

A black and white portrait of Sotiris Mitralaxis, a middle-aged man with dark hair, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark sweater over a collared shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him, and a watch is visible on his left wrist.

edited by Sotiris Mitralaxis

Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event

Engaging with
Christos Yannaras' Thought

Preface by John Milbank



Chapter Six

Relation, Activity and Otherness in Christos Yannaras' Propositions for a Critical Ontology

Sotiris Mitralaxis

Christos Yannaras has written extensively on ontology, epistemology, ethics, theology and politics. It is good fortune that a significant number of his books have recently become available in English thanks to Dr Norman Russell's translation of the bulk of Yannaras' work, including his magnum opus *Person and Eros*, the German edition of which bears a subtitle that describes it most abundantly: *A Comparison of the Ontology of the Greek Fathers and the Existential Philosophy of the West*.

In his work, Yannaras applies certain stable criteria emerging from his philosophical understanding of the world to a variety of categories, unveiling the vital connection between branches of philosophy and the world we live in. Thus we may classify the works *Person and Eros*, *Relational Ontology*, *Propositions for a Critical Ontology* and others under ontology/metaphysics, the works *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* and *The Effable and the Ineffable: The Linguistic Limits of Metaphysics* under epistemology, and, finally, *The Freedom of Morality* under moral philosophy. The application of the criteria emerging from these works leads to his treatises on social philosophy (*Rationality and Social Practice*), political economy (*The Real and the Imaginary in Political Economy*), the relationship between contemporary physics and philosophy (*Postmodern Metaphysics*), the philosophy of religion (*Against Religion*) and the historical background of the clash of civilisations (*Orthodoxy and the West*).

Returning to Yannaras' critical ontology,¹ it is interesting to note that

1. With the kind permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers (www.wipfandstock.com), I am reprinting here with some revisions the chapter on Yannaras' critical ontology from my book *Ever-Moving Repose: A Contemporary Reading of Maximus the Confessor's Theory of Time* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 29-40, first

*Propositions for a Critical Ontology*¹ (not yet translated in English) is one of the few philosophical books by Yannaras which does not explicitly mention theological notions *at all* – it seems to emphasise the fact that it is meant as a *philosophical proposition* in the strictest sense, with none of the traits of what we term and categorise under ‘theology’ – despite the fact that Yannaras absolutely does not believe in the exclusion of the ecclesial body’s ontological testimony from the field of philosophy. The fact that the *structure* of the book follows the pattern of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and the *method* of the book is reminiscent of Karl Popper’s insistence on falsifiability (although here employed in a different context) does also suggest this. One could perhaps explain that by saying that the book is also directed towards people who *do* believe in such a contrast between theology and philosophy, but we would have to disagree: *Propositions for a Critical Ontology* attempts to trace the *preconditions* for an ontological enquiry that would be free from philosophical dead ends and contradictions arising from traditions of thought that are, in Yannaras’ view, characterised by arbitrary apriorisms and axiomatic certainties (which would be the case with not only e.g. idealism or monism, but also with empiricism or materialism) – to ‘clear the ontological path’, so to speak. His proposal for the *content*, not merely the preconditions, of an ontology freed from problematic starting points, of a truly *critical* ontology, is to be found in the book’s sister volume published twenty years later, Yannaras’ *Relational Ontology* – or, for that matter, in his magnum opus *Person and Eros*, where Patristic literature is studied and employed much more extensively.

This later book, *Relational Ontology*, opens with a phrase from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1930): ‘Every proposition that I write always means the whole, and is thus the same thing over and over again. It is as if they are only views of a single object seen from various angles.’² The same could be said of *Propositions for a Critical Ontology*: here Yannaras applies some very specific criteria to a multitude of categories (ontology, epistemology, even society) and arrives at an ontological proposition that calls for communal empirical verification and validation.

presented at the 2013 Oxford conference on Yannaras. A revised version of my 2016 Cambridge paper at the ‘Polis, Ontology, Ecclesial Event’ conference will appear in *Christos Yannaras: Philosophy, Theology, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018, forthcoming), ed. Andreas Andreopoulos and Demetrios Harper, as this will serve the balance of each volume much better.

1. Christos Yannaras, *Προτάσεις κριτικής όντολογίας [Propositions for a Critical Ontology]* (Athens: Domos, 1985 & Ikaros, 2010).
2. The phrase is here taken from Christos Yannaras’ *Relational Ontology* (Brookline, MA: HC Press, 2011), v. The Greek original, *Όντολογία τής Σχέσης*, was published in 2004 in Athens by Ikaros Publishing.

*Preconditions for a Critical and Relational Ontology:
λόγος, Relation, Consciousness*

According to Yannaras, we can name *critical ontology* the answer to the ontological question that is subject to critical evaluation and verification, subject to the principle of the falsifiability of knowledge (the second proposition).¹ Answers to the ontological question can only then be subject to critical and empirical verification or refutation, ‘if we affirm the cognitive access to the existential event as an experience of *relation*’. ‘A *critical ontology* is possible, if we affirm the experience of the subject’s consciousness of self as a starting point for the interpretation of the existential event’ (7.3).

This experience of the self’s consciousness of self is the only cognitive event that is truly, universally verified by all human persons – and ‘this experience is only constituted through *relation*, which means that the experience of relation and its *referential widening* (i.e. the communal verification of the relation) constitutes the prerequisite for the cognitive access to the existential event’. Knowledge is the experiencing of relation and the nexus of shared experiences validates and verifies knowledge (7.3). The criterion thereof is the communal verification of knowledge, which can never be finite or taken for granted. This verification is an ‘attainment’ (κατόρθωμα), and by ‘attainment’ I mean it is always open to a fuller, a more complete communal verification, excluding the possibility of certainties or apriorisms (2.1). Linguistic and semantic formulations ‘signify the experience of relation without being able to exhaust it, as a relation is actualised [ἐνεργείται] as the manifestation and unveiling of the subject’s existential otherness’ (2.11).

Consciousness of self is a prerequisite for this. The subject’s consciousness, the consciousness of the fact that it exists, is the first and only certainty. The reality of consciousness precedes every assertion concerning reality (1.41). The existence of consciousness, of the Self, can be the only constant of a critical epistemology and ontology, as it is a cognitive event that precedes any epistemological stance, method, or assertion, even a *critical* stance. Consciousness of the self, the consciousness of one’s existence and otherness, cannot but be *the only*

1. For practical reasons, in this chapter I will not cite the book’s pages in footnotes, but its propositions in parentheses, which are hierarchically numbered statements in the style of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* – thus, numbers in parentheses point to statements in *Προτάσεις Κριτικής Ὀντολογίας*. An elaboration of each point I make can be found in the book’s cited proposition, which is also the case with the quotes mentioned.

certainty of a critical ontology (1.42). However, this does not lead us to forms of solipsism, as it is the relation to other realities that reveals our consciousness of Self.

The semantic function, not only in its linguistic meaning but in every relation of signifier and signified, is a cornerstone of the actuality of relations. The word Yannaras uses to denote all facets of the semantic function is the word λόγος, with all of its multiple meanings (and, sadly, any translation of the word in English would annihilate this polysemy). Λόγος is the manifestation of a signifier, which in turn signifies a presence. To be signified is to be manifested as a presence, and this referential function of λόγος turns it into the first precondition and manifestation of *relation*. A relation is *logical* as it pertains to λόγος (1.3). Each manifestation of something in the horizon of consciousness is a λόγος, a revealing of the Other to the subject, to the subject's consciousness. It is a referential revealing; a relational revealing (1.31). For Yannaras, 'λόγος is the subject's ability to *relate*, to manifest a perceptual relation to existence. The subject perceives existence as a revealing, as a manifestation which signifies the *otherness* of each phenomenon' (1.33).

I am not referring to abstract conceptions of relation. The physical impression constitutes a relation, as it functions as a signifier representing something for someone. Λόγος is the term we use for each and every semantic function: it creates the distinction between the two constituents of the relation, and in doing so constitutes the relation (1.332).

To perceive a λόγος (whether visual or auditory, sensible, or intelligible etc.) and to experience a relation to and connection with something or someone is to become conscious of one's individuality, as one perceives the other part of the relation as an otherness. Consciousness of the self is the consciousness of a difference, of an otherness, which is revealed in the relation. But the *fact* of consciousness precedes this: the *event* of consciousness is the prerequisite for every relation, it is manifested through relation but it precedes it, thus making it possible (1.341).

Yannaras maintains that the word λόγος signifies every referential activity which manifests the subject's otherness. (A similar definition of λόγος that he often employs is that λόγος is the mode in which everything that *exists* is *manifested*, becomes *known*.)¹ In different contexts, λόγος can mean a word, a meaning, 'an image, a sound, a visual representation, form, shape, a musical melody, a painting, etc. The polysemy of λόγος allows us to say that the mode in which λόγος informs us of the subject's

1. Cf. Christos Yannaras, *Σχεδιάγραμμα εισαγωγής στη Φιλοσοφία [An Outline of an Introduction to Philosophy]* (Athens: Domos, 1988), 20: 'τὸν λόγο τοῦ κόσμου, τὸν τρόπο μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὅ,τι εἶναι γίνεται φανερό, φαίνεται.'

otherness is the mode of λόγος (ὁ τρόπος τοῦ λόγου) – that the subject itself is actualised (ἐνεργεῖται) as λόγος.’ This would mean that λόγος is the *mode of relation*. ‘The *mode of relation* in the subject’s ability to make the participation in its otherness possible, as well as the *mode of relation* in the subject’s ability to participate in the activities that manifest the other subjects’ othernesses’ (6.13).

Ontological Categories: Substance, Particulars, Activities

What would be the meaning of *truth* in a critical ontology? The notion of truth as a static and finite formulation, either known or unknown, would surely be excluded, together with the notion of truth as stemming solely from the individual’s rational faculty. For a critical ontology, truth is not an *object*, but an event in which we participate: truth is the mode of reality. For Yannaras, it is the fullness of the subject’s participation in existence that is the criterion of truth (2.3). It is an empirical truth, the knowledge of which can never be finite and consists of the nurturing of the subject’s relationship with reality. However, the subjective experience of the individual is not enough: the cognitive event of individual experience is to be validated intersubjectively. The fullness of this communal verification is also a criterion of truth (2.31). For Yannaras, if truth is the mode of reality, then every true knowledge has a sound ontological starting point: he excludes the possibility of relativism or scepticism concerning the existence of truth itself (2.32).

It is in recognising truth as the mode of reality and reality as manifested through relation that we are led to an anti-essentialist notion of substance (οὐσία). Yannaras traces in the etymological implications of the Greek word οὐσία a relational conception thereof. Stemming from the feminine participle of the verb *to be* (εἶμι – οὔσα),¹ it signifies the event of participating in being. It defines existence as the mode of participating in being, which is even more the case when the word οὐσία is used to specify a specific substance, the qualities that manifest something as different from something else. Something is different from something else (in this context, a stone from a horse, not this horse from that horse), because it has a different mode of participating in being, and this is what defines its substance. In this, the *substance* (οὐσία) is the mode of participating in being – the substance not as a *what*, but as a *how* (4.13).²

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1. Cf. *Scholia in De Divinis Nominibus*, CD4.1 313C, ‘ἀπὸ γὰρ τοῦ εἶναι τὸ ὄνομα παρῆκται τῆς οὐσίας.’
 2. Yannaras also illustrates notions such as the body and soul as modes and not

This understanding of substance (οὐσία) as the mode of existence dictates a corresponding understanding of a particular existence. Excluding an understanding of substance as an entity in itself, we have cognitive access to the substance only through its particular actualisations and manifestations – through the mode in which they are different, through the mode in which they manifest otherness.

Every particular actualisation of the substance recapitulates the substance in its universality without exhausting it. A piece of stone embodies the universal truth of ‘stone’, by coming to know this particular piece we come to know *what stone is*, but the reality of ‘stone’ is not limited to that particular piece. That piece of stone manifests the totality of the mode in which something is a stone, it manifests the *substance* (οὐσία) of stone. However, this mode has also other, possibly infinite, manifestations. (4.131.)

We can only know the substance through its particular manifestations.

The Greek word for ‘mode’ (τρόπος, from the verb τρέπω, i.e. to turn, to turn in a certain direction, to alter, to change) does also have a dynamic meaning: it presupposes action/activity (ἐνέργεια) and an actualised relation. Substance (οὐσία), *the mode of participating in being*, is an event of perpetual becoming (it is interesting to note the Patristic identification of οὐσία with φύσις, nature, which stems from φύεσθαι, to grow, to become). It is known to us through the subject’s perceptive activity (ἐνέργεια). Substance as the mode of participating in being *is* and *is manifested* as a whole set of activities and realised relations (4.133).

The Activities (ἐνέργειαί) as a Primary Ontological Category

According to Yannaras, the activities (ἐνέργειαί) are to be ascribed to the substance, to the mode of existence – they constitute each hypostasis, each particular existence, and manifest its substance. For him, ‘the activities constitute an *ontological category* – the third ontological category together with the *substance* and the particular existence (καθέκαστον), which is more commonly termed the *hypostasis* (4.2).¹

as entities, modes that are revealed and manifested as relations through the activities. To conceive of these sums of actualized relations in a perpetual becoming as things, as some sort of material or immaterial objects, would be a grave misunderstanding (2.372-3.1).

1. For an account of the philosophical importance of the *activities* (ἐνέργειαί)

The notion of *activities* (ἐνέργειαι) emerges as a key term in Yannaras' propositions for a critical ontology, a criterion for the existential realism of said propositions. For Yannaras, the *activities* are not just a 'third term', an elucidation of previous terminology, but another way of perceiving and analysing reality. By approaching the existential event through the relations of (a) substance and activities, (b) substance and the particular (the hypostasis), and (c) the particular and the activities, our terminology acquires the prerequisites for a realism that is not to be found in the common distinction of substance and hypostasis. As Yannaras writes:

We acquire cognitive access to the *substance* through its *activities* as its common mode of participating in being, as the sameness of the particulars' nature.

We come to know each *particular*, each hypostasis, as a manifestation of its *substance*, while the substance itself is known through its particular existential realisations.

We come to know the *activities* as the *modes* that signify the *substance*, but also as the othernesses which constitute the particular as particular (4.21).

'The *substance* is distinct from both the activities *and* the particular, as it is *through the activities* that the substance's sameness of nature and the otherness of the particular is manifested, and as it is *through the particular* that the substance is recapitulated and manifested but not exhausted.' To mention an example, *smiling, to smile, or laughing, to laugh*, is an activity of the human substance and nature; it is to be found in every human being, in every particular manifestation of 'humanity'. But each human person manifests smiling or laughing, or *smiles and laughs*, in a completely unique way, in a way that actualises (not merely *reveals*, but *actualises*) their substance as a hypostasis, in a way that *actualises complete otherness*. The activities, being distinct from both the substance itself *and* the hypostasis itself, belong to the substance but actualise the hypostasis. The activities (ἐνέργειαι) are hypostatically manifested activities of the substance (4.211).

These signifiers, together with their signified realities, cannot function as apriorisms, as axiomatic statements and certainties, because their definitions emerge from their intertwined relations, relations that 'signify the realised manifestation of the existential

in Patristic thought and related matters, see also Yannaras' *Person and Eros* (Brookline, MA: HC Press, 2007), 43-70 (in which ἐνέργειαι is rendered as *energies*).

event'. That is why the notion of activities as an ontological category is a prerequisite for the articulation of a critical ontology, if it is to be truly critical (4.212).

It is the interference of the notion of *activities* that subjects this ontology to the critical (intersubjective and communal) validation or rejection of its empirical testimony. For it is the notion of *activities* that demonstrates the contradictory character of a perception of either the substance or of the particular as existences-in-themselves, thereby transcending ontological categories such as the *phenomena* or the *noumena*, materialism and idealism, etc. (4.213).

Otherness (έτερότητα) and Artistic Expression

The absolute otherness of each human person and its indeterminacy in language is not an abstract concept. Even the physical form of each particular person is impossible to describe exhaustively in language – and by physical form I am referring to 'the way (τρόπος) in which [each person's] bodily otherness is actualised (ἐνεργείται) – from the fingerprints and the exact shape of the body to his gaze, his smile, his hand gestures'. Even an exhaustive description of a person cannot but correspond to more than one human hypostasis, as the function of each separate specification is to objectify the specified so it can be understood by more people – whereas shared, common experience affirms that each human being constitutes a whole of absolutely unique and unprecedented mental and physical activities and actualisations (ἐνέργεια), 'an absolute existential otherness' (6.11).

We come to *know* this otherness, we have cognitive access to it, but we cannot *define* it, exhaust its reality in formulations of language. We come to know each otherness through the manifestation of its activities (ἐνέργεια), through the mode in which they are actualised. To directly experience a personal otherness is to participate in the activities and actualisations (ἐνέργεια) that manifest it, in the way in which this otherness becomes known. 'And that is why the recognition of another subject's otherness is a *relational* event, a *relational experience*' (6.12). Descriptions, however exhaustive, cannot contain, manifest or reveal a person's otherness. However, the participation (μετοχή-μέθεξις) in the λόγος of a person's creations can and does reveal it. A painting, a musical symphony, a poem or a sculpture *can* and *do* reveal the otherness of their creators – 'only the creation's λόγος can "signify" the reality of the subject, its otherness' (6.321).

It is in artistic creations we can most clearly discern this reality, but every act, creative activity and creation (πρᾶγμα, πεπραγμένο) has the subject's otherness imprinted in it and is manifesting it – however evidently or subtly. Human action is not merely contrasted with theory, it manifests and preserves the λόγος of the personal otherness; the reality of the personal otherness. As such, 'every human action is a relational event, a communal event' (6.322). Yannaras mentions the example of man's ability to discern the otherness of the poet in his poetry, or of the musician in his music – to be able to recognise Baudelaire's poetry and to distinguish it from Eliot's poetry, to be able to recognise the otherness of Mozart in his music and to be able to discern it from Bach's music. The fact that man is led from the information gathered by the senses to the 'empirical recognition of the otherness of the artist's creative λόγος is a cognitive event that is valid and true while annulling the "objectivity" of perceptible information', as it cannot really be demonstrated scientifically or formulated linguistically in its fullness, but can be only experienced and never defined, only inadequately signified through language, science or by other means. In the communal validation of experience, experiences of different persons *do* overlap, but this does *not* constitute 'objectivity', 'as the affirmation of the difference between Bach's music and Mozart's music is not adequate to transmit the knowledge of this difference' (7.2201).¹

Axiomatic Dichotomies and Problematic Ontologies

A critical ontology is an attempt to transcend philosophical apriorisms and dichotomies of the past, which were based on a lack of realism. Philosophical contemplation has at times identified the *abstract* with the *non-existent*, or the *abstract* with the *truly existing*. However, both theses

1. Art, usually not a subject directly pertaining to ontology, gives me the opportunity to comment on ontology's relation to *society*, there are ontological preconditions, whether clearly articulated and widely known or not, behind each collective approach to the *meaning* of reality, each approach to organising society, each choice in living collectively. A particular interpretation or reality, a particular ontological approach is to be discerned even in facets of life or in disciplines where one would not suspect the direct presence of ontology – perhaps due to the absence of articulated ontological reasoning (8.11). Yannaras discusses Karl Marx's insights on several occasions in his *Propositions for a Critical Ontology* (mostly in 6.2-6.613). In these pages, Yannaras does not only demonstrate Marx's vital and radically new ideas concerning the core of Western philosophy's dead ends, but also the inner contradictions of Marx's own system – contradictions which pertain to its implied or explicit ontological basis.

overlook the fact that every abstract formulation functions as a signifier and every signifier constitutes a relation. This relation is an empirical reality in cases of both sensible signified realities and abstract/intelligible notions. For Yannaras, the question is not if the signified is sensible or abstract/intelligible, but if the relation between the subject and the signified is real or imaginary – and this is to be verified communally, not individually; it must be judged from the wholeness of relations (2.35). To equate the abstract with the non-existent or with the truly existing is to impose apriorisms and axiomatic certainties to reality, giving birth to dichotomies such as materialism and idealism, whereas the basis of a critical ontology would be the realism of relation (2.351).

In a critical ontology, both the reality of sensible and abstract/mental signifiers and manifestations are subject to intersubjective, communal experience, to the ‘cognitive widening’ of experience (2.36). ‘Knowledge can neither be solely objective (independent of the subject) nor solely subjective (irrelevant of the object). The contradistinction of objectivity and subjectivity divorces and contrasts the object from the subject, it ceases to accept them as partners and constituents of a cognitive relation’ (2.361).

It is not only philosophy as an isolated ‘discipline’ that gives birth to the need for a critical ontology. Yannaras maintains that the profound changes in the scientific worldview during the twentieth century and up to the present cannot but change the way we see philosophy. Our perception of reality cannot be the same as the one offered to us by Newtonian physics, Euclidian geometry and the Cartesian ‘*cogito*’. Yannaras discerns in science’s recent developments that our perception of reality as a sum of separate entities in a given structure must be substituted with a perception of reality as a sum of relations and relationships that cannot be understood and explained in a singular and given way. ‘Relation emerges as both the *mode* of reality and the *mode* of knowing reality,’ of having cognitive access to it (4). In this it is *physics* that traces new paths for *metaphysics*.

For Yannaras, the sharp distinction between physics and metaphysics that is taken for granted in mainstream philosophy seems to be the corollary of a specific understanding of *λόγος* as individual *ratio*, as *facultas ratiōnis*. The cognitive access to reality is thus limited to the formulations stemming from method, ideology, and proof, giving birth to dualisms such as matter and spirit, dualism, and monism, physics and metaphysics, science, and ontology (7-7.023). However, the antithetical distinction between physics and metaphysics (ontology) seems to exclude the possibility of a *critical* access to the ontological question, the possibility of a critical ontology. For this contradistinction to exist:

every anti-thesis presupposes a definitive thesis, a thesis not subject to critical evaluation. In terms of the distinction between physics and metaphysics, the position (thesis) that is not critically examined and evaluated is the assumed axiom of either matter, or mind, or both. Because of that, the contrast between physics and metaphysics is always subjecting ontological reflection to the dogmatic apriorism of either dualism or monism (7.1).

The focus of critical ontology on experience and consciousness does not lead to empiricism or mysticism. The experience of (self-)consciousness transcends the information gathered by the senses. Consciousness of the self 'is not the only cognitive event that arises from experience without being limited to the information that is gathered by the senses.' Yannaras maintains that 'every relational experience, every experience of relation is a cognitive event which may arise from the information of the senses, but the relation as a cognitive event is not limited to this information' and transcends it (7.22).

Different Accesses to Reality:

A Personal Causal Principle and the Fullness of Participation

Every subject is participating in reality, but to what extent does one participate in the *fullness* of reality? Yannaras illustrates how a different stance towards reality produces seemingly equally valid conclusions in their inner logic, which are, however, radically different from one another. For example, while contemplating a painting by Van Gogh, a strict positivist would acknowledge the reality of it as a sum of canvas and oil paint. A different access to the reality of the painting would be to recognise the image it depicts. A third possibility would be to define the painting by its subjective aesthetic integrity, mastery of technique, etc. A fourth and different type of access to the reality of the painting would be one which is actualised by the degree of the subject's participation in the observed reality:

to recognise in the painting the visual λόγος of the person that created it, the otherness of the creative activity (ἐνέργεια) of this particular artist, whom we today have never met as a tangible presence, but the existential otherness of whom is 'defined' by the reality of his painting. Neither of these four interpretations is false concerning the description of the painting's reality, but the description and definition of reality differs according to the fullness of the subject's relation to it (7.4101).

Yannaras applies the same approach to the subject's perception of reality as a whole. There are approaches to reality as a whole which only recognise the constituents of reality, matter and energy, or even the beauty of the cosmos. However, another approach to accessing reality – an approach signified by the fullness of one's personal participation in the world, to reality as a whole – would be 'to recognise in cosmic reality the otherness of a personal creative activity (ἐνέργεια), the "bearer" of which we have never encountered as a sensible presence, but whose personal existence is signified by the world's reality'. The fullness of one's personal participation in the aforementioned painting or in reality as a whole is that which distinguishes these different paths to accessing reality, none of which is false in itself, even if they represent different degrees of personal participation in the fullness of reality (7.411).

If it is the experience of relation that constitutes the cognitive event, if reality is known and is manifested and revealed through relation and the dynamic of relation, then 'the hermeneutic access to the [philosophical] problem of the *causal principle* of reality can be freed from the dualism and contrast between physics and metaphysics, between science and ontology (7.43). The dynamic of each person's (and humanity's) relation to reality is an actual event, 'which cannot be subjugated to neither the natural "objectivity" of the sensible, to the natural sciences, nor to the abstract (mental, reductive) nature of metaphysical enquiry' (7.4202). This is in no way to be understood as a 'proof of God's existence' or even 'proof of God's inexistence' or anything of the sort: the very notion of a critical ontology is constituted against 'proofs' as compulsorily convincing constructs of the logical faculty. However, it recognises the communal affirmation of the presence of the relationship's Other. The personal discovery of a creative activity (ἐνέργεια) beyond physical reality, which constitutes physical reality, 'is a hermeneutic access to reality that cannot be confined or subjugated to the "extra-subjective" (objective) certainties of science and metaphysics. It remains a hermeneutic proposal that differs from other hermeneutic proposals in the fullness of the personal relation to [and participation in] the cosmic reality that it actualises' (7.43). The fullness and realism of the subjective cognitive participation in reality is to be judged by 'the wide referentiality of relation, its *communal* validation' (7.44). There is also a very real and practical difference in the *meaning* that each person's participation in reality grants to his life, or the *meaning* that each society's or community's collective participation in reality grants to each facet of human coexistence (7.45).

The recognition of a personal causal principle of the world in the field of ontology has direct implications for our human coexistence. If the universe in its infinite complexity and vastness is not a product of randomness but the outcome of a personal activity (ἐνέργεια), if the world is a manifestation of God's activity (ἐνέργεια), then 'the principle of conscious experience (consciousness), freedom and creativity is not an inexplicable exception pertaining only to the human subject, but the causal principle of existence' – the causal principle of existence as the existential otherness arising from consciousness and freedom. If that is the case, freedom and otherness must be recognised as 'real (and not evaluative, i.e. arbitrary) criteria for the genuineness of history and society: dependence, subjugation and oppression are to be recognised as very real forms of existential corruption, not merely as the corruption of social relations. (5.22)

Ultimately, the question of a critical ontology is a question of meaning, a question of truth. This question is not limited to the world of philosophy, but extends to the world of human coexistence, of civilisation and history.

Philosophical *ontology* is a proposal concerning the *meaning* of man's existence and its relations – a proposal of meaning concerning the mode of existence. And *critical* ontology builds its proposal on the subject's existential self-awareness as an experience of freedom and otherness. Freedom and otherness become accessible to us as a cognitive and empirical event through relation and the dynamic indeterminacy of relation. The criterion of reality is the experience of relation to reality and the verification of the relation's genuineness through its collective widening – i.e. the equally indeterminable dynamics of the social event that constitutes history and civilisation (8.21).

Yannaras ends his *Propositions for a Critical Ontology* with proposition number 9: 'For a critical ontology, truth is relation. And relation – i.e. truth – is never taken for granted. It is an attainment' (9). If Ludwig Wittgenstein has completed his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with the famous phrase 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent,' I could say that Yannaras' answer would be: *Whereof one cannot speak, therein one must participate.*

We hope that this short exposition concerning the possibility of a critical ontology will help the reader who wishes to explore Yannaras' philosophical work in acquiring a fundamental knowledge concerning it, as the continuous publication of newer translations of Yannaras' works seems to kindle an ever-growing interest in his thought.