thrust aside ... Should we therefore fall into a decline or become crippled with despair? Not at all. If we have always thought of ourselves as instruments of God's Word and not its masters, then there will be no room for despondency; rather there will be rejoicing that a new generation of instruments is at hand to take over from the old".

I was privileged to be with Leonard in the hospital for his last conscious hours. Although he said nothing especially pious, his single most repeated phrase was "thank you". And almost his last clearly pronounced statement: "I think I should go now". In honour of St Thomas, and in memory of Leonard, our brother, here to finish, is Leonard speaking about our common task today as preachers and scholars:

> We are attempting to make the wisdom of the past part of the present and of the future. It is an unequal task. But if we share our resources, we may at least give the past the possibility of a better future, and, God willing, we ourselves may be enabled to arrive at a *docta ignorantia* that gets *doctior* and *doctior* every day, because shared, humbly and happily.

Anti-Foundationalism and Radical Orthodoxy

Paul O'Grady

1. Introduction

It has often been claimed in the history of philosophy that great thinkers have been badly served by their disciples. Plato's genuine doctrines don't resemble the historical construction known as "Platonism", Aquinas is a more subtle and rigorous thinker than the Thomists, Hume more interesting than the positivists and so on. This claim is currently deployed for certain thinkers who collectively bear the signifier "Postmodern". It's held that Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze et al., are more subtle, deep and dialectically agile than their disciples. In particular, those who regard these thinkers as philosophers maintain that the use to which they are put in other disciplines—literary theory, cultural studies, sociology, and so on, fails to convey the depth of the *echt* thinker.

Be that as it may, it is true that philosophical ideas percolate into other disciplines and have profound general cultural impact, and this is especially true of the so-called postmodern ideas. Theologians in particular

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have responded with a certain degree of alacrity to the postmodern clarion (probably because modernism proved barren ground for most of them). The kind of views articulated in theology serve also as a model of the way postmodernist views have been used in general in the humanities and social sciences. It's not unusual for theologians to latch onto the latest philosophical fashion and use it with skill and ingenuity. The medieval theologians of Paris reacted to Aristotle and developed some of the most enduring intellectual works of the western tradition. The Cartesian revolution led to sustained theological reflection—a position still appearing as a bogey for novice theologians to sharpen their dialectical teeth on, or for more senior ones to dramatically unmask in their opponents. In the contemporary period, once again theologians have looked to Paris for the good news from philosophy and have found a dazzling constellation of thinkers to help them formulate their ideas. Curiously enough it's in the intellectual birthplace of analytical philosophy, Cambridge, the home of Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein, that a group of theologians has adopted postmodern ideas with zeal. There one finds a flourishing heterogeneous group of writers which applies ideas from postmodern theory to theology. Many differences appear between them (they probably wouldn't like being grouped together), but certain common themes also emerge. The elder statesman of post-modernist appropriation is Don Cupitt, who answers to many descriptions—Death of God Theologian, atheist priest, prolific author, Dean of Emmanuel College. A younger group (either teaching or trained at Cambridge) includes Graham Ward, John Milbank, Gerald Loughlin, Gavin Hyman and Catherine Pickstock and these style themselves as belonging to Radical Orthodoxy.[1]

My purpose in this paper is not to take issue with their religious beliefs (which are not uniform anyway). Neither is it a blanket attack on postmodernism. Rather it's an effort to relate some of their concerns to contemporary analytical philosophy and in so doing to produce a critique of what I regard as problematic in the methodology of their approach. Specifically I shall claim that they illicitly conflate various distinct philosophical positions, such that they trade on the plausibility of the rejection of some positions to carry through an implausible rejection of others. Neither is this just a gratuitous piece of philosophical groundkeeping, using an analytical rake to regiment the diverse and luxuriant foliage of continental thought. Milbank and Hyman use certain ideas from the analytical tradition to further their postmodernist goals. I shall argue against that use. To do so I shall investigate the notion of "foundationalism", the rejection of which is central to all their projects.

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2. Anti -Foundationalism

It seems that merely to impute this dreadful condition— foundationalism— to one's opponents is to refute their entire position. Indeed such is the contagion surrounding this condition, that even to be found to articulate it without immediate condemnation of it seems to qualify as succumbing to its pervasive clutches. Here are some examples.

Hyman characterises John Hick as belonging to an epistemological tradition awash with foundationalism.

> Hick is clearly placed, therefore, in the school of Anglo-American philosophical theologians who are broadly modernist, empiricist and foundationalist in outlook and heirs, like the logical positivists, to the thought of Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Kant and Hume.[2]

This is quite a motley collection of foundationalist bedfellows rarely listed together (unless simply as a list of philosophers). Hyman reads Hick's opponent Loughlin as having a position which

> is a denial of the old philosophical doctrine of foundationalism, a denial shared with the non-realist.[3]

Does this make anti-foundationalism identical with anti-realism? What kind of anti-realism? We're not told. Loughlin himself characterises his position as a rejection of "empiricism":

> The belief, as Bernard Lonergan puts it, that the "real" is "already-out-there-now-real" waiting to be sensed... [which] is naive; it forgets that taking a "good look" is never innocent, but is always, irreducibly, guilty of prejudice.[4]

I'm not quite sure how many empiricists would recognise themselves under this description—but it doesn't readily square with those empiricists who hold that observation is indeed theory-laden, such as Lewis, Quine, Van Fraassen etc. Ward doesn't openly attack foundationalism, but cites Derrida with approval, who articulates what is presumably a non-foundationalist view:

> Derrida suggests the openness of textuality to an indefinite future, a deferred eschaton—an openness which cannot be closed. We are always in medias res—moving between an origin which can never be recovered or single and a conclusion which can never be determined. We occupy a place, as such, in the shifting sands of semiotic systems, haunted by the possibility of presence and stable identity, but forever unable to produce it.[5]

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There seem to be various elements contained within this description—a fallibility about knowledge, a holistic conception of meaning, ontological relativity—but one is forced to seek out the traces of such views rather than a forthright expression of them (and, of course, there's no argument for them).

Cupitt shares the rejection of foundationalism of the Radical Orthodox group:

> As for philosophy, it clearly now becomes interpretative, unsystematic and conversational, not foundational. We forget all superstitious ideas of absolute standards, values, certainties or truths. We forget ideas of another world. Everything is contingent and necessity is just conventional. There is nothing but changing customs. The main themes of postmodernism thus become clear. They amount to a comprehensive rejection of virtually everything that the Enlightenment in general and Descartes in particular believed in. There is sharp criticism of the received ideas of representation, objective Truth, reason and historical progress, leading eventually to 'the death of man' a thoroughly wholesome loss of interest in the individual subject, his self-mastery through self-consciousness, his moral autonomy and the justification of his knowledge of the world. Instead we turn more to language, the sign, communications, art and culture criticism.[7]

Once more there's the grand gesture and the striking of a revolutionary pose, encompassing a multitude of positions in passing. Yet in the midst of the general energetic rejection of foundationalism evidenced in all these writers, it's nowhere clearly spelled out what it amounts to and neither are arguments offered suggesting why it's such a bad thing. What I want to claim is that three quite distinct positions are conflated within this single attack on foundationalism, relating to epistemology, ontology and rationality. I shall further show that there are good reasons to reject epistemological foundationalism. There are clear arguments against ontological foundationalism, whether one finds them compelling or not (I happen to think there's a lot going for them). However, there are not and could not be good arguments against rational foundationalism, as I shall show. Yet the rhetoric of these writers' view trades on conflating the three position, attacking the third one, yet employing the plausibility of attacks on the first and second. Let's look at each one in turn.

3. Epistemological Foundationalism

Foundationalism has been the most attractive epistemological position for many centuries. It is an account of the way in which beliefs are justified. There are two central tenets to which all foundationalists hold. First, there are some beliefs which are not justified by means of other beliefs and so can be called basic beliefs. Secondly all other beliefs are justified by means

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of these basic beliefs. One can explain how basic beliefs are justified in a wide variety of different ways and hence there can be a wide variety of foundationalist positions. For example, one can appeal to experience. Thus some experiential beliefs are justified without appeal to anything other than the immediate data of the senses. Or else one can appeal to intrinsic qualities of the belief itself. Some beliefs such as the Cartesian cogito are made true by their very articulation. The nature of the belief guarantees its immediately deserving the verdict "true". Hence foundationalism cuts across the empiricist/rationalist distinction. There can be foundationalists of both kinds, which is important to note as anti-foundationalism is often assumed to be anti-empiricism.

The key argument for the foundationalist position is one that says that there are four logical possibilities available for the justification of belief. The argument goes that three of these are inadequate and the fourth and only viable alternative is foundationalism. The four positions are:

1) Beliefs are justified in relation to beliefs that are not justified; which is equivalent to saying that the beliefs are not justified and so is an unacceptable position.
2) Beliefs are justified in relation to other beliefs, which continues in an infinite sequence without any basic beliefs. This is unacceptable because a) an infinite regress of beliefs is intrinsically unacceptable and b) because such an account couldn't possibly explain how finite human minds justify beliefs.
3) Beliefs are justified in relation to other beliefs, which circle back on the initial beliefs, being justified by them. This is viciously circular because a belief in need of justification cannot appeal to itself for justification.
4) Beliefs are justified in relation to beliefs that are not themselves justified in relation to other beliefs i.e. they are non-inferentially justified.

The foundationalist claims that the fourth position is the only acceptable one, and that these are the only options available. What then is required is some substantive account of how basic beliefs are non-inferentially justified. There may be disagreements and divergent strategies on this, but the fundamental framework is one on which all philosophers must agree.

As a way of resisting this foundationalist strategy one can try to defend one of the other three positions, or suggest a fifth. So some might take position one and say that there are some beliefs for which the notion of justification is inapplicable. Wittgensteinians might appeal to ordinary language considerations, or Reformed Epistemologists might appeal to the non-evidentialist nature of religious beliefs. What is problematic about this response is that there is no principled account as to why the favoured kind

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of belief (grammatical or religious) is treated in a way different to other beliefs. A certain arbitrariness in selecting some beliefs for this "hands-off" treatment is evident. Furthermore it seems very difficult to show that our normal standards of justification don't infect the special area. If one claims, as a religious belief, that there are 13 apostles it seems that the response to this is to point to scriptural, historical evidence and that of tradition that there are 12. No exotic appeal to the "non-evidential" nature of religious belief seems appropriate here. Hence position one still seems indefensible.

Another possibility is to take position three and accept some kind of circularity, but deny that all kinds of circularity are vicious. In so doing one might challenge the model of justification being presupposed by the foundationalist. In Sosa's image[8] this is that of the pyramid with linear connections running between the basic belief and higher beliefs, with justification running only one way. What's central is that the relations of support are asymmetric. Support only goes from the bottom up. Against this one might suggest that higher-level beliefs could loop back and partially support basic beliefs. For example, higher level beliefs about the trustworthiness of memory may help one recognise a more fundamental belief as a more fundamental belief. Thereby beliefs can receive justification in different ways. There may be intrinsic reasons for accepting a belief but also extrinsic reasons for holding that same belief. For example an experiential belief could receive support from its intrinsic qualities, but also from the role it plays in a system of beliefs. Such a development in fact produces a fifth option, namely that beliefs are justified in relation to beliefs which are partially self-justifying and partially circularly justified by other beliefs. The partial self-justification could derive from (say) experiential input; the circularity derives from the views about the role of experiential input in our view of things. Thus there are not basic beliefs in the way the foundationalist requires them to be, which are not justified in relation to any other belief. Yet neither is there a total circularity of mere coherence between beliefs. What this position shows is a way of explaining justification that serves as an alternative to the foundationalist's position[4]. Are there good reasons for preferring it to the foundationalist version?

Various arguments have been offered against epistemological foundationalism as a general strategy and also against specific versions of it. There is a general argument against it which occurs in both continental and analytic thinkers which I believe is sound. The argument is about meaning and in essence shows that epistemological foundationalism entails unacceptable views about content. This argument seems to be the kind of argument implicit in one of Derrida's most famous aphorisms—"There is nothing outside of the text."[9]

Let's examine it in that form first. At first blush Derrida appears to be

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asserting an extreme form of linguistic idealism. Only texts exist and nothing outside of texts exists. It's like Berkeley with the linguistic turn added on—instead of only ideas existing, only language exists. Just like Berkeley's master argument[10] that the only thing we can compare ideas to are other ideas, the Derridean line is the only thing we can compare texts with are other texts, hence the only things which exist are texts. This is in fact how Cupitt presents the case:

> My learned critics attack me at this point by saying that either I haven't read or I haven't taken seriously this, that or the other writer or argument or consideration. So they refute my assertion that it is all text text text by chucking text text text at me, which leaves me at a loss to know how to reply.[11]

Milbank refers to his position as "linguistic idealist" and appears to accept this reading.[12] However, just as with Berkeley's, the argument is not compelling. Because X is necessary for the fulfilment of our representation of Y, it doesn't mean that it has been shown that there's no need to posit the reality of Y. For example, because thought is necessary for representing non-mental states, this doesn't exclude the existence of those non-mental states. Because language is required to speak about the world, this isn't an argument that there is no world beyond language.

However, there is another way of reading this argument. Rather than setting up the opposition of text and object and in so doing denying the latter, what Derrida enjoins us to do is to regard all things as texts. That is—there are no objects which are self-interpreting, there are no absolutely basic points of reference on which to hang meanings. Putting this into a different idiom, it appears to be a claim for semantic holism. The meaning of terms is not given in isolation from their connections to other terms or to contexts. Terms have meaning in the context of sentences and sentences have meaning in the context of larger groupings of language. Another word for such a larger grouping of language is a text. Hence to say that there is nothing outside the text is to affirm semantic holism. Are there good arguments for thinking that if semantic holism is correct then epistemological foundationalism is doomed?

Semantic holism comes in many varieties, stronger and weaker. A strong version would claim that individual terms do not really have meaning at all, but only whole languages have meaning. However, on this version it becomes difficult to explain communication. Individual speakers use terms with semantic content, and that content is constituted by the entire set of relations to the totality of contents used by that person. If, as is currently thought plausible, it is difficult to make a principled distinction between meanings and belief, then a person's meanings will differ with

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different beliefs. Since my total set of beliefs is different to other peoples' total set of beliefs, then my meanings will differ as well. If I use a term "cat" and you use the same term, since my total web of meanings constitutes the meaning and these are different to yours, we cannot share meanings. Such extreme results have led many to view semantic holism with suspicion. However, there are weaker versions of the thesis. A weak version just needs to deny semantic atomism—that individual terms have meaning totally independently of other terms. What needs to be argued is that terms, at least minimally, have their content to some degree in virtue of their connections with other terms.

One way to do this is to argue for the absurdity of semantic atomism, the view that the content of a term does not depend at all on its connections with other terms. On this atomic model, it becomes mysterious how terms behave in patterned ways. If their meanings are systematically sealed off, how do we explain the way meanings interact, how they can play a role in inference? If the meaning of "cow" is totally given by the object for which it stands, how do we explain the connection of "cow" to phrases such as "four legged ruminant". How is the meaning of this latter given—do "four", "legged" and "ruminant" all have their own isolated meanings? How do they come together and equal the meaning of "cow"? To use a familiar example, if the meaning of "Venus" is totally constituted by its relation to the object for which it stands, and the meaning of "Evening Star" is constituted similarly, how can one explain the informative content of the sentence "Venus is the Evening Star"? Something more is required than the reference relation. This something extra is explained through the notion of the role the term can play in language, its set of inferential connections with other terms. This is, in essence, what is meant by the "context principle" attributed to Frege.

Epistemological foundationalism of any sort, it might be argued, requires a commitment to semantic atomism. For the foundationalist the justification of a basic belief is required to be independent of all other beliefs. A belief has content, the meaning to which the propositional attitude of belief is taken. The content of the basic belief, for the foundationalist, must exist independently of its relations to other beliefs. For if one accepts that the meaning of a basic belief is even partially constituted by its relations to the content of other beliefs, then it becomes impossible to seal off the justification of basic beliefs from its connection with other beliefs. The content of the basic belief would be partially constituted by its relationship to other beliefs, and so the justification of that content couldn't avoid taking into account the inferential connection to the content of other beliefs. Hence foundationalist justification would be impossible. That's why foundationalism requires semantic atomism, and

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why the rejection of semantic atomism and the endorsement of semantic holism entails the rejection of epistemic foundationalism.

This is exactly the problem diagnosed by Popper when he discussed what he called 'the problem of the empirical basis.'[3] He notes that giving an account of immediate experience we are forced to use terms that have application beyond the immediate experience. Thus if I say "I am now experiencing 'red'", the term 'red' has multiple applications beyond the immediate experience. How can it be applied in the particular experience without also knowing how it is to be applied in general circumstances? Therefore the justification of the basic experiential belief is tied, through the terminology used, to the justification of other beliefs using the same term.

Therefore there is a good reason supplied by the truth of semantic holism to abandon epistemological foundationalism. Similar kinds of consideration have led both analytical and continental thinkers to the same conclusion. Yet in giving up epistemological foundationalism, one hasn't given up the project of justifying beliefs. One has merely rejected a problematic version of that project—to be replaced by a different model. One could appeal to something like Bonjour's modified coherentism[14] or Haack's foundherentism[15] (positions which express something akin to position 5 above). That is the first kind of foundationalism dispatched. What of the second kind, ontological foundationalism?

4. Ontological Foundationalism

Ontological foundationalism can be loosely described as the view that there is an ultimate furniture of the world. More precisely it holds that the fundamental nature of the world is objective in the sense that it exists independently of any theorising we do about it or independently of any input from our minds. Much contemporary continental philosophy assumes the rejection of this view. The world is regarded as a construct, something ineradicably entangled in our ways of thinking about it. The extreme version of this holds that the world is constituted by our thought about it. However, this assumes that our minds at least have an independent existence, and so they themselves constitute the ultimate furniture—the position of idealism. In the way ontological foundationalism has been characterised, idealism emerges as being ontologically foundationalist—mind is the basis of reality and so what is ultimately real (for minds themselves are not constituted by minds). Few want to be stuck with this idealist position and so a moderated version of the thesis is that there is a world, which exists independently of our thinking, but we have no mode of access to it other than through our conceptual categories. The only world we know is therefore the one given to us by our modes of thinking. This thesis further subdivides into the view that there is one fundamental way of

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conceptualising the world binding on all humans or that there may be several alternative versions of which none is in a privileged position.

This latter position is the one most favoured by postmodernist thinkers. There are different ways of conceptualising the world and none gets at the world as it really is in itself and none is better than any other. An initial problem for this view is the dichotomy between world-version and world in itself; the former is our theorising about the world, the latter is the world itself. This latter notion of the world-in-itself is required to differentiate this position from the idealism already discussed. The notion is contentless—we can say nothing about the world in itself, since anything contentful involves one in discussing a version of the world. Because of this one might question whether the notion of "world-in-itself" has any meaning. We can say nothing about the identity conditions it must have—whether it is in space and time, has causal powers, is thinkable in principle. To affirm any of these is to put content on the notion and thereby to enter into yet another world-version. Hence being an empty concept, it is meaningless. Responding to this one could hold that it is a purely formal concept, a limit condition on our thinking. Such concepts are in use in our thinking—for example the concept of infinity. We cannot clearly form a concept of infinity, or clearly articulate identity conditions for it. Nevertheless it does play a significant role in our thought. Likewise the formal notion of a world in itself—an asymptotic goal towards which all our versions tend—can be viewed as a meaningful concept.

If one grants the acceptability of the world-version/world in itself dichotomy, there is still the issue of whether there is just one version possible or many versions possible. The many-version alternative holds that we describe the world in various ways. These ways are not mere variants of each other, but are genuinely alternative ways of describing the world. The one-version alternative holds that such diversity is not possible at a fundamental level, but human minds are constrained in certain basic ways and all must think using the same basic set of concepts and categories. This doesn't deny historical and cultural differences—we may have different views of, for example, food, beauty, morality, religion, and humour. However, there are basic notions such as objecthood, being a property of, causality, extension, succession, which are indispensable to us.

Now to make this claim of universality for certain concepts that play a part in our world-versions, one can't merely appeal to the consideration that all societies use these notions. The claim is that nothing can count as a version of the world, without the use of this basic set of concepts. It's a transcendental claim, not an empirical one. In order to oppose this position, one might argue against transcendental claims in general. One could argue that such claims are covert analytical arguments—they merely reformulate

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what's contained in their initial premises, premises that need not be accepted. One might always formulate the initial premises in ways that reach different conclusions. Any argument, which purports to have those premises as its conclusion, will rest on prior premises, which can be reformulated and so on. Therefore it still seems plausible to maintain the view that there may be different version of the world possible.

Yet however exciting this claim may seem it is still rather limited. What it merely says is that no account of the world is a privileged insight into how it really is. Yet this doesn't mean that there can be no evaluation of versions of the world, no means of saying one view is better than another. The claim blocks an avenue to ontological foundationalism and defends ontological relativity, but this is compatible with arguing for preferring one view on the grounds of its utility, explanatory power, elegance, simplicity, integration with background knowledge etc. Viewing ontological claims in this instrumentalist fashion allows one to say that the Einsteinian view of gravity is better than the Newtonian. It coheres better with experimental evidence, explains more phenomena and can accommodate the old theory within itself. It doesn't claim to be a genuine account of the literal nature of space, matter, time and force, but it claims to be the best theory available. In rejecting ontological foundationalism, one hasn't thereby rejected normativity in regard to world-versions, the possibility of argument and the giving of reasons in regard to them. One has merely rejected the view that our ontological theories reflect the nature of the world as it really is.

The basic point of this section has been to show that rejecting ontological foundationalism doesn't end in incoherence. Realists might well think that the instrumentalist position is flawed, but regard the view as mistaken, not self-refuting by pointing out its defects.[16] Alternatively one might try to defend transcendental arguments and argue for a single-version theory of world-versions. This view holds that even though our theories do not get at the world as it is in itself, there is no room for competing or alternative accounts. Again this is a distinctive philosophical position, trading in arguments with its opponents. While more controversial than the rejection of epistemological foundationalism, the rejection of ontological foundationalism is still a recognisable and coherent philosophical position. The same cannot be said for the third kind of rejection of foundationalism.

Rational foundationalism

Rational foundationalism holds that one should proffer reasons for one's theoretical position. These reasons must make some intellectual claim on one's interlocutors; i.e. they must be proffered as compelling in some sense or other. Such reasons may be fallible—they may subsequently be judged to

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be mistaken or not in fact compelling. However, to reject the demand that any particular set of reasons must be infallible or ahistorical is not to reject the demand for reasons. I believe that it is partly the failure to distinguish between fallible reasons and infallible reasons that has led some writers to reject the notion of proffering reasons at all. Because the search for infallible foundations for some philosophical positions has proved difficult if not impossible, they have erroneously concluded that there are no binding norms operative in theoretical discussions of a philosophical nature.

If one doesn't proffer reasons for one's position, what can one do? A common strategy is to speak of persuasion. If persuasion isn't conceived of as rational, what is it? The distinction between logic and rhetoric is appealed to, to make sense of this. Rhetorical language appeals to emotions or aesthetic qualities, which are conceived of in a non-cognitive way. Hence one's position is held to be "appealing" or "charming" rather than "compelling" or "mandatory".[17] Positions are defended on non-cognitive rather than cognitive models. As an example of this, Milbank says:

> MacIntyre, of course, wants to *argue* against this stoic-liberal-nihilist tendency, which is 'secular reason'. But *my* case is rather that it is only a *mythos*, and therefore cannot be refuted, but only out-narrated, if we can *persuade* people—for reasons of 'literary taste'—that Christianity offers a much better story.[18]

What sorts of consideration led people to abandon the traditional model of positions competing with each other using reasons, to a model of alternative positions having varying degrees of "charm" and "attractiveness"; i.e. from a model of intellectual interaction akin to contact sport to one akin to connoisseurship (with indeed all the social baggage involved in that!)?

The suspicion of reason itself is at the bottom of this. Certain types of intellectual activity, namely rational ones, are held to be neither neutral nor value free nor unprejudiced, in the way they have been traditionally presented. Rather they incorporate certain prejudices, certain attitudes that can and indeed should be rejected. Often the claim is that they represent the operation of power and that they are often used as a way of persecuting beleaguered minorities, such as non-western cultures, women, the poor (although it should be noted that none of these three are minorities in a world context). It is clear that reason has been used in this way in the past. For example, certain models of what it is to be human have been used to oppress women, and have been advanced using Aristotelian philosophy. Views about the goods of mechanisation and modernisation have been advanced at the expense of indigenous people and/or the environment. Views about the ultimate destiny of humankind have been used to prevent people from

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agitating for political change—the basic point of the Marxist critique of religion. In each case reasons have been put forward to thrust unacceptable views on disadvantaged people and to compel them to accept them.

However, what seems also clear in each of these cases is that it is the misuse of reason which is in question. The views that are to be rejected are to be rejected because they are *wrong*, not because they lack charm. Indeed it seems that the most powerful weapon an oppressed minority has, is to appeal to reason and to articulate the injustice of the case clearly, forthrightly and in a way that compels the intellect of their interlocutors. Oppressed minorities typically do not win in non-cognitive exchanges with people enchanted by military hardware, especially if their position rests solely on its 'charm' or 'literary value'.

However, another tack for the reason-resister is to say there are different conceptions of rationality and hence different models of being cognitive. Various attempts have been made to make sense of the notion of alternative conceptions of rationality, particularly appealing to the later work of Wittgenstein to do so. Hyman makes use of this strategy, appealing to *On Certainty*.[19]

Figuring out what Wittgenstein actually meant is a painstaking and difficult task. What I shall do here is present a fairly representative way in which Wittgenstein is read, abstaining from the claim that this is what Wittgenstein himself meant. Wittgenstein's idea of a language game is the starting place for this strategy. In a language game, rules of grammar constitute the meanings of the terms and the allowable interconnections between terms. Hence rules of inference, criteria for correctness, are constituted by these rules. The rules are in a certain sense arbitrary. That is, the nature of reality or the nature of the mind does not determine them. In this way Wittgenstein avoids both realism (seeing our cognitive practices determined by the way the world is) and idealism (seeing our cognitive practices determined by the way our minds are). Rather, the rules develop as "part of our natural history", ways in which we adapt to our surroundings, including in that the very way we describe our surroundings. There aren't any *a priori* limits on what counts as a language game, one can't legislate in advance about what is or is not possible. This is because there is no one dominant language game, no transcendental perspective from which one can judge all the others.

What emerges from this is cognitive relativism. Given that language games set up meanings, and the standards for correctness of cognitive practices, and that there are many different language games, it follows that there are many different standards of correctness for different cognitive practices. Hyman puts this into the idiom of conceptual frameworks. There are different conceptual frameworks that articulate different standards for

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cognitive activities. There is no overriding framework that governs all the others. From this position one can claim that rational foundationalists are privileging one specific conceptual framework and attempting to critique others in the light of it. Hence Hyman diagnoses a debate between John Hick and Gerald Loughlin as being a clash of frameworks, rather than a genuine debate.[20] Hick is presented as an empiricist foundationalist, Loughlin as a postmodernist. They have different presuppositions, different methodologies, and so fail to genuinely connect. There is no cognitive exchange possible between their different frameworks, since cognitive practice is always internal to frameworks. Hence other, non-cognitive, criteria are used to mediate between frameworks—so back to charm, attractiveness etc.

Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" is a classic rebuttal of these ideas.[21] In that paper he presents a variety of arguments against the possibility of there being alternative conceptual schemes. However, it seems clear that his arguments are directed to variously different targets. In some moves he challenges the epistemological notion of "the given", which is ordered in different ways, thereby producing different conceptual schemes. He challenges the notion of ontological relativity, that the world can be "carved up" in different ways. In doing this he engages with the empiricist tradition, charging them with a third dogma—that of scheme and content. By attacking the intelligibility of the notion of content he also attacks its correlated notion of scheme. I won't enter into that debate here, since it connects up with large issues about coherentism in epistemology and whether the role of perception is causal or evidential. What I shall focus on is his argument about the unintelligibility of the idea of an alternative conceptual scheme. He basically points out that the notion of an alternative conceptual scheme is a contradiction in terms. A condition of being a conceptual scheme is that it is recognisable as such by us. In order to be recognisable it cannot be so different as to fulfil what is required by "alternativeness". There must be underlying levels of similarity in order to recognise difference—otherwise there's no recognition at all. Drawing on a point made by Quine,[22] Davidson notes that nothing would count as evidence for a genuinely alternative conceptual scheme that wouldn't also count as evidence for mistranslation. We're stuck in our logical system with our basic cognitive practices. We're not committed to saying that these can't change, but we are committed to saying that from within them we couldn't recognise something genuinely other. It is literally inconceivable by us.

Milbank partly accepts this, noting that "there must be some background of assumed agreement for a radical disagreement even to be possible".[23] Yet he rejects Davidson, holding that the agreement is

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overwhelmed in the tidal wave of differences that confront us, leading inexorably to scepticism and radical incommensurability, which he thinks should be embraced. A glimpse of this difference is evident in the following extraordinary passage:

> ...it is at the most practical, the most "materialist" level that radical differences arise; in the same physical space one can build a cathedral or a nuclear power station, but there is no "commensurability" between the desire to build the one or the other, and the difference in the organisation of their structures, their configurations and symbolic evocations, is as great as that between the jargon of nuclear technology and the language of prayer... .Within our culture there are cathedrals and nuclear power stations, theologies and technologies, arts, sciences and so forth. In consequence, incommensurability is always already present. Besides endless overlaps, like the ground and the building materials common to both structures, there are also endless disjunctures, endless things not truly comparable, thought often in competition, because they have internal properties peculiar to their own size, position, speed, inclusion of other things....[24]

The upshot of all this for Milbank is radical incommensurability and scepticism. The pay-off for him, however, is that one can inhabit, as an insider, a particular "discourse" and feel free to carry on the conversation without fear of any outsider requiring one to justify it, or give reasons. A familiar form of fideism lurks beneath the postmodern pyrotechnics. There's no cross-discourse critical activity possible, because of the radical disjunction of mind, world and discourse.

This, putting it charitably, is wrong. The banal fact that things have differences, people have differences, there are different languages, has been miraculously translated into a grand thesis about difference, promoted as a vertiginous scepticism and paraded as a giant-killing rejection of all forms of traditional foundationalism, including that of reason itself. It's rather odd that in this climate one notes a startling number of normative terms insouciantly deployed.

> If these *arguments* are accepted, then MacIntyre is *right* to *insist*, against Davidson, on the *reality* of incommensurability of meaning.

What discourse do 'argument', 'right', 'reality' belong to? A radically incommensurable one? Why then couple them with 'insist', unless it means something different in Milbank's idiolect? In the passage quoted above about MacIntyre, he noted that even when speaking of choosing something on the basis of "literary-value", this latter was the *reason* for the choice! What does that mean? In another passage, berating those who hold

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misguidedly hold to the view that there is a united mental subject, Milbank informs us:

> In fact, we are not wholly united individuals occupying a single 'holistic' world; instead we find it quite possible to hold inside our heads several subjectivities, even if some of these are merely "entertained".

"In fact" indeed—a stable piece of knowledge in a fluctuating welter of signifiers. One could continue this catalogue of lack of self-reflectiveness at length—but let's draw to the central point. Those who advance the rejection of rational foundationalism are caught in Aristotle's old dilemma.[25] They can either argue for their position and so refute themselves, or remain dumb and let the rest of the intellectual world carry on with its business. There is no *via media* of "persuasion" on this. Milbank, in his *ipsissima verba* advanced arguments to the effect that there were no binding universal arguments. This amounts to an existential self-refutation. What point is there in writing books asserting the collapse of objective meaning—who would read or understand them? Why faithfully and carefully articulate the views of those who deny that one can faithfully and carefully articulate the views of others? It passes the time, as Beckett might observe, but there are more pleasurable or useful ways of doing so.

There are other nasty results from adopting such a position. It just ghettoises religious thought, leaving it apart from the intellectual mainstream. Maybe this isn't a bad thing—but it seems religious people should be worried by it, because other intellectuals (scientists, philosophers, historians etc.) will take no notice of them. Furthermore, suppose one accepted that religious positions were sealed off in their intellectual ghettos. Who calls the shots in these enclaves? They can't use binding canons of rationality, one can't rationally stake out a position, even internally, without succumbing to foundationalism. It seems that non-cognitive forces will triumph in the ghetto—rejecting rational foundationalism is a license for advocating the superiority of will over intellect and for the mob-rule of "persuasion" and "rhetoric".

An objection might be forthcoming saying that I have advanced a transcendental argument about the nature of argument and that transcendental arguments are question begging, as discussed above. Such an objection states that I'm assuming that argumentation is the right way to defend argumentation, and this is circular. However, this is not the structure of my argument. This is rather that anyone who rejects the view that argumentation is the correct way to reject intellectual positions cannot themselves argue for their view—they refute themselves. The power of my position derives from the incoherence of its opponents—an incoherence I believe I have illustrated above.

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6. Conclusion

My contention has been that the rejection of foundationalism is intelligible in some ways and unintelligible in others. The Radical Orthodoxy group is united by a common rejection of foundationalism. However, they have illegitimately compounded a number of distinct positions into a single monolithic "foundationalism". While it makes sense to reject epistemological foundationalism and in certain versions ontological foundationalism, it doesn't make any sense to reject rational foundationalism. An upshot of eliding the difference between these positions, in the way they do, is to create the illusion that if one defends the third, one is committed to defending the others as well. This is not the case. Many philosophers reject the first two kinds. Rejecting the third is not a viable option.

1 The group produced a collection of essays under the title *Radical Orthodoxy* London: Routledge, 1998. I won't deal with that material in this paper. I discuss it in a review in *Religious Studies* (January 2000).
2 *New Blackfriars* Vol.79, no.931, Sept. 98, p. 393.
3 ibid. p.395.
4 *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, H.Hewitt (ed.) Macmillan, 1990 p.183.
5 *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, Macmillan, 1996, p. 25.
6 *Radicals and the Future of the Church*, SCM Press, 1989 p. 43.
7 ibid. p. 39.
8 See "The Raft and the Pyramid: coherence versus foundations in the theory of knowledge", in E.Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.
9 See for example *Writing and Difference* Routledge, 1978, p. 151–152.
10 See *Principles of Human Knowledge*, section 8.
11 *Radicals and the Future of the Church*, SCM Press, 1989, p. 37.
12 *Theology and Social Theory*, Blackwell, 1990, p. 343.
13 *The Logical of Scientific Discovery*, section 25.
14 See his *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Cambridge, 1985.
15 See her *Evidence and Inquiry*, Blackwell, 1993.
16 For example the indefatigable work of Michael Devitt who carefully responds to various kinds of anti-realism. See his *Realism and Truth*, 2nd edn, Princeton, 1997.
17 See Hyman ibid. p. 402.
18 Milbank ibid. p. 330.
19 Hyman ibid. p. 400
20 Hyman ibid. p. 392
21 "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, 1984.
22 See *Word and Object*, MIT Press, 1960, p. 59
23 Milbank ibid. p. 342.
24 Milbank ibid. p. 343 my italics.
25 Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1006a12—15.

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