allein durch den Glauben.[62]

It is no surprise that this passage follows directly from Jüngel's reflection on the problem of the "assecutus" (605,6–14). As analyzed in Chapter 2, this is the passage in *De servo arbitrio* in which Luther discusses a sort of "theological" deductive structure of reasoning.

I distinguish two interpretations of Jüngel's position: either his position concerns the doctrine of justification, or it concerns the event of divine justification. In the first case, if the doctrine of justification is the synthesis of all truths of Gospel, then a theological conceptualization of the Gospel itself is also a conceptualization that begins from the fact of divine revelation. Theological conceptualization follows the *ex ante* of the Gospel. But this leads to an incoherence: divine revelation would need the formulation of the concept "Rechtfertigung allein durch den Glauben" in order to be grasped. In sum, the *ex ante* would depend on an *ex post*. In the second case (the event of justification), everything that can be said about the Gospel is synthesized because of the reference to *Rechtfertigung*. But again, there is an incoherence: if justification plays the role of the foundation, then all possible reflections begin *from* it, and thus, they cannot refer *to* it.

Regardless of the distinction between the doctrine and the event of justification, claiming that the foundation is grasped in terms of the concept of justification means that justification defines the boundary of theological language. Therefore, justification is identical to any other possible boundary definition. In other words, the Gospel is no longer identical to this foundation precisely because this foundation is the result of a reflection upon the Gospel; this foundation, this synthetic unit, is but a concept of the Gospel.

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[61] See McGrath, "Forerunners."

[62] Jüngel, "… unum aliquid assecutus": 70; see also *Id.*, *Il vangelo*: 32.

My position is different: the theological concept of justification has nothing to do with grasping the synthetic unity of all possible theological statements. Rather, the theological concept of justification is the representation of the fact that any theological definition of an axiomatic system cannot be applied *upon over* the Gospel, because it is applied *from* the Gospel. This means that there is no such a thing as an axiom for theology, because – if we still want to talk in terms of axioms – theology is a reflection upon the self-validation (the formal "self-justification") of all possible axiomatic structures in light of what is independent from any axiomatic structure: divine revelation of and as justification (in the theological meaning).[63]

It would indeed be appropriate to say that divine justification is the foundation of all reflections upon the Gospel, if and only if by "divine justification" we mean not the definition of a foundation, but the definition of the theological limitation of all foundations (and in particular the foundations of the conceptualization of justification). In sum, we can say that divine justification is the foundation of theology if and only if by this we mean that the synthetic unity does not concern what is said about the Gospel, but rather what is said about language itself in light of the Gospel: the fact that every possible statement is, theologically, the expression of what is not divine revelation. In the case of justification, every possible concept of justification is theologically synthesized as "that which cannot express or signify a justification unconditioned from the structure of imputative justice."

Perhaps our theological *Zeitgeist* will progressively reject the primacy of the concept forensic justification by qualifying it as arbitrary doctrine.[64] Or perhaps our *Zeitgeist* is the terrain on which the forensic justification will be revalued.[65] Again, the opposition between these two interpretations is irrelevant; it does not matter which is the specific *Rangordnung* between the concepts of justification, or which concept is more *Zeitgenössig*. Rather, what is theologically relevant is that, for any concept of justification, this concept shall be *theological*. This concept shall remind us that any theological concept of justification comes from divine justification. It is the product of a language always already overcome by its source: divine justification.

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[63] This confirms the conclusion of *supra*, Ch. 4, section 8: theology can be considered as a meta-axiomatic system.

[64] See Scott Clark, "*Iustitia imputata*": 272.

[65] See Wüthrich, "On Justification": 240–241. This thesis seems to neglect the current debate on the aging of – and the consequent attempts to overcome – the forensic meaning of justification. Moreover, I think that Wüthrich's idea that justification is incompatible with the "modern understanding of freedom" (*ivi*: 243) is at the same time true and false. It is true because theology is not a philosophical speculation on freedom; it is false because this "modern understanding of freedom" is precisely the object of the theological understanding of human freedom in relation to God's freedom.

Any concept, any meaning of justification, if it is *theological*, is the reminder that this concept is always already the object of divine justification; it always already derives from the *gratia* of divine justification.

Chapter 8

Luther and Kant

A study of the relationship between Luther and Kant helps to summarize the path from the condition of sin to the issue of imputative justice. It also clarifies some theoretical repercussions resulting from previous analyses in this Second Part.

1. The "Pro/Contra" Aporia

Facing the Luther-Kant relationship from the most impartial approach possible means looking into turbid waters. In fact, a connection between the two German geniuses seems evident or abstruse, depending on which concepts, arguments, and works are considered.

This unclarity is enhanced by the division within the secondary literature between two opposing sides. One party is "pro," affirming the existence of a relationship between some aspects of Luther's theology and some aspects of Kant's conception of religion and faith. Consequently, some representatives of this party place Kant in opposition to Erasmus. The other party is "contra," emphasizing the absence of any positive relationship between Luther and Kant. Consequently, some associate Kant with Erasmus. However, what is worst is that both "pro" and "contra" parties use the *same* texts and concepts by Luther and Kant as evidence for their opposing sides.

This division within the secondary literature is a serious aporia. It implies that, at least *prima facie*, there is no objective criterion for determining which of the two positions is right and which is wrong.

In order to elucidate the reason for this aporia in the state of the arts, and to try to resolve it, a short survey is necessary. Given that an exhaustive survey of the secondary literature is not only beyond the aim and limits of my research, but also scientifically tedious, I present here the elements upon which the two "Pro" and "Contra" parties usually found their arguments.

2. "Pro": Radical Evil

The "Pro" party's argument focuses at least on two elements: the concept of radical evil, along with its anthropological and theoretical consequences; and the assimilation or analogical relationship between some elements taken from Kant's transcendental philosophy and Luther's theology, respectively.[1] I begin with radical evil.

The relevance and complexity of the concept of radical evil was already indirectly recognized by Goethe, who was keen and ready to reject Kant's moral philosophy because of the presence of this concept.[2] Understanding this central concept is essential to fully grasp the extent and limit of Kant's theoretical proximity to Luther.

For Kant, radical evil is strictly connected to moral law. Being evil means knowing about the moral law, but deviating from it in the maxims – that is, in the principles of the determination of the will (B 27, Ak 32).[3] This "deviation" ("Abweichung") does not mean revolting against the moral law (B 33, Ak 36). Rather, it means failing to assume the moral law as the sufficient ("hinreichend") principle of determination of the will (that is, as the neustic of the *Sollen* according to which one acts). In fact, the human being is also subjected to sensible motives ("Triebfedern der Sinnlichkeit"), products of self-love ("Selbstliebe"). These sensible motives can also determine the will; they can contribute to the assumption of a *Sollen*. Hence, there is a contrast between neustics: the same *Sollen* can be assumed because of the moral law, or because of sensible motives.

Therefore, evil does not concern which *Sollen* is assumed as the determination of the will (for instance, an evil *Sollen*). Rather, evil concerns the *modality* according to which any possible *Sollen* is assumed. This modality entails that the sensible motives are the conditions of the observance ("Befolgung") of the

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[1] One exception is Paulsen, *Kant*. He focuses the parallels between Kant and Luther with regard to Kant's *personal* beliefs, instead of his theories. This approach is historically useful – for instance, in evaluating the influence of pietism upon Kant's re-interpretation of Lutheran motives. However, what interests me is not Kant's personal position, or the (always conjectural) reconstruction of the influence of this personal position within his philosophy. As an advocate for distinguishing between author and work, I aim to focus principally on the interrelation between the works of Luther and Kant.

[2] See Goethe, *Briefe*: vol. 30, 676, letter number 414 (letter to Johann Gottfried Herder, 7th of June 1793); see also *ivi*: vol. 30, 686, letter number 423 (letter to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, 7th of July 1793); *ivi*: vol. 31, 704, letter number 739 (letter to Friedrich Schiller, 31st of July 1799).

[3] All references to Kant's *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* are in the text, with indication of both the page of the second edition, and the page from the sixth volume of the Akademie Ausgabe. For the sake of consistency, in the footnotes I indicate also the number of the volume.

moral law. Consequently, evil is not the annulation of the moral law, but its subordination to the sensible motives (B 34, Ak 36). In sum, evil does not concern the frastic of the *Sollen* (in Kant's terms, "die Materie der Maximen"), but the neustic ("die Form der Maximen"): evil consists in subordinating the neustic of the moral law to the neustic of the law of *Selbstliebe*.

It follows that the action can even be empirically good, but it is nevertheless "intelligibly" evil (I would say: it is evil in its intentions, but not in the manifestations of the intentions) because the "good" action is the realization of a *Sollen* assumed for sensible motives. In sum, the action is evil in its intentions because the foundation of the *Sollen* (that is, the neustic, the reason why the *Sollen* is assumed as determination of the will) is perverted. Evil is this perversion of the formal (neustical) foundation of any possible *Sollen* (B 35, Ak 37).[4]

In order to understand why evil (in this formal, "neustical" meaning) is radical, I proceed *per absurdum*. If we assume that this formal evil does not exist, we deduce that the moral law would be the sufficient principle of the determination of the will. Human will would *always* be determined only according to the moral law. In other words, without evil, the moral law would be the law of the nature of human beings. However, this is not the case, because for us, the moral law has the form of an obligation,[5] of a law endowed with neustic: a *Sollen*. This prescriptive form of moral law means that the moral law is not a law of nature; it is a law of freedom.[6] As such, it is always *possible* for the moral law *not* to be assumed as the sole determination of the will; it is always possible for the neustic of the moral law *not* to have priority over the neustic of sensible motives.

Therefore, evil is radical because it concerns how the moral law appears to us human beings. In other words, it concerns how we understand the moral law: not as a law of nature, but as *Sollen*. The moral law would be the law of nature of our will if and only if our will were determined by reason alone (given that the moral law is formulated by practical reason). But this is not the case, and again, this is evidenced by the fact that the principles formulated by practical

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[4] See also B 23, Ak VI 30.

[5] See Kant, *KpV*: A 146, Ak V 82: "Das moralische Gesetz ist nämlich für den Willen eines allervollkommensten Wesens ein Gesetz der Heiligkeit, für den Willen jedes endlichen vernünftigen Wesens aber ein Gesetz der Pflicht."

[6] See Kant, *KpV*: A 97, Ak V 55: "Im Begriffe eines Willens aber ist der Begriff der Causalität schon enthalten, mithin in dem eines reinen Willens der Begriff einer Causalität mit Freiheit, d. i. die *nicht nach Naturgesetzen bestimmbar*, folglich keiner empirischen Anschauung als Beweises seiner Realität fähig ist, dennoch aber in dem reinen praktischen Gesetze a priori seine objective Realität, doch (wie leicht einzusehen) nicht zum Behufe des theoretischen, sondern blos praktischen Gebrauchs der Vernunft, vollkommen rechtfertigt" (emphasis added). In other words, freedom is the concept of a causality that is *not* phenomenal: "keiner empirischen Darstellung fähiger Begriff der Causalität." *KpV*: A 30, Ak V 15.

reason are not laws of nature but prescriptions – laws that can be violated.[7] In sum, evil is radical because it depends on how human practical reason functions: by formulating and understanding *Sollen*. Radical evil depends on the fact that there is a distinction between practical and theoretical uses of reason, that the two think about different objects.[8]

Given that evil deals with the *fact* of practical reason – that is, with the formulation and understanding of *Sollen* – then radical evil has to do with deontic freedom (it operates "in dem Menschen as frei handelndem Wesen," B 35, Ak 37). But this means that radical evil is not a *Sein*, but a *Sollen* (and for this reason, we are accountable for it: B 27, Ak 32). Therefore, radical evil is not merely solvable: it *should* be solvable (B 35, Ak 37). As I will discuss shortly, for Kant, religion has meaning precisely for the sake of the *hope* of the realization of this *Sollen*. For this reason, the concept of radical evil is present in an essay dedicated to religion.[9]

Kant's concept of radical evil constitutes the basis for a hypothetical proximity to Luther. This interpretation focuses on three points: the connection between evil and deontic accomplishments, the unknowability of this connection, and the distinction between morality and legality.[10]

Concerning the first point, for both authors, evil is not the effect of a misbehavior or of the violation of a *Sollen*. Evil is deontically uncaused, because it is present in all determinations of the will according to a *Sollen*. Evil informs

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[7] See Kant, *KpV*, A 36–37, Ak V 20: "Die praktische Regel ist jederzeit ein Product der Vernunft, weil sie Handlung als Mittel zur Wirkung als Absicht vorschreibt. Diese Regel ist aber für ein Wesen, *bei dem Vernunft nicht ganz allein Bestimmungsgrund des Willens ist*, ein Imperativ, d. i. eine Regel, die durch ein *Sollen*, welches die objective Nöthigung der Handlung ausdrückt, bezeichnet wird, und bedeutet, daß, *wenn* die Vernunft den Willen gänzlich bestimmte, die Handlung unausbleiblich nach dieser Regel geschehen würde" (emphases added). In sum, evil is radical in us because reason is not the whole of us; we are only *reasonable* beings, and not *rational* beings. See Weil, *Problèmes kantiens*: 148–150.

[8] Or, in more precise terms, the practical use and the theoretical use of reason think about the same objects (laws, and thus freedom, God, and soul), but in different ways (for the former, laws are principles of determination of the will; for the latter, laws are laws of nature).

[9] See Kant, *Briefwechsel II*: Ak XI 414, letter number 541 (letter to Carl Friedrich Stäudlin, 4th of May 1793): "Mein schon seit geraumer Zeit gemachter Plan der mir obliegenden Bearbeitung des Feldes der reinen Philosophie ging auf die Auflösung der drei Aufgaben: 1) Was kann ich wissen? (Metaphysik) 2) Was soll ich thun? (Moral) 3) Was darf ich hoffen? (Religion); welcher zuletzt die vierte folgen sollte: Was ist der Mensch? (Anthropologie; über die ich schon seit mehr als 20 Iahren jährlich ein Collegium gelesen habe). Mit beikommender Schrift: Religion innerhalb der Grenzen etc. habe die dritte Abtheilung meines Plans zu vollführen gesucht." Clearly, Kant harkens back to *KrV*: A 804–805 B 832–833, Ak III 522–523.

[10] See Hirsch, "Rechtfertigungslehre": 54.

the human practical sphere, or human deontic freedom,[11] regardless of the *specific* determination of the will (how good or bad the single will is).[12] Therefore, the eradication of evil is impossible within the deontic level.

As to the second point, for both authors, evil *precedes* all phenomena (of the will); for this reason, the root of evil cannot be known on a practical level, within the limits of deontic freedom (B 7, Ak 21 note). For both Luther and Kant, evil consists of a limitation of the knowledge of one's own practical condition.[13]

Regarding the third point, both authors establish a distinction between action and determination of the will. The will is determined by evil, even when the action that is effectively accomplished is good. It follows that the actor can never be certain of her or his intentions: the actor will always have the suspicion that their intentions are not pure, that evil is present as principle of each action, and that the actor's heart and whole moral being are worthy only of condemnation, and never absolution.[14]

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[11] I would say evil concerns the fact that in human beings, deontic freedom (the freedom to be determined by a causal determination independent of natural causality) always works upon *Sollen*; that is, it is only possible, and not necessary. This confirms that evil is radical because it concerns the functioning of practical reason in humans.

[12] Auweele, "Depraved will": 130, constructs the analogy to Luther negatively by referring to Erasmus's position; Kant would not agree with Erasmus's claim that we would always act good had we not the "distractions of the flesh."

[13] See Rieger, "Böse": 91.

[14] It is important to address the issue of radical evil as "Hang," propensity. Auweele, in "Depraved will": 124 writes: "Kant clarifies in a footnote that a propensity [*Hang*] differs from a predisposition […]. A propensity is contingent to humankind, while a predisposition is a universal a priori necessary constituent of human nature." However, Kant writes (B 21, Ak 28 note): "Hang ist eigentlich nur die Prädisposition zum Begehren eines Genusses, der, wenn das Subject die Erfahrung davon gemacht haben wird, Neigung dazu hervorbringt," and in the text: "Unter den Hange (*propensio*) verstehe ich den subjectiven Grund der Möglichkeit einer Neigung (habituellen Begierde, *concupiscentia*), sofern sie für die Menschheit überhaupt zufällig ist." For Kant, *Hang* is a special *Prädisposition*. Thus, radical evil is not an "anti-virtue," a morally negative habit acquired by the reiteration of evil doings. Were it so, it would be dependent on the actual doings. This is not the case: evil influences the ground, or the condition, of these contingent doings. See also *ivi*: B 26, Ak VI 31: "Dagegen verstehet man unter der Begriffe eines Hanges einen subjektiven Bestimmungsgrund der Willkür, der *vor jeder That vorhergeht*, mithin selbst noch nicht That ist; […] Der Hang zum Bösen ist […] der formale Grund aller gesetzwidrigen That […]. [Er] ist intelligibele That, bloß durch Vernunft ohne alle Zeitbedingung erkennbar." For this reason this *Hang* "nicht ausgerottet werden kann." Moreover, Auweele writes ("Depraved will": 130): "For Kant, we choose to act in an evil fashion although we are very much aware that we should act otherwise." Yet, Kant states in *Religion*: B 23, Ak VI 30: "Man wird bemerken: daß der Hang zum Bösen hier am Menschen, *auch dem besten*, (den Handlungen nach) aufgestellt wird, welches auch geschehen muß, wenn die *Allgemeinheit* des Hanges zum Bösen unter Menschen, oder, welches hier dasselbe bedeutet, daß er mit der menschlichen Natur verwebt sei, beweisen werden soll" (emphasis added); and in *ivi*: B 34, Ak 36: "Folglich ist der Mensch

To synthesize: for both authors, we find a "superficial" level where good and evil are mutually exclusive, a level where the distinction between good and evil is possible, and a "deeper" level where any practical determination (from the best one to the worst one) must deal with an evil root within.[15]

This multi-faceted similarity hides a fundamental difference. For Luther, it is *formally* impossible to exclude evil from the whole sphere of the *Sollen* at the point that the assumption of the *Sollen for the Sollen's sake* is the most acute expression of the human sinful condition. This relationship *coram legibus* subordinates the relationship *coram Deo* to itself.[16] On the other hand, for Kant, evil always refers to the subjugation of the *Sollen* of the moral law under the *Sollen* of empirical interests, so that what *should* be assumed unconditionally, for its own sake, is reduced to the apodosis of a hypothetical imperative.

This difference also influences the relationship between evil and deontic freedom. For Luther, sin precedes the law, so the knowledge of the ineradicable sinful condition is possible only in light of our contact with revelation. Thus, Luther's solution to the problem of ineradicable evil coincides with the *theological* subordination of deontic freedom (*primus usus*) to God's justice (*secundus usus*). On the other hand, For Kant, evil does not precede the law as such, but each human assumption of the *Sollen*. The issue of evil does not concern the deontic level *per se* (that is, pure practical reason), but its human reality (practical reason). Thus, Kant does not negate deontic freedom. On the contrary, the solution to the problem of evil coincides with the restoration of this freedom from the (evil) perversion of its priority.[17]

In sum, the difference between the positions of the two authors concerns the "depth" in which evil ineradicably lurks. For Kant, this depth is deontic and concerns the relationship between humankind and *Sollen*. For Luther, this

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(*auch der beste*) nur dadurch böse, daß er die sittliche Ordnung der Triebfedern in der Aufnehmung derselben in seine Maximen umkehrt" (emphasis added). One can be judged good only through the accomplishment of good actions. Thus, radical evil is the predisposition to act in a good or saintly way *not* for the sake of this good or sanctity.

[15] See Rieger, "Böse": 86.

[16] See Insole, "Pasternak's *Kant*": "Luther, like Kant, does not accept the notion of divine and human concurring action, but not because of a worry about the integrity of human action, but because concurrence makes too confident a claim about the human being, with not enough due being given to divine sovereignty."

[17] It follows that it is debatable to distinguish Kant's and Luther's positions on the basis of the distinction between on an inner level (Kant) or an outer level (Luther). This distinction is not reducible to the influence of *Neologie* (and Pietism) on an internalization of evil through substituting the metaphysical figure of Satan with the psychological-anthropological frailty of the practical human being (see Rieger, "Böse": 73–74). Kant is child of his theological age, yet his position is not limited to the analysis of a psychological limitation of practical reason; rather, it concerns the elucidation of the conditions according to which practical reason works in the case of humankind – that is, for a non-purely-rational being.

depth is theological, and concerns the relationship between humankind and God.[18]

3. "Pro": Three Conceptual Pairs

The party "pro" a relationship between Luther and Kant presents other parallels between Kant and Luther. These parallels are built upon three pairs of concepts: moral law and God; practical reason and grace; and moral freedom and transcendent liberation.

These parallels are based on the assumption of an *analogy* between the elements of each conceptual pairing. From this analogy, the similarity between the concepts in each pair is deduced. However, this is a fallacy, since the opposite should be the case: the analogy should be deduced from the existence of a proximity between the concepts. But this is impossible, given that the two concepts fulfill a function in the respective discourses that is too different. I will analyze each conceptual pair.

The first conceptual pair is moral law and God. The analogy between these concepts concerns the fact that, in both cases, the highest moral quality is attributed to a transcendent element. In sum, according to this argument, Luther attributes to the concept "God" the same properties that Kant attributes to the concept "moral law." Both God and moral law are unique, absolute, self-imposing; both humiliate and elevate the human being.[19] Both have the power to turn one's heart towards the good. Both induce at the same time a resistance and a submission, a No and a Yes.[20]

In sum, the analogy would be that in Kant the moral law has a divine character, and in Luther God has the same majesty of the *Pflicht*. Thus, the obedience to the moral law is analogous to the obedience to God.[21] The individual moral disposition is determined by the external source represented by the analogous pair of God and moral law. This analogy is supposedly reinforced when considering that both Luther and Kant undermine individual responsibility.[22]

One of the problems with this argument concerns the inconsistency in attributing a sort of "soteriological" power to moral law. As I will discuss later, for Kant it is Jesus Christ, and not the moral law as such, that fulfills the soteriological function of modeling the "Ideal der Gott wohlgefälligen

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[18] See Rieger, "Böse": 90.

[19] See Wand, "Religious Concepts": 345–346.

[20] See Hirsch, "Rechtfertigungslehre": 49–51. Hirsch understands that this analogy is only apparent, for it is built upon a formal difference consisting of the logical primacy either of God or of practical reason (see *ivi*: 52, 58). I will return to Hirsch's position in section 10.

[21] See Jenson, *The Gravity of Sin*: 113–114.

[22] See Wand, "Religious Concepts": 333.

Menschheit" (B 75, Ak 61) assumed by our intentions (B 103, Ak 76).[23] It is the purity of the moral law not in itself, but as the object of revelation (in and *as* Jesus Christ), that shows the will tainted by radical evil the way towards its own betterment, and consequently, towards God's good judgment.

The second conceptual pair is practical reason and grace. According to the supposed analogy, practical reason functions as a transcendent "aid" (such as divine grace) to the sinful one who is unable to eradicate the evil by herself or himself.[24] Again, the difference would exist only in the name: "grace" for Luther and "practical reason" for Kant are two names for the same thing.[25]

The problem here is that practical reason and moral will are internal, while grace is external to the human being; otherwise, claiming that it is impossible to be saved by mere human forces would be absurd.[26] It is certainly possible (although incorrect, and thus irrelevant) to claim that the *Wille* is external to the human being as a sort of *transcendent* hypostatization of a *transcendental* function of reason. But this would mean that the *Sollen* would be realized not by the individual will, but by this mysterious "transcendent" element, thus negating the connection between the will and the realization of the *Sollen*.

Therefore, moral will and grace have two different functions: for the moral will, it is a matter of the progressive accord with the moral law,[27] an accord that is *hoped* to be worthy of divine good judgment; for grace, on the other hand, it is a matter of divine judgment granted in light of the theologically *impossible* accord (whether progressive or immediate, *in fieri* or *in esse*) between the human being and divine commandments.

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[23] See also Kant, *Streit*: Ak VII 59: "[...] die Bibel scheint nichts anders vor Augen gehabt zu haben, nämlich nicht auf übernatürliche Erfahrungen und schwärmerische Gefühle hin zu weisen, die statt der Vernunft diese Revolution bewirken sollten: sondern auf den Geist Christi, um ihn, so wie er ihn in Lehre und Beispiel bewies, zu dem unsrigen zu machen, oder vielmehr, da er mit der ursprünglichen moralischen Anlage schon in uns liegt, ihm nur Raum zu verschaffen."

[24] See Auweele, "Depraved will": 130: "By ourselves, we have no way to opt for the good over the evil. We need the higher faculty of desire fulfilling the function of Luther's God to move us towards the good. Without this soteriological power of the *Wille,* it would be impossible for the human agent to venture towards the good. The *Wille* needs to grace us with respect for the moral law in order for us to move towards salvation."

[25] See Wand, "Religious Concepts": 341.

[26] The following quotation by Auweele "Depraved will": 131 is already the (perhaps unaware) illustration of this difference: "Luther denied any and all mediation between God and the human agent: she must fully rely on a 'super' or 'transcendent' entity to be saved. In the same way [?] must the human agent, for Kant, first rely on *her* 'super' or 'higher' faculty of desire for her to progress towards the good" (emphasis added). The difference is synthesized in that "her": *Wille* is a human feature; grace is not human.

[27] See Kant, *KpV:* A 126, Ak V 71: "Das Wesentliche alles sittlichen Werths der Handlungen kommt darauf an, *daß das moralische Gesetz unmittelbar den Willen bestimme.*" So again, no human being holds a pure moral value, but only (at best) a *progressive* moral value.

Finally, the third couple: moral freedom and transcendent liberation. In this case, the supposed analogy is that both concepts present a negative concept of freedom as liberation from the bonds of empirical nature (or better, from the limits of the empirical self).[28] In sum, both concepts would stress that freedom is a sort of autonomy from empirical bonds, and consequently, that this autonomy is unknowable from simply focusing on empirical conditions.[29]

In this case, the problem is that attributing a negative meaning to freedom means having misunderstood the Kantian distinction between the negative and positive concepts of freedom. The former is merely the substitution of an empirical condition with another condition (for instance, in the case of *liberum arbitrium*). The latter is the system of causality that does not belong to natural necessity (transcendental freedom).[30] Thus, freedom is by no means a sort of (impossible) "liberation" from empirical conditions. On one hand, the empirical freedom is the choice between empirical conditions (and thus, it is a choice *within* the set of empirical conditions); on the other hand, the noumenal freedom is the function of reason to formulate laws of non-empirical necessity (*Sollen*).[31]

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[28] I can already emphasize that this interpretation is based on a misreading of Kant's lesson. It is enough to comment on the following three sentences from Wand, "Religious Concepts": "[T]he determination of our will to act is due to reason in a transcendent but practical sense. This reason is totally divorced from our empirical selves and its commands, in the form of categorical imperatives, are made independent of our capacities whether they are innate or acquired" (*ivi*: 335); "[…] Kant's normal view that the good will is independent of empirical conditions" (*ivi*: 336); "On Kant's view we need not, nor indeed should we, pay any attention to this empirical knowledge in determining the moral duties of men" (*ibid.*). The formulation "reason in a transcendent but practical sense" is a bit unfortunate; it is either built upon the confusion between transcendent and transcendental, or deduced by a hypostatization of reason. Correcting this means annulling the contrast (the "but"); there is no contrast between "transcendental" and "practical." Moreover, the plural "categorical imperatives" might hint at a confusion between *the* categorial imperative (singular) and the contents of practical reason (the plurality of maxims). As I mentioned in *supra*, Introduction section 4, the categorical imperative is neither a moral maxim nor a (meta-normative) test for the morality of maxims. Rather, the categorical imperative is the *principle* (the "law of nature," if we want) according to which pure practical reason operates. Thus, the confusion can be explained by the lack of distinction between practical reason and *pure* practical reason. The second sentence combines good will and the principle of determination of the will; the "ought implies can" refers to the latter, not to the former. The third sentence is correct: it is not the empirical human condition, but rather the transcendental law of pure practical reason, that defines the morality of a norm. However, this does not contradict the fact that this norm is a maxim or a hypothetical imperative.

[29] See Auweele, "Depraved will": 130.

[30] On the distinction between the two forms of freedom, see Kant, *KpV*: A 58–89, Ak V 33; A 171–173, Ak V 95–97.

[31] Here, it can also be mentioned that Sidgwick criticizes Kant's supposed confusion between freedom as acting according to a law and freedom as acting morally (see Sidgwick,

The problem also concerns the interpretation of Luther. For Luther, human freedom does not refer to the possibility of acting morally, but to the revelatory awareness of the *impossibility* of acting morally, and thus, of God's wrath. This impossibility must be understood *theologically*, not practically, in light of the distinction between *primus* and *secundus usus*.

Thus, there is no "inscrutability" of autonomy. If autonomy were inscrutable, then it would be impossible for us to know it. But autonomy is indeed known precisely through the formulation and understanding of *Sollen* – that is, because of deontic language. The *Sollen* are the concepts of this knowledge, being the products and objects of practical reason (*ratio cognoscendi*).[32]

"Free will"). Sidgwick rejects Kant's strict connection between freedom and rationality; he argues that the German philosopher fails to consider the irrational choice of the good (or the evil) as an expression of freedom. This criticism seems to confuse reason in its psychological meaning (as awareness of freedom) with reason in its transcendental meaning (as form of freedom); the necessary condition for a determination of the will to be free is not the psychological awareness of this will's freedom, but the transcendental determination of this will by the principle of practical reason. The same is true for the criticism of Kant's supposed confusion between acting according to a law and acting in a moral way (see Wand, "Religious Concepts": 339). This criticism results from another confusion of levels: the level of the content and the level of the form (that is, the level of the maxim that the will assumes, and the level of the condition of this assumption). In terms of freedom, the only thing that matters is the form, the reason why an imperative is the principle of determination of the will. If this reason is subjective (that is, if the will is spontaneously disposed towards the good, *KpV*: A 146, Ak V 82), then there is no freedom, since the will is determined by an empirical cause. The free will is *causa noumenon* (*KpV*: A 97, Ak V 55–56), a cause that cannot be determined by laws of nature since it is determined by another kind of law – or better, by the *other* (non-natural) kind of law: the *Sollen*. Therefore, we either reject Kant's definition of freedom (which means falling back to the antinomy between *liberum arbitrium* and determinism) or we accept it, and thus we deduce that there is a coincidence between the freedom of acting morally and the freedom of acting according to a norm, if and only if this norm is assumed for its own sake, "als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung." Only by making a norm the principle of *another* causality that is not the natural causality do we act morally, and thus, we are free. Misunderstanding or underestimating the difference between content (of the will) and form (the condition of will's determination) means underestimating Kant's Copernican revolution, and failing to grasp why philosophy (as well as thinking in general) after Kant cannot be the same, as much as theology cannot be the same after Luther.

[32] Were autonomy not knowable, and, more importantly, not acknowledgeable, then norms would not exist as a specific kind of principles – that is, as *practical* principles. For this reason, the existence (and *not* the knowledge of this existence) of autonomy is *postulated* by the existence of moral law. The claim that we cannot formulate the laws of autonomy (since autonomy is what is not subjected to natural legislation) is true only if we understand these laws to be descriptive. But if we correctly conceive these laws as prescriptive, then these laws are indeed formulated; their formulation coincides with the conceptualization of the object ("intuition") to which these laws refer: autonomy. See Kant, *KpV*: A 238, Ak V 132.

Therefore, it is with regard to the concept of deontic freedom that Kant and Luther are *not* compatible. For Kant, one can be deontically free, which means that one can be *causa sui* (noumenal)[33]; for Luther, only God can be considered *causa sui*; only God is free.

In sum, the problem with all three of these analogical associations is the confusion between transcendental and transcendent, between function (of reason) and (hypostatized) being. As I will make clear in the conclusion, this fallacy derives from ignoring the difference between the structures of philosophical and theological reflections upon the relationship between humankind and *Sollen* (intended as divine commandment).

4. "Contra": the "Ought Implies Can" Once Again

I turn now to the analysis of the arguments *against* a positive relationship between Luther and Kant. These arguments claim to conform to the aforementioned distinction between the structures of the two authors' reflections.

The "contra" positions focus on the opposite ways in which Luther and Kant conceive the implication "ought → can," already discussed in the previous three chapters.

Kant affirms and assumes the implication between moral obligation and the possibility of its accomplishment as a logical postulate of practical reason.[34] As previously stated, the "can" refers to what belongs to the possibilities not only of the person referred to by the obligation, but of any human being. It is a possibility defined deontically.[35] So, the "can" concerns the general disposition

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[33] See *ivi*: A 97, Ak V 55–56.

[34] In fact, "das Unmögliche wird […] die Vernunft nicht gebieten" (Kant, *Anthropologie*: B 38, Ak VII 148). Kant formulates this in various works and in different ways: *KrV*: A 807, Ak III 524: "Denn da sie [*sc.* die Vernunft] gebietet, daß solche geschehen sollen, so müssen sie auch geschehen können, und es muß also eine besondere Art von systematischer Einheit, nämlich die moralische, möglich sein"; *KU*: B 464, Ak V 472: "[E]inem Zwecke, der für nichts als Hirngespinst erkann wird, nachzugehen, kann die Vernunft nicht gebieten" (also *ivi*: 462, Ak V 471 second note); *Frieden*: Ak VIII 370, in reference to the negative formulation of the implication from the adage *Ultra posse nemo obligatur*.

[35] See Kant, *Religion*: B 49–50, Ak VI 44–45: "Wie es nun möglich sei, daß ein natürlicherweise böser Mensch sich selbst zum guten Menschen mache, das übersteigt alle unsere Begriffe; [Aber] ungeachtet jenes Abfalls erschallt doch das Gebot: wir *sollen* bessere Menschen werden, unvermindert in unserer Seele; folglich müssen wir es auch können, sollte auch das, was wir thun können, für sich allein unzureichend sein und wir uns dadurch nur eines für uns unerforschlichen höheren Beistandes empfänglich machen."; and B 59–60, Ak VI 50: "Aber dieser [moralischen] Wiederherstellung durch eigene Kraftanwendung steht ja der Satz von der angebornen Verderbtheit der Menschen für alles Gute gerade entgegen? Allerdings, was die *Begreiflichkeit,* d. i. unsere Einsicht von der Möglichkeit derselben, betrifft, wie alles dessen, was als Begebenheit in der Zeit (Veränderung) und so fern nach

of the will: it is not defined by the knowledge of empirical possibility, but rather by the practical conformity of the will with the *Sollen*. Thus, it is impossible to present a demonstration or a deduction of the implication "ought → can": it can only be axiomatically assumed, in light of the *Faktum* of practical reason. In other words, the mere fact that *Sollen* (any *Sollen*) has meaning as the outcome of practical reason demonstrates the logical necessity of this implication.

Therefore, this implication is the basis upon which the whole Kantian philosophy of morals is built. The second *Critique* begins with the assumption that there are practical principles that are able to determine the will – to have sense as *Sollen*.[36] If it were not possible for the will to realize these principles, then they would not be practical; and if practical reason would consist of principles that are not practical, then it would negate itself. In sum, all efforts to deduce this implication, and not to postulate it, are in vain.[37]

Luther's operation *upon* this implication has already been analyzed. It is enough to emphasize once again that, in Luther, the axiomatic priority (and epistemological self-evidence) of this implication is the object of rethinking, and this operation leads to the overcoming of the (logical) limitations of the type of discourse (the deontic language of freedom) this implication founds. Thus, in light of what has been discussed, it is indeed correct to conclude that Luther is "a thinker who is not working within the confines that Kant takes for granted."[38]

However, as already outlined in Chapter 5, what is truly important in Luther is not the negative, but the positive aspect. Luther works outside the boundaries of deontic meaning *not* because of a mere whim to show that a logical limit can be violated, but rather, in order to operate *upon* these boundaries in light of the *Faktum* of a *Sollen* that is revealed (divine commandments). Therefore, this operation upon the boundaries of the deontic meaning of the *Sollen* is the

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Naturgesetzen als nothwendig und dessen Gegentheil doch zugleich unter moralischen Gesetzen als durch Freiheit möglich vorgestellt werden soll; aber der Möglichkeit dieser Wiederherstellung selbst ist er nicht entgegen. Denn wenn das moralische Gesetz gebietet: wir *sollen* jetzt bessere Menschen sein, so folgt unumgänglich: wir *müssen* es auch können."

[36] See Kant, *KpV*: A 35, Ak V 19.

[37] White's attempts to explain misunderstand Kant's position; see for instance "'Ought' implies 'can'": 24: "Kant may simply be guilty […] of confusing two different logical forms, represented by the same surface grammatical structure: If p, φ! might mean, either, as in the hypothetical imperative, that a certain condition had to be satisfied, before any imperative come into force, or, that what was (unconditionally) commanded was, 'If p, φ!'" This argument seems to be wrong: the distinction between the two forms is based on a misunderstanding of the hypothetical imperative. On one hand, in the hypothetical imperative, the imperative "comes to force" in order to satisfy the condition: it is not "In the event of p, then φ!" but rather "In order for p to be realized, then f!" On the other hand, introducing an "if" means already introducing a condition; thus, it is impossible for an imperative "If p, f!" to command unconditionally.

[38] White, "'Ought' implies 'can'": 4.

definition of another type of discourse on the *Sollen*: the *theological* one. So, the axiomatic condition of deontic discourse is no longer valid *only* in the case of the theological discourse. More precisely, it is the *validity* of this condition (the *primus usus*) that is used by Luther as evidence of this condition's *theological* limitation in light of what overcomes the logical boundary determined by this condition (divine commandments).

Therefore, upon a closer look, the remark that Luther overcomes practical reason's limits *only* for divine commandments[39] is at the same time important and irrelevant. It is irrelevant because in both cases of practical and theological discourse on the *Sollen*, it is the *Sollen* that is the object of discourse. In other words, the simple fact that a *secundus usus* is distinguished from the *primus usus* implies that the meaning of the *secundus* negatively depends on the meaning of the *primus*. The *secundus usus* is built upon its difference from the *primus usus*, and as such, it constantly implies the *primus usus*. As stated in Chapter 5, divine commandments are still *Sollen* – and for this reason, the reference to deontic language is necessary. Thus, Luther's negation of the implication is valid not only for divine commandments, but for any kind of imperative; this negation defines the *theological* discourse on the imperative.

At the same time, the remark concerning divine commandments is important because it correctly sets up the theological overcoming of the limits of practical meaning. Luther does not (for he *cannot*) negate the implication "ought → can" *in abstracto*. Because this implication founds a specific use of reason, it is the logical postulate of the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*, implied in all formulations, assumptions, and realizations of any *Sollen*. What Luther does is operate upon the axiomatic validity of this implication, and he does so for the theological discourse on the *Sollen*. Consequently, he *affirms* that the two meanings of the *Sollen* (the practical one and the theological one) depend on different assumptions of the implication. In sum, the *secundus usus* attributes to the *Sollen* a different meaning than the *primus usus*: it makes the *Sollen* coincide with divine commandments, thus making it possible for the concept of divine commandment to be distinguished from the practical meaning of *Sollen*.

This clarification helps to better understand the limit of the "contra" position. The negation of the positive relationship between Luther and Kant interprets Luther's operation upon the implication "ought → can" as a *falsification* of it – and hence, directly or indirectly, as a falsification of Kant's position.[40] The problem is that this interpretation neglects the formal functions of both acceptance and rejection of the implication. Both acceptance and rejection define a specific context of the meaning of the *Sollen*; they equally present the foundation of either a practical or a theological discourse on the *Sollen*. Therefore, the two positions cannot be objects of a comparison based on their

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[39] See *ivi*: 16.
[40] See Martin, "Ought but Cannot": 126.

acceptance or rejection of the "ought → can," because this implies the arbitrary assumption of one of the two opposing ways as the condition of validity of the other one.

This mistake is the same as claiming that the exclusion of Euclid's fifth postulate in a non-Euclidean geometry is proof of the inconsistency of this postulate in general, and thus *also* within Euclidean geometry. This claim is absurd, because both exclusion and assumption of the postulate are equally "primordial" definitions of two equal and distinct formalizations of space. In sum, the claim is absurd because both exclusion and inclusion of a postulate are both formal operations.[41] Thus, the positions of Luther and Kant can be confronted only from the standpoint of a formal perspective; that is, as two "geometries," as two systems of discourses, the philosophical and the theological one.

5. Engaging the Aporia

The previous analysis has shown that both arguments "pro" and "contra" are affected by the same problems: they compare (positively or negatively) Luther and Kant through reference to the contents of their discourses. This comparison is illegitimate because it does not consider the role that these contents play within each discourse. These contents are the means for the definition of two specific ways of thinking about the *Sollen*: the philosophical and the theological.

I present a different approach to this comparison: instead of focusing on the contents *per se*, I focus on the function that the concepts fulfill in the effort of Luther and Kant to define either the theological or the philosophical meaning of the *Sollen*. In sum, this means focusing on how the contents, or the concepts, are used by the two thinkers to formulate two different *methodological discourses* – one discourse on the method of speaking *theologically* about the *Sollen*, and the other discourse on the method of speaking *philosophically* about the *Sollen*.

This requires a narrowing of the scope of investigation. By taking into account the contributions in the secondary literature, this narrowing concerns the relationship between human morality (as the relationship to a *Sollen*) and the judgment formulated by a non-human (transcendent) judge. In other words, it

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[41] This parallel between Luther's rejection of the axiomatical validity of the implication "ought → can" and non-Euclidean geometries' "rejection" of the axiomatical validity of Euclid's fifth postulate is telling. Non-Euclidean geometries were not born from this exclusion, but rather this exclusion was the *consequence* of the need to formalize the *Faktum* of non-Euclidean forms of space (elliptical or hyperbolical); similarly, Luther's rejection of the implication is not for its own sake, but rather for the sake of the theoretical effort to deal with the *Faktum* of revelation.

is now time to analyze the specific way Luther and Kant present meta-discourses about the conditions of a discourse on the religious conception of the human moral situation.

Moreover, the analysis is limited here to Kant's *Religion* and Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. This limitation of sources is well justified. Concerning Kant, as evident from the previous analysis, it is clear that it is not effective to refer to other works apart from the *Religion*, given that this work is where Kant aims to openly discuss some important theological subjects that are quite present in Luther's work, as well. Concerning Luther, Kant's position – in particular, the "ought → can" – can be conceived as "a secularized version of what Erasmus is urging against Luther,"[42] and thus Kant's position can be considered an elegant formalization of Erasmus's rather intuitive argument.[43] *De servo arbitrio* is the *direct* reaction to an argument that is based on the axiomatic validity of the implication "ought → can," and thus, it is also the *indirect* answer to Kant's priority of this implication.

Keeping this direction of investigation in mind, I return to some of the issues previously discussed.

6. On the Human Sinful Condition

I begin again with radical evil. Although ineradicably evil, the human moral condition can be changed, according to both Luther and Kant. However, each presents completely different meanings and modalities of this change.

Kant repeatedly states that the negation of the evil tendency is *possible* because it is the content of the moral law (again, "ought → can": B 43, Ak 41; B 50, Ak 45; B 60, Ak 50; B 85, Ak 66–67). In light of the *Faktum* of practical reason, one can welcome the moral law within herself or himself; one can be aware of the possible accomplishment of this law, and hence, one can make the decision to overturn the fundament of the maxims in order to become a new human being (B 55; Ak 47–48).

However, it seems that there is an apparent contradiction. The evil tendency is at the same time ineradicable, since it depends on human morality, *and* eradicable, since the moral law commands it. This contradiction is solved by distinguishing between the practical and theoretical levels: the eradication is a practical possibility (since it is a *Sollen*) but it is theoretically inconceivable because the *reality* of this possibility is unknown; that is, there is no human being that can fully represent the realization of this possibility.

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[42] White, "'Ought' implies 'can'": 16.

[43] This reflection leads back to *supra*, Introduction section 5, in which I addressed the possible criticism of anachronism.

This translates into the *hope* for a *transcendent* help, enabling realization of what one cannot realize alone (B 62, Ak 53). This help is not granted on an empirical ground because radical evil still determines morality. In other words, the decision to change one's intention is still related to a *Sollen*: it has a deontic form, and thus, it is only a possibility and not a necessity. From the perspective of a moral tribunal, the human being is still guilty (B 99, Ak 74). Therefore, the merit for divine help is based not on action, but *only* on the intention – more precisely, the intention to assume the moral law (B 262, Ak 171; B 298, Ak 192).

This rejects the relevance of any merit related to works of atonement or self-humiliation (B 103, Ak 76; B 258, Ak 168–169). Such works belong to super-stition, to the absurd connection between physical sphere, the action, and non-physical sphere, the moral good (B 268, Ak 174–175; B 274, Ak 178). They do not belong to a pure religious faith, which is based on duties that are elevated to the rank of divine commandments (B 147, Ak 103–104; B 230, Ak 153).[44]

Thus, the merit consists of the conversion of the intention towards the moral law (B 98, Ak 74), of embracing not empirical prescriptions (such as historical and ritualistic practices: B 151–154, Ak 105–107) but the moral law interpreted as divine commandment (B 149, Ak 104). In sum, the merit consists of pro-ceeding (B 141, Ak 100–101) towards the *divine* end of moral perfection (B 73, Ak 60). Given that the human moral powers are insufficient to attain this end, one *hopes* in a "höhere Mitwirkung" (B 62, Ak 52; B 210–211, Ak 139). This moral hope, and thus the moral law, is the origin of the sentiment (and *not* of the evidence) of transcendent influences (B 165, Ak 113–114).

On the other hand, as I concluded in Chapter 6, Luther rejects all references to a cooperation between human being and God, for two reasons. First, because divine commandments imply the theological *impossibility* of their accomplish-ment. Second, because God's action (the divine promise of forgiveness) is not stimulated by (nor inferred from) anything that one can do; human moral pow-erlessness is not the stimulus or the cause, but rather the recipient or the object of God's forgiveness.[45]

Thus, For Luther, it is a matter neither of expiatory actions (this is indeed similar to Kant) nor of a change in intentions (this is dissimilar to Kant),[46] but simply of ineluctable sin. The conservation of this element alone is the condi-tion for preserving the freedom of God's initiative (and thus, not only its divine

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[44] See also Kant, *KpV*: A 233, Ak V 129.

[45] I expand upon this unconditionality of God's action in *infra*, Ch. 9 section 5, and Ch. 10 section 3.

[46] In *De servo arbitrio*, there is a change in the practical determination, so that *before* God's self-imposition on human one can only accomplish sin, and after this imposition one can only accomplish the good. But this means that, unlike in Kant, this change is not due to human initiative, but only to God's initiative. This change in the human being is further discussed in *infra*, Ch. 9 section 6 and 10 section 1.

nature, but foremost its being the source, and not the object, of the human conception of human's own relationship to divine commandments).

From this, it is clear that the similarity between Luther and Kant is only superficial. For Kant, the positiveness of God towards the sinner results from the deontically interpreted *possibility* of modifying (*conversio*) one's moral intention, and this possibility derives from the *law* of doing so (assumed as divine commandment). For Luther, God's relationship towards the sinner follows from nothing: it is *itself* the origin of the possibility of thinking about one's own sinfulness. The human sinful condition is revealed by God's "unconditioned" forgiveness. This forgiveness is not the result of a *negative* deontic deduction, but the source of the limitation of deontic deduction.[47]

This difference between the two positions can also be interpreted by referring to divine commandments. For Kant, divine commandments are assimilated into the moral law. For Luther, this assimilation is unthinkable, because divine commandments are the contents of the *secundus usus*. Thus, the meaning of the *reversio* from radical sin follows, for Kant, from the structure of practical reason: divine commandments are the expressions of the moral law, and conversely, the moral law is assumed as divine commandment. For Luther, the *reversio* has meaning because it depends on God's *verbum* revealing the human sinful condition and establishing revelation's supremacy over deontic meaning. In other words, divine revelation establishes another *usus*, the *secundus*. Therefore, from Kant's point of view, Luther's conception of forgiveness transcends the limits of practical reason,[48] and thus, it is not intelligible or meaningful from a philosophical perspective.

7. On God's Justice and Grace

This leads us to the concept of God's justice. From a general point of view, the difference between Kant and Luther refers to the fact that for the former, God's justice is not and cannot be absurd; it is and should be comprehensible through the human criteria of justice.

Of course, comprehensibility does not mean identity. Kant acknowledges that God's justice is different than human justice (B 84, Ak 66). If they were

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[47] The simultaneity of sinfulness and sinlessness (sanctification) is conceived differently by the two thinkers. In Kant's *Religion*, it refers to an infinite moral progress, an infinite *collimation* of human intention with divine commandment (B 85, Ak VI 66–67), to the constant struggle against the evil root still necessarily present in oneself (B 127, Ak VI 93), and to a history of progression of human moral self-sanctification (B 170–173, Ak VI 116–118). In Luther, the *simul* refers to the intertwining of the two plans, so that the sinner is forgiven *because* she or he is irremediably a sinner, and the saint is such only as a recipient of God's forgiveness, which is "deserved" (or rather *undeserved*) for her or his being sinner.

[48] See Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 171.

identical, then God's justice would judge one's conduct, and the infinite discrepancy between conduct and intention (due to radical evil) would entail only an infinite negative judgment (B 95, Ak 72).

Nevertheless, God, being able to see one's heart (B 55, Ak 48; B 61, Ak 51; B 96, Ak 72; B 139, Ak 99), embraces in a synthetic unity the totality of one's process of approximating to the moral law; this process is grasped as *immediacy*. Thus, from God's perspective, the one assuming the moral law is already transcendently (noumenally) another human being, although empirically and psychologically one remains always the same, always driven by *Selbstliebe*. In light of God's synthetic perspective, one is worthy before God (B 98–99, Ak 74–75).[49]

Therefore, God's justice, although different than human justice, is indeed comprehensible; it still follows the formal concept of justice called "*cuique suum*," according to which the "*cuique*" is the case (the specific human being) deontically defined (in light of the teachings of Jesus), and the "*suum*" is the juridical consequence (God's judgment). In both divine and human formal concepts of justice, the judge applies a *Sollen* (Jesus's teachings) to a case in order to establish whether reward or punishment is appropriate: *cuique suum*.

Because of this formal identity, the process of juridical determination is identical for both human and divine justices. This determination depends on the positive connection between the case being judged and the *Sollen*; this connection is the condition of the determination of the *suum* by the judge. The specificity of divine justice in this general scheme refers to the *case*, the *cuique*. For divine justice, the case is the synthetic unity of the progression of one's conversion towards the moral law, and not simply this or that punctual accomplishment (B 240–245, Ak 159–162). In sum, concerning divine justice, the positive connection between case and *Sollen* is not empirical, but noumenal. For this reason, from the human point of view, one's own worth is not a certainty but a *hope*, depending not on the right or legal certainty, but on divine grace (B 101, Ak 75–76).

Kant's difference from Luther is evident precisely in what concerns divine grace. For Kant, divine grace has nothing to do with the mystery of election referring to the *unconditional* decree attributing to someone her or his moral constitution (either good or evil), thus destining her or him either to eternal worth or eternal damnation (B 217, Ak 143). Believing in such decree is the

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[49] Thus, we deal with a double divine judgment: one concerning the merit (which is done by the Son of God) and the other concerning the innocence (which is done by the Spirit). The first kind refers to humanity as a whole, and it divides it into two sets: the worthy ones and the unworthy ones. The second kind concerns the single individuals taken from the second set (of the unworthy ones). See Kant, *Religion*: B 220–221, Ak VI 145–146 note.

"*salto mortale* der menschlichen Vernunft" (B 178, Ak 121): it is unacceptable by practical reason. Thus, it must be excluded from the pure moral religion.[50]

In the next Part, I will expand upon whether it is appropriate to speak of double predestination in Luther.[51] For now, it is enough to say that Luther would agree with Kant about the qualification of the unconditioned decree as the *salto mortale* of human reason, with the fundamental clarification that *precisely for this reason*, the decree is *compatible* with the right theological disposition towards God's judgment.[52] It would be hard to imagine the Luther of *De servo arbitrio* subscribing to the notion that religion consists of conceiving God as legislator (B 147, Ak 103–104), and not conceiving the legislating God as the savior and redeemer beyond the limits of the deontic meaning of the relationship between the human being and the *Sollen.*

Luther would not deny that God is "unser Herrscher." However, it would be highly disputable to consider this *Herrschaft* as *moral*. On one hand, for Kant, God's condemnation of the human being is avoided because of the *moral* (and not strictly "jurisprudential") *Herrschaft* of God[53]; on the other hand, for Luther, the promise of forgiveness depends only on the *absoluteness* of God's judgment, on its unconditionality by any legislation, moral or jurisprudential. Again, for Kant, religion consists of understanding moral duties as divine commandments. For Luther, I would say that religion consists of understanding divine commandments as the revelatory evidence of the *theological* (thus, non-

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[50] It is quite significant that these two passages of Kant's *Religion* (B 177–178, Ak VI 120–121, and B 217, Ak VI 143) are quoted by Barth in his criticism of Luther's concept of *potentia absoluta*. See Barth, *KD*: II.2 §32, 21.

[51] See *infra*, Ch. 11 section 5.

[52] Concerning this "theoretical disposition," it is true that Kant also rejects the theoretical relevance of divine mysteries, but he stresses their *practical* relevance. The mystery of humankind's creation submitted to the laws of nature (*homo phenomenon*) *and* free from these laws (*homo noumenon*), the mystery of divine cooperation in human conformation to the moral law in light of human (insufficient) merits, and the mystery of election (all three reducible to the mystery of the Trinity) are theoretically absurd and have meaning *only* practically – that is, in relation to the moral law (see Kant, *Religion*: B 215–217, Ak VI 142–143). Luther negates not only the theoretical but also the practical relevance of all these mysteries: first, the human being is not free at all; second, there is no possible satisfaction of the saintly law; third (in the light of the two previous points), the merit has no relevance whatsoever to God's judgment, being a judgment of election (see *infra*, Ch. 9 section 5). Therefore, practical reason has no place whatsoever in the conception and comprehension of God's justice.

[53] Galbraith, "Kant, Luther, and Erasmus": 71 claims that for Kant, grace is not in opposition to normative freedom, for it is the theoretically unknowable modality of realizing the moral law. Hence, she associates Kant with Erasmus (*ivi*: 72). I would only add that in Luther, God's blessing allows the human being to be untainted by sin, and hence, to realize the commandments. The difference is that this "sanctity" is, for Kant, always defined by the moral law, and for Luther, by God's election of the human being. More on this in *infra*, Ch. 10 section 1.

deontic) meaning of the relationship between the human being and commandments. In sum: for Kant, God's grace depends on God's legislation; for Luther, God's legislation *begins* from God's grace. This means that, although God is indeed legislator and the commandments are indeed part of God's revelation, the fruit of this legislation does not *determine* God, as would be the case for a "moralischer Weltherrscher" (B 139, Ak 99).

From this, I deduce the following, formal distinction between the two authors concerning the condition of conceptualization of God's justice. For Kant, the concept of God's justice is comprehended within the limits of practical reason, and thus it is a (more or less counter-intuitive) variation of the formal concept of justice (the *cuique suum*). For Luther, the concept of God's justice is *not* comprehended within these limits, so it is incomprehensible within the boundaries of practical reason – it is a *salto mortale* of human practical reason.

Speaking of the incomprehensibility of concepts might seem a true *contradictio in terminis*. Any concept is comprehensible; otherwise, it is not a concept. However, in the case of God's justice, this "incomprehensibility" means that the conceptual comprehensibility does not depend on the language this concept *usually* (that is, logically) belongs to. The judgment of "incomprehensibility" results from (and thus, expresses) the effort of operating *upon* this logic. This operation consists of considering God's action towards human beings *not* as the object of this language; rather, God's action is considered the starting point, the *ex ante*, of the *theological* rethinking of the concept of justice and the language sustaining it. In sum, what appears a *salto mortale* from the perspective of practical reason (for instance, the conceptualization of God's justice as "unjust forgiveness" or "unjust condemnation") is the theological operation on the conditions of the conceptualization of justice in light of God's justice.

Therefore, the theological reflection on God's justice is the effort to consider as examples of justness concepts that, if inserted into the logic of practical reason, belong to *unjustness*, not to justice. In other words, if the justness of God's justice is a *salto mortale* of practical reason, then God's justice can only be *unjust* (an absurdity: the concept of unjustness is a concept of justice) within the limits of practical reason.[54]

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[54] This difference in logical plans between Luther and Kant is confirmed by Kant's three aspects of God's function as judge (B 213–214, Ak VI 141–142). The first aspect is the fact that God's commandments should not be considered arbitrary ("willkürlich"); that is, "mit unsern Begriffen der Sittlichkeit gar nicht verwandte." Consequently, God should not be considered "gnädig," nor "nach seinem unbeschränkten Recht gebietend." From Luther's theological perspective, things are rather different; it is true that God's commandments are not arbitrary, because they are part of God's revelation and hence are understood and comprehended as divine *commandments* – that is as having a deontic form. Nevertheless, the *function* of these commandments does not correspond to our concept of morality: they indicate not the way, but the *impossibility* of the way. Thus, what is "arbitrary" is God's

8. On Revelation

As stated in Chapters 5 and 6, Luther's discourse on divine commandments and God's justice begins with the *Faktum* of the revelation of such commandments and justice – the *Faktum* there is a *Sollen* and a justice that are objects of revelation. This *Faktum* is *deontically* translated as the negation of the implication "ought → can."

Kant's position is different. In his case, religion has sense in light of the *Faktum* of the moral law. This *Faktum* is *religiously* translated into divine commandments. Similarly, we can see a sort of "socinianism"[55] in Kant's position: Jesus Christ is interpreted as practical reason's *ideal model* of human moral perfection (B 73–76, Ak 60–62; B 175, Ak 119), the human being worthy of the reign of God (B 203, Ak 134).[56] Hence, Jesus Christ is the representation of the practical ideal of humanity having its foundation "in unserer moralisch gesetzgebenden Vernunft"; he is the motive for the *conversio* towards this ideal's *realization*, the exemplification of the practical fact that "[w]ir sollen ihr [*sc.* this ideal of humanity] gemäß sein, und wir müssen es daher auch können" (B 76, Ak 62).[57] As such, one's rapport with Jesus Christ corresponds not to a religious need, but a need for practical reason.[58] This need is the conversion of the intention through the revelation of God's moral behavior towards humanity (B 211, Ak 139).

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judgment of the human being, because this judgment cannot depend on the deontic function of the commandments. Rather, it depends only on God's "unbeschränkten" will, which is absolute precisely because it is God's. Consequently, God is at the same time *gnädig* and *despotisch*; divine grace manifests God's absolute freedom, and God's despotism is expressed in the gratuitous forgiveness. The second aspect is God's "evaluation," through which human moral dispositions can be relished by God in order to evaluate the ways of compensating for human moral deficiency. However, it is highly questionable whether the smallest aspect of an irremediably sinful creature can be the object of God's approval, and whether even a cooperative sanctification of this creature is possible. The third aspect is God's "measurement" of the degree of conformity between the human being and commandments. This aspect clashes with Luther's position, according to which no conformity is possible: between normative expectations and creatural realizations of the norm lies a chasm (again, for the *secundus usus*). Thus, theologically, it is because nobody can be forgiven that this forgiveness belongs to God – or conversely, it is because God is forgiving that the sin of everybody is invincible and ineradicable.

[55] See Weil, *Problèmes kantiens*: 163.

[56] From this interpretation follows the rejection of any vicarious satisfaction of human moral debt (B 172, Ak VI 117–118), and of any resurrection and ascension (B 191, Ak VI 128 note); all these ideas are either incompatible with or useless for the rational faith, fruit of practical reason (B 174, Ak VI 119).

[57] In other words, it is through the example of Jesus that I am aware that my "ought" implies my "can."

[58] See Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 193–194.

What is at stake here is the subordination of revelation under the transcendental conditions of practical reason, so that the only meaningful revelation is God's will, inscribed in our hearts as the moral law (B 218, Ak 144; see also B 148, Ak 104).[59] This means that the moral law has priority (B 158, Ak 110) over all empirical and contingent types of revelations. Thus, it is the condition for all elements concerning the relationship between God and the human being, including divine revelation (B 161, Ak 112) and the Bible, to have sense and relevance.[60] Additionally, elements, commandments, prescriptions, and teachings that do not refer to the moral law must be considered religiously irrelevant (B 219, Ak 144–145).

Therefore, the distinction between Luther and Kant also concerns the *Faktum* they consider to be the beginning, the origin, of the reflection on the relationship between the human being and God. For Luther, this *Faktum* is the *claritas* of Jesus Christ in all Scripture, the priority of divine revelation over all human rules, canons, and meters. For Kant, it is the moral law through which God's revelation is comprehensible. Therefore, Kant excludes all reference to supposed "sacred mysteries." These mysteries are the expressions of the (impossible) theoretical (and *not* practical) attempt to know human freedom (B 209, 218 note). It follows that, for Kant, there is no contrast between faith and reason as such, but only between faith and reason *in its theoretical use*.[61]

In sum, for Kant, the *philosophical* relevancy of religion depends on the *Faktum* of pure practical reason. For Luther, the *theological* meaning of practical determinations depends on the *Faktum* of revelation.

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[59] Hence there is no need for any vicarious communication (B 216–217, Ak 143). Here the pietist roots in Kant's position are evident.

[60] See Kant, *Religion*: B 159, Ak VI 110 note: "Ich […] frage, ob die Moral nach der Bibel oder die Bibel vielmehr nach der Moral ausgelegt werden müsse. […] [W]erde ich versuchen, sie [*sc.* the biblical passages] meinen für sich bestehenden sittlichen Grundsätzen anzupassen."

[61] See Pasternack, *Kant on Religion*: 18; see also Insole, "Pasternack's *Kant*." See Pasternack and Rossi, "Kant's philosophy": "Thus, from Kant's objections to the traditional proofs for God's existence through to his rejection of supersensible knowledge, the negative elements of his philosophy of religion are not to be understood as denials of or even challenges to faith. They exist, rather, in order to make sure that the true worth of religion is not lost as a consequence of reason's excesses. Hence, despite more than two centuries of interpreters who have regarded Kant's criticisms as expressions of hostility, the barriers he establishes are not meant to abolish faith but to save it. It is, thus, a profound irony that Kant is so commonly portrayed in theological circles as the greatest enemy to faith that has ever emerged out of the history of philosophy."

9. Overcoming the Aporia

This difference with regard to the *Faktum*, the foundation upon which Luther's and Kant's discourses are logically based, marks the fundamental divergence between Kant and Luther. For Kant, God is a postulate of pure practical reason.[62] For Luther, God is the "postulate" of God himself; God does not presuppose any condition different than himself in the relationship between God and the human being. This divergence is fundamental because it does not concern the contents of the two positions, but it refers to the foundations, the logical grounds, the methodologies, that the two positions not only imply, but foremost *formulate*. For Kant, it is the methodology of philosophical discourse. For Luther, it is the methodology of theological discourse.

On one hand, Kant stresses not only the reconciliation of revelation with practical reason; also, and foremost, he emphasizes the *dependence* of the former upon the latter. Referring to practical reason is the method for understanding all religious elements. On the other hand, Luther stresses the subordination of the conditions of the deontic meaning (the conditions of the *primus usus*) to revelation. It follows that theological discourse is the operation upon the validity of these conditions.

Therefore, the two positions do not *have* opposing methods.[63] Rather, they *present* two methods that are opposed; they are the expressions of these two methods. They formulate the conditions of the cogency and coherence of two kinds of discourses and reflections on the relationship between the human being and God's commandments and judgment. Given that the two methods differ, then the two sets of discourse they formally define also differ: on one hand the theological set, and on the other hand the philosophical set. Thus, the positions of Luther and Kant can be indeed positively compared, but this comparison is very formal and thus very loose (not to say sterile); it concerns the fact that both positions are meta-discourses.

This formal (*not* conceptual) positive relationship between Luther and Kant is why all arguments that focus on a *conceptual* relationship between Luther and Kant necessarily struggle with the simultaneous presence of a similarity and a divergence between their positions. In fact, the concepts presented by both discourses are *beyond comparison* because they belong to two discourses that are *already* two methodological reflections upon different kinds of conceptualization. For Luther, it is a reflection upon the theological conceptualization; for Kant, it is a reflection upon the philosophical conceptualization.

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[62] See Kant, *KpV*: A 223–237, Ak V 124–132. See Hirsch, "Rechtfertigungslehre": 57: "Der Gottesbegriff [muß] nach moralischen Grundsätzen zugrunde gelegt werden." See Insole, "Pasternack's *Kant*": "Technically, we do not *know* theoretically that there is a God, or that we are free; these are required beliefs of practical reason."

[63] See Bauch, *Luther und Kant*: 144.

Therefore, all *conceptual* comparisons, positive or negative, between Luther and Kant are fallacious because they overshadow the fact that the concepts they analyze are already objects of the methodological aim of Luther's and Kant's reflections. In other words, these positive or negative conceptual comparisons impose a method (the method of comparison[64]) upon Luther's and Kant's reflections. Consequently, these conceptual comparisons equally overshadow the methodological aim of their objects. Rather than applying a methodology to Luther's and Kant's reflections, it is a matter of "simply" acknowledging the meta-methodological equipollency, and thus the methodological irreducibility, of the two positions.

Therefore, the aporia within the secondary literature concerns the scope of the secondary literature. Both negation and affirmation of a *conceptual* comparison are equally plausible, and thus misleading, because it is not a matter of conceptual proximity or distance, but rather of the formal proximity between two methodological propositions. In sum, Luther's and Kant's positions are *already* two different efforts to find and found the *method* according to which it is possible to attribute *meaning* to concepts – a meaning that is either theological or philosophical.

It follows that Kant's and Luther's positions are not conceptually comparable, positively or negatively, because they already express the criterion of their own conceptual meaning. They already formulate the conditions according to which any conceptualization concerning the relationship between the human being and divine commandments and judgment is possible, philosophically or theologically. For this reason, no common base exists, no logical ground (beyond and beneath the formal and sterile fact that they are two methodological reflections) on which it would be possible to perceive either a similarity or a difference between their concepts.

10. Kant is Not a Theologian

This reflection shows the irrelevance of formulating any theological genealogy for Kant's position. Kant's speculation is *not* the result of a secularization of

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[64] As hinted in the third section of this chapter, this method is analogy. For instance see Rieger, "Böse": 89. As discussed in *supra*, Ch. 2 section 7, analogy is the rapport between two elements that are mutually irreducible. Therefore, the fact that analogy is used as method of comparison between Luther and Kant is already the confirmation that the plausibility of any comparison is at least limited. This structure of the argument is a logical necessity for all attempts to compare two discourses whose divergence is not only formal, but meta-formal.

Christian (or Lutheran) conceptions.[65] Rather, it is the result of the incorporation of religious elements into a philosophical argument.

The difference refers to this: philosophical argumentation does not assume the religious elements in light of their empirical (contingent) existence (in Kantian terms, as religion "des bloßen Cultus", B 62, Ak 51); rather, it deduces the relevance of the religious elements from the transcendental (*not* transcendent) necessity for practical reason to refer to *transcendence* in order to solve the contrast between deontic necessity and the empirical possibility of the moral law.

For instance, Hirsch is right when he states that Kant's philosophy of morals cannot answer the question about human moral conversion without reference to God; however, he is wrong in saying that Kant's answer to the question about how a sensible will can become moral[66] is derived from Luther's doctrine of justification.[67]

Concerning this question, as already discussed, evil refers not to human *nature* (B 8, Ak 21–22; B 31, Ak 34–35), but to human *freedom*. Misunderstanding this means misunderstanding that the *conversio* of the intention is founded on a practical point of view, and the reference to God functions only on the level of a practical reason that is not only pure. Hence, the reference to Christianity functions as a mere exemplification: it is not necessary for it to be taken as a cult, because the conceptual level is already enough for reason.[68] The reference to God, grace, and divine justice in Kant's argument depends on (and should be understood within) the aim of Kant's speculation: the formulation of the philosophical method (and thus, the limit) of thinking about religion.

Concerning the answer, claiming that Kant "stehet unter dem Schatten von Luthers Geiste. Seine Erkenntnisse sind Luthers Erkenntnisse, seine Fragen sind Luthers Fragen"[69] is doubly wrong. It is wrong because it evidences a confusion of plans: the concepts of Kant's philosophy of morals have meaning only within their own (philosophical-transcendental) context. Furthermore, it is wrong because it misunderstands Kant's aim, which is not the conciliation of the doctrine of justification with human morality, but the rigorous operation of inserting the discourse on religion into the limits (and thus, the method) of reason.[70]

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[65] See for instance Bauch, *Luther und Kant*: 145–149, and Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 22–23.

[66] Hirsch, "Rechfertigungslehre": 52: "wie aus einem *natürlich* begehrenden Willen ein dem Guten gehorchender Wille werden könne" (emphasis added).

[67] *Ivi*, p. 60.

[68] See, for instance, Kant, *KpV*: A 229–230, Ak V 127–128.

[69] Hirsch, "Rechtfertigungslehre": 61.

[70] Another evidence of Hirsch's misunderstanding of Kant is his quotation "du kannst, denn du sollst" (*ivi*: 51), instead of the correct "du sollst, denn du kannst" (some secondary

11. Theology and Philosophy Conceive the *Sollen* Differently

This conclusion has serious consequences, not only on the level of Kantian and Lutheran scholarship, but also on the level of theological discourse.

The methodological nature of the discourses of Kant and Luther marks the separation between the formal conditions of the theological discourse (on God's legislation and justice) and the formal conditions of practical reason.

All *theologically cogent* concepts of God's legislation and justice have no dependence on moral concepts. Divine commandments (if theologically understood) cannot be considered as moral laws, God's justice cannot be considered to answer to human juridical expectations, and finally, religion has nothing to do with the human being as actor deontically understood. Otherwise – if divine judgment adhered to practical expectations and the concept of justice, and if religion had to deal with the realization of the *Sollen* and the accomplishment of a justice compatible with practical reason – religion would be just one of the many understandings of *praxis*, and divine revelation would be dependent on reason in its practical use. (That *is* indeed the case, from a philosophical perspective.)

This reflection does not mean that cogent theological discourse must associate religion with the *opposite* of morality – that is, with *immorality*. In fact, immorality also belongs to the logic of practical reason because it presupposes the freedom *not* to realize the norm. Rather, this reflection means that what has meaning in the practical sphere does not have to refer to the religious sphere to be valid. Additionally, it means that what has theological meaning refers to the practical sphere in order to find the *objects* upon which to operate, the *names* (such as "justice," "sin," and "forgiveness") whose conditions of meaning are to be placed under divine revelation in order for these names to no be vessels of practical meaning, but of theological meaning.

This confirms that theological discourse on "law," "justice," "sin," "forgiveness," et cetera is based on the inversion of priority between the boundary of practical reason and divine revelation. The theological discourse on the relationship between human being, *Sollen*, and divine judgment refers to concepts that do not derive their *validity* from the sphere of the philosophy of morals – although *prima facie* they belong to this sphere. The "validity" of these concepts, their theological relevance, consists of the fact that these concepts are the means for questioning the axiomatic validity of the condition of their formulation – that is, they are the means for questioning the priority of practical reason over divine revelation.

Thus, the theological meaning of "good," "evil," "*Sollen*," et cetera, is *methodologically* distinct from the practical philosophical meaning of the same

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bibliography on Hirsch seems to overlook this; see Lobe, *Prinzipien*: 94–97; Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 148). This mistake also affects Forde, *Captivation*: 75.

terms – that is, the terms related to *freedom* in deontic sense. Once again, this does *not* entail the theological annulment of the deontic level. Simply put, the deontic level is no longer a formally self-founded *Faktum*, but it is conditioned by the *Faktum* of divine revelation.

This clarifies that the distinction between the theological and philosophical discourses refers to the form, not the contents, of concepts. The two different directions of formal subsumption (either the deontic under divine revelation, or revelation under the transcendental principles of practical reason) are formal, not material; they are methodological, not conceptual.

Distinguishing between the formal and conceptual levels solves at least three fallacies.

First, antinomianism. The antinomian position is inconsistent because it confounds the form with the concept. The theological discourse logically *requires* practical reason and its principles because it refers to them in order to have objects upon which to operate; theology refers to them in order to be able to express a meaning when speaking of commandments, justice, condemnation, and forgiveness. In sum, as much as (practical) reason does not claim to annul faith, faith does not claim to annul (practical) reason.

Second, the "ethicization" of religion – that is, making religion a normative system. This position is also affected by the same confusion of form and concept. Religion is not a system of morality; nor is divine revelation a criterion for judging historical norms and rules of a *Sittlichkeit*. Otherwise, we would have the assimilation of religion into the normative level, the reduction of revelation to a meta-norm,[71] and consequently, the annulment of the formal difference between theological and philosophical (practical) discourses.

Third, the application of practical concepts and principles to religious practices. Even if this application is neither antinomian nor ethicist it is nevertheless inconsistent because it implies the reduction of faith to the practical agreement upon a normative system (with the absurd consequence that prayer is the accomplishment of a duty, for instance).

12. Neither Reduction Nor Subordination

These misunderstandings of form and concept also influence some interpretations about the influence that the (positive or negative) relationship between Luther and Kant has on the level of the relationship between philosophy and theology. I shall limit this analysis to two examples.

The first concerns Kant's supposed reduction of religion to morality. Kant's transcendental operation upon the understanding of religion does not mean that he is reducing religion to morality, nor that he is elevating morality to a

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[71] See *supra*, Ch. 6 section 5 and 6.

religious level.[72] Rather, it means that the philosophical definition of religion implies a transcendental perspective on practical reason, and vice-versa, that the philosophically cogent conception of the conditions of morality refers to religiously-based elements as practically understood.

Thus, Kant's analysis does not concern religion and morality *as such* by placing them either into subordination or by "elevating" them. Rather, Kant's operation lies on the level of the conditions of philosophical meaning of religion and morality. Kant's position clarifies the fact that *philosophical* conceptualizations of religion cannot be independent of the formal, logical conditions of practical reason – and that these conditions imply the reference to concepts whose object is defined as transcendent. In short, Kant does not claim to change religion or morality, for they are empirical, historical elements. He simply aims to understand the conditions according to which a philosophical discourse that concerns them makes sense.

Again, this formal point is indeed similar to Luther's argument. In Luther's *De servo arbitrio*, there is also no subsumption of an empirical element under another empirical element; rather, an empirical element (the deontic concept of *Sollen*) is subsumed under a *formal* operation: the theological modification of the conditions of the thinkability of this element.

The second example concerns the fact that both Luther and Kant would overcome the opposition between theological ethics and philosophical ethics.[73] Again, Kant and Luther do not relate the two kinds of ethics. Rather, they stick to one kind of meaning of the *Sollen* (either the philosophical or the theological one), and from this standpoint they deduce the cogency and thus the limitations of the other kind.

Again, this does not mean the subordination or the reduction of the one meaning to the other, but rather that there is no other formally independent "ethics" (that is, a system of meaning of *Sollen*) besides or beyond the specific meaning that is assumed. For Kant, the form (not the content) of all religious duties is dependent upon practical reason (being *Sollen*). And for Luther, the meaning of the theological *usus legis* logically refers to the theological operation upon the condition of the *primus usus*. In sum, theological and philosophical ethics are two formally equipollent (and thus irreducible) systems of meaning of the *Sollen*.

To sum it up: if we conceive the human being *coram Deo* as *free* in deontic terms, then all discourses on God and on being *coram Deo* are simply aspects of deontic language. Vice-versa, understanding human freedom in light of the relationship to divine revelation means that religion is not a masquerade of human practical needs and expectations; its conceptual value and relevancy is autonomous, it has its own *method*.

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[72] See Palmquist, "Does Kant Reduce"; Firestone and Jacobs, *In Defense*: 11–36.
[73] See Bauch, *Luther und Kant*: 148.

Precisely for the formal equipollence between theological method and the method of practical reason, divine revelation is theologically neither a treatise of morality nor a *summa virtutis*. This leads us again to the connection between Gospel and Law[74]: considering the Gospel as containing the Law, not formally (that is, as discourse on the Law) but materially (as meta-norm), is the result of the same attitude that conflates Luther's methodological position with Kant's methodological position.[75]

This conclusion gives rise to further questions. In light of this methodological separation between the theological and philosophical discourses on *Sollen*, deontic language, and divine justice, what is the theological meaning of the *conversio*? Given that, theologically, it makes no sense to speak of the realization of the *Sollen*, does it make sense to speak of self-improvement, self-education, and hence, of merits? How God's promise of forgiveness influences the entirety of one's whole life? How is it related to salvation, and how can the distinction between salvation and damnation be conceptualized?

These questions are the object of the next Part.

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[74] See supra, Ch. 6 section 5.

[75] This theoretical limitation invalidates both Ritschl's and Holl's interpretations of the relationship between Law and Gospel as attempts to make Luther's theology a "religion of conscience," thus making Luther an epigone of Kant. See Forde, *Law-Gospel*: 112–114, 129–130; see also Scott Clark, *Iustitia imputata*: 275.

Third Part

Freedom as Meaningful Life under Divine Election

Like the Second Part, the Third Part considers an aspect that goes beyond the modal interpretation of the *querelle* between Erasmus and Luther, beyond the issues of freedom (modally understood), necessity, and determinism. In the Second Part, this discussion concerned the deontic aspect and how theology relates to it; specifically, the Second Part analyzed Luther's operation upon the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. In this Part, the aspect beyond determinism concerns freedom as the formulation of life's meaning, and the specific language related to it.

Also like the Second Part, the Third Part focuses on one of Erasmus's two *ad absurdum* arguments. As discussed in the previous Part, Erasmus's first *ad absurdum* argument concerns Luther's absurd negation of the realizability of the norm. Erasmus's second *ad absurdum* claims that assuming Luther's position leads to the absurd negation of the movement of self-education, and consequently, the negation of the relationship between merit and reward. This argument is based on a third language of freedom. According to this language, freedom is connected neither to the realization of a modal possibility, nor to the realization of a *Sollen*, but rather to a life defining the form of its own movement. Thus, freedom is life's *self-attribution* of meaning; it is life as *type*. I call this third language of freedom "typological." Luther's response to Erasmus's second *ad absurdum* argument coincides with the theological operation upon this language.

In Chapter 9, I focus on the logical structure of typological language, and on Luther's rejection of typological freedom. In Chapter 10, I analyze life's theological meaningfulness as based on the relationship between salvation and damnation; accordingly, I discuss whether Luther's argument can be interpreted as "existentialist." In Chapter 11, I reflect on the function of the concept of predestination, and on the connection between theology and theodicy. Chapter 12 puts theology and literature into dialogue; I compare Luther's and Mann's "reinventions" of Jackob and Esau, and I end by comparing literary and theological interpretations of Judas Iscariot.

Chapter 9

Like Clay in the Potter's Hands

1. Life and Form

Erasmus's second argument *ad absurdum* refers to the fact that some absurd conclusions about human life and God's action upon it could be deduced from Luther's position.

Concerning the human being, according to Erasmus, the conclusion refers to the negation of the conception of life as movement of "perpetual and painful fight against the flesh" (I a 10). By conceiving that life is moved by the divine action according to a "mera necessitas," it follows that nobody could even try to change or correct their own life (I a 10). In sum, Luther's position leads to the absurd negation of all efforts of living a life in compliance with divine requirements (a saintly life). According to Erasmus, from Luther's perspective, life is like clay in the hands of God, molded according to the will of the potter (III a 13–14; IV 3; Isa 45:9; Jer 18:6; Rom 9:22–23).

Given that, from Luther's seemingly absurd point of view, human life does not proceed by itself along either path of sanctity or evil, it no longer has meaning to speak about a life movement of self-improvement. Consequently, it is impossible to speak of merit (or demerit) for this process – that is, to say whether this process, this movement of life, is positive or negative (II b 2; III a 6). And if it is no longer possible to speak about merits, then it is also no longer possible to speak about the rewards for these merits (III a 17; IV 3). Thus, from Luther's position it is deduced that God's assignment of rewards or punishments to human beings is arbitrary (II b 3; IV 4; IV 12).

I focus on the image of the clay and the potter. This image is a paideutic metaphor.[1] It conveys the situation of a formless mass (clay) that an agent (the

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[1] A distinction between a pre-modern and a modern conception of the *paideia* may be proposed: the pre-modern considers the movement of self-education as finite, so it is possible for the single life to realize the fullness of the ideal of this life itself (the *kalokagathos*); on the other hand, the modern conception considers the movement as infinite, so that the single life can only *approximate* the ideal that this life incarnates (see Heller, *Morals*: 6–7; see also Vestrucci, "Non-Prescriptive Aspect": 68–70). However, it seems to me that this distinction is an oversimplification of the issue: the conception of the pre-modern possibility of being fully formed clashes against the *paideutic* function of tragedy. An adult (*supposedly* fully formed) can understand the limitation of her or his own *phronesis* – her or his practical judgment – by attending the tragedies, the representations of the deeds of the heroes whose

potter) molds according to a form (the form of a vase).[2] The result of this process is the creation of an object that is no longer formless, but recognizable (as a "vase"). What was a mere mass of clay is now identified as a *specific* vase – a specific realization of a form. This means that the form is realized according to the quality of the clay; different clays realize the form differently, thus culminating in different vases.

This is a metaphor for life's education. Education is the process of molding a life into an informed life, a life whose living movement is the expression of the form that has been given or attributed to it – for instance, a virtue, a strength, or a talent. The life resulting from this process of education is the life moving according to this form. It is a life that knows, assumes and (more or less) satisfies the expectations related to its form.

It is important to underscore that, like the vase, for the educated life is it not a matter of simple realization of the form. Rather, it is the realization of a form *within* this life, according to the specificity of this life. In other words, the form is realized according to the psychology, the temperament, and the personality that characterize the uniqueness of a life as *this* life. Therefore, there is no such a thing as *the* informed (virtuous, educated) life; there is rather *this* informed life, this specific realization of the form.

It follows that the uniqueness of a life can be understood and appreciated in light of its movement of information. A life's character, the specific sum of its weaknesses and strengths, is understandable through the application of a form; they are "weaknesses" and "strengths" *for* the realization of the form, and thus in light of the form. Without a form, the character of life could not be known or appreciated because there would be no standard from which life's unicity would become apparent. The specific "measure," the specific quality of a life can be appreciated only by comparing it with a "meter," with a criterion applicable to a plurality of lives. Therefore, the specificity of a life can be thought only as the specific realization of a form.

The relevance of life's specificity to the process of life's education also has consequences on the level of the form. The same form can be appropriate for some specific lives, and not appropriate for other lives. Thus, there is no form that is valid *per se* and applied to a life *a priori*. Rather, there is a fine-tuning between the form of life and the potentiality of a life. Therefore, the form does not inform *in abstracto* the movement of life, but it incarnates in this life; it *is* this movement. The process of life education is a double process: the information of a life according to a form is simultaneously the manifestation of this form within a life. In sum, it is a *living* form.

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phronesis were limited, incomplete, and for this reason, tragic. I analyze the aretetic function of ancient tragedy in Vestrucci, "Le quattro cause."

    [2] See Heller, *Morals*: 5.

Thus, what has been stated about the knowability of life also applies to the knowability of the form. There is no form of life that is not simultaneously the form of *a* life. Moreover, there is no form of a life that is not also a form *as* this life, as this specific movement of living according to this form. There is no form *in abstracto*, but only in (at least potential) incarnations. Therefore, the concept of the form is the result of an inductive inference from different cases. The definition of a virtue (prudence, justice, et cetera) is the least common denominator of all virtuous lives, of all specifically prudent or just lives.

Erasmus speaks negatively about the metaphor of the potter because this metaphor presents a process of information that is imposed from the exterior (that is, by God's action). It follows that Erasmus has in mind the idea of a life that is committed to correcting its own conduct, or to loving God with the whole heart (I a 10). This means that the metaphor is not entirely rejected by Erasmus; what is rejected is the *heteronomous* conception of the process of life-information. Thus, the metaphor is sound and good, for Erasmus, as long as the clay and the potter *coincide*. The process of information the metaphor illustrates is interpreted as *self*-information. In other words, Erasmus bases his second argument *ad absurdum* on the concept of self-education.[3]

This second argument *ad absurdum* is distinct from the previous one, because in this case it is no longer a matter of the absurd negation of the realization of the *Sollen*. This time, the absurdity concerns the negation of the possibility of self-education. In light of what I have just stated about education, it follows that Erasmus accuses Luther of the absurd negation of the language that formulates the coincidence between form and life in terms of the informed life, or the living form.

Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate upon the structure of this language in order to identify the condition of non-absurdity that Erasmus assumes and claims that Luther's position negates.

2. Typological Language

First, it is important to clarify why it is no longer a matter of deontic language.

In fact, the case of self-education is apparently an aspect of the deontic conceptualization of freedom. In the present case, too, it is a matter of an "ought" that should be realized (in a life). In sum, the life form can indeed be conceived as a *Sollen*. At first glance, the only difference from the deontic scenario is that the *Sollen* is not realized in a single action, but as the sum of actions that defines the characteristic movement of a life.

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[3] Gestrich, "Gott und das Leben": 156 uses the term of *Bildung* to analyze Erasmus's position. In the following section I hint at both philosophical and formal grounds of this important term.

However, upon a closer look, it becomes evident that the difference from deontic language is more fundamental. In the case of the informed life, the relationship between *Sollen* (form) and *Sein* (life) is no longer unidirectional, as it was in the case of deontic language. It is no longer the *Sollen* that defines the *Sein*, and it is no longer the *Sein* that is defined by the *Sollen*. Rather, as I hinted in the previous section, in this case, the relationship is bidirectional: there is a mutual interconnection, a mutual interdependence, between form and life.

This interconnection is particularly evident in the case of the self-educated life. A self-educated life is a life that has chosen a form by which to be informed, so that life is the movement of realization of this life's form. This choice is not arbitrary, but it results from the appreciation of the specificity of this life; a life chooses this form instead of another because it recognizes it as its own form, as the form that fits this life's specific talents, strengths, inabilities, and frailties, that make a life this specific life. As such, it is as if life sees *itself* because of its relationship to this form, as *already* potentially informed by it. At the same time, the form fulfills its function as the principle of this life's movement because it is assumed by a life. As such, this form defines a specific life as the vessel of this form itself. Therefore, the form is thought as form-of-life, or living form.

This mutual interrelation between life and form differs from the deontic scenario. Deontically, the *Sein* is the realization (or non-realization) of the frastic, and thus is conditioned by the *Sollen*. In the case of self-education, there is a mutual conditioning between *Sein* and *Sollen*; there is no longer an independent variable that determines the value of the dependent variable (in the deontic case, these are *Sollen* and *Sein*, respectively). Rather, life and form are simultaneously both the independent and dependent variable – in other words, each one is the dependent variable of the other one.[4]

Instead of

$$Sollen \rightarrow Sein \text{ (deontic case)}$$

in this case, we have

$$Form \leftrightarrow Life$$

This is a biconditional relationship. Each element of the relationship is the condition of the other. On one hand, life is the condition for the form to fulfill its function as the principle of information of a life's movement; life is the

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[4] In other words, the *Sollen* is no longer the principle of the determination of a specific *Sein* (the accomplishment of the frastic of the *Sollen*); rather, the *Sollen* is now intrinsically present within the *Sein* of the self-educating life.

condition for the form to have *expression*, to be alive. On the other hand, the form is the condition for life's specificity to be acknowledged and recognized, to be thought and formulated; the form is the condition for life to have *meaning*, to be a concept (the concept of this life itself).

Thus, we have *two sets*, "Life" and "Form." The "true values" of the biconditional relationship between these two sets correspond to the intersection of the sets.[5] Therefore, there are elements in both sets "Life" and "Form" that are outside the intersection. In fact, there are lives that are not self-informed, and there are forms that do not inform a life.[6] However, for the elements of the intersection, the description of each element is possible only through the simultaneous application of both sets' definition. Each element is described simultaneously as expression of a meaning (by the set "Life"), and as meaning of an expression (by the set "Form").

In other words, the elements of the intersection are defined by their common properties: a life defines a form as its own meaning, and a form defines a life as its own expression. Thus, the biconditional relationship means that the life is the condition for a form to be a living form, and the form is the condition for a life to be a meaningful life. In sum, life and form are simultaneously the condition of conceptualization of the other. It follows that the unity between life and form is the condition of its own conceptualization.

Therefore, in the biconditional relationship both life and form can be known and conceptualized only *in* their intersection and *as* their intersection. Given that it is life that informs itself, then life expresses and formulates its own meaning: this meaning corresponds to the form living in this life. On the other hand, given that a form is defined as form of a life, then the formulation of this meaning can only be the *representation* of this meaning in a living expression. In sum, the biconditional relationship between life and form formalizes the fact that a meaning can be formulated *only* under representation (that is, only as the informed specificity of a life), or, in other words, that the object to which the meaning refers is simultaneously the source of this meaning.

I synthesize this biconditional relationship with the expression *modus loquendi et vivendi*. Life and form join together in a *modus*, a manner, a specific unity of "living and speaking"; that is, a specific unity of expression and meaning. In this unity, the life represents the form as a *modus* of being, and the form

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[5] I am aware that a biconditional does not entirely correspond to an intersection between sets, given that a biconditional is true if both elements have the same truth value. Thus, the space outside the two sets is also one of the true parts of a biconditional. The problem is that there is no logic for typological language, contrary to modal and deontic languages. Therefore, I ask the reader to forgive this imprecision as the evidence of a first attempt to understand this language formally.

[6] For instance, there are virtues that are considered outdated. I have in mind here Spinoza's famous rejection of humility as a virtue in his *Ethica*: IV, propositio LIII and related demonstratio.

gives life a *modus* of conceptualizing (better: of self-conceptualizing). We no longer have a life detached from a form, but the synergy, the *entelecheia*,[7] between life and form, the concept and the object of conceptualization.

I use the term "type" to express this counter-intuitive biconditional relationship. The type defines the process of self-conceptualization: it is the concept of the coincidence between a life as incarnation of a form, and a form as the law of movement of this life. The type represents the simultaneous conceptualization of life and form, because it formulates and presents the *modus loquendi et vivendi*, a way of living and speaking inside the "role" of a life. This can also be viewed the other way around (which is equipollent to the previous view): the type presents a life that is the representation of a universal *modus* to conceptualize life.[8]

Thus, the type is a specific concept of freedom. It is the freedom not only to elect a form as one's own form, but more profoundly, it is the freedom to elect oneself as the coincidence of life and form, as an informed life and living form. Therefore, the type is the concept of freedom as *self-election* – election of one's

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[7] See Weil, *Philosophie morale*: 103. This is the *hylomorphistic* process of a form informing a matter that has this form as its own form, and of a matter tending towards the full accomplishment of a form that exists as this movement (see Weil, *Philosophie morale*: 148; see also Vestrucci, *Il movimento*: 275–280). Contrary to the "asketische Ideale" (Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie*: third *Abhandlung*), the matter is no longer subjected to the form, but it is the manifestation of the form; and the form is not the principle of repression of the matter, but of its expression.

[8] Kant speaks of a *Typik* of pure practical judgment (see Kant, *KpV*: A 119–127, Ak V 67–71) as the modality according to which a principle of determination of the will (a *Sollen*) can be considered as the law of the intelligible (noumenal) nature. This modality consists of assuming the analogy between the two forms of law (natural law and law of the will): both kinds of law are formally expressions of legality – that is, both are elements of the set "law." In light of this, the law of empirical nature is assumed as the *type* of the law of the will. In the third *Critique*, Kant expands upon the issue by distinguishing between a schematic and a symbolic *hypotyposis* (see Kant, *KU*: § 59, Ak V 351–354), and associating the latter with the *analogical* presentations of concepts. Given that in the *Typik* of the second *Critique* the connection between law of freedom and law of nature was based on the consideration of the latter as an *analogy* of the former, the type corresponds to the symbolic hypotyposis. My idea of typological language is a sort of generalization of Kant's position. The *rhetorical* aspect in Kant's conception (see Gasché, *Form*: 207) is abandoned for the sake of the *formal* aspect: in the case of the type, the condition of conceptualization does not consist of a distinct legality of this conceptualization (a *schema*), but rather, it consists of the formulation *of this schema itself as* this specific conceptualization. In other words, the object of conceptualization is the *representation* of the legality of this conceptualization itself, a legality that exists *only as* this representation. Hence, in my view, typological language is still a *subjectio sub adspectum* (presentation under the appearance), but a very peculiar one: it no longer has a rhetorical function, but an epistemological one. The *adspectum*, the element of particularity, is the presentation of the law of conceptualization of this particularity itself. In sum, the type is the presentation of a law of conceptualization "in disguise" precisely because this law is expressible *only* by means of the specific conceptualization resulting from this law.

own meaning. This self-election is the election of oneself as principle of one's own belonging to a set (or rather, of one's own being an element of the intersection between the sets "Life" and "Form"). In other words, self-election is the election of oneself as the condition of one's own conceptualization. Freedom is the fact that the concept of a *modus loquendi et vivendi* coincides with the fact of *living* this *modus*.

   This freedom is the "*Wahlverwandtschaft*," the elective affinity, between informed life and living form, between the universal and the particular. This Goethean expression perfectly synthesizes the specificity of this concept of freedom: it is neither the realization of a possibility, nor the realization of a *Sollen*, but the synthetic unity of *Sollen* and *Sein*. This freedom is an affinity, something "natural," "magnetic," something "destined" – it is the accord of a life with its own form. At the same time, this affinity is elective, it is chosen, or rather, it is embraced and acknowledged as one's own, as authentic.

   Thus, this freedom is the fact that a universality (a form) cannot be known outside the particularity in which this universality lives, or, in other words, freedom is the fact that a particularity (a life) represents its own meaning through the election of its own universality. Freedom is being the condition of its own definition, and conversely, it means formulating a definition that corresponds to the uniqueness of the object. In sum, freedom is *beauty* as the active, moving force connecting form and life, universality and particularity.[9]

   This aesthetic terminology is not used by chance. In fact, the type answers to a peculiar structure (or legality) of conceptualization. This legality allows to formulate a concept that coincides with the object of conceptualization; in the typological scenario, no concept of a life exists that is different from this life as self-informed life. Therefore, this is an *aesthetic* legality[10]: the aesthetic legality produces objects that coincide with the laws of these objects. In other words, the aesthetic legality is the legality that is grasped only in the

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   [9] Here, the main references are the two famous works by Schiller, *Anmut und Würde* (see Introduction), and *Ästhetische Erziehung* (in particular, Letters 2, 4, 11, 14, 15, 18, and 25). Modern authors such as Ágnes Heller and Éric Weil reflect on the synergy between aesthetics and ethics in the history of philosophy, from the classic *kalokagathos* to the Renaissance until modernity. These two syntheses are issued from two different philosophical backgrounds (Lukács for Heller, and Cassirer for Weil – although, as hinted in *supra*, Introduction, there is a deep connection between Lukács's aesthetics and Neo-Kantianism). Nevertheless, their contributions are significantly similar. As I argue in Vestrucci, *Il movimento*: 240–244 and 284–287, this similarity is the evidence of the fact that Weil and Heller touched upon the embryo of the formal language constituting the concept of freedom related to the type. On the relationship between Schiller, Weil, and Heller, see Vestrucci, *Il movimento*: 290–292; *Id*., "Weil-Schiller"; *Id*., "Non-prescriptive": 52 and 83 note 19.
   [10] See Cohen, *Ästhetik*: 74–78. I translate Cohen's term "*Gesetzlichkeit*" as "legality."

particularity (in the object) that it determines, and thus the object itself fulfills the function of a universal legality.[11] It follows that the type is an aesthetic concept.

I call "typological language" the language that formulates types and conceptualizes freedom as the self-election of meaning. As such, typological language is another language of freedom; it is based on the biconditional relationship between universality and particularity, between legality and realization, and even between the law of life's movement and the psychology of this movement. As such, typological language is an aesthetic language.[12]

Typological language formulates a plurality of kinds of type, since freedom as self-election has many facets. One kind of type, already mentioned, is the beautiful life as self-educated, virtuous life. Another kind of type refers to an existential choice, the elevation of life's contingency to a necessity that is intrinsic and valid *only* for this specific life. In this case, type is the conceptualization of one's contingency as destiny; it is the authenticity of existence.[13]

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[11] This is the case of the work of art. Works of art are the laws of their own composition. In other words, the law of the creation of works of art can be formulated only *as* and *in* that created works of art. Thus, a work of art represents the legality of this work's determination.

[12] The reference to literature is clear. Lukács uses the concept of "typical" to express the capacity of realistic literature to create a character that embodies the synthetic relation between the individual and the structure of society (more precisely, of the division of labor); see Lukács, "Art": in particular 35–39. This is, for instance, the case of Thomas Mann's character Hans Castorp (see Lukács, *Thomas Mann*). The "typical" is a literary character presenting (in a sort of *hypotyposis*) a synthesis between the particularity of its individual aspects (*adspectum*) and the universality of the human ideal the character represents (as *subjectum*). Lukács's distinction between realism and naturalism is based precisely on the capacity of literary work to present this synthesis; the non-fetishized art is the art whose objectivations are referred to in the category of the typical (see Lukács, *The Historical Novel*). This is also the case for the *Bildungsroman*, especially Goethe's novels – Lukács uses the term "*Erziehungsroman*" instead of the Diltheyan term "*Bildungsroman*" in order to further underscore Lukács's theoretical proximity to Schiller (see Lukács, *The Historical Novel*: 133–138 and *Id.*, *Goethe*: 76–77; see also Vazsonyi, *Lukács reads Goethe*: 116). In the aforementioned *Wahlverwandtschaften*, the law of magnetic attraction is explained through the composition of the novel, in such a way that the character of the novel is the representation of a scientific concept, and the scientific concept is expressible in light of the aesthetic relevance of the character. The role of literature is further discussed in *infra*, Ch. 12.

[13] See Heller, *A Philosophy of History*: 112–113; see also *Ead.*, *Personality*: 161. There is continuity between the "aesthetic" aspect of type and the "existential" aspect of type: the authentic existence is seen, it appears as a beautiful existence, because the beauty is the expression of its existential authenticity, of being a *self-chosen existence* (see Heller, *Personality*: 275; Vestrucci, *Il movimento*: 261–266). This connection between the existential position and the ethical-aesthetic relationship is already present in Lukács's work, specifically in *Soul and Form*: here, Lukács attempts to converge the aesthetic problem of the form of art with the existential issue of the meaningful life in opposition to the mere empirical life (see Dannermann, "Ursprünge radikalen Philosophierens beim frühen Lukács"). This

This aspect of the type is discussed further in Chapter 10. There is a third kind of type: the archetype. The archetype is the mythical recurrence of the pattern that defines a life, or conversely, it is life as celebration of its own mythical role.[14] The archetype is the ultimate form of type, given that the coincidence between particularity and universality transcends the aspect of mere definition: life *exists* only as meaningful life, and there is no life that is not the repetition of a mythological concept. This aspect of the type is analyzed in Chapter 12.

3. Merit as Meaning

It is now time to explore the connection between typological language and Erasmus's second argument *ad absurdum*.

I begin by analyzing Erasmus's reprise of the scholastic distinction between the merit *de condigno* and the merit *de congruo* (II a 9). As mentioned in Chapter 7, the difference between the two merits concerns whether the action that is the object of merit complies with expectations. In the case of the merit *de condigno*, the expectations are perfectly satisfied. In the case of the merit *de congruo*, the expectations are not satisfied. A merit (*de congruo*) is nevertheless acknowledged; this merit refers to the totality of the life of the actor, instead of just to the single accomplishments. What is worthy *de congruo* is the general conduct, the moral effort, the whole virtuous movement of a specific life. Thus, from the *de congruo* perspective, the same accomplishment can be perceived differently according to the "quality of the clay" – the potentialities, the strength and the talents, the weaknesses and the failures characterizing the specificity of a life.

The fact itself that a distinction between the merit *de condigno* and the merit *de congruo* is possible demonstrates that in this case, Erasmus's argument is no longer based on deontic language. What is at stake here is no longer the realization of the *Sollen*, but life's effort of self-education. Erasmus uses the metaphor of the child who walks *by itself*, although unsteadily, towards the fruit shown by his father (IV 9–10). It does not matter that some steps are imperfect; the father appreciates the movement itself, the fact that the child is making the effort by itself. The single realizations can be unworthy. But God appreciates the struggle to remain on the path, the application of one's powers (according to their specificity) in moving towards sanctity.

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connection between the beauty, the good, and this sensual existence undergoes a pure aesthetic analysis in Lukács's early works on literature (see Köves, "Dance in Chains").

[14] The continuity between the existential and the archetypal aspects of the type can be seen in the connection between Lukács and Thomas Mann, not only because Mann is one of the highest examples of realistic novel, but also due to the mutual interconnection and definition of the two positions (see Markus, *Sociology of Literature*).

This movement of life is determined by this life itself; the individual being answers to God's call towards sanctity. It is the individual life that communicates the movement to itself, and that realizes it in its specific way. Thus, life attributes its own meaning to itself in the form of this specific effort of self-information; this meaning is the meaning of life as life moving itself towards God, and thus as life worthy of the merit *de congruo*. Sanctity is not formulated *in abstracto*, but it is represented and knowable through the individual exemplifications of it. Hence, the attribution of the merit *de congruo* by God is just the confirmation, the "certification," of a meaning that life has already given to itself.

Therefore, Erasmus's argument *ad absurdum* is based on the language that formulates the union between life's self-attribution of a form (in this case, life's own merit) and the form's expression within a life (as represented by this life). Consequently, a position (such as Luther's) that negates this union is judged absurd. By affirming that life is moved not by itself, but by God, Luther negates the freedom of self-election of meaning, thus annulling any active function of life; life is no longer the condition of its own meaning. And given that, for Erasmus, this union of life and form is what the merit *de congruo* attests to, Luther's position is absurd because it negates the merit *de congruo*. If the form of life depends entirely on God's action, if life's movement is the fruit of a "mera perpetuaque necessitas," then the concept of merit loses sense (II b 2; III a 6: III a 10, 17; IV 3). Luther formulates the absurdity that God either rewards or punishes not life's movement, but God's *own* actions on a life (IV 13).

This reflection clarifies what is, according to Erasmus, a non-absurd concept of God's action upon human life. The perspective of self-education implies that God's judgment of this life *mutates* in light of life's modification of its own movement (II a 18). Divine action is there to favor this movement, and to sustain the effort to live a saintly life.[15] Thus, God's action has relevance *ex post* as a consequence of the movement that life has attributed to itself. God says he does not want the death of the sinner (Ezek 33:11); therefore, according to Erasmus, damnation is not given *a priori*, arbitrarily, but it is consequential to the human lack of moral effort (II a 15).

In sum, according to Erasmus, the meaning of God's action is based on the conceptualization of life's self-attribution of meaning. God's action is the conclusion of a syllogism whose major and minor premises are, respectively, the form one gives to one's own life (the "movement" of the child), and the limited power to fully realize the form (the "unsteadiness" of the child). Luther's negation of self-education invalidates the deduction of God's soteriological action from the human initiative to assume a positive or negative conduct (II a

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[15] In this context, Erasmus presents the distinction of three or four (Erasmus is not clear about this) kinds of grace (II a 2). I will return to this distinction in *infra*, Ch. 12 section 1.

18). In sum, for Erasmus, Luther's position is absurd because it dismantles both theodicy and soteriology; the former is annulled as consequence of the annulation of the latter. It is no longer possible to formulate a concept of "*dike*" for God (theo*dicy*), because there is no longer a logic, a "*logos*" definable for God's assignment of salvation (and damnation) (soterio*logy*).

This is confirmed by the preference that Erasmus accords to the merit *de congruo*. God's attribution of merit *depends* on the concept of *de congruo*. "Deus est: non potest non optimum et pulcherrimum esse quod facit" (IV 12). God *must* be just according to the retributive concept of the merit *de congruo*. God has no other possibility. Thus, the theological conceptualization of the relationship between God's action and human life has no other possible structure than one that depends on life's self-information and self-election of meaning.[16] The non-absurd conceptualization of God's action towards human life presupposes the assumption of typological language.

This confirms once again that Erasmus's argument is a *petitio principii*, for it implies what it aims to found. The proof of this is again related to Erasmus's conception of Scripture's *unclarity*: Erasmus refuses a literal reading of the passage of the clay and the potter (III a 14) because only a non-literal reading can comply with the language conceptualizing self-education. Therefore, theological soundness, and non-absurdity, are built and depend upon the deduction of the concept of God's action from the thinkability of typological freedom.

This also affects the understanding of God's foreknowledge. Erasmus interprets God's foreknowledge in light of the conception of life's self-information: *praescientia* is *not* the cause of the event (that is, of the specific movement of this life), but it follows from the event (life's own movement) (III a 5).[17]

Erasmus reinforces his position by focusing on three Biblical figures: Jacob, Pharaoh, and Judas Iscariot. God's preference for Jacob before Esau (Gen 25:23; Mal 1:2; Rom 9:13) manifests a love that is arbitrary. However, according to Erasmus, this preference does not concern salvation or damnation, but only the empirical condition of the man Jacob, and his luck, fecundity, and wealth (III a 11).

God hardened Pharaoh's heart towards Moses, and thus towards God's own plans for God's people (Exod 9:12; Rom 9:17–18). However, according to

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[16] This is the same argumentative process we find in Descartes's *Meditationes*. The proof of the existence of God and of things is based on the claim that God, being supremely good, cannot deceive, and thus cannot instill in man a false idea of God or of the things we know clearly and distinctly. In the case of Erasmus, the theological (and epistemological) results are also deduced from the (supposed) compliance of God with the human conception of goodness. This "goodness" refers, in Erasmus's case, the retributive criterion of connection between merit and justice; in Descartes's case, it refers to the criterion of sincerity. See Descartes, *Meditationes*: III, 51–52; IV, 53; VI, 90.

[17] On Luther's criticism of this interpretation of prescience, see *supra*, Ch. 1 section 4, and *infra*, Ch. 11 section 4.

Erasmus, this does not mean that Pharaoh's heart was forced to harden; rather, it means that Pharaoh's heart was already hard. Thus, God did not force Pharaoh to resist God; God simply turned Pharaoh's already impious heart further towards evil, precisely for the sake of God's glory and the liberation of God's people (III a 3, 6).

Finally, as already discussed,[18] Judas's betrayal belongs to the *necessitas consequentiae*, not to the *necessitas consequentis*. Whatever God foreknows and wants will necessarily happen, but this does not mean that Judas would necessarily betray Jesus – because he could have acted otherwise, his will could have been pious, and *consequently* God would have foreseen this change in Judas's life (III a 9).

4. *Necessitas immutabilitatis*

As for the negation of *liberum arbitrium*[19] and the irrelevance of the commandments,[20] once again Luther radicalizes the "absurdity" that Erasmus rejects. For the third time, this radicalization corresponds to a questioning of the validity of the language founding Erasmus's position; Luther operates upon the *structure* of Erasmus's discourse.

I begin with the metaphor of the clay and the potter. For Luther, this metaphor is central because "nusquam se aspertius prodit Diatribe quam hoc loco" (729,11); on this issue of clay, potter, and vases, the *Diatribē* assumes its clearest position.[21]

Luther begins by establishing that Erasmus's reading of this passage is mediated by "Domina Ratione" (729,7). Because of this mediation, Erasmus deduces that the vase made by the potter is "suis juris" – its shape is formed by the vase itself (729,10). In other words, the vase is able to mold *itself* in order to comply with God's will (727,33).

However, Luther argues that it is Erasmus who molds Scripture. Erasmus supports his interpretation of the passage on the potter and the vase from Romans (Rom 9:21) by associating it to second Timothy 2:20–21, where Paul speaks about vases of gold and wood, honor and dishonor, and the fact that one can be a vase of honor if one purges oneself "ἀπὸ τούτων." According to Luther, this association is arbitrary, because even if the passage in second Timothy stated what Erasmus claims, this does not say anything about the passage in

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[18] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 5.

[19] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 2.

[20] See *supra*, Ch. 5 section 3.

[21] For this reason, Luther often returns to this image. He does so for rhetorical purposes as well: for instance, he applies it to himself (WA 18: 602,19) and to Erasmus (WA 18: 787,14).

Romans (728,6–9). And even if we assume that Romans 9:21 says the same thing of second Timothy 2:20–21, nevertheless we end with the negation of self-molding: the image of the vases in second Timothy 2:20 comes after the declaration that "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim 2:19). Thus, according to Luther, the passage in second Timothy means that "vasa non seipsa parent, sed herus" (728,28–29).

Given that the metaphor analogizes the clay with the human being and the potter with God, it illustrates the dependence of human life upon God's actions. It is not the vase that molds itself; it is its master who does so. Scripture confirms that there is no freedom of self-molding because human life is in God's hands (719,36–720,6; 727,20–22; 728,27–31).

This dependence of life upon God's action has nothing to do with the dependence of a child guided by his father; rather, it means that the child has no power to take any step on its own, no power to move towards God. It is God who not only *calls*, but also moves (746,15–29); it is God who guides the life upon the path that God wants (781,29–30; 781,36–782,8). In response to Erasmus's claim that by assuming Luther's conception no one would continue to educate oneself, Luther simply replies that it is not a question of willingness, but a question of possibility: no one can change the direction of life (632,3–5). Thus, considering life to be source of its own movement is hypocrisy (632,5).

This introduces the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis*. I have already analyzed the distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae* and Luther's rejection of it[22]: according to Luther, no matter which of the two necessities we consider, it is affirmed that the object of this *necessitas* is conditioned. Therefore, this distinction only has worth for confirming that the creature is not God, since no condition applies to God. Consequently, given that the human being is subjected to a necessity that is determined by God (a *theological* necessity), life's movement is also subjected to this necessity, and thus thinking about a self-movement is futile (617,2–20; 722,4–9).

However, this affirmation should not convey the impression that human life is *forced* by God to move in directions in which it does not want to go. The idea of coercion is misplaced because it would imply that *without God*, the human *voluntas* would be free – free to determine its movement as it wants. In other words, the scenario of coercion would imply a return to a situation of *necessitas consequentis*.

Therefore, the *necessitas* that God's *voluntas* imposes upon human beings is not a *necessitas coactionis*; one is not compelled by God to sin against one's will. Rather, one realizes the sin "sponte et libenti voluntate" (634,25). Simply, one cannot modify this movement by oneself (693,33–34). Therefore, it is not that a life is forced to follow a direction different from the direction it would prefer to follow. Instead, life cannot *determine* another direction by itself

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[22] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 5.

different from the direction that has received by God.[23] It follows that the *voluntas* that governs the movement of life is still there (otherwise, we should speak not about *voluntas*, but only about *noluntas*; 635,14), but it cannot mutate this movement by itself.[24]

Thus, the necessity that God imposes upon human life is the *necessitas immutabilitatis* (634,21–36; 747,22–23). Immutability means the negation of mutation of a movement. Therefore, the immutability concerns not merely the negation of the change of content of human *voluntas* from the object *x* to the object *y*; rather, it concerns the negation of the change of the direction in life.[25]

The evidence of this is Luther's application of this *necessitas* to the characters mentioned by Erasmus: Judas (720,31–35) and Pharaoh (714,28–34). For Luther, there is no possibility for these characters to change the direction of their lives. Judas continues to betray, and Pharaoh continues to be hardened against Moses and the Jews. In other words, for both characters, it is impossible to educate themselves into moving towards God.[26] This is the direction that God gave to their lives, so that their *voluntas* continues on this path.

In Chapter 12 I will expand upon the characters of Judas and Pharaoh and the responsibility connected to the *necessitas immutabilitatis*.[27] For now, it is important to emphasize that the concept of *necessitas immutabilitis* connects the *immutabilitas* of God's *voluntas* and *praescientia* to human life. As discussed in Chapter 1, divine *immutabilitas* means that nothing external to God's *voluntas* and *praescientia* conditions them: they are the conditions for everything to occur ("omnia in omnibus"). Thus, this divine *immutabilitas* also applies to human life (as part of the *omnia*). It is not human life that determines, and thus mutates, its own movement. Rather, human life receives this movement from God. In sum, divine *immutabilitas* translates into *necessitas immutabilitatis* when it is considered from the perspective of the movement and direction of human life.

Therefore, the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis* expresses Luther's negation of considering life's self-determination the condition of God's action

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[23] The fact that *coactio* is negated does not mean that Luther introduces a responsibility that is *moral*. In fact, this case involves a responsibility that is decided *before* the action is accomplished. In sum, it is not a moral responsibility, but a theological one. In *infra*, Ch. 12 section 6 I will further discuss the theological irrelevance of arguing about the degree of responsibility in Judas's and Pharaoh's cases.

[24] On *noluntas* see Saarinen, *Weakness*: 121.

[25] In other words, the *necessitas immutabilitatis* concerns the *time* of and in a life (720,35–721,1), thus, life's movement. In *supra*, Ch. 1 section 3 note 34, I expand upon the relationship between *immutabilitas*, time and movement.

[26] Self-education implies giving a new direction to one's own movement of life. This is the meaning that Erasmus defends. Clearly, this new direction of life is journeyed according to the specificity of this life; thus, it still belongs to the biconditional relationship between form and life.

[27] See *infra*, Ch. 12 section 6.

upon this life. God's action upon human life is no longer thought as the consequence of life's determination of its own movement, or as the confirmation of life's self-election as informed, meaningful life. Rather, life is the object of God's action; God's action is the source of life's movement.

Thus, given that the movement of life is the expression of life's meaning, and that this movement is originated by God, God's action upon human life corresponds to the source of life's meaning. Rejecting that life's self-movement entails God's action corresponds to rejecting that life can theologically be considered as the source of its own meaning; God's molding action is the principle that attributes, or *elects*, a meaning to life. Hence, the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis* is a vicarious concept, and thus inadequate, as Luther complains,[28] because it expresses an operation upon the language considering life as the source of its meaning.[29]

5. The Meaning Precedes Life

It follows that Luther reshapes the typological biconditional between form and life. The informed life is no longer the condition of its own meaning; it is no longer the representation of its own concept. Instead, life incarnates and expresses a meaning, a form, that has been received from God. Thus,

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[28] See WA 18: 616, note 1: "Optarim sane aliud melius vocabulum dari in hac disputatione quam hoc usitatum Necessitas, quod non recte dicitur, neque de divina, neque humana voluntate. Est enim nimis ingratae et incongruae significationis pro hoc loco, quandam velut coactionem, et omnino id, quod contrarium est voluntati, ingerens intellectui, cum tamen non hoc velit causa ista quae agitur. Voluntas enim sive divina sive humana nulla coactione, sed mera lubentia vel cupiditate quasi vere libera facit quod facit, sive bonum sive malum: sed tamen immutabilis et infallibilis est voluntas Dei, quae nostram voluntatem mutabilem gubernat, ut canit Boethius: Stabilisque manens das cuncta moveri; et nostra voluntas, praesertim mala, se ipsa non potest facere bonum. Igitur quod non praestat vox, impleat intellectus legentis necessitatem, intelligens id quod dicere velles, immutabilem voluntatem Dei et impotentiam nostrae voluntatis malae. ut aliqui dixerunt necessitatem immutabilitatis, nec hoc satis grammatice nec theologice." Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 170 note 35, discusses the issue of this note's autenticity. On this same topic see also Kolb, *Bound Choice*: 298–299.

[29] More precisely, the concept of *necessitas immutabilitis* replaces the peculiar necessity that is implicit in typological language. Life's determination of its own movement corresponds to life electing the principle of its movement, the law that life will obey to in all its movements; thus, life's self-determination coincides with life's determination of *its own necessity*. Therefore, typological freedom is a sort of self-determination of one's own *necessity*. This is reflected in the following quotation from Kierkegaard, *Sickness*: 13–14: "A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis." In *infra*, Ch. 10 section 5 I will take up Kierkegaard's philosophy.

theologically, life formulates its own meaning as a received meaning, as a meaning that life has not attributed to itself. Life thinks about itself not as self-electing life, but as the object of God's decision. The biconditional relationship is modified by the revelation that the form, the law of life's movement, the concept of life, is attributed without life's participation.

Therefore, this rethinking of the relationship between form and life has a counter-intuitive result: the object of meaning *follows* from the determination of meaning. From the theological priority of God's action over the entire movement of life it is deduced that life is the expression of a definition (of a *decision*) that has been formulated *prior* to life itself.[30] In sum, there are no longer two sets, "Life" and "Form," that intersect; rather all elements of the set "Life" are now defined by the set "Form." There is no life that is without form, because any possible life, any possible movement, is the expression of the form that God attributes to it. This result is Luther's theological operation upon typological language; it is the effort of thinking about the formal priority of God's decision about a life over this life itself.

This is confirmed by Luther's mimicry of Erasmus's statement "Deus est, non potest non optimum et pulcherrimum esse, quod facit" (IV 12). Luther writes: "Deus est, cuius voluntatis nulla est caussa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipsa est regula omnium" (712,32–34). This citation has already been quoted in Chapter 4, where I analyzed the *Deus absconditus*: theology is language acknowledging that none of its concepts is a theorem. The reference to typological language enriches the analysis by an additional layer. God's action is never an element of a set; rather, it defines the set of everything (*regula omnium*), and thus, it defines all elements of the set "Life."

The theological operation upon typological language clarifies why nobody knows about the good towards which one forces oneself (697,1–9): the positive meaning of the effort of self-education presupposes a language that can think about God's action as formally dependent upon the meaning of life's self-information. The conceptualization of this effort as self-education is not compatible with God's priority as the mover of life (775,1–4).

Thus, from the theological perspective, the virtuous being, the one who thinks to be able to educate oneself, does not know what she or he is doing (720,6–7) because the language according to which one considers one's life to be virtuous and meaningful makes it impossible to subordinate this meaning to

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[30] This has nothing to do with the case of the deduction of the definition of something before having experience of this something, as is common in physics: subatomic particles are often deduced before they are empirically detected. The case under examination is different. In this case, the object is not independent from the definition. There is no life before the movement of life, and given that this movement is attributed by God, there is no life before God's attribution of a movement, or a meaning, to this life. On the other hand, subatomic particles exist even if there is no empirical evidence of them.

God's action. Therefore, to live as a model of virtue is the manifestation of corruption (742,26–743,15): any effort to modify one's life is theologically conditioned by sin (760,32–35).

Luther does not deny that life has meaning. Rather, he denies that this meaning is theologically sound if it results from the structure of self-election as *type*. Therefore, the theologically sound meaning of life results from assuming that God's decision, God's *election* of a form, of a movement, as the source of meaning for human life. Clearly, this conception of life's meaning can only be absurd from the standpoint of someone (like Erasmus) who considers life itself, and not God's action upon this life, to be the condition of life's meaning.

6. *Incipit vita nova*

These reflections evoke a scenario that is completely novel, compared to the two previous Parts. As in those previous Parts, Luther's operation upon the condition of non-absurdity assumed by Erasmus consists of the simultaneous conservation and overcoming of this condition. In the present case, typological language is conserved because it is still a matter of thinking about life's meaning, but it is also overcome because the structure of this "thinking about life's meaning" (the biconditional relationship between life and form) is no longer valid. In sum, this language is modified.

What is new is that this modification occurs for the reason expressed by this modification: God's molding action upon human life. God's molding action applies not only to life, but also to life's self-conceptualization. This is due to the peculiarity of typological language. Typological language is the language of a life; it is uttered by a life, and thus, it is part of the *modus loquendi et vivendi* thought by this language. Therefore, the theological modification of this language (the fact that life thinks about its own meaning as dependent upon God's decision) is *already* the evidence of the priority of God's action over the life – over *this* life that says its *own* meaning.

In other words, thinking about the priority of God's action over life's movement entails the priority of God's *revelation* over any use of typological language. The priority of God's action over life follows from the revelation of this priority; what is revealed is the fact that everything one possesses (including one's life, its movement, and its meaning) is received by God (753,6–8). It is not up to the human being to believe or not (in God's revelation), for it is God who makes one a believer or a non-believer (745,28–33). Therefore, believing (that is, assuming the revelation of the impossibility of changing one's life, as in Luther's interpretation of the metaphor of the potter and the clay) *already* evidences that life's meaning no longer depends on life, but on God. In sum, the theological modification of typological language is already the expression

of the fact that life *cannot* modify its own movement, precisely because this movement is now thought in light of God's revelation.

This connection between the modification of language and the non-self-modification of life is confirmed by the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis*. Given that the negation of life's self-movement presupposes divine revelation, and the *necessitas immutabilitatis* is the concept that expresses this negation, then the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis* also presupposes divine revelation. And given that revelation is the source of the theological modification of typological language, the formulation of the concept of *necessitas immutabilitatis* implies a mutation in the language according to which life gives itself a meaning.

In sum, revelation not only conveys a modification of the meaning of life, but simultaneously marks a new way on the level of life itself. Revelation says "*incipit vita nova*" because it is what allows *life* to say about itself "*vita nova.*" As such, revelation mutates the immutability of life precisely because it *reveals* this immutability. Revelation contains and simultaneously realizes the passage from life's self-conceptualization to the theological awareness of revelation as the source of life's conceptualization.

This leads us to reflect upon Luther's anthropological position. Luther does not reject Erasmus's position by merely countering a *positive* anthropological conception (the possibility of self-formation, the self-definition of life's meaning) with a *negative* anthropological position (the immutability, the impossibility of self-education). Just as the concept of *servum arbitrium* is not the negation of the concept of *liberum arbitrium* but the evidence and the result of an operation upon the modal language of freedom,[31] Luther's rejection of Erasmus's anthropological conception is the result of an operation upon the structure conceptualizing such conception.

Luther rejects Erasmus's anthropology on the formal level: he unveils the theological fallacy of presenting an anthropological position that holds an unconditioned validity. Such unconditionality is already the evidence of the priority of human self-conceptualization over God's attribution of meaning to human life. Luther aims to re-establish the theological priority of God's attribution of meaning over life's self-meaningfulness (which includes human anthropological self-definition).[32]

It follows that it would be a mistake to call Luther's theology "anthropological," or to say that Luther's theology is an anthropology.[33] This "interpretation neglects the fact that Luther's effort consists precisely of giving the

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[31] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 9.

[32] This is the reprise of the priority of divine *verbum* over human *verbum*; see *supra*, Ch. 2 section 3.

[33] This is Feuerbach's position on Luther's theology. See Feuerbach, "Das Wesen des Glaubens": 396. See also Harvey, "Feuerbach": 4.

anthropological level validity and relevance in light of the revelatory priority of God's action.

This does not mean substituting a non-revelatory anthropological concept with a revelatory one; rather, this means that the conceptualization that human beings produce on *themselves* is theologically dependent on the life-event of contact with divine revelation. In sum, the "anthropological" interpretation ignores Luther's commitment to reshape any anthropological positions *theologically*. This confirms that Luther's anthropological position is the result and not the premise (as in Erasmus's position) of his theological position.[34]

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[34] This prompts further discussion of the relationship between *De libertate christiana* and *De servo arbitrio*. As analyzed in *supra*, Ch. 1 section 6, the idea of the human being divided into two parts, the spiritual and the corporeal, solves the contradictory statements of freedom as supremacy over everything and as submission under everything (see WA 7a: 21,11–17; WA 7b: 50,5–10). Therefore, in both versions of the 1520 treatise, the argument is built upon this anthropological assumption, and on the deduction of the theological explanation of this. See in the German version: "Und umb dißes unterschiediß willen werden von yhm gesagt yn der schrifft [zwei Reden] die do stracks widdernander seyn, wie ich itzt gesagt, von der freyheyt und dienstparkeit" (WA 7a: 21,15–16); and in the Latin version: "Haec diversitas facit, ut in scripturis pugnantia de eodem homine dicantur …" (WA 7b: 50, 10–11). See also Jüngel, "Zur Freiheit": 126. On the contrary, *De servo arbitrio* is based on the deduction of an anthropological position (human sinful condition) from the theological analysis of the relationship between human *verbum* and revelation. This is confirmed by the different conclusions of the two treatises. The Latin version of the treatise on Christian freedom ends with a section on the uses and abuses of freedom, and the presentation of a *via media* (see WA 7b: 69–73; for the *via media*, see *ivi*: 70,28–71,26). This prescriptive section suits the economy of the treatise, given that (in both Latin and German versions) freedom as an aspect of servitude is expressed by works. The theological relevance of works is negated *only* when works are impediments to the freedom of the spiritual part. Therefore, spiritual freedom is not freedom from works as such, but freedom from the theologically unacceptable prejudice attributing to the works even the slightest role in justification (see WA 7b: 70,14–16). Thus, the works are theologically relevant as the means not for a spiritual end (such as salvation), but for a material end: the submission of the corporal part under the spiritual part in the purification of the bodily aspects (See WA 7a: 30,11–31,10; WA 7b: 59,37–60,29) and in the service towards fellow humans (See WA 7a: 34,23–33; WA 7b: 64,13–37). This discussion about which kind of work is compatible with Christian freedom would be completely out of place in *De servo arbitrio*; here, it is not a matter of a *correct* use of freedom, but of the theological *consistency* of the conception of freedom. The bond of human freedom under God's freedom is the result of the bond of the conceptualization of freedom under God's revelation. For this reason, the 1525 treatise ends with the doctrine of the three *lumina* – not with a preceptistic teaching, but with the illustration of the theological extent and limit of our power of understanding. This confirms that the two treatises are not in contradiction (see Ricca, "Introduzione": 15), precisely because they think about freedom on different levels: *De libertate christiana* focuses on the definition of freedom, and *De servo arbitrio* focuses on the determination of the conditions of this definition. The former concerns what Christian freedom is and how to practice it; the latter concerns what theology on freedom is, and how to think about freedom theologically.

Chapter 10

The Path Towards Salvation

In this chapter, I will discuss three issues. First, I will examine the relationship between typological language and divine revelation, with reference to the antithesis between salvation and damnation. Second, I will analyze the theological modification of retributive justice and its connection to justification. Finally, I will discuss whether it is legitimate to apply terminology from existentialism to theological discourse.

1. Formal Rebirth

The contact with divine revelation is the contact with a meaning of life that is assumed to be unconditioned not only by this life, but also by any possible life. This is the meaning of life as dependent upon God's action; thus, also this meaning depends upon God's revelatory action. Thus, the only way a life can be aware of such a meaning is through revelation (663,19–20 and 25–29).[1]

The assumption of a life's meaning that does not depend on any possible life implies that this meaning *precedes* any possible life. This confirms Luther's paradoxical position: theologically, life's meaning precedes its object; it is established before life. This entails that life thinks life itself as no longer self-sufficient when it comes to formulating its own meaning. In other words, typological language is no longer a sufficient condition of life's meaning. There is another meaning that no life's language can formulate: the meaning that is the object of divine revelation.

However, typological language is still the necessary condition for understanding that this revelatory meaning indeed concerns life. In fact, it is life (life in contact with divine revelation) that considers that this revelatory meaning applies to life itself, that it speaks about and to life. Therefore, typological language is still applied because life is still speaking about itself, but the way in which life speaks about itself (the way life applies this language) has been changed through contact with divine revelation.

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[1] At this point in the argument, I am not interested in ascertaining the content of this meaning. I am only interested in analyzing the consequences of this assumption upon typological language, and thus on life itself.

Before determining what this modification consists of, I must address a possible objection. My use of the term "assumption" in relation to contact with divine revelation may raise questions. It might convey the idea that it is human life, and thus the human being, that validates divine revelation, or worse, originates it – *creates* it. This is not at all what I mean. What I mean by the term "assumption" is that life starts (or better, *re*-starts) to speak about itself in light of this assumption – that is, in light of the contact with a revelatory meaning about life.

I consider the discussion about the nature or cause of this assumption to be of secondary importance. Formally, claiming that this assumption is due to God's action is identical to claiming that it is due to human initiative. Both cases presuppose the assumption of a life's meaning independent from life; both statements are and can be uttered in light of this assumption. A comparison to the case of an axiom can clarify this. It is trivial to ask whether the assumption of an axiom is voluntary or forced – free or unfree – because any possible answer to this question *follows* from the assumption of the axiom. The only thing that matters is that this assumption is the origin, the beginning, of such inquiry – of *any* inquiry.

However, as I mentioned, in the case of contact with a revelatory meaning, it is not a matter of starting – it is rather a matter of *re*-starting. In fact, life already formulates meanings about itself before its contact with divine revelation, and it is precisely the assumption of a meaning that does not depend on life that presupposes this fact. Therefore, after contact with divine revelation, life begins to *re*formulate meanings about itself. In other words, life modifies its own language about itself: it modifies typological language.

This modification concerns the fact that typological language is applied in light of divine revelation. After contact with divine revelation, life can only acknowledge that divine revelation, and no longer life itself, is the beginning of life's formulation of its own meanings. Divine revelation is why life formulates meanings about itself, why typological language is used. Thus, typological language is applied to articulate the limitation of all meanings pre-contact with divine revelation, and the dependence upon divine revelation of all meanings formulated post-contact.

It follows that there is no such thing as a theological meaning of life. Rather, there is a theological *way* of formulating life's meaning. This way is the application of typological language in light of divine revelation.

This position is connected to the issue of immutable sanctity. Remaining loyal to his antithetical rhetoric (776,21),[2] Luther divides humankind into two categories: those who are called by the Spirit to believe, and those who are left in their unbelief (such as Pharaoh). The former belong to the Spirit, the latter to the flesh (741,5–6). This mirrors the antithesis between being the steed of

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[2] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 2.

either God or Satan.[3] The ones that the Spirit causes to believe are regenerated by the Spirit (693,8–9), reborn as children of God (776,30–33; 777,3–5). The others not reborn in the faith are completely flesh (745,6–8). They are impious because, being devoid of the spirit of God, they are subjected to Satan's rule (743,27–35).

Given that those the Spirit does not benefit are evil and every act of theirs is sinful (677,3–4), Luther deduces that those benefited by the Spirit and reborn as children of God can act *only* good (634,37–635,2), and do so spontaneously.[4] Apparently, this conveys the idea that to have faith means passing from a negative immutability (the condition of sin) to a positive immutability (a sort of immutable sanctity).

Luther's argument seems incoherent here. He seems to return to the *primus usus legis*, the deontic meaning of the *Sollen*. Sticking to this interpretation would entail that the condition of sin and the *secundus usus* are annulled in the exact moment of their revelation. Moreover, if the spiritual rebirth means always realizing the *Sollen*, then the reborn life would satisfy the expectations that life cherishes *itself*. Thus, life would once again be the origin of its own meaning. In order words, life would perfectly realize its own movement (to walk perfectly towards the father); thus, it would be worthy, and God's judgment of life would simply follow from life's merit.

The solution to these incoherencies lies in the formal perspective on the modification of life's language. The action of the Spirit is the revelation that life is shaped by God, that nothing can be attributed to life itself, but that everything is attributed to God because it is accomplished by God (638,9–11). Thus, rebirth is the passage from the condition of the unbeliever to the condition of the believer, from the situation of the absence of revelation to the situation of the presence of revelation.

It follows that rebirth is not the introduction of a power intrinsic to life that would allow life to be immutably just. Rather, rebirth is the change in the *forms* according to which life conceives its own meaning. Life no longer conceptualizes itself in light of the self-election of the law of life's movement, but in light of God's revelation as the source of re-thinking life's meaning. The contact with divine revelation does not transform a life into a good life; it transforms the *way* in which life thinks about itself. It is not a matter of acting justly, but of *thinking* "justly" from a theological perspective, of thinking about life's meaning as dependent upon divine revelation.[5]

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[3] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 5.

[4] See Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit*: 21. See also Heit, *Versöhnte Vernunft*: 213. This position is not only the fruit of Luther's antithetical attitude, but also of his rejection of the *adiaphoron morale* (768,19–21); see *supra*, Ch. 6 section 3 and 6.

[5] I consider the discussion about the passive or active role of the human being in receiving God's action (see for instance Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 264) to be of secondary importance. In both cases, it is a question of speaking about human life and its meaning in light

This formal perspective explains why, according to Luther, everything the unbeliever does is considered unjust, and everything the believer does is considered just (768,12–17). The non-reborn life is sinful no matter what action is expressed, not because the action does not realize the *Sollen*, but because the meaning of life (and thus of all accomplishments of this life) is not conceived in its subordination to God's decision (768,23–26). On the other hand, the actions realized after the contact with divine revelation are good not because these actions always realize the *Sollen*, but because they belong to a life touched by the Spirit, and thus, because the meaning of such actions can be formulated only in terms of dependence upon divine revelation.[6]

2. Damnation as Salvation

From this analysis, it follows that divine revelation does not present a specific meaning of life. Rather, it is life that reads a specific meaning into the contact

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of the assumption of divine revelation as a new reason to formulate life's meaning. This harkens back to the issue concerning the active or passive assumption of a revelatory meaning that does not depend on life. Life plays a role in formulating the dependence of life's meaning upon divine revelation; that is, it is indeed this life that speaks *theologically* (about life itself). However, whether this is an action or a reaction is formally indistinguishable: in both cases it is a matter of considering life's meaning *after* divine revelation.

[6] This formal interpretation is confirmed by another apparent incoherence in Luther's position. This incoherence concerns the introduction of a positive, self-educational function of the *Sollen*: for the reborn ones, divine commandments are words of exhortation to resist and endure in keeping one's life progressing on the path revealed by the Spirit (693,1–4; 695,6–11). Luther speaks explicitly of "realizing the good" (*bonis faciendis*); however, he clarifies a bit later that exhortations also belong to the *secundus usus*: "At exhortatio non probat, quid nos possimus, sed quid debeamus" (726,37–38; see 728,31–729,1). This entails an incoherent simultaneous affirmation and negation of the realization of the *Sollen* for the reborn ones. The solution to this incoherence refers to the frastic of these exhortations: the frastic, or the content, concerns the "fructus fidei" (699,9). The exhortations are spurs for enduring belief, for continuing to consider everything from the standpoint of faith – from the fact of divine revelation. For this reason, exhortations belong to the word of the Gospel, and not of the Law (692,19). They cause one to endure in believing oneself to be a *sinner*, and thus in resisting the formal temptation to place the self-election of meaning prior to God's revelation. Exhortations "sunt formae, secundus quas nos formari debemus, non autem testes nostri operis et studii" (733,19–20). They are words that *form* us, not words that are formed *by us*; as such, they are the stimuli for preserving the theological subordination of the formulation of life's meaning to the revelation of this meaning. This confirms that the reborn life is not a good life in the deontic sense; rather, it is a life aware of this distinction between a realization "*spiritu*," and a realization "*carne*," of the commandments (765,23–24). Even (and especially) a saintly life is understood (by the saint) as a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit (783,3–15; Rom 7:14–25; Gal 5:16–26). No one is able to tell whether her or his life is just and good (769,12–16).

with divine revelation and assumes this as the "rebirth" of any possible formulation of life's meaning. In other words, any possible meaning that one can (and does) find in revelation functions as the occasion, or the origin, of the reformulation of life's typological self-conceptualizations.[7]

This reflection introduces the topic of the antithesis between damnation and salvation. According to Luther's antithetical rhetorical strategy in *De servo arbitrio*, God's action upon a life is defined by the antithesis between damnation and salvation.[8] Salvation and damnation are the antithetical way in which God acts upon human life, regardless of anything life can possibly do. It is God that moves both the saved and the damned life. The human beings, whether outside of or beneath the Spirit, are moved ("*aguntur*") by God (753,35; Rom 8:14), regardless of whether this being is good or evil, saint or sinner, elected or rejected.[9]

Therefore, the antithesis is applied to a life (a life is either saved or damned) prior to the movement of this life. The movement of life is thus conditioned by the antithesis between damnation and salvation; it is either a movement of salvation, or a movement of damnation. God defines the set to which life belongs before any contribution from the life itself.

It follows that life conceives theologically its own meaning based on this antithesis. This antithesis is the new, theological way of life's self-conceptualization. Any meaning formulated by a life is an element of the "set" constituted by this antithesis: life thinks about itself not simply as either a saved or damned life, but as a life to which the antithesis applies, a life whose movement is defined according to the pair of damnation and salvation. This means that everything life's language says about life now belongs to this antithesis, and is circumscribed to the antithesis.

The life that produces concepts of itself in light of the antithesis between damnation and salvation is the life that leads back to God any meaning it can produce for itself. Given that this antithesis is the object of revelation,[10] then

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[7] See Gestrich, "Gott und das Leben": 156 note 41; from my perspective, the "spezifische pädagogische Einsichten" that theology introduces are the modifications of the concept of "Erziehung".

[8] Paul's division of humankind into two categories (the two vases; see *supra*, Ch. 9 section 4) refers precisely to the issue of salvation (727,6–8).

[9] Luther writes: "Hoc enim nos asserimus et contendimus, quod Deus, cum citra gratiam spiritus operatur omnia in omnibus, etiam in impiis operatur. [...] Deinde ubi spiritu gratiae agit in illis, quos iustificavit, hoc est in regno suo, similiter eos agit et movet, et illi, ut sunt nova creatura, sequuntur et cooperantur, vel potius, ut Paulus ait, aguntur" (753,28–29.33–35). See also a bit further: "Homo antequam renovetur in novam creaturam regni spiritus, nihil facit, nihil conatur, quo paretur ad eam renovationem et regnum; Deinde recreatus, nihil facit, nihil conatur, quo perseveret in eo regno, Sed utrunque facit solus spiritus in nobis, nos sine nobis recreans et conservans recreatos" (754,8–12).

[10] As Luther emphasizes, nobody could think that salvation is connected to Jesus Christ unless it is the object of revelation (778,26–38; 779,3–6).

this life thinks about its own meaning in terms of dependence upon divine revelation. Thus, the antithesis can be assumed only by a typological language that is modified by the assumption of something that does not depend on this language. Hence, the antithesis between damnation and salvation is not assumed to be a product of typological language, and therefore it is conceived as the *restarting* of typological language.

This points to an interesting aspect: salvation is not only one of two possible substances of life's meaning (the other being damnation). At the same time, salvation is the *condition* of formulating life's meaning according to the antithesis between damnation and salvation.

As Luther emphasizes, the assumption of the antithesis between damnation and salvation depends on one being already illuminated by the Spirit (653,15); thus, the antithesis makes sense for the one who believes. Believing, having faith, is the expression of God's benevolence. Hence, having faith means already being saved (758,18.39–40). Therefore, the assumption of the antithesis between damnation and salvation means that one is *already* proceeding towards salvation (758,39–40). It implies the rebirth, the action of the Spirit, and the revelation of and as Jesus Christ as the way, truth, life, and salvation (778,38–39; John 14:6). Considering the movement of one's life conditioned by the antithesis of damnation and salvation means already being saved.

It follows that salvation implies being in contact with divine revelation. Salvation means believing – believing that life's meaning does not depend on life, but on God's determination of life. Therefore, salvation has both a conceptual and a formal aspect; it is at the same time one of the two antithetical parts of the revelatory *definiens* (that is, the antithesis between salvation and damnation), *and* the condition according to which life applies this *definiens* to the *definiendum* (life's own meaning). In other words, salvation is formally the source of thinking in terms of the antithesis between damnation and salvation.

This conceptual and formal duality also applies to damnation. Given that salvation means also formulating meanings according to (and in light of) the antithesis between damnation and salvation, and given that damnation is indeed antithetical to salvation, then damnation is, again, not simply one aspect of the *definiens*, one of two antithetical specifications of life's meaning. Additionally, and more importantly, damnation is the lack of the *definiens*; damnation means *not* thinking about life's meaning in terms of the antithesis of damnation and salvation. In other words, the formal aspect of damnation consists of thinking that life, and *not* God's action (of either salvation or damnation), is the condition of life's own meaning; it consists in considering life's meaning conditioned by life itself.

Damned is the life that does not think that its own meaning is dependent upon God's action, and thus upon the revelation of the antithesis between salvation and damnation (758,33). Therefore, damned is the life that has no

contact with divine revelation; damned is the life that says "there is no God" (609,10–11; 749,14–15; Ps 14:1).

Given that this formal aspect of damnation corresponds to the impossibility to formulate life's meaning in terms of damnation and salvation, then damnation corresponds to the impossibility of formulating life's meaning as "damnation." Damnation is the language of life's meaning *pre*-contact with divine revelation, it is the meaning that has not been (formally) "moved" by salvation; damnation is life's language that is not re-started by the assumption of the antithesis between damnation and salvation.

On the other hand, formulating the meaning "damnation" implies believing, and thus, it implies *being saved* formally (that is, on the level of the conditions of this formulation). In other words, it is possible to speak (negatively) about the language pre-contact with divine revelation *only* from the standpoint of the contact with divine revelation. Thus, speaking of damnation implies the formal aspect of salvation.

This formal inclusion of the antithesis (and thus of damnation) within salvation can be clarified through the reference to a Barthian metaphor. The chant of the damned is a *Gloria Deo ex profundis*: it corresponds to the chant of the saved, the *Gloria Deo in excelsis*, but not simply because the *ex profundis* hints antithetically at the *in excelsis*.[11] The relationship between them is not only based upon the fact that the presence of one implies the presence of the other.

Rather, and more profoundly, this relationship refers to the *source* of this antithesis. The two chants are related because they depend on the same *pentagram*. This pentagram is salvation (in its formal aspect); it is the structure, the form, that contains and separates the two chants in two different staves. Salvation is the polyphonic structure of the harmony; it is what makes it possible for the two chants of salvation and damnation to be sung together (that is, in their antithesis).[12]

In sum, thinking about damnation, about the distance from God, already evidences the *formal* closeness to God, the contact with God's revelation. As Luther states, the language untouched by salvation cannot think about salvation (663,19–20). Given that salvation is antithetical to damnation, the impossibility of thinking about salvation implies the impossibility of thinking about damnation. Thus, thinking about damnation also means being touched by salvation. The life that thinks about damnation is *already* the object of salvation.

Therefore, life is already *formally* "saved" when it thinks about its own meaning as either salvation or damnation, and thinks that life's own movement

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[11] This is the position of Barth, *KD*: II.2 § 35, 507.

[12] Only with this formal meaning of salvation it is possible to understand why the blasphemer is cherished by God (see Gogarten, *L'annuncio*: 305); both blasphemy and worship, the scream against God and the hymn towards God, refer *to God* – they state the common submission of blasphemer and worshipper under God.

and meaning derive from the unconditionality of this revelatory *definiens*.[13] Salvation is living and thinking in light of the antithesis between damnation and salvation. Salvation is the union between manifesting in a life and formulating in language that God's *verbum* and work are there (663,16).[14]

3. Paradoxical Retributive Justice

This leads to Luther's negation of the consequentiality of God's reward of salvation.

As discussed in Chapters 7 and 9, Luther rejects the distinction between merit *de congruo* and *de condigno*. Both merits imply the same logic of consequentiality: God's reward is given in light of something that has been accomplished. This consequentiality is built either upon a "strict" merit (*de codigno*) or on a "large" merit (*de congruo*), but in both cases, it is still a matter of consequentiality (769,37–770,10). The distinction between the two merits demonstrates theological hypocrisy; it is simply a matter of substituting the fact of not deserving God's justice for the objective, quantitative (deontic) "weight" of one's actions with the fact of deserving God's benevolence for the subjective, qualitative "effort" of one's insufficient forces (770,30–36).

According to this perspective, it follows that God's action is conditioned by human action. God certifies and attests "operum, meritorum et personarum" (770,11). God's action is no longer the origin of the determination of one's life, but it is defined by one's typological idea about one's own life. God's action is expected to conform to such judgment (729,24–730,2). The divine power to mold human clay is itself molded by the principles and the conditions of this clay, as if the lord of the vineyard were chosen by the laborers (730,10–15; Matt 20:15).[15]

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[13] It might seem that I am negating all ontological aspects of salvation (and of rebirth). This is not my position at all. Rather, I am affirming that any ontological affirmation (and even the negation of the ontological aspect of salvation is an ontological affirmation) implies the formal aspect of salvation. Stating that salvation is a reality of in light of the real presence of Christ in the believer (see Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 186) presupposes the formal aspect of salvation as believing (in Jesus Christ, for instance).

[14] Divine salvation as this coincidence of being and thinking, life and word, is a reprise of the concept of divine *verbum* as the union of saying and creating; see Schwanke, "Doctrine of Creation": 317; see also Bader, "Luther's *theologica paradoxa*": 162–163. In the context of salvation, this same union of naming and being applies to life: life *says* its union with divine revelation (it thinks itself in light of revelation), and hence, it is *created* by divine *verbum* in order to say this union – more precisely, life says to be created by and because of this union.

[15] In this scenario, God's action is no longer the *ex ante* in light of which every human life's events and accomplishments are thought (and have meaning); it is instead *ex post* their

To re-establish the correct priority, Luther presents a paradoxical conception of retributive justice. He writes: "regnum meretur filios, non filii regnum" (694,27). It is God's kingdom that deserves God's children, not vice-versa. It is not the merit that is the cause of the reward, but the reward that is the cause of the merit.

Luther effects an inversion upon the consequential relationship between merit and reward. What is considered consequence has priority over what is considered the cause.[16] The reward is already given before anything that can or will be accomplished, before any event and any action in life, before life itself. The reward is the uncaused, unconditioned, *gracious* origin from which to think about life itself, theologically.

More precisely, Luther effects an inversion of terminology. What is usually considered reward is called "merit," and what is usually considered merit is called "reward" (694,24–25). God's reign (merit) deserves its children (reward), and Hell (merit) deserves the sinners (reward). Thus, the newly-interpreted "merit" (what was conceived as reward: the reign) now has priority over the newly-interpreted "reward" (what was conceived as merit: being a child of God).

This confirms Luther's operation upon Erasmus's argumentation. Erasmus, by inserting divine reward into the consequential logic of merit, inverts the order of the parts and establishes human typological freedom to give form and meaning to oneself as the condition for the determination of both merit and reward (694,1–2). On the contrary, for Luther, the reward is the condition for the merit to have sense. God bestows the reward unconditionally (696,6–7). Therefore, the *meaning* of God's rewarding action precedes all logic of reward and thus all efforts to foresee the reward, to give it a rule or a frame (775,23–24).

It follows that the reward does not depend on human life and its movement; the reward is eternal.[17] Thus, it is the children's life that is to be determined by the reign. The inversion between reward and merit is the way to think about the dependence of life's meaning upon this reward itself – that is, upon the antithesis between salvation and damnation. Thus, this inversion is how life thinks it is no longer the source of its own movement, of its own meaning.[18] In

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meaning. The consideration of God's action depends upon life's consideration of itself – thus, of its freedom to be the origin of its own meaning.

[16] This is true also for the causal relationship. Empirically, the cause precedes the event, but theoretically (in terms of knowledge of the cause), the event precedes the cause. See Dummett, "Effect": 329.

[17] Including Hell: "Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create/se non etterne, e io etterna duro" (Dante, *Inferno*: III, 7–8).

[18] The criticism of the consequential logic is also a criticism of the hylomorphistic conception of the virtuous life, as presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Büttgen, *Luther et la philosophie*: 63–64.

sum, the theological priority of the reward over the merit expresses the situation of typological language as re-started by God's reward in terms of the antithesis between salvation and damnation.

This relates to justification. As stated in Chapter 7, it is possible to distinguish between two aspects of the process of justice: the imputative and the retributive. As mentioned there, the latter follows the former. The first aspect establishes whether the defendant has committed the action with which he is charged. The second aspect concerns the "*fine tuning*" of the verdict in light of the specific situation of the defendant (for instance, whether she or he has a criminal record).

In that chapter, I analyzed the theological modification of the first aspect of justice, the imputative one. This modification concerned the inversion between action and imputation (including justification, the negation of a negative imputation). The analysis of Luther's paradoxical inversion of the implication "merit → reward" prompts further explanation. In fact, this inversion does not only concern the retributive aspect of justice; rather, it concerns the *relationship* between the retributive and the imputative aspects.

The attribution of divine reward (as antithesis between salvation and damnation) is the condition for speaking of divine forgiveness. In fact, the conceptualization of divine justification as *gratia* is possible in light of contact with divine revelation, and thus in light of the formal aspect of salvation. Thus, God's reward is the *ex ante* that makes it possible to think about justification theologically; the inversion between action and imputation is included within the retributive inversion between reward and merit. In sum, the unconditionality of God's justice by human concepts of justice depends on God's revelation of the unconditionality of God's action (in the form of the antithesis between salvation and damnation) over life's self-attribution of meaning.

This harkens back to the issue of the concept of "effective" justification. As discussed in Chapter 7,[19] according to this concept, justification coincides with a change in human life.[20] In light of what has been analyzed so far, it might seem that this effective concept of justification is the right one; contrary to the forensic concept, this concept is able to include the aspect of the modification of life after the action of the Spirit.

However, the formal inversion between imputation and retribution (justification and reward) confirms once again that what matters is not which theological concept of justification (either forensic or effective) is the most relevant, but *how* a concept of justification is possible as a *theological* concept. The theological concept of justification is possible because of the "retributive" inversion between reward and merit; therefore, no concept of justification is

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[19] See *supra*, Ch. 7 section 1.
[20] See Subilia, *La giustificazione*: 17.

theologically relevant unless it formulates its own dependence on God's reward (that is, unless it plays a meta-conceptual function).

4. Freedom to Say Salvation

This leads us to the issue of freedom. Again, the typological concept of freedom corresponds to the biconditional relationship between life and meaning; typological freedom is the coincidence between life saying its meaning and a meaning living in and as this life.

The theological modification of this scenario is not simply the passage from a life-centered coincidence to a God-centered coincidence. This interpretation ignores the fact that this God-centered coincidence is still a product of typological language, since this language formulates all coincidences of language and life (and thus also a God-centered coincidence). Thus, the theological operation does not merely correspond to changing the center of the coincidence of life and meaning. Rather, it concerns *how* the language formulating this coincidence operates. It concerns questioning the structure of this coincidence.

This questioning considers the coincidence of life and language as a *loop*, as a self-referential system. This loop corresponds to life's self-election; it is life's self-bending of its own language. Life self-elects because it creates its own language.

The possibility of seeing life's self-election as a loop implies contact with something external to this loop. This is contact with divine revelation. Thus, seeing the loop implies being already outside the loop, and thus, it implies that life, the life that sees the loop of its own language, has already broken the loop. This is a life "out of joint," out of its *own* joint – that is, out of its own language.

Again, this is not simply the passage from life's self-destination to life's "outer" destination by God. This interpretation does not consider that life also says itself as destined by God. Not only is life no longer the theological condition of its own meaning, but it no longer *thinks* about itself as this condition. As such, life gains the freedom to operate upon its own language, to operate on typological freedom.

This freedom is represented by salvation. As discussed in section two, salvation is the unity between being and thinking, life and language. However, this unity does not fall into the typological loop between life and language; on the contrary, this unity is based upon the identical dependence of language and life on God's revelation.

In other words, salvation is the unity of life and language in considering themselves in light of the antithesis between salvation and damnation, as language applying this antithesis to life, and as life modifying language according

to this antithesis. Theologically, the (typological) union of language and life has meaning because it is elected by God to be spoken and moved by God.[21]

In sum, the theological modification of typological language represents the freedom to break the self-established loop of the *modus loquendi et vivendi*; it is the freedom for the unity of life and language to be (*vivendi*) the object of salvation, and to say (*loquendi*) that it is the object of salvation.[22]

5. Existentialist Terminology?

These reflections lead to a consideration of the legitimacy of applying existentialist terminology to theology. One can see a connection between existentialism and theology: for both kinds of discourse (existentialist and theological), it is a question of an *antithetic* logic. In the case of existentialism, the antithesis concerns the authentic and inauthentic existence. In the case of theology, the antithesis concerns the faithful life and the faithless life, the saved life and the damned life.

Moreover, in both cases, the formulation of the antithesis formally depends on the assumption of the *positive* member of the antithesis; only from the standpoint of the authentic or faithful part is it possible to speak of the antithesis between authentic and inauthentic existence, or between the faithful and faithless life. Thus, in both cases, the formulation of the antithesis implies that the antithesis does not apply to the existence or life that formulates the antithesis. The conceptualization of an existence or a life *coincides* with the reflection that this existence or life conducts with respect to itself.

I focus now on existentialism. Existentialism is a reflection upon (and thus a reaction to) the limits of the conceptualization of existence. Specifically, it is the theoretical awareness of the incoherence of speaking of existential stages in universal terms. From the existentialist perspective, what matters is the reflection upon the relationship between the conceptualization of existence and existence itself. Thus, the conceptualization of existence is based on the

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[21] Referring back to *supra*, Ch. 9 section 2, I tentatively represent this in the following way: Revelation → (Life ↔ Form).

[22] In other words: "God's order is not ours, and our order is not God's. In that lies salvation" (Askani, "Paradox": 358). Salvation lies not merely in the fact of a difference of orders between God and human being, but rather in the *affirmation* of this difference, in the fact that this difference is a source of meaning. Salvation is the meaning that says its own theological dependence upon the "order" that is not the order of its own conditions, but the revelation of the limitation of such conditions. For this reason, God's wisdom is identical to God's power (the force creating reality; see *ivi*: 355); the submission of our criteria of wisdom under God is the reality of being under God. Thus, thinking about damnation means *already* being "foolish" according to human standards of wisdom, and already being dependent upon the wisdom of God.

coincidence between the subject of thinking and the object of thinking; the one producing a discourse on existence is *at the same time* the object of this discourse.

This explains the use of *dramatis personae*.[23] The concepts of existence are *represented* by types of existence, and vice-versa, these types speak for the concepts of existence. Thus, a *dramatis persona* itself is not the existential concept; rather, the concept of existence is represented by the life of this *dramatis persona*. It is clear that the structure of the conceptualization of existence coincides with the aesthetic legality that enables the invention of a *dramatis persona*.[24] For this reason, this branch of philosophy is considered close to literature[25] – but it is *not* literature. In fact, what matters is not the characters, but what they represent conceptually. The literary aspect is not an end in itself, but the means for the philosophical aspect to be expressed; it is the "matter" that formulates a general form of human existence through representations, or through characters.[26]

Thus, existentialist reflection expresses the coincidence between the *being* of existence and the *meaning* of existence. The relevance of existence depends on its power to represent a concept of existence (a concept of itself). So, the antithesis between authentic existence and inauthentic existence not only (conceptually) concerns the opposition between a unity and a separation of existence and meaning, but it formally *depends* on the unity of existence and meaning. The antithesis between authenticity and inauthenticity simultaneously illustrates and presupposes the passage from an existential "unreflectedness," or immediacy (for instance, as in Mozart's *Don Juan*),[27] to a situation of mediation. This mediation is the conceptualization that the existence produces for

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[23] This argumentative attitude is common in the works of both Kierkegaard and Heller. Neither of the two thinkers (as the existentialist approach in general) falls into a prescriptive approach, into the elevation of a specific character as a model for existence. On the contrary, all characters play the same role, although in different forms (that is, as incarnations of different concepts of existence), so that the best possible style of existentialism is the dialogical one (regardless whether it is direct or indirect, verbal or epistolary).

[24] In light of what I stated in the Introduction and in the previous chapter, this demonstrates that typological language is still in place.

[25] See Steiner, "Post-History": 390: "Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* – part metaphysics, part memoir, part reverie when language is in a state of total energy – is the antecedent of our tomorrow. We cannot describe it adequately with our present vocabulary of *genres*."

[26] One understands Kierkegaard's judge Wilhelm as the exemplification of an existential stage – that is, of a concept of existence. The evidence of this is that Kierkegaard's books are not works of literature, where each *dramatis persona* stands *prima facie* for itself and only *analogically* for a universal concept of existence; they are *primary* works of philosophy, where each *dramatis persona* is *prima facie* the incarnation of a universal concept of existence.

[27] See Kierkegaard, "Seducer's Diary." Given that I have no space here to analyze this issue closely, please allow me to refer to Vestrucci: "Kierkegaard."

itself (for instance, as "married man").[28] In sum, the passage from inauthenticity to authenticity corresponds to the change in the *form* of existence from non-conceptualized existence (better, non-self-conceptualizing existence) to conceptualized existence (self-conceptualizing existence).[29]

This is *apparently* similar to the theological position. Contact with revelation (the rebirth by the Spirit) is a breakthrough in the language of life's self-conceptualization. Existentially interpreted, it is a change in the meaning of existence. Beginning with that moment, existence deals not with a new concept, but with a new modality of self-conceptualization. In this case, there is also a passage from inauthenticity to authenticity.

However, the principle of this passage and the criterion of authenticity is dependence upon God's action; the inauthentic existence is the existence contemplating (and thus conducting) itself as the condition of its own meaning, considering itself the source of its own destiny (and also of its own justice, merit, and salvation). On the other hand, the authenticity of existence coincides with ceasing to attribute to itself a meaning issued and produced by this existence itself. Authenticity means beginning to consider existence's own meaning as dependence upon the revelation of God's action (specifically, of the antithesis between damnation and salvation).[30]

In light of this apparent similarity, one might think of a sort of existential paradigm in theology. This paradigm would correspond to interpreting theological issues as issues of existence. Here I see two risks. The first risk refers to the fact that the relationship with God's revelation, and thus faith, would be deduced from the reflection of existence upon itself. The conceptualization of (and *as*) dependence upon God would be dependent upon the effort of conceptualizing existence; it would serve as an answer to the question of the meaning of existence. Consequently, the second risk refers to the fact that theological discourse would be a *specific* form of existentialism. Any theological definition of the meaning of existence would be formally identical to any existentialist position.

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[28] This is the passage from a standard way of conceptualization (*das Man*) to the centrality of existence for conceptualization itself – for instance, in the form of the *Hirt des Seins* (see Heidegger, "Humanismus": 162). It is not a situation of (conceptual) "domination" of the *Sein*, but a situation of being amidst the *Sein*, the *Sorge* of and for the *Sein* (see Askani, "Heideggers Brief": 387), as being part of *Sein* itself.

[29] For instance, the concept of "Geworfenheit" does not change the *fact* that existence *is* indeed *geworfen*, but it changes the *form* (the conceptualization) of this existence – that is, the fact that it is now conceptualized as *geworfen*.

[30] This is the case of Bultmann, for instance, and his "idea of human existence as intrinsically driven by the search for authenticity in the face of nihilism and despair – and of Christianity as a promise and challenge of (any mundane attempt at reaching) such authenticity" (Schulz, "Bultmann": 133).

Focusing on the specific case of Luther, the criticisms of the existentialist paradigm in theology emphasize that Luther's theology is wrongly interpreted to be centered upon the existential issue of the sinner's tormented conscience.[31] The object of Luther's theological investigation is the dichotomy between the *Enten* of the self-reliance (the self-attribution of the concept of "just") and the *Eller* of the acceptance of God's condemnation (and forgiveness).[32]

I believe these criticisms miss the point. Not simply because (as already stated[33]) the historical aspect of criticism might be informed by the same arbitrariness that it criticizes,[34] but more importantly, because the theoretical aspect of the criticisms fails to appreciate that the distinction between theology (and also Luther's theology) and existentialism is *already* implicit within the theological position.

6. *Conscientia*

To explain my position, I analyze the issue of conscience *(conscientia)* in *De servo arbitrio. Conscientia* (and the German version *Gewissen*)[35] might be conceived as the faculty of self-identification, of awareness of the form of one's own existence – or in other words, of existential self-conception.[36] In the *Gewissen*, "der *ganze Mensch* – und nicht etwa nur sein

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[31] See Kärkkäinen, *One with God*: 40.

[32] See Nelson, "Ebeling": 147. I do not use Kierkegaardian terminology by chance, given that the criticisms also concern the interpretation of Luther from Kierkegaard's perspective. This interpretation is criticized not only theoretically, but also historically in the light of a supposed contrast of Kierkegaard against Luther (see Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 181).

[33] See *supra*, Ch. 2 section 7 note 53, and Ch. 7 section 2 note 16.

[34] Saarinen, in *Luther and the Gift*: 182, bases his criticism of the relationship between Luther and Kierkegaard on Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*, and Bornkamm, *Luther im Spiegel*. However, Pelikan individuates a proximity between Luther and Kierkegaard (see Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*: 16, 19–21, 118). Moreover, other works claim that Kierkegaard's knowledge of Luther was largely secondhand (see, for instance, Prenter, "Lutheranism": 127); and perhaps the respective backgrounds are too different for building a proper comparison. For instance, Alfsvåg, "'With God all Things are Possible'": 53–56, emphasizes the influence of mathematical understanding of causality on Kierkegaard as one of the main differences with Luther's conception of necessity. I limit myself to one remark. It might be possible to find a parallel between Kierkegaard and Bultmann concerning the centrality of the anguished conscience in Luther's theology; however, this parallel is only apparent. Kierkegaard's and Bultmann's positions are two variations of the theme of "Luther," one influenced by Danish Hegelianism, and the other influenced by Heidegger. See Schulz, "Bultmann": 133. Thus, concerning Bultmann, the order of historical priority should not be inverted; it is modern existentialism that is one of the derivations of Christian theology, and not the opposite (see *ivi*: 199).

[35] See Büttgen, "*Coscientia*".

[36] See Ebeling, "Theologische Erwägungen": 241–244. See also Staten, *Conscience*: 82.

Erkenntnisvermögen"[37] is involved and concerned. Thus, conscience is not referred to as the knowledge of an object, but rather, as the *subject* of conscience itself: the conscience is the certainty (*Gewissheit*) that the subject and the object of conscience are "equiprimordial" (*gleichursprünglich*).[38]

This access to oneself, this self-reflection, is possible only in reference to faith. Only in light of the relation to the call of God it is possible for a human being to be identified, and thus to identify itself as *human* (and not God).[39] So, the coincidence between the object and subject of conscience is the identity between the object and subject *of faith*. Therefore, self-reflection concerns the "Ganzheit," the "Identität *des Glaubenden*."[40] Hence, the reflection upon one's own existence is possible only as reflection upon oneself as a *Glaubende*. This implies the overcoming of the structure of *self*-reflection, or self-attribution of a concept to one's own existence.[41] Therefore, the certainty of the conscience (*Gewissengewissheit*) depends on the certainty of faith (*Glaubensgewissheit*). *Gewissen* is where one's self-understanding changes,[42] because this self-understanding is led back to God's revelation.

Now to relate this to *De servo arbitrio*. The analysis of all entries of the term "conscientia" is at first sight confusing, because the meaning seems to be subjected to various shifts. *Conscientia* is the instance deputed to evaluate the certainty and the truthfulness of things (618,17–18) with specific reference to religious issues (620,3.17; 624,3–5). Or, it is the instance of judgment upon all doctrinal controversies (including the one against Erasmus) (641,7–9.26–28; 721,22–24).[43] *Conscientia* interrogates scriptural passages for their meaning (702,17; 720,18–19); thus, it attests to the *claritas* of Scripture (749,21–23). It follows that *conscientia* is the source of *assertiones* (603,24).[44] At the same time, *conscientia* is intended as the recognition of the human sinful condition

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[37] Jüngel, "… unum aliquid assecutus": 62.

[38] See *ibid.*

[39] This echoes Luther's *Disputatio de homine*, theses 10, 11, 17, WA 39.1a: 175.

[40] Jüngel, "… unum aliquid assecutus": 62 (emphasis added). And vice-versa (*ibid*.): "Denn ein Glaubender, der nicht versteht, was er glaubt, würde sich selbst nicht verstehen."

[41] Thus, being *coram Deo* entails at the same time the limitation of the being *coram seu ipso* and the overcoming of this being *coram seu ipso* (see Schlögel, *Einheit*: 42); hence conscience, as place of the self-conceptualization of the subject of conscience, is at the same time the place of *liberation* of human being from one's own theoretical limitation (see Ebeling, "Das Gewissen": 109 and 114).

[42] See Meyer-Rohrschneider, *Aufgehobene Verborgenheit*: 138.

[43] See Büttgen, *"Conscientia"*: 178: "Conscience is defined first of all by a need of certainty: it is this need that Luther objects to in what he considers to be Erasmus's skepticism." (Or, rather, Erasmus's *self-defined* skepticism.) See also Jeronim, "Das Gewissen": 167.

[44] It is conscience that proves the falsity of opposing theological positions (WA 18: 601,12–14; 657,33–34).

(683,22–24; 773,3–5). Thus, it is the source of *uncertainty* concerning the moral status of man before God (769,16–17.20–23; 783,24–26).[45]

This mixture of theoretical and practical meanings is resolved by referring to the *certo apprehendere* and the *assertio*.[46] *Conscientia*, if operating *outside* the bond with God, is bonded by the unconditioned and undiscussed validity of both human authority (630,8–14: the human opinions bond the conscience, and the Word of God frees them) and human laws (624,14–15; 627,32–33). In both ways, the bonded conscience is denatured, and its voice is falsified. It is not free to act according to itself (again, 620,17).

This bondage, this denaturation, is revealed within and by the bond with God. Hence, conscience's freedom from this bondage coincides with its freedom *as* submission to the bond with and under God. The conscience is free because it conceptualizes freedom beyond the theoretical limits represented by the concept of *liberum arbitrium* (647,29–31).[47] The certitude of the conscience is the confession of the limitation of conscience if it is not bonded to God.

This reflects the connection between conscience and self-reflection: the *Gewissengewissheit* does *not* concern the conceptualization of a new meaning for existence (for instance, as *Glaubende* existence). Rather, it concerns the *limit* of every possible formulation of meaning, if based on the self-conceptualization of existence and not on this conceptualization's dependence upon divine revelation.

Therefore, the confusion between existentialist and theological conceptions of existence is resolved through the distinction between a discourse on the meaning of existence and a meta-discourse on the *conditions* of all discourses on existence. The moment of rebirth by the Spirit is not the fact of receiving a meaning of existence in competition with the other possible meanings. Rather, it is the starting point of the formal dependence of the conditions of the meaning of existence upon revelation.

Thus, theologically speaking, all concepts of existence are deprived of validity not because a *new* concept is introduced, but because a *different* way of conceptualizing existence is introduced. In other words, theological reflection upon existence is not the formulation of the passage from an existential stage to another stage, because the conditions of conceptualizing such passage and the concept of the existential stage are precisely what the theological reflection refers to and reflects upon.

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[45] Thus, it is the instance to which the divine promise of forgiveness speaks (WA 18: 684,1–3).

[46] See *supra*, Ch. 2 sections 5 and 9.

[47] For this reason, the bond with God is source of freedom. See *supra*, Ch. 6 sections 2 and 6.

7. Theology and Existence

This distinction between existentialism and theology is exemplified by the concept of *choice*. From the existentialist perspective, the condition of the meaning of existence coincides with the existence that is the object of this meaning. This coincidence between form and content is expressed by the concept of *existential* choice.

Existential choice is the choice of the contingencies and determinations of life.[48] The authentic existence chooses what determines it, and by doing so, it makes these determinations its own, the results of this choice itself. Yet, empirically speaking, this position is absurd: the determinations lie beyond one's power of choice since they precede any possible choice an individual can make. This absurdity is annulled by focusing not on the being of these determinations, but on these determinations' being *said*. Existential authenticity is the self-recognition of existence in the determinations governing one's life.[49] Therefore, existential choice consists of conceptualizing existence as fulfilment of these determinations. The authentic, meaningful existence is the existence that is not pushed by these determinations, but rather, pulled towards them.[50] In sum, existential choice is the *self-choice* of existence; existence has meaning as destined existence – or as self-destination, as existence that embraces and loves its own determinations and its own destiny, and that confesses this love.[51]

Therefore, existential choice is simultaneously the fulfilment and the starting point, the result and the condition, of existentialist reflection.[52] An existence chooses itself from the reflection upon its meaning, and at the same time, the first expression of this existential choice is precisely the formulation of existence's self-reflection.[53] In sum, existentialism presupposes the freedom of

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[48] This choice can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, it is the choice of the sum of genetic characters of an individual and the social environment in which the individual was born (see Heller, *Personality*: 204; see Terezakis, "Heller": 25). Another interpretation of the choice is *marriage*: it is utterly contingent how I have met the woman who has become my wife, but I *elect* this contingency to the necessity of my life, and I love this contingency as my destiny. This election is called marriage (see Kierkegaard, "Marriage").

[49] These determinations constitute a force that seems to guide life towards a path that appears only *a posteriori*; see Schopenhauer, "Transcendent Speculation": 183.

[50] See Heller, *Personality*: 143.

[51] This is the concept of *amor fati*, the ideal of the "*Ja-sagender*": see Nietzsche, *Die frohliche Wissenschaft*: IV, § 276.

[52] See Heller, *Morals*: chapter 1 section 2. See also Terezakis, "Heller": 18–20.

[53] The existential choice of the meaning of this existence *is* the meaning of this existence. This explicates the existentialist paradox of "becoming what one is." This paradox has sense in light of the equation between becoming (what one is not yet) and being (what one is already). The end of the process of "becoming" coincides with existence's conceptualization of its own meaning. Thus, existence has sense as movement towards its own meaning, as existential reflection. Existential choice is the transformation of the contingency

existence to self-produce concepts of itself that correspond to the existence it-self. Freedom is, in other words, the coincidence between *being* a meaningful existence and *thinking* about the meaningfulness of existence.

In and *by* theology, this freedom is de-centered. As stated, this unity of say-ing and being, this biconditional relationship between concept and source of conceptualization, is broken by divine revelation. Theologically, freedom re-fers no longer to the self-reflection of existence; rather, it refers to the acknowl-edgement that the meaning of existence depends upon God's action of revela-tion. Thus, it is not the existence that chooses itself; it is God that chooses this existence to be reborn by the Spirit, to be the recipient of divine revelation – to believe.

It follows that the concept of existential choice makes no sense theologi-cally, because this concept presupposes that existence *is* its own "revelation." This is no longer the case theologically, precisely because the self-reflection of existence re-starts from contact with a meaning (like the antithesis between damnation and salvation) that does not depend on this self-reflection.[54]

This does not merely mean the conceptual passage from the choice of one's own determination to God's choice of all determinations, aspects, specificities, and meaning of one's existence. More profoundly, it means that every possible meaning of existence is thought as an expression of God's choice upon this existence.

(*Geworfenheit*) of existence into the *concept* of this existence (see Lukács, *Soul and Form*: 39). Thus, the passage from inauthenticity to authenticity (regardless of the content of these stages) is possible as the *self*-awareness of existence.

[54] For Ebeling, Scripture does not concern the *quidditates rerum*, but the *qualitates*; not the essence, but the existence, the history of the individual in contact with Scripture (see Ebeling, *Lutero*: 79). Concerning the theological use of concepts such as *quidditas*, in WA 56: 371,2–12 Luther writes: "Quia philosophi oculum ita in praesentiam rerum immergunt, ut solum quidditates et qualitates earum speculentur, Apostolus autem oculos nostros revocat ab intuitu rerum presentium, ab *essentia et accidentibus earum*, et dirigit in eas, secundum quod *futurae* sunt. Non enim dicit 'Essentia' vel 'operatio' creaturae seu 'actio' et 'passio' et 'motus', sed novo et miro vocabulo et theologico dicit 'expectatio creaturae', ut eoipso, cum animus audit creaturam expectare, non ipsam creaturam amplius, sed quid creatura ex-pectet, intendat et quaerat. Sed heu, quam profunde et noxie quaeremus in predicamentis et quidditatibus, quod stultis opinionibus in metaphysica involvimur!" In light of revelation, the theoretical look moves from the things themselves (the existences) to what gives the things their meaning as parts of creation. This source of meaning is also the source of the theological meaning of accidents and substances, qualities and quiddities. Thus, the "*au-dire*," the "listening" to divine revelation changes the structure of these concepts (Grosshans, in "Reason and Philosophy": 224, speaks of "conceptual scheme"); any reference to meta-physical and philosophical concepts is theologically sound only in light of their reconsider-ation in light of divine revelation. More precisely, theological discourse *is* this reconsidera-tion. The problem is not in switching from essence to existence, but in seeing what happens to both orders of discourse about things if they are in relationship with revelation.

Therefore, the unity of being and saying is still present; the existence is still the source of its own concept. However, this unity is no longer the loop between existence and its language, because this unity is, and it is thought as, the fruit of God's action. In sum, theologically, existence has sense as what is no longer meaningful in itself, given that any self-formulation of a meaning is already overcome by divine revelation. Theological reflection upon existence coincides with the reflection upon this overcoming. It consists in an operation on the form of existentialist thought.[55]

I can finally return to the criticisms of the existentialist terminology in theology.

There is nothing wrong with speaking of existence in theology, precisely because this concept no longer depends on the forms of existentialism. Rather, this concept, theologically intended, *applies* to these forms and refers to them; the forms of existentialist thought are the object upon which theology works (and *not* from which theology operates). In sum, if we still want to speak of an existentialist paradigm in theology, then we must understand that this "paradigm" does not imply the subsumption of the forms (and specificity) of theological language under the aegis of the existentialist forms. Rather, it concerns the theological modification of categories belonging to the semantic area of existentialism.[56]

This does *not* mean that existentialism *as such* is falsified. The formal structure of existentialism is still valid in itself. This form is simply no longer valid within a theological discourse. Existentialism *qua* language is theologically assumed as limited, or as the *limitation* of existence's self-sourcing of meaning.

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[55] Vice-versa, any theological conceptualization of existence makes no sense from the standpoint of the forms of existentialism, given that theological conceptualization assumes the form of existential thought as the limitation of all possible concepts of existence. Our existence *coram Deo* is indeed freedom, but this affirmation of one's religious "*Lebenserfahrung*" (see Jüngel, "… unum aliquid assecutus": 68) is possible only in light of the freedom of conscience from its own self-certitude and self-unconditionality.

[56] See Askani, "Le canon": 158: "Le canon s'oppose à la vie au sens où il la confronte à un ailleurs: la vie – même la vie tendant vers le texte, son propre texte – n'est pas tout. La vie n'est même pas toute la vitalité ! Et pourtant – et d'autant plus – la vie humaine cherche son accomplissement en elle-même. Le canon insinue, introduit un accomplissement qui se situerait *ailleurs* et qui *viendrait d'ailleurs*. La lisibilité réalisée – non pas *dans* la vie, mas *pour* la vie, *en direction de* la vie. C'est la structure pre-scriptive du judaïsme ou la structure pro-missive (prometteuse) du christianisme" (*ivi*: 158). Although with a different vocabulary (Askani focuses on Scripture; I focus on revelation), these statements are close to what I mean. Theologically, the meaning of life consists of modifying the structure of the existentialist meaning of life. The conditions of the formulation of this meaning are made dependent upon God's revelation. Life conceives itself to be destined to think about itself as destined by God. Therefore, the meaningfulness, the "lisibilité," is already present in the relationship to divine revelation; life's meaningfulness is in light of the Word. Life thinks that its own "vitality" is dependent on the "vitality" of the Word.

Every time theology speaks of existence, it does indeed refer to existential categories, but this reference coincides with a modification of these categories. Theology does not aim to attribute a meaning to existence; rather, it refers to, questions, and modifies the modality according to which a meaning is given to existence. Were it not so, theology would reduce itself to the mere presentation of the *dramatis persona* of the believer.[57]

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[57] In other words, faith is not the most fundamental source of meaning for the believer (see Dupré, "Belief": 6); rather, it is the only source of meaning that is also *theological*.

Chapter 11

The Function of Divine Predestination

In this chapter, I analyze three facets of the concept of divine predestination. First, I introduce the concept by analyzing the human effort of "justifying" God's retributive justice. Then, I focus on predestination as it appears in *De servo arbitrio*. From this, I deduce the function fulfilled by the concept of predestination in theological discourse; in light of this function, I determine the scope and aim of theodicy.

1. *Fidei summus gradus*

I begin by analyzing the issue of the certitude of salvation. As shown in the previous chapter, thinking life's meaning in terms of the antithesis between damnation and salvation presupposes the illumination of the Spirit. From this, one might deduce that damnation never applies. It does not apply to the life that thinks itself either damned or saved; because this life believes, it is already touched by salvation. Nor does damnation apply to the life of the unbeliever, because the antithesis between damnation and salvation plays no role in the formulation of this life's meaning.[1] This seems to be a sort of *conceptual apokatastasis*: everyone is saved because salvation coincides with the fact that the word "salvation" has theological meaning.

This conclusion is mistaken because it results from the overlapping between the formal and the conceptual aspects of salvation. Salvation in its formal aspect is the situation of language (of *life's* language) consisting of the subordination of all formulations of life's meaning under the antithesis between damnation and salvation. Therefore, salvation is not merely the formulation of the meaning of life as "saved" (or "damned"), but the fact that life's self-formulation is completely reorganized; typological language does not produce meaning, but receives meaning. Thus, saying "My life is saved" or "My life is

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[1] One could state that a life can be damned even if this life does not think itself in terms of salvation or damnation. As discussed in the previous chapter, Luther himself says that a life is damned precisely because it does not think salvation. But here it is a matter of thinking the relevance of this antithesis to life, and this antithesis does not apply to a life if this life does not apply the antithesis to itself, that is, for the formulation of its own meaning.

damned" is irrelevant *per se*: what is relevant is the fact that saying so expresses the limitation of any possible meaning that life can produce for itself.

Therefore, salvation has nothing to do with the certainty of being saved, or with the certainty that salvation is the correct meaning of life. On the contrary, salvation is the awareness that there is no certainty about the meaning a life formulates for itself (for instance: "Saved!").

In fact, the condition of this certainty is the biconditional relationship between life and meaning; life is certain about a meaning for itself because it recognizes itself in this meaning, and it elects this meaning as its own. However, contact with divine revelation breaks this biconditional relationship between life and language, or life and meaning. Theologically, life no longer elects its own meaning, for its meaning is the object of God's election. Therefore, formulating meaning in light of the antithesis between damnation and salvation is the same as acknowledging and expressing the loss of such self-certainty. In sum, salvation is not the object of typological language; rather, salvation is the annulment of the certainty connected to typological language.

It follows that, theologically, we do not think salvation; we think *from* salvation. The content of a meaning of life has priority over the criteria for the application of this content to a life. A life can be miserable, or joyful, or successful, or unlucky, according to some criteria. Nevertheless, believing means thinking that everything that a life endures and joys, suffers, achieves, acts, and wants is received from God's action (614,23). This is the content of any possible theologically-modified meaning of life: being the result of God's action. Thus, regardless of what content is applied to life, this content expresses the work of God upon this life. The criteria of application of these contents work *ex post*; they are applied *in light of* the revelation of God's action. Having faith means molding the criteria for formulating life's meaning *ex post* contact with divine revelation.

I focus now on the concepts of justice and mercy. Stating that these two concepts are contents of life's meaning means that life considers itself, its own movement, or at least some events in life, to be evidence of God's justice or mercy.

There are two different ways according to which this is possible. One way assumes that human criteria (and expectations) of justice and mercy are applicable to life's events, and thus, to God's action as the cause of these events. Accordingly, some events, or even the sum of events in one's life, are considered examples of these concepts – that is, they are considered (for this life) evidence of the fact that life is the object of mercy or justice. In other words, these events or actions are examples of these concepts. For instance, the fact that an evil life is also miserable or unhappy can be considered an example of

justice (usually by the victims of this evil life).[2] In this case, the criteria of justice and mercy are applied *ex ante*; they are the principle according to which a case (an event, or the sum of events corresponding to the movement of life) can be considered an example of a concept.

There is an opposing way for these concepts (justice and mercy) to be applied to some events or the sum of events. According to this way, the application of these concepts is conditioned by the revelation of God as just and merciful (683,14–23). In this case, events are considered examples of the concepts of justice and mercy based on this revelation; in other words, these events are considered evidence of God's justice and mercy in light of the assumption that God is just and merciful. This means that everything that happens in life is a manifestation of this divine justice and mercy, since God's action is assumed to be the source of everything that happens in life. Therefore, life is keen to associate all possible cases with these concepts – even events that in the normal situation would be considered examples of injustice and mercilessness.

The fact that every possible event is considered an example of God's justice and mercy means that there is no example of injustice or mercilessness. In other words, from this situation, it is impossible to know the contents of God's justice and mercy, since opposing events are equally interpreted as such contents. Therefore, what matters here is not the pious conceptualization of everything as just and merciful and good. Rather, what matters is that the applicability of the criteria of justice and mercy is reconsidered in light of a theological assumption. Thus, what matters is realizing that from the revelation of God's justice and mercy, the usual criteria of justice and mercy – the principles of connection between case and concept – are completely remodeled. In sum, according to the first way, the criteria of justice and mercy are applied *to* revelation, and thus, God is thought of as just or unjust and merciful or merciless according to the application of these criteria to the events of life. According to the other, opposing way, the validity of the criteria of justice and mercy derives from the "axiom" that God is "natura iustum, natura clementissimum" (611,9–10).[3] This second way introduces the supreme degree of faith (633,15–21):

Hic est fidei summus gradus, credere illum [*sc.* Deum] esse clementem, qui tam paucos salvat, tam multos damnat, credere iustum, qui sua voluntate nos necessario damnabiles facit, ut videatur, referente Erasmo, delectari cruciatibus miserorum et odio potius quam amore dignus. Si igitur possem ulla ratione comprehendere, quomodo is Deus sit misericors et iustus, qui tantam iram et iniquitatem ostendit, non esset opus fide.[4]

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[2] Kant thinks that reason has a tendency to connect the course of nature to the laws of morality: *Religion*: B 97, Ak VI 73–74 note.

[3] For instance, the idea of justice is derived from the revelation that God is just (WA 18: 632,23–26).

[4] My translation: "This is the supreme degree of faith: believing to be merciful who saves so few and damns so many, and believing to be just who, by his will, makes us necessarily

Fidei summus gradus consists precisely of rethinking the applicability of the criteria of clemency and justice: these criteria are applied not *ratione*, but *fide*; not *ex ante*, but *ex post* the belief in divine revelation. This confirms what was already determined in Chapter 2: the *sub contrario* is no longer a method of knowledge – in this case, knowledge of the quality of God's action, whether good or bad, just or unjust. Rather, the *sub contrario* is the re-evaluation of the validity of any method of knowledge.

2. Justifying God's Retributive Justice

It follows that all attempts to "justify" God negate this *fidei summus gradus*.[5] The intention or need to declare that God's actions are just and merciful (or even unjust and unmerciful) presupposes that the criteria of justice and mercy are applied to God's actions (or are applied to events as expressions of God's actions). These criteria are used to "double-check" God's justness and mercifulness. In sum, these criteria operate *ex ante*, not *ex post* revelation. They are applied to confirm, or to contradict, the assumption issued from revelation that God's action is just, merciful, and redeeming.

Therefore, the tendency of justifying God is theologically suspect. *Fidei summus gradus* is not the work of advocacy, of clearing from God's name the charge of injustice and ruthlessness. It is the opposite: it is the effort of deducing that something is example of justice and mercy because it is the fruit of God's action, which is assumed to be just and merciful (708,8–9). This confirms what was discussed in Chapters 6 and 8: it is not God's action that is conceptualized as just; rather, the revelation of God's action as just is the source of the theological reconsideration of the criteria of justice.

In light of this, I return to an important issue: the distinction between God's *potentia ordinata* and *potentia inordinata*. As analyzed in Chapters 1 and 4, there is an antithesis between two perspectives on God's *potentia*. According to one perspective, God has revealed the law of God's *potentia* as covenant, so that the quality or character of God's *potentia* (justice, mercy, forgiveness) is deduced from this pact (or from interpretations of it); God realizes things that

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damnable, as if (according to Erasmus) he took pleasure from the sufferings of the miserable ones, and he were worthy of hate more than of love. If, in some way, I could understand how can be called merciful and just this God who shows so much wrath and injustice, then I would have no need of faith." Again, the *sub contrario* is not a method of thinking; it is the situation of language before information that does not depend on its inferential structure: divine revelation.

[5] Justification *of* God (objective genitive) is the equivalent of theodicy; see Reinhuber, "Deus absconditus": 52. I will show in few pages how our discourse returns to the issue of theodicy, and *negatively*.

are in accordance with the pact. Thus, God's *potentia* is *ordinata* in light of the pact that God reveals.

The other perspective consists of considering a divine *potentia* that is not bound to this pact, a *potentia* that is *absoluta*, unlimited, and unbound, such that no law can be formulated for it. Evidently, from the perspective of "*potentia ordinata*," this second perspective conveys the idea of a *potentia inordinata*, of a power, and a *voluntas*, that does and undoes arbitrarily, by having itself as its only criterion. This antithesis is expressed by the opposition between *Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus* (a *Deus absconditus* understood conceptually, and not formally, or meta-conceptually, as I do in Chapter 4).

The antithesis between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia inordinata* applies to the human "justification" of God (as objective genitive). As discussed in Chapter 7, justification (in its imputative meaning) is the negation of a negative imputation. Therefore, justifying God implies that a negative imputation to God should be formulated, but this negative imputation is negated. The reason for this negative imputation to God is the concept of *potentia ordinata*. This concept presents a certain quality of God's power as power to realize states of things; therefore, the concept of *potentia ordinata* forges a connection between this quality of God's *potentia* and the quality of a state of things realized by God. The negative imputation to God is based on the *discrepancy* between the supposed quality of God's power in realizing a state of things, and the criteria that are applied to qualify this state of things.

It is important to emphasize that this state of things realized by God must be something that affects life. It can be an empirical event (for instance, the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755) or a believed event, state, or condition (for instance, the belief that one is saved or damned). If the same state of things occurred with no reference to life, then no negative imputation would follow. Therefore, the concept of *potentia ordinata* establishes the rule according to which God attributes something to human beings, or to a life. In sum, the criterion that the *potentia ordinata* introduces and validates is a criterion of *retributive justice*.

Consequently, the discrepancy on which the negative imputation to God is based is a *retributive* discrepancy: the criteria of retributive justice supposedly introduced and validated by the concept of *potentia ordinata* are not the same criteria that the state of things solicits. More precisely, the negative imputation to God follows from the discrepancy between the retributive concept that life attributes to itself (a certain degree of merit) in light of a supposed criterion of God's retributive justice and, on the other hand, the retributive concept that life deduces for itself from the state of things that affects life; this state of things does not comply with the degree of merit life attributes to itself. Thus, the negative imputation to God is a meta-judgment: it is a judgment of God's retributive judgment; God's retributive judgment does not satisfy life's retributive expectation.

All this sounds very abstract, but it is not. Suppose that a state of things affects a life. This state of things is assumed to be the fruit of God's *potentia*. Now, God has supposedly revealed (*potentia ordinata*) a criterion of retributive justice: for instance, strict justice (merit *de condigno*) or mercifulness (merit *de congruo*). Suppose that the state of things is not an example of such a criterion; it is not compatible with the retributive expectations based upon a *potentia ordinata* that is just or merciful. For instance, an earthquake that kills people regardless of their merit. Thus, a negative meta-judgment of God's retributive judgment is formulated: at least for this state of things, God is unjust or unmerciful. The application of the criteria (justice, mercy) that revelation apparently validates are negated by the state of things. This is the structure of Job's accusation against God: one formulates a concept for her or his life as "pious life," and a series of events occurs in this life that clearly do not have the quality of reward for this concept.

The "justification" of God from this negative meta-judgment comes in the form of arguments that present reasons for making God's judgment compatible with the criterion of retributive justice. This is the task of theodicy, and this is the structure of the answers of Job's friends.[6] I will expand upon the theodical answers later. What is important is to notice is that in this scenario (*potentia ordinata*), justification is *at least* possible because of the *potentia ordinata*.

I turn to the opposite scenario: the *potentia inordinata*. In this case, there is no indication as to which retributive criteria should be used to qualify God's *potentia*; God does what God wants, with no limits, no meters, and no order. The only retributive criterion is God's own *arbitrium*. Again, suppose that there is a state of things (an event or a belief) that is judged not to correspond to the retributive concept that life formulates for itself. This state of things is an example of the negative quality *x* (injustice, mercilessness, tyranny, et cetera). But this event is wanted by God. Thus, the same quality *x* (unjust, merciless, tyrant, et cetera) is applied to God.

What is important to emphasize is that in this scenario no justification is possible: the "trial" of God always ends with a negative imputation. It is not possible to negate this imputation (that is, to formulate a justification) because there is no *a priori* knowledge of a retributive criterion for God's *potentia*. The only source of formulation of this criterion is simply the *a posteriori* interpretation of the state of things in retributive terms. There is no discrepancy between criterion introduced and validated by the *potentia* and criterion applied to the state of things; the two kinds of criterion coincide, since the former is deduced from the latter. In other words, no justification is possible because there is no retributive justice whatsoever; it is impossible to formulate any rule or law for God's attribution of rewards and punishments.

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[6] Bayer, in *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 190 mentions Luther's position on Job's friends and their "theodical" attitude.

3. *Potentia sub-ordinata*

There is a third scenario: God's *potentia* is a bit *ordinata* and a bit *inordinata*. This scenario was already mentioned in Chapter 7: God is assumed to be just because God saves those who deserve to be saved, and God is simultaneously "unjust" because God also saves those who do not deserve to be saved. In the first case, God is just *de condigno*; in the second case, God is just not *de condigno*, but *de congruo*. Thus, this scenario is based on the simultaneity of the merit *de condigno* and the merit *de congruo*. Luther rejects this third scenario because it establishes its own coherence: if God is just when God saves those who deserve (*de condigno*) to be damned, then God should also be considered just when God damns those who deserve to be saved (730,22–731,1).

The first two scenarios (*potentia ordinata* and *potentia inordinata*) are intuitive: a criterion of retributive justice is applied to God's *potentia*, and God is judged negatively because there is no correspondence between the (negative) state of things and life's merit (or life's own understanding of its own merit). The third scenario is counter-intuitive: in this case, there is correspondence *and* non-correspondence at the same time. As Luther remarks (730,29–30), this counter-intuition satisfies the human interest in being saved always and for both possibilities of deserving (merit *de condigno*) and not deserving (merit *de condigno*) the reward.

This interest in justifying God's retributive justice is also present in the other two scenarios – the intuitive ones. This is demonstrated by the fact that the first scenario is interpreted positively, and the second negatively.

The first scenario (God's *potentia* is *ordinata*) is interpreted positively in the sense that it associates God's power with order. This positivity is due to the fact that justification of God's supposed "mistreatment" of human life is at least possible. In sum, God's *potentia* is *ordinata* because it is *sub-ordinata* to our standards of and need for reward.

The second scenario (God's *potentia* is *inordinata*) is interpreted negatively because justification of God is not a possibility. The fact that this scenario is negative (it speaks about *potentia* in-*ordinata*, about *dis*-order) implies the positivity of the standpoint of retributive expectations: God's *potentia* is at least wished to be *sub-ordinata* to such expectations.

Of course, the third scenario is the best possible scenario, because the justification of God is never needed. God's retributive justice not only complies with human standards of retributive justice, but indeed satisfies them beyond all expectations; God's justice is *ordinata* both *de condigno* and *de congruo*. Thus, the third scenario also presupposes God's *potentia* as *sub-ordinata* to human standards of retributive justice.

It follows that God's *potentia* and retributive justice are conceptualized and judged in light of the human need to be rewarded by God. A life seeks to justify God in light of life's *self*-justification. This self-justification takes the form of

either life's claim of salvation (*de condigno*), or need for salvation (*de congruo*). Thus, God's attribution of the reward should follow human expectations, both intuitive and counter-intuitive, of this reward. As Luther writes: "Cum igitur Ratio Deum laudet indignos salvantem, arguat vero immeritos damnantem, convincitur, non laudare Deum ut Deum, sed ut suo comodo servientem, hoc est, seipsam et quae sua sunt in Deo quaerit et laudat, non Deum aut quae Dei sunt" (731,2–5).

The previous chapter has shown the fallacy of this position: theologically, the reward precedes the merit. God's retributive justice is unconditioned by any standards of retributive justice; it is not bound to any assumption of merit. God's reward is not only attributed beyond any human merit, but more importantly, it *formally* precedes the merit. Thus, it is independent of the consequential logic "merit → reward." In sum, God's reward makes it possible to *think* that God's reward is beyond any human merit.

Therefore, no criteria of retributive justice can legitimately be applied to either the state of things the life receives (or thinks to receive), or, consequently, God's *potentia*. Rather, it is the other way around: human standards of retributive justice (intuitive or counter-intuitive) are no longer valid *ex ante*, as criteria for the judgment of a specific case of retributive justice (God's). On the contrary, these standards operate *ex post*: their applicability is reconsidered in light of the assumption of God as just and merciful. God's justice and mercy are unconditioned by any criteria of justice and mercy. Therefore, life deduces the self-attribution of merit from the formal unconditionality of God's retributive justice. Any state of things that occurs in a life is re-qualified as evidence of God being just and merciful.

However, this change must be correctly understood. It is not that life should now deduce its own merit from the state of things, so that life must recalibrate its self-understanding in light of the quality of the event. For instance, life infers its own guilt from a negative state of things (that is, from a lack of reward). This is a mere *tollendo tollens*, and as such, it still confirms the implication "merit → reward." God's *potentia* and God's reward still depend on human merit (or in this case, the lack of merit), and thus on human criteria of retributive justice. These criteria make us say simultaneously "pro Deo et pro nobis," thus forgetting ourselves ("... nec nostri interim memores …") and our dependence upon God's reward (706,28–32).

Thinking this dependence causes us to question the *ex ante* validity of our standards, when applied to God's reward. Thus, the priority of the divine reward over the merit is not an epistemological priority – for instance, in the form "I know the merit from the reward." Rather, divine retributive justice has priority over the epistemology of retributive justice itself. It is not a matter of assuming the implication "merit → reward" backwards from the fact of the reward. Rather, as determined in the previous chapter, it is a matter of rethinking the implication *from* God's retributive justice; it is a matter of thinking

God's retributive justice – God's attribution of either damnation or salvation –
as the *beginning* (and not the mere recalibration) of life's self-attribution of
merit.

Given that we begin to think theologically *from* divine reward, then ques-
tioning the validity of the retributive implication means affirming that the re-
ward is not the object of thinking or investigation. In sum, rethinking retribu-
tive justice theologically means thinking that God's retributive justice answers
to a principle of justice, a criterion, that is *unknown*. We do not know the prin-
ciple according to which God attributes salvation and damnation because this
attribution, the reward, is the theological origin of life's self-thinking (includ-
ing thinking its own merit).

This reflection leads to the analysis of the relationship between revelation
and the criteria of the attribution of a content to a life. More precisely, it is a
matter of addressing the compatibility between what life destines for itself, and
what God has decided about this life independently of life's self-destination.
In sum, this is the point at which we must investigate what the concept of "di-
vine *pre*destination" means.

4. Predestination in *De servo arbitrio*

We know the contents of God's retributive justice: salvation or damnation,
election or rejection, love or hate. We know nothing about the principles of this
justice, the forms according to which these contents are attributed to a life,
because theologically life re-thinks its own meaning (and thus its own merit)
from the revelation of these contents.

The concept of divine predestination is the conceptual representation of this
limit of knowledge. This concept impedes extending the investigation of God's
plans for life beyond the limit of the revelation that God is just and merciful
(the *summus gradus fidei*). In other words, predestination is the concept that
excludes from the field of theology any discourse based on the *ex ante* validity
of retributive criteria, and thus, any justification of God's retributive justice.

Predestination is *pre*-destination. The destination, the effect, the conse-
quence, is *not* a consequence. It is a destination that does not follow from any-
thing. The destination, the consequence, the reward, is defined as "*pre-*"; that
is, not only beyond and before human cooperation, but formally beyond and
before one's determination of its own role and worth in the consequential sys-
tem of merit and reward.

In order to explain this, I begin analyzing Luther's use of the concept of
predestination in his *De servo arbitrio*. First, a terminological clarification: the
term "praedestinatio" (or sometimes "destinatio") appears only six times
(618,14; 691,30; 716,18; 723,34; 772,39; 786,5). In three *loci* (618,14, 723,34,

786,5), it is associated with the term "*praescientia*," which, on the contrary, appears much more often, as discussed in Chapter 1.

I return to Luther's answer to Erasmus's interpretation of *praescientia*. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, in light of the distinction between *necessitas consequentis* and *necessitas consequentiae*, Erasmus associates divine prescience with the human prescience of a natural event (in Erasmus's example, an eclipse: III a 5).

Luther rejects this interpretation; there is a distinction between human scientific prescience and divine prescience. Human prescience follows from an empirical necessity (more precisely, from a universal legislation of nature). Divine prescience is the *cause* of the event's occurrence (716,11–15). On one hand, in the case of scientific *praescientia*, the formulation of natural laws (for instance, the law of the revolution of planets, from which the eclipse is "foreseen") derives from the causal structure of natural events. On the other hand, in the case of divine *praescientia*, the causality is based on and refers to God's *voluntas*. Thus, theologically, the understanding of the necessity depends not on the connection between cause and effect, but on the connection of everything to God's *voluntas* (615,31–33; see 717,13: "... necessitatem nobis imponi praescientia divina"). Again, it is a theological meaning of necessity, not a causal one.

This negates the reduction of divine *praescientia* to a system of *metaphysical* causality. When Luther associates "praedestinatio et prescientia Dei" with the classical conception of "fatum" (617,23–618,18; 718,15–19), he rejects a discourse on God that excludes the reference to necessity by counterposing to it the correct wisdom of classical poets who present a concept of divinity as source of necessity. Luther does not say that divine prescience is the cause of a metaphysical causality determining human actions[7]; rather, he simply means that human projects, expectations, plans – in sum, life's freedom of self-determination – cannot be considered the source of the states of things that a life lives, when life considers itself in relation to a divine agent.[8]

Therefore, Luther is not merely opposing a metaphysical causality with an empirical causality; he is presenting the theological modification of our thinking in terms of causality, specifically life's self-determined causality (or: self-destination). In other words, it is not that the concept of predestination is a variable associated with the operator of necessity; rather, the validity of the

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[7] For instance, see Ferrario, "Nascondimento": 101.

[8] In sum, the concept of divine predestination applies to the language that thinks the freedom of self-determination (self-destination) by generating a conceptual *aut*/*aut* with freedom (WA 18: 717,25–27). The concept of predestination makes the concept of human freedom "outer" from the "space" of theological discourse (WA 18: 718,10–11.25–26) because this concept is incompatible with the unconditionality of the divine operation upon life's destination, an unconditionality introduced by the concept of predestination (WA 18: 718,20–25).

operator of necessity is conditioned by the assumption of the concept of pre-destination – that is, by *believing* in it. As Luther writes: "… ut sentirent ne-cessitatem nostram, *si credatur* praescientia et omnipotentia Dei" (719,18–19, emphasis added). Therefore, Luther is not saying that the world *is* indeed based on such predestinating causal necessity (a metaphysical statement). Instead, he is saying that our *theological conception* of the determination of *life's* history depends on the assumption of divine predestination.

It follows that theologically, the knowledge about the origin of life's deter-mination cannot go beyond divine predestination. The concept of divine pre-destination marks the end of life's backward attempt to determining the source of its own determination. Divine predestination is the limit of all processes of inference about God's rewarding method in light of the fact that this reward is the source of life's theological self-thinking.

Thus, the concept of predestination represents the limit of all claims of mak-ing God's retributive justice the object of knowledge (and thus also of judg-ment and justification) in the name of life's self-understanding. As such, it im-pedes investigation of the decision of God as well as the definition of the prin-ciple of this decision: the rule of predestination. In sum, the concept of divine predestination impedes a *biased use* of the concept of predestination itself[9]: it prevents predestination from being absorbed and phagocyted by criteria of re-tributive justice, reward, and self-destination.

Therefore, the concept of predestination plays an epistemological function. It represents the limit of our knowledge, formulation, and attribution of a law (a concept) to the divine assignment of salvation or damnation. Speaking of predestination does not mean speaking about the principle of determination of the antithesis between salvation and damnation; rather, it means speaking about the *formal impossibility* of formulating such principle.

Given that predestination is unknown ("incognita"*: 691,31), it is impossible to formulate the content of God's *voluntas*.[10] It is impossible to know how God acts towards life *before* this action is present in life, as movement or molding of this life. Thus, the concept of divine predestination is connected to the con-cept of *Deus absconditus*. As the antithesis between *potentia ordinata* and *po-tentia inordinata* is resolved by the formal interpretation of the *Deus abscondi-tus*, similarly, the antithesis between the possibility and impossibility of justi-fication of God's retributive justice (or destination of human life) is resolved by the concept of predestination.

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[9] See Gogarten, *Theologie*: 172–173.

[10] In light of the assumption of predestination, the only thing that can be stated about divine *voluntas* is not "God's *voluntas will* be realized" (in this or that way), but rather "Thy will be done" (WA 18: 618,12; 718,3; Matt 6:10); it is not a (empirical or metaphysical) statement, but a prayer; see Gogarten, *Theologie*: 172; see also *supra*, Ch. 4 section 5.

In both cases, we have a concept that plays a formal function: like the *Deus absconditus*, predestination is the stratagem that theological conceptualization assumes in order to avoid extending the theological conceptualization beyond its limit. The concepts of *Deus absconditus* and predestination impede the consideration or assumption of other concepts as sources of theological conceptualizations. Therefore, the two concepts work as a sort of "subroutines" that allow the whole system (theology) to respect its source.

The difference between the two concepts concerns the specific interpretation of the source or limit of theological conceptualization. For the *Deus absconditus*, it is divine revelation; for predestination, it is God's reward.

Given that God's reward *is* the reward of believing, and divine revelation reveals the priority of God's reward, there is an intertwining of *Deus absconditus* and divine predestination. Each of them concerns a specific issue that might affect theological conceptualization. For the *Deus absconditus*, is the issue of placing concepts of God deduced from revelation on the same formal level of revelation. For divine predestination, it is the issue of knowing the law of life's destination, the law of all events in a life and in the afterlife.

Therefore, the distinction between the two concepts of *Deus absconditus* and divine predestination concerns the specific aspect of their formal function. For the *Deus absconditus* this function concerns the logical aspect; for the divine predestination it concerns the epistemological aspect. The concept *Deus absconditus* undermines the presupposition that theological conceptualizations have the same truth value of their source (that is, as theorems of divine revelation). The concept of divine predestination precludes these conceptualizations from being considered principles of knowledge of God's determination of a life.

This difference confirms the formal equipollency of the function fulfilled by the two concepts. In both cases, we have a concept that "fights" against the extension of theological conceptualization beyond its limit: the dependence of conceptualization upon divine revelation and divine reward. This limit is the starting point of theological inferences (as the *Deus absconditus* reminds us) and of theological knowledge (as divine predestination reminds us). Thus, *Deus absconditus* and predestination are two "leucocytes" that keep the consistency and the soundness of the body of theological language in check.

5. The Elected Life

From the preceding analysis, it follows that the concept of predestination not only does not open the theoretical doors to wild elucubrations on God *in abstracto*, but indeed, it closes those doors, impeding such elucubrations. Either there is a speculation on God that is abstract, and thus not theological; or there is a *theological* speculation that is not *in abstracto*, that does not bind God's

attribution of reward to the criteria of retributive justice. This latter speculation does not assume God as the object of arbitrary determination (arbitrary because it is based on conditions *not* limited by the concept of predestination). Predestination does not invite a fake theological certainty of salvation; rather, it is the condition of the theological operation upon this certainty itself.

As such, the concept of predestination preserves the specificity of theological conceptualizations. Predestination prevents questioning the divine promise, and the risk of conceptualizing it as human promise (619,1–6). Moreover, it impedes conceptualization of divine commandments as human laws; it preserves the *secundus usus legis* from being reduced to the *primus usus* (691,29–34). Third, predestination precludes the consequentialist logic of retributive justice from being the principle of determination of God's *voluntas* (772,38–40), and thus from determining and limiting God's *voluntas* (786,3–5).

This includes the issue of the theological perspective on life's meaning. The concept of divine predestination ensures and confirms that life is *not* theologically conceptualized as a saved life or as a damned life, since there is no possible knowledge about the principle of assignment of salvation and damnation. The principle of either one or the other destination is *pre-*. Therefore, the concept of predestination reminds that the destination *precedes* any concepts of this principle. Predestination limits life's theological self-knowledge to the fact that life is the object of the antithesis between salvation and damnation, and thus the object of God's *voluntas*.

Therefore, predestination is not only (negatively) the negation of any principle of assignment of salvation or damnation; it is also (positively) the affirmation that the conceptualization of life depends and is based upon this negation. Theologically, life's meaning depends on and refers to *being* predested, being in the molding hands of God. In other words, life thinks its own self-destination by attributing the destination entirely to God; life is destined to be destined by God and to think itself as the object of divine predestination.

This is the maximum possible extent of self-conceptualization that life can reach when dealing with the concept of predestination. Life thinks itself and knows its own movement in terms of predested life. This result is already the *fullness* of the theological conceptualization of life; if another conceptualization – or self-conceptualization – about life were presented, then the discourse would no longer be theological because it would be based on the determination of God's attribution of a destination, and thus, it would negate the concept of predestination.

This is the "redactio in nihilum" of the elected ones (633,2): ceasing to attribute to life the meaning of either salvation or damnation, and focusing on considering both salvation and damnation as meanings of life – or vice-versa, focusing on life's meaningfulness as based on *both* damnation and salvation. Elected is the one who believes that she or he is predested, and thus, who knows oneself *because* predestination refers to her or his life. Being elected

does not mean living a life (*being* a life) of joy without sorrow, or of justice without injustice; rather, being elected means living a life whose meaning is thought to be dependent upon God's unconditioned election as pre-destination.

Again, this concerns life's self-knowledge from states of things. A state of things is not interpreted as evidence of either damnation or salvation. For instance, rain is *not* an empirical proof of damnation (704,21; Matt 5:45); the concept of predestination negates such epistemological deduction. What truly matters is that this negation, this limitation of life's self-knowledge, is the foundation of the *acknowledgment of being under the rain* – that is, under God's action. Life has meaning as "rained" by God. In sum, election means being the object of God's *voluntas* as correction of the Spirit (632,5). This correction concerns the introduction of thinking in terms of the antithesis between damnation and salvation as the origin *itself* of life's meaning. It concerns thinking about the impossibility of the specification of this antithesis, or thinking about the falsity of any possible certainty of salvation (632,16).

Is there a double predestination in *De servo arbitrio*?[11] The duality of salvation and damnation is intrinsic to the antithetical structure of Luther's argument: if there are saved ones, then there are damned ones (783,34–35: "Ita fit, ut si non omnes, tamen aliqui et multi salventur"). More clearly: "ut electi et reprobi sunt, ita vasa honoris et ignominiae sunt" (729,2–3; See also 727,7).

But again, what matters is *not* knowing whether a life belongs to one side or the other of the antithesis; what matters is that this antithesis informs the attribution of meaning to life as a life under God's predestination. In both cases of damnation and salvation, there is predestination. Therefore, in both cases there is *election* – election for salvation, and election for damnation. In both cases, there is a life (whether damned or saved) that is under God, and that formulates its own meaningfulness through dependence upon the assumption of God's election. In both cases there is a life that knows itself, and its own movement, in light of the epistemological limit introduced by the concept of divine predestination.

We do not know whether we are saved or damned; this is a confession of limitation, represented and expressed by the concept of divine predestination. This confession of limitation is how theology thinks the meaning of life.

6. No System of Predestination

From this reflection, it follows that predestination is not a *system*.[12] The introduction or formulation of a system of predestination would imply precisely the

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[11] On this, see Scott Clark, "Election": 95; Jeon, *Calvin*: 94; Barth, *KD*: II.2 § 32, 16.

[12] Contrary to Calvin, *Institution*: III, 21; see Heinz, *Justification*: 183–184; Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie*: 188–189. Luther never places predestination in the theological

same theoretical attitude the concept of predestination is there to reject, or at least limit: the synthesis of a determination of God's predestination itself.

In fact, a system of predestination is the organization of the concept of predestination. In this scenario, predestination would be an object of conceptualization, and thus, it would lose its function towards conceptualization as a concept to which the powers of conceptualization shall refer. Therefore, it is not only the case that no system can be formulated for predestination, but more importantly, it is the concept of predestination that impedes the formulation of a system for predestination itself.

This confirms what I have mentioned in the previous section: the concept of predestination is what impedes all biased assumptions of the concept of predestination. By "biased" assumptions, I mean all uses of this concept as a source of certainty on God's decision about life, and not as a re-definition of the condition of such certainty. The concept of predestination prevents itself from being considered as a mere concept instead of a concept *about* the conceptualization of God's *potentia* applied to life. It is a concept that opposes the reduction of predestination to a mere concept, that opposes the dismissal of its formal function. Predestination is the concept that takes the origin and the limit of the movement of conceptualization from human hands and places them into God's hands.[13]

Therefore, the conceptual uncertainty concerning predestination is formulated neither for intellectual sadism, nor for reverence for God's mystery. Rather, it concerns the opposite of the mystery. The concept of predestination impedes the systematization of predestination not because predestination is what words cannot say, but because words are uttered (theologically) after the reward, after believing, and after the revelation.[14]

"foreground" (*ivi*: 183), as a fundamental concept of theological discourse. This attitude is the result of the non-realistic consideration of predestination. Predestination serves as a formal function within theological discourse. As such, I do (paradoxically) agree with one who rightly criticizes Luther for his un-realism (see, for instance, Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine": 100). Luther's "un-realism" is, upon a closer look, the attitude of not submitting the conditions of realism over God. Another difference from Calvin might be that for Calvin, predestination is supralapsarian, while for Luther, it is infralapsarian; see Brosché, *Luther on Predestination*, 100 note 21. Yet, concerning *De servo arbitrio*, it can be questioned whether Luther's view is indeed infralapsarian; see WA 18: 675,25–39; see also Herms, "Gewißheit": 38.

[13] See Gogarten, *Theologie*: 181.

[14] This might seem similar to Calvin's concept of predestination. See Askani, "Glauben": 124: "Wenn es um Gottes Gerechtigkeit geht, dann ist er nicht nur der, der sie ausübt, sondern auch der, der – einzig – weiß, was sie ist. Ist es nicht das, was uns verrückt macht an der Vorstellung von Gottes Prädestination: daß Gott unserem Gerechtigkeitsgefühl nicht entspricht? Calvin würde wohl denken: wir müßten daran verrückt werden, daß er unserem Gerechtigkeitsgefühl entspräche – und nich seinem. Nach Calvin nämlich steht Gottes Gerechtigkeit unendlich über der unseren: Gott ist – das weiß, das glaubt Calvin (denn sonst

This allows me to return to the previous point about God's justice and mercy. A systematization of predestination corresponds to the systematization of God's retributive justice. And precisely this is impeded by the concept of predestination; predestination "reminds" language to conceptualize justice in light of and in dependence upon *God's* justice. Justice is no longer what we can possibly think to be justice; justice is posited by God, and from this position – from this revelation – the concept of justice is theologically built. In sum, predestination is the concept that impedes formulation of a judgment upon God, a judgment of God's justice *ex ante* the revelation of God's *potentia* as justice.[15]

This is what Luther means when he speaks of honoring and adoring God's justice and mercy: neither adoring God's satisfaction of human expectations of or need for justice and mercy, nor dwelling in the silence before what cannot

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wäre Gott ja nicht Gott) – *immer* gerecht. Und daran hängt der ganze Sinn seiner Prädestinationslehre. Nicht wir stehen über Gott, sondern er stehet uber uns. Das hat Calvin von Grund auf gedacht." However, there is an important difference: for Calvin, predestination is a *doctrine*; it defines the correct way of conceptualizing God's justice. For Luther, predestination is not a doctrine because it is *not* the correct way of conceptualizing God's justice. Rather, it indicates the reflection of conceptualization upon its own limitation because of and before divine revelation; it indicates the fact that every possible use of the concept "justice" is theologically dependent upon and "originated" by God's justice itself. Thus, in both cases, we deal with a meta-conceptual function; but according to Calvin, this meta-conceptual function consists of the distinction between a correct and an incorrect conceptualization of God's *potentia*. Hence, this function is the result of a reflection upon conceptualization (a reflection that is nevertheless still a conceptualizing, metalinguistic reflection). On the other hand, according to Luther, this meta-conceptual function is *self-considering*; it results from a reflection that conceptualization carries out upon itself, and thus, it consists of the self-limitation of any conceptualization of God's *potentia* (be it predestinating or not). This difference between Luther and Calvin is implicitly evident in this line from Askani, "Glauben": 127: "Die Prädestinationlehre ist der Ausdruck eines Denkens, das Gott von Gott her, das Gott in seinem Gottsein denkt." For Luther, the predestination is rather the concept that *impedes* the presumption of thinking "Gott in seinem Gottsein." In other words, the difference concerns the absence (in Calvin) and the presence (in Luther) of the concept of *Deus absconditus*. This is Luther's "un-realism", and thus also Luther's operation upon the "meta" level: the attention shall not be on the concept of predestination, but on what happens to the level of conceptualization if the concept of predestination is formulated (as the expression or representation of this level reflecting upon its own theological situation). Again, this does not mean that Luther's concept of predestination plays a merely negative function (as the determination of the limits of conceptualization); rather, it means that predestination plays the *positive* function of constantly re-establishing the priority of the theological source of life's self-reflection over the validity of the forms of this self-reflection. This leads to the *aesthetic* form of Luther's concept of predestination: given that predestination is not a concept *in se*, but the representation of the theological situation of conceptualization, the discourse on predestination can only refer to *specifications* of it, to single lives as predestined lives. The role of aesthetics in the discourse on predestination is discussed in *infra*, Ch. 12 sections 4–6.

[15] See Gogarten, *Theologie*: 135.

be spoken – but rather, speaking in light of the theological upheaval of our ideas of justice and mercy, an upheaval that comes from believing, from the reward.[16]

Thus, Luther quotes Romans 9:20a ("Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"; 686,12; 695,31–32; 716,26–27) not to compel silence, but to compel to speak *otherwise*. This "speaking otherwise" consists of speaking in light of the only theological assumption of our criteria (and certitude) on justice, mercy, salvation, damnation, and life: their assumption as dependent upon divine revelation. Again, the *lumen gratiae* does not enlighten God's justice, but rather the limitation, the dependence, of our criteria of justice (785,26–38). The certainty of God's justice corresponds to the *lumen gratiae* revealing that certainty coincides with the *lack* of *lumen gloriae*.

Sometimes Luther seems to establish a compatibility between God's justice and human expectations (and certainties) on retributive justice – for instance, when he states that what is not punished in this life will be punished in the next life (785,16–19). Yet, upon a closer look, he does not claim that God's justice will coincide with human justice, nor that the *lumen gloriae* will coincide with the *lumen naturae*. Rather, he claims that *when* all expectations of justice have vanished (when "which is in part shall be done away", 1 Cor 13:10), *then* God's justice will be the expectation itself, the only possible reality of justice. Until this future of the *lumen gloriae* is realized, predestination continues to limit the conceptualization of man's life *within* the antithesis between salvation and damnation.

Therefore, although Luther assumes the position of Job's friends in other works, looking for a moral justification for what occurs empirically in human life,[17] the situation is different in *De servo arbitrio*. God is not the guarantee of a harmony that is ultimately dependent upon human criteria and expectations of harmony. Nor is God the classical, Aristotelian "Deus otiosus," entirely detached from human affairs (706,22–23). Rather, God is the *imposer* of God's own harmony and justice. This is what the concept of predestination presents to our thinking: the passage from the formulation of a rule of God's *potentia* to the definition of the validity of any rule in light of the unconditionality of God's destination.[18]

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[16] See WA 18: 784,6–11: "Hic honorandus et reverendus est Deus clementissimus in iis, quos iustificat et salvat indignissimos, donandumque est saltem non nihil divinae eins sapientiae, *ut iustus esse credatur*, ubi iniquus nobis esse videtur. Si enim talis esset eius iustitia, quae humano captu posset iudicari esse iusta, plane non esset divina et nihilo differret ab humana iustitia" (emphasis added).

[17] See WA Br 7: 124,10–125,19. See also Reinhuber, "Deus absconditus": 57.

[18] See *ivi*: 59: from "Kreißsälen" to "Sterbelagern," from "Mozartsymphonie" to "Kriegsgreuel," everything that happens has meaning, not because it conforms to our idea of God's justice, but as product of God, and thus submitted to God's action.

7. Children's Suffering and the Grand Inquisitor

This analysis of Luther's conception of predestination in *De servo arbitrio* leads to a discussion of the concept of theodicy. In fact, it seems that predestination is the *formal* "*coup de grâce*" of the theological relevance of theodicy.

Theodicy is the formulation of the compatibility between God's *potentia* and God's justice. As such, it implies that God's justice is subsumable under our expectations and criteria of justice. In sum, the concept of theodicy implies the compliance of God's harmony with a more or less intuitive concept of harmony (as the harmonic organization of the world as a *just* world).

To work through this issue, I analyze two positions presented by Iván Karamazov. The first position concerns the suffering of children. The second position concerns the Grand Inquisitor.

Concerning the suffering of children, Iván presents to his brother Aleša various instances of little children beaten to death by their sadistic parents. In no case was this behavior a punishment for the children's misbehavior; the children were beaten simply because they existed, or alternatively, simply because the parents enjoyed their children's suffering.[19] This gratuitous suffering is particularly sorrowful in the case of children, in light of their condition of dependence, helplessness, and unconditional love towards their parents.[20]

This helplessness is not only physical (children cannot defend themselves physically), but it is foremost *theoretical*. The children are unable to find any justification for this suffering, or any meaning for it. We adults are always able to find a meaning for our suffering. Even the undeserved, unjust suffering has meaning as such: as undeserved or unjust, it has meaning as a scream against

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[19] See Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*: 320–322: "I have noted down a detailed account of a well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife flogging their own seven-years-old daughter. The papa is delighted that the twigs he uses to flog the child have knots in them. […] These people may be kind and even behave with gentleness toward other adults of the human species, as any normal, humane, educated European would, but they love torturing children. In fact, in a sense, they even love the children because of the tortures they inflict upon them. […] Under the pretext that the child dirtied her bed (as though a five-years-old deep in angelic sleep could be punished for that), they forced her to eat excrement, smearing it all over her face. And it was the mother who did it! And then that woman would lock her little daughter up in the outhouse until morning and he did so even in the coldest nights, then is was freezing. Just imagine the mother being able to sleep with the child's cries coming from that infamous outhouse!"

[20] *Ivi*: 322: "They flog the girl for one minute … five minutes, they go on to ten, harder, faster, more stingingly. The child screams, then the child can no longer scream, she's gasping for air … 'Ah, papa, papa, papa dear' … […] What excites them is the utter helplessness of the little creatures, the angelic trustfulness of the child who has nowhere to turn for help – yes, that's what sets the vicious blood of the torturer afire. […] Imagine the little creature, unable even to understand what is happening to her, beating her sore little chest with her tiny fist, weeping hot unresentful, meed tears."

God, or as crying out from abandonment. But children's suffering is without meaning, without a name; precisely because it is left unexplained, it does not entail even the rebellious or forsaken scream.[21] Screaming against God is still screaming *towards* God, or *for* God. In children's suffering, being beaten, and eventual death, even this "towards" is absent.[22]

All attempts to conciliate the meaninglessness of this suffering with a supposed, even unknowable, greater (divine) Good may be read as fruits of human disrespect. Theodicy cannot formulate a harmonic answer for this meaninglessness – not even the negation of this harmonic answer. For Iván, this suffering is the proof that atheism is the only answer, and also, more profoundly, that harmony – the accord between the world and divine justice – comes at a price that is so high (the meaningless suffering of children) that it negates the worth of this harmony. What is left is the refusal to enter into divine harmony. What is left is not merely negating this harmony, or negating God, but instead acting as if God did not exist.[23] Aleša is embarrassed.[24] Augustine is embarrassed.[25] Theology itself is embarrassed.

And yet this embarrassment, this intellectual and spiritual honesty in not sugar-coating the profundity of the issue, is *itself* the correct answer. The failure of theodicy before this issue is not in providing no answer, but in *seeking* an answer. Iván's rebellion is the rebellion of a sad man, because it is the rebellion against the theoretical cost of this harmony itself. As such, this rebellion *judges* this harmony; it judges the adequacy of God with regard to this idea of harmony.

In sum, Iván's rebellion understands and treats God as something to understand, as the guarantor of harmony, and thus as something dependent upon this harmony, something submitted to it. It follows that theodicy, as a response to this rebellion, presupposes the reducibility of God to a collection of human forms (especially the expectations of justice). As such, theodicy fabricates an object that can be negated or affirmed – an object of negative imputation or of justification – whether it is judged compatible or incompatible with the

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[21] See Conche, "La souffrance": 44: "Admettre en effet que l'apparente injustice de Dieu cache ici une justice plus haute et pour nous insondable, c'est considérer encore la souffrance des enfants comme en principe justifiable, ce qui est contradictoire avec l'expérience irrécusable que nous en avons comme d'un mal absolu."

[22] See Dostoevsky, *Karamazov*: 322: "I am not even talking about the suffering of adults: they, at least, have eaten their apple of knowledge, so the hell with them. But it's different when it comes to children."

[23] See *ivi*: 327: "I feel, moreover, that such harmony is rather overpriced. We cannot afford to pay so much for a ticket. And so I hasten to return the ticket I've been sent. […] It isn't that I reject God; I am simply returning Him most respectfully the ticket that would entitle me to a seat."

[24] See *ivi*, the whole Chapter III of Book VII, "An onion."

[25] See Augustine, *Epistula 166*: 16–18.

expectations of justice. Again, the systematicity underlying any theodicy is an "abomination"[26]: it is the normalization or the homogenization of God within the conditions of systematic harmonization; it is the encapsulation of God within the requirement of and need for a system, a harmony.

This argument is reinforced by the Grand Inquisitor.[27] The Grand Inquisitor is a tragic figure, like Iván, his creator. The Grand Inquisitor substituted himself for God as an extreme gesture of generosity towards the faithful humanity that was dissatisfied by the non-conformity of God's revelation with human expectations of divinity and salvation. Humanity looked for a God who could satisfy such expectations. However, in the desert, Jesus refused the riches (the bread), the power (the miracle), and the glory. Yet again, the faithful ones do not live without riches (yearning for bread), power (expecting miracles), and glory (being willing to participate to divine potency).

The Inquisitor accuses the Prisoner, the returned Son of God, of having overestimated humanity, of having neglected the human need for satisfaction, a satisfaction not merely empirical, but foremost logical, as satisfaction of the human *idea* of God. These expectations concern three elements: divine riches as supreme everlasting abundance, divine power as supreme miraculous power, and divine glory as supreme frightful mystery.

Humanity wanted a God that corresponded to its own idea of God, a God defined by this idea. They expected a miraculous God, a God descending from the Cross; a God of mystery, a God depriving humankind of all access to God's majesty; and a God of authority, terrible and wrathful.[28] Human beings bow only before this God – they bow only because of the miracle, the mystery, and the fear. Human beings are willing to hear about the celestial bread *because of* the earthly bread.

Therefore, God's revelation as Jesus Christ was too much for human expectations. Jesus's negation of the empirical miracle, of the sacerdotal mystery, and of the frightful authority negate the human ideal of God; they negate that God is submitted under this idea. Thus, humankind had to "improve" God's revelation by re-dressing God with the clothes of expectations. Thus, humankind became the slave of its own concept of God.

In Dostoevsky's masterpiece, something happens after such supreme confession of the impossibility of the love of God, of desperate self-compliance and self-justification. The venerable Stareč Zosima dies, and his earthly remains emanate not a scent of sanctity, but a smell of putrefaction.[29] Again, this is the "betrayal" of an expectation, the negation of the theoretical satisfaction of an idea: the idea of sanctity as bodily purity. Is the Stareč no longer a saint?

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[26] See Conche, "La souffrance": 49.
[27] See Dostoevsky, *Karamazov*: Book 3, Chapter 5.
[28] See *ivi*: 255–256.
[29] See *ivi*: Book 7, Chapter 1.

Aleša's shock, not because of the smell, but because of the voluble faithfulness of his fellow monks, is already the overcoming of the Grand Inquisitor.

It is not God's revelation that is invalidated by the fact that God does not accord with the human idea of God. Rather, it is this primacy of the human expectations of divine divinity, justice, and mercy, that is invalidated by God's revelation, and *only* by God's revelation. Iván's position is theologically wrong because it assumes a God submitted to human forms; this assumption is implicit in the problem of children's meaningless suffering, and explicit in the Grand Inquisitor.

In sum, from Iván's position, it is possible *only* to question whether God exists; it is possible *only* to ask whether it is possible for the man to believe, or whether God makes sense. Therefore, from Iván's position, it is *not* possible to ask about the *legitimacy* of the application of the human idea of divinity to God; it is not possible to question the relevance of speaking about existence and nonexistence, or about meaning and non-meaning. It is not possible to think that the rebellion against God depends *upon* God's revelation.

Faith does not mean believing in God because God makes or has made himself *believable* and lovable to humankind, or because God is *eligible* as a candidate for the role of "God" in the human theater. On the contrary, faith is believing that human thinking, concepts, language, and meanings are subordinated to God.

8. Theology vs. Theodicy

Back to theodicy: what has been analyzed helps to demystify all possible answers that theodicy presents to the issue of meaningless suffering. I present three answers: the justness, the meaninglessness, and the mystery of suffering.

The first kind of answer of theodicy is the most basic one. It concerns the imposition of a compatibility between the human "evident rule of justice"[30] (whatever this rule is) and God's retribution of a meaningless suffering: theodically, this suffering must have a reason. This compatibility is theologically rejected because it implies the submission of the God's retributive justice to the "evident" criterion of retributive justice. This rejection is, *in nuce*, evidence of the vacuity of theodical speculation. The consequence is the inversion of the formal order of things, thus allowing the retributive criterion to be re-considered in light of divine revelation.

Theodicy's second kind of answer concerns the justification of a meaningless suffering by comparing it to Jesus's suffering as a justifying sacrifice. Also this second kind of answer implies the attitude of justification, this time in terms of a sort of *apotropaic* meaning. The meaningless suffering is made

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[30] See Conche, "La souffrance": 53.

meaningful because it can never compare to the suffering of Jesus, which means that the suffering of Jesus is conditioned by the meaninglessness of human suffering.

The last kind of answer from theodicy is its own silence. In this case, the meaningless suffering is indeed meaningless, which means that it is a *mystery*. Here the mystification is subtler than in the second kind of answer. Mystery is indeed the satisfaction of a human request. God and God's justice have a meaning that is hidden, and as such, this meaning is compatible with the human idea of divinity. In sum, the mystery of suffering and evil already implies the justification of such suffering and evil precisely *because* its meaningfulness is a mystery, and as such, it properly belongs to the idea of "God."

It follows that theodicy is the victory of the Grand Inquisitor. It is the affirmation that God must comport with the human idea of God, that God must be the principle of satisfaction of the human need for meaning, the consolation of the desperate one. God conforms to the human expectations of satisfaction of these needs and desperations.

The only response to the Grand inquisitor is the exact opposite: the human being, a life, *discovers* itself as a needing life, as a desperate life, as sinful *because of* God and in light of the revelation of this need, of this sinfulness. One knows what one cannot know by oneself because of divine revelation: namely, that the human *verbum* is not everything, for there is another *verbum*, and this other *verbum* is called "divine revelation." This is precisely what the Grand Inquisitor knows and tells us: that humankind needs and builds a God precisely because of the *dissatisfying* revelation of God – that is, precisely because divine revelation is another *verbum*.[31] The Grand Inquisitor knows all of this, but he cannot admit it (either because of his love towards humankind, or in order to conserve his power over humankind). For this reason, he is a tragic character.

Therefore, even from the theological perspective God is connected to human need and desperation, which is ultimately desperation for meaninglessness, or

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[31] In sum, theodicy is equal to thinking that it is indeed possible and legitimate to make an *image* of God that is equivalent to God. See Askani, "Glauben": 118: "[D]as Bilder-Haben-Wollen, Sich-ein-Bild-Machen-Wollen, so sehr es doch wie eine Öffnung des Menschen erscheint, wie eine Erweiterung seines Horizonts, wirft den Menschen auf sich zurück. *Im Bilder-Machen bleibt er bei sich*. Glauben aber ist das genaue Gegenteil davon! Darum ist die Frage: Bildlosigkeit oder nicht? keine dem Glauben äußerliche. Im Gegenteil, sie betrifft ein Innerstes, sie betrifft ihn selber, sie betrifft, was er ist: *Glauben heißt, sich kein Bild machen*. [...] [Glaube] ist geradezu als das definiert, dass der Mensch aus dem Kreis seiner Selbstbezogenheit herausgerissen, befreit wird." Therefore: "Darauf verzichten, uns ein Bild von Gott zu machen, heißt, Gott zuzutrauen, dass er gerecht ist. Und ohne den Verzicht darauf, sich von Gott ein Bild, das heißt, Gott *zum Bild* zu machen, gibt es dies Zutrauen nicht. Warum nicht? Weil wir dann immer bei unserer Gerechtigkeit und nicht bei seiner Ankommen" (*ivi*: 126). See also *ivi*: 126: "Einen Gott, der ist wie wir, brauchen wir nicht."

the need for meaning. However, for theology, the answer to this need does not come as a miracle of ultimate harmonic solution; rather, it comes as the revelation *of* (and *as*) the *limitation of meaningfulness*. It comes as the revelation of the constant dependence of meaningfulness upon God. In sum, meaninglessness (specifically the meaninglessness of suffering) is not what God's revelation washes away; on the contrary, it is the *result* of God's revelation. It is precisely God's revelation that causes this meaninglessness to be seen as the limitation of meaningfulness and, thus, of human *verbum*.

As such, theology restores the order that theodicy inverts. It is because of divine revelation that one can scream against God for the meaninglessness of one's own life. God is not the emendation of the loss of meaning, nor is God what fills the void. Rather, God *reveals* this void and causes it to be seen; God causes the incompatibility between divine revelation and the human idea and expectation about revelation to be acknowledged, questioned, and also screamed. In sum, meaninglessness is itself the spark of theological language.

All this has already been expressed by Luther almost five hundred years ago, in his clash with Erasmus. Luther says: "*fidei summus gradus*"; this *summus gradus* is to submit our ideas and images of harmony, justice, mercy, and divinity under God.[32] In other words, this *summus gradus* is to make God's incompatibility with our ideas (of God) the meanifestation of the dependence of our ideas themselves upon God. Theology is the affirmation of this incompatibility by the logics that ground these ideas. Thus, precisely the form and meaning of any *theodical* answer negates the *theological* relevance of such answer.[33]

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[32] See Askani, "Glauben": 125.

[33] See Reinhuber, "Deus absconditus": 65: "Luther sieht keine innerweltliche oder der Vernunft zugängliche Lösung des Theodizeeproblems. Sie kann, ja sie muß das Problem der Theodizee aus vielen menschlichen Erfahrungen erheben – sie kann es aber nicht lösen. […] Dessen Lösung sieht Luther nun darin, daß der Glaube, der sich ans Evangelium, an den offenbaren Gott hält, einen anderen Blick einnehmen kann. Er vermag diese Welt zu relativieren, zu übersteigen und kann in eine andere Welt, in Gottes Ewigkeit hineinblicken, hineinglauben." I agree with this position if it is assumed in a formal perspective. Faith is not merely the solution to the problem of theodicy; rather, it is the confession of the limitation of the conditions according to which the question of theodicy makes sense. Therefore, *De servo arbitrio* is not simply "entfernt" from all theodicy (see Schwarzwäller, *sibolleth*: 12); rather, it challenges the supposed theological validity of theodicy. Nor the *lumen gloriae* is a sort of eschatological theodicy (see Hinlicky, *Paths not Taken*: 271); rather, the fact that this *lumen* is not (yet) at our disposal negates the legitimacy of assuming the foundations of theodical reasoning (the form of retributive justice) to be valid *also* in theology.

Chapter 12

Life, a Celebration of Divine Grace

In continuity with the previous discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov*, I end this work with a sort of serious *divertissement*: an attempt at dialogue between theology and literature. This is the most appropriate way to complete the analysis of the element that made this journey on the freedom of theology possible. This element is divine grace.

1. *Gratia*

Grace comes at the end, because it allows for the formulation of everything that precedes in this book. Grace is what precedes everything, in theology. Grace is the principle that is neither deduced nor deducible (777,21–28); it follows nothing and derives from nothing. As such, the concept "grace" represents the unconditionality of the divine initiative of revelation. Therefore, grace precedes the use of the concepts "preceding," "following," and "deriving" in a theological discourse. Grace precedes every possible theological statement.

Grace not only precedes everything; for the same reason, grace is also the source from which everything flows, theologically. Everything that one receives is the fruit of grace (752,20–753,8). This also includes everything one can do (754,21–23), live, and think. Grace is the principle according to which something exists theologically instead of nothing, and thus, something is said theologically, instead of silence. Grace gives movement to theological discourse and to the life that formulates this discourse. Grace not only precedes but originates all reflections on grace, and on God.[1]

Grace is introduced at the end because it is the principle that makes the theological questioning of the validity of the formal languages of freedom possible. Grace is the unfounded foundation that theology assumes to re-found all

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[1] See Askani, "Rechtfertigung": 153: "'Gabe Gottes'. – Alles hängt am Verständnis dieses Genitivs. Er ist (wie Genitiv immer wieder) zweifältig; die 'Gabe Gottes', das heißt: die Gabe, die Gott gibt; und: die Gabe, in der Gott gegeben wird, in der Gott sich gibt, also *die Gabe (des Lebens!), die Gott* ist. Gott gibt hier nicht nur irgendetwas, diesenfalls das *Leben* … Nein, wenn er das Leben gibt, gibt er, sonst ist es nicht das Leben, *als Gabe Gottes*, – sich selbst."

foundations of meaning, including the meaning of freedom. Grace is the element from which the problem of foundation is reformulated, theologically.

For this reason, Luther rejects Erasmus's division of grace into four or three graces. This rejection is not due to the obscurity of Erasmus's argument. Initially, he distinguishes between four graces: "natura insita," "operans," "cooperans," and "consummans." Later, he speaks of three graces: the one that stimulates, the one that allows progress, and the one that concludes (II a 11). But the reason for rejecting Erasmus's division of grace is not limited to its obscurity; the reason is more radical.

Without grace, or without the unconditioned initiative of revelation, it would not be possible to think and speak theologically, and thus to think and speak *about grace*. Grace is what allows one to recognize that thinking grace theologically depends on grace. Thus, it is impossible to think and speak about grace *directly* – without its own mediation.

Given that any discourse about grace is a discourse *within* grace, thinking and speaking about grace means thinking this "being within grace." It means living under grace. Thus, the life that thinks grace lives and thinks its own living as already touched by divine grace, or as already within grace. Life thinks grace in reference to life itself: it thinks grace as related to this life, as the genesis of life's meaning.

Therefore, theological reflection upon grace coincides with the theological reflection upon the theological meaningfulness of *lives*. Grace can be thought and said through the thinking and speaking of specific lives that are meaningful because they are touched by grace, because they are evidence of the unconditionality that grace is. Conversely, the theological attention to the meaningfulness of lives – to their being *stories* – is the way to think and say grace as the source of such stories. The absolute primacy of grace is approached from the perspective of a life seeking and narrating the theological origin of itself.

In sum, grace is the concept in light of which theology thinks the *modus loquendi et vivendi* as unity living, thinking, and moving in the bosom of grace. Theology thinks grace as the creation of every possible *modus*. On the other hand, the theological reflection upon the narration of a life's story provides access to what would otherwise be inaccessible: grace as the unconditioned origin of every possible theological reflection. This origin is accessed within the shapes of a life's story as a story of God's election of this life.

This final chapter marks an important stage in our journey about freedom: the passage from the issue of *what* is a meaningful life to the issue of *how* life is narrated, *how* this meaning is expressed in a story. In light of this passage, it is now time to examine the actual creations of the *modus*, of types; the inventions of literary characters. If the object of investigation before now was the form according to which literature speaks (that is, typological language and how theology operates on it), then the protagonist is now literature itself, and its own speaking.

This opening to literature will help to make clear the specificity of the theological answer to the question of the creation of the type. It is now a matter of presenting a confrontation between the literary creation of characters and the theological discourse on stories (stories of lives, and stories *as* lives) in their dependence upon divine grace.

2. Jacob and Esau as Archetypes

In this context I introduce the last form of type: the archetype. The archetype is not only a specific type, but it is also a specific *aspect* of the creation of lives as stories. The narration of a story (of a life) and the story that is narrate coincide in the archetype. Therefore, the archetype is not merely a kind of type; it is a specific *law* of the creation of a type, an origin (*arché*) of types. Hence, the question is what happens to this *arché*, to the origin of life's narration, when this life is a child of God and this narration is originated by divine grace.

This final chapter is a dialogue between life as result of literary creation, as aesthetic incarnation of the archetype of this life itself, and life as a result of God's gracious creation, life as the object of divine election. It is a dialogue between life as a narrative celebration of its own divinity, and life as a theological celebration of divine grace.

Here I discuss the limit and the extent of how it is possible to put together, on the same line, the two terms "schöne Geschichte" and "Gotteserfindung."[2] Let us climb down the "Brunnen der Vergangenheit"[3] and acquaint ourselves with the events and deeds of the two brothers Jacob and Esau, and finally, of Judas Iscariot. These are the lives, the archetypes, and the children of God whose stories are the "characters" of this final stage of our journey.

It is already clear who I assume as representatives of the literary and theological treatments of these stories: Thomas Mann and Martin Luther.

Thomas Mann writes about Jacob and Esau according to the "Mondgrammatik," the "Moon grammar."[4] Persons and events are considered under the light of the moon. Because of this light, past and present come together in a vague and nebulous fusion. The narration of the persons and events of the present concerns their analogy to corresponding persons or events of the past.

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[2] This is how Thomas Mann's *Joseph* tetralogy ends. The final sentence sounds: "Und so endigt die schöne Geschichte und Gotteserfindung von *Joseph und seinen Brüdern*." In his English translation: "And so ends this invention of God, this beautiful story of *Joseph and his brothers*" (See Mann, *Joseph*: 1492). The translator's inversion between "schöne Geschichte" and "Gotteserfindung" is probably due to his care to avoid the ambiguous alliteration of "of": "… the beautiful story and invention *of* God *of* Joseph …"

[3] This is how Thomas Mann's *Joseph* tetralogy begins. See *ivi*: 3.

[4] *Ivi*: 93.

For instance, from the perspective of the *Mondgrammatik*, the steward named Eliezer that had been borne to Abraham is the same Eliezer that serves Jacob. Abraham's Eliezer and Jacob's Eliezer coincide; together, they are the incarnation of the Eliezer *in general*, of a general character and role within the history of Jacob's family.[5]

This narrative mechanism also applies to events. The same event (a patriarch's spouse left unsullied despite other men's lavish attentions) happens to Sarai both in Egypt and at Gerar, and to Rebekah again at Gerar. Or, the maternities of Sarai, Rebekah, and Rachel are defined by the same pattern: the initial infertility of the true spouse.

Another example: Joseph is thrown into the well and thrown in jail, and resurrects from both "deaths" in the ritual rebirth of Tammuz-Dumuzi, the Sumerian-Babylonian child-god.[6] Tammuz-Dumuzi's divinity is simultaneously the son *and* consort of the divinity of fertility associated with the pantheon of Ishtar; and Mut-em-Enet, Mann's fictional name for Potifar's spouse, is transformed precisely into a divinity of fertility by her irresistible infatuation with Joseph.[7]

Additionally, the passion of Jesus is represented by Joseph's death and resurrection from the well, and it is referenced in the dying Isaac's self-conception as "averted sacrifice," as the ram whose blood "should be regarded as the blood of the true son shed in atonement for all."[8] There is no distinction between *human* events and *mythical* events; gods and goddesses walk among human beings on earth, because the stories of human lives are divine stories, or embodied myths.

This conception also applies to the stories of Jacob and Esau. The blessing of the former and the curse of the latter were determined before their birth as validation of the mythical fixity and timelessness of a recurrent schema: the "disobedience" towards the birth right, and the story of the younger brother preferred over the elder. This same schema applies to Isaac and Ismael, Abel and Cain, and Osiris and Seth.

Thus, the characters of Jacob and Esau are not simply built *within* a mythical role, but more precisely, *as* this mythical role, or as the new (yet timeless) living existence of this role. According to this perspective, it is only possible to speak of stories (specifically, the stories of Jacob and Esau) through the lens of

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[5] According to the *Mondgrammatik*, the "'I' did not turn to be solidly encompassed but, as it were, stood open to the rear, overflowed into earlier times, into areas beyond his own individuality, and incorporated experiences that, when given shape as memory and narration, should have actually – in the light of the day – been cast in the third person, rather than the first" (*ivi*: 94).

[6] See Mann and Kerényi, *Mythology and Humanism*: 47.

[7] See Mann, *Joseph*: 65, where Potifar's spouse is associated with the Bacchantes, with reference to Kerényi's "Gedanken über Dionysios."

[8] *Ivi*: 147.

mythical and cyclical recurrence, and vice-versa, it is only possible to speak of such recurrence – of mythical fixed forms – by referring to the specific incarnations of these stories. For instance, the smoothness of Jacob's body is a *leitmotiv* in Mann's construction of his character *because* it references Jacob's being a tent-dwelling shepherd blessed by the moon. And this hints at Osiris, the brother-spouse of Isis, the goddess associated with the moon. Similarly, Esau's hairy roughness is his identifying characteristic because it references his being a mountain hunter blessed by the "dark moon" and the burning sun (like Seth the Red, the deity of the desert).[9]

This coincidence of individual life and mythical role is represented by the image of the sphere. A sphere "consists of an upper and a lower," a human and a divine "in complement with one another as a whole, so that what is above is also below and whatever may happen in the earthly portion is repeated in the heavenly, the latter rediscovering itself in the former."[10] Therefore, it is incongruous to ask whether the pair "curse and blessing" could have been differently applied to the pair of brothers "Esau and Jacob," because Esau and Jacob *exist as* the living presence of this mythical attribution – they exist as the mythical pair of cursed brother and blessed brother.

Therefore, there is no such a thing as a blessing or a curse *in general*, awaiting application to a particular individual. Rather, there is the specific blessing of Jacob as the younger brother, and the specific curse of Esau as the elder brother. Everything that happened to Jacob and Esau "had happened as part of a ceremony and according to the pattern, had gained its reality in the present, like a festival, and had reoccurred just as festivals reoccur."[11]

Thus, these characters are free not only because they are the manifestations of this mythical pattern, but, more precisely, because they *recognize* themselves as "the return or the present manifestation" of "the relationship between Cain and Abel."[12] This present Esau, the uncle of Joseph, coincides with the mythical Esau, father of the Edomites. Moreover, the present Esau *is* Seth, brother of Osiris; he *is* the Red One belonging to the netherworld; he *is* Esau's great-uncle Ismael. According to the *Mondgrammatik* all these characters are one because they are incarnations of the same archetype.

In sum, the freedom related to the archetype is to know oneself as a character of a mythical narration, and to be thought and narrated as such character – at the same time a living myth and a mythical life. Again, this is typological freedom: it is the freedom to be a principle of understanding of universal forms,

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[9] See *ivi*: 104.

[10] Mann, *Joseph*: 151.

[11] *Ivi*: 160. This conception is parallel to Kerényi's (see Kerényi, "Vom Wesen"). This is clear in the epistolary exchange with Mann (see Mann and Kerényi, *Mythology and Humanism*: 87).

[12] Mann, *Joseph*: 151.

and also the object of such an understanding.[13] It is possible to *think* about these stories – and all stories, and thus all lives – only as inborn rules, primal images, and founding myths; and it is possible to *think* according to these rules, images, forms, and types only by referring to the names of the particular lives that incarnate them.

3. Literature, Myth, and Psychology

It follows that, from the perspective of the archetype, the history of humankind is the history of living, dying, and reincarnating godheads.[14] This is not a metaphysical statement; for instance, this does not mean that history is cyclical. Rather, it is the *conception* of history to be cyclical. The individual "individuates" herself or himself according to the supra-individual forms. Thus, these forms exist only in the bodies of particular individuals referring herself or himself to these forms, thinking about herself or himself as the living repetition of these forms. This is "the phenomenon of a more open identity, which stands alongside that of imitation or devolution and, locking arms with it, defines one's sense of self."[15]

Nor is this archetypical perspective a mere literary expedient. It is not the writer's genius to create fixed functions and attribute them to characters, as in the case of Proust's elevation of the "fille de cuisine" to an "*institution permanente*."[16] Rather, the archetype is the creation of the character itself as the *self-*

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[13] According to this concept of freedom, the individual life is the production and the expression of its own justness, so that nothing falls beyond or beneath the meaning this life incarnates: "[T]he situation respecting freedom was just contrary to that conceived by ordinary common sense. It lay not in doing but in being, not in *operari* but in *esse*. […] Accordingly, every being led his life with the strictest justice, and not only life, but the life peculiar to him, this individuality; and in all that befell him, yes, in all that could befall him, everything happened exactly right" (Mann, "Schopenhauer": 387).

[14] This complete fusion between the archetype and the life is synthetically expressed by Mann at the occasion of the death of Isaac, when the identification of Isaac with the scapegoat is no longer a metaphor, but is *lived*. See Mann, *Joseph*: 147: "Yes, shortly before the end, he attempted to bleat like a ram, and which the most remarkable success, while at the same time his bloodless face took on an astounding resemblance to the physiognomy of that animal – or rather *it was as if one suddenly became aware of a resemblance that had always been there*" (emphasis added). The mythical identification is not the condition for Isaac's life to have significance; rather, it is formulated *because of* Isaac's significance. Thus, it is irrelevant whether Isaac is known as the mythical sacrificial child or, vice-versa, whether this mythical role is applied to Isaac because of his bleating; what matters is the identity of the two, the fact that the familiarity with one's life is the familiarity with one's myth.

[15] *Ivi*: 98.

[16] Proust, *Recherche*: 145.

attribution of a specific role within the mythological narration.[17] In sum, the archetype is the artistic creation of "those bridges that bind individual self-awareness to the general consciousness."[18] It is the aesthetic recreation of the historical structure *as* mythological structure.

It follows that the *Mondgrammatik* transcends literature. Mann's position is in fact one of three aspects constituting the reflection upon the archetype.[19] The other aspects are the mythological and the psychoanalytical. The mythological point of view is the topic of Mann's dialogue with Kérenyi, and the psychoan-alytical point of view is the basis for the connection of Mann and Kérenyi to Jung.[20]

The psychoanalytical aspect concerns the *coincidence* between supra-indi-vidual conditions of knowledge and the individual user of such conditions.[21] According to this view, life is the process of self-identificatio not just with some forms, but foremost *as* a form – as a mytical formula.[22] Life is at the same time the origin of this form, the cause of its existence, and the subconscious collective dimension of this form.

This psychoanalytical aspect is intertwined with the specific current of mythological study aiming to overcome the dialectic between the historical evolution of a mythological form[23] and the irrationalistic interpretation of this form.[24] This program consists of determining the forms and structures of

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[17] See Assmann, *Thomas Mann*: 47–48.

[18] Mann, *Joseph*: 94. See Mann and Kerényi, *Mythology and Humanism*: 44–45, where Kerényi, commenting on the passage from *Zauberberg* to the *Joseph-Roman*, writes: "It ap-pears that a confrontation with the mythical sphere becomes the crowning, the chosen task of the greatest novelist [sc. Mann]. […] the novel at its acme now returns to its primal source and thus discloses its original essence. […] Yours views are crucial for me in determining whether the essential form of the novel as I saw it in my studies of the comparable genre of antiquity is not merely an artificial and arbitrary construct."

[19] See Mann, *Joseph*: 149: "[A]ll the stories rose up again […] and were present in spirit, just as they had once again been present in flesh moulded according to their ancient arche-type."

[20] In particular, the book by Jung and Kerényi, *Einführung in das Wesen der Mythologie*. The book contains the two studies "Das göttliche Kind" and "Das göttliche Mädchen." See Mann and Kerényi, *Mythology and Humanism*: 97–99.

[21] See Mann, "Freud": 419: "Nobody has focused as sharply as he [*sc*. Jung] on the Scho-penhauer-Freudian perception that 'the giver of all given conditions resides in ourselves – a truth which despite all evidence in the greatest as well as in the smallest things *never* be-comes conscious, though it is only too often necessary, even indispensable, that is should be'. A great and costly change, he thinks, is needed before we understand how the world is 'given' by the nature of the soul; for man's animal nature strives against seeing himself as the maker of his own conditions."

[22] See *ivi*: 421: "Life is in fact a mingling of formulaic and individual elements."

[23] See Mann and Kerény, *Mythology and Humanism*: 41.

[24] See *ivi*: 38, with specific reference to Ludwig Klages; See also *ivi*: 58, with reference to the George-Kreis. Clearly this also includes a reaction to the Nazis' abuse of mythology.

mythology through the study of the recurring elements in these forms and of the historical specifications of each mythological figure.[25]

In light of this dialogue between literature, psychology, and mythology, the psychological form is "actually the mythical, and […] one may as well say 'lived myth' as 'lived life.'"[26] Accordingly, "[psychoanalysis's] penetration into the childhood of individual soul is at the same time a penetration into the childhood of mankind, into the primitive and the mythical."[27] Therefore, these forms, these schemas, these mythical roles, are not concepts because they do not exist in themselves, but only as a particular living expression of the myth. In the analysis of the archetype it is not possible to go beyond – or rather, beneath – the individual identification with a mythical archetype.

Of course, there are recurrent elements in each incarnation of the myth; because of these elements, the myth can be narrated, and a life can recognize itself, and be recognized and narrated by the other, as the playful presence of this myth. For instance, Osiris is Tammuz and Dumuzi and Attis and Adonis and Abel and Joseph, because the same pattern is present in all these stories and in all these lives. Cleopatra *is* "Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite in person"[28];

As Kerényi writes: "[T]he nasty, un-Dionysian (dys-Dionysian, I might say) insanity of the youth," as "will of self-destruction … towards the twilight of the gods" (*ibid.*). Mann writes: "I have long been a passionate adherent of this combination [sc. of myth and psychology], for actually psychology is the means whereby myth may be wrested from the hands of the Fascist obscurantists to be 'transmuted' for humane ends" (*ivi*: 100). Mann uses here "*umfunktionieren*," the neologism coined by Bloch in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*: 1065.

[25] See Mann and Kerény, *Mythology and Humanism*: 75, 94. Kerényi's position, as evident in his studies on, for instance, the primordial woman (the myth of Helen), the psychopomp child (the figure of Hermes), and Dionysus, originates from a re-thinking of W.F. Otto's conception of mythology. See, for instance, *ivi*: 40–41. From his reading of Otto, Kerényi carries out his attempt, his mission, to "found the science of the great mythology" (*ivi*: 85) based on the study of the eternal forms of mythologies. It is also correct to state that the expansion of such conception came from the exchange with Mann in the form of self-reflection as a writer of letters (see *ivi*, in the introduction of Kerényi himself: 28).

[26] Mann, "Freud": 422.

[27] *Ibid.* As Mann synthesizes: "The myth is the foundation of life; it is the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious. […] The character is a mythical role, which is played in the naivety and spontaneity of illusory uniqueness and originality, as the result of his own invention and his own hand; and yet at the same time with a dignity and security that such uniqueness and unprecedency are not derived from this actual character under the light of the stage, but on the contrary that he creates out of the deeper consciousness so that something grounded and legitimized shall once again be represented […]. His dignity and security lie all unconsciously in the fact that with him something timeless has once more emerged into the light and become present; this is mythical dignity, which is attributed also to the miser and valueless character, it is natural dignity, because it originates from the unconscious" (*ivi*: 422–423. The translation has been modified by me).

[28] *Ivi*: 423. See also Mann and Kerényi, *Mythology and Humanism*: 37.

Napoleon says: "I am Charlemagne"[29]; Jesus's fourth word on the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), is the expression of a "messianic sense of self" through the reference to Psalm 22, "which from one end to the other is an announcement of the Messiah".[30] These lives are already the concept of the archetype they incarnate, because the stories of these lives are characterized by the same elements of the myth or divine figures that they play or reference.

However, these recurrent elements do not constitute a concept of the archetype to which all myths belong and refer; rather, these elements, the content of the mythical pattern, constitute precisely a myth, a sacred story – a life. The difference is fundamental. It is certainly possible to determine the mythical story of which a specific life is the reoccurrence. However, it is impossible to consider this mythical story as an archetype, because this story is *already in itself* the occurrence of that archetype. In sum, there is no archetype of which a life or story (the distinction is nebulous) is the reoccurrence. Rather, each living story is the reoccurrence of *its own* archetype. All formulations of the archetype are formulations of *characters* – of stories.

It follows that it is impossible to arrive at a sort of *Ur*-type, a common denominator of all archetypes; each and every archetype is already an *Ur*-type of itself.[31] The archetype, a particular archetype, a particular mythological pattern, is already *arche*-; thus, the mythical content (a particular mythical story) is already the *Ur* of this content, or the origin of itself. All archetypes are at the same time the reproductions of themselves *and* the archetypes governing these reproductions.[32]

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[29] Mann, "Freud": 424.

[30] *Ivi*: 425.

[31] One cannot speak of "*Ur*-" without referring to Goethe. However, there is a difference between Mann and Goethe concerning the "*Ur*-." Goethe aims to define the original forms of art (and nature); for Mann, the final *arché* cannot be found because the deepest layer of the well of time always hides another layer at the bottom. This difference is epistemological. On one hand, it is a matter of perception and objectification; on the other hand, it is a matter of self-objectification. See Slochower, *Mann's Joseph*: 7–8.

[32] Each form of a specific archetype refers to a content, or to an image. There is no such a thing as *the* archetype, but only a particular archetype, and thus a particular illustration, representation, and incarnation of the archetype. If Joseph is Tammuz, then Tammuz is also Joseph; both are not merely two incarnations of the same archetype, but the *same archetype in representation*. It is not that Joseph is relevant because of the archetype he incarnates; rather, Joseph is *an archetype* and he is the same archetype of Tammuz. Thus, there is simultaneity and equipollency between the three aspects of the psychological, the mythical, and the literary: the archetype is, and is understood, because of the reference to all three aspects. The archetype is subconscious, it is myth, and it is novel. The archetype is understood as this individual's subconscious, as this mythical story, and as this aesthetic character.

4. Comparison with Theology

Apparently, there is a closeness to theology. First, because in both cases we have myths, or stories of gods. The archetype is the principle of adequacy of a human life with regard to divine status; thus, it is the principle of understanding human life as related to the divine. Second, and consequently, because the mythical, divine element is the fact from which the conceptualization of this element begins, the "revelation" of a divine story is the source from which mythology itself can be formulated as a coherent system of myths.[33]

However, this closeness to theology is broken by the presence of psychology. Concerning the first aspect, the mythical stories coincide with the fundamental forms that each individual psychological disposition may assume; therefore, the existence of these myths depends entirely on the existence of the sovra-individual, collective (and yet *menschliches*, *allzumenschliches*) subconsciousness. The problem does not concern merely the inversion of the genealogical priority between the divine and the human (the divine derives from the human); rather, what is most problematic, again, is the inversion of the *formal* priority of the divine over the human (the divine is deduced by human structures of meaning).

I pass to the second aspect, the connection between human thought and divine revelation – or in the case of the archetype, the connection between mythology and myth. From the standpoint of the archetype, the mythical stories are elements of human discourse, and as such, they are submitted to the conditions of such discourses. This is confirmed by the psychological aspect of the archetype: the conditions of thinking about the archetype are posited by the subject that uses these conditions: the subject is the giver of these given conditions.[34]

Thus, the divine stories are the result of mythological and psychological conditions; the "beautiful invention of God" (subjective genitive) of the story of Jacob and Esau is actually the beautiful human invention of gods (objective genitive) as expressions of the mythological universality of the human subconscious. In sum, divine revelation would be a myth among myths, and the Bible a book among books.[35]

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[33] See Schelling, *Filosofia*: 347 and 363 note 1.

[34] See the quotation in note 21.

[35] I distinguish between two levels, the text and the Word, and consequently, two questions: "Is the biblical canon a book among books?" and "Is the Word a mere content of a book (of the Book)?" Concerning the first question, see Askani, "Le canon": 167: "[L]e texte, saisi dans son sens littéral et compris dans son sens le plus exigeant: en tant que cohérence, en tant que tissu, en tant que dessin, en tant qu'écriture (lisibilité), dépasse déjà – en tant que catégorie herméneutique, philosophique – les schémas di 'monde'. Il représente par rapport à la cohérence du monde (qui a comme principe de se contenter de lui-même, de former en lui un 'tout') une irruption, une interruption, une 'alternative', une autre voix. Le

However, it seems that there is at least one positive aspect of similarity to theology: the annulment of the need for an affirmative answer to the question "Did it (the story, the myth) *really* happen?" It is irrelevant whether Esau and Jacob really existed in human history. Rather, what is relevant is the *subordination* of the conception of human history under the archetypical relevance of Esau and Jacob. The question concerning historical truth is transformed into the question "To which myth did this event belong?" Thus, at least limited to the aspect of historicity, it seems that the archetypical perspective also respects the priority of a divine-oriented speculation over a human-centered one.

Yet again, this is mistaken. This priority is not respected because the divine-oriented speculation is mythological-psychological – it is still a human invention. It is merely a matter of departing from an intuitive conception of history in favor of a less intuitive one (the *Mondgrammatik* conception). This conception is less intuitive because instead of being based on a linear succession, it is based on a circular one.

In light of this analysis, a fundament difference of structure between the archetypal pair Esau and Jacob and the theological pair Esau and Jacob is deduced. This difference refers to the individuality or universality of the meaningfulness and relevance of life in relation to the antithesis between election and rejection.

The rejection of the archetypical Esau and the election of the archetypical Jacob are their *specific* rejection and election. Esau's rejection it is the always new, always old reoccurrence of the rejection of the Red One, of Set; and

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'canon' – concept religieux et qui demande et offre une certaine croyance – est *le texte par excellence*: le texte comme institution, comme contre-pôle du 'monde'. Ce texte par excellence est un symbole et une réalité en même temps. Symbole de ce qu'un autre-du-monde existe. Et réalité de cet autre-du-monde au milieu de lui (du monde)". See also *ivi*: 168: "Parmi les innombrables textes, [le canon] représente ce que la réalité 'texte' est 'au fond': une autre référence en contradiction contre 'le monde', qui prétend à être la seule". The reference to the "symbole" implicitly answers the second question: "[L]e centre de gravité théologique est situé […] dans le *parler* du texte (ou à partir du texte) et non pas dans le texte lui-même. […] Le texte, la parole écrite, est toujours secondaire en comparaison avec la parole parlée. […] Le canon n'est pas transcendance au sein de l'immanence, il est plutôt *représentant* de cette transcendance, il témoigne d'elle, il est sa trace" (*ivi*: 163). And vice-versa: "[L]a matérialité de la parole […] entre dans le monde non pas sous forme d'un texte, mais sous la forme du Logos devenu chair. Le Christ est la matérialité de la transcendance, et le livre qui en parle est seulement son témoin. Témoin qui n'a pas son sens en lui-même, mas dans la transformation de son être-texte en un être-parole; en une parole qui annonce la venue du Christ qui a eu lieu *déjà* et qui est promise *encore*, car il est caractéristique de cette venue que son advenir ne s'épuise jamais. La *parole* promet au croyant ce futur eschatologique, c'est-à-dire un futur indéductible de toutes ses connaissances du passé et du présent, et indéductible aussi de toutes ses attentes" (*ivi*: 164). This harkens back again to the *claritas scripturae* (see *supra*, Ch. 2 section 2): what matters is not Scripture in itself, but its *claritas* – that is, the fact that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is present in every part of it.

Jacob's election is the always new, always old reoccurrence of the election of the second-born. Thus, their election and rejection are different from the "elections" of Joseph or Judas (the son of Jacob), for instance, and from the "rejections" of Reuben or Potifar's spouse, given that such elections and rejections are connected to other myths, and thus to other stories. In sum, given that each archetype is equi-primordial to any other archetype, it is impossible to formulate a concept (such as "election" or "rejection") unifying a plurality of archetypes (for instance, as "all the archetypes of rejection").

More precisely, it is impossible to formulate a concept that does not coincide with the *name* of a particular mythical character – that is, with the name of a particular archetype itself. This means that it is incorrect to apply the concepts of rejection and election to the totality of the archetypes precisely because this is *not* a synthetic totality (a totality that can be thought in synthetic unity). Rather, the totality of all archetypes is an *analytical* totality. The discourse on this totality can only be the collection of these stories, it can only be mythology.[36]

This contrasts with the theological level; in theology, the antithesis between rejection and election, and between damnation and salvation also leads back to a level that transcends the individual life. However, this level is not an analytical totality (of archetypes); it is a *synthetic* unity. It is God's elective predestination, God's predestined molding of the life. In other words, the level of determination of election of rejection does not adhere to the (archetypical) meaning of life, but precedes such life, and it precedes it because it theologically defines it.

Therefore, from the archetypical perspective, the conditions of the discourse conceptualizing the general aspect of election or rejection are *the archetypes themselves*. Thus, this discourse, this conceptualization of an "election" and a "rejection" that embraces more than one archetype, depends on and ultimately coincides with the existence of myths (myths of a particular election or rejection) and the psychological dimension of these myths. Again, the archetype is not conceptualizable because each archetype, each incarnation of the myth, is the foundation of the archetype itself.

The theological perspective is very different. The theological discourse is not *from* the existence, but *about* the existence; it does not concern the unity *from* the data (from stories all archetypically identical), but rather it concerns the fact that such unity is *imposed* upon the data. It concerns the subordination of the meaning of these data to their source of unity. In other words, election and rejection, and all stories of election and rejection, have their theological synthesis in (and thus depend on) God's election. Divine grace, the theological concept of the unconditionality and foundational character of God's election,

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[36] In sum, there is no such a thing as a rejected or an elected story; there are simply stories, and each of them has its own meaning in light of the specificity of its archetype.

is the source to which the plurality of lives (and stories) is lead back, as stories of God's gracious and predestinating assignment of either salvation or damnation.

In sum, from the archetypal perspective, the inventions of gods are, *de jure*, human inventions. Not inventions made by a particular human being, but rather, inventions of the structure of human psychology. From the theological perspective, there are human inventions (stories of lives) which are, *de jure*, God's inventions – that is, stories formulated and recognized in light of God's action towards human life.

Thus, the archetype, and human history within the archetypical meaning, is *ex ante*; it is a consequence of itself because the human being is the source of all given conditions of thinking about the archetype. On the contrary, from a theological perspective life's meaning depends on God's election of either salvation or damnation; thus, this meaning is *ex post* because it is based on God's unconditioned action on human life, and it formally depends on the *ex ante* of divine grace.

On one hand, the totality of the archetypes is never fully defined (is not definitive) because new archetypes or new mythological-psychological patterns can always be formed; on the other hand, theologically, the totality of life's meanings is already fully defined (and definitive) because it depends on what founds this unity: God's gracious election. Thus, theology can present and formulate a unity of meaning that is *synthetical* because the source of this unity precedes (is *ex ante*) the elements of such unity.

This is the distinction between the archetypal and theological meaningfulness of life. On the one hand, meaningfulness is based on the life as archetype, and on the archetype as living archetype; thus, the equipollency of all lives derives from the fact that all lives are equally *arché* (of themselves). On the other hand, meaningfulness (being under God's election) *precedes* life because it is the condition according to which all possible lives are defined; thus, the equipollency of all lives derives from the fact that their meaningfulness (whatever it is specifically) is derived from divine grace.[37]

Therefore, theologically, the rejection of Esau has nothing to do with the psychology or contingency of Esau. Rather, it has to do with Esau being a human being and, as such, submitted to God's unconditioned destination. Esau's rejection is not the expression of his myth, but the expression of his being

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[37] This does not mean that theology is somehow superior to literature or psychology. It simply means that there is a *differentia specifica* between the theological treatment of the stories of Jacob and Esau and the literary-mythological treatment of them. The analytical unity the literary-mythological approach is capable of is by no means inferior to the synthetic unity resulting from the theological approach. Both are the structures upon which a cogent and sound (and beautiful in and for their difference) kind of discourse is built. Simply put, the two distinctive unities (analytical and synthetical) represent the formal distinction between the two approaches.

submitted to God's pristine election. The story of Esau is equipollent to the story of Jacob, not because (analytically) both are stories, but because (synthetically) both stories have meaning as lives touched by grace. Esau's rejection is equipollent to Jacob's election because both are equally submitted not to their own archetype, but to the *Ur*-unity of the divine source of their meaning. In sum, it is possible to speak about Esau as rejected and Jacob as elected only in light of the revelation of God's election of human life.

In other words, both election and rejection are *equally* expressions of divine grace towards human life because election and rejection exist and can be thought and told only in reference to lives that result from the unconditionality of divine grace. The story of Jacob is identical to the story of Esau, not because they are equipollent archetypal totalities, but because they are equipollent "ektypes,"[38] equipollent results of something that it is not themselves, that does not belong to them, and thus, that they represent in their being stories.

5. Luther on Jacob and Esau

This is how Luther considers the stories of Esau and Jacob: such stories are not merely the expressions of individual lives or general psychological dispositions; rather, they deal with the salvation and damnation of all humankind (724,3–6). As such, these stories are comprehended and embraced by God's predestination, or by the identification of prescience with predestination (723,34–36). Prescience coincides with predestination because for God, knowing the stories of these lives coincides with establishing their role before their birth (723,25–27; Rom 9:11): Jacob as the master, Esau as the servant (723,23.35–36; Rom 9:12).

It is true that the two stories are opposed (one as story of election, the other as story of rejection), but this opposition has meaning only in light of the theological *synthetic* unity of the two stories. This synthetic unity is established "PER VOCANTEM" (723,22; the capital case is Luther's); that is, in virtue of the One that calls before being called, as the source of all callings. In sum, this unity is the fact that neither Jacob nor Esau are the cause of their lives being stories of accomplishment and non-accomplishment; the meaning of their stories does not depend on them, but is pre-established ("pre-"destined) by the grace of the call from God (723,25). Because God's grace is the source of synthetic unity of the two stories, these stories represent the fact that, theologically, life is visible and conceivable only in its dependence upon divine grace.

These stories represent the fact that grace is visible and conceivable from the perspective of a life dependent upon grace – a life whose meaning, whose

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[38] Concerning the distinction between archetypal and ectypal uses of reason, see Kant, *KpV*: A 75, Ak V 43; DiCenso, "Urbild": 116–117.

story, is originated by grace. Grace is the creation of the meaning of a life from anything related to this life; rather, it is life that relates to this meaning. This meaning is the mere fact of being in the hands of God. Grace is the unconditioned election of a life as a life under God; not only does this election not follow from the specificity of this life – from its merit, idiosyncrasy, or psychology – but this election is foremost the origin of life's rethinking of its own specificity. Grace is the fact that a life has been chosen absolutely, before life itself and before *time* itself, to be meaningful as a life under God.

This is why Jacob and Esau are identical: both refer equally to this dependence upon grace. Both stories have meaning because both are stories *of* God's grace, in the double qualification of the genitive: as stories originated by and because of divine grace (subjective genitive), and as stories that tell and retell, at each step and at each new narration, this origin – the fact of being children of grace (objective genitive).[39] Both stories are God's inventions, stories of the Bible, existences that exist *because* God reveals God as the *VOCANS*, as election out of nothing, election out of grace.[40]

From this, it is deduced that both stories of Esau and Jacob are identical not just in the synthetic origin of their meaning, but also, and foremost, in the principle of *understanding* of their meaning. Both stories are *known* from the standpoint of their dependence upon God's election. Both stories are known as stories of grace about grace. It follows that, theologically, it is not possible to interpret the stories of Esau and Jacob as archetypes: the election of a life to be meaningful depends not upon this life – it does not consist of this life's story. Rather, a life is meaningful because it is considered elected by God in the antithesis between election and rejection. A life is meaningful because its story is interpreted in light of God's calling, as a life called by God, as resulting from and invented by God's grace.

Predestination helps to re-establish the correct order between God and human being, this time specified as the order between grace and life. From the theological perspective, the stories of Esau and Jacob mirror each other because both are equally subjected to God's grace. It is true that God's grace is specified in an opposing way[41]: on one hand, love, and on the other hand, hate (Mal 1:2; Rom 9:13). However, this does not invalidate their synthetic union; both love and hate are variables of God's predestination, and knowable only from the standpoint of predestination.

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[39] As discussed in *supra*, Ch. 9 section 4, the stories are as they are, and not otherwise; they cannot change, they are *immutable*, because they are the fruit of a necessity that is conceptualized not as "nature," but as "grace"; see Gogarten, *Theologie*: 130.

[40] Hence, the *Vocans* is the *Dictor* (see Büttgen, *Luther et la philosophie*: 108–109), the one who reveals himself as the revealer.

[41] "Opposing way," not "different way"; grace is specified not in a plurality of ways (which would imply a plurality of graces, and thus the return of the logic of the archetype), but in the antithetical way of election and rejection.

Thus, predestination, by impeding the reduction of God's decision about life to an object of investigation, reminds us that divine election is the origin of the unity of life and thinking (life thinking about itself), and not the byproduct of this unity. Theologically, life is meaningful not because a meaning can be attributed to it, but rather, because meaning *has already been attributed* to it by God's unjustifiable and inexplicable invention of human life *as* God's story – as the story of and from God's grace. In sum, predestination unveils the fallacy behind the question about "quomodo Deus amet et odiat" (274,30–31), how God loves and hates. This question is theologically illegitimate because God's love is assumed as a source of meaning (of lives), and thus as the origin of the investigation of the relationship between God and life.

It follows that the understanding of divine love as what makes what it loves lovable[42] is based upon the theological modification of our concept of love. The definition is absurd if we assume "lovable" to mean the compatibility of a life with the forms and expectations of lovability – or, in other words, if we assume "divine love" to have meaning in light of (and in dependence upon) our conception of love. Vice-versa, the definition is meaningful if we assume divine love to be the source of our conception of love. God neither loves nor hates according to our fashion (724,32–25), because God's love and hate are the sources of our life's movement and meaning, and thus also the sources of this life's theological conceptions of love and hate.

It is irrelevant which concept of love we consider as the concept of divine love, because what matters is the *order* of the priority between the concept of love and the specific case of love called "God's love." God's love is what our conceptualizations of love and hate must refer to, since these conceptualizations depend on God's love. Thus, the statement that God's love makes its object lovable is meaningful if and only if the judgment as "lovable" is the result of the theological re-consideration of the forms and expectations of lovability.[43]

Love and hate, election and rejection, salvation and damnation, are the antithetical ways according to which God's grace defines the meaning of life. The love towards Jacob and the hatred towards Esau are united synthetically by God's gracious attribution of meaning. Jacob and Esau are the representations of the conjunction between love and hate within grace. Both hate and love are expressions of grace.

Thus, grace is not merely love opposed to hate; grace is the first love, "*primo amore.*"[44] It is the original election that God performs upon a life that becomes the recipient, and the story, of either love or hate. The theological thinkability

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[42] See WA 1b: 365,1–20; . See Saarinen, *Luther and the Gift*: 187, quoting Mannermaa's study "Zwei Arten der Liebe" contained in *Der im Glauben*: 107–181. See also Forsberg, "Lutherforschung": 152–153.

[43] Thus, the "exact relation" (Vainio, "Love": 216) between divine and human love is a *formal* one.

[44] See Dante, *Inferno*: III, 6; *Id*., *Paradiso*: XXVI, 38.

of love and hate depends on God's love, because only by assuming God's love can theology formulate life's meaning as a story of either election or rejection, either love or hate. Again, love and hate formally depend on God's love. This confirms that God's love is not at all something lovable, because it is not bound by our criteria of lovability; it precedes these criteria. For this reason, it is the first love.

In the previous chapters, it was the question of *another* concept of justice – "another" in the sense of "theological"; here, it is the question of *another* concept of love – a theological concept of love. Concerning justice, God's justice is conceptualized as unjust; concerning love, God's love is conceptualized as the source of hate.[45] I have identified the theological fallacy of the first formulation: God's justice is not unjust because it is the source of the *theological* distinction between what is just and unjust. The same applies to the second formulation: God's love is not the source of hate because it is the source of the theological distinction between love and hate, and between salvation and damnation. God's love is the source from which we speak of salvation and damnation and love and hate.

This is why it is "love," why it conserves a positive aura; God's love is the source of the possibility for theology to speak about life's meaning. Both love and hate are ultimately positive, because in both cases, there is a story. The stories of Jacob and Esau are stories of love and election, because in both cases, there is a meaning that can be formulated only in reference to God's absolute grace.

Given that this absoluteness of God's decision about life is precisely what the concept of predestination preserves, divine predestination defines the conceptual impossibility of applying our distinction between love and hate to God's love – to the origin of our theological thinking in terms of love and hate. It follows that divine predestination is the only possible concept of God's love. God's love precedes the life because it makes it a life of love or of hate, and thus a story of God's love.[46]

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[45] See WA 10.1: 266,6 and WA 23: 517,2.

[46] A note on Mann's concept of "innate merits," or in German, "angeborene Verdienste". Mann in "Schopenhauer": 388, writes: "Goethe liked to talk of 'inborn merits', an absurd phrase from any logical or ethical point of view. For 'merit' is entirely and by definition an ethical concept; whereas what is inborn – be it beauty, talent, wit, refinement, or, in the sphere of outward destiny, good fortune – can thus not logically be merits". And in Mann, "Goethe": 124 we read: "Goethe, half-maliciously, half-paradoxically going about to deprive the word 'merit' of the moralistic flavour that clings to it, likes to talk about 'inborn merit.' Everybody is free to call this a logical contradiction. But there are cases where logic is confronted by a metaphysical certainty higher than itself; and Goethe, who on the whole was certainly not a metaphysician, undoubtedly felt the problem of freedom to be a metaphysical one. This is to say, an indemonstrable intuition told him that freedom, and therewith merit and demerit, were not a matter of the empirical but of the intelligible world; that, to speak with Schopenhauer, freedom does not consist in *operari* but in *esse*. Herein lies the

6. "Den falschen Verräter, das mördrische Blut"[47]

This love, this grace, is what embraces Judas. It is the source of Judas's story.

Judas is chosen; he is one of the Twelve (Matt 10:4; 26:14, 47; Mark 14:10, 20; Luke 22:3b; Acts 1:17). Judas betrays *as* one of the Twelve (Luke 22:47; John 12:4), and then he kills himself (Matt 27:5; Acts 1:18). This is the striking aporia: chosen *and* betrayer (Matt 26:21; Mark 14:18; John 6:70, 71; 13:21).

Between being the chosen and the betrayer, and between being elected and rejected,[48] which of the two aspects has priority over the other? Are the two aspects one and the same? Was Judas chosen *as* betrayer? Was he elected to eventually be rejected? The fact that he was chosen means that he did not choose himself as one of the Twelve – so did he choose to betray? Since Jesus knew all about "who should betray him" (John 6:64b) and "all that was to befall him" (John 18:4; also 13:1), should Judas be considered guilty, and therefore damned? Or rather, was it Satan who corrupted him (Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27a)? In short, what is right, Judas's election or Judas's damnation? And moreover, is *our* condemnation of Judas right?

From these questions arise the literary reinventions of the story of Judas. For instance, Judas's betrayal is a self-sacrifice for the redemptive mission of the

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humbleness of his aristocracy, the aristocracy of his humility; both of them so categorically opposed to Schiller's idealistic evaluations, his personal and moral pride in his freedom. Goethe, when he wants to characterize the principle that composes his essential nature, speaks humbly and gratefully of a 'gift of fortune.' But the conception of a 'gift', of 'grace', is more aristocratic than one might think. What it means is the indissoluble union of fortune and merit, a synthesis of freedom and necessity; in short, 'inborn merit'; and the gratitude, the humility, carry with them that metaphysical consciousness of being at all times and absolutely certain of the favour of destiny". Again, this is similar to Luther, but also different. It is similar because of the annulment of the moral relevance of the concept of merit, the entanglement of freedom and necessity, and the paradoxical contradiction within the union of morality and nature. It is different because Luther speaks of merit *before* the birth, not *within* the birth; merit lies outside of the reference to individuality. From Mann's perspective, the "merit" of beauty and talent, and even of good luck, is paradoxical because they are not chosen, but they nevertheless refer to the individual; they are the elements defining the specificity and the unicity of this individual as a *genius*. Genius is one who thinks herself or himself in terms of the paradoxical connection between merit and nature. On the contrary, Luther's conception is not at all elitist, but profoundly "democratic": it is not the explication of the artistic meaning of genius; rather, it is the explication of the theological meaning of *humankind* in general, as humankind under God. Luther's conception of merit is not only based on the switch from *operari* to *esse* (of the individual), but more significantly, it is based on the switch from a human-based conception of merit to a God-based one. In short, Luther's paradox on the inversion between merit and reward is the key to understanding merit and reward – it is not a merely counter-intuitive conception of merit.

[47] Bach, *Matthäus-Passion*: first part, choir "Sind Blizte, sind Donner im Wolken verschwunden?"

[48] See what Jesus said about the betrayer in Matt 26:24.

incarnated Word to be accomplished; or Judas is the ultimate ascetic, mortifying the spirit instead of the body, choosing the vilest sin as offering to God; or Judas is himself God, incarnated in the lowest, most iniquitous, and most reprobated of men – Judas as the terrifying visage of God.[49]

Here is another example. Judas is the apostle who loved the Christ the most, to the point that he renounced his own status as apostle in order to offer Jesus the occasion of the greatest of his miracles: the descent from the cross, the ultimate proof of Jesus's divine nature, before all of Jerusalem – but Judas's plan fails; his self-sacrifice is in vain.[50]

The questions about the meaning of Judas's story and the relevance of these reinventions of Judas's story are already answered by the previous analysis. Both questions and reinventions result from the inversion between human invention and God's invention. The central point is not Judas's story, but rather what makes it possible for us to think, question, and reinvent Judas's story. What is the origin of our discourses about Judas's story, and about God's justice or God's love?

This origin is the *narration* of the life of Jesus Christ; our concepts of Judas's story, and our formulations of meanings for it (any meaning, whether positive or negative), are possible because of the revelation of and as Jesus Christ. This does not refer to the mere "aesthetic" organization of the narration: the fact that the character of Judas enters on stage *after* Jesus has chosen him as one of the Twelve. More profoundly, this origin is the fact that all possible meanings of Judas's story (and even the suspension of meaning – the story of Judas as aporia) are possible in light of God's primary movement of revelation in and as Word of God, in and as the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Judas's story, whatever its meaning might be, is *within* Jesus's story; the former depends on the latter.

Judas's story is not the "aesthetic" expedient for God's revelation, as a sort of "efficient cause" for the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to be introduced in the narration. Rather, the election of and betrayal by Judas formally *follow* from the life, passion, and resurrection of Jesus Chris. Judas's story originates in and has relevance *from* Jesus's story, life, passion, and resurrection. Judas's story is *moved* by Jesus's story. Every single word that can be said on the story of Judas is a word that refers to Jesus's story. It is a word that is born, grows, and ends in light of the Word of God.

Thus, every word we can say about Judas attests that a life (Judas's) has meaning as a celebration of God's invention of this life as a life within God's revelation. Speaking about Judas's story means speaking of the fact that our

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[49] These are the "three versions of Judas," respectively, in Borges, "Three Versions": 164, 165, and 167.

[50] See Oz, *Giuda*: 164–169 and 281–293.

speaking about Judas has begun, has *moved*, because of the revelation of original grace, of the first love.

Luther confirms this point by stressing the *theological* impossibility of formulating an alternative concept of Judas's story. Judas wanted what he wanted, not because of an external force (God) acting upon his will, compelling him to betray, but rather, because God knows Judas, because Judas's story is the content of God's prescience and thus God's action towards Judas and upon Judas (715,18–716,1; also: 720,33–35; 721,1–4.8–9).[51]

For this reason, another story of Judas, or the Judas of another possible world,[52] is not conceivable from a theological point of view. This alternative story would imply the negation of the priority of God's action over human self-determination, and consequently, the negation of the priority of God's invention of this life over this life's self-invention. The creation of another story of Judas (a creation that can only be literary) precludes the theological assumption that life is known, thought, and spoken as part of God's revelation, as a story within the story of divine grace.

This does not invalidate or in any way falsify literary reinventions of Judas. Literature can and should create other concepts or other stories of Judas. Simply put, this is impossible for theology: theology cannot *create* any alternative story of Judas. Theology can only attest that this story has *already* been created (or chosen) by God. Theology can only say that Judas's story leads back to its source, divine grace, and that this story has meaning as God's story, as a story that derives from and thus always returns to grace. Theologically, Judas's story is the fruit of the unconditionality of grace, and so it belongs and refers to the divine invention of life's meaning.

This is confirmed by the fact that Luther does not treat the story of Judas as a special case – for instance, again, as the necessary "efficient cause" that triggers Jesus Christ's passion and glory. Rather, for Luther, Judas's story is identical to the story of Pharaoh hardened by God against Moses and the Jews. As discussed in Chapter 9, these are stories of the *necessitas immutabilitatis* (the immutability of God's election), not of *necessitas coactionis*. Like Judas, Pharaoh is not forced to persevere in his negative attitude (the hardening), rather this is the nature of his *voluntas*; when the Pharaoh is faced with what *naturaliter* irritates him, the only possible outcome is the hardening (711,27–38).

In this way, Luther responds to Erasmus's claim about the absurdity of negating Pharaoh's responsibility for his action (III a 6). Luther's solution is to subordinate this action under the source of this action's theological relevance:

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[51] Hence, Luther uses the story of Judas as evidence for his negation of the distinction between the *necessitas consequentiae* and the *necessitas consequentis* (WA 18: 722,9–11.18–23; see *supra*, Ch. 9 section 4): it is the confirmation of the *necessitas immutabilitatis* – that is, of the priority of God's action over any action of Judas.

[52] See *supra*, Ch. 1 section 5.

God's revelation. Theologically, the center of the discourse is not Pharaoh's action, but God's action upon Pharaoh (713,25–27). The relevance of Pharaoh's action depends on the insertion of this action within Pharaoh's story as part of God's revelation (714,6–12). Thus, Judas and Pharaoh are responsible for their betrayal and hardening because these actions define these lives' *meaning* as stories of God (in the double sense of the genitive). In other words, their responsibility has to do with the theological method of thinking about life: Judas and Pharaoh are responsible for expressing the priority of God's molding action over any meaning that can be formulated for these lives (for instance, the meaning of being guilt).[53]

Two important clarifications follow from this analysis. First, Judas's and Pharaoh's responsibility is not at all retrospective: it is not a responsibility imputed *ex post*, for an accomplished action.[54] Luther's inversion of the consequentiality between imputation and reward (or retribution) destroys the retrospective concept of responsibility, because this inversion entails that everything that can be imputed to a human being depends on (and follows from) God's decision and action that shape this being's life. Thus, in *De servo arbitrio* responsibility is not *ex post* but *ex ante*: it concerns being the living expression of the theological *immutabilitas* that God attributed to this life. Responsibility refers not to something that has been accomplished, but to the fact of being the carrier of a life – or the protagonist of a story – whose meaning depends on (and hence points at) God's election.

Second point: it is theologically irrelevant to argue about the *degree* of Judas's and Pharaoh's responsibility. Are they fully responsible, or only partially responsible for their actions? Those questions have no theological sense. Judas and Pharaoh are responsible for being stories of God (in the double meaning of the genitive), thus either they belong to God's election and are parts of God's revelation, or not. There are no possible degrees for that. Either their stories are conceived theologically, and their actions (betrayal, hardening) have no autonomous relevance whatsoever because this relevance – these actions' meaning – is subordinated under God's revelation. Or their stories are conceived literarily, and their actions are indeed at the center because Judas's and

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[53] This reflection answers also to Ratzinger's interpretation of Judas. According to him, the Gospel insists on the aspect of "Judas's personal responsibility, who miserably capitulated to a temptation of the Devil" (Benedict XVI, *Insegnamenti*: 452, my translation). Even if Ratzinger seems to agree with Luther concerning the dependence of Judas's action upon God's action (see *ivi*: 453: "After all, when we think about the negative role Judas played, we have to insert it within God's superior direction of the events"), this dependence is interpreted in the logic of the "*causa efficiens*": "God assumes Judas's inexcusable action as occasion for the total gift of the Son for the atonement of the world" (*ibid.*). Luther presents a different view: it is God's action, and specifically the revelation of and as the Word, that is the source of Judas's action; it is in light of the atonement that Judas's story is told and thus can be an object of discourse.

[54] For instance, see Sievers, *Bestimmtes Selbst*: 245–248.

Pharaoh's stories are the sources of their own meaning; in this scenario Judas's and Pharaoh's responsibility is indeed retrospective, and we can play the role of the jury with them.[55]

7. Freedom to be an Object of Grace

These reflections further clarify the formal freedom that distinguishes theology from other human discourses – in this case, literature.

On one hand, literature presents laws of meaning creation in the form of a specific creation: as *this* story's meaning. Thus, literature is the freedom to create stories that are at the same time the laws of their own creations.

On the other hand, theology leads back to and thus submits a law of creation (creation of meaning, or of a story) under divine revelation. Thus, it is the freedom of assuming and attesting that every law, meaning, and story, in sum every linguistic creation (including this reflection of mine) arrives always in the second instance – they are founded, not foundations. Theology is the freedom to make every possible story not the representation of this story's own aesthetic law, but the representation of the origin of all stories' meaning *when theologically considered*: divine grace.

This confirms the fallacy of deducing the nature of God's election from a specific story (Jacob, Esau, or Judas). This is identical to the fallacy of asking the question on "quomodo" God loves. Precisely as for the case of theodicy, this fallacy consists of formulating a rule, a meter of understanding God's election. This corresponds to the negation of the theological assumption of God's election as the source of all theological applications of rules and meters.

The story of Judas is the most striking evidence of the fact that the elected life is a *formally* dependent life; it is a life whose meaning can be formulated only as the consequence, expression, and manifestation of God's foundation of every story. The story of Judas is the evidence that our meters of distinction between election and rejection are dependent upon God's gracious election of a life as a story – the story of this election. Therefore, it is irrelevant whether

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[55] This attitude also informs the reinventions *rehabilitating* Judas. The literary rehabilitations of Judas conceive Judas as a case of retributive justice – that is, as a case of "fine tuning" the condemnation of what was accomplished with the intentions of the accomplisher. According to this interpretation, all condemnations of Judas are right only in reference to Judas's action; they are wrong in reference to Judas himself, his story, his death. Thus, the condemnations are ultimately wrong, because the judgment on Judas takes into account not only the objective element, but also the subjective one. The jury is right to assign guilt, *and* the judge is right to fine-tune the charge according to the life (and the suicide) of the defendant. All rehabilitations are specifications of this general structure. This structure is evidently affected by the same frailty of theodicy: in both cases we have the application of an expectation of justice as a meter for understanding the dependence of a life upon God's election.

we consider Judas elected or rejected. What matters is that whatever answer we give is an answer *on* Judas's story, and thus, it is an answer that already presupposes God's election as the origin of this story's meaningfulness.

This confirms what was discussed in Chapter 10. Rejection is connected to election *not* because rejection leads back to election, or it "hints," *negatively*, at election. As discussed in that chapter, this is the mistaken interpretation of the *Gloria Deo ex profundis* echoing the *Gloria Deo in excelsis*.[56] Thus, rejection is connected to election not because they are in a mutual relationship of antithesis, and consequently, they intertwine and determine each other, as much as the night hints at the daytime.[57] Rather, the night is connected to daytime, and the *ex profundis* is connected to the *in excelsis* because the possibility of *thinking* about such connection depends on their synthetic *origin*: God's gracious, unconditioned election.

As the day is composed by night and daytime, and as our hymnal includes both *De profundis* and the *Gloria*, so does God's election shape a life within the antithesis of election and rejection. Rejection is *formally* connected to election: their antithesis, and thus their intertwining, have meaning and can be thought as dependent upon divine revelation.

In other words, there is no "*Bestimmung*" of the elected one and of the rejected one, not even if we consider the mutual intertwining of their "determinations."[58] This is because *there is no formal distinction* between election and rejection; "election" and "rejection" are simply our understanding of the revelatory fact of God's love as pristine grace, as much as "day" and "night" are our understanding of the rotation of the Earth around the Sun. Election and rejection are already formally one because they can be seen only in light of divine grace.

8. Living Grace, Living Freedom

It is time to return from a life's story to life *as* story. A life moves and speaks – it tells its own story – because it is moved by God. Thus, God attributes to a life its nature, the particularity of its movement, of its *voluntas*. In sum, God knows the hearts of every life – because this heart is given by God.[59]

This means that we do not know our own hearts. Thus, theologically, life is thought in light of the limitation of one's knowledge about one's own life.

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[56] See Barth, *KD*: II.2 § 35, 506–507.

[57] See *ivi*: 511.

[58] See *ivi*: 507: "Was würde aus der Bestimmung des Erwählten, wenn der Verworfene mit seiner besonderen Bestimmung nicht mit ihm wäre?"

[59] See WA 18: 605,25.29.33; 607,13.16; 609,5; 618,16; 624,24; 629,10,15; 657,19; 662,18; 679,29; 680,35; 681,15,31; 684,12; 686,25; 688,6; 696,10; 714,28; 719,17; 719,27; 726,11; 730,23; 736,6; 759,36; 763,28; 779,33.

Positively, life is thought and has meaning in light of the divine invention of this life to move and think, to be a story, within divine grace. God does not reveal the story of one's life, nor the shape of one's heart; there is no rule for God's predestination. Rather, God reveals that life's story begins from nothing else but God's grace, that life's story is the story of God's gracious love as *primo amore*.

The unity of the *modus loquendi et vivendi*, the meaningful life, is, theologically, the unity between *being* the fruit of God's invention and *saying* that one is such fruit. Being and saying – living meaning and meaningful life – come together not within life, but within the synthetic unity of all specific unities: divine grace. And vice-versa, it is only thanks to this life *qua* story that it is possible to think what would otherwise be unthinkable: the divine invention of this story, the unconditioned origin of this thinking about itself, the origin and the end of all movements of life and theological narrations of this movement.

This is the theological way to give such an unthinkable, all-preceding, and all-encompassing source a word: "grace." And this is the theological way to give a story of election and grace a name, *its* own name: "life."[60]

To conclude, it is theologically irrelevant what life's story is, and in which particular shape life's movement is designed or destined. For every case, for every story – or more precisely, for the fact that there *is* a story – life is the freedom of having meaning under God's grace as the unity and origin of all stories. The freedom of theology is the freedom of living and thinking about life as a celebration of divine grace: "Siquidem gratia vel spiritus est ipsa vita, ad quam verbo et opere divino perducimur" (663,17–18).

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[60] See Askani, "Rechtfertigung": 154: "Wenn es Gott gibt […], dann bestehet die Spezifität des Menschen – sein Dasein vor Gott – darin, dass er sich selber erst gegeben wird. Dieses Gegebenwerden, als Geben Gottes, heißt Leben."

Conclusion

The book has connected a historical case to a systematic case. The historical case concerned the *querelle* between Erasmus and Luther, or, more precisely, Luther's operation upon the conditions according to which Erasmus's position has meaning. The systematic case concerned the conception of theological language as the relationship between conditions of meaning and divine revelation.

The connection between these two cases, the historical and the systematic, was based upon the concurrence of three aspects: first, the formal difference between Erasmus's and Luther's criticisms of each other; second, the passage from the conceptual level to the formal level; and third, the passage from theology about freedom to the freedom of theology.

The first aspect concerns the distinction between the criticism that Erasmus presents against Luther and the criticism that Luther presents against Erasmus. Erasmus accuses Luther's position of absurdity because it does not comply with the formal conditions of meaningful concepts of freedom. These conditions are three. First, the negative connection between freedom and necessity. Second, the implication between obligation and the possibility of realizing the obligation. Third, the biconditional relationship between life and meaning.

Luther accuses Erasmus of using these conditions in a modality that is illegitimate from the theological standpoint. Erasmus is keen to mold Scripture in order to make it convey a meaning that complies with the aforementioned conditions. For Luther, it is the legitimacy of these conditions that must be questioned in light of what cannot be measured by them and is not conditioned by them: divine revelation. Therefore, Luther's response to Erasmus does not present a concept of freedom opposed to the concept presented by Erasmus. Rather, Luther's position is an operation upon the conditions of the conceptualization of freedom: it aims to define what happens to these conditions, in case they are assumed in a theological way.

This means that Luther's position is *not* superior to Erasmus's position. Rather, they are two different perspectives on the relationship between theological language and conditions of meaning. On one hand, divine revelation depends on some conditions, and thus, the specificity of theology is conceptual or terminological. On the other hand, divine revelation does not depend on conditions, and thus, the specificity of theology is formal.

This leads us to the second aspect: the passage from the conceptual level to the formal level. *De servo arbitrio* is a peculiar meta-discourse on freedom. It does not seek to determine the forms or logics of meaningful discourses on freedom; rather, it questions and eventually rejects the unconditional validity of these forms. This rejection derives from and at the same time expresses the inversion of the formal priority between these conditions and divine revelation. The theological conceptualization of freedom corresponds to the *theological modification* of these logics of freedom in light of the unconditionality of divine revelation.

From this follows the third aspect: the passage from a theology about freedom to a theology as freedom – that is, from a theology as a language producing concepts of freedom to a theology as a language free to operate upon the foundations of the conceptualization of freedom. This is the freedom to consider these foundations not as self-founded boundaries of meaning, but as what shall be re-founded in light of divine revelation. The paradoxicality of Luther's *De servo arbitrio* manifests this freedom that distinguishes theology from the other kind of discourses.

This formal freedom of theology is the consequence of the specific foundation of theology: divine revelation. Theology begins by assuming a message, a "string of information," that is conditioned by nothing, that is not the result of anything preceding it. It is not only *a* beginning; it is *the* absolute beginning. This message is called divine revelation. Because this divine revelation is unconditioned, the mere existence of such message is already the evidence of the limitation of any possible condition, of any other foundation. Thus, the formal freedom of theology consists in thinking the limitation of the requirement of and need for foundation.

Because of the introduction of this formal perspective, I have been able to present a new perspective on three central concepts in *De servo arbitrio* and in theology in general (in particular, Lutheran theology): the *Deus absconditus*, justification, and predestination. All three concepts fulfill a formal function. They are not simply concepts; they *represent* an operation upon conceptualization. Each concept's function refers to a different aspect of conceptualization. The concept of *Deus absconditus* prevents the concepts issued from revelation (concepts grouped under the collective name of "*Deus revelatus*") from having the same validity of their premise (revelation) – that is, from being theorems. The theological concept of justification makes evident the limitation of the imputative conceptualization of justification in theological discourse: theology rethinks the structure of imputative justice through the concept of divine justification. The concept of divine predestination negates the epistemological validity of claims about God's *potentia*, thus inviting to question the theological relevance of theodicy.

The book also discussed some issues affecting the secondary literature. In the First Part of this book, in analyzing the issue of the *unum aliquid assecutus*,

omnia assecutus, I showed that Luther rejects the fact that God can serve as an axiom for the deduction of theorems. In other words, divine revelation does not provide an axiom for a deductive system, and thus, divine revelation does not depend on the deductive structure "*unum assecutus → omnia assecutus*." This relates to the issue of the *nova lingua*. Concerning this topic, I focused on the metalinguistic interpretations of the *nova lingua* based either on the semantic or the syntactic level. I underscored how the novelty of the language of *De servo arbitrio* refers not to a specific metalanguage, but to the theological reflection upon the validity of every possible metalinguistic proposition.

In the Second Part, I reevaluated the semantic distinction between forensic, effective, and ontological justification. I claimed that, instead of establishing which meaning is the correct one for expressing divine justification, it is worth focusing on the modification of the imputative concept of justification entailed by the idea of a divine justification. I also presented the overcoming of the aporia within the secondary literature concerning the relationship between Luther and Kant. This aporia consists of placing on the same level (and thus making comparable, either positively or negatively) two discourses that define two distinct levels, two methodologies of thinking sin and divine justice: the critical-philosophical one, and the theological one.

In the Third Part, I debated the relevance of the theological use of existentialist terminology. Theology breaks the existentialist biconditional relationship between existence and meaning by positing divine revelation as the beginning of the self-reflection of existence. Thus, the theological reference to existentialist terminology is the result of an operation upon the language of existentialism. In the same Part, I addressed the relationship between divine election and rejection. I argued that both are forms of election, since it is because of both that a life thinks its own story as God's invention. Election and rejection are related not simply as members of an antithesis, but as concepts that a life uses to express the subordination of its own meaning under God's decision.

The results I arrived at in this book have created prompts for other fields of investigation. One of these refers to the aesthetic structure of predestination in Luther: the non-systematicity of predestination concerns the fact that the only content of this concept coincides with the manifestations of predestination in stories. As such, predestination is a concept that allows not an ascending movement of thinking (from the concept of predestination to the law of divine predestination), but a descending movement of thinking (from the concept of predestination towards the results of this concept).

Another field of investigation concerns the relationship between theology and logic. This field has different directions. One direction would expand upon the definition of theology as a meta-axiomatic system, as presented at the end of Chapter 4; this would potentially connect to the logical issue of foundations (for instance, in mathematical logic). Another direction focuses on the

elucidation of the relationship between logical paradox and theological para-dox, in light of the different structures of the two kinds of paradox. A third direction would be an analysis of the distinction between axiom and dogma; this would lead to a further contribution on the extent and limit of the formali-zation of theological language.

A third field of investigation concerns the formal definition of the commu-nicative action constituting the inter-religious dialogue. This definition is for-mal because it refers not to the content of each participant's position, but to its form. This form consists in positing a "string of information" (the source of a religious position) that does not depend on any condition of foundation and validation. Thus, the symmetry presupposed in the dialogue would concern not a specific content (an abstract common "godhead") but the formal limit of any possible foundational systems.

All of these elements and results confirm that Luther's *De servo arbitrio* is a masterpiece of human intellect; it is one of the summits from where theology can see itself and its own freedom.

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