

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
University of Oum El Bouaghi  
Faculty of: Letters and Languages

## **Thesis**

Presented to obtain

### **3<sup>rd</sup>Cycle Doctorate**

**Branch: English**

**Specialty: English and American Literature**

Title :

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# **A Leap of Uncertainty : The Representation of Agnosticism in the Anglo- American Novel in the Interwar Period (1918- 1939)**

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Presented by :

**Soumia Bakezzi**

Publicly defended on dd/mm/yyyy in front of the following committee members:

<b>N<sup>o</sup></b>	<b>first and last name</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Quality</b>
01	Sarah Merrouche	Prof.	L'arbi Ben M'hidi University	President
02	Hachemi Aboubou	Prof.	Mustapha Ben Boulaid University	Supervisor
03	Mokhtar Hamadouche	Prof.	L'arbi Ben M'hidi University	Examiner
04	Salah Eddine Aaid	MCA	L'arbi Ben M'hidi University	Examiner
05	Dallel Chenni	MCA	Mustapha Ben Boulaid University	Examiner
06	Mallek Benlahcene	MCA	Mustapha Ben Boulaid University	Examiner

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## Statement of Authorship

I declare that the present dissertation and the content presented in it are my own work, and has been generated as a result of my research. To the best of my knowledge, the present research contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made. I further declare that I have not submitted this dissertation to any other institution for the obtainment of a Ph.D. degree.

Soumia Bakezzi



**to my father, in loving memory**



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## Abstract

That the modern crisis in spiritual life was further exacerbated by the effects of the Great War has been widely recognized. In the interwar literary corpus, the entrapment into unbelief is clearly visible, and the view that atheism accounts for the irreligious experience makes sense only against a background of myopic taxonomization. What is strikingly clear is the tensions of faith and unfaith which suggest the existence of competing interpretations and conciliatory ones. These, in turn, allow us a context to consider the nature and extent of this dichotomy of belief/unbelief away from a standard reading of exclusionary terms (i.e., atheism as the threshold of unbelief or the theistic recuperation of faith). This dissertation aims to offer a broad interpretation against the standard reading of binary oppositions of the religious/irreligious experience of the Anglo-American novel as a hybrid account of rival stances as a result of the coexistence of the desire for God and an ostensibly hyper form of escapism from God which seems to take place in interwar literature. By examining D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920), George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), and George Santayana's *The Last Puritan* (1935), I hypothesize that agnosticism is summoned as the propositional alternative to the tension between faith and unfaith, which receives its most thoroughgoing formulation in the interwar novel. I also hypothesize a hitherto unwelcoming thesis of the desire for God. My argument is premised against the thesis of the godlessness of modern consciousness and the broader conception of the disappearance of God as well as the "death of God". I argue that the modern consciousness is conscious of the metaphysical problem and that the desire to broach the topic of God emanates from the desire for God per se, which is accentuated by a pronounced and ubiquitous uncertainty. To make the move from comprehension to interpretation and from the real to the fictive (and vice versa), I rely on philosophical hermeneutics, contextual analysis and deductive content analysis. The results show the recurrence of agnostic theism fueled by epistemic ignorance and epistemic uncertainty that result in a resounding suspension of judgment and knowledge as they relate to issues of self-

fulfillment, the loss of faith, and the crisis of faith in the three novels respectively. These, in turn, expose the range of the agnostic position and its different and possible formulations which cannot be explained by atheistic hypotheses.

*Keywords:* agnosticism, uncertainty, faith, unfaith, religion, modernism

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP.....	i
DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv

### I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Background and Context of the Study .....	1
2. Statement of the Problem .....	7
3. Objectives of the Research.....	10
4. Hypotheses and Research Questions.....	13
5. Methodology .....	14
6. Limitations of Analysis and the Limitations of the Novel.....	16
7. Thesis Structure.....	16

### CHAPTER I: Iconoclastic Tendencies and Retreats: The Metaphysical Crisis and the Desire for God

1. Introduction .....	21
1.1. The Crisis in Metaphysics and the Problem of God.....	23
1.2. The Limits of Knowledge and the Unknowability of God.....	40
1.3. Modernity and The Death of God: A Very Concise History .....	43
1.4. A Leap of Unfaith: Belief and Uncertainty in the Nineteenth-Century .....	53
1. 4.1. Belief and Uncertainty in the Victorian Age.....	58
1. 4. 2.. On Uncertainty and Unbelief: The Rationale for Agnosticism .....	64
1. 5. Disenchantment and Unbelief in The Twentieth-Century.....	72
1. 5. Conclusion.....	79

**CHAPTER II: *Excessus in Logos: The Sentient Unknown, sui generis* Ontology and the Terminus of Knowledge in D. H. Lawrence’s *‘Women in Love’***

2. Introduction... 82

2.1. Resisting Premature Definitions and Categorization... 88

2.2. Unchristian... All Too Unchristian... 93

2.3. Suppressed by Limitations, Divulged by Mysticism... 102

2. 3. 1. ‘But always there was a deficiency’... 107

2. 4. The Sentient Unknown, Truncated Ontology and the Limits of Knowledge... 113

2. 5. Conclusion... 122

**CHAPTER III: Frontiers of Unfaith: Examining the Agnostic Trope in George Orwell’s**

***A Clergyman’s Daughter***

3. Introduction. .... 125

3.1. Synopsis, Biography and Authorship.....127

3.2. Concentration of Presence, Inwardness and Historical Documentation in “*A Clergyman’s Daughter*” ..... 130

3.3. On the Loss of faith..... 138

3. 3. 1. The Frontiers of Unfaith: Unfaith Bordering on Agnosticism .....156

3. 4. Conclusion.....160

**CHAPTER IV: Balancing Alternatives: Puritanism and Agnostic Disbelief in *The Last Puritan***

4. . Introduction. .... 161

4.1. “The Skepticism I am Defending”: Understanding George Santayana..... 167

4.2. Skepticism in Metaphysics.....173

4.3. The Will to Disbelief.....178

4.4. The Essential Background of *The Last Puritan*: Oliver and Puritanism in Context .... 186

4. 4. 1. The Religious Crisis in *The Last Puritan* and the Retreat of the Doubter... ..... 193

4. 4. 2. Authorial Contribution to the Naturalism-Skepticism Controversy: Surrendering Unbelief.....	203
4. 4. 3. Half-hearted Agnosticism: Agnosticism without Argument.....	208
4. 5. Conclusion.....	213
II. GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	220

## RÉSUMÉ

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## 1. Background and Context of the Study

Despite the safety of the end of the Great War, the rapid changes caused by modernity, and life after the war, the persistent danger of another monstrous war severely impacted people. Historical accounts studied with minutiae detail the change in the general sentiments that animate the private and public life and the intellectual scenery of this period. In some respects, these accounts understood the peculiarity of the interwar years only by analogy to either the war time or the prewar years, thus bringing out a nostalgic account to point to a regaining of faith and hope in the new reality in the individual and collective realm (i.e., the building up of the self) and/or the reconciliation with the new state of affairs. In other respects, their accounts helped gauge the extent, scope, and gravity of the situation and the conscious level of the responses that were developed concerning every sphere of human life or with reference to the existential deadlock clocked under philosophic tendencies, for instance sinking into the abyss of nihilism, and therefore the destruction of the self or the construction and reconstruction thereof. In either case, these accounts assessed the effects of the implications of the war. They also implied that human existence was radically questioned, and so they alluded to a sharpened skepticism. Consequently, the sphere of the metaphysical was in no better condition and was no less questioned.

Besides the effects of war, this negative correlation between modernity and man's ontological and epistemological safety stands as the background for approaching the issue of religious experience in the interwar period. Certainly, one of the implications of WWI which irreversibly changed the nature of modern life and whose impact still echoes to this day manifests itself in the realm of faith. The effects of modernity most explicit in an "unbounded Prometheus", the "secularization thesis"<sup>1</sup>, and an ambivalence towards religion most

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<sup>1</sup> "the secularization thesis" proved a serious limitation to an understanding of personal experience. There is a general agreement that it is used to describe the waning of the significance of faith and religion for the social system among other concerns. For more on this point, see Brian Wilson (1998), *The Secularization Thesis, Criticisms and Rebuttals*, (p. 63) in *Secularization and Social Integration: Papers in Honor of Karel Dobbelaere*.

heightened in the post-war years have consequently challenged the established certainties of the previous epochs, shattered the old orthodoxies and intensified the spirit of rationalism.

In her seminal book *The Varieties of Beliefs: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960*, Susan Bud (1977) concluded, “the effects of developing scientific knowledge, especially Darwinism...have been mainly responsible for weakening belief in the literal truth of scriptural religion for some, and for forcing others to abandon belief in God altogether.”(p. 104). In the larger scholastic body of the philosophy of religion, the repercussions of this thesis has gone by the name of the death of God, a figurative use of the language admittedly conditional and disputable but it provides a non-definite yet measurable description of Western exodus from Christian faith however the variations of what it entails give off. Undoubtedly, if the modern period is regarded as notorious for “the dissolution of the certainties of traditional religion” (Herynicks & de Maeyer, 2010, p. 14) there is a small chance of considering the situation in the interwar years to forgo this crisis.

Theorizing about this period has always identified this crisis and this crisis in turn has enjoyed critical attention. Anthony Woodward’s (1988) striking observation —presented as a Cartesian argument for dualism— stresses that the restless energies of modernity “multiplied the machinery of existence to the detriment of its spiritual quality” (p. 39). Truly, the spirit of Prometheus haunted the fragmented collective<sup>2</sup> and led to an explicit reference to mechanical determinism adulterated by non-determinacy —which is a condition of living— and with faith and religion relegated to the arena of subjective existentialism rather than idealism<sup>3</sup>(where the concession is made against objective materialism and for absolutism), faith became an

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<sup>2</sup> My assumption here is that once it is dispensed with one such factor of unity as that of faith conceived sociologically and anthropologically, the ripples of fragmentation continue to take effect until there is only individuation and atomization left.

<sup>3</sup> With the essence preceding existence, and thus faith is eternally anchored in an ideal objective reality independent of the vagaries of existence.

existential question<sup>4</sup>; therefore, loyal to Kierkegaard's tradition, each one individual has to work out for themselves their metaphysical stance. Hence, new religious and non-religious sentiments were being crystallized, sentiments that are both individualistic and dialectic.

Whilst asserting that the religious experience in the interwar era crystallized in a distinctive way, the chronological proximity of the worldviews of the twentieth century and what precedes it urges us to compress the commonalities and to build a bridge between their particularities for the sole purpose of establishing a norm for interpreting the religious/irreligious experience. To this extent, the general ideas that we form about distinct periods become the *what* of the thing we seek to understand, thus revealing the ontological aspect and the ahistorical dimension of our historical query, meaning that we superimpose the theme over spatiotemporal considerations while keeping a foothold in the historicity of our thematic concern.

For this reason, if we take relative certainty or uncertainty which is in Bertrand Russell's (1928/1962) view "one of the essential things in rationality" away from its historical grounds<sup>5</sup> and build upon it a reading of a priori claims to the preponderance of doubt over certainty in times of crises<sup>6</sup> which we readily accept as a given, then doubt, being ripe in the interwar period—a period that is charged with impending conditions which trigger further uncertainties—will essentially lead to the undermining of things that bear the stamp of fixity, certitude, and finality. To stretch this point a bit further, it cannot be seen as a historically developed uncertainty, conceived linearly, but more situational, contextual and non-linear<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, doubt and

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<sup>4</sup> This statement does not suggest that faith has not been as such prior to the dynamics of effects of modernity, but in my view and in the language of Plato, it has been twice removed from it being truly an existential matter as it is the *thing itself* (creation/created): in its phenomenological conception as it relates to the object of faith (how it is made in the human mind), and as is construed vis-à-vis the subject who perceives it, both intellectually or participatory (imitated). However, apart from conception which no doubt is foundational, how it translates externally is what contextualizes it, hence why my statement is self-explanatory because it is conditioned upon standard historicity.

<sup>5</sup> Meaning that it is the process of intellectual development, historically speaking.

<sup>6</sup> Or rather it is sufficiently probable to warrant consideration.

<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted that both of which are necessary to an understanding of uncertainty and both should serve as valid frameworks depending on my objectives.

uncertainty<sup>8</sup> about the existence of God which was an expansion upon the foundation of rationalism have become according to Gregory Erickson (2007) “intellectually fashionable”(p. 7) in the last two centuries but more so during the years of war, in which it became incomparatively intense.

Indeed, what has been referred to as a “ubiquity of doubt”, albeit more of an encompassing term than a context-specific description, outlines in a serviceable way the dwindling position of the metaphysics of theism but only accounts for it from the vantage of cultural development. However, to the extent that we focus only on the proposition that in an environment suitable for liberating ideas and revolting with the encouragement to abandon old worldviews and a growing dissatisfaction of what the old has wrought, the focus is within impersonal general ideas. When we shift the focus to the marginal and the unconventional, we would still be left with the concept of the “ubiquity of doubt” but nuances would dominate in accordance with the personal.

Early twentieth bulk of knowledge saw the screening of the intellect against heresies and illusions and where relative certainty in the sciences and dialogical hermeneutics in the human and social sciences were elevated to a higher status as instruments of epistemic knowledge and which ended with the assessment of the metaphysical question, not least that of God and the perusal for answerability. Likewise, the philosophy that emerged during this period is fundamentally existential; It is with the consideration that uncertainty is rooted in the normative framework of modernity that the individual engaged with the metaphysical. Additionally, the period sought the privileging of the self and the self’s reflexivity in relation to the world or the outside reality. In fact, what this individualism entails is the Hegelian dialectic, in that the shunning away from the order in which man was placed by the divine led to the destruction of the old self and the rebuilding of a new one.

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note here that uncertainty is a critical philosophical framework by which views about the world are formed and understood, while doubt is the general feeling that arises out of this uncertainty.

Preliminary works in psychology, sociology, and the sciences with their rational frameworks undermined claims to truth, and the resort to the self to explore the “tragedy of the spirit” reinforced the unabating outcome of what Nietzsche terms “the ungodliness of existence” that authors such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and others took up as the thematic center of their works to think “through the death of God”, and to wrestle with the hollowness of a world devoid of God’s presence. While such an absence bequeathed the men of letters with “an aesthetic philosophy which offers little comfort in the face of an uncertain world” (qtd in. Simon Critchley, 2004), it did, in fact, smooth the edges of this categorical denial of his existence and seemed to have put a neat but nebulous version of this inner and outer struggle into clearer focus which sought the personal and the aesthetic cultivation of doubt and uncertainty.

In some important ways and as a broad description, the interwar period of the twentieth-century bears some resemblance to the seventeenth-century reigning philosophy, skepticism and the critical paradigms that emerge from therein which they so fervently desired<sup>9</sup>. Evidently, following the nineteenth century’s critical paradigms, the twentieth century sought full integration of doubt and uncertainty into culture. Considerations of this matter reach the conclusion that skepticism and uncertainty infiltrate Kantian perspectival knowledge<sup>10</sup> defined as “knowledge from a vantage point” (Massimi, 2018, p. 3280) and impact "the way in which evidence is measured, probability calculated, institutions and conventions assessed, and the mind itself situated." (Reid Barbour, 2001, p. 16). Therefore, when the focus has shifted to the world of private experience, to attending to relativism and to containing it, a worldview disentangled from absoluteness shaped a dispositional subjectivity which is responsive to

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<sup>9</sup> As heirs to Descartes’ legacy, skepticism and religious uncertainty became for the intellectuals of this period a token and the blueprint by which a person should and must live their life. Skepticism, which “even through a thick wall [it] is contagious” (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 25) spread fatally “in all matters religious” (qtd. in Lane, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Perspectival knowledge in the Kantian sense has a reactionary connotation. It emanates from the tension that absolute knowledge fails to sustain.

skepticism. Here, skepticism appears as a personal philosophy and a form and function of narrating that supplies an entry point to discussions about the personal accounts of the religious experience in interwar literature.

The French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, wrote in (1922) expressing feelings of disillusionment that plagued him and the intellectuals of his time, stating that “The storm has died away, and still we are restless, uneasy as if the storm were about to break. Almost all the affairs of men remain in a terrible uncertainty” (qtd in. Spielvogel, 2015, p. 825). This epistemological and ontological uncertainty, which metamorphosed into metaphysical materialism, is counterbalanced by the desire to repudiate the idealism and materialism which tainted metaphysical acknowledgment as well as the desire for God, which is a question that cannot be silenced and which is, as Fiona Ellis (2019) among other argue, a human nature<sup>11</sup>.

This status quo has unabashedly led to the emergence of literature predominantly preoccupied with questions concerned with the myriad social, economic, historical, and religious matters. Therefore, and given its overarching significance, this latter (i.e., the religious sphere) stood out with deepened scars, as writers of literary works intelligibly relegated such realities to the realm of literature, and their writings voiced out the state of affairs regarding the nature of the representation of the religious/irreligious experience.

Literary critics and researchers have pointed out the uncertainties of modernist characters, to their cynicism, confusion, and pessimism, among other things, contending that literature during this era dealt with the psychological themes pertaining to the limitations of the self characteristic of Hegel’s “agentive expressivity”<sup>12</sup> (*Allen Speight, 2001, p. 5-6*). To this extent, “agentive expressivity” enlarges our perception of the peculiarity of the direction and purposefulness of writing. The intellectual investment in the subjective character of the writing

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<sup>11</sup> See Fiona Ellis (2019), *The Quest for God: Rethinking Desire* for more insightful engagement with the question of the desire for God.

<sup>12</sup> meaning “The way in which an action is might be expressive or revealing of an agent” (*Allen Speight, 2001, p. 5-6*)

of the interwar period urged the authors/novelists to consider the human mind a minefield that merits a thorough exploration. Thus, paving the way to the emergence of distinct literary styles that lay bare the author's thoughts in the perfect sphere that englobes intersubjectivities.

Furthermore, interwar literature, because it was densely realistic, addressed the limitations of the self and downplayed collective representation. To emphasize a point already stated, interwar literature was accused of bearing the stigma of uncertainty. An uncertainty that is closely tied to the limitations of the knowledge of both the self and the world fueled by an informed realization of the limitations of the self. The limitations of the self result from the alienation of the individual from the cohesion of the whole, which provides and solidifies a fleeting epistemic and ontological safety. Thus, the infatuation with the self and the nature of the self retained a skeptical essence in the context of the spiritual crisis. Personal experience which showcases the struggle for self-actualization and the grappling with questions of meaning supplant ontological and epistemological primacy of the truth or falsity of the existence of God in the very quest of approaching the question of God.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

That the modern crisis in spiritual life was further brought into collision by the effects of the Great War has been widely recognized, and that the consecutive narrative of the dawn and the perpetuation of unbelief of modernity loosely defined was further exacerbated hitherto continue to dominate our understanding of the interwar period. In the interwar literary corpus, the entrapment into unbelief is clearly visible, and the view that atheism accounts for the irreligious experience makes sense only against a background of myopic taxonomization.

Studies by (Miller,1965; Susanna Lee, 2005; Erickson,2007; Lewis, 2010; Herynicks et. Maeyer, 2010) led not only to a profound understanding of the religious and irreligious content as a distinctive modernist problem which constitutes a dominant motif in modernist literature but also to the fact that modernity defines the literary usage of religion. On this claim

George Lukacs (1974) in his influential book *The Theory of The Novel* builds a reading of the novel as a space abandoned by God. However, in this space of estrangement, the departure of God becomes “the formal substance and undertone of the novel, and the novel, in turn, informs our understanding of secularism and its crises, uncertainties, and potentials”<sup>13</sup>(Susanna Lee, 2005, p. 1). Therefore, in shifting the focus towards the content of novel rather what we take the novel to represent, there appears a sustained consideration of the supremacy of content within the narrative structure which downplay the “supremacy of [the]function” of the novel to identify the possibility of its appearance in its own elements<sup>14</sup>. This argument would be lost unless we considered the tension of representation of a varieties of stances that uphold the literary work, i.e., the novel, and how it grows sequentially after it had taken roots in the centrality of the thematic narrative which propels the theme of that which is proclaimed to be absent, i.e., the question of God and what it subsumes to leap into the fore irrespective of the theistic or atheistic formulas found in approaching this very topic which is grounded in this particular historical moment, all the while stressing the fact that it is historically induced.

Critics of the interwar literature frequently turned to the normative reading of religious indices, both in structure and content, as a place to begin a consideration of the criteria of faith/unfaith, belief/disbelief, and theism/atheism however suggestive and non-conclusive they might be. Indeed, there is a relationship of correspondence between this distinction and the layers of meaning which can be derived from the superimposition of one interpretation over the other to arrive at a concrete understanding of the functionality of the novel and the themes it espouses.

Although the death of God is the reigning narrative of the irreligious experience of modernism, the critics of this period have successfully distinguished between the

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<sup>13</sup>The author adds that “A world abandoned by God functions as an occasion for narrative intervention as well as felt spiritual condition” (ibid. p. 123)

<sup>14</sup> in our case the religious aspect of the novel.

disappearance of God and the Death of God and have, to an extent, extensively elaborated on them. In his (1965) book *“Poets of Reality”*. J. Hillis Miller contends that “If the disappearance of God is presupposed by much Victorian poetry, the death of God is the starting point for many twentieth-century writers” (p. 2). However, despite contending that the death of God is significant enough to constitute more than an anomaly within the modernist novel<sup>15</sup> and despite calling attention to the connection between modernity and the loss/gain of faith, their studies have gone so far as to identify the religious/irreligious discussions too narrowly with the nineteenth-century thesis of the death of God. Truly, their accounts can go some way toward explaining the dawn of atheism in the modern novel or in treating the religious comeback. One theoretical problem with this is that what is implicit or explicit in this division in modernist literature, and by extension, the interwar literature, is the natural move from the dramatization of the death of God and what it entails, which is charged with atheistic connotations to the circling back to Him, which is a theistic propensity<sup>16</sup>, both of which follow a singular and congeneric interpretation within a uniform literary reconfiguration. This only amounts to raising a thematic concern<sup>17</sup> but defies questions about the truth-value of their content which remains in some manner unapproached and thus semantically problematic.

What is strikingly clear is the tensions of faith and unfaith which suggest the existence of competing interpretations and conciliatory ones, which allows us a context to consider the nature and extent of this dichotomy of belief/unbelief away from a standard reading of exclusionary terms, atheism as the threshold of unbelief (as many view atheism as a capacious enough term to account for the varieties of unbelief) and/or the recovery of the wounded spiritual sphere which has a bearing on the interpretation of many modernist works. Though

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<sup>15</sup> Virginia Woolf subscribes to Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and argues that the incident of the death of God “profoundly influenced our language”.

<sup>16</sup> As custodians of the Victorian metaphysical baggage, this was a Hegelian move par excellence.

<sup>17</sup> In so far as they answer the question of the tension rather than referential meaning, i.e., what they are and not what they mean.

I do not reject any of these claims, this distinction, which is fashionable in the rigid chronological division of literary movement and in the way I stress the pre-eminence of one view over the other, is not plausible, nor is it sustainable in a period vehemently marked by severe epistemological and ontological uncertainty framed in quasi-existentialist thought and discourse. Furthermore, one cannot simply advance a standardized and opinionated proposition on the basis of a dissimilarity of hypothetical reference between two uninterrupted antithesis because it would prove detrimental to the analysis which is based on nuanced contextual understanding. Agnosticism and atheism do not assert the same thing nor do they have the same implied identity and cannot be integrated into the same context if one has a strong referential semantic structure within the novel and in this regard, little has been done to relate the theistic thesis or the atheistic antithesis to suggest a hermeneutical reading of the religious and/or irreligious experience as a synthetical phenomenon conditioned by an underlying agnosticism that both holds meaning, has reference within the narrative, strongly challenges reductionist dichotomous assumptions, and acknowledges an irreducible experience of saturated belief/disbelief. Therefore, although their works hold significance for my research, their focus on either theism or atheism is limiting.

### **3. Objectives of the Research**

The start of my research which has began in 2019 marked one year after the centenary of the end of WWI, a period I have always been interested in and fascinated with coupled with the question of God which, in my view, is an ineluctable accompaniment of existence, that has been at the back of my head ever since I could recall the first episodes of consciousness at a very early age but more importantly is not how it relates to my personal experience because I believe it is a shared experience that knows no historical or diegetical limitations (temporally or spatially) but as the greatest abstract conception that man can ever conceive and the biggest problem that could either cohere or disperse the unity of man, or creates a fissure that can only

be filled/fueled with uncertainty in the absence of faith, and if anything whether we admit it or not, it is at the center of our existential concerns and therefore, it, by necessity, factors into our all forms of inquiry whether implicitly or explicitly, overtly or covertly. This is then what has inspired the thematic frame of this research and the critical engagement that touches upon the theme of agnosticism<sup>18</sup>.

What I am interested in in this research is not necessarily the transmission of the event of the interwar years (which is a historical event among many others) into the novel because the novels I have chosen are not war novels but rather novels produced during this era (1919-1939) and because the logic of this thesis holds true the undeniable effect on any form of writing, i.e., The writings are necessarily subordinate to this context; nor the explicit forms of agnosticism that could have been identified by the authors of the chosen novels as separate remarks about their work or as a word in the novel but rather what can be gathered from the title of this dissertation (i.e. what the word representation entails), but how this representation unfolds in the narrative while relying on narrative markers that tread the path of theism/atheism and how it confer upon it an expressive value of the tension of this dichotomy with a focus on how characters seek the imperishable question of Truth or battle with it and how the authors perpetually position them on the threshold. Hence, in a variety of ways, the chapters of this dissertation answer the central question of the edge of the antipodes of theism/atheism.

This dissertation aims at offering a broad interpretation against the standard reading of binary oppositions of faith and unfaith in the interwar and, by extension, the modernist Anglo-American novel as being exclusively synonymous with either faith in the transcendental or atheism, and suggests a rereading of novels with such characteristics in the context of the problem of the loss or persistence of faith as a hybrid space of rival accounts as a result of the

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<sup>18</sup> Agnosticism is an epistemological position in which claims to the knowledge of the metaphysical realm and its conceptual make up are not made either in the affirmative or the negative and that man is incapacitated from that knowledge whether it exists or not.

coexistence of the desire for God and an ostensibly hyper form of escapism from the question of God. Our query foregrounds the issue of the limits of man's knowledge of the metaphysical sphere and opens new venues into the consideration of the uncertainty in life and the uncertainty in being, as well as the uncertainty about life and the uncertainty about being which overlap in the narratives with various themes that I will discuss while considering the baseline criteria for gauging the belief and disbelief content of the religious/irreligious experience as being different in each case, all in a historical time of crisis, namely the interwar period.

Furthermore, this study offers a reading of the phenomenon of agnosticism as the 'emplotment' of this religious/irreligious crisis and as a reworking of idiosyncratic philosophical ideas converted into artistic expression whether arbitrarily or deliberately through a rereading of three novels written during the interwar period that center around the theme of religion/irreligion and to analyze the articulations and the manifestations of varied positions on agnosticism. Moreover, I seek to work out an argumentative perspective that seeks to anchor the *beyond* of the question of unfaith into a renewed understanding of it. Next, this dissertation attempts to answer how agnosticism and uncertainty play out narratively in the Anglo-American novel and to understand how the disparate popular movements and tendencies contribute to our understanding of agnosticism.

Another objective is to examine the boundaries between the real and the represented, discuss the interwar novel as a site of the performance of authenticity, and revive interest in a neglected aspect of the period. Overall, this dissertation is a simple form of metaphysical theorizing, a literary contribution to the philosophy of the question of God and to possible definitions of agnosticism expressed artistically. In it, I look closely at three disparate works, British and American, of the interwar period, and trace agnosticism and where it appears in their works. The goal is to open up their work to the thematic concern they participate in,

particularly as they are relevant to the problem of religion/irreligion which is central to understanding the interwar period. This thesis also aims to provide additional insights into the representation of the religious and irreligious experience, and how questions of existential matter are responded to narratively at the crossroads between the factual and the fictional.

#### **4. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In particular, this dissertation will examine three crucial questions:

Q1: First, is agnosticism fundamentally taciturn?

Q2: Another question is whether the literary trope of irreligiosity undermines the overriding idea of atheistic unfaith/disbelief of an ossified Victorian tradition.

Q3: Last, the central question in this dissertation addresses the problem of identification and the degrees of meaning of the roots of faith or unfaith and whether the dialectic which provides a sustained form to the tension within the novel corresponds to agnosticism at the crossroads with uncertainty. In asking this question, I hypothesize a surface meaning where misinterpretation may occur and a higher meaning where a gestalt reading takes place.

I hypothesize that agnosticism is summoned as the propositional alternative to the tension between faith and unfaith which receives its most thoroughgoing formulation in the interwar novel. I also hypothesize an unwelcoming thesis of the desire for God. My argument is premised against Richard Wright's thesis that "Modern consciousness is Godlessness...Godlessness in a strict sense". I argue that the modern consciousness is conscious of the metaphysical problem and that there is a desire to broach the topic of God or the desire for God per se, which are accentuated by a pronounced or discreet uncertainty. Moreover, I theorize that to speak of God by way of negating his existence or to speak of God in the absence still meant God in the presence and the presence of the question of God.

Lastly, I import into my argument the hypothesis that the antithesis reading of religion throughout history aids in bringing a dispositional reaction, in the Hegelian sense, a

kind of self-reflexivity to decades of untamed and unwavering religiosity; however, it is neither a solicited representation nor does it truly represent the whole range of religious/irreligious experience. I part from Paul Tillich's (1948) assumption which merits quoting to some degree, that “we are always held and comprehended by something greater than we are, that has a claim upon us, and that demands a response from us.” (p. 46)

## **5. Methodology**

This research explores the ways in which agnosticism is represented and how it can be read in light of the absence of this term. Therefore, the role of agnosticism in my research is thematic and for a reason. In order to eschew prediscursive claims to the discourse of unbelief in the Anglo-American novel of the interwar period, I seek the indications of agnosticism which involve the search for identical equivalence between the assumption and the content value of the religious/irreligious experience (since agnosticism is not necessarily a neutral state strictly defined as the suspension of judgement but can be theistic or atheistic) or across the structure of the novel and the standard definition of agnosticism as it is my contention that by overlooking the nuances of unbelief or even belief I am neglecting an important aspect of semantic correctness. Insofar as I retrieve surface meaning and in exploring the degrees of meaning from the religious/irreligious experiences of the chosen works to make a strong case for agnosticism within the frame of epistemological and ontological uncertainty, which, I argue, receives its most thoroughgoing formulation in the interwar writing. It follows that I take the juxtapositions of different readings (textual, intertextual and intratextual) as the critical prism through which I assess the truth value of the experience of disbelief. Our approach is therefore hermeneutical. Furthermore, that there should be a correspondence between the real and the fictional provides the backbone for this dissertation. With that said, the present study is a fundamentally textual interpretative criticism, however, I will draw from autobiographies, and authors' essays as well as from the corpus of their work when needed.

A leap from the specific to the general is highly problematic. Therefore, the role of deduction in our approach as a means to achieve a microanalysis subverts reductive closed arguments within the critical arrangements of modernism. Therefore, my focus on this topic within the interwar modernist tradition is not a claim to homogenize the religious or irreligious experience but to focus on the topic of agnosticism as a distinct form of the varieties of belief and/or disbelief.

A question that must be asked is why the novel instead of poetry<sup>19</sup>: Although poetic language offers the perfect template for the voicing of one's religious views, the novel provides, in Ellen Glasgow's narrative voice, "a chronology of emotions". Perclis Lewis (2010) contends that "the novelists did ... share the poets' evident concern with religious experience" (p. 4). Taken together, it is this "chronology of emotions" and this assertion of the novelists' thematic concern that we wish to explore in the present study. Lewis answers this question in terms of the functions of both modes of aesthetic expression; he affirms that "the novel tends to approach the sacred more obliquely than poetry" (ibid.) My implicit argument that by focusing on poetry, we are ignoring the centrality and functionality of the novel as a performance of authenticity<sup>20</sup>.

Within the gambit of literature and religion, agnosticism is marginally and desultory discussed and although the theme of religion or the absence thereof usurped a dominant position in the literary corpus of the interwar years, agnosticism is invariably misunderstood, misrepresented, or mentioned only in passing. Indeed, agnosticism is often caught in a narrow trap or bracketed between theism and atheism. Furthermore, agnosticism which is a neutral

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<sup>19</sup> We may ask why the poem and not the novel which seeks to explicitly broaden and channel the issue of the religious experience? Lewis (2010) answers this question in terms of the functions of both modes of aesthetic expression, he affirms that "the novel tends to approach the sacred more obliquely than poetry". He further expounds on this point that, "Among the major modernists, poets were more likely than novelists to espouse religious views or to link their work explicitly with the problem of religious experience" suggesting in this account the nature of poetic and novelistic writing in approaching religious views.

<sup>20</sup> Especially because we are interested in examining the boundaries between the real and the represented.

attitude towards doctrinal compliance is underrepresented in literary studies and is sometimes mistaken or obscured by the more renowned “atheism”, leaving little room for considering it as the legitimate account for tension resulting from religious/irreligious experience. Thus, the insufficient research and documentation are, in their essence, a gap in the knowledge to be filled. This gap may change my view about modernist oeuvres in their expositions of the conjectures of crises as ones whose source germinates from the profound question of God.

The criteria for choosing those novels are the following:

The three novels predominantly treat some of the most compelling talking points that drive my research and analysis such as the dialectic of faith and unfaith, the loss of faith, existential issues. Furthermore, the selected novels balance between narrative and the philosophizing of the important scenes that hold the narrative together.

My focus on agnosticism builds upon the existing scholarship on unfaith in the field and aims to challenge the overriding thesis of equating unfaith with atheism which continues to dominate my understanding of the religious crisis.

## **6. Limitations of Analysis and the Limitations of The Novel**

One of the preliminary intentions of this research is to select novels that are said to better depict the state of British and American state of religiosity during the interwar era, however, it is not plausible to provide an overarching analytical and critical study of all if not most of the literary works written during that era. The first limitation is found in the scope of analysis and the breadth of coverage. Additionally, given the nature of my subject matter, I am aware that in the way we use the adjective ‘agnostic’, I am spelling out a descriptive value of the author’s belief or the works’ content belief, and in so doing, we acknowledge the fact that I cannot sidestep the stereotypical view of what agnosticism is taken to mean, or its extended meaning.

A challenging focus of this work is that when dealing with some literary texts, especially the analysis of three novels, however confining that might be, would lead to a non-

comprehensive representation/coverage of agnosticism. Another representative sample that would validate the hypothesis of agnosticism in interwar literature is needed since this is generally an understudied theme within the scope of modernism literature.

## 7. Thesis Structure

Chapter One, "Iconoclastic Tendencies and Retreats: The Metaphysical Crisis and the Desire for God" attends to the question of the historicity of the concept of agnosticism and broaches discussions that are framed in the larger intellectual and cultural context. It establishes the thematic root of the thesis of agnosticism by examining the links between the metaphysical crisis, and the problem of God in Western philosophy to arrive at a better construal of the death of God<sup>21</sup>. In it, I also provide a panoramic historical account of the problem of God and the myriad forms of expressions it took from the pre-Socratic era to the twentieth century, analyze the death of God back to its roots, and explore at some length the desire for God as the vector for the perpetuation of this enduring and everlasting problem. I argue that it is found throughout the history of philosophy and theology, however, it is always with relation to the religious or irreligious experience that it is discussed and is not discussed thoroughly. I also argue that it is not a matter of historical construction. In a way, the gist of this chapter is used as an introductory argument for the analysis of subsequent chapters where I treat the underlying concepts operative throughout the stages of this research and the basic terms of this dissertation which are likely to be of much relevance to us.

Chapter Two, "*Excessus in Logos: The Sentient Unknown, sui generis* Ontology and the Terminus of Knowledge in D. H. Lawrence's '*Women in Love*'" sets out to address the problem of the limits of knowledge and its relationship with agnosticism. In it I consider the synthesis of two disparate positions that correspond to theism and atheism. I also consider the

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<sup>21</sup> because I believe that the perfect explanation of the reigning philosophy is when it is framed in its Age. What comes after it is mostly a reaction that either submits to it and then develops it, reforms it, or refutes and supersedes it with one that responds to the zeitgeist of its Age.

aggregate of two predicates that are not strongly pushed to the forefront as themes in and out of themselves but their implications, the fixed cues the narrative offers and their effect which are visible in the development of the plot line. I argue for a necessary connection between events which reveals a latent agnosticism that is brewing from the tension that we have come to associate with two divergent positions. In this respect, we suggest that first, agnosticism escapes ready definition and easy categorization and two, that it is derivative, transitive, and should be read dialogically. The second argument which we propose to take notice of is the limits of ontological and epistemic knowledge which is of paramount importance in this chapter as it drives my analysis in the direction of containment of exhaustion and the expediency of this containment leads to the acknowledgment of finite exhaustion of the limits of knowledge — limits inherent in the foundations of immanence— which prompts a strong claim to ignorance that corresponds with the intensity of the religious/irreligious experience. This analysis is led by the observation of Lawrence’s exercise in Platonic mimesis (with a slight difference). Here we are implying a meta-mimesis, that is an imitation of the immanent highest order of existence via a surrogate. Furthermore, almost all attempts are reduced to a strong claim of the limits of human understanding, not contracted in unbelief but rather the belief in the unknowability of the transcendental as far it could be conceived (which is the very essence of the religious experience). I maintain that Lawrence does not deal with the problem of signified but the beyond of that signified which conspicuously presents within meta-mimesis which we reason to be conceptually underdeveloped from the perspective of metaphysical ontology. My interpretation weakens the homogeneity of the irreligious experience and aborts it in that it distances it from unbelief and opens it to the opposite which itself is a religious experience. We take these nuances and establish the connection between agnosticism and the limits of knowledge.

Chapter Three, “The Frontiers of Unbelief: Examining the Agnostic Trope in George Orwell’s *A Clergyman’s Daughter*” approaches the issue of the loss of faith and offers the

hypothesis that given the parameters of the novel, unbelief is suggestively one which is directly linked to agnosticism rather than atheism. In this chapter, the focus will be on the affinity between the two and settle on the interpretation in favor of the former.

Chapter Four is concerned with two important factors in the conception of unbelief, that is naturalism and skepticism at the crossroads with a historically antithetical phenomenon,

which is Puritanism conceived from a moral perspective rather than a religious/ theological standpoint in George Santayana's *The Last Puritan*. In it, we frame the discussion around important indices to the polemic of unfaith and argue for an agnosticism without argument.

While the chapters of this dissertation focus on agnosticism, the analysis intersects with broader philosophical ideas. Therefore, the pathway the chapters take, and indeed the content of this dissertation, is interdisciplinary in nature and that is through necessity. Delving into Agnosticism in literature may appear as a trend away from a single variable, insofar as the word itself invites myriads of meanings and allows for a vast array of interpretations coupled with the intricacies of literary analysis. It is a priori that literature picks up where philosophy leaves off, since the former is, so to speak, an extension of the latter, and the two are bound to collide. Hence, the inclusion and integration of philosophy in literature along with a discussion about religion is an unavoidable path to undertake. This is something we have come to understand intelligibly as the work progressed. Furthermore, in attempting to answer one of the research questions which is about the novel as a provider of a frame of reference to the author's life and to the era at large, this dissertation, therefore, addresses several concepts and contested literary questions that are bound to play a central role in any attempt to define and analyze the chosen novels: the first of which is the novel as a form of communication and a pronouncement of the author's deep self; the multiplicity of meaning; the intention of the author; knowledge and the text. It is thus of vital importance to go through these considerations to gain familiarity with the subject matter of not only agnosticism but of the authors' religious standpoint.

The rationale for this is to compile the possible varieties of the agnostic experience into an expansive conceptual definition of what agnosticism is (or how it should broadly be defined as) and how it is expressed artistically. The merit of this approach is that we can touch upon a variety of topics related to agnosticism that would not otherwise be thought to be constituted of this experience which would allow us to gather evidence, speculatively so, for this position

because nowhere in our corpus do the authors explicitly refer to agnosticism but rather the concept or experience surfaces from the theoretical discord and friction immanent in such various positions that encompass the range of unbelief and disbelief that is premised on the rejection of faith or the attempt to subdue the millennia-long historically ontological order that comprises the deity at the top with one which is of a mundane quality (as in Chapter Two) that corresponds to the confines of man's fallible and curtailed knowledge which is less tenable and unsupportable by the spirit of modernity.

# **CHAPTER I**

**(Iconoclastic Tendencies and Retreats: The Metaphysical  
Crisis and The Desire for God)**

## **Introduction**

- 1.1. The Crisis in Metaphysics and The Problem of God**
- 1.2. The Limits of Knowledge and The Unknowability of God**
- 1.3. Modernity and The Death of God: A Very Concise History**
  - 1.3.1. A Leap of Unfaith: Belief and Uncertainty in The Nineteenth-Century**
  - 1.3.2. Belief and Uncertainty in The Victorian Age**
  - 1.3.3. On Uncertainty and Unbelief: The Rationale for Agnosticism**
- 1.4. Disenchantment and Unbelief in Twentieth-Century Interwar Era**

## **Conclusion**

*“And a barrier will be set between them and that which they desire as was done in the past with their counterparts. Verily, they have been in grave doubt”*

**Quran [34:54]**

## Iconoclastic Tendencies and Retreats: The Metaphysical Crisis and The Desire for God

Neither is there sense, nor image, nor opinion, nor reason,  
nor knowledge of Him. —Dionysius (qtd. in *Summa  
Theologica*)

We have therefore, as we progress in our acquaintance  
with the world, an always greater confusion. — George  
Santayana, *Skepticism and Animal Faith*

Nothing is more challenging to us than the very possibility  
of an ultimate call.

—Altizer, *The New Gospel of Christian  
Atheism*

Love is a magnet, it draws me into God,  
And what is yet greater, it pulls God into death.  
God himself, if he wants to live in me must die  
How do you think you can inherit his life without death?

—Angelus Silesius, *Der Cherubinische Wandersmann*

And our knowledge compared with Thy knowledge, is  
ignorance—Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*

### Introduction

From the pre-Socrates of antiquity to the modernists, the historical and epistemological turns in the metaphysical question reveal a persistent and long-standing interest in the question of God. What this trend does, in fact, is the uncovering of the repeated attempts to subdue the limitations of metaphysics to either human reason or to surrender the will of man to the power of faith in order to laboriously answer *vexata quaestio*. In the background of many philosophical systems is the dialectic of this vacillation culminating in iconoclastic tendencies or in an undercurrent propensity to retreat to non-apologetic theistic defense. Lofty claims in either account<sup>22</sup> fashioned within the frame of the knowable have been challenged. However, with the understanding that the metaphysical realm is physically and consciously impenetrable and the concession to what this entails constitutes the metaphysical crisis orbiting ever closer to an undying metaphysical call, the desire for the Ultimate, the quest for God, and the desire

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<sup>22</sup> which played out in the arena of dialectical historicism with each having self-serving merits, wavering between the material and the speculative realms.

for God as that which emanates from *amor naturalis*, and the desire to disclose the source of our being. The rationale for this desire is the incompleteness which is a hypothetical structure to everything that exists which emanates from the trust that here is something unknown (which is put in the object belief, here the metaphysical realm or God per se). St. Thomas Aquinas diagnosed this appetite in the following quote, “For there resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in men. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void.” (p. 65)

The word God in our context is not a provisional interpretation of the highest ontological status but a permanent criterion that supplants the conceptual diversity of the enclosed systems of thought all of which are subordinated to the fundamental question within the broader question of the existence of the possibility and extent of the knowledge of God<sup>23</sup>. To view it as such is to understand the synthesis of the claims made thus far that converges into one source that expressed the dominant and highest being as we shall show later in light of the inadequacy in the antecedent accounts of knowledge claims and flourished into, to use a more apt term, a kind of “participation in God”, which reveal consequentially, the recesses of provisional knowledge the concept that is compatible with this condition<sup>24</sup>, in the context of the uncertainty and ambiguity of existence (incomprehensible in our final material manner), and what I consider to be the corollary of this polemic, is atheistic agnosticism and theistic agnosticism. Here we will explore how philosophers took up the arduous undertaking and how they formulated the concept of God.

Our objective is to secure the definitional oneness of God and metaphysics since, to a certain extent, we part from this absolutely necessary assumption, that they are nearly the same

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<sup>23</sup> It is also not strictly confined to its Judo-Christian conception per se. As we progress in this exposition, the word God would eventually denote the God of monotheism whose essence and Being is congenitally different from the being of beings.

<sup>24</sup> i.e., the desire for the knowledge of God.

insofar as the wider inquiry of metaphysics is concerned that is not eclipsed by the struggle for terminological accuracy. Therefore, in what follows we show how this question has been taken up by distinguished Western philosophers. However, the scope of this chapter has limitations, one of which concerns the coverage of a narrower range of these philosophers than what might be expected from bringing this topic to light. Furthermore, the core of this chapter is to explore the links between the metaphysical crisis in the thought of a number of philosophers, the problem of God to arrive at an understanding of the death of God, and how these discussions may illuminate our topic, agnosticism and its mode of expression in the novel.

This chapter proceeds to articulate, albeit very briefly, four substantive axes that have an immediate bearing on the topic of this dissertation, three of which are the driving questions that form the crux of this chapter. However, these topics do not purport to present a thorough exposition of what they entail but only as a simplified entry into the invariant subject matter of this dissertation. I have purposefully limited myself to set out in this chapter three interrelated topics. The first is the crisis of and in metaphysics. In it, I take the liberty to exclude from my consideration the focus on the sequential development of this history of thought in favor of discussing how the issue plays out in the philosophical system of men of erudition in no historical order, hence the emphasis is rather thematically<sup>25</sup>. This consideration should serve as a caveat to using anachronistic concepts when necessary to discuss the subject matters of this chapter and where they will guide us. Next, I will take up the issue of modernity and the death of God. The third axis treats Victorian and modernist agnosticism. Lastly, I consider disenchantment and unbelief in England and America in the twentieth century.

### **1. 1. The Crisis in Metaphysics and The Problem of God**

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<sup>25</sup> Although the claim I depart from is founded on what I believe to be the philosophy of solution as well as the ahistoricity and continuity of the problem of God, it is important to start somewhere which, in the history of thought, has a logic of decomposing the complexity of the problem of God (which has never been on the margins of the philosophers' work, but one of intensive focus) and to see how later formulations were built from earlier attempts to give it its epistemic content and ontological status and how ultimately they expressed one thing in particular, God.

As the quest for certainty grows and with it the paradigms of inquiry discovered, the roots of the epistemological edifice, seen thoroughly as such, appear to be impaired, unsettled and destabilized revealing thus the corrosion made by the crisis of metaphysics which climaxes in the death of God. From the ancient Greek metaphysics to the twentieth-century development in thought, the sensitive quest for certainty outgrew its initial scope but instead of resolving the metaphysical problem of God, it further provoked —and still provokes— more pondering on this question, all the while hedging the answers<sup>26</sup>. The problem of God is the crisis of metaphysics which propelled the crisis in metaphysics, and the uncertainty that perpetuates this crisis calls for yet more speculation. The problem of God, to borrow Goethe’s expression, “develops because it lives”. It developed from critical strands expanding in theological dimensions, arriving at a secular cognitive departure delimited by the factors of secularism and rationalism, and culminating in the supremacy of the hermeneutical enterprise in the modernist period.

Despite the logical positivists’ perfunctory remarks regarding the ambit of metaphysics and its legitimacy as a science, Kant, among many others, argued in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* that human reason can never do without metaphysics “no one can cast off metaphysical questions, because they are too closely tied to the interest of human reason,” (Kant, 1782/2001, p.134). He remarked that inquiry into metaphysics is a natural disposition and is therefore rationally unavoidable; and one which cannot be dismissed despite the frustrations it brings which confers on metaphysics its internal crisis. “Human reason has never been able to dispense with a metaphysics as long as it has thought, or rather reflected, though it has never been able to present it in a manner sufficiently purified of everything foreign to it.” (Kant, 1781/1999, p. 696). he added, “The idea of such a science is just as old as speculative

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<sup>26</sup> Apropos this, Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said, “I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view.”

human reason”, and that “we shall always return to metaphysics as to a beloved one from whom we have been estranged” (ibid. p. 700). The issue of metaphysics — as is picked up by all philosophers— is that many problems arise from its very nature and one such problem is its possibility of it as a science<sup>27</sup>. Mander (2011) confidently affirms that “nearly all concerns resolve rapidly into metaphysical ones.” (p. 88), because metaphysics is, by definition, both “driven by its own need to such questions that cannot be answered by any experiential use of reason and of principles borrowed from such a use; and thus a certain sort of metaphysics has actually been present in all human beings as soon as reason has extended itself to speculation in them, and it will also always remain there.” (Kant, 1781/1998, p. 131)

In the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant rationalizes that metaphysics is a “battlefield of endless controversies”. Metaphysics revolves around an ‘indeterminate being’ conventionally known as God; however, as a term it persists beyond one encompassing name. It concerns a discursive tendency about “a being whose determination exceeds our cognitive power and an exercise in that knowledge “is required in order to complete the edifice of rational knowledge.”. Talbott (2021) reasons that this exercise “has repeatedly led to skepticism, relativism, Platonism, and other epistemological dead ends.”(p. 299). In the same vein, Stephen Paul Foster (1997) considers “philosophic history was a self-conscious, deliberate work of iconoclasm but was above all else critical.” (p. 331) but he adds that it is also by virtue of its relation to religion “a profound exercise in disillusionment.” (ibid. p. 332).

Metaphysics is a condition that led one philosopher to ponder, and rightly so, on the influence it exerts on us, showing that it is more about these questions’ existence than their results, “How else could we explain that the repetitive vacuity of the results of metaphysics has yet to stop anyone from returning to it” (Alain Adious, 2000, p. 185). Similarly Nietzsche

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<sup>27</sup> because that would justify its existence and its perpetuation.

(1883/2001) attests to this gripping influence of metaphysics and its effects on the psychology of those who ponder,

But to stand in the midst of this *rerum concordia discors*<sup>28</sup> and of this whole marvelous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence without questioning, without trembling with the craving and the rapture of such questioning, without at least hating the person who questions, perhaps even finding him faintly amusing-that is what I feel to be *contemptible* [...] This is my type of injustice.  
(p. 30)

From Nietzsche's quote we find the crisis of metaphysics is a fitting place to start our discussion. First, the problem of metaphysics starts from its inevitability. It follows directly from this its nature when postulated a priori or explored. "Metaphysics is subjectively actual; and then we will rightly ask: How is it (objectively) possible?" (Kant, 2004, p. 119). This account will be extended to an account of the death of God as it is emblematic in it.

To track down the crisis in metaphysics we have to run through historic elements of the history of Western epistemology as it touches upon the field of metaphysics starting from ancient Greeks all the way to modern theology; ontotheology, and modern critical philosophy of metaphysics.

Parmenides' Idealism, Plato's Theory of Forms, Aristotle's theory of primary substance, Aquinas' natural theology, Descartes Cartesian dualism, Kant's transcendental idealism, Hume's epistemological skepticism, Locke's empiricism, Spinoza's monistic metaphysics, Hegel, Fichte and Schelling's German idealism, Nietzsche's ex nihilism and subversive criticism, among numerous others have all in their important contributions to the field of metaphysics, willingly or unknowingly, properly pursued the same line of inquiry,

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<sup>28</sup> From Latin, meaning the harmonious discord of things.

namely, they raised the theological problem of God, traced a way through the labyrinth of the problem of God, expounded on it and sought entries into metaphysical knowledge which would equip the individual with grounded certainties only to be confronted with the indisputable complexity of the subject matter, leaving them harboring but uncertainty regarding the knowledge of God.

This uncertainty with regards to the difficulty of the philosopher's perusal finds ready mention in the introduction of Berkeley's (1710/1884) magnum opus *A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Understanding*, he writes,

we are insensibly drawn into uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow upon us as we advance in speculation, till at length, having wandered through many intricate mazes, we find ourselves just where we were, or, which is worse, sit down in a forlorn Scepticism. (p. 12)

Parmenides' metaphysics of *Being* chronicled in his poem *On Nature*<sup>30</sup> has made him the most predominant pre-Socratic philosopher. The poetic work of Parmenides<sup>31</sup> (late 6th-century BC-5th century BC) is a work of exercise in ontology, wherein he gets introduced to two ways of inquiry: *the Way of Seeming* and *The Way of Truth*. The critical difference between the two lies in their foundation for the obtainment of knowledge. While in the former the senses are the vessel of reasoning. But because their critical receptiveness is dubious, they are then dismissed by him and denied any logical credibility. The latter which rests primarily, like dialectics, on self-contradictory statements relies on logic and theoretical premises. However, that existence undermines any account of change and becoming but only one is true; thus, the general conclusion is that a thing is or is not as opposed to the kaleidoscope results from the senses which vouch for change and thus judged as mere illusion and are rejected on this ground

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<sup>30</sup> The poem is written primarily in hexameter verse.

<sup>31</sup> It describes the journey of Parmenides from darkness and into light where he recounts, or as he writes in the first person on the path to his encounter with the Goddess of justice where he is introduced to two ways of inquiry.

and denied any logical credibility. In short, all that can be known is deduced by the exclusive use of reason unassisted by the senses. Parmenides dramatizes these two paths to inquiry the best in a passage reminiscent of Nietzsche's Zarathustra. To that extent, he narrates,

Come now, I shall tell—and convey home the tale once you have heard—  
/just which ways of inquiry alone there are for understanding:/ the one, that  
[it] is and that [it] is not not to be,/ is the path of conviction, for it attends  
upon true reality,/ but the other, that [it] is not and that [it] must not be,/ this,  
I tell you, is a path wholly without report:/ for neither could you apprehend  
what is not, for it is not to be accomplished,/ nor could you indicate it. (qtd.  
in Palmer, 2009, p. 365)

But what we're most interested in Parmenides' philosophy is not his elaboration of an Existential judgment from the syllogism of the being and the non-being or his elevation of reason as the directive for sound logic for the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, but rather his attunement to and identification of the metaphysical crisis against a background of abstract beginnings despite the fact that the most interesting upshot of his demonstration revealed itself in the One, the Being, the Unchangeable and the Indivisible. The poem is certainly an intellectual celebration of the idea of the ideal and the unity of that ideal and with that ideal but it is also the wrestling of two philosophical systems of what would take the name of realism and idealism in an ongoing historical dialogue about the ineffability of God or "the fetishized Other".

Parmenides develops an extended meditation on ontological monism in the following excerpt, with arguably an agnostic twist<sup>32</sup>, he eloquently writes,

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<sup>32</sup> Which is perhaps lost to the remarkable cogency of what it guarantees in the passages quoted here and elsewhere in his poem. To digress, though this is not the object of my discussion, my reading of him as an agnostic here which might be controversial, or at least of his grasp of that/all which can be known, is based on an idealist assumption grounded in realism that his plenary view stands at the peak of his argument for idealism is in fact an alibi for realism. He states, "you can not know what is not" which is seemingly intended as an epistemic recap and a respectful gesture for the boundaries of human knowledge.

And the decision about these matter lies in this: it is or it is not; but it has in fact been decided, just as is necessary, to leave the one unthought and nameless (for no true way is it), and it has been decided that the one that it is indeed is genuine. And how could What Is be hereafter? And how might it have been?/ For if it was, it is not, nor if ever it is going to be: thus generation is extinguished and destruction unheard of. (qtd. in Palmer, 2009, 365)

The metaphysical dimension of Parmenides' poem hardly needs emphasis. It speaks for itself in the metaphysical crisis "the unshaken heart of well-rounded reality", a topography into which the events are cast<sup>33</sup>. Heidegger remarked that "The [Parmenides] fragment at the same time gives us the most ancient document that shows that, together with the path of Being, the path of Nothing must expressly be *thought*." (Badiou, 2015, p. 28) and there must be thought, in the Parmenidean thought, not because of the necessity of contradiction but the possibility of it, i.e. the possibility of the being and the possibility of the non-being and this is what Heidegger calls 'philosophy'. Alain Badiou (2015) argues in this regard that this conception of philosophy is the decision to think the dialectic of being and non-being, "the doctrine of the necessity of concurrently thinking the path of being and that of nothingness." (p. 29). Richard Geldard (2007) defensively argues that what Parmenides wanted to achieve was "a vision of the purity of being, without separating it from plurality" (Geldard, 2007, p. 64). Indeed, the above passage makes clear how remarkable his poetic celebration of eccentricities of thought is a testimony to the ineffability of God as purity of being, the issue of unity and plurality and the theoretical effort to envision or describe the non-self or the absolute self by means of conceiving limitations and negations of the relative or relativized self in the world of matter..

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<sup>33</sup>The pre-Socratic philosopher, Parmenides, born 515 BCE, proposed two ways to knowledge [a way of error and a way of truth]: one which relies on the senses and perception (empirical) and so it is an illusory and deceptive and divine path to truth. The proof he supplied was that reality is unchanging and change is but an illusion and true knowledge is in the former.

Moving to the tradition of Plato, we find, similarly, that his philosophical enterprise took on another idealistic dimension embedded in a critique of Absolute knowledge. In this abiding self-circular system, Plato sought to ascend to the transcendental, to the domain of Goodness. Plato's allegory of the cave, which in many respects resembles Aristotle's *underground men*, presupposes layers of existence, with one of a higher ontological position, and thus of knowledge penetrable by consciousness or speculation. But before it lays claims to that, it first implicitly distinguishes between the body and the soul. Therefore we find in it the first cartesian formulation, which asserts the coterminous existence of the dichotomy of soul and body. Within this system, it is accepted a priori as existent a higher realm that is outside the range of our subjective experience, that of the Ideas, but because the content of absolute knowledge is a circular self-justification, which the logical positivists dismiss as invalid, no mortal can have complete and absolute knowledge of them.

Platonic metaphysics proceeds methodically through an elaboration of a philosophy of nature and ends in his Theory of Forms or Theory of Ideas. Plato's metaphysics rests on the proposition that corporeal existence is derived from the existence of the Eternal, of the elements of objective totality wherein truth, beauty, and goodness are lodged<sup>34</sup>. And because the finite and the worldly are epistemically conditioned on this theory of Ideas, it follows an interpretative fiat of the latter on the former. He develops this conception largely by way of the necessity for a higher ontological reality, as evidenced in his Theory of Form.

W. K. C. Guthrie proposes three possible expositions latent in Plato's idea of the Good: the first is teleological (having to do with the end or purpose of life), the second is the knowledge that makes the world intelligible and from which reason derives the intelligibility of the world, and lastly, the cause that sustains the forms of all beings (causal antecedents that

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<sup>34</sup> Plato himself and his critics find faults with this worldview, especially in the glaring presence of negative qualities which absolve the Idea, or God, from the possession and the bearing of these qualities, which in turn jeopardize the narrative of Goodness.

arrives at a finitude, the First Cause). While we can easily make the connection here between Plato's idea of Good and the notion of God as traditionally understood. Two notable critics ask the same question, that is whether the Platonist notion of God differs from the Idea, and arrive at the same conclusion with two different formulations<sup>35</sup>. For Charles Cooper (1864) the eternal Ideas were the 'highest Being itself' and therefore are the same as God<sup>36</sup>. In a similar vein, Herbert Ernest Cushman (1910) argues that Plato's Idea is but the simplification of an understanding of the comprehensibility of the two worlds, one is presupposed and compressed in one idea<sup>37</sup>. (p. 148)

This point is never lost on Plato. In a remarkable *Timaeus* dialogue, Plato corroborates the above claim,

“Let us, then, state for what reason becoming and this universe were framed by him who framed them. He was good; and in the good, no jealousy in any matter can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself. That this is the supreme principle of becoming and of the order of the world, we must surely be right to accept from men of understanding. Desiring, then, that all things should be good and, so far as might be, nothing imperfect, God took over all that is visible—not at rest, but in discordant and unordered motion—and brought it from disorder into order, since he judged that order was in every way the better. (qtd. in Reginald E. Allen, 1991, p. 270)

From Parmenides' poetic medium to Plato's dramatic form, the problem of metaphysics morphed into yet other conceptual frameworks, and in the subsequent millennia, it shifted

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<sup>35</sup> That they hold the same epistemological content and ontological status.

<sup>36</sup> His deduction is unsurprisingly on the eternal forms of things from which materials derive their existences.

<sup>37</sup> See Herbert Ernest Cushman, *Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, Michigan State University, p. 148

dialectically and assumed both dogmatic, exegetical, and critical proportions answering the primordial question of metaphysics, that of God.

However, in keeping up with the pulse of idealistic metaphysics, we will leap over the theological and logical periods of the development of the metaphysical quest to Hegel's absolute idealism.

We proceed with Hegel<sup>38</sup> because interestingly enough, almost two hundred years ago, Hegel boldly and courageously declared that he had completed philosophy by achieving absolute knowledge<sup>39</sup>. Hegel had the philosopher's enthusiasm for a comprehensive philosophical system that starts with the aim of arriving at a complete understanding of all questions and the articulation of not only satisfactory answers but the seeing if those claims satisfy the criteria of objective rational truth that will respond to the epistemic condition and would not object to the condition of their being and the ultimate nature of reality, both physical and metaphysical.

In his quest for certainty, Hegel enlarged theoretically an arbitrary objectivity that grows out of subjective, knowing experience<sup>40</sup>. The guiding thread for his system and the center of his thought assumes the shape of 'genuine objectivity', which though it emanates from subjectivity or the immediate certainty of the consciousness, ultimately transgresses the barrier of subjectivity. Hegel writes, "the subjective consciousness of the absolute spirit is essentially and intrinsically a process, the immediate and substantial unity of which is the belief (Glaube) in the witness of the spirit as the certainty of objective truth" (qtd. in McRae, 2012, p. 95), it is, thus, a process wherein every moment is an appeasement of inherent contradictions. This posits the idea that the completeness of knowledge is a condition of developmental history that

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<sup>38</sup> A nineteenth-century German philosopher.

<sup>39</sup> We started with Hegel because his philosophical system is deliberately holistic. He freed his philosophy from the reduction of propositions, he enshrouded it with a complete structure that meets the criteria for a universal validity.

<sup>40</sup> Judged by many as a fairly grandiose claim.

stretches out in the temporal contingency in the dialectical sense, with history being the activity of the spirit.

It is clear from the foregoing that Hegelian philosophy bears the mark of realism in that it entrusted history with answering the most fundamental questions of being which may seem like an intellectual aberration<sup>41</sup> and a threat to plausible knowledge, especially of the transcendental<sup>42</sup>, but in it we see a different kind of approach, that the system of Hegel is making a strong claim for idealism from realistic prerequisites; therefore, if Platonism is top-down, Hegelianism is bottom-up<sup>43</sup>.

Hegel's system as it has an intimate association with *Absolute Knowledge* grounds its groundlessness in the Absolute Spirit, in a sort of permanent escapism from subjectivity<sup>44</sup> as it unfolds to chase *bona fide* objectivity in the continuous formation of the world<sup>45</sup>. George Vassilacopoulos (2008) aptly defines this *Absolute Knowledge* as that which "withstands the opposition between the infinite command and its finite reception." (Ashton et al., 2008, p. 303)

Therefore, his metaphysics or first philosophy culminates in *Absolute Spirit*. This Absolute Spirit, because it is endowed with self-sufficiency, ostensibly overcomes all possible negations and limitations by overcoming the illusion of appearance which alienates us from the essence.

Undeniably, Hegel's philosophy is that of the essences and a 'Philosophy of Revelation'. The subject's claim to knowledge in the Hegelian system should harmonize with the object or concept which unravels itself in the process of consciousness for the objective of revealing the deficiency as well as the complexities that obscure the previous stance in an

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<sup>41</sup> As well as a metaphysical anomaly.

<sup>42</sup> To satisfy his own criteria, Hegel subsumed dualism to a loaded "genuine objectivity" thought so that the reality and essential nature of its objects are penetrated.

<sup>43</sup> This is understandable considering how the Hegelian tradition famously concedes to the historical.

<sup>44</sup> and the suppression of immediate variables

<sup>45</sup> Though we noted earlier that in his philosophical system, subjectivity is simulated as paradigmatic; the escapism from it in the sense of this passage should not hold a negative connotation. Subjectivism is relied upon because it divulges the transient character of all events, and if every phase is transitory, truth is worked out in the dialectic of the preceding and the following which resolves itself in a synthesis. Because ultimately in it, there is the presupposition that it meets the truth conditions of objective truth. "The individual is the absolute form, i.e., he is the *immediate certainty* of himself" in the immediate certainty of consciousness

exercise of phenomenology in which consciousness cycles through new formations until it “no longer needs to go beyond itself”, hence the shift from reason to spirit.

To come back to what has been said before, there appears to be an immanent problem that we pick up quickly when we observe the conflation—at least theoretically— between a subjectively generated objectivity, and the solution that Hegel implicitly offers for the purpose of reaching this ‘genuine objectivity’ which is to be regarded not in how it appears but in its essential nature (Cunningham, 1908, p. 629). It should be mentioned that the nature of this essence should be objective and it is as such. “Hegel returns to the most negative that may be thought, to the concept in which there is least to be *known*, the one that, as he says, is as free as possible from every subjective determination and is, in his sense, the most objective” (qtd. in White, 1951, p. 18). A propos of this, Cunningham (1908) argues that this is what Hegel intends when he says that “objective thought transcends the individual experience” (ibid. p. 11).

However, Schelling, a contemporary to Hegel decried it as trivial and not in the least entailing “universal validity” (White, 1951, p. 18). Schelling also ascribes the limits of the scope of the Hegelian system to the “suppression of the subject” and argues that it “contributes to a misleading semblance of objective developmental necessity.” (ibid. p. 17). Contemporarily speaking and in a similar vein, Joseph Flay (1984) makes the striking remark that although Hegel made a remarkable solution to the epistemological impasse, he thoroughly and categorically reworked traditional notions about the essential quest for certainty<sup>46</sup>. "Hegel took exception to the way in which this quest for certainty had been carried out in the tradition" (p. 8)

If it may not be clear so far, the reason we ran through this brief exposition of Hegel’s philosophy is to understand the relevance of the question of God in the Hegelian system. William Maker (2000) contends that Hegel elected history to a paramount position so as to

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<sup>46</sup> Adding that “Hegel’s unique solution to the thematic and methodological problems involved in its undertaking he altered radically the traditional notions about this basic quest for certainty.” (Flay, 1984, p. 1).

understand God as the Absolute (p. 33), and so we recall St. Augustine's intriguing remark that total knowledge is a requirement for the understanding of God. The relevance of this question can be glimpsed from his *magnum opus* "*Phenomenology of Spirit*" in which he allocated the second chapter to the theme of religion. Hence, there is no denying that the concept of God bears an immediate relation to him.

In this regard, Hegel is more in line with the tradition of Spinoza who bases his understanding of God in grounding Him to the logic of essence within a wider understanding of the world and nature <sup>47</sup>. Understandably so, Hegel nowhere negated religion or God and understood both as revealing and manifesting themselves in the first place as existing and in the second place as designated as such to be revealed. A fact that led many scholars to derive the conclusion that his philosophy is undeniably theological. To posit his philosophy as such is to consider him a philosophical metaphysician and a theologian as well who argues from the standpoint of a certain epistemological foundation. Indeed, Hegel fulfills the metaphysical requisite by grounding knowledge and basing judgment in the absolute unity of spirit, and argues that God also makes himself known in the Absolute finite Spirit transcending its own finitude.

Though Hegel's approach to this task exposed the cracks in his system and amplified furthermore the crisis in metaphysics, the aspiration for a complete system of knowledge proved to be incomplete because in lifting history to an epistemic authority, it itself abolishes final statements/claims to finitude and completion because it is still within the range of circular causality<sup>48</sup>.

"This religion which is manifest to itself, is in the second place not only manifest but is also the religion which is designated as revealed. By this is understood

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<sup>47</sup> Spinoza being the naturalist that he is, views God from the lens of the "universal corporeal Nature".

<sup>48</sup> It proved an attempt to "circumscribe the entire realm of the concept and all possible conceptual moments within a logical circle."

that, on the one hand, it has been revealed by God, that God has made himself known to man and, on the other, that it has come to man from outside, that it has been given" (qtd in. Lauer, 1983, p. 212).

Though Hegel, among many other philosophers in the classical German philosophy<sup>49</sup>, started their journey in idealism<sup>50</sup> “by repeatedly mocking the whole metaphysical tradition of opposing any fully transcendent (unknown, “in itself”) realm to the world” (Ameriks, 2006, p. 9), he planted his feet firmly in it with a certain acuteness to historical contingency and to the vagaries of the humans’ condition all the while setting his hopes high in closing the knowledge gaps revealing yet another crisis in metaphysics. And Hegel, in spite of being a successor to Kant, is to be found in the dogmatic phase of metaphysical inquiry

Now turning to the eighteenth-century metaphysical crisis, to the philosopher of that century Immanuel Kant (1724-1802) whose contribution to philosophy was largely metaphysical in scope and complexity. We find his metaphysical/speculative inquiry departing radically, albeit anachronistically, from Hegel’s complete philosophical system, vis., from dogmatic philosophizing —from which he was later awakened from its slumber<sup>51</sup>— to pursue a skeptical and critical metaphysical inquiry. The concerns he raises are deep and compelling particularly in the field of metaphysics for the detour in his philosophy cast him in the ranks of Pyrrhonian skeptics and put the label of agnosticism on his philosophy. Such interpretive claim is straightaway derived from his *Prolegomena* where he urges us to ask the important and looming question: whether such a thing as metaphysics is even possible at all. This marks a crucial step in his skeptical tendency because ideally what follows from the question of the

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<sup>49</sup> Notably Schelling and Fichte who belong to the period of classical German philosophy which sought the development of different systems of German Idealism

<sup>50</sup> Idealism in our discussion does not exclusively denote anti-realism as such, that there can be no mind-independent reality or existence.

<sup>51</sup> Kant narrates two critical episodes that nudged him from his dogmatic slumber. The first, as he writes in *Prolegomena* (1783), “the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my research in the field of speculative philosophy.” The second was in a 1798 letter to Grave where Kant expressed his skeptical problems about metaphysics and confessed how the antinomies awoke him from his dogmatic slumber.

existence of the ultimate is hitherto an uncertainty as regards all claims to knowledge. More to the point, this question should not be viewed in isolation, but rather tied to the conceptual necessity of God and the epochal necessity and why it has been brought up by him as well.

The first question Kant prioritizes the answer to in his mature work *Critique of Pure Reason* is ontological ‘*what can I know?*’ followed by an ethical one ‘*What ought I to do?*’ to which he answers that if our interest is knowledge then what is grounded and positive is that we are unfit to participate in the knowledge of this ubiquitous and demanding problem<sup>52</sup>. Kant’s pertinent remark over the precedence of knowledge within the limits of reason brings to light his focus on the privation of transcendental epistemology that departs from implausible theoretical claims so as to designate the dependency of the theoretical over the practical and the supremacy of the latter on the former which would later inform his practical philosophy of morality. Ultimately, because he saw the difficulty in attaining absolute knowledge and recognized as limited and finite the realm of the phenomenal world tangled in a web of perception and apperception and to overcome the limitations of supersensible metaphysics, Kant would demolish speculative metaphysics to erect one which is based on moral consciousness (Emil Fackenheim, 1996, p. 9) In short, Kant validated theism through the directives of moral consciousness and if anything, this is an implicit capitulation to the necessity of metaphysics. Indeed, at one point he admitted to the inevitability of this enterprise because it is bound by the interest of human reason<sup>53</sup>.

In order to do that he relied on two pillars for the reformation of metaphysics: the first is the exclusion of traditional metaphysical claims about transcendental reality so as not to

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<sup>52</sup> “Hence if our concern is knowledge, then at least this much is certain and established: that we shall never be able to partake of knowledge regarding those two problems.” “All my reason's interest (speculative as well as practical) is united in the following three questions: 1. *What can I know?* 2. *What ought I to do?* 3. *What may I hope?* Immanuel Kant (1996), *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, p. 735.

<sup>53</sup> “no one can cast off metaphysical questions, because they are too closely tied to the interest of human reason,” Immanuel Kant

chance upon the implications of Pyrrhonian equipollence and the inclusion of synthetic a priori concepts which belong to metaphysics. The second is the advancing of such concepts in a manner that can refute skeptical positions (Forster, 2008, p. 34). “Metaphysics must find its place “on the lowly ground of experience [sic] and common sense” (George S. Morris, 1882, p. 35). In an empirical fashion, Kant placed knowledge of the supersensible world over the limits of theoretical reason. Nonetheless, in the context of our discussion, the rationale behind the predominance of practicality seemed to anticipate the preference for teleological argumentation and the rationalization of teleology prepares the ground for intellectual certainty, which in turn dispenses with uncertainties. Unlike Hegel who worked out a way out of the cogency of the thesis and antithesis, Kant saw inherent faults with the *Antinomies* and placed them on an equal par arguing that they are equally lucid, compelling, and hold “irresistible proofs”<sup>54</sup>.

We turn to Kant for insights on this point. About metaphysics, he wrote in a letter in 1765 from the first publication of *Critique of Pure Reason*,

I saw at that time that this putative science lacked a touchstone with which to distinguish truth from deception, since different but equally persuasive metaphysical propositions lead inescapably to contradictory conclusions, with the result that one proposition inevitably casts doubt on the other. (Forster, 1998, p. 191)

Merging his view about metaphysics and the intellectual uncertainty resulting from the antinomies alone, we get a clear picture of the conception of God within the Kantian tradition. Within the ambit of his metaphysics, he contends that the conception of God is “theoretically undecidable for us” (Gava, 2023, p. 210)

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<sup>54</sup> See Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

Fully cognizant of the present ontological and epistemological condition and confronted with the crisis of metaphysics<sup>55</sup>—whose solution can never be attained but through a foregoing critique of pure reason—Kant is found suggesting that “it is considered more advisable still to give up all claims to metaphysics entirely, in which case, if one only remains true to one’s intention, there is nothing to be said against it” (*Prolegomena*) However, as someone to whom the notion of ambivalence seems most attractive, the last condition may not be fulfilled. Eventually, the notion of God would crystallize from the form of practical reason into an impersonal and personal necessity, hence unmasking a teleological argument amid the conserving of an agnostic position. Consequently, the conception of God is reduced to the account of ideals and values driven out from human experience and extended to accommodate the God of theology<sup>56</sup>. However, despite this utilitarian move, Kant’s stance regarding the unknowability of God (still yet embedded in the structure of the Antinomies) overshadows any other claims. He remains vacillating between the skeptical and the critical tradition<sup>57</sup>. Overall, Kant’s rational efforts were devoted to the consolidation of critique and the exposition of the transcendental.

The question of metaphysics was also a supreme challenge to nineteenth-century philosophers. The historical rationalization of theology, which we have considered in this chapter thus far, culminated in strengthening the position of rationalism which seemingly, as it is understood by some historical accounts, left no leeway for metaphysical probing<sup>58</sup>; however, eventually it ended up assuming the form of critique of metaphysics which is essentially anti-dogmatic that it ended up dethroning theology and metaphysics momentarily.

In a manner commensurate with the critical impulse of the rationalists, nineteenth-century philosophy looked suspiciously on the instrumentalization of religion, faith, or

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<sup>55</sup> Man’s predisposition to ground metaphysics as a science which is by definition elusive and unfeasible.

<sup>56</sup> Even as a proof for divine revelation.

<sup>57</sup> So as to suspend judgment by force of the indeterminable and the indeterminacy.

<sup>58</sup> Though this could not be further from the truth.

rationality for the purposes of validating theology resulting in making God irrelevant but still lengthy philosophical sermons of the likes of Nietzsche's *Twilight of The Idols*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* could not do without participation in this historical debate. The nineteenth-century metaphysics was thinly disguised as atheistic not because a certain philosopher of the century made the bold move to sound the death knell for God or to report on his absence but because it was a valid representation of the conjuncture at which metaphysics was found. Indeed, the force by which they imbued their metaphysical and anti-metaphysical stance (critical, dialectical, hermeneutical, positivistic, and even theological)<sup>59</sup> made them allies, to use Talbott's expression<sup>60</sup> "in the kind of solution that they proposed to the crises in epistemology that they addressed." (Talbott, 2021, p. 55). The crisis in epistemology and in metaphysics was most and foremost the crisis of metaphysics.

## **2. 2. The Limits of Knowledge and The Unknowability of God**

Ahistorical reading of metaphysics presupposes, by default as well as by the definitional standards of the subject matter of metaphysics, a crisis of metaphysics embedded in its conception and the nature of this inquiry. With "nearly all concerns resolve rapidly into metaphysical ones." (Mander, 2011, p. 88), the intuitive course of human reason when engaging with preliminary questions has been to seek out or posit the existence of a necessary and unconditioned Being so as to strengthen the philosophical foundations of metaphysics; however, this turns out to be roughly half the metaphysical endeavor<sup>61</sup>. The next task is to prove the knowability of this Being. Indeed, it appears that our philosophers agree with Aquinas on the fundamental question of existence and the limits of reason in facing this issue.

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<sup>59</sup> See Alain Badiou (2000), *Metaphysics and the Critique of metaphysics*.

<sup>60</sup> which he used on the metaphysician Kant and the naturalist and skeptical Hume.

<sup>61</sup> William J. Talbott contends that during the time of Plato, the basis of knowledge was dubious and problematic and reasoning was in a predicament and in a state of crisis because even when we know that problems could be solved by deductively applying rules of inference from supposedly well-founded premises to reach valid conclusions the source of infallible premises which is somehow arbitrary and would be rejected by positivists because the validity of it, if any would be by chance.

Aquinas rightly says, "Once it is grasped *that* something exists, it remains to be investigated how it exists, in order that what it is may be known." Aquinas (1485/2014, p. 55). Unexpressed in this remarkable passage is the unmistakable exclusion of the possibility of any human knowledge about the Being on two levels:

1. Embarking on the prefatory work of the Being requires preposition (under which accounts of epiphenomenalism and causality are subsumed) that propounds the likeness of the tangible with the intangible which cannot be proven as such which, in turn, leads only to conceptual analysis in a circular argument.

2. How it exists surpasses any analogical similarity with sensual existence for this can not be proven logically or empirically because "we cannot subject the subject divine (uncreated) essence or nature to the semantics of reason or conceptual intelligibility." (Yannaras, p. 63). Therefore, engaging in methods of demonstration would prove to be futile<sup>62</sup>. Regarding this, Wittgenstein said, "whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, [...] demonstrate to him that he had failed to give meaning to certain signs in his propositions."

As these two maxims make evident, the problem of metaphysics is that it is presuppositional and the farthest knowledge with regards to metaphysics is the knowledge of the unknowability of God. "The extreme point of the human knowledge of God consists in knowing that God is unknown to us in the sense that his proper being passes beyond all that we can understand of it." (qtd. in Bouillard, 1968, p. 109),

From the preceding discussion and the literature on the systems of philosophy, what Schopenhauer calls "the metaphysical need"<sup>63</sup>, as he remarked in *The World as Will and Idea*, does not synchronize with that which would allegedly bring closer the object of knowledge

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<sup>62</sup> This realization has led Comte to make the sardonic remark that metaphysics "is in fact nothing but a form of theology gradually enervated by dissolving simplifications".

<sup>63</sup> This is not a secularized aim towards a transcendental understanding with dubious worldly objectives but a genuine longing for the divine, for God.

(i.e., God) for the would-be-knowing subject, namely, the “metaphysical capacity” (Schopenhauer, 2011, p. 362) and the mechanics of the metaphysical need would gain in knowledge what deviates it from metaphysical ponderings and would deviate the subject from that aim with which he started his endeavor, which stimulates nothing but oblivion of the initial subject matter.

In relation to this, Heidegger argues that being (contextually speaking of God) *as such* is concealed from metaphysics which in turn incites and fortifies forgetfulness; however, this forgetfulness is itself “the unknown but enduring impetus to metaphysical questioning.” (Heidegger, 1959/1999, p. 19). Despite this, the limits of knowledge nourished and encouraged the appraisal of freedom and the concession to other worldly matters, as well as the focus on human nature.

Ever since the Antiquity, the Western tradition was involved in discussions of the polarization of the physical and the metaphysical, the phenomena and the noumena, matter, and soul; and if we consider what has happened since that period and was dragged along the subsequent millennia down to the nineteenth and twentieth century, and despite repeated attempts to settle novel issues, there was always something threatening the balance of intellectual breakthroughs, vis., steady eruptions of skepticism in the philosophic tradition which signal epistemological and ontological uncertainty not of a certain *superior being* as many metaphysical accounts with their linguistic dimension would have it (the Demiurge for Plato, *Absolute Spirit* for Hegel, the Lawmaker for Kant...etc.), but of the *Supreme Being* in the most orthodox conception of the concept of God.

Philosophers have shown concerted efforts in the process of conceptualization of this *supreme being* and the desire to transgress the ineffable character of it to ground it in intelligible knowledge while also developing systems in which the alterity of God was inevitable<sup>64</sup>. We

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<sup>64</sup> One discerns that metaphysics or first philosophy does not endure enclosure, therefore revealing a renewed interest, albeit a persistent one, in the question of God. From a critical perspective, it is not that which comes to pass, but that which exists to stay.

gather evidence that these metaphysicians and thinkers knew that their systems could not stand the test of this uncertainty in their quest for certainty and that there is always a residual question from philosophical speculation with mostly the problem of God coming into view.

Indeed, although Presocrates came up with the Ideal from which they derive their knowledge of the world as well as the supersensible world and to settle the contention over infallible knowledge (Parmenides with the *Idea*, Plato with the *Good*, Aristotle with the *Unmoved Mover* or *Nous*) and others that follow them or diverged from their tradition, namely the Neo-Platonists, the rationalists, the empiricists, the logical-positivists, the objective authority and the insolubility of the metaphysical thesis would still be a source of anguish and controversy and would prove to sit uncomfortably with the demands for certainty.

The idea of God as a conceptual reduction of the ultimate in the Platonic sense makes possible the intelligibility of the ineffable, but the unintelligibility of it will remain unavoidable. This is a restatement of the ontological and epistemological uncertainty and a blatant declaration of the unknowability of God.

At which point the unknowability of God has been understood as conventional wisdom, we do not profess to know, although there are many philosophers who, in their metaphysical inquiry begin with this presumption or ultimately end up with it. Two things are sure to exist, that is the limits of human knowledge and the unknowability of God.

### **2. 3. Modernity and The Death of God: A Very Concise History**

Contrary to the non-historicity of the problem of God, the death of God is an historical event with far greater consequences in philosophy, theology, and religion. Certainly, the philosophical and religious implications of the 19th and 20th centuries have a higher validity to our understanding of the question of God. However, despite the Nietzschean proclamation of the death of God in the nineteenth century, a number of critics agree that the issue has been brewing for a millennium of metaphysical speculation.

In tracing the genealogy of this idea, Yannaras (2015) enumerates substantial steps in the historical progression of “atheistic theism” which would consequently annihilate God<sup>65</sup>. Yannaras did so by examining the paradigms which prevailed over the metaphysical question in the Western metaphysical tradition from scholasticism up to the modernist milieu.

He starts by observing the somehow problematic conceptual containment within the framework of scholastic tradition which directly identifies and establishes the link between human reasoning and the divine mind. During this intellectual period, metaphysics was subjected to rational demonstration<sup>66</sup>. Descartes, whose thought did much to determine the course of rationalism namely in establishing rules for reason, qualified the mind to reach the truth of existence and ascribed to human reasoning the unmatched ability to establish facts beyond any reasonable doubt. Descartes’ epistemic foundation rests upon the tradition of Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, and Aquinas among others, who shifted from theology to rationalism (all the while remaining theological rationalists) and established rational deduction as the proper method in science. These theistic rationalists were committed to substantiating the existence of God by conceiving its very idea. Yannaras finds faults with the projection of the ‘absolutized self’ onto an abstracted formation of an idea.

with disputes about the infinite, since, finite as we are, it would be perverse to attempt to make any determinations about it, turning it, as it were, into something finite that we could conceive . . . since only one who considers his own mind infinite can feel obliged to reflect upon this subject. (p. )

Admittedly, critics of this period saw the philosophy of Descartes, which holds the promise of restoring theological metaphysics, as doing a huge disservice to Western

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<sup>65</sup> Modern metaphysics corroborates atheism in that its precepts hold that the limits of knowledge are only temporary and that the gap in knowledge can be overcome and will be bridged in due time.

<sup>66</sup> On this issue, Yannaras (2003) writes, “precisely because it offers an absolutized rational affirmation of God, European metaphysics prepares for the possibility of its own rational refutation. The death of God is but the end result of the historical unfolding of this absolutized and double-edged rationalism, which took place in the nations of Western Europe over the span of approximately a millennium” (p. 22)

metaphysics by endowing the subject with epistemic referential determinacy and by conceptualizing and absolutizing God as the Absolute Man, consequently adumbrating the *Übermensch*<sup>67</sup>.

Next, marked by deferential extension to that of Descartes, and extended from apriori knowledge of the inner into the outer world, natural theology validates the contingency of essences on one *substance*. The critical focus was on Spinoza. Indeed, the central Spinozan metaphysical claim is that there exists only one substance, *Deus sive Natura*, and every other existence is but a finite mode of its evanescent manifestation. Spinoza's metaphysics has implications for the transversal leap it makes from theology to philosophical metaphysics and is commonly criticized, like Descartes' rational foundationalism, for being but theology dressed in intellectual garb. Spinoza identified God with nature and his examination of the Bible is commonly found as the "first truly historical inquiry into its genesis as a natural historical phenomenon, rather than as an infallibly inspired work."

Furthermore, within the ambit of natural theology emerged Leibniz's systematization of the rational proofs for God's existence. He puts forth, or rather arranges, and systematizes four arguments that demonstrate the existence of God: the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the argument of sufficient reason, and the teleological argument.

The historical rationalization of theology into 'structured Scientia' has emphatically stressed the rational dimension of metaphysical inquiry which prescribed correctives to theology that ultimately culminated in strengthening the position of rationalism.

The monism of the subject that ensued from this historical juncture has allowed a context from a change in epistemological precedence. That is from reason and ideas to sense experience<sup>68</sup>. This is not to say that during this period the pendulum swung in the direction of

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<sup>67</sup> The detriment Descartes inflicted upon Western metaphysics is when he arbitrarily established the subject as the indubitable incipience of knowledge and by conceptualizing and theorizing God as the Absolute Man.

<sup>68</sup> The rationale behind this shift has been the mistrust of logical and non-sensical conclusions triggered by the skepticism of logical claims to reality truth.

empiricism exclusively as empiricism and rationalism have always existed alongside one another in the ongoing debate of intellect-experience accounts of reality and the ideal but it needed to be stressed because the tools for valid scientific knowledge gives considerable space to inquire the perceived world to remedy for the imminences of the rationalist methodology by putting heavy emphasis on perception and deduction.

The methodology of empiricism and empirical knowledge which was developed had weakened the rationalist chord and bereaved metaphysics from rationalist claims to knowledge of reality. Metaphysics morphed into a matter of inquiry about existence that can only be revealed empirically. As a result of this radical shift, Yannaras contends, “the very ‘supreme Being’ of logical certainty and rational and rational ‘proofs’ is now separated from the scope of human experience by the barrier that marks off real discovery from mere conjecture, the empirically existent from the empirically non-existent” (p. 28)

However, the most powerful factor in these shifts was the unexpected development of scholasticism of apophatic theology<sup>69</sup> as a theoretical weapon in addition to logical demonstrations. This scholastic apophaticism was adopted by the protestant reformation which ultimately paved the way to *pietism*<sup>70</sup>. The Lutheran God is hidden; however, this is only “the negative backdrop for God’s positive revelation.” (Johannes Aakjær Steenbuch, 2022, p.79) Existentially speaking, this revelation is moderated by human experience and this gives it a historical dimension because man is at the mercy of the contingent forces of history and it grounds it in a realistic perspective. “There is no immediate knowledge of God, the revelation of God is itself a mediated revelation...God as revealed is precisely a hidden God.” (Yannaras, p. 30)

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<sup>69</sup> Apophatic theology or negative theology is the theological thinking that advances knowledge of what is not God or what God is in negative statements.

<sup>70</sup> Pietism is a historical phenomenon that emerged in the late seventeenth century. Pietism prioritizes individual religious experience, and it rejects rationalist conception of God and instead cherishes moral expediency all the while maintaining a distance with knowledge and ‘sometimes even lapsing into agnosticism’.

Negative theology reveals the inability to arrive at an immediate knowledge of God, and that it is only mediated through the world, and since there is no human experience and thus no understanding of reality but from the world, it follows that knowledge of the transcendence and God happens through religious symbolism (perceptively material substance).

The transcendent that is revealed by any particular symbol, then, is disclosed within human experience precisely as transcending the symbol; it is the whole of the transcendent that is mediated. But at the same time that wholeness and transcendence is limited, specified, focused and thematized by the finite constitution of the mediating symbol. (Haight, 2014, pp. 87-88)

Nonetheless, despite its rejection of rationalism, the ‘theology of the cross’ still maintains a fundamental aspect of rationalism, which restrains the limits for knowledge within the limits of subjectivity where the subject turns inwardly to the infinite rational essence from which he derives knowledge about the world. The subject becomes the dominant authority on any knowledge. This is the monism of the subject that undermines positive theology by removing God from objective experience, thus paving the way for skepticism, relativism, and agnosticism in the dialectic of the reconciliation of the logic of positive with the logic of negative.

The shift then was from theology to rationalism, from rationalism to empiricism, and from empiricism to idealism. From empiricism emerged a feeble strand of utilitarianism and practical expediency, especially as the deontology that Kant developed. The basis for this deontology is transcendently unconditional and it consists in grounding values in categorical imperatives or moral requirements, thus changing the system of values and their theological content into a secular content that progressed and morphed into liberalism. Following that, the absolutized spirit took over, and the transcendent has been further pulled and mounted by historical progress (Hegel’s dialectic) which further eroded the status of God.

It appears from this that man occupied the liminal space of longing for not only the intelligibility and totality which answer all his possible questions but also the need to be in it, to dethrone absolute objectivity to occupy it. It is at the margin of this subjectivity<sup>71</sup> and hyper subjectivity that Western metaphysics allowed an assault on God to be made.

Unexpectedly and unintentionally, God had received repeated blows so much so that the foundations upon which He stood have been shaken by the same metaphysical tradition that sought to rationalize and approximate Him to the perplexed subject who could not trace him but to bend his conception to reason, nature, sense experience, and to anthropomorphize him or develop that which altruistically substitute his presence. In short, the primacy of rationality, nature, and subjectivity overthrew God, whose presence was and still remains uncertain in a history that has revealed his impending presence. A crisis that the later philosophers/philosophies would inherit leading up to the death of God.

Thereupon, the hypothetical event of the death of God ascribed to Nietzsche (which would have started the work of deconstruction) was interpreted by many to be symptomatic of the religious malaise and the crisis of faith that overtook the Western world somewhere around the Nineteenth-century. However, Nietzsche's proclamation that *got ist tot* has, in fact, been traced to Antiquity but this is a long way far from our current discussion. The idea of God's death, in addition to being a central idea in the theology of Christianity, has been referred to in several philosophical and literary works (as a semantics as well as an idea), particularly in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), in an 1854 poem by Gérard de Nerval entitled "Le Christ aux Oliviers" "Dieu est mort!", and in Victor Hugo's 1862 *Les Misérables* "God is dead, perhaps" among others, all predating Nietzsche's proclamation of God's death that appeared

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<sup>71</sup> At one point the pendulum has swung in the direction of faith, with Kierkegaard radicalizing the essence of Protestantism and subjectifying the religious experience, Kierkegaard's metaphysical philosophy urged the subjects to cultivate an immediate relationship with God through personal faith.

many times in the *Gay Science* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* which was later popularized particularly in theological studies (theothanatology).

Hegel, who parted from the Christian idea of God, allowed a context within the paradigms of dialectical logic for the interpretation of God (the Father) as reincarnated in Christ and the crucifixion suggests a double death of God; the dialectic therefore resolves itself abstractedly in the Absolute Consciousness. Indeed, ontotheological abstraction, by definition, submits God to the logic of the finite. The God who is incarnated in a body and the God who lives in a finite space should go through the process of death. "God's death identifies God with the world but equally distances the world from God since the world is so distant that God dies there." (Connor Cunningham, 2005, p.104)

However, despite the semantic weight this death may carry, Hegel's development of this thought, explicitly so, the death of God in this context does not hold a negative connotation. The shift of absolute spirit into self-consciousness and then into knowledge<sup>72</sup> is but the clarification of the muddled philosophy of alterity (which would later round off in the relation of no relation) in light of the exigencies of the subjective experience<sup>73</sup>. Readers of Kant proposed that this very idea of God's death aided him to shun an "ontotheological understanding of difference." (ibid.)

From this was developed the antithesis of the Absolute Consciousness; that is nihilism. Because the subject matter is responsive to finitude, the philosophy of nihilism came to supplant all the previous philosophies which were in Nietzsche's regard but perspectives<sup>74</sup>. therefore leaving no space for metaphysical pondering but the annihilation of all reactive

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<sup>72</sup> "which preserves itself into its otherness" Cunningham (2005, p. 104). I=I "the loss of substance and of its appearance over against consciousness"

<sup>73</sup> "God, in being dead, is not over and against the world"

<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche's perspectivism can be regarded as constituting a critical arm against rigid philosophies whom he judged as being affected by the philosophers' perspectives in building and consolidating their philosophies which engenders limitations on their theorizing practices. "Perspectival objectivity" which ostensibly infiltrates subjective appearances to better grasp the world subverts that it aims to strengthen.

forces. Certainly, the nineteenth-century philosophy of Nietzsche was the height of victory of reactive forces which provisioned that very nihilism with disintegrating truth. Nihilism is overall a reaction to the recurrence of the same in bold deterministic and dogmatic statements. And so in the grinding process of this dogma, all that pertains to human existence was rejected. meaning was lost, values were lost, knowledge was denied, and man was alienated from existence. This was translated in philosophy and theology into the rejection of the idea of God, in atheism, but more so than that it aggravated not only the metaphysical crisis which it sought to trespass but the crisis of the modern subject in a meaningless world.

Feeling out of joint in this philosophical calamity, to remedy that breach and to restore meaningfulness back to man, Nietzsche breached his stance regarding perspectivism and reverted to a form of controlled nihilism. He writes, "I contradict as no one has contradicted before, and nevertheless I am the reverse of a negative spirit." (Nietzsche, 1927, p. 924). Indeed, his verbal confession mostly finds its expression not in the enterprise of philosophizing with the hammer (although this provided him with the incentive to philosophize) but in the building up of a distinct vision which crystallized in the philosophy of the will to power and *amor fati*. Therefore, the death of God in the Nietzschean sense has more to do with the adjustment with the modernist status quo than it is the subversion of the immortality of God. In short, the Nietzschean will to will supplanted the Socratic will to truth which is but a nail in the coffin of nihilism.

In fact it is important to quote his famous passage about the death of God at length to clear him of nihilistic charges. In his 1882 work *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche's madman felt strongly about this event that left him looking for God amid the mockery of his newfound surroundings. This important passage is worth quoting at length. In it, Nietzsche wrote,

*The madman.*—Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I

seek God!”—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried; “I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

Nietzsche was obviously deeply concerned with life post-iconoclasm and with the aftermath of this nihilism and it shows in the direct links he makes about the killing of God and the damnation of men in the absence of any system of meaning<sup>75</sup>. His participation in secularizing the world even more by passing on the torch of responsibility to man betrays any commitment to indulge in a nihilistic narrative, but instead reveals his profound concern for the atonement from this grave sin. Hence, by realizing the vulnerability of the man he was

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<sup>75</sup> “Nietzsche, in announcing the death of God, announces the current climate of nihilism. The highest values—God, truth, morality, etc.—have collapsed.” Duane Armitage (2017), *Martin Heidegger and The Death of God*, p. 26

adamant to bring everything to man's modest epistemological level so as to uplift him to the ranks of gods and twice he emphasized such prescription. Nietzsche declared through Zarathustra that "this meant to *me* knowledge: all that is deep shall ascend to my height" (Nietzsche, 1883/1997, p. 122), and that 'summit and abyss - these are now comprised together!' (ibid. , p. 148). Briefly "providing surrogate forms of transcendence, plugging the gaps where God had once been" (Terry Eagleton, 2014, p. ix)

To a greater degree than does Hegel's or any of the other death of God statements, Nietzsche's strand of it was rather a description of the ills of modernity. It received more elaboration because it outgrew its initial scope from diagnosis to a secularized solution, thus bringing to light the anthropological dimension that gives rise to the *Übermensch*. The rise of the *Übermensch* results in increasing the value accorded to the triumph of the positive spirit over the ontotheological one.

What would be made clear in the following century about the idea of the death of God is that it, too, made a deep impression on many philosophers and thus it resurfaced in various guises. Sartre discussed 'la mort de dieu' at some length in his 1942 essay called *A New Mystic*. Heidegger applied the theme of death to the question of Being<sup>76</sup>, and Buber's 1952 eclipsed God as well as the rise in thanatology show that there is no terminal consensus over the problem of God or his putative death<sup>77</sup>. Thomas Trotter (1965) suggests that the variations in the proclamation of the whereabouts of God namely Sartre's deceased God, Heidegger's absent God, and lastly Buber's eclipsed God demonstrate the precariousness of the definition of the 'death of God' (p. 44). It ushered in the age of "anxiety, alienation, irrationalism and boredom." (Ice & Carey; 1967, p. 104)

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<sup>76</sup> and it had an important implication in Heidegger's approach to finite knowledge of the Dasein or the Being-in-the-world. Heidegger remarked that the killing of God is identified by double absences and double negations: "the No - more of the gods that have fled and the Not - yet of the God that is coming".

<sup>77</sup> This niche inspired the death of God theologies in the sixties and the seventies. Of the remarkable figures of this inclination, we find William Hamilton and J. J. Altizer.

The death of God continued to be subject to modern sensibilities. Despite many claims to the contrary view of atheism, philosophers and theologians still grappled with this issue and any attempt to bring together the nuances in the understanding of God's death revealed but the semantic complexity and hermeneutic interpretations. What we gain by comparative reading is that in the wake of post-metaphysical and up to the later half of the twentieth century the Death of God continuum opened many venues of interpretations; God's volatile death, God's murder, and God's absence are but the opening statements for very sophisticated philosophies.

But it should be stressed that the view that the death of God is a symptom of modernity leaves unexplained history. Certainly, it furnishes a conceptual instrument to understand modernity but it is still tied to the problem of metaphysics, of God.

Although a case can be made to interpret the last section as the background against which the Death of God thesis develops, historical forces, which we did not account for, have a much bigger role to play in this narrative (i.e., the narrative of the death of God).

#### **2. 4. A Leap of Unfaith: Belief and Uncertainty in the Nineteenth-Century**

Our look at nihilism cast a direct light on the issue of faith and uncertainty in a nineteenth-century Anglo-American setting. The key validation of nihilism from an intellectual perspective was the death of God and the implications that follow it; however, the argument for the soaring unbelief in this period sits better with the historical understanding of the undercurrent variants that are worked out in the winds of its manifestation.

In *The Tale of Two Cities* published in 1859, Charles Dickens famously declared the following about his epoch, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity... we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."one might argue that if we to take a quick glimpse into this period, or at least in England, we should look no further than Charles Dickens's description. The simultaneous coexistence of the many contradictory

terms with no affinity between them but a relation of opposition sets a normative reading of this period as an exceptional one with conflictual debates and events.

Indeed, that there was tension during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between religion and science is the standard view about these two periods. These were periods that saw the challenging of fundamentals of belief, the revealing of human intellectual development and the elevation of science above religion. But it should be noted that, in addition to being read exclusively through the lens of science and religion, the two periods concisely also tell the story of the relationship between modern thought and religion.

The nineteenth century specifically witnessed the promotion of scientific naturalism by prominent figures such as John Tyndall, T. H. Huxley among many others who methodically pushed a strong version of naturalism at the expense of religion and theology<sup>78</sup>. Materialistic theories such as the theory of biological evolution (Darwinism), and social Darwinism<sup>79</sup> found many followers and they left a markedly, albeit relatively, lasting imprint in the following century.

The spirit of that age was principally the quandary of faith and doubt so much so that popular biographies and fictional works written during this period or about this period revolved around this theme. *The Nemesis of Faith* (1892), *The Battle of Unbelief* (1878), and *The Creed of A Layman* (1907) among many other books grappled with the issue of religion, doubt, and science. Likewise, scientific and theology books abounded in discussions about this polemic with scientists such as T. H. Huxley, and John Tyndall taking a noticeably antagonistic stance against religion. Undeniably, scientific naturalism which was propagated during the Victorian period was looked upon suspiciously as engendering and damaging intellectual integrity. By

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<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, despite it being an uncontested fact, there were many men of science who lingered on religion and aspired to the hope that their involvement in science would embrace their beliefs.

<sup>79</sup> Advanced by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)

and large scientific naturalism implied determinism and “the rigid determination of all events, including mental events, by natural laws.” (Bowler, 2001, p. 15)

"Victorians came to view doubt as inseparable from belief, thought, and debate, as well as a much-needed antidote to fanaticism and unbridled certainty." (Christopher Lane, 2011, p. 4). This status quo is not without consequences. On a sociological level, it heralded a new social order where scientists supplanted the supremacy of the role of the clerics. Consequently, the modes of interaction between science with religion reached an all-time high adversity, and with that emphasis and uncompromise on determinism trailed unprecedented implications in the arena of faith and belief, namely a growing doubt, uncertainty, and disbelief especially in the veracity of literal truth of religion and the proponents of science were willing to entertain those doubts, uncertainties and unbelief. Writing in 1833 about the effects of Trinitarianism in driving huge swaths of believers out of the folds of faith, Rajah Rammohun Roy asserted the following, "We would not be understood to affirm that the whole intellect of the country [England] is ranged on the side of unbelief, but we do maintain that a great part of it is imbued with skepticism, while much is decidedly antichristian, so far as belief is concerned" (p. 336)

But to think that doubt is a particularity of the Victorian age is far off the mark. In the preface to his remarkable work history of *The History of The Conflict Between Religion and Science*, John William Draper (1873) powerfully remarked that "The minds of men are everywhere agitated at present by religious questions." (p. v). He added that they still wrestle with the same questions about which their predecessors disputed "What is God? What is the soul? What is the world? How is it governed? Have we have any standard or criterion of truth? And the thoughtful reader will earnestly ask, "Are our solutions to these problems any better than theirs?" (ibid. p. xiii). Victorian doubt or uncertainty is but the progeny of philosophical skepticism and the skeptical tradition which reached the nineteenth century with no clear-cut answers to the vexing metaphysical questions. It follows that doubt about the attainability of

knowledge persisted in the nineteenth century as evidenced by the preoccupation of the Victorians with the believable and the unbelievable which ultimately proved to be but another nail in the coffin of belief. The English Novelist William Mallock ascertained that “Modern thought has not created a new doubt,” he insisted; “it has [instead] made perfect an old one” (qtd. in Lane, 2011, p. 8). The specificity of this kind of doubt and uncertainty within the Victorian context, however, is clear when we know by hindsight that the implications of the supremacy of science and scientists coupled with the supporting structure of metaphysics that has been long gone in the process spawned burdensome pangs of doubts which had become ever sharper and in need of release<sup>80</sup>.

In the late Nineteenth-century, the French sociologist Auguste Comte charted the historical development of human thought and deconstructed it into three stages: theological, metaphysical, and positive or scientific. If we go by this classification, then the nineteenth-century man has reached the last stage of intellectual human development, and therefore, all that he seeks to answer can be provided for by science. However, issues pertaining to safety, order, and meaning which are to be expected from the religious experience were not fully superseded in any way by science to the extent that religion previously provided especially as it could not answer the metaphysical questions with its methods, which explains the lingering of the problem of the knowledge of God in the general atmosphere of the Victorian and early twentieth century periods.

Peter J. Bowler's (2001) contribution to the debate about religion and science allowed him to mark the historical relationship between science along three models, two of which are explicit (cooperation and conflict) and one is subtle (coexistence and mutual tolerance)<sup>81</sup> each corresponds to the degree of tolerance, acceptance or rejection in the unraveling dynamics

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<sup>80</sup> or in need of another system of belief grounded in the knowable.

<sup>81</sup> These models can, in my view, be distributed along the historical lines from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century.

between religion and science<sup>82</sup>. Scientists of the early nineteenth century were enacted clergymen and most had tenacious views about religion; they adopted science to a revealed theology to better understand theology and called it by the name it was given to it by Aquinas, natural theology. Likewise, scientists maintained scientific poise while entertaining unsupported claims and in the later part of the century, reformation touched on religion to contain evolutionary ideas. This marks the stage of cooperation and coexistence.

In an encyclical letter to the Church of Lambeth Conference of 1930, the bishops of the Anglican Church expressed the following:

There is much in the scientific and philosophical thinking of our time which provides a climate more favourable to faith in God than has existed for generations. New interpretations of the cosmic process are now before us which are congruous with Christian Theism. The great scientific movement of the nineteenth century had the appearance, at least, of hostility to religion. But now, from within that movement and under its impulse, views of the universal process are being formed which point to a spiritual interpretation. We are now able, by the help of the various departmental sciences, to trace in outline a continuous process of creative development in which at every stage we can find the Divine presence and power. Thus scientific thinking and discovery seem to be giving us back the sense of reverence and awe before the sublimity of a Creator Who is not only the cause and ground of the Universe, but always and everywhere active within it. (qtd. in Bowler, 2001, pp. 12-13)

However, as the edges of science got sharper by materialistic Scientific naturalism, the —unbridgeable rift— happened. It happened because there was a mutual attitude of the overstepping of the boundaries each camp represents and stands for. Bowler asserts the nature

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<sup>82</sup> Worth bearing in mind that the brief exposition is by no means a chronological development of the relationship between science and religion but only serves as a simplified synthesis of the subject matter.

of this conflict noting that initially there was difficulty in assimilating new scientific theories with the already existing religious perspectival truth. This marks the stage of conflict. Indeed, as Michael S. Reidy (2015) puts it, "One side touted the limits of science and the loftier knowledge attained through theology; the other boasted the power of science and the restrictive influence of religion." (p. 2). Because scientific naturalism satisfied the same needs as religion, it replaced it for its adherents (Peter J. Bowler, 2001, pp. 8-9).

### **3. 1. Belief and Uncertainty in the Victorian Age**

There can be little doubt that by mid-nineteenth century England, the intelligentsia was confounded with uncertainty about the basic truths of Christianity. Accounts of the loss of faith at an early age and apostasy were commonplace in autobiographies or in literary mediums and the word unbelief rose to prominence<sup>83</sup> (Budd, 1967) .

One of the earliest Victorian novels that depicted skepticism and religious doubt was James Anthony Froude's 1849 epistolary novel titled *The Nemesis of Faith*. This thinly veiled fictional novel (some hold strong reasons for considering it to be an autobiographical work) was denounced and anathematized by the religious body of England and was publicly put to flames as an iconoclastic work. The story depicts a certain Sutherland's troubled understanding of the XXXIX Articles of Religion of the Church of England and his harboring heavy doubts about the accuracy of the Bible which then escalate into a crisis of faith that endured and he died with those doubts.

The sweeping crisis of faith became an issue of the highest significance, and it left an enduring mark on the collective consciousness to the extent that led the historian Margaret Maison to declare that "Never has an age in history produced such a detailed literature of lost faith, or so many great men and women of religious temperament standing outside organized religion."

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<sup>83</sup> The word unbelief as differentiated from atheism includes the disbelief in religious assumptions and their implications.

Queen Victoria presided over a period of unparalleled historical events. The reign of Victoria sought advancements in technology and scientific progress<sup>84</sup>. The fascination or even the fetishization with prosperity and progress opened an incurable fissure of varying degrees between the spiritual experience and the premises of sciences. The conflict between theology and natural science was very acute to the extent that it amounted to an open warfare (the term became commonplace at the height of tension between science and religion in the later nineteenth century)<sup>85</sup>. Alister McGrath (2013) writes that "the Victorian period itself gave rise to the social pressures and tensions which engendered the myth of permanent warfare between science and religion." David Siep (2018) writes that as the 1870s unfurled, a considerably educated person was faced with the choice of either denying the literal truths of the Bible which were undermined by higher criticism and thus adopting science, or keeping on their belief regardless of the irreversible assault that targeted the Christian tradition.<sup>86</sup> (p. 120)

Incipiently, the Victorian crisis of faith has been strictly regarded as an intellectual experience triggered by personal or intellectual motivations or a spiritual condition that grew out of the conflict between science and religion. Nonetheless, the old uncritical suppositions and the views they sustain were challenged in the relatively new literature. Their views are now considered a *reductio ad absurdum* that are no longer tenable by scholarly literature. Indeed, though critics of this crisis share overlapping concerns in conceiving the fundamental subject matter from the lens of a deviation from the conventional and the traditional. However, there is a difference in how they understand the factors that propelled forth the loss of faith. For instance, Frank Turner (1990) acknowledges that new scholarly outlooks have come to

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<sup>84</sup> It was called 'an age of progress'

<sup>85</sup> This term or metaphor was fostered by 19th-century historian John William Draper in 1874 in his important book *History of The Conflict between Religion and Science* as well as in Andrew Dickson White's 1896 work entitled *History of the Warfare of Science and Theology*. The underlying assumption is that because both religion and science approach the issue of Truth from two different and discordant worldviews or practices and with each challenging the fundamental principles of the other, they are by default bound to collide.

<sup>86</sup> From a theological perspective, and to reiterate the idea of the previous section, Frederick Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (1882) that "The belief in God is overthrown. The belief in Christian ascetic ideal is now fighting its last fight" (p. 175)

familiarize us with other considerations which reckon with the Victorian crisis of faith notably the historical, the religious, and the literary aspects of this crisis, arguing that the new scholarship now regards the crisis of faith as rather a "*problematical* occurrence" (p. 10) rather than the old interpretation that took the form of warfare between its two constituents namely religion and science.

In this regard, Turner tells us that now scholars are informed about the covert and strong polemic that is within what appears to be figurative speech, i.e., the warfare between science and religion, and that such a view is no longer tenable and that the motifs of its narrative make up only a fragment of the experience narrated and as such, it cannot be seen as problematic as it truly is. He adds that scholars became more sensitive and critical of the social and cultural significance of the Victorian loss of faith and its cognates 'crisis of faith' and 'faith in crisis'<sup>87</sup>.

Turner establishes at the beginning of his critical study a foundational understanding of this Victorian behavior asking matter-of-factly, a very crucial question about this behavior, that if this crisis of faith is connected to ideas, then why did it happen at the dawn of the Enlightenment period which as we know, had it happened at that historical conjecture, it would have provided it with valid conceptual tools to deconstruct faith if ideas were sufficient to destabilize faith. He also asks why it did sometimes find a ready heart and mind to receive them in a historical period with distinct particularities, one of which is that it ironically coincided with missionary services. On this point, Turner observed that the faith crisis of the nineteenth century happened not at the height of an ardent attack on faith but during the religious crusade "associated with militant Christian institutions" in an attempt to Christianize the British nation. (ibid. p. 11)

Turner enumerates three conditions that led to the possibility of the crisis of faith: first the political implications of the French Revolution. Next, denominational discord and finally

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<sup>87</sup> Of course, enlarging our perspectives of the crisis urges us to draw from the many causal factors that have an immediate bearing on it, those that ostensibly close our inspection by reduction within the ambit of this theme.

Evangelicalism —or to use a precise concept— the acculturation of Christianity<sup>88</sup>. The first which surprisingly happens to be the reverberation of the French Revolution on religion in Britain in particular sought the faraway reaction of the religious body of the Anglican Church towards the growing threat of materialism, anti-christianism and atheism. Britain during that period (late eighteenth century) shouldered the burden of leadership of the coalition set against France to protect religion in a state of vulnerability so as to maintain the existing social and political structures and order. Furthermore, from a religion that needed support grew a liking to natural theology to repudiate atheism and materialism and to assert with great vigor that science and rationality are not conducive to materialism or atheism, but rather promote the existing order in which God plays an important role in the preserving of it.

Additionally, and subsequent to the aforementioned stage, reforms were made in the late-eighteenth century to secure more civil rights in parallel with the expiration of the political and religious monopoly of the Anglican Church and the emergence of the Protestant Nonconformists. The changes that occurred as a result isolated and weakened the Church of England, particularly in England and Wales, consequently it found itself competing with other denominations.

Lastly, the flourishing of personal religion based on personal religious experience and the Protestant discernment of passivity allowed a privileged space for the layman's interpretation of the scripture such as in Evangelical Christianity which further secluded the clergymen whose roles were increasingly neglected<sup>89</sup> but also led to a religious exuberance<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> For more on this concept see Gabriel Vahanian (1961), *The Death of God: The culture of Our Post-Christian Era*, pp. 28-37

<sup>89</sup> the examination and critique of the scriptural book consequently led to either the creation of denominations or denominational reforms, the desertion of certain creeds, the rejection of faith, or to the acquiescence to agnosticism or even atheism (Frank M. Turner, 1990, p. 9).

<sup>90</sup> It is not without reason that several historians, critics and clerics pointed out the malleability of the Christian faith in the face of economic, political, or cultural flux. For instance, the American protestant clergyman Josiah Strong praised the adaptability of the Christian faith to changed conditions and took this as a sign of its truthfulness and absoluteness. He wrote in *The New Era*, ". . . evidence that Christianity is the absolute and final religion is found in its power of adaptation by which it has adjusted its methods and outward forms to changed conditions. Christianity has already had three great transitional periods, and is now passing through a fourth." Quoted in

Turner envisages evangelicalism as "a faith of social action and reform" (ibid. p. 19) and the merits of reading it as such have inspired unbelievers to foster "the earlier evangelical role of advocacy for social reform." (ibid. p. 18) Turner concludes that "Certain of the very successes of evangelical religion contributed directly to unbelief in ways that no evangelical and perhaps no believer really understood." (ibid. p. 20). Christopher Lane (2011) concurs that "the fervor that inspired the Victorians' Evangelical revival ironically hastened its decline and collapse (p. 6).

All these factors and 'forces of intensified religiosity' led in the following century to the expansion of the religious sphere to the public domain, and to the bringing of personal religious crisis which was seized as an opportunity by what Turner calls "the soldiers of unbelief." (p. 14).

Accordingly, the term 'crisis of faith' is now viewed not as a miniature label that is unidimensional but also an encompassing one that covers an expansive range of experiences (Lightman, 1990, p.283; Seip, 2018, p. 116).

In her important work *Reasons for Unbelief Among Members of the Secular Movement in England, 1850-1950*, Susan Budd (1967) concedes that the loss of faith for Freethinkers<sup>91</sup> agnostics and atheists correspond to extreme individualism, social instability, the involvement in radical political action, and sound moral ideals. But she also confesses that such causes, though necessary, are not sufficient to understand the loss of faith for the members of this movement (p. 125).

Another view comes from James R. Moore (1990) who ascribes the Victorian religious crisis to a three-dimensional frame of 'professionalization', 'secularization', and 'naturalization'.

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Gabriel Vahanian (1961), *The Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era*, pp. 29-30. This was a period of unmatched religious revival.

<sup>91</sup> In this sweeping research, Susan Budd introduces the often overlooked category of Freethinkers who represent a tiny proportion of all English atheists and agnostics whom she studied (her study rests on one hundred and fifty biographical accounts of Secularists during the aforesaid period).

The Victorian crisis of faith, writes Moore, “culminated in the professionalisation of science, in this sense, and in the secularisation of religion.” (p. 154) though it did not correlate with it or was a matter of effect stimulated by its cause.

Moore conceives it to be "a crisis of legitimation" (ibid, p. 153) that arose from the demands of the modern age to prescribe intentional and studious measures for quibbling with the social conflict in a way that is compatible with the securing of the status of the intelligentsia. For the general public, it was a crisis that arose largely from economic change or the change in the market of ideas and opinions which tended to compromise or impair personal meaning.

Moore implies that naturalization organically grows out of secularization. He concedes that if secularization is the deliberate withdrawal of religious ideas, values, and religious institutions from positions of power and authority then naturalization is the transmutation of these ideas, values, and institutions after an explicit and overt process of emptying them out of the religious content and the reinstating back into non-religious forms (in practice and perception) so that their counterpart become enabled by naturalistic content. In this manner, the centrality of the sacred moves "from the nominal towards the phenomenal, from the eternal towards the temporal, from another world towards this world." (ibid. p. 155). These conceptions are embedded in the rationale that this world can be made better by human efforts rather than through religious mediums. Moore believes that on the whole, this broader perspective, or what he calls the "notional tripod" reinforces a comprehensive examination of the Victorian crisis of faith.

Other critics view the growing interest in liberalism together with the implosion of the church into sects and the Higher criticism which reframed biblical scholarship as contributing to a feeling of loss and uncertainty.

Staggered by the discoveries that were made and the scientific progress, and no longer content with the crumbs thrown to them by theological naturalism, many nineteenth-century

intellectuals and laymen endured an intense religious crisis in the midst of an intense debate that amounted to an overt rivalry between science and religion. It was a time of deliberate march in the direction of unfaith against the winds of religious condemnation, but it was not a peaceful unfaith, but one which is tainted with doubts and uncertainty, and one particular strand of unbelief: agnosticism.

#### **2. 4. 2. On Uncertainty and Unbelief: The Rationale for Agnosticism**

One of the most cited facts in the scholarship on the late Victorian epoch is the widespread use of catchwords such as uncertainty, unbelief, and agnosticism. One such scholar, among others, who studied Victorian religious culture has emphasized the prevalence of unbelief in the nineteenth century, “Never has any age in history produced such a detailed literature of lost faith, or so many great man and women of religious temperament standing outside organized religion.” (qtd in. Trotter, 1965, p. 43)

Normally unfaith in a no context of irreligion opens the way for many interpretations, chief among them is atheism. Atheism is the standard usage for accounts of disbelief and is commensensically explicitly rooted in any proposition of unbelief. In formal logic A does not believe in x if (but not only if) x is either empirically and logically invalid (i.e., it lacks evidence); it breaches logical coherence/series, or there are insufficient reasons to prove x as such or what its proposed definition holds. However, since it remains within the folds of faith<sup>92</sup> on the ground that it asserts the nonexistence of God in as much as faith asserts God’s existence then Atheism is a creed. Rabbi and theologian Eliezer Berkovits (2004) goes further than this by declaring it “a not respectable philosophy” (p. 22). It seems that Berkovits like many contemporary views in philosophy and pop science defends the view of the religiosity of atheism and considers it to be synonymous with religion as it contradicts itself by refuting theism and religion from the same position it authenticates itself<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> meaning that A believes x to be the case, in negative terms.

<sup>93</sup> See for instance Joe Cienkowski’s 2014 book on *Atheism is A Religion; Evolution is Their Creed*.

In one of the earliest contributions to natural philosophy the philosopher Henry More (1614-1687) presented his impeachment of atheism saying,

And verily I think I have ransacked all the corners of every kind of Philosophy that can pretend to bear any stroke in this Controversy with that diligence, that I may safely pronounce, that it is mere brutish Ignorance or Impudence, no Skill in Nature, or the Knowledge of things, that can encourage any man to profess Atheism, or to embrace it at the proposal of those that make profession of it.  
(qtd. in Berman 2013, p. 15)

Once was a passionate endeavor because of the promises it offers, i.e., that it checkmates the dilemma of metaphysics, by mid-century atheism had a narrow appeal. It should be mentioned that not many nineteenth and twentieth-century prominent figures, in fact even those popularly conceived as atheists were not as such<sup>94</sup>. They expressed doubt about Christianity and reservations about the propositions of atheism. Indeed, contrary to the received understanding of the claims of atheism and atheists, many thinkers actually doubt the legitimacy of atheistic claims. In an insightful passage from *Bibliotheca historico-scara*, Thomas Broughton (1737) expressed the ubiquity of doubt even if there are thinking men who worked out a final stance for disbelief in God or Deity (p. 1). Elsewhere he argued that “Many people, both ancient and modern, have pretended to atheism, or have been reckoned atheists by the world; but it is justly questioned whether any man seriously adopted such a principle. These pretensions, therefore, must be founded on pride or affectation.” (qtd. in Berman 2013, p. 1). In the last excerpt as in many, we find the thesis of rejection of the possibility of atheism, and mostly it is an argument from pretension, ignorance, and adamancy. Berman (2013)

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<sup>94</sup> See Bernard Lightman’s (2019) *The Origins of Agnosticism* for a comprehensive list of some of the influential theologians, philosophers, historians and literary men who are reported to be atheists when they are, in fact, agnostics or have espoused the core of agnosticism into their worldview, philosophic system or literary works. (p. 14)

inferred that the atheism that is denied is not any atheism, it is the 'reasoned' atheism and the 'serious' atheism.

It was widely understood that transitioning to unbelief<sup>95</sup> founded on the soundness of science—which presumably disciplines the mind—can only answer the how but not the why of things, and if the first is answered and the second is left out, then perforce and immature doubt and uncertainty are bound to happen<sup>96</sup>.

Certainly, by the nineteenth century, this was all clear. The run up to doubt and uncertainty was not accidental, unfounded, or illegitimate. When Nietzsche prophesized or rather described the void that would overshadow the world with a lost faith, it was evident that none of the thinking men took the ramification very lightly. Whether they ruminated over it or experienced it first-hand, there was certainly the preparation of man in anticipation of what will come. It is the reckoning with this important dimension in Nietzsche's diagnosis and prognosis, anachronistically perceived<sup>97</sup>, that doubt germinated and agnosticism was prescribed. We use this nuance as a key to transition from atheism briefly discussed to one thread of unbelief: agnosticism.

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) provides us with an interesting rhetorical account of the futility of the different philosophies in their aspiration to reach certainty in view of the indispensable dialectic of mind-body, spirit and the material world, from the opposing poles of Materialism and Idealism, atheism and theism, and their ultimate amenability to the very starting point from which they took off. He writes,

Materialism and Idealism; Theism and Atheism; the doctrine of the soul and its mortality- appear in the history of philosophy like the shades of Scandinavian

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<sup>95</sup> The epistemic standing of unbelief in general is either categorical negation or an agnostic humility.

<sup>96</sup> And any criticism leveled against positivism would start from this postulate.

<sup>97</sup> Nietzsche's proclamation that happened rather in late nineteenth-century. Psychologically speaking the pangs of doubt and uncertainty are concurrent with the loss of faith and the desire for a Higher Being, a Higher meaning incessantly fueled by the desire for them/Him, i.e., God.

heroes, eternally slaying one another and eternally coming to life again in a metaphysical "Nifelheim." It is getting on for twenty-five centuries, at least, since mankind began seriously to give their minds to these topics. Generation after generation, philosophy has been doomed to roll the stone uphill; and, just all the world swore it was at the top, down it has rolled to the bottom again. All this is written in innumerable books; and he who will toil through them will discover that the stone is just where it was when the work began. Hume saw it; since their time, more and more eyes have been cleansed of the films which prevented them from seeing it; until now the weight and number of those who refuse to be the prey of verbal mystifications has begun to tell in practical life. (qtd. in Cowling, 1980, p. 157)

In reaction to the subjects posed and the stances adopted by its members of the 'Metaphysical Society' to which Thomas Huxley belonged, and losing any semblance of certainty over metaphysical questions and at a loss with where he stands when he rejects all forms of theism, atheism, pantheism, and realism, Huxley turned to agnosticism. He confided that the term agnostic "came into [his] head as suggestively antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which [he] was ignorant" (qtd in Clare, 1910, p. 335). According to a similar view expressing the source of agnosticism, Dr. Harriet Martineau (1888) argued that "for much of the Agnosticism of the age The Gnosticism of theologians is undeniably responsible." (qtd in. Moore, 1888, p. xii).

Though he was greatly influenced by Darwin, Huxley differed radically from him in voicing his skepticism about the kernel of Darwinism, i.e. the evolution of species. In *Agnosticism and Christianity*, T. H. Huxley boldly claims that the reason people label themselves as 'Agnostics' is because they are uncourageous to call themselves infidels and to evade the offensiveness.

Stephen Leslie (1832-1904), a clergyman who turned agnostic, went through an agonizing period in which the views he developed and entertained and the vocation he held became very incompatible. What is known in Victorian literature as the "Crisis of vocation" ultimately led him to forsake the academic life he was so enamored with. Documents reveal the reason for this was a crisis of doubt. One appeared in an autobiography called *Early Impressions* published in 1903 in the *National Review* where he avowed that Mill's demeaning and uncompromising epistemological metrics, especially in the system of Logic derailment from intuitive truth to inferences based on observed phenomena that led him to be an agnostic. Another indice indicates that Auguste Comte made a substantial influence on him with his higher criticism of religion.

In the late 6th century AD, the Berber Theologian Saint Augustine (426 AD/2002) wrote in his *chef d'oeuvre, The City of God* , "Let no one, then, seek to know from me what I know that I do not know; unless he perhaps wishes to learn to be ignorant of that of which all we know is, that it cannot be known." It is very clear even as a theologian, St. Augustine avows that the noumenal world is beyond the limits of human knowledge. There is in this passage also an explicit acknowledgment of the fact that ignorance correlates with our distinctive modes of interaction with nature which cannot be surpassed by any kind of reasoning.

Taken together, and in as much as the Gnosticism of theology is acknowledged as the seedbed of agnosticism, it is not from its contemplation over the *unknown* that agnosticism is inferred. In one of his letters from the year 1889 to James A. Skilton, Huxley affirms that the word 'agnostic' is not derived from a biblical passage in which there is a mentioning of the 'Unknown God' for its author, St. Paul, is undoubtedly a theist, however, not a confident and relaxed theist but an anxious one whose stance he then likened to the position of modern philosophers who feign knowledge but toy with words so as to evade ignorance which he

berated them for bringing it. The substance of agnosticism, he argues, lies in the "confession of ignorance" coupled with persistent uncertainty-laden unbelief<sup>98</sup>.

Accordingly, Huxley's position seems to echo an important critical strand in Ancient Greek thought. In a profoundly unreserved fragment from *On The Gods*, Protagoras (481- 411 BC) splendidly wrote the following, "About the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in form for the factors preventing knowledge are many: the obscurity of the subject, and the shortness of human life" (qtd in. Caponigri & McInerny, 1963, p.99). Whether this fairly represents the state of every genuine seeker of the Truth to accomplish the aspirations of the whole man<sup>99</sup>, the announcement of the limits of knowledge and acknowledgment of man's incapacity to know the existence or non-existence of the gods, or the God, though it has resulted in the eviction of Protagoras from Athens, would later start a scholastic tradition of skepticism or rather agnosticism that would take on various forms of expressions under variegated enclosed systems of thoughts that echoes through the centuries.

Victorian scholar Bernard Lightman (2019) construes agnosticism as "a new form of skepticism" (p. 9). Indeed, agnosticism stands firm on skeptical grounds, and it stands in opposition to Christianity and all kinds of theistic claims which claim ownership of higher knowledge. Huxley who followed Kant's reasoning understood agnosticism as a construct that circumscribed knowledge to the phenomenal world based on the mind's intrinsic ends.

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<sup>98</sup> The formula for uncertainty and belief relation is an inversely proportional one. At any moment uncertainty increases, belief decreases. Belief begins to gradually supersede at exactly the moment the factor of uncertainty appears. This brings insight into what I shall call the 'unfaith threshold' which is at once based on occurrence and recurrence measured by frequency, i.e., the frequent appearance of uncertainty such that: occurrence=1 and recurrence>1. If this case is anything to go by, then we stand to reason that the nature of belief and uncertainty is "relational rather than substantial". Considered together (i.e., uncertainty and faith) and their inherent nature, they represent a solid point for broaching the themes of agnosticism and atheism, which harmonize with uncertainty and unfaith respectively (to avoid saying they correspond) though to an extent in atheism.

<sup>99</sup>In saying this we want to implicitly establish, only in passing, a different kind of connection between man's aspirations which are in accordance with the teleological view of not only religion but also nature in Kantian terms. The most striking feature of this whole man is that he is sufficiently oriented towards the attainment of the highest knowledge in so far as his cognitive abilities allow him to satisfy an underlying need (psychological, spiritual or otherwise). The implications of Kant's notion of purposiveness find a hospitable acceptance in Thomas Aquinas's expression who argues that "To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists."

(Lightman, 2019, p. 15). The English historian Frederic Harrison (1889) calls it "the religion of the Infinite Unknowable" (p. 222). Huxley once more talks about it but in different terms. He views it as the protest of the heart and conscience against the limitations of the certainties and the certainties of limitation.

Agnosticism for the man who coined the term cannot be described as a 'negative' doctrine, nor is it any doctrine except to the extent that it "expresses absolute truth in the validity of a principle". This principle, he adds, can be stated in myriad ways but it boils down to this: that it is erroneous to be certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless there is sufficient reason that can justify it. "Yet the application of that principle results in the denial of, or the suspension of judgment concerning, a number of propositions respecting which our contemporary ecclesiastical "gnostics" profess entire certainty." (qtd. In Burt, 1950, p. 231). However, this is not all that is requisite for it because relying on this only would take us back to positivistic knowledge of atheism when agnosticism resists claims to Knowledge. It should be stated that this is the base knowledge for agnosticism but not everything about agnosticism that would ground our understanding of it. It is but the minimum base, not its different conceptions, definition, or its etymology.

A. H. Armstrong (1970) strikes a similar note in linking agnosticism generally perceived and the agnosticism of Huxley. He argues that Huxley's agnosticism subsumes under it the idea that metaphysical knowledge and by extension theological knowledge is unfeasible which at its core correlates with man's finitude, and he defends the view that the strength in Huxley's critique is "in his analysis of the linguistic confusions present in the theological arguments of contemporary theistic apologists." (p. 325)

There is no denying that in a linear account of the history of thought in the modern age, it was first the appeal to the limits of reason which seemed to be the barrier set against any belief in the metaphysical but it was also the age where theism was sustained by logic. From

the Age of Reason to the Romantic Age, the pendulum switched when the secularists worldview expanded (the appearance of many denominations, the reduction and accommodation of theological postulates to the limits of reason...etc); then the intellectual depth of the question of God found a new avenue to address it but only in refuting it. This is when atheism assumed authority over philosophical speculations or theological reflections and steered the wheels of philosophical, scientific and theological discussions<sup>100</sup>. The chronological proximity of such revolutionary worldviews compressed in roughly two centuries has put heavy emphasis on the function of responding, the last of which was fashioned on Lockean and Kantian molds<sup>101</sup>, on skeptical foundations<sup>102</sup>. Oscar Wilde (1981) poignantly declared in *The Critic as Artist* that “It is enough that our fathers believed they have exhausted the faith-faculty of the species. Their legacy to us is the skepticism of which they are afraid” (qtd in. Watson, 2014, p. 264). The concerted efforts to emphasize the limits of reason paved the way for uncertainty and doubts to creep into the intellectual scene. “The ‘unknown’ was too thin and abstract a notion to ground real hope, but honesty ruled out any faith that called on one simply to close one’s eyes to intellectual progress.” (Mander, 2011, p. 35).

With that said, far from being a matter of ‘Linguistic reform’, the transition from atheism to agnosticism as a historical necessity is a necessary preference in light of the critical and important changes in thought. Thomas Huxley was one of many self-professed agnostics of the nineteenth century and his case can be multiplied by a constant factor, that is uncertainty, to see in this collective inclination a phenomenon —with a scope too wide to be contained— the reason why the word agnosticism did not remain "part of the private language of a small

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<sup>100</sup> The scholarly view that is widely held is that God of Descartes and Spinoza contributed to the generation of ‘atheistic theism’.

<sup>101</sup> Kant’s agnosticism arises from the skepticism that is raised against metaphysical claims (from his Antinomies which are composed of two equally valid arguments or two propositions which inevitably cast doubt on the other, isostheneia) which can’t be settled peacefully or easily which ultimately lead to the suspension of judgment about the queries in question.

<sup>102</sup> On this note, it is noteworthy to consider the roots and the extension of unbelief to not only about what is written against belief, but it is also what is written about belief.

circle of Victorian intellectuals. " (Lightman, 2019, p. 12) but a phenomenon to be reckoned with, hence why it still persisted in the twentieth century.

On a different note, the break with the traditional past and its conventional ways, the loss of fixed principles, the resurgence of freethought in America, the revival of the critical spirit as well as the equivocal questioning around timeless themes defined a key concept in modernity and I suppose that we would err to account just for its outcome without recouring to key historical happenstances destined to uproot the old to erect the edifices of the new. One aspect we sought to delay is the issue of modernity in light of its surface-level implications. Therefore, there remains only to take notice of the emphatic phenomenon of what Max Weber calls the 'disenchantment of the world' and link the role it played in highlighting the loss of meaning and thus unfaith in fin-de-siècle and the twentieth-century Anglo-American context.

## **2. 5. Disenchantment and Unbelief in the Twentieth Century**

The formative semantics of the turn of the twentieth century abounded in rhetorics that revolved around the loss of meaning that has shaken the West to its core but has not resolved it in modernist terms. In 1981 Christine Brooke-Rose adroitly explained the crisis of the century to be a crisis of rhetorical abundance within a reality crisis, taking note of the disappearance and the receding of millennia of fixed meanings, she argues,

that this century is undergoing a reality crisis has become a banality, easily and pragmatically shrugged off. Perhaps it is in fact undergoing a crisis of the imagination; a fatigue, a decadence. And rhetoricians usually appear in times of decadence, that is, when stable values disappear, when forms break down and new ones appear, coexisting with all the old ones. Their task is then to try to make sense of what is happening by working out reasoned typologies of structures. Today the rhetoricians of innumerable kinds are more voluble than they have been for centuries. (p. 3).

This passage is significant in many other respects but the one that lends itself to articulation is the symbiotic relationship between the plurality of rhetorical expressions in an endless strive for the imminent meaning —tacitly embedded in the magnanimous question of the Ultimate (which is more probable than any other suggestion of meaning devoid of any religious essence)— and the existing new reality<sup>103</sup> which shapeshifts continually. This is what rhetoricians picked up and worked up heuristic ways to verbalize, but is also suggestive of the deficiency in meaning which binds together the predicament of the modern man with that which sustains a structured and ordered meaningful life.

The unfastened meaning and thus the divergence of meanings are first and foremost the result of natural and protestant theology coupled with Kantian philosophy. It had been anticipated in the post-enlightenment era<sup>104</sup> and along scientific lines and has thus led to an intensifying bifurcation of the different spheres of life and to the awareness of the plight of Modern Man. On a sociological plane within the context of modernity, the German sociologist, Max Weber, among others, have shown an unmediated concern with the issue of the march towards progress which annihilates all sense of meaning. His reaction to Western modernity led him to develop the rationalization thesis which, to an extent, restates the conditions for the possibility of modernity and provides a veracious diagnosis of the plight of modern man. Weber rightly and accurately diagnosed the conditions of modernity as a process that has been operative for thousands of years, and in which 'progress' was its impetus. The only difference is, perhaps, by the turn of the twentieth century, this progress became the means and the end; a Prometheus unbound. Indeed, by the twentieth century, the devaluation of theology and religion has become clearly established. Science has repelled the realm of the mystical and the superstitious and denounced them as purely irrational whilst proclaiming judgment about the

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<sup>103</sup> a reality that projects the loss of the meaningful and the structured.

<sup>104</sup> The separation of the divine world from the real world which was a key factor of the Enlightenment has ultimately progressed into the separation of religion of science

world, leading to an alternative historical development of knowledge that is understood not by reference to the world of the supernatural but by reference to empirical inquiry, to science.

In a 1917 lecture on “Science as a Vocation” (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*), Weber (2004) introduced what he euphemistically calls the ‘disenchantment of the world’ which Schlucher (1985) considers to be “the special historical achievement of modern Western rationalism” (p. 22). Weber gives a clear account of this phenomenon and contends that it grows out of the conscious realization that it is by dint of the rapid progress of rationalization and or intellectualization that the authority of the mysterious or capricious forces recedes, namely the absence of ‘mysterious incalculable forces’ so that everything can be controlled by means of calculation. (1948/1991, p. 139). A further aspect of this disenchantment is also the manipulability of the causal mechanisms. However, implicated with this is Habermas’ idea about the ‘unfinished project of modernity’ and the repercussions of the move from the self to the ways of nature where man continuously establishes unsolicited ties and nonreciprocal external relations. Weber remarked that modern man or what he calls the “civilized man” —as opposed to the savage man—is always caught up in the march for progress which is unending and branching out into pedantic hyperspecialization. However, the recondite of this worldview is that science as is known showed mounting defiance to the epistemological presuppositions of theologies, religions, and superstitions, namely the meaning of existence, and so the question its adherents pose is ‘how to interpret this meaning so that it can be intellectually grasped?’ But if science has a meaning or marches towards the acquisition of a certain meaning in and out of itself as separate from traditional speculations of the liberal arts<sup>105</sup> then it is valuable to know that meaning. In view of this, Weber (1919/2004) remarked the following,

The simplest reply was given by Tolstoy with his statement, "Science is meaningless because it has no answer to the only questions that matter to us:

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<sup>105</sup> Or questions normally associated with philosophical speculation or theological interpretation.

'What should we do? How shall we live?'" The fact that science cannot give us this answer is absolutely indisputable. The question is only in what sense does it give "no" answer, and whether or not it might after all prove useful for somebody who is able to ask the right question. (p. xxxi)

Weber understood the challenge that sciences faced<sup>106</sup> as well as the impossibility of it to render meaningful what is still in the making and probably will not amount to any defensible knowledge of the meaning that man hopes for. He reached the conclusion that death and more importantly life become meaningless since the accumulation of infinitesimal knowledge has a negative implication, and this negative implication, he surmised, is that the pinnacle of progress within one's timespan is impossible despite the pretensions of science to answer the most fundamental questions about life. Weber noted that the infinitude of the progress of science and knowledge procures the obsolescence and the rapid outdatedness of scientific breakthroughs. He explains that with every ostensible scientific fulfillment, new questions are raised and that science as a vocation deliberately "asks to be surpassed" (Weber, 1949/2014, p.138) and this is the core meaning of science and the fate of science and scientific endeavor entailed within the abrasive wheels of progress<sup>107</sup>.

In the same vein, Weber also argues that "the increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives." (Weber, 2004, p. 322). The issue he points to is not just the failure and inadequacy of the scientific model in the spheres of human affairs but a lopsided balance between its authority and the subsiding power of the narratives of mysticism and the predicament of existence in an unmeaningful world. Conceptualized as such, Weber draws our attention to the works of Leo Tolstoy, particularly *"The Death Of Ivan Ilitch"* which, as he

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<sup>106</sup> Science broadly understood is inherently parochial and exclusive.

<sup>107</sup> It is perhaps clear that in this atmosphere that the non-Kierkegaardian strand of existentialism as a philosophy was being fomented.

observed, raises the question of the technical and practical aspects of the process of disenchantment in the most fundamental way from the angle of the ethics of death for the civilized man who is confounded with the question of existence and the end of that existence. Is death a "meaningful phenomenon"? he asks and the immediate response is that the *ad infinitum* sequential march to progress kept him at a distance from developing or sustaining any meaningful construal of death and by extension life. "its own imminent meaning should never come to an end;" (Weber, 2005, p 323).

On this score, the position of the modern man is quite riveting. On the one hand there is the embodying of humanistic phenomena under the rubric of science which does not even proclaim to answer the necessities of the cultural<sup>108</sup> —and might I add— the religious being for the purpose of validating factual results —contrary to illusory responses— but also is the last abode of reason to relax the bent of mind over speculation, and on the other hand there is the fear of escaping into another yet illusion<sup>109</sup>. It is a situation that cannot be compromised, assuaged, or alleviated by either science or religion. In Germany, as in America, England or the rest of Europe, the mixture of circumstances came to have universal significance and validity.

The idea that the criteria of historical unfaith is the unfolding of this inner struggle between a disadvantaged epistemology and the pressing existential questions of meaning is a recurrent theme that partakes in the hypothesis of the disenchanted world which many scholars and critics could not refute. The concept we discussed above proves useful in understanding the force of unfaith without stopping by the politics or the historiography of modernism. The detachment from a life of meaning which was revered for the idealistic skeptic of the previous

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<sup>108</sup> But initially took it upon itself to ostensibly cleared the grounds for the Ultimate meaning by not transgressing into the sphere of the world of imagination and illusion.

<sup>109</sup> All theologies have presuppositions, but unlike science which it, too, is based on presuppositions, the suppositions of theology in a world denuded of meaning is doubly unappealing.

century (nineteenth-century) denote an excessive liberation and a powerful sense of cynicism engrossed in a different preoccupation —if any at all— with the here and now<sup>110</sup>.

In his essay *On Youthful Cynicism*, the twentieth century philosopher Bertrand Russell (1930) contends that the atmosphere of the West is afflicted with cynicism<sup>111</sup>. He ascribed this cynicism —which he remarked to be absent in the East because they accept something, a dogma to live by— to the intellectual sophistication of the youth of the West who have a hard time believing anything as well as to the lack of potent passion. Luis E. Navia (1996) corroborates this view by calling attention to modern cynicism<sup>112</sup> which has as its feature the lack of "every kind of human aspiration" (p. viii). Russell explains that, unlike their Eastern counterparts who have some form of belief in utopia, Westerners have a depleted passion and a faith in nothing, a nihilism. The Russian youth, for instance, are energetic and loaded with passionate belief; in India, the moral force is at work, and in China, there is this passion for Occidentalism, however, the West ascertained that "rationality is to no avail, all is illusion and nothing has any meaning in itself." (Owen & Strong, 2004, p. xviii). Russell adds, "Not only are the young unable to believe what they are told, but they seem also unable to believe anything else." Russell argues that even believers reduced God to a workable hypothesis for remediating the world and that by subduing God to the needs of this mundane life, and by not being saved by no union in the ideal or with the ideal they become more doubtful and skeptical about the truthfulness of their faith.

Independently of any other consideration, Russell puts cynicism in alliance with unfaith and it is an accord that is generally recognized by many. Russell here alludes to what Martin

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<sup>110</sup> meaning that on the surface there is no preoccupation but with the immediate mundane.

<sup>111</sup> Russell actually began to diagnose the youth of Western university with this cynicism, however, for the sake of the comparison with which he made with the East or non-Western parts of the world in a non-demographic stratum, we chose the word 'West' for its connotation bears immediate relation to the issue in the current context.

<sup>112</sup> This modern cynicism is what the cynicals inherited from ancient/classical cynicism and instrumentalized its deleterious elements (which she mentions ethical nihilism among other things.)

Buber (1967) calls the 'existential mistrust'<sup>113</sup>, that is "the destruction of confidence in existence in general" (qtd. in Arnett & Arneson's, 1999, p. 16) which is a historical modifier of the kierkegaardian existentialism, a pathological existentialism that leads in the direction of economic engagement that amounts to absence; an absence of honest and sincere relations with the self and with the Being. Here Russell drives home a point that can be assessed duly taking into account atheistic existentialism<sup>114</sup>, namely that cynicism supports a fraught relationship with the obsolescence of [M]eaning and [T]ruth (as the markers of theological commitments) and the turndown of any acknowledgment about any significant referent to the concept of the ultimate reality, or God, hence why we can go as far as to call it a metaphysical cynicism par excellence<sup>115</sup>.

Therefore, this kind of existentialism is neither only atheistic (for we have established that briefly) or only annihilatory but agnostic. Copleston & Copleston (2003) consider the starting point for the atheistic existentialist position to be in man's idea that God is dead or no longer has any relevance or credibility. (p. 175); however, that does not make it the point of departure for the existentialist thought because the focus shifts towards man devoid of any ties to external identity. Hence, on no grounds of indifferentism to external propositions, the problem that we treated in this chapter, that of God or the existence of Him "cannot be raised on the level of thought to which the existential analysis of man belongs; it can be raised only on the plane of 'the holy'" which would explicate, to a certain extent, the dislocation of matters

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<sup>113</sup> For more on this concept, see Arnett & Arneson's (1999) book on *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships*, pp-15-16.

<sup>114</sup> Atheistic existentialism was developed in Jean Paul Sartre's 1943 *Being and Nothingness* and it is the rejection of any metaphysical belief and its cognates as important themes/theoretical foundations to account for philosophical existential thought. Such themes include existence before essence, facing nothingness, alienation and estrangement, despair, absurdity and anxiety...etc.

<sup>115</sup> To digress, Paul Tillich drives the genesis of existentialism —or at least existential anxiety and guilt— to the spiritual component of the being of man, he writes, "Man's being, ontic as well as spiritual, is not only given to him, but also demanded of him. He is responsible for it; literally, he is required to answer, if he is asked, what he has made of himself. He who asks him is his judge, namely, he himself, who, at the same time, stands against him. This situation produces the anxiety . . . of guilt and condemnation **M a n** is essentially 'finite freedom'; freedom not in the sense of indeterminacy but in the sense of being able to determine himself through decisions in the center of his being"

pertaining to the holy sphere, namely those of the meaning of life and death and the question of existence, to the secular sphere, hence the plenitude of rhetorics. Concerning this, Michel Meyer (2010) argues that the resurgence of rhetoric is to be considered as an essence of the nihilistic present. (p. 5). On these grounds it appears that the existential analysis of man, as argue the Coplestons “neither affirms nor denies God " (p. 182). Undoubtedly, existentialist philosophy do not take any heed to interrogate the forces of the past which were long disposed of but focus on the achievement and the knowing of the authentic self —when it does not turn a blind eye on the self as well— Here one thing stands out and that is this annihilation bursts in the generation of meaning from the reservoir of the *here* and *now* in a kind of re-enchantment (either through the literature, the arts, philosophy...etc), hence the pluralities of meaning and the semantic excesses which are a historically distinct experience in a disenchanted world.

If the history of freethought in America and its Victorian counterpart in England laid the groundwork for an extended version of Cartesian doubt in the nineteenth-century, the first decades of the twentieth century sought layers of doubt<sup>116</sup> bottling up and it began to make itself felt with every wave of traumatic event. From a historical perspective, the twentieth century has had an enormous significance. It picked up on the legacy of the nineteenth century loss of faith and manufactured yet a crisis of unfaith followed by a crisis of rhetoric. In this section, we considered the concepts of disenchantment, cynicism and existentialism in very narrow terms to account for the persistence of the different shapes of expression of unfaith, implicitly or explicitly.

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<sup>116</sup> It is vital to note that in making homogeneous historical check-ups we do not take for granted a linear and uniform exegesis of the intellectual, social or political reality of binary constructs, i.e., the very religious and the very secular or from the dominant to the private and personal space (of the first decades of the twentieth century across individuals more so than geographies, vis. America and England) nor are they clear cut as they would seem, but we want to stress the criterion of unbelief during this period at the expanse of a circular historical reading so as to restrict our scope.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the commencements of the problem of God and the different formulations it took which were framed around an intellectual history that spans from antiquity all the way to its implications in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In it, we considered the chain of intellectual, historical circumstances and conceptual transformations that led to the emergence of uncertainty, unfaith and agnosticism.

This chapter also provided a narrative of the history of Western epistemology and its concerted epistemic effort regarding metaphysics (or rather those of philosophers and scholars) which have always led to the subversion of claims to knowledge, and this has always been the *de facto* core of epistemology<sup>117</sup>. We remarked that with respect to the definite position regarding metaphysics, some have withheld their judgment evidenced in the retreat characteristic of skeptics, whilst others attempted to eschew ambivalence by developing a metaphysics of the ‘absolutized subject’. However, in considering the knowability and unknowability of the subject matter, that of God, the prominent thinkers we discussed thus far and their philosophical systems we noted that they are certainly defeated by this vicious circularity which either accorded primacy to the reality of things to divine revelation, or to secularist reworking of religious principles (for eg. Kant).

Lastly, we brought our discussion about the metaphysical crisis and the quest for God to the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century which inherited a hefty burden of metaphysical tradition and highlighted how it plays out in agnosticism. We recounted how as the Victorian era unfolded, there had already been alarming signs of a severe crisis of faith<sup>118</sup> which has disturbed and drowned previous certainties with a pronounced dissatisfaction with traditional thought, and the uplifting of philosophical skepticism whilst leaning on the crutches of agnosticism for a better moral and epistemological support in questions of the metaphysical.

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<sup>117</sup> In the systematic workings and reworkings of epistemic conclusions of different natures.

<sup>118</sup> and we know that crises come to relieve humanity from the illusion of safety and the deceptions of the fixed reality.

And we concluded with a somewhat covert discussion of the desire for God as the will to progress historically under the pretense of existentialist themes.

# CHAPTER II

*(Excessus in Logos: The Sentient Unknown, sui generis Ontology, and the Terminus of Knowledge in D. H. Lawrence's 'Women in Love')*

## **Introduction**

**2.1. Resisting Premature Definitions and Categorizations**

**2.2. Unchristian...All Too Unchristian**

**2.3. Suppressed by Limitations, Divulged by Mysticism**

**2. 4. 'But always there was a deficiency'**

**2. 5. The Sentient Unknown, Truncated Ontology and the Limits of Knowledge**

## **Conclusion**

*Excessus in Logos: The Sentient Unknown, sui generis Ontology and the Terminus of Knowledge in D. H. Lawrence's 'Women in Love'*

*So many ignorances  
I am not guilty of" —Mina Loy*

But how otherwise to conceive of  
you I could not see —St. Augustine;  
*The confessions*

"For Thou hast made us for Thyself  
and our hearts are restless till they  
rest in Thee."

Those who are timed for destruction  
must die now.—D. H. Lawrence,  
*Women in Love*

For if there is nothing, it is merely  
nonsense. —D. H. Lawrence,

## Introduction

In his Forward to *Women in Love* (1920), Lawrence writes that it "took its final shape in the midst of the period of war, though it does not concern the war itself." indeed, Much like *The Rainbow* which was written before the war, revised in the autumn of 1914 and published in 1915, "*Women in Love*", although written in the war years, revised countless times during it and published after the end of it, makes no clear reference to this period<sup>119</sup>. However, in a letter to Waldo Frank written on 27 July 1917 where Lawrence vented his doubts about the publishing and circulation of his novel, he remarked on the difference between the first novel and its sequel (i.e., *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*) in that the latter "Actually does contain the result in one's soul of the war: it is purely destructive, not like *The Rainbow*, a destructive-consummating. It is very wonderful and terrifying, even to me who have written it" (Boulton & Roberston, 1984, p. 134). Evidently, Mr. Lawrence's remark is aptly convincing to the readers of this novel who find him orienting their attention towards and inviting them to consider the shocking effects of war combined as the indubitable after-effect of modernity as

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<sup>119</sup> as any work written during tumultuous times should necessarily reflect the circumstances that imbue it with its substance/subject matter.

if he's trivializing the effects of the Great war in contrast to the magnanimous effects of Modernity and so he wore down the direct effects of war and subsumed it under the conditions of modernity in a fastidious exploration of the rich reservoir of the unconscious experience — characteristic of the artistic movement modernism— in extremely stressing times.

To the extent that Lawrence takes over the issue of the war, he does not elaborate on its implications nor stresses it straightaway, but he cautiously and paradoxically reassesses the residual emotives amid the persistence of the event in a manufactured addition and extension to Modernity<sup>120</sup>. The relevance of the war, thus, assumes a different dimension under the rubrics of modernity so much so that even to arrive at a concrete understanding of the relationships that are developed in the novel and what they amounted to, David Wallace (1986) concedes that they are intimately linked to a kind of "critical response to modernity." (p.28) which is expected from D. H. Lawrence who is unarguably one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century who have captured the essence of this era. Lawrence has an affinity with modernists whose aim was to liberate the unconscious (Michael Black, 1992, p. 3); and being “the outlaw of modern English literature” as J. M. Murry labeled him (qtd in. Draper, 1921, p. 168), and the most intriguing figure in it, Lawrence is certainly apt to pin down the critical symptoms of modernity, to work out idiosyncratic representation and to develop critical diagnosis paralleled only by a few of his caliber. Therefore, if anything, *Women in Love* should be an excellent read on modernism and Modernity. It is a novel in which the literary critic and Lawrence's fiercest advocate F. R. Leavis gave his highest acclamation and for good reasons. Rebecca West judges it "a work of genius" (qtd in. Wallace, p. 54). The novel stands today, a century after it was published<sup>121</sup>, as a major work and an open space for myriad

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<sup>120</sup> It should be noted that modern conditions are delicate, fragile, unsubstantial, and are always on the verge of lopsidedness and déracinement, which is what creates self-unfulfillment and the desire for containment by something total and coherent.

<sup>121</sup> In 2020, at the time the analysis of this chapter was carried out.

interpretations that relate essentially to the crisis of modernity. The novel falls into the category of confessions (Evelyn Scot, 1921, p. 162), and makes historical claims that can be dispersed among various niches to be studied as phenomena in their own right. Furthermore, this work exhibits a rich and lucid literary style matched only by a few.

With that said, the novel unquestionably problematizes the apprehension of many themes within it and presents a difficulty in interpretation. John Beer (2014) argues that the difficulty of reading this particular novel owes to the fact that it is problematic to know exactly what the author intended to mean by certain terms (p. 254). However, it is crucial to start somewhere with what bears an affinity to the crisis and critique of modernity as gathered from the heightened dialectical response to modern forms of life in order to bring into sharper focus the elements that touch upon all the aspects of life to force the important elements that underpin the making of it to float to the surface so they become visible in the analysis. Therefore, it would be more interesting for us to not overlook certain subtleties, and to go beyond word clichés or conventional references.

Therefore, what should be of interest to its readers and critics is to be alert to the juxtaposition of antithetical themes that make an appearance in works about modernity (for instance conformism and nonconformism, cues of the *being* and the *becoming*, nature and culture and the existential struggle) because there exists a transitional meaning therein of a certain hermetical depth and is one which is established on precarious grounds revealing an often overlooked dimension that has an immediate bearing on the primal root of the issues we ascribe to modernity<sup>122</sup>. It follows that we can simply trace a neat division between two substantial narrative oppositions and extensions relative to the theme of collapse and generation among other important modernist themes demarcating the old and the new world in the *becoming* and going from there to their problematic limitations, ramifications, and lucanae.

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<sup>122</sup> It should be noted that if the work is viewed as relating only to local connections, then our analysis of this work would miss the mark.

This opens a different fissure than the one we are accustomed to in plot-driven narratives, hence our focus should be towards that which the author alludes to that occupies the inexplicable rift and how he conceptualizes it.

If we are prepared to accept that modernity has a unique underlying issue where all its problems emanate from and whose irresoluteness keeps on fueling them, then we arrive quite naturally to two consolidated views: the first is a superimposed order of problems that start from the problem of God because God conceptually grounds other existences and the source of the being and because it is the problem of existence and the problem of man, and the second is the knowledge of God —being the highest order of knowledge—that guarantees the knowledge of man and the knowledge of living which in turn promises credulous and harmonious living. Accepting that means that we ensure that the problems that are figured in modernity are on the same level, i.e., the problem of man being commonly synonymous with the problem of God, the problem of existence being synonymous with meaning which is derived from knowledge of God and so on, as opposed to fragmentary problems that if studied together or on their own, they have their own intensity and complexity that cannot be penetrated to its beginning, unless the beginning is their very beginning, phenomenologically perceived, which again gives a deficient depth and something short of a kaleidoscopic picture of the whole. Furthermore, that they can collectively be traced back to their source to understand them retrospectively in a detached manner from that of the root problem seems quite futile and repetitious, since the dynamics of their interface would spiral them out of proportionality, creating therefore complex problems that relate to self-fulfillment.

In postulating that, we will not be far from the conclusion that analyses that include the intricacies of the factors that make up the issues of modernity perpetuate a cycle of interrelated problems because they recognize only the secular sphere, therefore despite being very essential in other contexts, they shroud the real problem in unwarranted explication, miss the obvious

religious aspect of the novel and also downgrade its effects in self-actualization in the quest for a fully-developed self.

My interpretation in this chapter differs in some important respects from the analyses that establish the links between the limits of knowledge in "*Women in Love*" and mysticism or occultism, as well as the quest for fulfillment perceived solely on a secular ground, emptied from its theological implication and disengaged from the principal problem of being, meaning and existence. Our objective is to reduce the variables of interpretations that revolve around modernity, mythology, and mysticism to an all-encompassing Variable and I argue that the unintelligibility of the first, the recurrence of the second and third themes that previous readings resulted in concerns the undermining of knowledge of the Ultimate as a way to make sense of the excess of signification, despite them being powerfully communicated and thoroughly sustained throughout the course of the novel. For all the interpretive accuracy and the intrinsic logic in them, we should also apprehend the limitations ingrained in them. It is thus an interpretation of a wider scope in so far as it subsumes the aforesaid variables and of a limited scope inasmuch as it focuses on that which I aim to bring to light and to expand. Therefore, we deal with the novel to the purposes of shedding light on the conscious of the unknown, limits of knowledge, self-unfulfillment and the excess of signification by restricting our frame of reference to this novel alone, but I also rely on his other non-fictional writings and on previous studies as they bear evidence and for that reason the analysis will not consider the story in detail. Additionally, my approach in dealing with characters is by the criterion of how they relate to the principal argument or premise of this analysis.

Nowhere in *Women in Love* do we encounter a direct and unambiguous account of agnosticism, despite the defined dialectic of faith and unfaith which sets the tone for the synthesis of the religious crisis of the novel; however, again and again, we find the problem of knowledge appearing consistently with the remainder of the argumentation of realism and

idealism in the broader context of claims to definitive knowledge. Therefore, three central theses will be defended here. 1. That the aggregate symbolic potency of the novel has its origins in religious experience. 2. That the synthesis of faith and unfaith resolves itself in uncertainty about the noumena leading to further tension and then to the unsuspension of judgment in the form of a peculiar ontology of a hierarchical order of existence<sup>123</sup>, and 3. That the possible meaning of this knowledge which is ostensibly esoteric and mystic consumes itself in its own limits and strikes at the heart of the acknowledgment of the unknowability of God. In following this strand of analysis, I do not claim to substitute our hypothesis with logically satiated interpretative hypotheses done in previous works but I contend that the issue of unknowability presupposes a priori those elements.

In this chapter, I attempt neither total equivalence with what the word agnosticism is conventionally taken to mean but sameness and conditional correlation between the agnostic position which rests on the premise of ontological unsafety and epistemological ignorance, insulation and alienation; and the alternative that is forcefully pushed to the surface of the narrative in a stark challenge to nature by culture and an appropriation of this letter to relax the existential tension while at the same time respond to the quest for God and the desire for fulfillment with something logically or philosophically untenable but psychologically redeeming which is the necessary condition for this quest. "And desire is the admitting of deficiency." (Lawrence, 1958, p. 58).

The present chapter offers an opportunity to reflect critically on one such different form that agnosticism can take, particularly through the analysis of "*Women in Love*" which will supply us with supporting literature in favor of agnosticism in modernist literary texts. Thus, to bring to completion the objective entailed in the title of this chapter, I sought to identify the tacit form that agnosticism could take, expanding beyond its original conception as "a

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<sup>123</sup> Which presupposes a higher order of existence.

compromise between theism and atheism” (Robin Le Poidevin, 2010, p. 8) as just that and nothing else, and we argue that it proceeds in subtler, less elucidated ways, with fractions between these two dualities to a dialectical position where the lines are blurred. This invisibility that is disguised in numerous ways, I argue, proves that it is inherently nebulous and dialectical. In laying out this claim, we primarily recourse to disclosing the ways in which Lawrence’s kind of agnosticism can be manifested. my principal argument for the reinterpretation of our reading rests against the background of mysticism. This is then what the following points will attempt to highlight.

### **2.1. Resisting Premature Definitions and Categorizations**

For Schleiermacher and Barth, the requirement for understanding the author should be “in the light of that to which he points”<sup>124</sup>. On the surface, the overarching themes which the novel deals with seem to be clearly defined. Through allusions or immediate and direct narration, Lawrence heightens the identification of each theme and dramatizes in the process forms of his philosophical thoughts. As such, it is no coincidence that the themes of this fictional world are guided by an impulse that exists as a reflection of the world of its author, especially with consideration of the primacy and urgency of what he developed in the novel, i.e. the conscious formulation of an overwhelmed unconscious experience and the bifurcation into distinct themes the struggle for being—in the becoming—and the struggle for self-fulfillment, and for existing incredulously with an artificial identity in the absence of fixed stabilities. Most direct on the point of the impulse presiding over art in Lawrence is Aldous Huxley’s (1932) justified remark, who noted that art, Lawrence thought, “should flower from an immediate impulse towards self-expression or communication, and shall wither with the passing of the impulse.” (p. xvi). Evelyn Scott (1921) makes the point of urgency and precedence clear when he stresses that “Lawrence was a type of the affirmative artist whose

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<sup>124</sup> See Paul Ricoeur *Meanings in Texts and Actions* for an insightful analysis of the understanding of the meaning(s) in a text.

convictions were too urgent for his art.” (qtd in. Draper, 1970, p. 15), and about *Women in Love*, he remarked that it is not “pure as an art form, but it is because art is too limited for Lawrence’s conviction of reality” (qtd in. *ibid*, p. 162). Therefore, we distinguish Lawrence as a realist and an eluder one at that who is absorbed therewith with the artistic range of human experience and with. Nigel Messenger (1989), on the other hand, recognizes in Lawrence a certain fondness for the “indirect mode of narrating” and, like other critics, supports the view that Lawrence is profoundly sensitive about the aspect of consciousness and likes to explore “the intimate recesses of his characters’ consciousness” (p. 81) which, together, affect the structural features of the novel as well as the themes that made a significant presence in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

It must be made clear from the onset that what we deal with in this novel are two things that constitute our point of departure. The first is the dimension of realism in *Women in Love*, or the impingement of the real over the fictional—despite the author’s aversion to writing about the war— and how it is worked out, beautified and enlarged aesthetically which changes any of them altogether if they exist or perceived on their own and how it lessens the gap of fictivity and draws it into closer relation with the representation of the world of the author, and the second is that it is shaped by a degree of wholeness that brings together disparate themes, joins gaps, and emphatically stresses the dominant aspects which unify one conceptual frame that we are particularly interested in in this chapter.

There is nothing in our analysis of the nature of exploring these points in themselves. However, they remain of some critical interest to us, therefore, I seek to rationalize them as I draw the connection between the scope of religion amidst the confrontation with faith and unfaith which have a visible and convulsive identity that mark the course of the novel<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>125</sup> This will allow us to extend our interpretation to the claims made with assertiveness as the author’s broad and sweeping argument about the limits of knowledge and by extension the suspension of judgment.

In his non-fictional work *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence writes, “The novels and poems come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man.”. In his review of *Sons and Lovers* in 1915, Alfred Kuttner opined that “to understand Mr. Lawrence fully we must go beyond his works.” (qtd in. P. T. Whelan, 1988, p. 1); and in 1964 in the preface to “D.H. Lawrence”, Rober P. Draper would write that “it would be a mistake to assume that Lawrence's work can be dissociated from his life.”. Draper (1964), like many others, also endorse the contested idea that “the life and the work must be read together, and partly as commentaries on one another.” (p. 10), stress the significance and the value of knowing ‘something’ about the personal history of the author. In the same line of argument he adds that the world created in *Women in Love* “is thus not an isolated world. It is a parallel creation that reflects and comments on reality.” (ibid. p.77) he goes even further to consider it as a weakness since it speaks volumes about his fervor to bridge the fictional and the non-fictional worlds, saying that “the major weakness of *Women in Love* is perhaps an overeagerness to tie the fictional to the real world, involving a descent from the level of art to mere preaching.” (ibid.).

Draper’s note reveals his presumed objection to the biding of the fictional to the real and an implicit remark to the self-sufficiency of the fictional work and a dereliction towards absolute art; however, nothing in his remark is to the effect of the inadequacy of the real or the fictional for the author to ground his convictions and to express his views freely which in turn entails a fundamental impatience to finitude and the order of succession that the dimension of the real takes, although this could be the prima facie why they are an extension of one another. Draper’s remark remains one-sided and quasi-formalist and of the least correspondence to the

genre of this novel which is more than fiction, but a fictional autobiography from which scholarly concerns derive much of their interpretation of the life of D. H. Lawrence and just how important it is to do so. Therefore, however sound Draper's value judgment is, if we refer to a clearly determined effect, we find that there is no escaping the organic passage of any of the worlds into the other, and we shall never succeed in isolating them as spatial breaks of different structures since one transmits into the other ideas that would not otherwise take shape or a concrete form in the other and purport to overcome it.

It remains to be determined by the author an evaluative account of precedence and antecedence and the reasoning that sustains it. Writing about what his critics call 'pollyanalytics', Lawrence writes that "this pseudo-philosophy of mine 'pollyanalytics,' as one of my respected critics might say is deduced from the novels and poems, not the reverse [...] These 'pollyanalytics' are inferences made afterwards, from the experience." (qtd in. Black, 1992, p. 102). However, this does not suggest that it takes away from the logic of correspondence or the influence of the real on the imagined or vice versa because at what precise moment do we become conscious of the discharge of, the seeping into, and the inference of one from the other? And at what precise moment do we differentiate the antecedent from the consequent? Though it remains for Lawrence to decide which one has the most gripping effect, we cannot but expose it to the logic of correspondence as well as the logic of cause- effect<sup>127</sup>. The question then becomes whether Lawrence is justified, on logical grounds, in assuming which is derivative of which. Put differently, granted that his 'pollyanalytics' are principally drawn from his poems and novels which is but thought materialized, what then is the unmaterialized thought that has not been put to paper but abstract thought that needs to be structured in relations of ideas and a stimulant to materialize, but it remains there unstructured,

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<sup>127</sup> What would have completed our defense of this worldview is itself parochial and incomplete, but we rely on it nonetheless because, ideally, it is more than half the truth.

unexhausted, and inert.

Independent of any confessions or arguments, dialectical or otherwise, there is no denying the reciprocity of involvement of one in the other. I wanted to establish this to continue on this thread to bring Lawrence's life to his work *Women in Love* and his work to his life at different conjunctures in this analysis.

In working out the philosophy of *Women in Love*, Lawrence seems to be less interested in the sheer dramatic value of the situations he has created than in the opportunity to problematize divergent viewpoints, and while the second claim appears to contain the first in an improved tautology, there is a difference of emphasis and teleological preference, which makes us believe that with the abundant creativity and dramatic ingenuity which Mr. Lawrence exhibits that he knows how to handle his narrative. However, the conflicting instantiations, I argue, are not altogether predetermined but are at once spontaneous and uncalculated as well as purposeful, which means that they are developmental strands and that there is in them the sensitivity to alterations. The novel is after all "the release of individuality in the confusion of sense." It follows that there are constant readjustments that come with augmented awareness (perhaps that come with dealing with Freudian and Jungian aspects of the novel with which it abounds) that the weakness of each account vis-à-vis the author's intended point is made manifest?

The philosophy of *Women in Love* is the accommodation of the creative with the urgent because essentially "at bottom [Lawrence] was not concerned with art." Mr. Lawrence, Draper asserts that "by accident a novelist, actually is the priest of an age almost intolerably self-aware. Evocative, rather than delineative" (p. 164). Indeed, where a certain view vies for exposition it is necessarily brought to the surface for a theoretical performance within Lawrence's overall frame of thought with other elements of a potential for theoretical collision in an interplay of intense psychological experience. Therefore, the philosophy of Lawrence cuts across all

recognized divisions and is condemned to a dialectical nature characteristic of religious crisis.

The divergent viewpoints Mr. Lawrence executes have a profound bearing on the overall metaphysical statement of the narrative which has three dominant aspects to it: the crisis of uncertainty (existential crisis as it relates to life and death and the purpose of life), the quest for self-fulfillment, and the insatiable will to knowledge of the unknown which resolves itself in the creation of a solipsistic metaphysics. We recognize that Lawrence accommodates the creative with the urgent which in turn creates resistance to premature and facile categorization. Therefore, in so far as these viewpoints are embodied together coherently in a single work, the novel presents itself as a vehicle for the religious experience that is unique and intimate.

## **2.2. Unchristian...All Too Unchristian**

In a work not distinctively renowned for its religious pathos and otherwise only commonly read as a quintessential work on and about Eros, *Women in Love* espouses many modernist concerns, chief among them is the problem of metaphysics and the knowledge of it. However, to get an entry into that, one shall begin now, briefly so, with the importance of religion in Lawrence's life and work. It is essential to note preliminarily that the significance of religion in this work and what sort of religion the author adheres to are two separate quests. Thus I will not treat them as carrying the same semantic weight or that they overlap more naturally, for religion in the context of the present chapter is not of the sort that spells out dogmatic submission but is rather idiosyncratically aesthetic holding the same substance as any religiously fulfilling credo or as religion is narrowly and conventionally conceived.

For the author, the question of religion and fulfillment is inseparable from any other major theme and its implications are ineluctable. Perhaps this is why he wrote to Edward Garnet in 1914 that he is, as he worded it, "primarily a passionately religious man" and that all of his writings "must be written from the depths of [his] religious experience." and in his *Study of Thomas Hardy and other essays* published posthumously, he writes, "There seems to be a

fundamental, insuperable division, difference, between man's artistic effort and his religious effort. The two efforts are mixed with each other, as they are revealed, but all the while they remain two, not one, all the while they are separate, single, never compounded." (D. H. Lawrence, 1973, p. 59). He added, "One has to be so terribly religious, to be an artist" thus positing an indistinguishable continuity and overlap between the two whilst acknowledging their inseparateness. Luke Ferretter (2013) Compiled in his book *The Glyph and The Gramophone* a systematic study of the history of Lawrence's thought as well as his desultory views about religion and where he stands on the arch of belief. He noted from the dispersed letters of Lawrence and his other writings the unremitting developmental stages when it came to religion which then had noticeably far-reaching implications. He stated that up until his last days, Lawrence's articulation of the religious experience had a certain elasticity that certainly evaded intellectual or artistic neutrality on the question of God. Ferretter also remarked that Lawrence had at once the trait of a forced elusiveness and a compelling engagement. He talks about the glyph and the gramophone, which, in his terms are about "the 'God' who Lawrence believes cannot be known or spoken about and his constant and passionate effort to speak about it nevertheless." (p. 10)

Thereupon, there is no denying that the philosophy of Lawrence and his philosophy of religion as it is delivered in *Women in Love* is not oversimplified, and it cuts across all recognized divisions. At one moment in the history of criticism of this novel, this crucial element of religion did not go unnoticed in the scholastic literature composed about him. According to Wallace (1986), the novel provides generous evidence for a religious interpretation (p. 93), and commenting on the Foreword to *Women in Love*, T. R. Wright (2000) writes that the novel "presents itself as a radical but profoundly religious work" (p. 129). Undeniably, if the nature of religious experience is by definition beyond definition, other, less explicit means must be found for conveying it.

In an ideal interpretation, everything converges towards religion. The novel provides a complex structure of religious meaning and allows one to construct a synergic connection compatible with the observation of features of religion and analysis that conforms to it.

The novel starts with a strong anti-Christian, anti-faith undercurrent that is delivered in a certain reticence with an impulse to represent the background of what will yet to come. The novel opens with the Brangwen sisters sitting in their home in Beldover and exchanging their thoughts on commitment through their talk on marriage. From the first pages, we can already see an attempt to define what love and marriage are and attempts to abstractly evade it, and in the liminal space between these two disparate attempts lies confusion, uncertainty, and an alarming fear. Though both of the sisters appear to be outwardly confident and boasting about the non-temptation of marriage, the author reveals that inwardly, a tinge of fear crept into their hearts, “in their hearts they were frightened” (Chapter One). Right off the bat, the issue of religion and an anti-Christian attitude are being conceptualized and they progress linearly either symbolically or literally. From that we see the divergence of acute problematics within the narrative which made one critic of Lawrence raise the question of the adequacy of our “critical categories in dealing with a phenomenon like Lawrence” (Montgomery, 1994, p.3). However, if we trust that the beginning of *Women in Love* which we read thematically as separate from *The Rainbow* and as a fully rounded work (which we are seeking to do in this chapter) has an inescapable piercing advantage then Lawrence, writing in the age of a post-God world, and being the prophetic novelist that he is, is leading us to deeper knowledge and understanding of the overarching symptom of modernity by illuminating for us the problems of marriage, commitment, and faith.

It becomes clear the complexity of having these themes prioritized from the very start and how it continues well into the novel when we read through it. In the first few lines of the story, when Gudrun asks Ursula if she wants to get married, it seems that the meaning of it

does not register for her. For clearly the most simple and immediate conception of marriage is a God-ordained relationship between a man and a woman, but in the case of the major characters of this novel, their enhanced skepticism overrides their certainties, which is why everything must be approached individually in a relativistic manner rather than coming from a social agreement (or social and historical absolutism) about what something is. There is always a deferment of its orthodox meaning and a negotiation of what it holds and entails, from hashing over finding some sort of relief and alleviation of existential angst to man's making marriage impossible, the unified meaning of marriage and love are continuously reformulated. A couple of pages in, when the sisters are on their way to a marriage, the tone the author uses is the intensification of the feeling of darkness. Everything on their way was a caricature simulacrum of darkness and hostility, the woods, the cornfields 'blackened with distance', the path on which they walked was black, the dwellings were 'of darkened red bricks...with dark slate roofs', and even children called out names, adding a painfully somber obscurity to match with the scenery and retrogressively the psyche of the sisters thus overthrowing Gudrun in despair so much so that by the time they approached the church regretting why she ever came back in the first place to her town from London and she wanted to retreat from it all.

Confronted with the religious context from the beginning, the sisters —and subsequently other characters— are trapped into dealing with the residues of that which has not worn off completely and which they themselves continue to wrestle with, albeit from an atheistic standpoint. This is, then, the "thorough-line" that links many characters and their thoughts about life and existence and many themes in an unbroken endeavor to represent this worldview.

On a symbolic plane, this inchoate anti-Christian pulse and the problematic the author opened up his thematic preoccupation which takes another form progressively when contracted into an overt convergence of different anti-Christian viewpoints. With Mr. Crich symbolizing

and personalizing Christianity and its teachings. He served God in others and loved God by loving his fellow men. Even though he had an upper social status and “a great promoter of industry”, he was a sacrificial benevolent and perceived himself as equal to them, "following in the second generation, having a sufficient fortune, had thought only of the men. The mines, for him, were primarily great fields to produce bread and plenty for all the hundreds of human beings gathered about them.". He was a Christian “who wanted to be more Christian” ; however, there is a minute detail that renders this ideal image a half-truth. In representing the two extremities of Christianity and materialism, Mr. Crich exhibits a functional contradiction in representing not only Christianity but the state of Christianity in modernity as a cultural development of a theology that is open to and is subverted by materialism. He is neither one through and through, but more so than this dialectic materialism, the significance of having someone like Mr. Crich is to underline two antinomies: the paradox of the death of God as a prerequisite for materialism and materialism as the redeemer and perpetrator of the survival of theology which, at its core, is based on the incarnation, thus the materialist side of it. This in turn is reflected in his profession and in his marriage. Indeed, his wife is given the name Christiana (and it is no coincidence that she is given this name) and he is an industrialist, a mine owner by profession. On a basic level of interpretation, one can understand why he still dwelt among the harsh conditions of modernity which are inhospitable and antagonistic to religious truth, because there is a strong inculturation of modern ethos and an appropriation of Christianity to fit with the demands of modernity. Nonetheless, by making radical connections with the spirit of materialism, Christianity is subjugated to internal desolation, weakness and ultimately to recession<sup>128</sup>. Mr. Lawrence, conscious of the effects of modernity in not creating a polarized world; but a strange sameness and the melting of the old with the new makes him cognizant of the state of Christianity when he describes Mr. Crich’s physical appearance early

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<sup>128</sup> Materialism which still enjoys broader currency is by definition devouring and relies for its survival on invariable consummation.

in the novel as having a frail body which suggests contradictory forces at work. He is thin, 'pale and ill-looking'. Subsequent events in the story divulge literal, symbolic, and semantic ways that have an immediate bearing on the portrayal of Christianity and faith in the old in a characteristically Lawrenceian tone —unapologetically concerned and critically engaged. The author leaves no doubt Mr. Crich's physical state will worsen and deteriorate as the story unfolds. Half way into the story Mrs. Krik would tell Ursula that 'He's not long for this world, he's very poorly', his life was wearing thin and eventually Mr. Crich, the Father in this story, would die,

So the father drew more and more out of the light. The whole frame of the real life was broken for him. He had been right according to his lights. And his lights had been those of the great religion. Yet they seemed to have become obsolete, to be superseded in the world. He could not understand. He only withdrew with his lights into an inner room, into the silence. The beautiful candles of belief, that would not do to light the world any more, they would still burn sweetly and sufficiently in the inner room of his soul, and in the silence of his retirement."

In contradistinction to this, albeit with the same finality, Mr. Crich's son Gerald embodies the essence of modernity. Wallace highlights the connection on the one hand between uncritical participation in modernity and the submission to nihilism and on the other hand between the critical consciousness of the negativity of modernity and the "struggle for radically different cultural alternatives" (p. 27) which consequentially transforms modern society from a secondary nature with mechanical stability "to a world of historical creation, whose forms express explicitly human intentions and desires." (ibid.). It is no coincidence that Lawrence insisted on bringing from the line of Mr. Crich a materialist and industrialist as someone like Gerald who is a self-acclaimed atheist with a Cain spirit/past, whose religion is the cultivation of nature to his will is as per the author "the God of the machine, Deus ex Machina". The

author aptly remarked in the Coaldust chapter that the two are ‘as different as they welly can be, Gerald Crich and his father—two different men, differently made.’. Gerald’s understanding, he felt “was much sounder and safer” because it matched with the landscape that modernity shaped, “his own knowledge were direct and personal” rather than inferred from observation, and in him, the desire for God was mediated by his will to culturally appropriate Matter, “to turn upon the inanimate matter of the underground, and reduce it to his will.” In Gerald, there was “the desire to translate the Godhead into pure mechanism.” The author adds,

He had his life-work now, to extend over the earth a great and perfect system in which the will of man ran smooth and unthwarted. Timeless, a Godhead in process. He had to begin with the mines [...] And then, in this there was perfection attained, the will of the highest was perfectly fulfilled.

Lawrence converts this zeal and this flicker into ashes when he reveals towards the end of the story that the flicker of atheistic logic is fully consummated, that there is nothing for it to reclaim him, and that this desire for a Godhead is forced to its annihilation.

To a great extent, Both Gerald and Mr. Crich and what they represent are victims of an inexplicable hostility. But do they offer themselves as examples to the conclusion that Lawrence has come to?

Michael Bell (2001), who finds in the contemporaneous of Lawrence and Dostoevsky (whose work was a case in point in Bakhtin's concept of dialogy and in his study of dialogism) and with Lawrence's familiarity with Russian literature striking similarities. He validates the Bakhtinian argument by narrowing his analysis on Lawrence's prose, defining it as "a narrative mode of shifting subjectivity" (qtd in. Sotirova , 2011, p. 52) and finds a correlation between the "internal relativism" with "the dialogic conception of [Bakhtin]" (ibid. p. 52-3). Furthermore, he substantiates the mode of the narrative of *Women in Love* as "Bakhtinian in its

effects." (ibid. p. 53). André Topia (1993) agrees with the interpretation that Bakhtin's dialogic mirrors the author's artistic experience. Therefore, if the novel is defined exclusively in terms of either pondering on religious questions, or on materialistic and naturalistic questions as the sole quest, it will quickly be plagued by instruction and will be reduced to a didactical pursuit. However, *Women in Love* is a work of excellent Bakhtinian dialogy, particularly because, in the words of David Lodge (1990),

the narrator never delivers a finalizing judgemental word on the debate or its protagonists. The narrator also 'circulates' between them. The narrator seldom speaks in a clearly distinct voice of his own, from a plane of knowledge above the characters: rather, he rapidly shifts his perspective on their level, and shows us now what Ursula is thinking of Birkin, now what Birkin is thinking of Ursula, now what Hermione is thinking of both of them, and they of her. (qtd in. ibid. p. 52)

Practically speaking, what follows is the subordination of subjective experience to a fictional narrative. In furtherance of this point, it is important to raise the hypothetical questions about the surrounding meaning, from where does it originate and how can we locate its authoritative figure? In the end the coveted answer recoils on the author. It is very evident in "*Women in Love*" that the narrator carries implications that exceed the narrative scheme. The narrative mode in *Women in Love* is transmuted through dialogism, a view many critics were alerted to and held as the acceptable justification and a potent and effective interpretation for the diversity in viewpoints, the authorial distance, non-engagement and the inconclusivity.

That these two threads, i.e. thesis and antithesis (belief and disbelief) reveal the narrative logic of the novel is unmistakable. Even if he did not delay on this detail, it still reared its head in different settings and under different circumstances. The author, it seems, did not overcome the problem just yet by preparing the ground for a dialectic of faith and unfaith, thus

allowing for weaker adherence with neither position. The issue of the desire for knowledge, and for “some sort of finality” still persisted amid the throes of tragedy and the mayhem of existence behind a background of love and union and the vocabulary of the psychology of dealing with the unknown as well as religion, if religion allows for the grounding of meaning in life amid the suffering rather than it being about theological doctrines and if religion is about the preparation for the unknown in the worlds that man imagines he occupies or will occupy.

The undermining of the concept of marriage and the heretic conception of union and relationships are the first in a series of undertakings to subdue Christianity and the old order. With an emphasis less on that than on diverting our attention to the dialectic of belief and disbelief of a theological order of the world, we become familiarized with the sensation that there is no lamentation over the loss of them nor of any desire to bring forth a new Gospel and new religion—except that it should be an umbrella for the limits of man’s conception and to respond to his blood and by blood we take it to mean the conscious realization of something greater and wholesome that the self craves— seen as alienating man further from belief in the unknown. Even if he did not delay on this detail for the sake of the development of parallel themes, it still reared its head in different settings and under different circumstances.

In a telling dialogue between Gerald and Birkin about the meaning of life in chapter v (in the Rain), the two seem to be ambivalent about what to make about life. It is a discussion that involves the subject of religion, of smashing old idols before erecting new ones, of new Gospels and new beginnings, and pondering on the irrelevance of it all, of getting inside the skin of life and accepting its limits. For Gerald, new beginnings meant a socio-economic repackaging (and it is the recycling of the old in a quasi-new form), the reformation of the whole order of society, a suggestion or proposition that Birkin refuted immediately, and called it "a tiresome game for self-important people."

If certain themes came to an end, apocalyptically, then that of metaphysics remains

open, pulsing, and vital. The author does not hasten its end but prolongs it. Not that the different situations fail to carry themselves fully to the end in a sort of lucid narrative connection and logical association into a kind of fabricated certainty or have not their proper place and proportion in the story, but as one critic pointed out that Lawrence is above those elemental things that any competent novelist knows. It seems that it is a matter of a lenient gesture that proceeds towards the full consummation of each claim than an evidence he stacks up for them, therefore leaving a fissure for discontinuity, for not much for other viewpoints but for other themes and other concerns. The elemental things the novel undermines reveal areas of preoccupation and concern that play a critical role in Lawrence's thought. Lawrence is attentive to balance<sup>130</sup>; thus, the philosophy of knowledge (which defies antinomies and aporetics) becomes the philosophy of language mediated by symbolism fully rendered in *Women in Love* through two modes of characterization, direct speech and the representation of viewpoints (Lodge, 1990).

### **2.3. Suppressed by Limitations, Divulged by Mysticism**

Hitherto, studies about this alternative, which critics have rightly extracted from *Women in Love*, have for the most part merely focused on mysticism. There is indeed an impressive diversity regarding the alternatives drawn from imagination to explore precariously the mystical side of the world; however, this thesis falls short on the following aspect: mysticism is the subordination of the imagination to the desire for the unknown<sup>131</sup> and is itself mystical and shrouds lucidity.

In his studies in Classic American Literature, Lawrence "explored the idea of an original world religion" (qtd in. John Beer, 2014, p. 205). This tells us something about

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<sup>130</sup> Hence from these limitations and delimitations that give rise to the dialectic of belief and disbelief grow a desire for a search for the alternative.

<sup>131</sup> Mysticism also entails rituals and is an undeniable path to Gnosticism and in the novel, this is moderately suggested.

Lawrence, that he finds as an obligation and as a prerequisite for existential appeasement a place between the physical and the metaphysical, between the aesthetics and the philosophical.

The world mystic in *Women in Love* describes sensations relative to different characters that are attached to either external things, like the flowers or abstract feelings like hate, movement of the self towards something, the maintenance of the self, union and bond, balance and integrity, degeneration, harmony and organisation, reason, knowledge, death, 'the nodality of physical being', the body of reality, otherness, the navel of the world, the east...etc. There is indeed an almost full panoramic coverage of things that the word mystic can be applied to and here, Lawrence suggests very strongly to us that much of the abstract terms are metaphysical and as a poet whose fascination with the world of objects, some of the objects, if not all, are also mystical. We note here two things. One, the transmutation of even the known into the unknown; and two, the struggle to express the unknowability. Both of which are consistently reflected in the novel in the handling of the mystic side of the world. The author's perceptiveness of the world beyond phenomena informs much of his understanding of the world either in the abstract or concrete. Lawrence, it seems, readily contests ready-made knowledge and he "disapprove(s) of too much knowledge, on the score that it diminished men's sense of wonder and blunder their sensitiveness to the great mystery." as if he is seeking in the solace of unknown his source for creativity. A simple conclusion follows from this, We cannot say that he, or his characters as such converted to mysticism. Mysticism is rather a fascination, and the fascination with mysticism brought to its limits. Aldous Huxley (1947) rightly says,

Lawrence's special and characteristic gift was an extraordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called "unknown modes of being". He was always intensely aware of the mystery of the world, and the mystery was always for him *numen*, divine. Lawrence could not forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies behind the boundaries of man's

conscious mind. This special sensibility was accompanied by a prodigious power of rendering the immediately experienced otherness in terms of literary art. (p. 203)

Huxley adds that "his possession of it accounts for many things." (ibid.). Being aware of the fact that man is condemned to absolute non comprehension, and "mocked by a promise of certain knowledge", Lawrence resorts to the uncovering of mysticism in adorned and shrewd ways. Before arriving at that level, Lawrence indicates his comprehension of the depths of the unknown which is transferred from perception to a creative and artistic assimilation of religious experience. The twentieth-century literary critic and philosopher Eliseo Vivas (1960) attributes to the virtuoso of symbolism an important aesthetic significance which, according to him, gives the novel the frame to articulate a 'subjectively intense experience' which introduces by its functionality and mediation "an explicitly religious content" imbuing the novel with a predominantly religious meaning. He points the idea succinctly when he draws the link between the aesthetic value, worthiness and importance of *Women in Love* from a formalist point of view and the capacity of the symbolic immanent in the aesthetic to give form to a subjectively profound experience. John B. Humma (1990) considers the orchestration of the symbolic and aesthetic "a matter of Lawrence's having found what suffices for him." (p. 92) and what would suffice him should be enclosed in the bounds and scope of his creativity<sup>132</sup>.

Creativity is an important element in Lawrence's thought and it mediates the unbustling way between the unknown and comprehension. Conditioned by unfulfillment and actualization, Lawrence creates from contingency an optional choice. His symbolism is derived from the phenomenology of the things perceived, then imagined, then oversimplified yet profoundly articulated, then anchored in something perceived and known then repackaged abstractly in understandable terms, then brought to light, each one being a "half-mystic

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<sup>132</sup> However, on a profounder level, what would suffice Lawrence too is this development of a religious vision.

assertion" (Lawrence 1936/2017). He makes slits in the unknown to extract something known and makes slits in the known to reveal something about the unknown. It is a secondary knowledge of the abstract that emanates from his rebuff "to know abstractly" and his refusal of generalizations<sup>133</sup> but also, to put it in Platonic terms, by the force of this embedded imitation is infinitely removed from truth. Besides, being an artist, there is an indubitable yearning for creation and the consummation of the finite. On a non-aesthetic level, this correlates with evins's assumption about the characters of the novel who "are prepared to struggle against the forms of modern culture, and to create a fragile basis for a new world." (Wallace, p. 27). This new world is a world of intensified consciousness of what would have typically gone unobtrusive. Vivas remarks that the novel "is a triumphant of symbolic art: of art that works [...] from cofounder levels and in more complex ways in order to convey more and deeper significance than naturalistic or realistic art is able to do." (qtd in. Wallace, p. 101)

Even though the symbolic and the aesthetic have "no autonomous value and thus represent a limitation of Lawrence's creative consciousness." (ibid. p. 102), they still have a bearing on the religious experience; i.e., they help develop it and the relationship that binds them is one which is marked by creativity because it proceeds from self-referential bodies of knowledge, therefore, the resultant religious vision is itself dependent despite it being original and idiosyncratic.

Part of the larger conflict of the novel as Lawrence puts it in the Forward to the novel, is the "struggle for verbal consciousness". His "obscure terminology" which we will explore shortly is derived from that serious query into questioning the existence and theorizing about it so much so that his theory of the novel was to fuse philosophy with fiction. In his essay *The Future of the Novel*, Lawrence expressed his pettiness about the state of fiction and philosophy,

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<sup>133</sup> Huxley contends, "It was not an incapacity to understand that made him reject those generalizations and abstractions by means of which the philosophers or the men of science try to open a path for the human spirit through the chaos of phenomena." (xv) but by being the artist that he is who is making sense of the world.

suggesting that they should be brought together to be read like Plato's Dialogues for the important effect both have when paired. He writes, suggesting the restoration of the initial structure and content of the novel,

Plato's Dialogues, too, are queer little novels. It seems to me it was the greatest pity in the world, when philosophy and fiction got split. They used to be one, right from the days of myth. Then they went and parted, like a nagging married couple, with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and that beastly Kant. So the novel went sloppy, and philosophy went abstract-dry. The two should come together again, in the novel. (Lawrence, 1936/ 2017)

To stay moderately balanced as a philosopher and artist, Lawrence espoused in the novel both fiction and philosophy to the extent that we cannot tell them apart. This is perhaps why in May 1916, he spoke to Catherine Carswell of "something quite new on the face of the earth [...] a terrible and horrible and wonderful novel." (Catherine Carswell, 1932/2008, p. 46) and described his new work *Women in Love* as "his most important novel." (ibid).

The implications of this on his writing style is that when bonded with personal sensibilities the narrative becomes a modified form of critical practice of what he intuitively recognize as missing or a puzzlement of what to make of the excess of the signified and the knowledge thereof in the labyrinthine of the unknown. Lawrence's writing adumbrates the deep desperation and discomfort many of his contemporaries have felt in a world in which many human elements were being depleted and surrendered. It intersects with Montgomery's (1994) diagnosis of Lawrence's knack for penetration to the farthest limits into "what Jaspers calls the "boundaries" of thought, where the understanding fails and where only the reason or imagination can carry us further." (p. 105). In his *A Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence writes, "it is only a disproportion, or a dissatisfaction, which makes the man struggle into articulation. And the articulation is of two sorts, the cry of desire or the cry of realization, the cry of

satisfaction, the effort to prolong the sense of satisfaction, to prolong the moment of consummation.". On this point Sibyl Jacobson (1973) writes, "Lawrence's language consistently asserts the importance of progressing beyond the border to a completeness which is fulfillment, not deadening finality." (p. 61).

"The experience of god is an initiation into the soul of chaos. But belonging to the English race of moralists, Mr. Lawrence persists in a search for temporal solutions." (Evelyn Scot, p. 163) he adds towards the end of his review that "religions are immediate philosophies." (qtd. in Becket, 2013)

#### **2. 4. 'But always there was a deficiency'**

Throughout the story, there is a painful presence of all of these variables. We find most characters accepting the burden of comprehension that the increase in consciousness brings. "they are overconscious, burdened to death with consciousness.", and the pain that comes with it is riveting and remarkable; thereby subsuming the story and the myriad plots in it to an underlying consciousness of crises, to a philosophy of crises, or for an accurate verdict, to a philosophy of crisis strewn all over the novel.

Crisis in *Women in Love* concerns death (not the arrival of death but the person's arrival into death), the fractured reason, crisis of resistance, but most importantly, the crisis of knowledge. Certain knowledge brings peace as Ursula contemplated, and uncertain knowledge brings turmoil, unrest, chaos and a deep sense of insufficiency.

The author's explicitly cynical tone about Hermione is consistent with the crisis of knowledge which is emphatically stretched and elaborated throughout the novel with and through other major characters. Hermione is described as a strident woman of faith, a "touchstone of truth.", and a *Kulturtrager*, a vehicle for culture who is ensnared in the pretensions of higher knowledge in which she takes pride<sup>134</sup>. The situation with her is

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<sup>134</sup> And so she "piled up her defences of aesthetic knowledge, and culture, and world-visions and disinterestedness.". Rupert Birkin; whom she was conversing with when her crisis of knowledge was promulgated,

paradoxical. Though she embodies the ideals of a believing person, we are told that she is a “tortured woman” who “has no natural sufficiency” and there is always a troubling emptiness in her and a lack of something when being with her. The logical solution the narrator tells us is that “she wanted someone to close up this deficiency” and she looked up to Birkin for that for a mystical union of which she felt it was most prescient, “yet she could never stop up the terrible gap of insufficiency” (p. 12). Interesting enough, from the vantage of her higher knowledge there appears that she possesses meta-knowledge, or knowledge of her psychological and spiritual predicament. Though irrelevant to the nature of her problem, in the brief space in which she is narrated and talked about, she is criticizing impassionate knowledge, knowledge that impedes spontaneity and forceful knowledge about decided and lawful living besides actively searching to superimpose something external to remedy her inward insufficiency. Not that she confesses the error of her knowledge. Rather, she expresses her own certainty and stands firm on her beliefs, but that she reflects that it is far removed from spontaneous living.

In emphasizing the way Birkin and Hermione interact with each other, the same problem reappears, time and again. Their fixation with this topic is the only justification for them having to interact. Their abhorrence for each other is due to the fissure in their understanding of knowledge and thus life which paradoxically enough shows variations on a tight perspective, a similar one we might say. In addition, both transform the terms of their forced encounters into criticism of realism and idealism in relation to the subject of knowledge, and in doing so, the boundaries of knowledge are charted and examined with each character putting in their their perspective and bringing into the discussion their own terms of critique. The topic without a doubt draws in an amalgam of perspectives, not unlimited, but eclectic, thus pleading for relativity that ends up in undermining the idea of absolute knowledge.

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accused her of having only one tree, one fruit in her mouth. This is a clear biblical allusion. The story in Genesis holds that.

Birkin's conception of knowledge comes in a passage where he tells Ursula that she can only have knowledge meticulously "of things concluded, in the past." Of the things in motion, of the cosmos, one cannot pin down or allege to have a knowledge base. Birkin willingly participates in this subject; Hermione on the other hand, is hauled to it, unwillingly revealing her thoughts on the matter. In a short passage, she expresses her frustration with her "criticism and analysis of life". And that she "really *do*[es] want to see things in their entirety, with their beauty left to them, and their wholeness, their natural holiness.". Hermione complains from an alienated existence at the same time she acknowledges the amplitude of aesthetic order, and the existence of the completeness of knowledge that we may not know and we do not know yet we accept it a priori as it is. "Don't you feel it, don't you feel you *can't* be tortured into any more knowledge?" said Hermione to Ursula. However, the implication of this is that in a world that is illuminated by the light of certainty such that the dark corners of life and the world are disbelieved in indefinitely has proven time and again that the metaphysical is beyond scientific investigation. In a passage with Ursula, Hermione admitted that she could not be sure if she should stick to her belief—in the completeness of knowledge per se whose onus is apparently on her and her alone—which ostensibly provides structure to life or to the realization that her consciousness brought about the incompleteness of her knowledge vis-à-vis the state of knowledge as complete in the abstract, and hence her self-unfulfillment, "sometimes I wonder if *I ought* to submit to all this realisation, if I am not being weak in rejecting it. But I feel I can't—*I can't*. it seems to destroy *everything*. All the beauty and the—and the true holiness is destroyed—and I feel I can't live without them.". Similarly, Ursula at one moment of heightened unconsciousness declared to herself, "But to live mechanised and cut off within the motion of the will, to live as an entity absolved from the unknown, that is shameful and ignominious."

An implicit criticism emerges from this, that it should have been a sign of its truth, i.e. the truth of the knowledge she advocates but has not accrued in its entirety (only through belief), if by this truth self actualization is reached, however, this is not the case. Hermione and to a great extent Ursula (early in the novel but only in the shadow) claim to possess the knowledge sufficient to let them know that what they know through belief despite the evidence to the contrary in their tone of confusion and uncertainty and that the knowledge they advocate is complete in and out of itself. It is an argument for morality. There is the stressing on what is morally *right*. Hermione brushes off the infinitude of knowledge as an inquiry in itself through no perusal and instead imposes the necessity of old order upon her internal struggle and chaos. So far there is evidence that in the nocturnal silence of safe knowledge and (un)secure belief that Hermione, whose safety in not knowing is a reference in agnosticism.

Ursula who agrees with Hermione's assessment early in the narrative<sup>135</sup> is singled out in the chapter of Sunday Evening where she is shown through her monologue to ponder over the accomplishment of life and the immanence of death, though it was a false feeling because the novel is not a conventionally plotted one and nowhere in it does she die. But what the passage "why should we ask what comes after the experience, when the experience is still unknown to us? Suggests is epistemological ignorance that is tolerable within the confines of unknown experience which certainly adds an important specificity to the crisis of knowledge. In the same context by submitting to an agnostic rationality characteristic of agnostic believers when the sense of death is amplified in them, she ruminates about the discrepancy between the known and the unknown in the subtlety of death and that death alone is conclusive in this regard, and it is death alone that will settle the issue, but again, even with death and in death, we do not know "Oh, let us ask no question of it, what it is or is not. To know is human, and

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<sup>135</sup> saying that "would be simply wrong to live without them [beauty and holiness]" but contrary to Hermione, she felt fulfilled and ready for death. We are told that "she knew all she had to know, she had experienced all she had to experience, she was fulfilled in a kind of bitter ripeness, there remained only to fall from the tree into death."

in death we do not know, we are not human. And the joy of this compensation for all the bitterness of knowledge and the sordidness of our humanity.” Ursula, it seems, is also cognizant of the blissfulness and resoluteness that this settlement should bring, “To die is also a joy, a joy of submitting to that which is greater than the known, namely, the pure unknown”. Whatever the certainties are, they could not eliminate the inevitable uncertainties that revolve around the human experience of life. Only the death experience which has the key to the answers that torment humans.

So far, the agony of Hermione and Ursula are ill-defined if not at all undefined unless we consider intertextual links so that the objective meaning is revealed. Despite Ursula’s initial accord with the value judgment of Hermione, she would later suffer from her one-sidedness and from claims to certain knowledge. The inner state of Hermione herself would expose her “aching certainty” and deficiency as originating from her —still hidden conviction— that it is bogus, which conferred on her a sense of cynicism. The author writes,

Poor Hermione, it was her one possession, this aching certainty of hers, it was her only justification. She must be confident here, for God knows, she felt rejected and deficient enough elsewhere. In the life of thought, of the spirit, she was one of the elect. And she wanted to be universal. But there was a devastating cynicism at the bottom of her. She did not believe in her own universals—they were sham. She did not believe in the inner life—it was a trick, not a reality. She did not believe in the spiritual world—it was an affectation.

Until now, we have come to the root cause of the issue of her self-unfulfilment and that is the privation of knowledge, or rather of complete and sufficient knowledge. She is described as “a leaf upon a dying tree.”, but her case is captivating in that despite her obsolescence and the obsolescence of that which stands firm on, she persisted in her trajectory,

What help was there then, but to fight still for the old, withered truths, to die for the old, outworn belief, to be a sacred and inviolate priestess of desecrated mysteries? The old great truths had been true. And she was a leaf of the old great tree of knowledge that was withering now. To the old and last truth then she must be faithful even though cynicism and mockery took place at the bottom of her soul.

Hermione is one such person with no character development and this is where the narrator establishes a distinction between Ursula and Hermione. Ursula is rather responsive to the vagaries of the conscious demands of situations, an important clue regarding her position on knowledge.

In my analysis thus far, we notice that the consciousness about the levels of knowledge does not struggle to remain a key preoccupation of the text. It is an embedded statement of the author that remains most evident in the way he divides sides and creates allies, accomplices and detractors and in the way he creates divergent paths along the line of the desire for the ontological Other and self-fulfillment. This fact warrants notice when we posit that self-fulfillment is realized only with the transcendence of the limits of the self.

Sibyl Jacobson (1973) rightly observes that "the striving for fulfillment becomes an important theme and an underlying metaphor in the novel." (p. 53). She also notes that the quest for fulfillment and the desire for it "is worked out both extrinsically, on the narrative level, and intrinsically on the symbolic level." (ibid. p. 54) and it "helps establish character and motivates much of the action." (ibid.) However, she states that the objective of this quest is indeterminate and thus, it remains transient. But according to this last statement an instability of meaning emerges. It does not reflect the psychological grounded conditions of its existence regardless of it being established horizontally across the events of the novel and vertically along the degrees of anguish.

What this reading suggests is the withering of the complexities and ambiguities that have been formed structurally into the novel. The equivocation of this particular dimension in the narrative in what Lawrence calls '*The gap of deficiency*' discussed thus far communicates existential void linked to knowledge of the unknown or rather the different levels of knowledge that one is happily or disconsolately acknowledges as forming part of the limits of man's capacity for comprehension and how it is implicated in broader contexts about life which constitutes a recurring dispute between different characters. If certain themes came to an end, apocalyptically in the story, then that of metaphysics remains open and pulsing and vital. The author does not hasten its end, but prolongs it.

## **2. 5. The Sentient Unknown, Truncated Ontology and the Limits of Knowledge**

It will still be a proposition in this study that man's inherent privation of complete and comprehensive knowledge is what instigates and stirs the sense of unfulfillment and internal chaos that reflects the outer chaos of the modern world which is dynamically represented in *Women in Love*.

We now turn briefly to the word chaos and its genesis in Lawrence's thought to justify my approach to the crisis of knowledge, uncertainty, unfulfillment and metaphysics. Oddly, Chaos for Lawrence is polysemous yet Neoplatonic. It is the cosmos, consciousness, mind and even civilization. It is also, as he remarked on many occasions, the bursting of the bubble of life, which "is all we shall ever know of God.". Lawrence confronts the concept of God by equating chaos with the unknown which according to a metaphor that he used in the preface to *Chariot of The Sun* is penetrated only through the slits that poets make in the parasol that they erect between the known and the unknown to gain a vision, or a simulacrum of a vision<sup>136</sup>. Getting back to chaos, which is essentially the unknown, the first cause that explains all the unexplainable is "the momentous crisis for mankind" that knows no historical barriers, it is

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<sup>136</sup> See Lawrence's Preface to *Chariot of The Sun* by Harry Crosby in his Phoenix: Posthumous Papers (1936), pp. 255-262

God in a standard interpretation. God or chaos remain within the confines of transcendental idealism<sup>137</sup>, become their own reference, and therefore, any understanding of them is teased out by an approximate understanding of an image mediated by a phenomenological perspective of the natural world. Maya Karlins (1995) picked up on this subtle yet sophisticated view, albeit in non-metaphysical terms when she said that "Lawrence analyses the mind's predisposition to impose order on the chaos of the phenomenal world." (p. 26). God as unknown is at once analytical and synthetic. God the unknown is the mysterious and thus it reproduces or redoubles the criterion of the unknown; here God as unknown shows that the predicate is contained in the subject and synthetic because the quality or characteristic mentioned in the predicate also relates to the subject.

God for Lawrence is the Inscrutable and the unknowable, and to comprehend Him would be essentially derivative and would include the subordination of the unknown to the known in a kind of conceptual metaphor which is essentially symbolic. In this regard, Lawrence does not militate against theism nor does he espouse an atheistic view (i.e., God is neither obsolete nor is He non-existent). Lawrence, observed Huxley (1932), "could always perceive the otherness behind the most reassuringly familiar phenomenon" (xxii). Therefore, there are the seeds of both theism and agnosticism in Lawrence's conception of God. Indeed, for Lawrence, the idea of God is compatible with agnosticism and is agnostic par excellence.

This observation becomes all the more important as we grow more aware of the journey of Lawrence in metaphysics<sup>138</sup>. Harry Moore (1961) asserts that "Lawrence's serious interest in Metaphysics began around the time both novels were conceived." (p. 73), and this is

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<sup>137</sup> which means that all objects are mind-independent and we cannot comprehend the mind-independent world.

<sup>138</sup> We should mention here in passing that Mr. Lawrence who is pigeonholed as a religious man, was unequivocally brought up as a Christian and it is Christianity that shaped his formative years, however, during his teenage years and later in college he repudiated Christianity. In a letter to Bertrand Russell, Lawrence writes: 'I have been wrong, much too Christian, in my philosophy,... these early Greeks have clarified my soul... I am rid of all my Christian religiosity' (15). However, despite rejecting Christianity, he continued to develop religious beliefs of his own." see (Ferretter, 2013, p. 1).

probably the time when his self-consciousness began to sharpen, and when he recognized man's limits. In an article written in 1927 he writes, "In his adventure of self-consciousness, a man must come to the limits of himself and become aware of something beyond him. A man must be self-conscious enough to know his own limits and to be aware of that which surpasses him." (qtd in. Lawrence, 2013). Aldous Huxley (1932) inferred that Lawrence was someone "to whom the world's mystery is continuously present...he did not want to increase the illuminated area; he approved of the outer darkness, he felt at home in it."(p.xiv). There is a tacit acknowledgment in him of the unknown but his method was not to resist its frontiers but to enter into an intimate "contact with the surrounding darkness." (p.xv) Following Lawrence's remark about unknowability, Huxley wrote, "One god had as much right to exist as another".

Unlike Augustine of Hippo who "protested against all the physical images [of God] in [his] mind", Lawrence goes a step beyond the analytical to the creative in secularist terms. After "the miserable restlessness of the spirits, who fell away and discovered their own darkness." (p.385) Lawrence felt compelled to imagine something physical enveloping space and has eventually surrendered to the exigence of the human perception to conceive of God anthropomorphically. He argues that "man cannot live in chaos... Man must wrap himself in a vision, make a house of apparent form and stability, fixity..." (qtd in Maya Kalnins, 1995, p. 26). Huxley echoes this sentiment by arguing that he is gifted with "a gift of feeling and rendering the unknown, the mysteriously other." ‘

In *Women in Love*, Lawrence penetrates a certain metaphysical depth by association through an ideal (symbolism of woman) only to transmit to us prematurely the apriori impossibility of knowledge of the reality of metaphysics. He elevates intuition to the highest value and passes to it the role of demystification. Intuition in this context constitutes a secularist and cognitive departure. And here agnosticism becomes a synthetic phenomenon because it represents a conjuncture between different levels. The first is of delimitation of man's limits

by means of intuition of “the mysterious forces of otherness” compressed into one concept, that of God because as Lawrence confidently states, “our intuitions point to things that are unknown and hidden —that by their very nature are secret”; the second is the conceptual containment and semantic surpassing of this unknown by an understanding that surpasses comprehension of its existence as comprehension in and out of itself to one that renders it mystically material<sup>139</sup> through an artistic effort to express mysticism and to contribute to it. Here mysticism may appear to be a general wording of everything unknown, but we want to stress that it relates to a high ontological order of a certain mythical dimension. It is the spiritual qua sensual and the religious qua aesthetic.

That something of a mystic semblance in the novel that is forced, and which could not be demonstrated is both “an idea” and “an interpretation of a profound yearning” that finds its way to materialized expression through language, molded to assimilate a certain unknown God. Halfway into the novel, we are introduced to an idea that has the recognized form of ontology, however epistemically mystic. This is what renders *Women in Love* a theocentric work whose essence is an inclination towards an ontological retrogression, “And in the great retrogression, the reducing back of the created body of life, we get knowledge, and beyond knowledge, the phosphorescent ecstasy of acute sensation.” The created body of life was reduced twice in the novel and it relates to the idea and Ideal of male and female (both are synonymous with the word known) having an alternative ontological function in the novel and an epistemic potency. Here the author poses the conditions for the play of words and for the conceptual argumentation that rests against a backdrop of criticism. In the apotheosis of the phallic —the loins— or the female mystery which has rightly been identified as an African goddess<sup>140</sup> lies the idea of creation and the flow of life which is a challenge to transcendental ontology. The ideals of the

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<sup>139</sup> Huxley contends that Lawrence’s distaste of “abstract knowledge and pure spirituality made him a kind of mystical materialist.” (p. xx)

<sup>140</sup> “And now Woman,” writes Evelyn Scot “because of her immediate part in the intimate mystery of creation, is revived for worship.”

male and the female are very artistically sharp that there seems little for anyone else to add to them, save from a radical shift in focus and the turning to language and arguments. The female is a primitive caricature of the creative force and the male, too, has a fair share in the workings of creation. Gudrun “thought there was no source deeper than the phallic source.” after coming into a fierce sensual experience with Gerald. However, seen in the broader set of events, Birkin concludes his thoughts about the primacy of the phallic knowledge later in the novel in a corrective way when he deduced that the inverted culture that revered the female body surpassed phallic knowledge and that the secret of creation in a limited temporal window is ascribed to her (the author does not go far into accounting for the eternity but limits<sup>141</sup>). We already see different levels of knowledge conscripted to approximate knowledge of the unknown.

Unsurprisingly, both models are of a corporeal nature and are not identical to the normative views of God but they imitate the force of creation in a mundane way and have metaphysical properties that account for the mystic to a limited extent and the author brings them into the story with a divided yet exclusive focus. Both sprang from the imagination and their quality of the imagined bears a resemblance to the concept of *imago dei*, at least as far as the elements of creation—to which they are strongly linked and it is the *raison d’être* of their being—is concerned. They are Conscious articulations of an Unconscious desire and intelligible claims are not by definition credible or compelling, much less convincing, but they are unquestionably functional (because they are conceptual derivatives that aim at eliminating or diluting the ambiguity of theological claims), at least in form and epistemic proximity even if it is construed mythically and precariously.

The desirability for completeness which the reader feels is a compelling theme in the novel, especially with the bringing together of contraries and the juxtaposition of them has a

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<sup>141</sup> which justifies our thesis of a truncated metaphysical ontology.

metaphysical implication. Somewhere else in his writing, Lawrence locates what he calls the Will-to-Inertia in the female whereas the Will-to-Motion he located in the male and it seems that Lawrence's epistemic preference rests with the ideal of order, of trying to pin down the unlimited, the eternal and the chaotic and it seems like this is his kind of imposition of order to chaos, and he locates it in the female, hence, his inclination towards the female.

Contextually, a woman is a symbol of mystery, of something else rather than being a symbol in itself. In her "the desire for creation and productive happiness" and she is worshipped "because of the principle of knowledge in dissolution and corruption". Birkin ponders the epistemic lengths that the West Africans have reached and how far they have gone beyond phallic knowledge. "Very, very far. Birkin recalled again the female figure: the elongated, long, long body, the curious unexpected heavy buttocks, the long, imprisoned neck, the face with tiny features like a beetle's. This was far beyond any phallic knowledge, sensual subtle realities far beyond the scope of phallic investigation." Birkin and by extension, the author allocates the agency of genesis to the female body<sup>142</sup> in a forceful invocation of a replacement for God and in an authoritative assertion of its supremacy over the phallic. The symbolism of the female asserts Lawrence, "sort of keeps [him] in direct communication with the unknown, in which otherwise [he is] a bit lost." (qtd. in Black, 1986, p. 34)

The author resorts to economizing the knowledge of the substance in a flesh-induced knowledge that replaces the unknown with the familiar known yet still within the confines of the mystery. The economy of the flesh, although no less radical than the first —of the loins— and on an ontological plane is equivalent both for the loins and the creative spirit of the female, has profound implications for the conventional view of metaphysics. Miso contends "...Lawrence seems to have overestimated the flooding force of his prose. Transcendental forces cannot be convincingly located at the back and base of the loins...The flesh...is

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<sup>142</sup> whose ontological existence supposedly responds to

recalcitrant when called upon to embody mystical forces." (qtd in *ibid.* p. 98) which is considered by one of his critics an "aesthetic failure because he has sacrificed the religious for the erotic, consciousness for being." However, I believe that it should not be read in a linear manner as the scapegoating of the religious for the aesthetic but as the employment of the aesthetic to probe one of the perennial problems man has faced, especially in light of the issue of self-unfulfillment, nor should it be viewed as a compromise of consciousness for being, but rather a Gestalt reading would have it as the restoration of a fragmented consciousness so that the becoming in the being is fixated.

Moreover, it is not under the dictates of aestheticism, I believe, that Lawrence pursued this alternative ontology, but as a believer in sufficient reason to be secondary to The will to fulfillment. The religious effort that Lawrence pursued reminds us of his vision of his conception of it in *A Study of Thomas Hardy*,

The religious effort is to conceive, to symbolize that which the human soul, or the soul of the race, lacks, that which it is not, and which it requires, yearns for. It is the portrayal of that complement to the race-life which is known only as a desire: it is the symbolizing of a great desire, the statement of the desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire.

This passage is satisfactorily revealing of the way in which the author brings together the logic of desire and how it pertains to the religious experience. Sexual experience, among other related themes that bring out the issue of the unknown, has an important significance which Huxley has identified as that which in it "the immediate, non-mental knowledge of divine otherness is brought, so to speak, to a focus—a focus of darkness." (p. xii) which could perhaps release the tension in Birkin's struggle with man's limits as an important predictor of his uncertainty with the limits of individuals. His issue, like many other characters, is a basic theological problem. In the novel, Birkin asks "Why could they not remain individuals, limited

by their own limits? Why this dreadful all-comprehensiveness, this hateful tyranny?” and then he gets ensnared in these limits and becomes himself tormented by an irrevocable demand for an answer that would whitewash, even momentarily, existential angst.

Lawrence’s construction of a quasi-metaphysical system (its epistemology is symbolic which is intolerable of the mysterious) does not come with the label agnosticism. Certainly, it departs from the unknown into the working out of credulous and self-referential metaphysics from the splinters that make up chaos and all that is diametrically opposed to mechanics, fixity, and stability. What would give out the idea of agnosticism is the overall air suspension of judgment which is the result of the convergence of still important factors that we analyzed throughout this section and the previous ones. In the novel when Ursula asks Birkin what he believes in since he does not believe in love he says that he believes “in the unseen hosts.” This suggests that Birkin is an agnostic believer rather than an atheist. In a later passage the author reveals that Birkin is cognizant of the persistence of man’s ignorance and that he is destined to ignorance “But humanity never gets beyond the caterpillar’s stage. It rots in the chrysalis, it will never have been wings.”. There is a clear suspension of judgment in the presumed faith in the creative spirit which presumably aborts faith in the known but also contests it, and if anything it is the ascertainment of ignorance shrouded in the seemingly accessible narrative of the unknown—in a truncated ontology— which functionally works to counter the narrative of faith; however, on the whole, the author stretches the proposition of unknowability.

Lawrence establishes a movement between the essence of the concept of unknowability and the demands of reason for intelligibility which does not abide by the criterion of plausibility but by that of sufficiency. This contributes to assuaging the plight of existence and existential concerns as they relate to the Ultimate, God whose presence or existence remains unbeknownst. This is further strengthened at the level of abstraction that relates to the limits of knowledge.

Phallic knowledge and the “purely sensual understanding, knowledge in the mystery of dissolution.” appear as a transitive epistemological basis to an understanding of the mystic and the unknown, however, through their functionality, i.e. in the way they are used, signify the continuity of a crisis of knowledge, a kind of escapism from theological models of inference which in turn invalidates it (because it is epistemically ungrounded), thereby continuing to signal a critical void and an urgent deficit in the epistemological and ontological safety of the characters. Lawrence firmly confesses, "But when man became conscious, and in awe of *himself*, his own littleness and puniness in the whirl of the vast chaos of God, he took fright, and began inventing God in his own image.”

Though the two ontological models laid out in *Women in Love* become one with the objective of the literary work, merge with creativity to supplant the void, and attempt to understand the unknown, they do not amount to the development of an alternative conception of God that is sufficient to account for the metaphysical view in its entirety. Knowledge which is a trope in the novel and the strongest argument for the alternative metaphysics in it is supposed to offer the antithesis of ignorance, if certainty is the premise from which we departed, however, ignorance of the unknown could not be any more stressed. The problem with this supposition presents itself on the grounds of equity and sameness of ontological status. Lawrence attempted a move from the sphere of theology to ontology with the suppression of the former; however, both have shown that they do not serve a model of inference.

D. H. Lawrence, like his fellow artists who have shown concerted efforts to jettison theology, is very aware of a lack of language to represent the experience of the struggle to make sense of the unknown, to patch what is seen as a human impairment with a medium that channels the implicit meaning the experience seems to carry. Lawrence managed to capture the mythical known symbolically—that which rings as familiar—and expands its scope to illuminate the rift that exists between what we are habitually used to and the dark area and uses

it as a background to his development of an alternative metaphysics and in doing so he satisfied one Platonic criterion of knowledge, that it is attainability, but it remains fallible (or likely to be wrong) truncated, and unreal.

His reconstruction of the idea of the divine in mythic form, relativistically, in two different ontological conceptions, might seem to suggest that it is an experience of unbelief cocooned in secular terminology that he is conveying which might be true, but my contention in bringing it into line with the abandoned metaphysical view is so that it allows a different interpretation, and the interpretation we suggested is a strong belief in the unknowability of God despite his best efforts as well as an uncertainty and ambiguity about the arrival to the destination of God's knowability precariously through imagination<sup>143</sup> and the construction of equivalent formulas in human terms.

### **Conclusion**

Some of Lawrence's critics have recognized that Lawrence made the greatest leaps in developing a metaphysical system of his own was during the war years, and that "the meaning of *Women in Love* is Lawrence's religious quest as expressed through the fates of the various characters"; and others have noted that his fiction is a sincere and sensible attempt "to theorize about existence" (P. T. Whelan, 1988, p. 2). Both views seem to hold out the idea that Lawrence is interested and concerned with metaphysics and with theorizing about the unseen. Lawrence regards the novel as a suitable surrogate to transmit a distinct religious identity. In *Women in Love*, the author does not delay the religious crisis the characters undergo and he does so by outsourcing the struggle for self-fulfillment in a world that lost the compass to God known

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<sup>143</sup> In his last book *The Apocalypse* which was criticized as "a strange and mysterious book" by one critic, Lawrence recounts, in his exceptional terms, his experience in reading books of astronomy and how the limitless space made him reel and in awe at the immensity and the infinitude of the universe, but quickly alluded to the regaining of his balance by asserting that only the separated mind alone that treads on the heels of this void and this hollowness and that imagination (perhaps alone) can remedy it. The chasm that separates the known and the unknown can only be transcended by imagination (which is an extra kind of experience and another sort of world) which ostensibly reconciles the known with the unknown measured by another dimension". He then talks about *moving* and *being*. Montgomery (1994) categorized it as a religious experience because it helps to reinstate in us the sense of awe which is "the religious element inherent in all life" qtd in p. 230

theologically through logic and belief, first by spreading thinly the dialectic of theism and atheism by relying on the biblical insinuations or the opposite of it, i.e. blatant atheistic confessions (for instance from Gerald and Birkin who considered God absent or rather inexistent, “seeing there is no God”) which causes a mislabeling and misidentification of the overall religious pathos. However, the logic of the story makes it obligatory to reach out to the antithesis of this dialectic to the extent that it cannot be considered too trivial to be unmentioned.

Whilst the dialectic of theism and atheism is playing out in the novel and progressing, the author is struggling with the excess of significance which he sought to order symbolically to communicate the intensity of the experience of the unknown translated into chaos of unordered patterns. Lawrence, Determined to domesticate the unknowability, to soften its edges and to present it in a quasi-mythic (actually in Jungian terms) then introduces two quasi-ontological models rounded out in realistic idealism and idealistic realism to account symbolically for the force of the unknown . He “uses the language he has to speak of that of which language cannot speak, because language is all he has to do it with.” which Feretter (2013) argued is the problematic “that Lawrence’s religious thinking and writing, from 1915 onwards, take place.” (p. 9-10)

If the ontology or quasi-ontology he proposes could be extended symbolically *ad infinitum* all the while jettisoning the true essence of metaphysics which, by definition, is the unknown it would still not be exhaustive, the author would still be short on accounting for it and he recognizes that. If the divine which is a non-contingent existence cannot be proved (*creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing which is in fact nothing short of the acknowledgment of the first mover or first cause) then a contingent existence *creatio ex materia* (not eternal and is itself made) cannot be hold. Lawrence showed powerful signs of agnosticism throughout this novel, from the dialectic of faith and unfaith, to a persisting angst that manoeuvred its way

out to an ontology (or ontological models) constructed and construed symbolically as the forces of creation, but it is in them still the issue of the unknowability of the Ultimate that made the characters in 'so uncertain' and 'so unstable', 'the misery of nothingness' and 'hollowness' are even more pronounced.

# **CHAPTER III**

**(The Frontiers of Unfaith: Examining the Agnostic Trope in George Orwell's "*A Clergyman's Daughter*")**

## **Introduction**

### **3. 1. Synopsis, Biography and Authorship**

### **3. 2. Concentration of Presence, Inwardness and Historical Documentation in “*A Clergyman’s Daughter*”**

### **3. 3. On the Loss of faith**

#### **3. 3. 1. The Frontiers of Unfaith: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back**

#### **3. 3. 2. Unfaith Bordering on Agnosticism**

## **Conclusion**

## The Frontiers of Unfaith: Examining the Agnostic Trope in George Orwell's "*A Clergyman's Daughter*"

"We had the experience but missed the meaning  
An approach to the meaning restores the experience"  
—T.S. Eliot "The Dry Salvages", Four Quartets

"I say not that there is not God: but that/I know not. Dost  
thou know, or dost thou guess"  
—Frederich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra

"And how cowardly [...] to want to believe something that  
you knew in your bones to be untrue"  
—George Orwell "*A Clergyman's Daughter*"

### Introduction

In keeping up with our earlier discussion on agnosticism in "*Women in Love*", it seems established now that exploring the genealogy of agnosticism refers us back to atheism as symptomatic of the religious malaise which is strongly present in the modernist novel with the apotheosis of its characters and the disenchantment with any form of an unjustified belief. After all, whoever says agnosticism says atheism before everything else. Atheism is a tag that stands for whatever has a certain constellation of properties qualified enough to be admitted into the realm of unfaith. The epistemological congeniality, which glues the two at times to the point of no separation, points out to a thorny terrain, a frontier where differences melt, and ambiguities arise since each has a different semantic value restricted to its inception and conception. The broaching of atheism in this chapter allows us to conceptualize its limits in the experience of the loss of faith, which will be the guiding thread of my analysis throughout this chapter. This chapter opens up a nuanced interpretation to account for Dorothy's loss of faith and examines narrative rupture and how it relates to the principal theme in George Orwell's *The Clergyman's Daughter*. In it, I suggest a divergent interpretation of this experience, and I argue that agnosticism is implicated in the atheism that is so intricately attached to unbelief/unfaith.

Above all, I want to reach an understanding of how unfaith has been conceptualized in it, and explore the links between atheism and agnosticism within it. By putting atheism and agnosticism into dialogue, I aim to meet many of the questions about unfaith: what demarcation lines can we draw between agnosticism and atheism? Is atheism but a more pronounced form of agnosticism? Does the loss of faith have a polythetic definition and is it visible through the epistemological hybrid nature of unfaith? My secondary objective in this chapter is to substantiate the claim that the loss of faith, which is interpreted as atheism and which is literally mentioned twice in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, grows perceptually smaller vis-à-vis the hidden aspect of the novel (i.e., agnosticism), and that atheism features disproportionately to agnosticism as an idea, a meaning, which is compressed and stretched depending on the use to which it is put, since as one critic puts it, “the story a novel tells is inseparable from the way it is told.”

My choice of this title uncovers widely held assumptions about unfaith or disbelief, the uninformed synonymy of the loss of faith with atheism and its exclusivity as a monopolized interpretation. One of my aims, which is implicitly stated above, is to conceptually delineate the contours of atheism and agnosticism within the novel and exceed the tangents to explore the overlap. Once the conceptual delineation is made, I then turn to revisit their congeniality, and then, hopefully, a distinction will appear.

Edging on the many factors that reflect the topic, we opt for a deductive method. In pursuing the question of the kind of inference readily available, I argue that the guiding thread in this novel is atheism for its multiple uses in reference to the loss of faith. However, my interpretation imposes constraints on atheism as the frame of reference for unfaith; therefore, it is my contention that the analysis of unfaith cannot proceed without a tenable textual demonstration of atheism. Moreover, I attempt to showcase how atheism and agnosticism<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> which is an interpretive assumption which will be justified with textual evidence.

are co-extensives with the latter being not a subsidiary theme but the dominant one.

Though it is what orchestrates order in my interpretation, the hermeneutical method features intermittently and will occupy a substantial section in this chapter, but it pales in importance with the logical impulse of this analysis. It helps furnish insights into the entirety of the elements of the fictional world at the intersection with the real. Elements whose use and meaning are determined by contextual and historical parameters. Other themes explored in the novel will be mentioned only in passing to make a point and to exploit their thematic significance in the broader context of the novel. Others backgrounding this chapter are discussions about the motor logic that pushes the consilient explanation between the real and the narrative. Particular interest will also be given to exploiting the structure of the novel, its vulnerabilities, missing parts and what that says about it.

### **3. 1. Synopsis, Biography, and Authorship**

Written in 1934 and published in 1935, *A Clergyman's Daughter's* fictional duration spans a period of six months, which is accordingly divided into five chapters, where each is set in a different geography and with different characters, with the exception of the first and last chapters which are but the ebb and flow of the novel, a circulation back to square one in terms of the setting, and also because in it, the main character retraces her steps back to her routine and her normality. Though it contains no reference to the years in which it is set against, we deduce that it compresses Orwell's adult experience. We follow Dorothy Hare, the only child to the Reverend Charles Hare, Rector of St. Athelstan's, Knype Hill, who journeys through hardships and disenfranchisement. Her life, which was once seeped in routine and was relatively predicted, came to be reversed by a sudden episode of amnesia, whose occurrence is undeliberately mystified, which causes a missing circle in the chain of this narration. Dorothy Hare is an active participant in everything that concerns the social duties of a typical Clergyman's daughter. From what we can tell, she is involved in services that outweigh her

capacity, from the mundane responsibility of the house, which was shouldered on her since the passing away of her mother, and the extra mental exigencies caused by her indifferent father. She constantly has something on her agenda, and this is projected in the lengthy description of one day of her life, of which Orwell covered the most ostensible nitty gritty. Her physical description surely attracts the reader, but the anticipation of the character's development is built up from the moment she is depicted as drowning in the murky waters of an indifferent and harsh father and the futility of her mundane and quotidian course.

As the story unfolds, the wind of change hits quite unexpectedly and reverses her sailing ship into unpleasant experiences and encounters, permeated by unremarkable character development in the absence in her abstract and concrete net of safety. The novel is thus a bildungsroman in so far as it depicts Dorothy's search for answers and in the rebuttal of her old beliefs in favor of what she came to acknowledge at the end. The story ends with her return back to Knype Hill with seemingly resolved conflicts that emphasize a conspicuous singular viable option for her which constitutes the gist of this analysis, as far as her identity development goes<sup>145</sup>.

Earlier on, we know that the pendulum of her faith swings between a short attention span in prayers or her pagan-like worship, which intensifies precisely when prayers begin. We also know about her non-consensual affair with her neighbor Mr. Warburton, who not only attempted to talk her out of her nonsensical beliefs but made several immoral strokes towards her—which is stereotypically common in unbelievers and particularly in atheists—and which we come to learn about simultaneously with his pronounced and emphatic unbelief.

As we begin the second chapter, we cannot but notice a glaring presence of a narrative inconsistency. Picking up where we were left off leaves us with a Dorothy who lost her memory

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<sup>145</sup> We also consider "*A Clergyman's Daughter*" to be a circular narrative, despite the events that are weaved to produce the effect of linearity. Therefore, my reading of the loss of faith speculates a shift of the ground of the analysis where the starting point is at once what it is and the end.

and who was on the way to the adventure of her life, an adventure that would leave long-lasting imprints on her as an individual, battling an interior struggle, outwardly keeping up a façade of the believer, while staying an ardent disbeliever inwardly. Towards the third chapter, we stumble upon a stylistic shift, where the narrative is when measured by resolution appears to be, once again, quasi-disrupted. The story culminates at various points, and with every twinge of existence, disbelief seems to be what defines her new persona, and it is incomprehensibly so persistent but not unshakable.

Often a marginalized and understudied novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter* unravels a key dimension in the writing of George Orwell. The belief (or unbelief) aspect of his life, his religiosity or irreligiosity which runs profusely and is sustained throughout the novel and, at times, accentuated. The novel appeared four years prior to the Second Great War and can perhaps be defined as the archetype of realism. Reading it reminds us of the gloomy and grimy images drawn by Dickens, albeit in a more mitigated way. Indeed, The novel is Dickensian par excellence in its fidelity to depicting the harsh reality which often goes unnarrated by modernists without glossing it over with what came to be known as “littérature engagée” though it is one of the running themes, it appears quite immature and suggestive rather than imposed.

Facing exigencies to change the text, the final version of the story seems to be deeply wounded as a result of the omission that befell it. Peter Davidson's (1990) notes on the text include what the reader feels upon reading the novel. He writes, “Changes required of *A Clergyman's Daughter* affected many changes and caused the omission of a vital link in the story's narrative line”, which explains why it “had a difficult passage into the print...for the changes made were too widespread and the original transcript has not survived”[5] In retrospect, it seems easy to speculate the content that has been omitted in a period where the issue of censorship along with that of circulation was commonplace. What is not understandable, however, is the toning down of various passages describing the wretched

conditions in the school, in the hop-picking fields, and elsewhere in the novel. Was this done at the cost of giving precedence over to other thematic forays? or was the excursion into them an end in itself for merely aesthetic reasons, such as what readers encounter in the third chapter? One can imagine it was done in this manner to explore the effect of it on first-hand reception, which made Orwell realize that it might have faced the barrier of favorable reception of the readership, so he dispensed with it. Something outside that conception will involve the metrics of the house of edition and the criteria that must be met for publication, and we don't exclude that possibility. Either way, the irreversible effects it created are deeply felt.

### **3. 2. Concentration of Presence, Inwardness, and Historical Documentation in “A Clergyman’s Daughter”**

There are tendencies to regard the novel as bendable (bending onwards), in what signifies closure on itself and the confiscation of everything deemed foreign in the virgin land of the novel. One must metrically measure the extent to which such a claim is sustainable. As an artistic form, the autonomy of the novel disrupts the reconciliation between the themes exhibited under its gaze, especially if they mirror the outside of the text. Those who insist on this autonomy can only provide a formalist study of the text without merging with the wider, extralinguistic elements of it. Indeed, such a theoretical and even perspectivist view as the autonomy of the novel certainly does not reflect the state of affairs, i.e., the relationship of the author with the work and the intertextual and extra-textual elements that factor into the work. We call here for two observations, *inter alia*. First, we ascribe to the creative aspect, which is emblematic of novelty and newness (as they are embedded in the word novel) elements of resistance enough to make a shift of fiction, a detour from the real, to diversify away from reality, to give the impression of consistency within autonomy are absolved from their merits the very moment we begin to question even before hermeneutics enters into play. Furthermore, the issue of the presence of past elements preceding the exposition of the novel subsumed in

the usual components of questioning marks the (who, when, where, how, and why?) infiltrates into the medium that separates the consciousness and the material incarnated in the novel. Because we want to draw lines between the familiar and the unfamiliar, it helps us to navigate the waters of the unfamiliar through the familiar to rest my interpretation—based on an approximate and tenable oneness of meaning—on concrete ground.

A blind spot in the preceding passages is the overlap of the historical documentation with literature, which would undoubtedly relegate us to a Marxian perspective on art given that it's a material production of words and the raw elements that go into its making are of an abstracted form that reflects obsolete social and historical determinants<sup>146</sup> rather than lasting artistic criteria. Suffice it to say that our secondary exegetical task concerns itself with drawing parallel lines between the real and the fictional. It goes without saying that many attempts have been spared to deliver adequate and viable approximate answers to such a question. Moving purposefully in that direction means that we do not enter the center but the fringes of any discussion about art since what we limit ourselves in this regard is the content and not the form, and we are bound to explore it from without as opposed to from within.

In her seminal book *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn (1978) reminds us of the harmony between the inwardness of the novel and the outwardness subsumed more or less in the authorial voices by the visible lopsided ratio of the consonant and the dissonant voices between the authors and the protagonists as well as “from maximal to minimum removes from the language of the ext and the language of the consciousness” (p. v). This leaves us with a preliminary but most significant remark that fictional writing as a whole is “not entirely disengaged from the historical axis” (Mannheim, 1943, p. 151). The cords of such inwardness, such as the one praised by Mannheim as the “inwardness which flourishes in privacy” (ibid. p. 159), cannot be severed from the

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<sup>146</sup> Because change is a timeless law of history.

dynamics that sustain them.

The Hungarian philosopher György Lukács asserted that the “richness and profundity of created characters... relies upon the richness and profundity of the total social process” (qtd in. Eagleton, 2003, p. 14), and while this statement is unidirectional because it follows a Marxist reasoning<sup>147</sup> an Auerbach's mimetic argument, and though largely unstated, it can be reversed to accommodate to the Hegelian logic in turn, because in supplying the novel with the decorum, the temporal aspect and the conscious tone, and a historical dimension (personal and collective), the effects of consciousness and the external forces such as the socioeconomic and political forces become reciprocal. Therefore, the dialectic of the precursor of this profundity and richness of created characters is resolved by the reciprocity of the existent and the yet-to- exist. Additionally, any story has a historical involvement by being merely present in that temporal record. It leaves an irreversible effect of presence because even if it recedes, its traces will remain (however, not to the parochial eye). In this regard, Lars Torjussen argues that “The individual experience always contain a growing sedimentation of reference, a history, which also shapes all future meaning” (qtd in. Tymieniecka, 2009, p. 188)

Writing is a field in which personal inclinations actualize themselves, where the author harmonizes his immediate concerns, and where a mode of production produces its own apotheosis, the author by force of converging diverse ends into a tuneful whole puts at stake and puts into the open collective and personal history and the sort of confidentials which would otherwise be rumored. Charles Ledbetter (1961) writes,

The ‘kind’ to which Orwell’s work belongs is the polemic. All of it, in whatever form – novels, essays, descriptive sketches, volumes of autobiography – has the same object: to implant in the reader’s mind a point of view, often about some definite, limited topic ... but in any case

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<sup>147</sup> or that it disengages from a Hegelian standpoint.

about an issue over which he felt it was wrong not to take sides. A writer of polemic is always a man who, having himself chosen what side to take, uses his work as an instrument for strengthening the support for that side.  
(p. 5)

In the case of George Orwell, he did not shy away from putting his life into words nor was he hiding much of his personal history. All of this is a token in our selected novel. D. J. Taylor (2015) informs us that “in compiling his portrait of Dorothy, Orwell drew upon his private life.” (p. 112), which could be read inversely. In fact, it was not in his nature to gloss over his personal experiences. He says, “One difficulty I have never solved is that one has masses of experience which one passionately wants to write about...and no way of using them up except by disguising them as a novel” (qtd in. Rai, 1988, p. 38). Meyers (2002) writes that Orwell’s “experience as a hop-picker, tramp and teacher is ‘disguised’ too transparently and is reported rather than rendered into a convincing and coherent work of art.” (p. 9)

In making his identity so central to his work through Dorothy, what is the identity of the novel now that it opened itself to biography and to the kaleidoscope of modernism with all its currents which is the backdrop and rationale to Blair’s artistic identification? And can the novel *ad intra* be separated from the novel *ad extra*? What seems to settle these questions is to regard *A Clergyman’s Daughter* as a fictional autobiography that subsumes an androgenized text, where gender differences melt in the quest to relieve the lived experience into the depicted, wherein, despite its blatant realistic depiction, it becomes shrouded with symbolism and it is for the interpreter to work out the truth from falsity at the intersection between the literary and the real.

The centerpiece of Albert Camus’ idea that “the fictional world is nothing but a correction of this world, according to the core desire of the human” leads us to consider the power of symbolism and the symbolizing of personal experience. “symbols act as mediations

between the empirical world and the world of imagination” (Eubanks & Petrakis, 1999, p. 293). This philosophy is grounded in revolt against the conditions of existence with a range of alternatives of exploitative capacity. Camus maintains, “Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world...it rejects the world on account of what it lacks, in the name of what it sometimes is... Thus, art should give us a final perspective on the content of rebellion” (qtd in. *ibid.*), which in turn leads to denying everything which is unnecessary for the objective of the logic of representation. On this account, the self-sufficiency of literature has been criticized on the grounds of isolating ‘signification from reference’<sup>148</sup>, and one of the problems that arise from such a polemic is the conflation of the temporary and permanent significance. The fixed meaning (in a fixed context) gets dispersed into an array of meanings. This is what we will deal with at some length in relation to my thematic preoccupation.

If we consider literary writing as a tangible aspect of the growth of an independent personality achieved by dint of the inwardness of the novel and the possibilities it offers, then we are prompted to consider the novel as the projection of the novelist in the space and time in which it is achieved where the *being* and the *becoming* —sequestered—and the *being* in the *becoming* overlap in the heart of the organic unity itself.

The novelist swims in his imagination and restlessly allows one of the many potential lines that spring from the last one and so on to flourish but they do have a starting point which, in turn, is chosen amongst an endless possibility considering the endless potentiality of linguistic production—which are subject to the necessities that control the narrative’s formulation— and it is perhaps this practice coupled with the rarity of application that the sociologist Karl Mnnheim (1947) had in mind when he wrote that it is (and I mean by that the act of narrating and what en entails) “the realm of seclusion and potential isolation” (p. 157),

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<sup>148</sup> See Jeffrey Barnouw’s (1981) article on *Signification and Meaning: A Critique of the Saussurean Conception of the Sign*.

which he goes on to add that “it is in this realm (...) that we become spiritually different from our fellow men” (ibid.). Thus, the consistent explanation between the real and the narrative breaks down the myth and ‘the illusion of autonomy’ of the novel. This is not about patching up pieces here and there to satisfy oneself with cohesion but to make the whole intelligible by making connections that penetrate both worlds to quench the thirst of the mind to be united with the representative in each realm.

It is almost a truism that the possible is derived from the actual. At the heart of the matter is the utilitarian value entrenched in Kantian teleology, as things driven by meaning. This ties closely with structural units which respond to the necessities of the structural determinants or the force of narrative dynamics—which are the determinants in the novel and which give shape to it—. Therefore, what remains, in a Cartesian sense, is the spirit of the novel, or the situational complexity inoculated by the themes generated by the content, which are bound to collide, at least in epistemic ways, with real-world thought-provoking situations. This outlook of the visibility and invisibility parts of the novel, which should not be underestimated, draws our attention to the topography of the ideas that spring from the mind to cascade down into the novel and draw lines, unparallel or otherwise, with the real world.

Spinoza drops the cues of assimilation when he works out the relationship between the real and the possible. He affirms that the two co-exist. This amounts to no less than the representation of consciousness since the visible and the invisible overlap and comes to light, which is a “fictional consciousness” that is symmetrical with the real consciousness. Thus, the view that they occupy separate territories cannot stand the test of logic or the test of mimesis (which is the very logic of life and art) and representation.

Naturally, a move from a socially constructed world into a personal constructed world which often finds expression particularly in novels proved to be an arduous mission for Eric Blair or George Orwell. Between making his financial ends meet and wanting to deliver his

best piece, Eric Blair became frustrated at the turnout of things. In July 1934, he wrote to his friend Brenda Salkeld, unleashing his frustration and expressing his entrapment in what he created, the following: “I am so miserable, struggling in the entrails of that dreadful book and never getting any further, and loathing the sight of what I have done. Never start writing novels, if you wish to preserve your happiness.” (qtd in. Hammond, 1982, p. 99). It is no surprise that Orwell himself was attuned to the flaw of inconsistency. We can perhaps give a firmer understanding of this by considering the author's longing for a fully-fledged disclosure that would connect the loose ends of the narrative together, which was dependable on his own experience. Hammond writes, “Orwell realised, however, that the only way in which he could expand this fragment to the length of a full-scale narrative would be to incorporate episodes taken from his own experience - as a tramp, a hop-picker and a schoolteacher - and present them as Dorothy's.” (ibid.)

Self-consistency which formalists stress so vehemently is but a cover-up term for their sensibilities as regards the disruption of the narrative with referencing to the outside world. Understandably so, this is also the case for historians and social and economic scientists. However, it is hardly the case that the two descend into antagonism because both stances are amenable to a converging point, that is, cross-referencing.

Cross-referentiality is illustrious of the reciprocal lending of terms of the inhabitants of each niche to make a case as if relying on the literary world reveals uncovered aspects/points overlooked or dismissed by the other while solidifying their view in a fragile territory that is not much expounded on apart from either in the form of art slightly displaced in reality or reality displaced in art and was regarded in both as an asset that can be capitalized on to enrich

the meandering to validate, by resourcing to direct lines of affirmation and juxtaposition<sup>149</sup>.

At the outset, the question of vicarity/proxy finds an answer in the gender disparities between Dorothy and George, a double move away from his persona as an Eric Blair into his pen name, Orwell, and into a female character. Hammond adds that although Dorothy's "background is imaginary through and through, it is one with which Orwell was all too familiar" (ibid., p. 100-1) It is, in this sense, a representation that is not only textual and intertextual but also metalinguistic.

In peering through the slightly closed curtain of his life, Jeffrey Meyers investigated the catalyst behind Orwell's exceptional writing. He writes, "[To] supplement his meager income as an author, Orwell deliberately sought out experience to provide material for his writing, and everything he produced is related to the events of his life" (ibid.). J. R. Hammond (1982) described *A Clergyman's Daughter* as "a chaotic mixture of genuine fiction and the thinly disguised experiences and opinions of the author" (p. 1). For that reason, we should not dismiss, as is otherwise suggested by Brennan (1982), to cast those two as unreliable narrators (p. 103) precisely because, as far as Orwell is concerned, the genres under which he writes are watertight and inseparable. Therefore, such an exceptionally charged theme as that of religion is only tractable through the writing because it is the lived witness that offers a window into George Orwell's world of belief widely dispersed across various genres, from journalism to essays to biography to literary writing.

We would like to think that Orwell, like a number of his biographers and the people who studied his life and works has sorted out that he did exploit the safety of the citadel of the novel to fortify his views regarding systematized religion, starting ostensibly from the title and the plot to make a statement. Orwell is critical of his time, and it shows in this story. In this

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<sup>149</sup> Christoph Bode (2005) maintains, "Every narrative works out its own sense and meaning" (p. 3). Narratives abound in self-referential meaning, and whether they follow a linear or non-linear trajectory, at the heart of the organic unity itself resides the *raison d'être* that is simultaneously the means and the end of itself.

sense, he is equally critical of the educational system, organized religion, and everything it entails. Not only that, but he is critical of faith and what it encompasses. A biographical account of Orwell's faith has him saying that "he was unwavering in his rejection of the concept of a spiritual afterlife" (Brennan, 2016, p. xiv).

*A Clergyman's Daughter* falls into the category of committed literature. It is a novel that "taught its author both his limits as a novelist and his potential as a writer able and willing to go where angels fear to tread" (Quinn, 2009, p. 111).

We continue by embracing the view of religious detachment from everyday life with its repercussions in the realm of literature, which is not so much a view as it is a historical fact. Historically speaking, the pilgrimage to God ceased to take place because God, who was once mortified (a relatively controversial conception) and the edifice upon which He rests had been eroded by the hammer of philosophy, which was later joined by scientism, became many times removed from ordinary life. It is an account of the soul in search of meaning, but the quest remains hanging because a weak form of nihilism was superimposed on it. The loss of faith — which is a recurrent phraseology in the novel — happened, yet finding no replacement proves to be an aborted mission because stagnation was second nature to Dorothy rather than going through myriad paths to evolve out of the nihilism in which she is entrapped. Certainly, Dorothy is barred from self-exploration for the duration of the novel, but a frail and fragile form is squeezed into the narrative.

### **3. 3. On the Loss of Faith**

In his review of Michael G. Bernnans' *George Orwell and Religion*, Jeremy Crump (2016) writes that most writers go across the subject of religion and get straight into the central political themes in Orwell's writing. Indeed, there is no mention of Orwell without drawing a straight line between his political allegory "*Animal Farm*" and his poignant dystopian work *Nineteen Eighty Four* With a particular emphasis on the grand theme of totalitarianism and

dictatorship and the prophecy that reigns throughout these two works, as well as the lingering effects they have once they're historically established. Since their publication in (1945) and (1948) respectively, so much ink has been spilled over their analysis and an over-reading into what else they could signify. The Cold War period provided exactly the kind of alibi to canonize them and to overstudy them, a confirmation bias that catered to the sensibilities of the Westerner whose growing alertness to anti-Communism attitudes made them allergic to despotism in all its varieties and for a reason.

The Westerner's antennae captured with a bewildering capacity any literary or otherwise manifesto that aimed to put communism or, in a more broad term, "the other" in the trash bin of history. For George Orwell, whose anti-totalitarian inclination was his *post hoc* trademark, religion was as much a culprit in his overgeneralization as is any political system deemed unfit by Western standards. This ties in closely with the notion of God as a totalitarian subject who enjoyed a remarkable staying power prior to the 'radical uncertainty' that swept the western Judo-Christian legacy.

Peering through this magnifying glass, God appeared to be as much a complacent in stifling individual freedom as any other self-destructive regime, and in hindsight, this seems to sit uneasily with Orwell, who, even when scratching the surface of his literary output and journalistic endeavors, is considered to suffer from religious recession.

Nevertheless, Bernard Crick (1980) considers that "Whatever Orwell revealed about himself in *A Clergyman's Daughter*...he did not reveal his politics" (p. 270). Having said that, it is imperative not to dismiss the political impulse of the novel as it manifests in the realm of faith of the loss thereof to tap into his belief system when studying it, but this is another research endeavor that remains outside the remit of the present chapter.

Rodden (2001) argues that "the reputation for utter integrity, for sheer goodness" is what spawned Orwell's canonization" (p. 325) even if it stood in stark contrast with his anti-

Catholicism and anti-Semitic tone. Anti-catholicism which “was sustained throughout his literary career” (Brennan, 2016, p. xv) was diagnosed as a “pathological hatred” (ibid.), while the latter was developed much later against the horrors of the holocaust, Sheila Davison and Ian Agnus (1997) identified more closely the chronological order of the successive historical events encompassed in his literary writing, namely “the twilight of Imperialism, the Depression, the Thirties, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the post-war Labour Government” (p.xviii). It follows that any views expressed in his writings must bear the imprint of the events under which it is birthed.

Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that Orwell simply could not leave religion unspoken about, not only in his private correspondence and notebooks but also in his published fiction, journalism, and reviews. Hostile treatment of dogmatic worldviews, unwavering though they may seem—of which catholicism figures prominently— “remained unabated until his death in 1950”, as Brennan noted. His writings are rich in sustained and incidental commentaries on Catholicism, the Church of England, nonconformist British sects, Hinduism, Burmese Christian sects, and Islam, as well as the threats to personal spirituality and social structures posed by the rampant hostility of twentieth-century Communism, Fascism, and Nazism towards organized religions. Comments and critical views, as opposed to the rites he had undergone in his marriages, the christening of his adopted son, and his burial, which still retained a substantial christened aspect, reflect a critical aspect in the novel.

Bernnan's (2016) condensed account of Orwel’s faith appears in the preface of his work. He considers Orwell’s core religious modality throughout his literary career to confirm paradoxically two things: present disbelief, i.e, atheism (he has “been from his adult years a resolute non-worshipper” as he asserts, and the retention of a “highly religious sense morality” which implies that in a world that was losing much of its value to a dwindling in morality ad spirituality he insistently sought for a ‘morality suitable for a post-Christian age.’” The fact

remains that the word ‘non-worshipper’ certainly describes a quality that isn’t retrievable, which in turn allows for various interpretations, one of which is ‘non-believer.’

On these accounts, posthumous biographies found him both a religious and pious atheist. Again, a description that strives to strike a balance between the secular and the religious—which also corresponds to the category of a ‘certain believer’ or an “uncertain believer”—and an act of complicity that seems to be epistemically positioned between two essentialisms: faith and unfaith, but most evidently to a liminal space, an in-betweenness; because there was never any suggestion that he was a conventional believer despite him being labeled a ‘saintly figure.’ The word ‘saint,’ though remains an opinionated, reductive, and even a misleading typification, has a positively connotative stigma because it speaks to the confluence of the features of Orwell the persona and Eric Blair the author, perhaps because “Orwell himself seemingly underwent a rapid posthumous apotheosis and transfiguration.” (Brennan, 2016). Each reworking of the concept (i.e., ‘saintly figure’) seems to stem from an operative canon of inference, which, in turn, makes for a new variant with every syntactical turn and semantic twist with two concepts that would not otherwise be paired together, or one can easily go political and argue that “the shift of meaning is the result of the power structure” (Torjussen, 2009, p. 185). Reflecting critically on such forms of expressions leads us to a first-order consideration that faith is, by default, the locus of epistemological controversy. These are all accumulative qualities stacked together to give a concentrated and a carefully curated image to suit the working out of his adjectival descriptions of both worlds and a means of distinguishing Orwell from the hardly separated collective personality of the men of letters of his caliber from the vantage, and dare we say, the privileged point of having his legacy while his physical presence no longer holds.

Furthermore, Orwell’s apperception of his religiosity/irreligiosity, how his religious stance was presented/delivered, and how it is and continues to be interpreted are different things

that may overlap in various conjunctures because it has largely to do with our perusal of the edge(similarity/dissimilarity) and node (similarity) that are created though our reading of the tone which we recognize by establishing connections between the confessional, the represented and the misrepresented.

In this regard, a significant part in my interpretation resides in arriving at some valid view about the author and the performance of what is supposed to be a representation of his experience<sup>150</sup> which, according to Jane Heal (2003), “is not knowledge of some theory of the mind but our ability to imagine alternative worlds and how things appear from another person’s point of view” (p. 1).

On this, the duality of projection and simulation—vis-à-vis the author—, of being the other while retaining the core elements of the self does, as much as it fragments elements of unitary existence in a mystical sense, undermines a Gestalt outlook on others in a non-consensual reading—but not interpretation— however, it compensates a great deal for how we view the frailty of existing in isolation while yearning for a unification with the whole of one’s existence<sup>151</sup> when each part demands its relative medium of expression and here comes our role. Heal maintains, “We have thoughts about others’ thoughts. We have views about what others perceive, think, feel, care about or intend. And where we are ignorant about such things, we often try to find out more, since knowing these kinds of things about each other is important to us in many ways” (ibid.). Recoursing to this observatory prism allows the filtering out of the dregs that result from misinterpretation at the peak of convulsion, which takes place midway

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<sup>150</sup> We are interested in faith and unfaith here.

<sup>151</sup>In his engaging book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty (1989) writes, “To rise above the plurality of appearances in the hope that, seen from the heights, an unexpected unity will become evident- a unity which is a sign that something real has been glimpsed, something which stands behind the appearances and produces them” (p. 96) . It explicates in simple terms that not reason but rather imagination that “creates a real common world” (van Riessen, 2007, p. 57) through an “optional private part of the self and the share” (ibid.)

between the metastory (factual/fictional) and the narrative.

Orwell externalizes and assimilates his personal experience in many passages in the novel, explaining to us Dorothy's seemingly middle position between her attachment and detachment from a fixed meaningful system of belief, thus revealing the fact that although he anchored his and her conservative nature in the conventionally known or rather the conventionally familiar, the nature of that unbelief, however, remains elusive and unexplicated, "it seemed to her that though you no longer believe, it is better to go to church than not; better to follow in the ancient ways than to drift in rootless freedom."

One ideal cliché of feminist rhetoric, especially within the parameters of a bildungsroman, is that a female starts from a ragged subordinate place and matures through an unabated and unwavering process of self-discovery and individuation and then comes out of that stifling cocoon as an enlightened, unsubmitive and rebellious female who commands her entourage. "*A Clergyman's Daughter*" does not live up to that ideal as we would like to think. Surely, there is a significant dimension in the novel that follows this narrative, but it is characterized by a surface contradiction of distress, alienation, and rupture. Dorothy is moved forward from her familiar surroundings with startling speed that Orwell himself had to pay the price of dislodging an entire episode and supplementing it with the cut episode of amnesia, however inconvincing that is.

Hammond (1982) argues that it is a sustained literary tradition for Orwell to depict his central characters as escaping from "an oppressive normalcy" (p. 104) and fail to do so. As with Winston and Julia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, after what is considered as physical escapism, Dorothy receives a notably authorial guidance to go back to how things were, thereby enhancing the novel's conservative tone. Despite the fact that her view has been sidelined by the narrator, Dorothy showed a capitulation to the familiar and thought, upon conversing with Mr. Warburton, that one "retain[s] the habits of thought that [one] have been brought up with."

Regardless of the fact that the feminist wrath is employed to a telling effect, it is met with the current of conservatism that, though it undermines its potency, it does not eliminate it.

Indeed, it is hard to construe the tenor of the novel without considering the element of conservatism. Conservatism appears to be an investment in constructing the identity and in retaining elements of the past while moving forward in the narrative. This reveals a critical point that connects with the overall passages, which indicate that Dorothy's loss of faith is not revolutionary and does not coincide, symbolically speaking, with her gold cross that went missing, but rather had prior existence to the narrative's beginning threads. It speaks to a kind of faith and unfaith at a crossroads.

Certainly, the preponderance of unfaith has held the narrative hostage since the offset, and it constitutes an integral part of "the problem of her identity" and of coming to terms with the world. In the instance of Mrs. Pither's asking Dorothy to join in her dual prayer to alleviate the toll of rheumatism that befell her, Dorothy, by the force of habit and by adhering to "the Christian scheme of things," was involuntarily and unconsciously putting up a show to assimilate the image she projected to her surroundings, to abide by the circumstantial necessity and social title that is incumbent on her by the position of her father<sup>152</sup>. At that time, there was a flicker of hinged belief in her; however, nowhere does the author allude to an intrinsic belief in her but only reveals an outward form of it as a social rationalization in anthropological terms. Indeed, when Dorothy was immersed in her social obligations, she rarely intellectualized or rationalized her unbelief. For her, the absorption in Christian services and the nursing of dishonest belief was "the next best thing to believing" (p. 277) in an absence of belief. She even confessed that "it's better-less selfish- to pretend one believes even when one doesn't, than to say openly that one's an unbeliever and perhaps help turn other people into unbelievers too." (ibid.). This view supports the thesis that her supposedly belief is not only not spiritual—which

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<sup>152</sup> hence the title of *A Clergyman's Daughter*.

undoubtedly was approximately imitated— but it carries in it the seeds of disbelief and an aversion to the spiritual component, which introduces the concept of incompatibility and inconsistency of the inwardness (i.e., her inward state) and the outward projection of social compliance which, in turn, caused dissatisfaction and “Chaos in her heart” (p. 10) which indirectly prescribed her enigmatic ‘teleportation’ so to speak.

When she stepped to the altar to pray, the author reveals that

it was quite useless attempting to pray; her lips moved, but there was neither heart nor meaning in her in her prayers [...] A deadly blankness had descended upon her mind. It seemed to her that she actually *could* not pray. She struggled, collected her thoughts, uttered mechanically the opening phrases of a prayer; but they were useless, meaningless- nothing but the dead shell of words.” (p. 10)

This has been there all along and has persisted all along. Coming home after a period of eight months of absence from her village, Dorothy, it seems, “had not restored her faith” which she confessed that she had lost but that “had restored the outward habits of faith” (p. 294). The author agrees that “the spiritual background of her mind is Christian” and “that the Christian way of life was still the way that must come naturally to her.”(p. 285–6). This reveals that her faith was rather a social construction. In the words of Mr. Warburton, she has been brought up in what he called “absurd beliefs.” and that she had built herself “a life-pattern [...] that was only possible for a believer, and naturally it was beginning to be a strain on [her]. In fact, what was wrong with [her] was obvious all the time. I should say that, in all probability, that was why [she] lost [her] memory.”. Here, Mr. Warbuton offers a significantly important psychoanalytic diagnosis when he points out the repression of her idiosyncratic nature. He went on to explain to her the psychological ramifications of an impossible situation, of someone who is at once an unbeliever and a believer, which authorizes a sort of burnout enabled by cultivating

a false belief and the maintenance of a false façade. Thus far, it is evident that ‘immaturity’ and ‘unevolved’ describe her conspicuous faith and the loss thereof.

Toward the end of chapter two, Dorothy Hare recalled that “For the first time that it had crossed her mind- that she had not uttered a prayer since leaving home, not even since her memory had come back to her.” This should help us to shift away from the claim of a supposedly persistent faith —since prayer is the backbone of belief— to a withering away of it, which points to a latent causality that is the very genesis of her disbelief. Moreover, she was aware that she did not have the smallest impulse to pray, “prayer...had no meaning for her any longer”. This passage paradoxically connects with an instance where disbelief, unfaith or a feigned belief seems to have made its inaugural appearance at the start of the novel, where Dorothy inflicted pain with a glass-headed pin on her arm so that she heeds her prayer, “she made it a rule, whenever she caught herself not attending to her prayers, to prick her arm hard enough to make blood come. It was her chosen form of self-discipline, her guard against irreverence and sacrilegious thoughts.”. And “with the pin poised in readiness she managed for several moments to pray more collectedly.”

What is striking about her jettisoning of prayer that the story unfolded is that contrary to her past life before the memory loss, her current condition and convictions concomitant with her stupendous journey, her ‘queer predicament’ defy stereotypical Marxist or Durkheimer’s view on religion as functional in social settings, as an opium that numbs the senses to life’s struggles<sup>153</sup> and on such an assumption which admittedly provisional rests the case for atheism.

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<sup>153</sup> It is very interesting how Mr. Blair employed this worldview in the construction of the identity of believers in the novel, more particularly with Mrs. Pitcher, who is comforted by the thought of Heavens and “a better world coming.” that is reserved strictly for the “poor working folks”, those believers who had a miserable life. “In almost every moment of her life the vision of Heaven supported and consoled her, and her abject complaints about the lives of ‘poor working folks’ were curiously tampered by a satisfaction in the thought that, after all, it is ‘poor working folks’ who are the principal inhabitants of Heaven”. The expression of this worldview reflects Mr. Blair’s view of religion as a social construction that serves social ends. He himself held onto the ritualistic side of Christianity for the social value it generates and the social services it offers, which he echoed in the novel when Dorothy realized that people come to church only to be married and buried.

However, it does not defy a teleological argument about her need for it<sup>154</sup> or her ontological view of the world that she holds, and here lies the heart of my interpretation.

But after all, there must be some meaning, some purpose in it all! The world cannot be an accident. Everything that happens must have a cause-ultimately, therefore, a purpose. Since you exist, God must have created you, and since He created you a conscious being, He must be conscious. the greater doesn't come out of the less. He created you, and he will kill you, for His own purpose. But that purpose is inscrutable.

And while it seems that the purpose of life which is agonizing her is what is incomprehensible to her, it remains a fact that she has no faith in that which she allegedly claims to apprehend. Here, Dorothy is acknowledging the unknowability and the limitation of one's knowledge, which overlaps with the ontological argument for the existence of God but does not negate or divert the epistemological crisis which appears to hold both concepts (faith and unfaith) captives to the logic that sustains both, but amplifies, strains and aggravates it. This leaves a leeway to consider the question of the extent to which this faith and unfaith with these attributes intersecting with uncertainty validate or disprove truth claims about atheism.

That her ostensible belief is a forced belief is clear. It is not based on satisfaction, nor does it yield satisfaction, "she did not reflect, consciously, that the solution to her difficulty lay in accepting the fact that there was no solution, that if one gets on with the job that lies to hand, the ultimate purpose of the job fades into insignificance; that faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable." Like *women in Love*, there is a yearning for that satisfaction that can only be achieved through the completeness of knowledge and the subduing of the desire for God with an informed faith, but unlike it, a symmetrical ontology is already speculated. It is by "a process deeper than reason"

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<sup>154</sup> and the theological argument is her the achievement of self-satisfaction past the point of self-actualization.

that her peace of mind is and can be restored. It is the capitulation to an abysmal, unbounded, and inexistent knowledge. We see this with Dorothy's desperate supplication, 'Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. Lord, I believe, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.' (p. 295) It is a despondent thirst to align her desire with what she would naturally accept had it sufficed the epistemological requirement. It is the pleading of the unbeliever to which the narrator commented, "It was useless, absolutely useless. Even as she spoke the words she was aware of their uselessness, and was half ashamed of her action." Begging for divine interference is a lucid sign that she is ready to be moved by truth<sup>155</sup> which is remedial in purpose, however unmet across the narrative.

It was not a matter of denominational preference that was lacking. Dorothy, an Anglican Catholic by birth and by practice<sup>156</sup> but not by faith, found it extremely unsavouring to belong to a Methodist, a Protestant or a Nonconformist or to believe in their creed. Her belated encounter with various denominations reinforced this fact. And what it unmasked is her readiness to disbelieve. And it is not "Science and Free Thought" that drives her unbelief, as the discussion she had with her father revealed.

When we read unfaith linearly in this novel (the loss of faith by many coaxial factors that presuppose the presence of faith) and circularly (triggered unfaith, which leads to the loss thereof, postulates unfaith and disbelief initially), we notice a transition of feeling and a degree of disbelief which is immersed in the aspiration for faith. We gather that her 'negligence' of prayer emanates from her disposition to actually live without it as if there is no spirituality in the first place, which the author did allude to as her default state (if no disciplinary action is taking place) and no knowledge-based belief which would assure her in times of uncertainty or disbelief. However, the narrative of the loss of faith does not end with the absence of spirituality

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<sup>155</sup> Or "a capacity for comprehending the whole" (Augustine, 397AD/2021, p. 58)

<sup>156</sup> i.e. by attending to the duties that are incumbent on her as the reverend's daughter.

and the absence of epistemological inquiry, as her persistent struggle suggests.

The inevitability of stumbling upon “erroneous inferences”<sup>157</sup> with regards to the loss of faith points out the range of possibilities, but we will proceed in the same vein from the recognized and orthodox extrapolation of the loss of faith as compatible with atheism and start from a definition that is widely approved of which will help us bring into view a relation of no relation between atheism and agnosticism<sup>158</sup>. To achieve that, we must first contend that atheism is a functional definition in the sense that it is the benchmark of unfaith and disbelief. Dorothy is far from being secular insofar as she participates in daily religious practices and is far from being an atheist. The varieties of religious unbelief encompass the ‘certain unbelievers’ (i.e. atheists), the ‘uncertain unbelievers’ (i.e. agnostics), and the ‘uncertain believer’ (. Dorothy, upon pondering on her state, infers that “beliefs change, thoughts change, but there is some inner part of the soul that does not change. Faith vanished, but the need for faith remains the same as before.” (p. 292)

Dorothy has shown an intrinsically undeveloped intellectual delinquency. “God- what I’d meant by God-immortal life, Heaven and Hell- everything. It had all gone. And it wasn’t that I’d reasoned it out; it just happened to me. It is like when you’re a child, and one day, for no particular reason, you stop believing in fairies. I just couldn’t go on believing in it any longer.” This suggests that her loss of faith or unfaith seems to have just happened or just to have existed; however, this violates the principle of causality<sup>159</sup>.

Furthermore, her unbelief is not so extreme, so negated that it is intolerant of the appearance of faith despite her being labeled an ‘Anglican atheist’ by Mr. Warbuton. The closest explanation we can get is that this fusion of the secular and religious is a salient

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<sup>157</sup> Because it abounds in frames of reference.

<sup>158</sup> While a distinction between the two is essential before they can be first spoken about, they first need to be rendered visible. Atheism and agnosticism are sometimes cast in the same mold but don't have the same starting point, nor describe the same reality, though they can be mistaken for having the same effect. In the context of this chapter, we are interested with uncertainty as designating a marked agnosticism.

<sup>159</sup> The principle holds that anything existent has an underlying cause (known or unknown).

trademark of secularism. But is Dorothy a secular?

There are no grounds to draw the conclusion that Dorothy's loss of faith is synonymous with secularism or atheism because it readily gives itself up for such interpretation when we haven't worked out the congruence of such opposing views, i.e. there was faith before as a textual surface reading may reveal, but now it vanished. Her disregard for the timing of her unfaith or the loss of faith<sup>160</sup> also factors into this confusion if we want to pinpoint the nature of her disbelief, which can sometimes, in the broadest sense, be labeled atheism as being the generic nomenclature of unfaith. Nevertheless, the linguistic structure reveals the enduring resistance to the flow of this narrative (i.e. that the loss of belief equates with atheism) with the addition of the desire for belief which is lucidly revealed, as well as what we gather early on from a non-narrative, an uninscribed but a very strong suggestion of a lacuna that precedes it all which is a space that disrupts the reading of the loss of faith as atheistic in nature if we are interested in the genesis of Dorothy's unfaith<sup>161</sup>, and it disrupts a stable meaning of this sort.

An atheist is one who exhausted the epistemological wells to the point of drought and settled on the opinion that God is nonexistent. Mr. Warburton seems to be a case in point; this latter, who provided an instant diagnosis of Dorothy's loss of the sense of meaning (by putting it into the basket of unfaith along with atheism), had insisted that her loss of faith has always been there, a dormant awaiting for a confessional nudge to wake<sup>162</sup>. Surely, there is enough evidence that Dorothy was not affirmative in her belief in her moments of solitude from the onset, and in the private experience is a pattern that indicates her loss of faith but it does not amount to atheism, for she did not rejoice in it. She judged it as "that vague, blank disbelief so common in illiterate people, [and] against which all argument is powerless." Therefore, if we

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<sup>160</sup> "But don't you see, if my faith is gone, what does it matter whether I've lost it now or whether I'd really lost it years ago and i've got to begin my life all over again."

<sup>161</sup> which is translated as a loss of faith but simultaneously calls into question the reality of it all.

<sup>162</sup> Mr. Warburton showed that he is the voice of reason despite her unjustified objections to his ability to read her like an open book.

are to probe the matter at length, there is plenty of room for speculation.

From critics, we learn that situations hold the key to interpretation, but we risk overcontextualization in texts overflowing in meaning—such is the case with *A Clergyman's Daughter*—. The overflow, as is pointed out above, comes from the many lines we draw across the novel and outside of the novel for reasons we cannot overlook —such is an implicit agreement in the hermeneutical task— and we do so by bearing in mind three levels of engagement: in so much as we engage the self in the exegetical task of interpreting, then in locating the characters' unhinged fixity in the context of the grinding wheel of life and lastly, inasmuch as we engage ourselves and them in a faded temporality. The acquisition of some “new semantic content”<sup>163</sup> happens precisely at the moment when the word/phrase (here we are interested in the loss of faith) finds itself mentioned or is deployed or relocated in the text across literary devices or in the narrative structure or hidden under a heap of insinuations which are but the context which a breeding setting of potentialities (that would otherwise remain inert) makes it conspicuous and vibrant.

Undoubtedly, transparency correlates with decipherability. Taken at its face value, our understanding of the loss of faith in *A Clergyman's Daughter* would remain superficial insofar as we take it to mean what it means literally and insofar as we do not upgrade to a Gestalten reading that pours the parts into the whole as an attempt to shake off the outré from the thematic homogeneity. This is achieved by removing objects of obfuscation from the prism through which we interpret the text. By keeping the maxim of non-contradiction of the segment or the fragment with the whole at bay, there is a great chance we arrive to decipher with great exactitude what the author intended to get across in relation to the loss of faith.

In *George Orwell: A Literary Life*, Peter Davidson writes, “*A Clergyman's Daughter*

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<sup>163</sup> See Michel Foucault (2002), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, p.68.

can be read in the tradition of the nineteenth-century novels of the loss of faith.” (p. 62)<sup>164</sup>. However, away from this seemingly isolated comparison, the loss of faith logically acquires a new semantic meaning in a different context under different circumstances. It delimits by extension or restriction the nature of the content of disbelief and reduces it to atheism, which means that the main character, as we read through the lines, goes through the trajectory of no return as far as unbelief—which is synonymous with atheism—is considered. However, if, on the other hand, atheism is implicitly commented on, then allusions or symbolism language embedded in the themes that feature in the story give this theme new slants that are revealed by way of narration.

In this novel, The compass of loss of faith led to the breakdown of the self<sup>165</sup>, hence the appeal to a weaker notion of atheism<sup>166</sup>. Though we only peered at the psychological ramifications of the alienation of belief in Dorothy, the alacrity to commemorate these feelings begs the question of the authenticity of the unconscious experience, for much of what would help us to understand it often finds expression in the act of writing. Though it is dimly referred to, the existential aporia resulting from hovering between unfaith which promises liberation, and the surrender to the familiar and the conventional, can be picked up as a legitimate

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<sup>164</sup>To go back a bit further to the themes that characterize modernism, Suzane Hobson (2011) draws our attention to how “Modernist literature is said to bear witness to a contemporary crisis in faith.” Indeed, the link between unfaith and modernist writings is so strong that it can be used as a key criterion to define it against it. This is true inasmuch as we resist fragmentary powers and consider how other themes are weaved together to give us an expressive image that is built gradually based on the inclinations of the situated and the contextual necessity. Undermined by scientific positivism, the organic downfall of religious sentiments may have pushed the impulse of Ungodly writings starting from man’s prolific writings, which aimed at an earlier version of self-determination which has a historical connotation, and a symbolic expressiveness that exists elsewhere, away from the scripture or any other source that falls into the category of the sacramental.

<sup>165</sup> which resulted in attempts to pick up the fragmented pieces through aesthetic expression. For instance, as far as stylistic experimentation is concerned, Orwell’s critics unanimously agree that the third chapter in “A Clergyman’s Daughter” is experimental and was “written consciously under the influence of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.” However, Orwell’s originality is an often overlooked dimension in such discussions, which could exemplify his sidestepping repressed contents in the Freudian sense. Studies of Orwell abound in passages depicting his writing experience as being drawn extensively from his own experience. Be it as it may, the element of rarity from which we extrapolate the implicit meaning should be derived from the depository of meaning in a single discourse that is charged with atheistic insinuations or pronouncements.

<sup>166</sup> Because if what holds the being from decentralization must be cemented in the transcendental, then its absence is a *sin qua non* for the fracture of the being.

interpretation of a position of in-betweenness that exposes the liminality of the irreligious experience but it is also one which is neither synonymous with a return to fundamentalism (or the closed epistemological structure which Dorothy by no means questions it decisively) or a passionate protestation of atheism that led Dorothy to shelter herself under the subterfuge of nostalgia which eventually brought her back to where she started from, albeit in a state of profound anguish.

Dorothy's anguish seems to echo Nietzsche's (1883/1997) quote that "sombre is human life and as yet without meaning" (p. xi). This meaninglessness equals the invaluable qualities that each of the two states that occupy her or that she occupies vis-à-vis her own existential condition "and without valuation the nut of existence would be hollow" (p. 56). Dorothy understood the consequences of the loss of faith and the tribulation of the modern soul who is liable to "hateful" and 'corrupting' ennui.

We would have edged on the many factors that reflect the issue of the meaningless and the invaluable, but we are spared from attempting that because the crisis of meaning for her conflicts with the ontological (existence from the perspective of causality) and teleological implications, which she considered and admitted to their semblance and which consecutively pressured her unfaith.

Exegetically speaking, we accept the thesis of indeterminacy as well as questions of undecidability and uncertainty, which hover in the background of "*A Clergyman's Daughter*", and at certain moments it acquires a life of itself in the form of existential aporias and the objection to the word atheism. This latter is certainly not a subsidiary theme. However, it is especially visible as the novel neared its end, where the narrator confessed how Dorothy's anguish following her ruminations over the loss of her belief exacerbated her uncertainty, an uncertainty that is concomitant with the incapacity to formulate one's standpoint clearly and unequivocally; "she could not formulate these thoughts as yet, she could only live them...Much

later, perhaps, she would formulate them and draw comfort from them”. Holding on to this view as narrated is not promising in and out of itself—as far as faith is concerned— unless it is viewed as an instance of the neutrality of the state of mind, a kind of critical laxity that the author wanted to stress and make visible. An intellectual laxity abetted and turned off by the effective dynamics of habit.

However, even though she self-medicated on the only available prescription that would make her resistance less pronounced, it failed to deliver on its promise. The antidote in returning to the orthodox way of living life, to a closed epistemological structure, gave her a new identity, albeit in definitional terms. The author unravels a latent tension that is suppressed, “something that she did not want to face was waiting just below the surface of her consciousness”; something was unresolved as well as unpronounced. One can argue that her vexed relation with unfaith is symptomatic of accepting reality without due intellectual perseverance, which would go some way into explaining the authorial interjection that “it is a mysterious thing —the loss of faith—as mysterious as faith itself, or that it is not in her power to reach the knowledge of such truth, but, to accommodate Descartes point in *Meditations of First Philosophy*, that it remains within her power to suspend her judgment. Like faith, her unfaith is ultimately not rooted in logic; it is a change in the climate of the mind. coupled with the fact that “there was never a moment when the power of worship returned to her.” “Indeed, the whole concept of worship was meaningless to her now; her faith had vanished, utterly and irrevocably,” there is a clear relinquish of faith and a momentary renouncement of unfaith with a disposition towards agnosticism as the verge of unfaith. After all, Orwell did not walk us through the vicissitudes of her loss of faith, which leads us to consider that it was not there from the beginning objectively as the default state if we admit the variable of knowledge into the equation.

The logical underpinnings of the outward and inward change are rooted in the performance and the relation between the latter and the change that ensues is causal. This is

associated with a particular conception of radical action. Russel Graig (2009) is strikingly reticent on this, where he infers from Zizek “that an agent who performed a truly radical act is radically transformed as a result”(p. xxxi) and to go to an earlier point this ‘transference of meaning operates in accordance with unconscious desires that thus disguise themselves in otherwise innocent representations.’”(ibid. p.55). Therefore, the implicit proposition that we are treating here is that if each of the two states —i.e. faith and unfaith construed simplistically as religion and atheism— are elevated as both a possible and actual argument for assuagement and self-sufficiency which are intrinsic in them, then the narrative would have taken a different turn, and there would not be a strong narration of anguish mediated by tribulation which continues despite the narrative’s convergence into some sort of finality, and no speculation over the kind of unfaith in proportion with Dorothy’s experience in the narration and interpretation.

The author had his reasons to slow him down in a narrative that is plot-driven and always forward-moving. The memory loss surely does throw us off center and disrupts the logical flow of the succession of the events to the extent that we question if it is a dream-like retelling, but it is one of the strongest indicators, in psychoanalytic terms, of the author’s discharge of unwanted excess (of his once affiliation with religion<sup>167</sup> and faith as a system which he disapproved of) all the while building on a baseless foundation a necessary argument found in an escapism from the unfavorable implications of the elemental components of the story as well as the conventions of it from a conventional perspective that would fill the lacuna in the author’s account of the loss of faith or unfaith.

As the wheels of unfaith accelerate at the end of the novel— since what needed to be said was compressed and said in bursts of confessions in the train (i.e. Dorothy and Mr. Warburton)—, we are at last informed about the pattern of unbelief and the precise nature of

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<sup>167</sup> To the degree that we consider Eric Blair’s clutching over the services that religion offers, i.e. mundane rituals which have been documented by him and his critics.

that unbelief/disbelief. Indeed, nearing the novel's end, contemplation proliferated, and long-abandoned questions sprung to life as if they fed off the isolation in the presence of comfort “changed the tenor of her thoughts.” Condensed and squeezed into the few lines in which these thoughts occupied a small place in a relatively lengthy story, whose major contours have been truncated somehow and for some reason.

Despite Orwell's account of Dorothy's unfaith trial as truncated, what we do know is that she did not object to the presence of God on any grounds, perhaps because, in connecting with a passage in the novel where “she could not formulate her thoughts as yet” that there is a piece of starking evidence disguised under a heap of narrative apparatus which suggests that Dorothy went through a kind of a ‘rebirth experience’ incited by violent uncertainty, where indoctrination and past accumulated knowledge do not prefigure; where a priori and posteriori are paused for inert consideration and effect. And it is precisely this effect that suggests that her loss of faith is interpreted and should be interpreted as a process of working out the dilemma of God, owing to a vexing uncertainty that dominates the liminal space between her religious/irreligious experience<sup>168</sup>.

### **3. 3. 1. The Frontiers of Unfaith: Unfaith Bordering on Agnosticism**

Statements about unfaith are reducible to statements about atheism. But we ask the question: in a situated interpretation of the text, how persuasive is this interpretation following Orwell's linguistic limitation, which metamorphosizes into a creative wordplay? how much of what we are led to believe is true with a secondary partial reference to atheism? Atheism is axiomatized in relation to the loss of faith (with Mr. Warbuton and the general unbelief of the

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<sup>168</sup> This is not disconnected from the general tenor of the narrative. Embracing uncertainty seems to be a running theme in the novel. After all, living is notoriously period marked by uncertainty, added to that the circumstance and the teleology of the narrative, that is in a quasi-tragic and drama-based narrative such as this one, uncertainty in the lower tier class, to which Dorothy belonged in the interval between departure and arrival to and fro Knype Hill is even more accentuated on an existential level and displayed in the open, which maximizes its symbolism. Considering this thesis, we become more alarmed by the effects of symbolism, which we understand as being diluted to the point of satisfying the requirements of realistic writing, and even more alarmed to consider weaving the themes that take center stage as a proxy to the dominant theme in the novel that has a strong bearing on the existential crisis as it pertains to Dorothy's crisis of faith.

lay people of England, which Dorothy and her father were discussing). However, this is not expressive or revealing of what is of paramount importance: that is the very queer case of Dorothy. Iteration may establish atheism as what is taking the loss of faith to be, but it rules it out progressively as it terminates with an abstracted conceptual change, which we feel happening on the level of handling lexical charge with such easiness or heaviness<sup>169</sup>, of the themes of uncertainty, and lingering skepticism which we see manifestly as ever so existent in the final pages of the novel and implicitly throughout the narrative.

More to the point, in the echelons of signification, unfaith —from a terminological perspective that indistinguishably lumps together the variants of the word— signifies not only a neutral equidistance between various positions under the heading of unfaith but also the same genesis, whereas the word frontiers introduce a concept of space which differentiates between the ‘outside’ and the ‘beyond’ of each variant of the experience of unfaith which exceeds neutrality to audacious nonparticipation with the content of the other variant of unfaith.

One can hardly give more than two suggestive connotations to the word “unfaith”. To begin with, the word does not register in the Oxford dictionary and this says a lot about its desirability and historicity as a concept. It indicates a distribution of the negative over the positive, and it is telling of its disposability, not as a concept per se, but as an overall thought system underpinned by logical consistency, discrepancies, and filiations and its powerful grip on the mind of the beholder. The suffix “un” is usually bracketed, giving us the impression that it is an alien concept that is better understood by its lexical equivalence and loses it when it is recontextualized. The meaning is thus transferred, but we continue to see it as linguistically admissible. Therefore, there are solid grounds to consider *Unfaith* as a “unity of distribution,” from which atheism and agnosticism emerge<sup>170</sup>, wherein “the conditions of their appearance

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<sup>169</sup> In the case of atheism, it is handled with heaviness.

<sup>170</sup> And where both are naturally mutually exclusive of one another.

are identical” and the terms of their presence are analogous, and the variations of meaning result from the contextual shift.

If, on tautological grounds, atheism is the condition for the possibility of unfaith or disbelief<sup>171</sup> of any kind in the sense that it rejects the metaphysical or God on ontological and epistemological grounds<sup>172</sup>, then the case of Dorothy does not hold and will quickly lose balance<sup>173</sup>. If, on the other hand, agnosticism in its broadest conceptions is the condition for the possibility of unfaith and disbelief<sup>174</sup>, in that case atheism is nullified<sup>175</sup> if and only if we tap into the fallibility, errancy, and unreliability of our reasoning, which points to a lopsided foundation<sup>176</sup> in our conception of unfaith that excludes atheism on the basis of epistemological dissatisfaction, which aligns with the perception of the loss of faith thus far conceptualized.

In this regard, there is no overcoming or transgressing the threshold of unfaith; there is only the return to the generic state, not only of uncertainty but of adamancy to a strange position between faith and unfaith because what she went through only reinforced her feeling of estrangement from religion, but it cannot be strictly an argument for disbelief construed as atheism because the desire within her is otherwise. After all, such desire is fundamentally spiritual and essentially antithetical to atheism.

In accordance with the “limitations of argumentation”<sup>177</sup>, the acquiescence of Dorothy or the narrative of the loss of faith to metaphysical realism entails the petering out of atheism at the expense of a variant of unfaith/disbelief. Dorothy identified atheistical unfaith and

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<sup>171</sup> Both are interrelated in some fundamental way.

<sup>172</sup> Faith is often cast as mythical and unconvincing on accounts of Herbert Spencer’s concept of the “unknowable”, whereby it is treated as intellectually inferior.

<sup>173</sup> Unlike atheism which presupposes decisiveness and certainty, agnosticism is fundamentally based on an epistemological neutral position, arguably the epistemological default state of a person.

<sup>174</sup> Which makes it a baseline for the definition of unfaith, factually speaking, because it is based on the restrictions of reason concerning the metaphysical.

<sup>175</sup> despite them, i.e. atheism and agnosticism, as being co-terminus, that is having the same boundaries as far as unfaith is concerned and by extension the same frontiers

<sup>176</sup> From the premise that departs from both being equitable on accounts of unfaith and disbelief.

<sup>177</sup> See more on this in Hugo Strandberg’s (2016) *The Possibility of Discussion: Relativism, Truth and criticism of Religious Belief*, (p.127)

reasoned that it is but the manifestation of irrationality and the absence of reason, and thought about it as “that vague, blank disbelief so common in illiterate people, against which all argument is powerless”. Therefore, the presence of the loss of belief, disbelief, and unfaith should exceed the simple lexical equivalence to which it is customarily attached.

In making a case for agnosticism in “*A Clergyman’s Daughter*” —which so far is valid since the narrative of the novel possesses both the logical structure of agnosticism and an argument for it— we made it clear from the onset that it is presented in an ambiguous way. We brought into board the antinomy of the transgression of belief in a negativistic fashion while also arguing for the seeking of a transcendental experience (that is the ‘beyond’ and ‘outside’ of the conventional, the uninformed and substandard belief).

The preeminence of agnosticism over atheism in this novel presupposes an unwavering narrative structure with its internal logic that has a bearing on the concern to delineate the frontiers of unbelief (the overt and covert castigation of religion and belief), all the while presenting an issue of competing boundaries in the realm of unfaith and bringing the theme of identarian crisis all along the narrative and leaving it unresolved whilst accentuating the two themes of desire and uncertainty, thus ensuring the suspension of judgment. Surely, being an agnostic is a statement of evolving unfaith but more so of existing unfaith. However, a caveat must be made that her agnosticism, like that of *Women in Love*, overlaps significantly with the desire for faith for God. This is correlative with the ensemble of the textual evidence we garnered from the text, and this is the position Orwell takes on the subject of the loss of faith.

As is referred to above, agnosticism is approached through the intermediary of atheism, which is pronounced on multiple occasions in the novel, and it is, to a great extent, what “the loss of faith” arguably refers to in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*. From the very beginning, the loss of faith is germinated and as the narrative progresses, it spreads it thinly until it becomes ubiquitous with a significant verge towards theism (i.e., agnostic theism). It is firmly anchored

in the storyline that it forms a condensed form of unfaith that is hard to penetrate and explicate for the weakness in the development of the psychological aspect of Dorothy that usually infiltrates modernist literature; however, only from an agnostic hypothesis that such a reading is being challenged and thus made comprehensible.

### **Conclusion**

That there was a religious crisis in “*A Clergyman’s Daughter*” cannot be denied. “The age of faith,” as George Orwell referred to in his essays, was long gone, and if anything was resistant to the volatility of the narrative or has been sustained throughout the novel, it is the probing of faith in the unfaith, it is uncertainty that begets an unusual kind of unfaith precisely by tapping into its frontiers. *A Clergyman’s Daughter* reveals the extent to which unfaith was deeply rooted in the author’s life and that it remains intact throughout the narrative’s thread, though how it was weaved suggests the presence of agnosticism.

Certainly, agnosticism is not formed explicitly, though it can be seen as a hidden presupposition. To think that it supplants an understanding of the true nature of the loss of faith he refers to is to stretch the root term beyond its capacity in an overlapping territory.

The fact remains that unfaith in this novel harbors a degree of malleability, conservatism, and correspondence with the human condition that is essentially founded on doubt and uncertainty while conforming to the demands for knowledge of the transcendental so that faith can be established on solid grounds forms a conceptualization that is synonymous with agnosticism. Hence, the loss of faith in *A Clergyman’s Daughter* knocks at the doors of faith/unfaith and absconds the frontiers of atheism into that of agnosticism.

# CHAPTER IV

(Balancing Alternatives: Puritanism and Agnostic Disbelief in “*The Last Puritan*”)

## **Introduction**

**4.1. “The Skepticism I am Defending”: Understanding George Santayana**

**4.2. Skepticism in Metaphysics**

**4.3. The Will to Disbelief**

**4.4. The Last Puritan: Oliver in context**

**4.4.1. The Last Puritan: Puritanism in Context**

**4.4.2. The Retreat of The Doubter**

**4.4.3. Surrendering disbelief**

**4.4.4. Half-hearted Agnosticism**

## **Conclusion**

## Balancing Alternatives: Puritanism and Agnostic Disbelief in *The Last Puritan*

“Having renounced my faith in nature, I must not weakly retain faith in experience” —George Santayana, *Skepticism and Animal Faith*

For man has in his nature a desire and love to seek the limits or ends, and wants to reach the end of everything. — Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*

“Religions will thus be better or worse, never true or false” —George Santayana, *Reason in Religion*

“And he who chooseth not hath chosen best”—George Santayana (1922)

### Introduction

That there should be an agnostic reading of Santayana’s overall philosophy in his novel “*the last Puritan*” calls into question the contrasting ways of reading opposite systems of thought, that is, naturalism and skepticism along the lines of what he called “*The pressure of existence*” which presides over the events of the novel. This “*pressure of existence*” which sits so predominant at the center of the novel under analysis, I argue, finds its way to the surface of his writing in which he undermines or derides a sense of religious faith. Still, this presentation raises implications that go beyond the explicit in a kind of narrative and non-fictional circularity, which is a loud expression of the ubiquitous presence of the question of God within an individual who hasn’t resolved this question in the affirmative or negative, that in turn, is manifested by an elusive balance that preoccupies this fiction. On this claim, I build a case for reading *The Last Puritan* as a conflict of alternatives that links the exceptionally confident style and the profundity with which he penetrates the themes raised explicitly or alluded implicitly. This chapter discusses an overlooked metaphysical philosophy that helps elicit the subtle connections between agnosticism and Puritanism in “*The Last Puritan*” and presents an argument in favor of pushing back against privileging a vacuous generalization of the novel as the epitome of Puritanism in its orthodox conception. I go beyond Kierkegaardian reading of the various stages of existence as a more fully developed form of the ethical stage of

existence to suggest a strong link between how the religious experience (as both a state of being and criticism of metaphysics) as presented and/or underrepresented and talked about and a robust and compelling link which possesses a firm sense of a stymied irreligious experience that he sought to channel into his fictional work. In this chapter, we explore Santayana's life and philosophy before proceeding to examine Santayana's *The Last Puritan*, and I trace how he considers naturalism and its metaphysical concrete expression, puritanism to be Oliver's (and his) position of unfaith or disbelief as Santayana addresses the larger question of existence and substance, as well as the meaning of life, all embodied in Oliver's journey to a life worth living. The argument that informs my reading is Santayana's overt atheistic position and the primary and secondary literature relevant to this topic. In short, this chapter explores Santayana's skepticism as well as some of the ways in which *The Last Puritan* (1936) may be understood as an agnostic novel and how it can be considered in relation to George Santayana's loosely contested and variedly defined skepticism across his literary and personal life. I take the novel as a yardstick by which we measure Santayana's unwavering skepticism in relation to claims of knowledge of God and religion.

It is perhaps understandable that until 1935, Santayana's main writing was philosophical and continued to be philosophical until his death in 1952. His corpus comprises works penetrating the heart of *matter* and metaphysics typical of those endowed with a supreme intellectual gift. He is thus both a materialist and an inconspicuous metaphysician. However, whilst his place in classical American philosophy is well established, and while his work has a degree of philosophical merit, he also enjoys an unshakable literary status owing to his contribution to prose and poetry. His first work published in 1894 was *Sonnets and Other Verses*, which is a compendium of poetry and surely is not his last poetry book, is a testimony to his literary predilections.

Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás, later anglicized as George was born on 16 December 1863 in Madrid, Spain, to Spanish parents. At the age of nine, he moved to America where he was raised and educated. In 1889 he assumed a professorship at Harvard and would teach there until his permanent departure from America in 1912. Santayana would later settle in Europe, alternating between France and Italy, and would be called the intellectual wanderer who inhabits the ivory tower, thus producing distinguished scholarship in philosophy and an enduring contribution to literature. Of the figures he influences, we find Bertrand Russell, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Steven Wallace, and W. E. B Du Bois, among others. As an American and Spanish philosopher and a self-exiled writer, Santayana's versatile writing saw him wearing the hat of the poet, the philosopher, the essayist, and the novelist, and he is a prolific writer at those. Santayana is thus distinguished explicitly as an eclectic philosopher who enjoins in Greek philosophy and who brought many contributions to the twentieth-century scholarship on naturalism, materialism, and metaphysics. However, his intellectual itinerary is categorically philosophical.

With this particular approach and initiation to the love of wisdom, he begins to loosen the hinges of the stringent philosophy that sets him apart from his predecessors and contemporaries alike. Indeed, Santayana everywhere pursued a philosophy of *essence* and *substance* but with a certain "metaphorical novelty." His 1896 *Sense and Beauty*, which he published only for tenure, plays a watershed role in the theory of aesthetics, and although this work declares to be profoundly naturalistic in that it opposes the account of God and revelation in matters of art and aesthetics accepts its usage (i.e., of God) as metaphorical.

Much attention has been paid to the important ways in which Santayana's fiction carried the seeds of his personal/distinct philosophy, which led his critics to grapple with the literary dimension in his philosophy and the philosophical dimension in his literature. Critics of Santayana took note of the generosity, artistic and controversial complexity, and artistic

markers of his philosophy. Michael K. Macrakis (1996) marks his philosophical credentials as belonging to three categories: scientific philosophy, artistic philosophy, and prophetic philosophy. Each constitutes a significant move in scope and treatment from the other with an unflinching focus on the aesthetics that marked his philosophic journey.

Santayana received sustained critical attention. With an eclectic background such as Santayana's, he is considered by some critics as a philosopher who "eludes easy classifications" (Glenn Tiller, 2004, p. 137). While mostly dubbed a "literary philosopher", Santayana is also a critic "who writes from the vantage point of a reasoned philosophy" and is rightly written about as whatever "he touches seemed to turn to philosophy" (Newton P.

Stallknecht 1971). Henry Aiken (1962) describes him specifically as a "natural historian of symbolic forms" (p. 337) and John Herman Randall, Jr. (1954) as "one of the most impersonal thinkers." On the other hand, Will Durrant considers Santayana as a "poet first, and philosopher afterwards" in the sense that Santayana gives to the expression "poetry is essentially true than history." He must be, in his own phrase, "a Platonist in logic and morals, and a transcendent in romantic soliloquy," both combining and obliterating rigid cuts between realism and idealism.

Glenn Tiller (2004) reports that he was not regarded as "quite a serious philosopher." but "a writer with a poetic turn of phrase". Thus, It is not without foundation that Henry David Aiken (1953) calls him the "natural historian of symbolic forms." Aiken puts forward the proposition that even if Santayana is a metaphysician, it is still incomparable to the systematic philosophy sketched by giants philosophers such as Whitehead, Heidegger, and Bergson. In a telling passage, Santayana avows, "I am a sensitive creature surrounded by a universe utterly out of scale with myself: I must, therefore, address it questioningly but trustfully, and it must reply to me in my own terms, in symbols and parables, that only gradually enlarge my childish perceptions." (Kirby-Smith, 1997, p. 111). His flagrant revulsion from academic philosophy

sets him apart as a philosopher who enjoys “a wider influence among the laymen than in strictly professional and academic circles.”

As to why there seems to be a general lack of interest in Santayana in philosophy courses, the British idealist philosopher Timothy L. S. Sprigge (1974) gives the following reasons, which, when viewed as a whole, give us cogent reasons to believe that is the case for the deliberate neglect of Santayana as a philosopher. The first is more general and spread: the lack of interest in contemporary American philosophy. Among many American philosophers, Santayana has lost the centrality of attention to a rising French and German philosophy. The second is the poetic nature of his philosophy. The third is his leave from academia before his philosophy matured and his distaste of the American intellectual scene and the American way of life<sup>178</sup> as a whole, which led him to not thoroughly engage with contemporary philosophy<sup>179</sup>. Additionally, his retirement from Harvard caused a wave of shock in academic America, especially within the intellectual circle of Harvard, which in turn caused significant hostility towards him. The fourth is that his view of the world is decidedly deterministic (i.e., materialistically determined), all the while merging with its transcendental ontology which has offended the proponents of both camps.

But perhaps the disinterest in Santayana’s scholarship was because he is seen as a disengaged philosopher who maintains an emotional distance from the matters he probes and writes about. Alcalà & Laursen (2014) make the case that because Santayana does not abide by any school of philosophy and that he maintains a hot and cold relation to the matters he engages in, he is uncommitted. Writing in 1949, the English writer Somerset Maugham regretfully resolves, “It was a loss to American literature when Santayana decided to be a philosopher rather than a novelist.” (qtd. in Singer, 2000, p. 209)

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<sup>178</sup> His distaste for American life can be evinced in his most famous essay “*The Genteel Tradition*”.

<sup>179</sup> He confesses, “My intellectual relations and labors still unite me closely to America; and it is as an American writer that I must count, if I am counted at all.”

In his position and during his time, Santayana was certainly an extremely rare exception, comparable only to Wittgenstein. Stallknecht (1971) describes an admirable trait of his, that he is “unmoved by the pressure of contemporary opinion” (p. 5). The corpus of his work is multidimensional, colorful, and accessible and proffers a source of insight for those interested in the ordinary and universal issues of philosophy.

Santayana’s system of thinking and personality steer many questions coming from his variegated positions on man and nature, philosophy and religion, and society and politics. Therefore, it is important to understand that what crystallizes his philosophy revolves around the rejection of the faith not only of contemporary philosophy -which has been brewing and progressing behind prestigious institutions- but also modern philosophy which he also seemed to eschew at all costs, save for Spinoza’s philosophy.

Though he denied a change in the gist of his philosophy, his later works such as *The Realms of Being* and *SAF* retained a considerable ontological exposition, while most of his earlier works are epistemological (they push a phenomenological thesis). A fact that becomes clear when we glimpse at the discourse markers and the intentions behind them that demarcated his aim to ward off the monopoly of one over the other. His philosophy and the systematicity built into it reflect, in a crucial way, his intention not to undercut his understanding of the world. John Lachs concedes, “His system is a self-consistent and sophisticated synthesis of elements, such as materialism and Platonism, that have hitherto been thought irreconcilable.” (John Lachs, 2019, p. 949).

There is a commonplace remark about Santayana’s non-involvement and emotional distance in his philosophy that made an indelible impression on the scholarship of his philosophy as endemic in his skepticism. The death of his only “real friend,” Warwick Potter, caused in him an irrevocable separation from places as well as from events down to his youth and religion and the admiration of Goethe inspired him to detach himself from everything. A

detachment that paradoxically, in his words, “presupposes attachment.” (Santayana, 1953, p. 9)

What Mark Francis calls “artistic licence” which Santayana generously gave to himself stems from his characteristic humanism, a humanism that is based upon the belief “in the value of all forms of human expression.” Santayana “an exponent of holistic knowledge” was himself, to varying degrees and depths, a universalist.

#### 4. 1. “The Skepticism I am Defending”: Understanding George Santayana

In his important book *Skepticism and Animal Faith* (1923)<sup>180</sup>, Santayana took on to criticize skeptic philosophers who are unsympathetic to the aesthetic and spiritual realms as he himself conceives them, particularly Hume and Kant more so than Berkeley —the radical skeptic— and sought to denounce their skepticism as veering towards an assertion of some sort, an equipollence<sup>181</sup>, pejoratively calling their form of skepticism “limping skepticism”<sup>182</sup> corroborated by “incidental sophistries”<sup>183</sup>. He criticized Kant on the grounds that he scapegoated knowledge, not to subvert its value but to prove that faith is above knowledge. Indeed, in the preface to his 1787 *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant confessed the following, “Thus I had to deny knowledge to make room for faith.” Hume, on the other hand, defended the view of the existing world and knowledge of that world all the while questioning the reality of substance. His skepticism rests on the repudiation of certainty, not of belief. In short, he found it impossible for ideas to reveal anything (which Santayana ruled out as “an added harmony...not the ground of its existence.” What both philosophers share and apparently a cause of concern for Santayana in the historical tradition of skepticism is the dogmatic

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<sup>180</sup> Henceforth *SAF*

<sup>181</sup> a method based on stocking up on arguments and weighing in one over the other.

<sup>182</sup> Here Santayana agrees with Nietzsche who criticized “those whose knowledge walketh on lame feet” See *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 124

<sup>183</sup> He argues that the “philosopher today would be ridiculous and negligible who had not strained his dogmas through the utmost rigours of skepticism, and who did not approach every opinion, whatever his own ultimate faith, with the courtesy and smile of the skeptic”

assumption of knowledge of any sort, namely the notion of belief that betrays *prima facie* the skeptical method and position. Santayana took note of the fact that the ideas we have of things are expanded and enlarged to the things they represent, which ultimately causes faith in the things themselves in their beholder. He states, “All alleged knowledge of matters of fact is faith only, and that an existing world, whatever form it may choose to wear, is intrinsically a questionable and arbitrary thing” (Santayana, 1923, p. 49). And in the words of William Hamilton, “We are warned from recognizing the domain of our knowledge as co-extensives with the horizon of our faith”<sup>184</sup> (qtd in. Mansel, 1966, p.

Santayana’s critical philosophy is not only a reactive passive judgment of that kind of skepticism that undermines his kind of skepticism, but it is the redirection of the skeptic from the ideal to the real, from the transcendental field to the material, from a faltering skepticism to a Pyrrhonian one. His illuminating book *Skepticism and Animal Faith* expounds on his mature philosophy and offers and justifies a new system of philosophy, albeit still grounded in borrowed knowledge as he himself concedes. In many ways, *SAF* presents the kernel of his ontology; nevertheless, the merit of it is not the replacement of one ontology for another, but it is the refinement of our ordinary viewpoint that lends weight to Pyrrhonian skepticism which forges no claims to knowledge.

One such way we can approach this system is through reading and understanding his skepticism. The theme of skepticism surely has a strong claim on his philosophy and forms of it appear frequently in his works as a concept or a methodology. A strong form of skepticism denies the existence of anything, as he stresses the absolute position of the skeptic that “nothing given exists.” A weak form of it, however, is the doubt of the existence of anything. But apart from existence (an appeal to the senses and the psyche that reacts back on external things),

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<sup>184</sup> Hamilton poignantly asserts that the potentiality of thought is not supposed to be contained in the whole or parts of existence. “We are thus taught the salutary lesson, that the capacity of thought is not to be constituted into the measure of existence”

there is also knowledge of that existence (understood generally as veiled perception interceded by symbols as *prima facie* requisites for faith) which is suspended and dismissed as non-existent. Santayana seems to state defensively the two accounts of such discourses.

However, his criticism is not without critical foundations. *SAF* carries strong claims about the ontology of the external world. In it, he gives a philosophical prominence to both the perceived objects of the real world and our intuition of them, though it is inscrutable which one is prioritized. Thus, early in his *SAF* and in a single stroke of skepticism, he attacks skeptics on many points, and he attacks them with the advantage of a retrospective critic whose point of reference is the immediate and a running thesis that nothing given exists coupled with an epistemology of materialism of some sort, and he pierces into skepticism from the vantage of radical skepticism. From thereon, he expounds his kind of skepticism. But how does he recover skepticism all the while elbowing that which he is lying on?<sup>185</sup>

In working out an illuminating definition of skepticism, Santayana places it squarely in temporal terms and is not a matter of semantic dislodging but is understood as an epistemic stance (i.e., the making of negative claims about knowledge) as well as teleology, and if the question we ask is whether there is anything that is resistant to skepticism, Santayana's response would be "nothing whatever can be known to exist" (Sprigee, 1974, p. 42) an instant where he not only flirts with the dubitability of knowledge, but he also acknowledges it. He states, "The fact that something is presented to the mind is by no means acknowledged" (p. 43). He offers the notorious thesis that all matters are equally dubitable. However, there is only one thing that is indubitable, and that is the character of the given thing (the form of being) and whatever is presented to the consciousness. To put this in faithful light, man has a necessary relation with everything visible and invisible—as long as it ticks the mind and the conscious—which leads him to ask some fundamental questions concerning existence by zooming in on

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<sup>185</sup> In *Realms of Being*, Santayana has turned from "preoccupations with moral problems to a direct interest in epistemological theory" (Lamprecht, 1933, p. 567)

the material world to work out the perpetually agonizing questioning of the act of perception and that which is perceived. Moving purposefully in that direction requires recognition of some form.

Thus, Santayana construes skepticism as he transitions from traditional skepticism to dogmatism in an economical naturalism. Understood from this perspective, the philosopher makes clear that the skeptic cannot assure himself of the truth and can in no way avoid illusion, error, or doubt. Therefore, the realm of truth is but the truth of the essence.

Only through progressive knowledge which is made possible inasmuch as the discernment of essences is achieved. However, it is in the immediate, through the senses, that true existence is found. Indeed, what matters is the immediate moment which freezes confusion of the essence, the self-evidence of the existent rather than the appearance. The essences, which are forms of being, are symbols of existence; therefore, existence is spoken only in terms of essences and the truth of those essences. Santayana lacks neither the eloquent force nor truth as long as his discussion remains within these terms.

His most eminent work *The Realms of Being* (1942)<sup>186</sup> expounds on this philosophy and presents and develops many theses to their epistemic limits. The intrinsic value of the existing thing reveals itself in two possible ways:

1. The thing itself exhibits qualities, spatial and temporal, which are then picked by intuition and the impression it makes on the memory before it withdraws into the flux of the present moment. And 2. through the external relation that one thing has with another.

The idea of essences serves as an axis around which several of his themes rotate which is the key to his naturalist philosophy. Santayana presents the kernel of his ontology by acknowledging the plurality of essences, and he defines them as indispensable terms in the perception of matter.

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<sup>186</sup> In it, he details an exegesis and exposition of four realms: The Realm of Essence, The Realm of Matter, the Realm of Truth, The Realm of Spirit.

Hence, the assumption about the mind-external world is valid so long as it puts heavy emphasis on the intuition to respond. Santayana's explicit concern with intuition provides the key to the epistemology of the physical world; intuition being the awareness of the essence in the substance. This epistemology is an epiphenomenal naturalism par excellence which engenders belief in the essence of the perceived matter. His views on existence become thematized as such.

Accordingly, his views on causation subscribe to the idea of the necessity of apprehension of the natural world. He declares that "by calling into question the question about a starting point, we have affirmed the question ability of existence and we have established a horizon under which our reflections can take place." (Winquist, 1972, p. 36) He drives our attention to two primal exigencies. The first is the inception of existence, whose perceived essence generates discourse. The second is when Santayana speaks of the primacy of the observed over the senses of the observer; thus, he lends support to noumena over the phenomena, he states, "there is nothing in sense which is not first in things" (SAF, p.84) Thus according to this view, Mind-independent existence is known only insofar as the mind intuits it. *Intent*, argue Santayana's critics, is the chief word in his thought. intent/intuition furnishes us with somewhat sufficient knowledge of the natural world.

Therefore, the practical implication of this perspective is that Santayana entertains a kind of direct realism, in that by perceiving sensible datum, we gain knowledge of the perceived object and a justified belief in that object or at least a momentarily. According to this worldview, intuition is an antecedent, and perception is a prerequisite premise to penetrate the essence(s) of the matter perceived, which then lends support to the *truth* of the matter.

Nonetheless, by bringing into clear view, he throws light on the issue of motion and the infinite nature of essences which he presents antithetically to the intuition of the essence in the immediate which annuls any claims to knowledge. He defines experience as "the successive

intuition of essences” (ibid. p.140). This view is only an elaboration of his skeptic stance, wherein he discusses mutability and change as correlative with the suasive nature of things ultimately containing the idea of something, and the idea of something is the belief in that thing either is or implies harkening back to the position he tried to avoid.

Overall, Skepticism supplies solutions to the sphere of epistemology and infiltrates epistemology with enough good reasons so as to render the suspension of judgment the default nature of it. The fullest expression of this skepticism with respect to intuition and essence, in my view, results in ataraxia and is uttered in the following, “Scepticism is the chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon or to the first comer: there is nobility in preserving it coolly and proudly through a long youth, until at last, in the ripeness of instinct or discretion, it can be safely exchanged for fidelity and happiness” (ibid. p.69-70)

Notwithstanding, whilst the skeptic may enjoy a sort of “luxurious idleness”, skepticism, vehicled by “the fear of illusion”, is a practice, and an act of purgation of the mind from prejudices and ill-founded claims in preparation for when the time comes to believe. His use of belief, contextually and textually, is not suggestive of circuitry from absolute doubt to an unwavering belief that stands the test of certainty across timely and constructs, but Santayana is forced by his own position to instrumentalize it to retain a certain skeptical spirit which is responsible for his undisputed disengagement.

Santayana also pushed forward the proposition that if also the material world is rejected, then we will verge on solipsism of a certain temporal quality which admits of the present only (in phenomenological terms, this is attention that fending off the weeds of “unwarrantable idea” such as the past or future) which is intolerant of the physical and metaphysical world such that any attempt to repudiate it would be based on misunderstanding and would also be self-contradictory.

Though the immediate experience of anything is doubted by the skeptic and though nothing exists is intuitively plausible as Santayana argues, the concession to intuited essences as a belief is, I suppose, an added familiarity with the unknown rather than the cognizance in the absolute. Perhaps the single most argumentative thread in his philosophy is that *intent*, a catchword in his thought, serves as an indication of the physical world and conditions us to crystallize essences, even just conceptually. We only make judgment of the intrinsic nature of matter, thus, the non-existence of the metaphysical realm.

#### 4. 2. Skepticism in Metaphysics

Still important in our discussion is the recognition and clarification of the transcendental dimension of this ontology. A well-known problem with the reductionist reading of the philosophy of physical determinism such as Santayana's is that it does not present an ontology that is within the folds of metaphysics when it aims to cushion it in a plea for naturalism and materialism. What determines the conditions for such a ready-made assumption would not only be the notoriety of skepticism in undermining all claims of knowledge, not least in the sphere of metaphysics but also the unwavering focus on *matter* rather than the spiritual aspect of existence which spreads thinly until it becomes ubiquitous, which ultimately doubles the effect of subordinating metaphysics to philosophical probing of the physical world; therefore, resulting in eschewing this query altogether.

The question of God and the transcendental finds a negative answer in the philosophy of naturalism. The kind of naturalism that we have in mind does not allow any leeway for any form of natural belief in the transcendental to be formed, only belief in the natural *qua* natural.<sup>187</sup> However, Santayana's kind of naturalism is not entirely a rejection of the idealistic

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<sup>187</sup> Natural belief as man's propensity to believe/belief as a cognitive and psychological necessity which carries propositional content and belief in nature as the ultimate form of knowledge must be contrasted with one another to understand Santayana's naturalistic philosophy. Not unexpectedly, reductive naturalism would stand in opposition to this distinction, for instance, in Spinozian Unity of *Being*. but in its essence, it denotes the opposite of the Ideal, transcendental or spiritual.

thesis. In fact, there is no denying that an ontology that seeks to answer the grand questions necessarily outgrows its circle of containment and would rise to the transcendental sphere. Indeed, if this is a comprehensive ontology<sup>188</sup> that develops with simplicity and greatness the account of natural perfection or the perfection of the natural it should expose it afterwards, by necessity, to other outward realms, to the infinite, and it is necessary to grasp exactly the point on which it stands<sup>189</sup>.

Therefore, in the case of Santayana, it would not suffice to content oneself with a poorly developed ontology. Santayana, with every intention, was delighted to present this kind of comprehensive ontology by touching on the spiritual element.

Throughout his philosophy, Santayana's departure was from materialism; however, despite the cogency of his materialism, his formulation does not seem committed to an explicit form of it. As Laursen & Alcalá (2022) put it in a recent study that "Santayana moves paradoxically between contrary positions, variously tending without wishing toward an inevitable objectivism or naturalism, and then implying without intending it an absolute subjectivism and nihilism" (p.13). The implications for such a reading substantiate the spiritual dimension. Truly, the spiritual element, too, receives special care and we might think of it as forming a bridge spanning idealism and realism, thereby constituting the uniformity of nature<sup>190</sup> in its unadulterated conception<sup>191</sup>.

To retrace our steps, the flaw in the argument for realism alone rests on the extent to which realism reveals nature which makes plain that the appeal to it has finite and defined implications. The obligation is then to seek compensation for idealism. Reading it in this context enlarges for us the idea that physicalism and knowledge of the physical world are advanced through a continual reinvigoration of the spiritual contract until the winds of

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<sup>188</sup> an ontology whose objective and practical use also plays the role of criticism.

<sup>189</sup> What I mean by that is an ontology that is responsive to questions of transcendental nature.

<sup>190</sup> Read this way, Santayana stands closest to Spinoza in advancing the thesis of the unity of nature.

<sup>191</sup> Both positions animate his literary and philosophical discourse.

aspiration are calmed and the appeasement and harmony of the different raging impulses are reached.

His intricate scrutiny of spirituality, for instance, as a human idol from the vantage of the materialist is particularly riveting. The term “spiritual” for Santayana springs not from the application of nature to the criteria of reason which, then, supposedly reaches an abstract conception of the essence and thus existence, but is, in fact, juxtaposed with the rational life all the while remaining an important aspect of the life of reason. Spirit, thus envisaged, gives us a sense of harmony rather than the congruity of identity between the true essence and the imagined essence which Santayana makes explicitly clear that it is unsubstantial.

Much in the manner of his epiphenomenalism, which is unidentical with pragmatism, the term spirit for Santayana gets its meaning from the effect of contemplation which originates from existence and/or that which is applied to and is accessed only when it is conceived as an effect. It follows that it transitions from epiphenomenalism to fatalism when the subject matter is explored, the satisfaction of the human impulses (reason is one of them) is made, a value judgment is synthesized, and when inferential knowledge, via the vector of the compulsion to believe, is reached.

An indispensable component to the realms of being, the realm of spirit has an intrinsic value and this intrinsic value, in which the imagined essences are harmonious with external references, surpasses mere accounts of naturalism *qua* naturalism but verges towards idealism which seems to permeate his philosophy<sup>192</sup>.

This observation calls into question the interjection of the metaphysical into the realm of materialism framed by the acceptance or negation of the question of God. A positive belief in the world of the material is not something the radical skeptic would uphold, nor the belief in the mind. This reflects an ambiguity in Santayana’s own perspective and places him in an

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<sup>192</sup> Hence why a solid monopolistic account of realism in his philosophy seems less convincing because it lost ground to another complementary account, idealism.

awkward position. Concerning knowledge of the transcendental Santayana emphatically stresses, “the intuition of an idea...is not knowledge.” On this claim, Santayana builds his epistemology on shaky grounds.

To go back to an earlier point and leaving all argumentative preambles aside, we propose that the quality of being skeptic would have made one think of serious, deep, and impending questions and one such kind of skepticism that falls within the scope of our discussion is that of theological skepticism. Indeed, God must have ontological status within his philosophy whether it is stated or implied, and depending on whether this question will be resolved one way or another, skepticism as a function of critical philosophy undermines all metaphysical claims. For our author, essences or the quality of being cannot lay claim to metaphysical advantages (only so by belief). He argues, “Thus although essences have the texture and ontological status of Platonic idea, they can lay claim to none of the cosmological, metaphysical or moral prerogatives attributed to these ideas. They are infinite in number and neutral in value.” (Santayana, 1923, p.77-78)

Santayana offers the thesis that existence is primarily unintelligible and that knowledge is approached symbolically. He adds that "Belief in the existence of anything ... is something radically incapable of proof, and rests, like all belief, on some irrational persuasion or prompting of life" (ibid. P. 35). The implications would then challenge the assumption of knowledge of metaphysical claims in support of the existence of God. Thus understood, Santayana's position in this regard is not informed by the Kantian critique of metaphysics which puts heavy emphasis on the limits of perception and conception on our way to comprehensive knowledge but an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of the senses and awareness in revealing the Pure Being; the offshoot is that we can never know the thing in itself “i.e., the nature of reality” but only an approximated image of it. Read this way, his ontology

does escape epistemological objections and not only reveals in the strongest terms the limits of theistic knowledge but also raises arguments against metaphysical claims to knowledge.

The question of God and whether or not God exists independently of any intuition can be easily answered in the context of this discussion as well as in the philosophy of materialism. This latter validates the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge. By relying on the concept of intuition, Santayana tries to avoid errors in logical inferences in addition to the limits of knowledge, which takes us to one of the central themes in his thought system: that is belief. It follows that whoever strives for certainty acquires but what he called a “settled language” appropriate for conducting philosophical meditations, which, as Immanuel Kant would have it, there is no freedom in man “only the necessity of knowledge”. The necessity for knowledge is fueled by belief, however, this belief does not have a strong claim on the metaphysical sphere. In short, this is limited epistemology.

Sprigee (1973) locates the gist of Santayana’s epistemology in the following excerpt, “Investigate and reflect and then report honestly what you feel compelled to believe. If you are told that this compulsion is psychological rather than logical, then reflect that consistent resistance to such compulsion would lead to a suspension of all belief whenever —then report again.” This is an agnostic epistemology, not exegetical or descriptive but relational.

Belief, or natural faith, which is a crucial factor in idealism, is, for Santayana, fundamental to materialism, and it should offer an epistemic headway into the nature of things, their modes of existence and our relationship to them. Though this kind of belief is ambiguously at work in Santayana’s philosophizing system, it does not denote a long standing belief in the existence of anything.

Santayana recovers belief by contending that the belief in the existence of matter adumbrated by intuited essences is true. Interpret belief on psychological grounds. Santayana thinks that belief in its essence is “an expression of impulse” (Coleman, 2009, p. 592), and so

to arrive at a full grasp of his spiritual position, we note that he introduces the idea of the compulsion to believe, and contrary to the account of knowledge as justified true belief, he argues that the content of this faith (i.e., intuited essences) is true. In short, beliefs are grounded in the knowledge of certain truths<sup>193</sup>.

Santayana stands firm on arguing that the knowledge we have and the continuous form of the world are not unsymbolic. Literal knowledge, he persists, is only possible if the intuited essences synchronize with the real essences, and this we can never posit. This may help us to understand where he stands on the problem of God.

#### **4. 3. The Will to Disbelief**

What this comes down to is the question of the substance of Santayana's religious position. Apart from his theoretical writing which we will discuss briefly, examining the problem of religion against the backdrop of his circumstantial life is indispensable to understanding more his skepticism. At one point, T. L. S. Sprigee (1974) declared that the impressions he gained upon reading some of Santayana's correspondences with his father Augustin suggest that our philosopher is, to a large degree, influenced by his father who cannot be described as a believer (p. 23), and their views about religion appear to be congruent. Summing up he wrote, "Augustin expressing the view to his young son that religious accounts of the world are to be regarded as a kind of poetry." Sprigee goes a bit further in reporting that neither of Santayana's parents can be said to be believers. His sidestepping God worried his sister and later a certain priest undertook a last chance to score a belated conversion but failed in his endeavor. These remarks are crucial in tracing Santayana's non-religious position.

Everywhere in Santayana's scholarship and in his corpus, religion acquires considerable exposition. Throughout his various writings he pushed forward his claim of

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<sup>193</sup> As explored above, because intuited essences have an intrinsic truth.

religion as the product of imagination<sup>194</sup>; religion “falsifies, depreciates and denies” the real world. Summing up, he clearly regards religion and faith as the murky path that obstructs the purity of thinking. He states that “the poet, the disinterested philosopher, the lover of things distilled into purity, frees himself from belief” and his route to salvation is, according to his own account, unholy. It is the dispensation with all pretensions to non-existential truth<sup>195</sup>; “I had been childlessly absorbed in religious ideas, and it was a true though bloodless sacrifice for me to wash them clear of all pretensions to historical and material truth; yet I was able to do so quite young, readily and even gladly, because when I learned to conceive those myths as poetry, their meaning and beauty, far from being lost, seemed to me clearer and more profound than ever” (p. 8). On this fundamental critical engagement with religion, we know without observation his position towards faith (theory) construed as religion (practice) and vice versa.

The thesis that runs throughout his outstanding *SAF* is to push against dogma through the rigor of skepticism, and to clear the mind of illusion “even at the price of intellectual suicide”<sup>196</sup>. The repercussions this mantra would have on his view about religion and faith is unambiguous. In some important respects, his thinking system is premised on avoiding belief because it ultimately leads to illusion. He held the skeptic in high esteem because he dispels dogma and avoids belief. He writes, “I should then be obliged to honor the skeptic for his heroic though hopeless effort to eschew belief, and I should despise the dogmatist for his willing subservience to illusion”. However, he was, without a doubt, sympathetic to religion and faithful to the role of its representation. He parted ways with naturalists in holding onto the idealism embedded in realism and in romanticizing the role and functionality of religion and

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<sup>194</sup> *The Last Puritan*, is, as we shall see.

<sup>195</sup> “Like Zarathustra, Santayana faced his world well aware that “God is dead” and that man must take responsibility for the ideals to which he finds himself committed unsupported by a belief in divine revelation.”<sup>[31]</sup>

<sup>196</sup> his skepticism is thus instrumental.

like scientific knowledge, religion too, has a certain ontological and epistemic validity that physicalists, positivists, and naturalists sought to abort historically and cognitively.

Though Catholicism strikes a sympathetic chord in him, it would not cease to be a critical axis around which his conception of religion revolves. He likens it to paganism, which suggests that he recognizes the naturalistic and the aesthetic dimension in such a compelling human choice all the while disregarding any truth value beyond it. The spiritual element in this Catholicism, he contends, is principally naturalistic. “Catholicism is paganism spiritualised: it is fundamentally naturalistic; and the transcendental spirit and the wise statesman may accept Catholicism, where it naturally arises, as a good poetic symbol for the forces and issues of human life in that phase; not however, as a scientific revelation of reality or a history of literal facts. Religion is, thus, valid poetry infused into common life. It is not a revelation truer than perception or than science. Nature, where it breeds life, is undoubtedly animated by spirit kindred to man’s and to human morality; hence the dramatic sympathy in us with all real or imagined vitality in the universe.” (qtd. in Holzberger et al., 1986, p. 492). There is an emphatic stressing that this regenerated spiritualism does not equate with the belief in the transcendental but is only an instrument in phenomenology.

Religious ideas, which were for his beloved sister Susana unvarnished Truth, were for him, in addition to being a poetic force of a compelling sort, a force of moral significance. Newton P. Stallknecht (1971) wrote that in his later years and at the high of his naturalism, there was a shift in Santayana’s critical priority, that he was “more inclined to subordinate the aesthetic to the moral” (p.14) to the point where his philosophy seemed “profoundly Christian in moral orientation” (ibid.). Though traditionally, the moral is known to be implicated in the theological sphere, theorists and critics have long established the links between these two. “Morality...has a simple natural ground” (Coleman, p. 571) argues Martin A. Coleman. the

reason for that is because there is in man a non-elastic feature that if pushed past the limits it will collapse, therefore, the origin of morality is natural.

This secular interpretation of religion (if we may), if considered critically, takes morality from the realm of the transcendental to the realm of the psyche, monopolizes, and to a large degree, secularizes his understanding of the world. This non-religious morality is that force that gives meaning to what would otherwise be insignificant in a world that battles with the loss of religion, the loss of faith and the loss of meaning. Morality, conceived from this vantage, is that force that filters away the atheistic conception of non-spiritual materialism and naturalism. In short, it is a naturalistic philosophy conversing with the problem of religion and its variegated facets.

Following this, perhaps we would do better to ask if Santayana is a “natural theologian”? as one critic affirmed. Is he both a Catholic and atheist as Irving Singer (2000) also claims? There is scope for establishing this connection. Sprigge (1974), for instance, accredited Santayana’s tendency to treat existence in naturalistic terms to his appeal to Bertrand Russel, however, with an inclination to view it against the backdrop of transcendental thinking/ontology. The reader of Santayana would find evidence of him protecting spirituality from the attacks of philosophical positivism, and this has removed him temporarily from the folds of mainstream naturalism. “To appeal to what we call the supernatural is really to rest in the imaginatively obvious, in what we ought to call the natural, if natural meant easy to conceive and originally plausible.” The flow of this argument in this latter passage, which is an argument from authority, suggests an undeniable agreement of the question asked with the critics’ apprehension of Santayana’s religious label, however, it is an agreement with a twist.

Santayana, committed to the spiritual life as he is, unabashedly separates himself from his sister when he argued that she “couldn’t live her religion as I lived my philosophy. It was too unreal for her human nature.” The reason for that being is that genuine life is sought in

living according to human nature, that nature offers regenerated spiritualism of a truthful kind, whilst religion offers an unrealistic alternative, an illusion. He distinguishes between what he called “*philosophic metanoia*” and “*religious metanoia*”. The former being a sort of spontaneous, albeit expansive transition from the realm of existence to a platonic idealism where the traces of religion are inexistent. He consistently maintained that this is the religion of the philosophers which is a cornerstone for the understanding of the intellectual substance.

Perhaps we find in his overall position a settlement of the religious problem but an ambivalence towards the question of God, but if by God instinct is an innuendo of divine force and movement, i.e., natural revelation, then that is where faith is registered and upheld. Yet even with such clarity as he himself claimed to possess, the problem, and I take it here to mean the problem of reality was pressing and unresolved.

Be that as it may, it is not so much the illusion of religion that informs his anti-theistic arguments or any arguments in favor of faith in the transcendental, but the weight and clarity of instinctive knowledge which he defends profusely in his exposition and clarification of naturalism, whose presence and the acknowledgment of its presence are effectively idealistic and realistic and forms the core of his philosophy.

To answer the above question briefly, we have to consider his objection to objectivity and certitude. Santayana had a liking for the Greek skeptics whom he aimed to imitate and called forth the skeptics to imitate them<sup>197</sup>; he argued that they turned their skepticism into “an argument for personal detachment” and in the same context he declared, “for why should I pledge myself absolutely to what in fact is not certain? Physics and theology, to which most philosophies are confined, are dubious in their first principles: which is not to say that nothing

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<sup>197</sup> On the Greek skeptics he wrote, “They turned their scepticism into an expression of personal dignity and an argument for detachment. In such scepticism every one who practises philosophy must imitate them; for why should I pledge myself absolutely to what in fact is not certain? Physics and theology, to which most philosophies are confined, are dubious in their first principles: which is not to say that nothing in them is credible.” (ibid. p.126) He adds, “I have imitated the Greek sceptics in calling doubtful everything that, in spite of common sense, any one can possibly doubt.”

in them is credible.” (Santayana, 1923, p. 126). Hence, we would not be mistaken to say that his stance concerning certitude cannot place him on an equal par with the first principles of each of the models of realism and idealism.

This invites us to go back to an earlier context where Santayana is seen as swinging between materialism and idealism. We know for a fact that he is compelled to take this position to counterbalance the dryness and the inadequacy in either claim to Absolute Truth. After all, he is a skeptic and a skeptic who pledges to set his heart on nothing to settle any question of uncertainty.

When it comes to the question of God, Santayana is far from being indubitable. Setting aside the point about his true belief and extrapolating only what we could from the skepticism of his defense, the skepticism that Santayana secures gained him a foothold in the agnostic position not because his brand of belief -which undoubtedly echoes an agnostic perspective- but as one critic pointed out, “He pulled back from the brink of following through on all of the implications of skepticism”. His skepticism promises short-lived engagement<sup>198</sup> and is not one compressed into an either/or, and therefore mitigates naturalism as a system for understanding the natural world if religion is part of the theoretical backbone of the intelligibility of the world in so far as it exists —according to the law of causal determinism—. Furthermore, he does not keep a firm hold on any tension so the belief that ensues, if any, is neither the belief beyond doubt nor doubt beyond and above the verity of belief. It brings together the threads of what I call a *neutralized epistemology* based on perspectival belief and perspectival disbelief, engaging the notion and role of uncertainty in matters of fact and existence.

There are good reasons for reading Santayana as a believer, but there are stronger reasons for reading him as a disbeliever. Our philosopher suggests that our tendency to believe is a symptom of the fact that we have the capacity to believe, but he does not follow through

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<sup>198</sup> A conclusion which could be reached more swiftly

with a satisfactory account of the existence or non-existence of God which does not verge on agnosticism (perhaps because his natural metaphysics drops God from the system of assumption?). Though his theoretical position is hardly the normative interpretation of the suspension of belief<sup>199</sup>; however, panoramically, it is the suspension of belief in its rudimentary conception. Furthermore, the stanza in his poem “*The Pessimist*” “I set my heart on nothing now” after “I set my heart on politics” suggests the retracing of his steps back to erase what he said before which reveals, somewhat obscurely, his infamous detachment, proves a textual support for interpreting his skepticism as agnosticism.

While similar in the primary function, Santayana’s skepticism and other different strands of skepticism are dissimilar in structure and the epistemic stance from the premise all the way to the conclusion. Skepticism informs his discussion of essence, substance, and existence; it is methodological. Laursen & Alcala (2014 ) draw our attention to Santayana’s mixed position in the realm of skepticism. They state that his position oscillates when “faced with the void”<sup>200</sup>, in this case, the question of Ultimate existence and Ultimate essence abstracted and compressed, between “academic skepticism Pyrrhonian skepticism and a dogmatic, nihilistic skepticism”. Santayana, despite everything, viewed religion symbolically and cherished the order it evokes and sustains and the metaphors it embodies in its refined and tactful philosophy. “His allegiance to an entirely naturalistic account never faltered and, when he died in the convent in 1952, he resisted efforts to administer the rites of the church on his behalf”.

The remainder of the chapter centers on the textual and intertextual intricacies of *The Last Puritan*, on the retreat of the doubter and agnosticism in the novel.

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<sup>199</sup> but the belief in the movement of the present moment which has an intrinsic value and has epistemic contours.

<sup>200</sup> John Christian Laursen & Roman Roman Alcala (2014 ), George Santayana and Emotional Distance, p. 18

The point of these remarks is not to undermine or overshadow his literary contribution by an authoritative blow of critical philosophy but to approach his novel philosophically as bearing the traces and the echoes of his thought system to the extent that Santayana's ontology uncovers and covers the epistemic potentialities within the limits of a composition consacrée to critique because literary production is regarded by some as a farcical element and a vehicle for expressing technical philosophy.

Now that Santayana's philosophy has been briefly surveyed and introduced, it is time to inspect it for the ways in which it is different or similar to his literary work, therefore, the remainder of the chapter centers on the textual and intertextual intricacies of *The Last Puritan*. Though we will not expound on it, Kierkegaard's three stages of existence remain a substantial backdrop to my argument in the present chapter as an entry to suggest an interpretation of the religious crisis in the novel from an agnostic angle. Therefore, a considerable part of this chapter is an attempt to consider the religious crisis in the novel, to trace connections between Oliver's Puritanism and skepticism as a basis to discuss unbelief so that we will set the stage around these discussions for the articulation of agnosticism.

To articulate the determinate features of this account, Santayana identifies three communities or clusters of regularities: of desire, of morality, and of faith which correspond to Kierkegaard's stages of existence, namely the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious and the author kept them in dialogue with each other. This what one would call the *great division* opens each of the discourses to what contradicts the other: desire and restraint, morality and immorality and faith and unfaith.

In the following, we synopsise the essential background of the novel. We seek to find how Santayana crystallizes in his narration the issue of the religious crisis and unbelief, search for the two opposite undercurrents that sustain the dialectic of faith and unfaith, and eliminate the kind of objections we raise in favor of atheism to draw a conclusion approving of what I

call a half-hearted agnosticism and we are obliged to stop short there. The following reorients attention from

#### **4. 4. The Essential Background of *The Last Puritan*: Oliver and Puritanism in Context**

More so than much of his work, Santayana's *The Last Puritan* (1936) is to be placed amongst the author's intimate theoretical writing and it would be better to consider it as an absolutely "privileged context" where the various entrenched themes of his philosophy proceed unwatched and unobserved, albeit relatively so, in a kind of embedded expressivity by the fierce rhetorics of persuasion and/or explanation<sup>201</sup>. The novel, which is a compelling and sustained piece of work, was written, as one critic rightly put it, "to express what he fancied was a potential experience of his friends." (Ballowe, 1963, p. 16) whose tragic deaths at a young age left a lasting impression on him. But in the prologue of the novel, the author informs us about the rationale for this literary endeavor; that is the fruit of an acceptance of the request from Oliver's cousin, Mario Van de Weyer (ostensibly true historical figures whose hyperbolized caricature is made fictional) to write a biography of him. Furthermore, in the preface to the novel, Santayana gives ample explanation to the conditions that inspired and labored *The Last Puritan*; he writes that because it was never intended as a story with "artificial dramatic unity" but as a narrative "half-satirical, half-poetic of a sentimental education" that he called it *A Memoir in The Form of a Novel*. Similarly, in another place, he wrote, "nothing is wholly historical, nothing is wholly imaginary," and he maintains that it is a hopeless fusion of the two.

Moreover, he alludes to the fact that even his characters speak his language and are hypothetically a disguise of his own spirit. The characters are themselves endowed with free

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<sup>201</sup> In the epilogue of *The Last Puritan*, Mario Van de Weyer charges Santayana with an inconspicuous and modest dogmatism which would go unnoticed if not revealed by the antagonism against the other point of view (in his philosophic works) or an utter blindness towards it, however, with this novel, Mario avows that the arguments were dramatized and "the views become human persuasions, and the presentation is all the truer for not professing to be true" (TLP, p. 572)

will to dialogue the spontaneous variances and potentialities at the center of his thought. Here, and elsewhere in the novel's prologue, we trace the link between the real and the imagined in an "intricate interplay of creation and critique." Though we may not accept the thesis of the privileging of one over the other, we might concede to an overlap between the two, with the former taking precedence over the latter. Accordingly, Santayana selected the subject matter of his novel for its 'thematic relevance', specifically *Persons and Places*. Ballowe (1963) notes that *Persons and Places* "are called not for their physical qualities, but for the numen within them" (p. 16). Though it might be precocious to rest the case that Persons and places form Santayana's backdrop serve as referential, textual and contextual interpretations, still, since the underlying structure of his fiction is factual, his philosophy of critical realism marks out the indispensability of this matter. This, in turn, legitimized the long-awaited work as both a fictionalized philosophy and a philosophized narrative because, as one critic flatly stated, "indeed, everything he touched seemed to turn to philosophy" (Stallknecht, p. 5). However, as for this novel, he resorted to casting a wider net to catch the most out of human experience thrown into the vagaries of life. Indeed, he apprizes the dynamic forces with which make the novel a stage for his utmost philosophical ponderings because after all, for Santayana, there is some truth to literature, but the truth of it is the use of signs (Coleman, p. 587). Writing about the novel, Santayana says that it gives the emotions of his experiences "and not [his] thoughts or experiences themselves." (Santayana, 1955. p. 282).

Though objectionable criticism is not uncommon in reviews of Santayana's works, to his great surprise, the reviews of *The Last Puritan* were overwhelmingly favorable. The novel's popularity, despite being a matter of high speculation, was esteemed by critics as "a book fated to endure"<sup>202</sup>. A reviewer of Santayana's novel gives us more substantial reasons why this is the case. He speculated that such popularity could be a sign or proof of what they called "the

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<sup>202</sup> See Santayana, George. THE LAST PURITAN. The Jmiller  
nal of Nervous and Mental Disease: August 1936 - Volume 84 - Issue 2 - p 224-225.

practicality of high voltage advertising”, or that Santayana, as a renowned poet, essayist, and philosopher, wrote this reverberating work, his first novel, at the age of seventy-three, which I believe is a cause for celebration in the literary world of a philosopher who steered away from the world of ideas to the world of life. And I believe that, to a greater extent, the approving and appreciative reviews he received (which is also substantiated by the criterion of bestselling) bridged the fractured gap between philosophy and literature. On the relevance of the novel, John McCormick confessed in his critical remarks on *The Last Puritan* (1936) that after his sixth reading of the novel over five decades, he finds it to be not-old fashioned but beyond fashion.”. One could attribute this to the attendance to the synchronicity with the flux of the world on a deep level rather than on a superficial one and to the treatment of timeless and imperishable themes and concerns. Indeed, that Santayana stretched the use of his philosophy to penetrate the realm of the mundane rhetorically and artfully is certain. He was revered by many as having an unflagging insight into the subtleties of everyday life; therefore, there is no denying that the perspicacity of his description transgresses the superficiality of the overtly social happenings that eclipse a significant portion of what truly counts for the individual. He also establishes connections between and across different times and places, impregnating moments with deep meaning because it is the virtue of ahistorical reading that it reads against reductive statements and fleeting sentiments and chords. Consequently, the author in this novel details with an unflinching shrewdness this inward experience that is congruent with the existential impasse, which in turn reveals the “*pressure of existence*” and he does so by assimilating the narrative to a polemical frame of alternatives.

The story of *The Last Puritan* starts in the seventeenth century<sup>203</sup> and rounds itself into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It follows three generations of the Alden family,

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<sup>203</sup>It is historically fixed that after the tightening and restrictions the Puritans faced in England during the reign of James I in the seventeenth century and as the intolerance grew towards them and their views against the ceremonial customs of the Church of England, they set themselves to flee to the US from religious persecution

reported to be Puritans of origin, leading up to Oliver Alden, a late nineteenth-century absolute moralist. A moralism that is handed out to him by the merits of his lineage and his Puritan pretensions are emphasized in such a way as to be the deterministic factor in what plays out in the novel<sup>204</sup>. In an awareness of his true nature and the coarseness of his bona fide nature, his father, Peter, has judged that his son has “drawn his character from his remote ancestors.” (*The Last Puritan*, p. 314). Everywhere in the novel is stressed such important elements as the possession of an honest and scrupulous spirit —and descriptively so— which, in avoiding vagueness, pursues a non-concession approach to life and can go as far as to be cruel in the service of truth, indeed, in an epoch of a relatively moral vacuum, Oliver is someone upon whom nothing ethical and moral is lost. However, more than anything, and despite his modern situatedness, we feel that the author aimed at reviving an image — of a Puritan —blurred by historical vicissitudes.

It was perhaps the modern birth of a sensible soul who was spared from the revenge of equalizer forces. A late-born Puritan, Oliver was born a boy and he was born punctually (p. 97). The author suggested in the prologue that the last Puritan does not necessarily mean that he is the last Puritan to ever live, but as someone whose Puritanism is intentionally misplaced, or even anachronistic, given the socio-cultural currents that swept old morals and made them outlandish. Oliver was a descendant of the Mayflower pilgrims, a privilege that adds up to his perfected image. The author extends this calculated appearance in the world to a morality that is ingrained within him because first, if he were born of xx chromosomes, he would have deceived the hopes of his mother, and if he were born prematurely or within the post-term window, it would have infringed on the absolutism of his very refined existence and character; furthermore, if he were born in a non-affluent household, he will have to face the consequences

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which grew by the day where they diligently established their colonies across New England Area (Eastern seaboard area)

<sup>204</sup> Puritanism is hence immediately introduced from the title to the themes that run along the plot line and the author builds a careful structure of his story about it as a fixed point of reference.

of the scarcity of choice and rightful decisions will slip out of his volition. There is something wholesome about the circumstances of his being from the moment he appeared in the world which made Mrs. Alden unbearably pleased. He was someone who was born on the winning side. His existence was a magnet for all things exemplary. He was full weight, a perfectly formed fair-skinned child with “large grey eyes, and a little fuzz of limp, yellow hair.” With these physical descriptions, he was also armed with a certain faith which was markedly instilled in him from the beginning and so he was a “model infant” primed and perfectly ripe for the outside world, planting his feet on the ground of life with an infallible physique and character and life responded back by being good to him and to his senses. He was all that and much more besides.

The author ruled out any deficiencies that might get in the way of the construal of our protagonist’s journey of progression<sup>205</sup>. It was incumbent on Mr. and Mrs. Alden to ensure a liberal education for him to prepare him for the right way of living in the modern world, so they did not want him to start on an unequal footing with the demands of modernity. His mother viewed religious rituals such as the recitation of prayers, which carry barren emotion as meaningless, unprofitable, misleading, and even detrimental to his tender mind, so much so that she refuted her brother’s plead for a concession to the importance of bringing up an all-rounded individual with a gifted physicality, an accomplished education and a healthy sensuality. She wanted him “to live in harmony with nature” (p. 109) with the truth, and as for religious upbringing, she described it as being “superstitious” and nonsensical and that her son will have enough to deal with “with his burdened nervous inheritance” (p. 84). She was also unsurprisingly alarmed by the menace of the stereotypical and it frightened her, and forms of abstraction as well horrified her; his father, on the other hand, was more enthralled in raising a gentleman with a refined tongue and wits to safeguard him from the calamities of life; however,

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<sup>205</sup> We will ultimately bring our discussion about the progression and development of Oliver.

he was the least displeased with liberal arts for they will only counterbalance the earnestness innate in him.

As he grew out of his infancy, Oliver's mother consigned his education to someone else, and so Oliver was raised by a German governess, a certain Fraulein Irma Schlote who is a clergyman's daughter whom she trusted because, as frau Alden pronounced, "she belongs to a scientific nation, and knows that science is elevating" (p. 113). It was she who suggested advantageously that he will grow up to be like her father, a pastor, and a preacher and that was the first seed implanted in him of this prospectus, and so a nebulous uncertainty lingered in his mind that he was fated to be a clergyman and to be bolted into an altar. And so their acquaintance set the tone for his spiritual pilgrimage for she imparted to him her reserve of knowledge in classics, in German and English literature, and also in history. In matters of science, she was only his companion in his knowledge journey.

At the age of five, Oliver aspired to ascend naturalistically and materialistically to control the material world and he wished to exploit the recalcitrant forces of nature. The arrival of Dumpy the pony has given him the first chance to test his ability to conquer terrestrially, and in the words of the author "Dumpy became the symbol of worlds to conquer" (p. 103); however, far from being the case as the author commented, there was an element of grave tragedy in this philosophy, namely that the orbit of the material is ever expanding, and what can a little boy do in face of a ubiquitous ever-growing power? But even with the small scores he made defiantly (for example, occupying a seat, claiming the back of beasts, moving over water, observing landscapes sensually...etc.), any thinking matter that would undermine his aspiration was not on his radar. As he grew and his Dumpy grew shorter for him, he switched to riding bicycles, choosing to sacrifice his heart and feelings for his self-development. These expressed diagnoses accentuate the dimension of naturalism, and even though they blur what is in the background of it which make themselves dimly felt, it would eventually help us to

bring together the theme of naturalism to the fore so that way we can bring to light the salient to focus on the subtle and the concealed (I want to argue the implication of forced choice in favor of naturalism in the grand scheme of things).

In view of this, and coming back to Oliver we learn that as his knowledge progressed, he soon found out that there are two sides to the path of knowledge: the shady and the sunny, simple truth and complicated questionable truth (which harbors the seeds of illusion). The study of nature, mathematics and all areas of natural exploration cast a sunny glow over his spirit and was closest to his nature and in general befitting of the human mind because they are purified from human stains, liberating, and through them, there is the promise of working out the problems and difficulties to a trustable solution. It was a “private wordless religion” (p. 118). The study of the human world, history, literature, language, and religion was for him an intimidating affair because it treated the natural world instinctively, speculatively, that is weakly, untruthfully, and chaotically<sup>206</sup> which was not harmonious with his core and, as a result, it did not penetrate to his inner depths but rather estranged him inwardly, constrained him and therefore, the Puritan in him despised it. Oliver recognizes only — and encouragingly so— this level of thought revealing that he is more dependent on nature, and he merrily approved of such dependence and rejoiced in the “fugitive strength” it offered.

At the age of fifteen, when Oliver’s socialization began in school, it was a chance to develop his character, and with it, something became irritatingly clear. Despite his inclination to believe in the validity of whatever was natural, there was always a relational challenge to the epistemological aptitude of nature and the aptness and rightness of its truth. It was partly a realization, and partly a dismissal of something bigger than the soundness of his belief system which did not really lose its credibility, but it opened a crack enough for all the metaphysical questions to pass through it.

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<sup>206</sup> because it regularly goes off at a tangent.

This much remains stated in the novel. However, Oliver's knowledge journey was not without challenges particularly in light of his religious crisis which we will turn to and discuss its symbolic implications. In these episodes, the outcome of naturalism is yet concealed from him.

#### **4. 4. 1. The Religious Crisis in *The Last Puritan* and the Retreat of the Doubter**

That behind *The Last Puritan* lies the story of religious crisis is clear. Oliver, dubbed a "Naturally a spiritual man"<sup>207</sup> by Santayana, was fashioned to the likeness of his professor William James as a "spirited rather than a spiritual man" (Coleman, p.590). Though he embodies and exemplifies Puritanism, the spiritual and the religious side of it to the extent that it satisfies the requirements of the traditional view of it, paradoxically enough, drops out of view. Santayana certainly offers a sympathetic view of it as the compensation that balances the spiritual void, as we shall see later on, but the critical synthesis of our analysis does not amount to sustaining the idea of faith in the long run or reclaims the faith that is lost in the person and the narrative as it pertains to the life and experiences of Oliver or his father, nor does the author offer an outlet to compensate for the loss of faith even when he draws him closer to it as he heightens the emotional impact of the different lines of arguments. The principal argument is to read it against the background of Oliver's faith and where faith is most expounded on to arrive at a better understanding of the religious crisis. Therefore, we ask the following questions: is the theistic hypothesis criticized? And was there a metaphysical inquiry to talk about the issue of certainty? Is there any criticism of transcendental idealism in the novel? Do we find anywhere in the novel where he argues for a limited epistemological capacity to approach the question of God? We will take these questions implicitly in turn when we discuss the topic of the religious crisis in *The Last Puritan*.

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<sup>207</sup> See the Preface to *The Last Puritan*, p. 7

In the prologue, where Santayana interjects his personal remarks, he lets us know that Oliver suffers from a religious crisis. However, Oliver is not the only one enduring that. The attention allocated to this thesis spans the entirety of the novel and in the body of the novel, the author develops a narrower focus on this issue in a kind of relational dialogical move along the lines of similar themes and experiences and with a focus on how it plays out in the representatives of each side each embattled by the conditions of their existence, the faithful to religious dogma, the secularists, and those like Oliver and his father, Peter. Therefore, there is a point to the unique style he captures the religious crisis. Ostensibly, there is a pilgrimage of the spirit embarked by Mr. Peter Alden and his son, and on the supposition that the whole journey is sacred, one gathers that they should have arrived at a certain destination consistent with the quest, but the narrative reveals tensions that reached a high point of skepticism in a sustained treatment of the opposite, of a well-grounded system of thought that prescribes its own solutions to the trials of existence, naturalism.

Needless perhaps to say that in connection with the question of the religious frame of the novel, neither Oliver nor Peter Alden can be said to appeal to any dogmatic teaching in the religious or theological sense, though we can, in passing, make room for an interpretation that includes what Santayana calls “dogmatic innocence” (Santayana, 1923, p. 9) which, contextually speaking, consists in subscribing to naturalism that denies the legitimacy of all interrogation that is beyond the physical world. Much like Oliver, faith also fell out of joint with his father. Peter Alden, born a black sheep and self-identified as un-Christian, was initially a constant source of derangement to his brother Nathaniel and a rare mutation in his ancestral line. His attitudes and views introduce a Freudian essence to religion which ultimately gives birth to a polemical offense on religion in the story. In fact, both were seeking to catechize the phenomenon of religion and religion as a phenomenon. Poetry, philosophy, and sermons were for both inherently and deliberately deceptive for the sole utilitarian purpose of making an

impression. Apropos of this Alden says, "Poetry and philosophy and sermons purposely went off at a tangent, purposely lied, in order to make an impression. The simple truth. What a liberation, what a relief! How easily a man might square his accounts with the universe if he had the courage to face it." (p. 165). The simple truth for Peter is enough to give a satisfactory account of the world. Peter and Oliver expressed disapproval of religion and considered it to be an illusion<sup>208</sup>. His father cherished the power of imagination and pleasantry from an intellectual perspective, although not as it bears on one's faith, and was concerned with refining these traits in his son along with the requirements of their social class. In a telling passage about Oliver's breeding preferences, he says,

"I want a lively person who will wake up his wits and chase him about and help him build his castles of blocks so high that he will laugh when they topple over. And why should Moses in the Bulrushes or Noah's Ark or Jonah or David and Goliath be a whit more religious to a child's feeling than Gulliver or Sinbad the Sailor? They won't be: they will simply fill his fancy pleasantly, and accustom him to enjoy intellectually what is enjoyable in this world—which is mighty little."

Though he is necessarily conservative, Peter was all for a liberal upbringing, an upbringing that overcame the religious question and one which is free from links to Puritanism as it bears not on moral prescriptions but on the metaphysical question. For him, the stories of Noah and David and Moses were canonized for their fictional potentiality, not their historical correctness and this would help to clear the ground for a secularist or even atheistic claim firmly grasped as an indispensable component to the religious crisis and anti-metaphysical claims.

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<sup>208</sup>This reminds us of Hume, who upon finding fault with an absent —scientific methodology— in the schools of metaphysics, namely the absence of "abstract reasoning concerning quality and number" or "any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and science", he urges at the end of the Inquiry following these questions whose answers are supposedly negative, to "commit [those schools and libraries of divinity and metaphysics] to flames, for [they] can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

Peter and Oliver's irreligion is at once distinct and confusing in that it is blurred against an antediluvian Puritanism<sup>209</sup> with a naturalist, anti-metaphysical, and almost atheistic foreground and similar in the sense that it is substantiated by the profundity of material truth, as opposed to Christian or religious truth which is but an illusion in their linguistic repertoire. Although Oliver seems ostensibly poised between the extremes of religiosity and the adamant commitment to no faith but faith in nature, he was in no better state than his father, who "was less certain about the purposes of existence." (p. 116). Therefore, since the purpose of existence is enormously compromised and this religious crisis, which the author rebuilds over and over, the petering out of this spiritual aspect of a religious dimension is everywhere expounded in the novel. It is worth noting that Puritanism as a label comes with descriptive terms given to him but he never self-proclaimed to be Puritan, particularly because he had not succumbed to the entailments of his label, veritable, adorned, or otherwise, unless when it is charged with important ethical implications (i.e. when it reflects on issues preferred by ethical existence). Indeed, the novel is committed to representing him as an unflinching Puritan unhinged from the religious weight that the label carries so much so that "he had neither the force nor the time to break through and live victoriously in the spirit." (p. 7). The fact that faith in him is conscious and that it is nothing but the relatedness to animal faith is premised earlier on. The *prima facie* implication, then, is but the anticipation of atheism. Indeed, every march towards naturalism in his life and the belief in it is to drag down theism from its pedestal and to diminish its significance and sense of importance, albeit with no complete certainty. It is an elusive certainty, hence the insistence on the spiritual crisis.

However, what sets Oliver further apart from his father is how they led their lives. He is a true Puritan who does not indulge in worldly pleasures stands in stark contrast to his father who lived through it all. Impervious to anything but a moral life, Oliver is disengaged from the

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<sup>209</sup> this much we do not fail to extrapolate as it is explicitly expressed.

superfluities of life or “established dispositions” in the words of Maimonides; and unlike his father who had various religious and spiritual experiences during his world voyage, Oliver has known no spiritual development despite embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage on which Santayana develops a narrower focus and which ultimately earned him the label of “the hero and martyr” of a religious crisis.

One of the few passages in which we access metaphysical claims in the novel is where there are claims to knowledge or the subversion of alternative claims to knowledge under the auspices of the critique of it to demonstrate their epistemic stance, especially concerning the ultimate ontological structure of reality. However, this does not mean that the counter-belief, as we shall see, is one which is identified with certainty or is conducive to it. Santayana did so by bringing their compounded critique (those of Oliver and his father) into contact with a remarkably unique exigence of this biblical story with a slight deviation from the orthodoxical components of it.

The author tells us about Oliver that “He could no more believe in Jacob’s ladder<sup>210</sup> than could be his father. Both had drunk too deep of the sea, the one by experience and the other by intuition.” In the full force of this passage, the author announced an alliance between two generations of Puritans on this common thread in the tapestry of disbelief. Indeed, this passage suggests that the Alden's starting point is an element of nature and that they engage exclusively with one side of knowledge, i.e., experience and intuition as the means to gain knowledge, because the derivative resultant points to one direction, the sunny side implied in nature which accords the reality of life to either intuition construed naturalistically or experience that draws its veracity from empirical trials. Furthermore, sea and water signify the

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<sup>210</sup> The Biblical Jacob saw in a dream a large structure, a shape like a ladder connecting the earth to the skies, to heaven. The story has important symbolical meanings, but the crucial one in our context starts from the repudiation of the reunion of Heaven and Earth which suggests a tacit acknowledgment of the non-existence of a transcendental reality which is, in Jacob's description, “the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17), or the steps of the ladder which signify, in my view, levels of knowledge.

immensity of knowledge, though vast and clear it remains yet limited, suggesting the epistemic limits accompanying human finitude and all material existences for that matter, thus, the start of the pressure of existence. To digress, a basis to rest this argument is human's natural desire to have higher knowledge and the disposition to seek metaphysical knowledge so as to accentuate one's epistemological stance, and when it is not met or is subverted by uncertainty, it creates an existential pressure.

Jacob's ladder was later brought up once again upon an inadvertent exchange between Oliver and his father. When Peter Alden noticed his son's intellectual awakesness, and upon bringing up the idea of Jacob's ladder, the critical spirit within him was stimulated once more, he felt refreshed and reinvigorated and he wanted to engage with his son on apparently an existential pressing matter that the idea of Jacob's ladder has revived. The author described the requisition of Jacob's ladder as "one of Peter's catchwords, one of his shibboleths" and for Mr. Alden, the story carries a moral weight of an ontological existential dimension. In a particularly illuminating passage on the Alden's, he says whilst referring him to an earlier discussion he had with his cousin Caleb Wetherbee on the order of the world, that

Jacob's ladder is the fabulous moral order imposed on the universe by the imagination of Cousin Caleb and Plato and conservative Anglican gentlemen; but the heathen imagination in Goethe and Emerson and you and me, and in your liberal British intellectuals and philosophers, has outgrown that image. Instead, either we impose no moral order on the universe at all—which I think would be safer—or else a moral order such as we expected to find in our own lives when we were young and romantic. I suppose, as a matter of fact, there is an obscure natural order in the universe, controlling morality as it controls health: an order which we don't need to impose, because we are all obeying it willy-nilly. But this half-deciphered natural order leaves us, morally, in all our

natural heathen darkness and liberty: and we are probably little inclined to devote ourselves to ascending and descending the particular Jacob's ladder imagined by Platonists and Catholics and Conservative English Gentlemen. (p. 302-3)

Mr. Peter avows to the mystery of the natural order and implies that because we do not know it nor can we know it, it remains a semblance of existence that we do not know for sure, therefore it is prudent not to impose it because by virtue of our being obedient to engagements we impose on ourselves that higher power that creates this higher order<sup>211</sup>. His reasoning also highlights a tacit acknowledgment that the merging of the spiritual with the natural is only by the superimposition of the latter on the former so therefore, the pursuit of this epistemic path leaves them with a stance of no commitment albeit weakly holding on to naturalistic theism which Centore (2004) defined as being "restricted to the materialistic interpretation. Since everything is already in nature and there is nothing beyond nature, there is no going beyond nature. Ultimately, there is no difference between the 'is' and the 'ought', the natural order and the moral order, the physical and the spiritual, the actual and the ideal. The only gap to be bridged is the difference between one's present illusion of real individual existence and one's final fading back into nature forever." (p. 26).

Besides having an existential ontological status, Jacob's ladder for Mr. Alden had a hierarchical moral significance. It denoted, poetically, the stages that take for the attainment and fulfillment of an absolute moral life in so far as the imagination allowed, and he reasons that this is what the nature of man has constructed. And here, too, is an instance of the limits of imagination, in which knowledge is on an even par. This follows the conventional interpretation that, by extension, the limits of imagination are also the limits of knowledge. It

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<sup>211</sup> This impeccably fits Santayana's confession about the unreachable, he discloses that he is "a sensitive creature surrounded by a universe utterly out of scale with myself: I must, therefore, address it questioningly but trustfully, and it must reply to me in my own terms, in symbols and parables, that only gradually enlarge my childish perceptions."

also signified an antiquated epistemic *modus operandi* that is no longer responsive to the current zeitgeist either in America or England (which are the predominant spatial setting of the novel) and was as well synonymous with the order of superiority and depends on this regularity for the world to function harmoniously.

It is thus a moral question that the Aldens raise because bringing this up has implications on morality because morality is concerned with practical knowledge, and therefore, consenting to it could inform their obligations, particularly the religious ones, those of abiding by the demands of faith. Apropos of this, in his book five of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes, “Once a human being reaches the fundamental conviction that he *must* be commanded. He becomes a “believer.”(Nietzsche, 1882/1974, p. 289). In this sense, the narrative of puritanism is cogent, whose essence is given expression in its implications. This rests on the proposition that their moral philosophy is exempt from religious moorings or dogma-induced faith. Oliver’s moralism, in particular, had no antecedent in his system of thought that could tether him to a singular religious pole. Trapped in the premise of puritanism. The point we are making is that there is more to Puritanism than its historical account might suggest

Accordingly, Oliver, equipped with a protestant spirit, considered the re-edifying of Jacob’s ladder nothing but the restoration of moral servitude from which his conscience had boldly and pridefully broken free; a freedom that escaped its original confines. From an argument for equality, he dismissed any belief in this biblical ladder.

For a boy who has been brought up a heathen, the belief in nature only might seem like a logical conclusion, and by dealing —or wanting to deal— exclusively with the world in its limits, which seemed to him ostensibly thorough and intelligible, Oliver escapes from the psychological necessity of the why of the world to the way and the how of the world, a pattern compatible only with naturalism merged with thus far a subtle desire for something.

Furthermore, Oliver slides from absolute moralism, which has a religious connotation that he lacks, to what Chabot (1992) calls a "skeptical moralist" (p. 79), which he defined in relation to Thomas Hobbes as "allowing skepticism to inform his vision of a good life for human beings" (Chabot, 1995, p. 402). More specifically, he forces the implications of naturalism into the humanities; the arts he learned conscientiously were not ratified because they felt like sad arts "which remained unmoved, as if waiting for something wholly different to call them forth," (p. 123). A few pages from this description, we find an emphatic assertion of Oliver's uncertainty regarding independent valid truth claims about nature.

Embedded in a general critique of moralists a general critique of the limits of knowledge and the infallibility that ensues, the author wrote,

They had perched at a certain height on the tree of knowledge, had stuck fast at a certain point up the greased pole of virtue. They could climb no further; and from there they had turned and pecked ferociously at everybody below them and screeched ferociously at everybody above, invoking their hard dry reason to discredit all that was beyond their own meager and cruel morality. But this reason of theirs was just their reason, their effort to entrench themselves in their limitations. Not only was such a thing useless and in the end impossible, but perhaps in the moral world there was no single pole, no single tree on which heights and depths could be measured, like record tides.

Apart from the argument from moralism, it seems that the Aldens oppose these ontological categories or The Ontological Category by forcefully adopting the arguments of a certain ontological methodology that relativizes knowledge, all the while vouching for the limitations of man's faculties. The Ontological Category is at once exterior, superior and intelligible to them, but they maintain some semblance of certainty because their scaffolding

model is naturalistic<sup>212</sup>. It becomes clear that the move to naturalism/materialism is necessitated by the lack of a solid realistic ground that admits of no skeptical idealism. However, despite reflecting on issues preferred by ethical existence, they fell short on the demands of the spirit and the external conditions which inflame the quest for God, hence why the idea of religiosity or faith trails behind.

We know thus far that Oliver is firm on an epistemological position in naturalism as a system for understanding the world, and as the description in the boyhood years continues, we gather a fuller account of his blatant naturalism to concoct an alternative narrative about man and the world which also leads to conscious or rather unconscious unbelief<sup>213</sup> (because essentially to naturalize any pretext for meaning it necessarily wards off any religious hypothesis) and we understand that he experiences the world in a non-religiously based belief system which is intricately and suitably assimilated into the Puritanist frame. However, this epistemic preference is not without a challenge and his naturalism is also not without tension. There is a dynamic element in that tension that coerced the author to take account of it. Indeed, significant difficulties will be seen to plague not only Oliver but the Aldens' march toward a purer form of atheism (when all arguments of naturalism converge in atheism and strengthen it, we deduce simplistically that the former entails the latter).

This naturalism, quite dispatched in the novel and scattered over this analysis, is not independent of a solitary understanding of moralism; they are codependent and an epistemic extension of one of the other, and both are intelligible on a rational plane and both are, to an extent, an excuse or an alternative to a profound religious experience or experience of faith.

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<sup>212</sup> In the sense that it grounds the factual world not in transcendental understanding beyond the thing in itself, but in the essence of a thing in the phenomenal world. It also admits of no other reality but the reality of appearances.

<sup>213</sup> Here we are not left undecided as to the nature of his unbelief, for we know that so far into the narrative of his boyhood years, there is no development of character nor of the belief system since he is snarled by his roots, save only for his school experience and the new adventures which revealed to him another world, especially from a moralist perspective. Therefore, both conscious and unconscious unbelief is well-grounded as we will make clear later.

However convincing this account is, there is another important passage where it could undercut our conclusion thus far. Santayana has put forward the proposition that “If in [Oliver] the metaphysical austerity of the seventeenth century reappeared atavistically, his late birth relieved him of any horrid uncertainty about the truth of traditional myths and dogmas” (p. 8), if we hold up to the literal reading of this description, Oliver would begin to look suspiciously as an atheist, that there is the deference for the boundaries that are set for. It remains to be determined if this is really the case.

Santayana’s interest in elaborating on this religious crisis within a truly aesthetic experience doubles on the constraints of form and content. Here, he does not articulate an explicit argument for atheism, and if we hold to the idea of the atheism of the Aldens, which is nowhere expounded on, or the religious trope that faces the same fate in the *Last Puritan*, we will arrive at a poor view of a religious crisis that orbits in the sphere and zone of naturalism and skepticism. Surely, they flirted with the possibility of skepticism that flaws the cogency of their naturalism construed crudely, undecidedly.

I pass to the next related question which has an immediate bearing on this one

#### **4. 4. 2. Authorial Contribution to the Naturalism-Skepticism Controversy: Surrendering Unbelief**

So far it is clear that we distinguish, as we read through the novel, two strong undercurrents: naturalism and dogmatic skepticism<sup>214</sup> about higher knowledge. Not surprisingly, this distinction is not without problems because if both are read separately, then they must, by necessity, be tangled in controversy due to their nature. On the one hand philosophical naturalism holds that genuine knowledge of the world falls within the scientific remit and that there is no knowledge of or truth in the supernatural with no exception. In *The Last Puritan*, there is an alternation between two philosophical rivals, both of which provide

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<sup>214</sup> entails the affirmation of apriori impossibility of substantial claims of knowledge.

abundant and convincing responses to the metaphysical question in the negative (naturalism) and in uncertain terms (skepticism), and the author entrusts the entirety of his thought to these two accounts which do not suggest methodological break but a continuous impetuous formation of an agnostic line of thought. We want to stress this delicate but sturdy connection and read it not as a distinction but as a dashed liaison to cultivate a conception about a surrendered disbelief that verges towards agnosticism.

Whether sporadic claims about the absence of knowledge of the metaphysical world are altogether coherent or suffer an inconsistency, they are brought together by the force of the narrative that bears on the question of the religious crisis and the pressure of existence. We find a close link between the deformation of the overall epistemological position perceived as a confident one (naturalism) and a distinguishable skeptical strain based on uncertainty and doubt that jeopardizes this epistemic confidence. Does not stick around the truth content of the first inquiry before he corrects and humbles his epistemic confidence with a potentially objectionable question that neutralizes the first, Oliver seriously thought about the outcome of lingering on a false hypothesis, he thought, “Why dwell on the consequences of a false hypothesis? Or was the hypothesis possibly true?” (p. 304).

The narrative explores the extremity of this skeptical and uncertain thread that reveals the arrival at some constrictive conclusion accorded primarily to naturalism which has strong roots in materialism experienced in a closed system where everything is presumably defined and where naturalism ostensibly contains in understanding and explication the extension of the surplus meaning — and by that I mean both the meaning of life and the meaning in life rather than the phenomenological perceived meaning of the object itself—with absolute certainty. In a telling passage, the author makes problematic one of the privileged strands of thought in this novel; naturalism. He brings open a space for the expression of the vagaries of nature and by extension the paradigms of naturalism and reveals a remarkable untrustworthiness and

unreliability that is consistent with nature that is consummated with unsettlement and unpredictability that is closely linked to the existential anxiety or the “*pressure of existence*”, he says,

Yet something in particular will some day happen. Nothing is more treacherous than the peace of nature, when we fancy that the mountains were compacted to endure and to sleep for ever. Such material peace is a surface phenomenon, a mask for internal and incessant war. Matter is full of hidden springs and unexpressed affinities; some furtive influence here, some secret impulse there, will presently set in motion an insidious drift, destined to disrupt that equilibrium. A curious evolution will follow, or a sudden explosion. (p. 151)

Therefore, if there is anything that procures uncertainty and skepticism, it is the very reliance on an unreliable source that is long been deemed to be the cornerstone of investigations of all types that ultimately lead to veridical conclusions<sup>215</sup>. Despite being “The great and trusty educator of mankind” (p. 126). *Matter*, the author acknowledges, has serious consequential flaws, and these flaws are the apology of reason in naturalism. To an extent, Santayana develops for himself and the naturalists in the novel a response to the limits of naturalism in a thoroughly convincing setting by way of raising this issue to the surface and by making its implications painfully clear and urging the reader to consider that this framework cannot sustain critical blows that are within the realist framework (not to speak of the idealist view which, according to the claims of its proponents, inarguably underpins the unseeable working of nature that the author embraces.). More to the point, the author suggests that a whole aspect is obscured when we limit ourselves to this worldview, and *The Last Puritan* goes a long way

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<sup>215</sup> Rather than confessing ignorance, naturalism by definition makes pretentious claims about the inexistence of the transcendental realm.

towards amplifying this sentiment/view, and this is not a gratuitous pursuit; it is a sincere curiosity to follow through his naturalism<sup>216</sup>.

Therefore, and accordingly, it is legitimate to make the claim that the critique of naturalism is phrased in terms of skepticism, or at least in the context of the novel. From an absolutist perspective, the realization of the fallibility and/or inadequacy of the current scaffolding model (i.e. naturalism) prompts skepticism. The conditions for such an epistemic stance of the latter, of skepticism, to flourish are not one bound by time but by a parallel framework that judges a priori the inadequacy of our attempts to reach any claims to knowledge.

This is a helpful explanation to the tenor of the passage above, though, on this very interpretation, one could raise the objection that the essence to which he alludes is phenomenal rather than noumenal, and our best answer to this objection is in the very skepticism that convoys the noumenal world which is the world of things outside of our conception of them or *res extansa*, the physical world, as is the case with Oliver, the naturalist, who could not “reach the inside of anything from the outside.” (p. 277); the phenomenal on the other hand is rather relatively or even absolutely improbable, understandable, and unquestionable. It is a futile attempt, then, to abscond from idealism to realism only to fall into the trap of uncertainty because it will still keep on haunting even in the safest paradigmatic havens.

Surely, there is in the aforementioned quoted passage an implicit argument for a limited epistemological capacity about the ways of nature, which foregrounds first unsettling doubts about the ways of nature, which grows into a state of uncertainty and then into an unflinching mode of skepticism, but it does not flourish into false idealism or a desperate strive to hold onto faith narrowly construed in terms of religious cradling because ultimately the narrative

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<sup>216</sup> There is a further point to discuss here and that is the method of the author. The author’s logic is rather deductive in nature, in that he attributed to nature alone the capacity to put an end to existential anxieties to corrode its potentiality and to weaken the hyper-inflated claims of naturalists to eventually stay within the rails of detached engagement and to skepticism.

denies faith the space within the folds of the story. Therefore, there is an unspoken accord that the naturalist, as a believer in naturalism, is compelled to live with this uncertainty even at the expense of an unappeased spirit who is longing for completion and cloture.

This view is corroborated when we consider that the impending shift between unwavering confidence and steady and unwavering ignorance signals the unfolding of symbolic duality and speaks to the way in which the novel's resounding religious crisis stands on a thin ridge by not refuting any claims so long as they are somehow grounded on a rhetorical, deductive or argumentative level. This is principally a conservative epistemological stance. One of the most revealing passages on this "It was a foolish debate: free and infinite spirit, in a free and infinite world, could never stop short at any point and say: This is truly right, this is perfect, this is supreme. Perhaps the whole pilgrimage of spirit was the only goal of spirit, the only home of truth". Regarding this, Montaigne concedes that "Truth has its conveniences, disadvantages, and incompatibilities with us." the pragmatic move would be to confess ignorance.

Though he is not ambiguous on this point either in his philosophy or in the novel, we see in the latter, i.e. the novel, a deliberate effort to stretch the boundaries of naturalism so far as to expose it to its limits and to bring forth the counterargument/narrative to normalize the skeptical strain within the novel. There is indeed no hegemony and appeasement of the tensions which could have escalated it to a ridiculous finality uncharacteristic of a philosopher who is never on the path of seeking reconciliation but who is notoriously and pathologically both engaged and detached.

Hence, if it can be established that epistemic ignorance is the de facto resultant of this controversy which is a sequential connection of tight logical consequentials, then this fits into a more general anti-metaphysical worldview previously explored. According to this idea, what naturalism does is it provides a provisional structure of meaning so long as it represses the

human instinct (of which the author acknowledged its existence) to indulge in the why of things (i.e. the meaning of life).

So far we have talked at some length about the correlation between naturalism and skepticism and what naturally falls within their rubric is disbelief embedded consequentially in their epistemic affinities. The novel dramatizes the conflict between two seemingly different ontological positions both personified and discussed abstractedly which find many echoes in his philosophy and the narrative that endures the essence of this inarticulate disbelief we suggest, is the alternation between naturalism and skepticism. We suggested that the problem of reading them separately and not interactively consists in the subversion of the totality of the epistemic claims that the words of the author gave voice to in *The Last Puritan*.

Regarding the metaphysical question, naturalism has the lion's share of the epistemic monopoly in that it foregrounds all claims in the here and now perceived and located spatio-temporally and deprives any intellectual ascendance towards the immanent or the transcendent, but to make clear categorical distinctions is in no way helpful in reading with lucidity the transparency of the trope of disbelief in the novel. Indeed, to square this with the demands of existence for certainty, he provides subversive answers to a compulsory and necessary question by topping skepticism on the lacuna of naturalism.

To link this to the previous discussion about the religious crisis in questions of the transcendental shrouded in critique, we stop at the idea that disbelief treads the path between naturalism and skepticism, but it does not offer us atheistic reading. In contrasting the spontaneous potentialities within the narrative, the author positively invites us to consider the suspension of judgment as the core of this connection.

#### **4. 4. 3. Half-hearted Agnosticism: Agnosticism without Argument**

The foregoing view has generously albeit quite concisely justified the polemic of naturalism and skepticism in *The Last Puritan*, and as we have seen when speaking of them as

existing together, there is an unquestionable emergence of a third line that untangles any potential knots in this connection. The challenge of this section is to explore and expand a bit on the implications of this unusual epistemic uncertainty and argue for a weakened version of skepticism, which is agnosticism without argument. We want to engage the notion of religious crisis previously explored and make space for what I call “neutralized epistemology”<sup>217</sup> in light of the diffidence and ontological and epistemological insecurity of the Aldens, who seem to suffer existential pressure and whose current scaffolding model is hitherto unreliable.

The questions we ask to support the above-mentioned claim are: Do we find a finished system in the novel that can withstand the hammer of skepticism? Does the author provide any promising alternatives? But before picking up on these abstract terms, it is crucial to revisit our view of Oliver, Mrs. Alden, and the religious crisis in the novel as a whole to further support our claim.

Our review of Oliver as a Puritan and naturalist prepared us to read him both as a believer as well as an unbeliever, which is the story’s narrative marker. There is an artificial distinction here that restricts the character of Oliver from both ends. He is at once the ideal of the naturalists of contemporaneous times and the ideal of Puritanism whose emergence from the hazy past made him out of joint with the modern world’s configurations. We are more likely to see the rationale beyond this (un)deliberate categorization that is based on the commitment to antipodal epistemologies: of belief and unbelief, i.e., he assorted faithfulness and adherence to variegated positions or a “diversity of allegiance”, especially when the author made a voluntary temporal adjustment and brought one historical incident to bear upon another — puritanism and naturalism— incarnated and personified and as an idea hedged in the running

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<sup>217</sup> I define neutralized epistemology in relation to “ratio fidei” or the reason of faith as the repositioning of knowledge quest into the middle ground of inconclusivity but not of diffidence where the believer and unbeliever are found sharing the same quest for certainty only for the former to reach the threshold of faith by some Will of their own —in the Schopenhauerian sense— and the latter to remain at a measurable distance from this commitment. The idea is not wholly implausible. It is synonymous with acknowledgment of ignorance.

theme of the religious crisis<sup>218</sup>. Not coincidentally, the author provided a margin to manoeuvre this crisis that ensued from these antithetical forces by suggesting two routes with symbolic signification that could bear upon this religious crisis. Seemingly, the conjunction of the historical phenomenon of Puritanism with naturalism as an ahistorical tendency would expose him to the possibility of faith; however, the author ultimately dropped the hypothesis of belief. Hypothetically, Santayana uses the theme of Puritanism to examine the effects of modernity on the most staunching believer whose moralism is unfazed yet uncondusive to faith in the transcendental—inasmuch this morality is a portion of secular knowledge or a categorical imperative in Kantian language—despite the implicit suggestion that it emanates naturally and paradoxically from faith. By contrast, the unbelief trope is categorically atheistic<sup>219</sup>, but interestingly enough, this atheistic trope has made accommodations to endure the element of or rather the plague of uncertainty to divine the root of the mystery of the world that plagued the believer and the unbeliever. There is not in him or his family unit the will to change perspectives.

We see this most clearly in the distancing of oneself from commitment to the unintelligible, in the previously explored passages as well as in Mrs. Alden who held back from this way of inquiry. Indeed, when the author described Mrs. Alden, who clearly had an issue with the outer world, he phrased it in terms of her puzzlement over the issue of the incomprehensibility of this level of abstraction, and her prescription to this conundrum is simple: it is once more the declaration of ignorance and the detachment from making any claims, he says, “Beyond the pale there could be nothing but outer darkness — an alien, heathen

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<sup>218</sup> The religious crisis in its broadest sweep does not only pertain to the loss of faith if faith existed in the first place, but it is open to interpretations of the causation of intellectual perplexities between materialism and what Hegel calls ‘impalpable abstractions’, existential anxieties when confronting the limitations of existence and hence a crisis in meaning, and the reconciliation of antinomies (as in the desire for God and the burden of proof).

<sup>219</sup> Or raised in this way to the level of atheism that repels any form of theism.

unintelligible world, to be kept as remote as possible.”<sup>220</sup> (p. 93). Heretofore, she meets her husband and son on the same ground, the ground of ignorance and emotional detachment that, if otherwise stable, would enable them to upgrade it to faith because what is the criterion of their judgment but skepticism, which by virtue of being rooted in naturalism, make the standard of judgment relative and dismissive of the unknown. Here, there is a timid yet strong confession, recognition, and acceptance of the fact that ultimate knowledge, beautifully captured in the words of James Ward (1903), "can never transcend the phenomenal; concerning 'unknown and hypothetical' existences beyond and beneath the phenomenal, whether called Matter or Mind or God, science will not dogmatise either by affirming or denying." (p. 20).

To return to an earlier thesis in this chapter, it seems like Santayana —perhaps— like Spinoza also distinguishes three kinds of knowing in the novel: chaotic knowing achieved through the senses, lucid and distinguishable truth of ideas relevant and faithful in its projection/formulation to the objects it represents coming from reason, and the penetration of the essence of the material and metaphysical world accomplished through intuition (from the particular to the general). In *the last Puritan*, this division was impeccably fitting to the nature of the subject matter of belief/unbelief. The author reflects an ambiguity in the third category which although it does not completely renounce higher knowledge, it admits only of the phenomenal world and leaves untouched the metaphysical aspect of it for reasons of ignorance, or the confession thereof. Furthermore, the critical synthesis we have formed so far reduces this polemic to what James Ward (1899/2011) calls “agnostic despondency.” (p. 19)

The insecurity of foundation that prompts what Alcalà & Laursen (2015) call “Olympian detachment” (p. 25) undoubtedly leads to a vulnerable form of atheism. While such an account does have the advantage of being posited to fill a gap of understanding, we should take care to note that understanding the conditions of the limits of knowledge and the desire

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<sup>220</sup>throughout *The Last Puritan* there runs a supporting thesis to the effect that the spiritual and supernatural terminology, in the words of Huxley, " is utterly barren, and leads to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas."

for a more complete knowledge is what causes this puzzlement or the pressure of existence (like that of the Alden family) and therefore, the dramatization of the quest for certainty takes on this dimension, and the pressure of existence is to respond to this challenge which speaks to the inner/outer dissonance which we tease out thematically and symbolically. In the end, the author emphatically stressed that despite all the material possessions Oliver had and despite his natural ‘superiority’, yet what he called “the aggrieved stranger to that artificial world certainly missed something.” One deduces that this enfeebled form of atheism spawns a new direction, that is agnosticism as grounded in the remnants of the surplus of the pressure of existence that realism embedded in an undefeated faith in materialism and the important methodological consequences of skepticism cannot fully satisfy —because—as skeptics, they are not bothered with abrogating ideas, therefore, this unexpected suspension of knowledge<sup>221</sup> lapses into agnosticism as relating to the ideal of knowledge<sup>222</sup>.

Certainly, the author’s usage of this polemic convincingly reveals that it is not to showcase a concern with the validity of their arguments because, by the end of the story, we realize that he dragged Oliver specifically and his father to an extent, to the field of the quest only to show that they have gone this far in their quest for certainty to show a regular denial of knowledge of and to announce towards the end of the story his father’s demise and his own end all the while foreshadowing the profound concentration of indecisiveness, but in how the semantics of unbelief are weaved into the tapestry of the running theme of faith/unfaith in the

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<sup>221</sup>I say unexpected because ideally, skepticism would not organically grow out of a belief firmly grounded in naturalism unless naturalism itself is artificially posited as the only sustainable paradigm to the fulfillment of knowledge, or if this self-sufficiency which naturalists claim to be the case is hijacked by an overwhelming need to complete the pyramid of knowledge that acknowledges idealism as a crucial aspect that is not revealed through the clinging to a one-dimensional realism.

<sup>222</sup> In his Gifford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Aberdeen in the Years 1896-1898, James Ward (1906) had established a momentary and unconsolidated relation between naturalism and agnosticism, calling it an alliance, but quickly backpaddled to specify the nature of this liaison that binds the two as a strange one and that that alliance is destined to fail. However, in our exposition, we consider this alliance an emphatically strong one on the basis of the incompleteness of the knowledge model that admits of higher knowledge as the nexus of naturalism only determines the nature of realist knowledge.

novel and in the multiplicity of perspectival contexts and experiences where arguments dissolve.

So as not to confound our interpretation as an argument in favor of agnosticism, we read him and the thread of faith/unfaith as presenting perspectives not arguments, and argumentation not argument; however, the argumentation<sup>223</sup> is not denuded of a structure.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the variables of faith, unfaith, and the concentration of multiple alternatives and how they ultimately converge into an agnostic position. In tackling it, I sought to soften the edges of atheism, which is the defacto reading of any trope of disbelief (although in *The Last Puritan* deism or pantheism—the latter of which the author mentioned in relation to Oliver— might be suggested the literal or symbolical reading of the polemic of the religious crisis). My aim was to provide or show evidence for hitherto unknown links between Puritanism, Santayana’s philosophy of naturalism, skepticism, and agnosticism, and the parameters of authorial intrusion that have facilitated this reading.

I started off by offering a brief overview of Santayana, his philosophy, and his religious/irreligious stance because in many important ways, the themes the chosen novel<sup>224</sup> treats are rooted in the fabric of his other works, and we inquired about the ways we think and talk about Puritanism and the questionable faith of the believers as well as the unbelievers all the while engaging two crucial methodological and philosophical strands from the novel wherein the seeds of atheism were sown, i.e. naturalism and skepticism. I focused on whether his supervision of this question relieved the major characters (the Aldens) from skepticism.

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<sup>223</sup> Here we distinguish between the word ‘argument’ flatly stated and squared with equivalent reasons that support the premises and conclusions of the argument which then need demonstration deductively or inductively, and argumentation which is the systematic reasoning and the basis and structure that support an idea.

<sup>224</sup> Conversely, his one and only novel, *The Last Puritan*, takes on an importance almost equal to his non-fictional works.

In taking up this topic, it appears that George Santayana had an initial optimism about the potential of Puritanism in opening up the pores of belief in the transcendental bound by the existing values inherent in Puritanism<sup>225</sup>. However, Puritanism or even Calvinism for him, as he remarked, “is the philosophy of the agonized conscious”. Once Puritanism is firmly placed at the center it becomes exhausted and surpassed, meaning that to the extent that it prescribes the course of life —especially of the protagonist— its naturalistic essence is kept minus the religious side of it<sup>226</sup>. Furthermore, in setting up a Puritan who is a naturalist and quasi-atheist, he strikes at the heart of the religiosity embedded in the fabric of Puritanism when it meets a profound skeptical vein. Moreover, the theme of pilgrimage with that of naturalism signifies that an attempt has been made to answer the calling which has been explicitly alluded to; however, I found a somewhat ambivalence about the question of God and the uncertainty that ensues from clinging to naturalism and its limits has fallen flat on the question of profound knowledge. I also remarked on the willingness to eschew a solid conception of the immanence of God (that he is “knowable, perceivable, graspable”) in a general criticism of higher knowledge or knowledge about higher things and beings.

With this in mind, it should be clear the scope of my claim about the Aldens epistemological position, which is nowhere expounded, is not an argument per se but construed crudely as a perspectival criticism and that the layout of the novel and how it enables this reading supports our claim for unfaith as a half-hearted agnosticism. The novel as a whole is a case in historical reconciliation of the dialectic of materialism and puritanism. Therefore, the pragmatic aspect of it thus becomes evident here.

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<sup>225</sup> Because if Oliver as the novel’s protagonist is a Puritan then he is by definition or by the truth of the presupposition a believer

<sup>226</sup> the author fostered a conception of Puritans as not religious but from the perspective of moralism located firmly in naturalism. Interestingly enough, the novel’s protagonist and hero, despite being a Puritan, is “naturally a spiritual man” and spiritually a naturalist man did not live up to either of them.

# **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

## General Conclusion

Nothing further now remains but to summarize the essence of this dissertation. To read in a comparative way a historical trace of a recurring pattern of a formerly crisis of faith by means of narrative depiction that happened twenty years prior to the start of the interwar years should get us somewhere in understanding the religious crisis of the interwar years. In 1888, Mrs. Humphry Ward published *Robert Elsmere*, a novel that would sell over a million copies by 1911. This fictional work tells the story of the emotional crisis that ensues from the spiritual quest amid growing religious doubts. The journey that has been made was from evangelical Christianity to an inner battle at the throes of theistic agnosticism. Its kernel being an impractical iconoclasm with theoretical merits that treads the liminal path of the profanity and the sacrosanct. However, *Robert Elsmere* was neither an oddity to this kind of prose formula nor the first in a chain of existentialist writing that placed the issue of God at the center of the narrative but was rather a circle in a chain of narratives that dealt with what truly mattered to man and towards that which the authors, novelists, playwrights, and poets have inexorably pushed their writings, that is the question of God.

With the question of God stretching philosophically as far back as the Pre-Socratic era, one common feature among its inquirers and what they share is the acknowledgment of the limits of knowledge and the mystery of existence. If believers, they rely on the crutches of belief whilst acknowledging these limits and this mystery, and if unbelievers, they either profess knowledge of the nonexistence of God, or harbor doubt, uncertainty, and incredulity while maintaining epistemic neutrality. Whatever it is, not the belief in God which is problematic but knowledge claims which are<sup>227</sup>. The latter category, i.e., the unbelievers, historically speaking, thought they start on a better intellectual ground<sup>228</sup> the revival of

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<sup>227</sup> considering that the issue of knowledge is in fact a reflection of the nature of man.

<sup>228</sup> A crucial conjunction in man's history that God does not exist but in man, and "man has no existence in himself". Indeed, once faith became personal, the assault on it was raised to new heights. Therefore, human freedom was a significant step that modern man thought he needed to escape the crutches of God and religion.

knowledge only to reach, on the aggregate, the epistemological position that not only is God unknown but He is unknowable. Thus, dispensing with the idea of God as knowable which faith entails meant a blatant collision with the sphere of belief which in turn incentivized nihilism whose two possible consequences says Yannaras (2003) is either the absence of God or the unknowability of Him (p. 55).

Indeed, that God is incontrovertibly beyond the realm of sensible experience is a platitude. The unknowability of the infinite and God is due to the limits of matter "in the modes of knowledge in which things are seen in the world", Aquinas (1485/2018) writes, "but He is unknown to us by reason of our feeble intellect, which in its present state has a natural aptitude for material objects only. Therefore, we cannot know God in our present life except through material effects." (p. 403). This realization has challenged the ossified interpretation that equates unbelief and disbelief with atheism and has also challenged the quintessential idea and the dogmatic expression of the death of God which has come to momentary and paradoxically signify the end of history in the Hegelian construction, it nonetheless opened up some reflections on the zeitgeist of the period that spans the nineteenth and twentieth century which revealed at the convergence of the thesis and antithesis —however the order of this layout the ongoing tension with the declaration of an everlasting metaphysical crisis.

To comprehend this crisis, Bernard Lightman suggests that a fit place to start is to perceive the novels which center on doubt and faith. We have opted for novels written in the interwar years for their historical significance. They represent, so far as the concision and scope of this dissertation permit, a sample of case studies into the topic of agnosticism in the Anglo-American novel.

The narratives of the dialectic of faith/unfaith, the ontological vitality, the religious crisis and the epistemic ignorance of Lawrence's *Women in Love*, the loss of faith in A

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However, the enormous responsibility that comes after it was a resounding neutral reference to God or a world abandoned by God.

*Clergyman's Daughter* and Santayana's *The Last Puritan* respectively reveal a strong current and a preoccupation with more than the restrictive construal of the duality of faith and unfaith or any subsiding and fleeting concern with supplementary themes that revolve around the general themes indicated above because the quest for God is a strong strand of thought with novels treating existential themes. In the interwar years which saw the emergence of unprecedented crises, especially existential crises, there is the reconstruction of an identity denuded of certainty and plagued with skepticism, indecisiveness, suspicion, and disbelief but almost with the desire for knowledge and belief. The selected novels of this dissertation offered valuable insights into these, and their narratives dramatized in the form of mild to extreme tragedies the antithetical of faith. We unmasked it as dialectical and relational in the first two novels and affiliated with a strong appeal to skepticism in the last chapter.

What I have remarked is that for each of these works is the following:

- That the characters' unbelief takes greater importance in this contextual analysis is clear and that "there is always... 'excess' of the signifier beyond the signified." (Steiner, p. 84).
- The agnostic position is not embraced as starting point but emerges out nonchalantly as the narrative develops.
- It can be mistaken for atheism in the characters we have analyzed if we do not pay close attention to syntactical references which reveals that atheism suffers from quite a few limitations not least specifically in the correspondence of reference (i.e. in what the position of unfaith exactly refers to which reflects the effects of the context).
- A nuanced understanding guarantees an intersection of atheistic and agnostic beliefs, and the demarcation of this semantic vicinity can prove to be problematic.
- An examination of referential discourse enclosed in a frame of the fictional with personal, factual, and historical extensions is inherently different from a reference that

is grounded in fixed propositions based on loose inhumane factors, i.e. some intelligible abstractions.

- Within a limited lexicality that has to do with unfaith, the issue of knowledge and its contextual references thus analyzed should settle the perturbation and ambiguity of designation sympathetic to atheism.
- The authors regularly espouse the viewpoint of the Other or the “antithesis” to make space for an antithetical stance.
- And that the agnosticism that is derived through conceptual analysis has variations in the modes of expression and representation and exists in varying degrees within the limits of its standard definition.

Through these novels, the central question was about the irreligious identity and so my approach was to investigate the ways they approached it, what they reserved, and what they dropped out of the narratives with the explicit purpose of studying characters who seem to be impelled by a sense of inner vacuity, bereavement and the difficulty to reconcile modern reconfiguration with the demands of the spirit. My analysis displays versions of authenticity and uniqueness in the identity of each novel and the experiences they engage in.

The layout of this dissertation is based on an argumentative structure from the theoretical part (in giving the *raison d'être* of the terms we expounded on diachronically and thematically. Here I sum up the structure of this dissertation.

D. H. Lawrence opened his novel *Women in Love* (1920) with a brazen anti-Christian sentiment that targeted the foundations that have long sustained English society, for instance when mocking the institution of marriage. Lawrence was not frugal in demonstrating the aspect of unbelief. The onus of truth and making sense of life in the modern world created further sensibilities and confusions that led to a lopsided stance which was then resolved by repeated tragedies. These tragedies supply us with hints and suggestions of a broader set of connections

linked to the symbolic, figurative completeness of two experiences, not least belief and disbelief, and suggest a third one that was brewing in the narrative and which accumulated from the ashes of them, namely agnosticism. However, the agnosticism we identified in our analysis of *Women in Love* leans on the direction of faith and the agnostic believers in the novel such as Birkin and Ursula accept by faith as existing the mysteries of the divine nature in some manner unknown to man.

George Orwell laid bare the issue of the loss of faith and presented an immature unfaith/disbelief. The internal configuration of the text and the narrative structure reveals a pattern of agnosticism and it accords with the experience of Dorothy, however, the nature of that agnosticism is settled against a strong indication of the presence of atheism which lends itself customarily as interpretive of the irreligious experience, which, in the presence of the element of uncertainty and the desire for knowledge, is far off the mark.

In George Santayana's *The Last Puritan*, there exists an explicit critical strand revealing the impossibility of knowledge implicit in the capitulation to naturalism and what it entails from the adjustment of an understanding of the world along these paradigmatic lines and what they entail.

I aimed to achieve a greater understanding of the religious identity rampant in our chosen novel and also to cross-reference it with the interpretative endeavor of biographies and autobiographies of the authors because I believe that the novel serves as a function of criticism and a function of representation. One of the aims of this thesis was also to elaborate a conception of agnosticism along the epistemic variations that the concept or the normative definition holds (which is propositional) in order to address the various questions in which the desire for God as an existential repose morphed into an existential pressure—as the underlying problem—in the matrix of modernity which I hope I have met.

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## Résumé

Il est largement reconnu que la crise moderne de la vie spirituelle a été encore exacerbée par les effets de la Grande Guerre. Dans le corpus littéraire de l'entre-deux-guerres, le piège de l'incrédulité est clairement visible, et l'idée selon laquelle l'athéisme rend compte de l'expérience irreligieuse n'a de sens que dans un contexte de taxonomisation myope. Ce qui est frappant, ce sont les tensions entre foi et infidélité, qui suggèrent l'existence d'interprétations concurrentes et conciliantes. Ceux-ci, à leur tour, nous permettent d'examiner la nature et l'étendue de cette dichotomie croyance/incrédulité en dehors d'une lecture standard des termes d'exclusion (c'est-à-dire l'athéisme comme seuil d'incrédulité ou la récupération théiste de la foi). Cette thèse vise à proposer une interprétation large contre la lecture standard des oppositions binaires de l'expérience religieuse/irreligieuse du roman anglo-américain en tant que récit hybride de positions rivales résultant de la coexistence du désir de Dieu et d'une forme d'évasion de Dieu qui semble avoir lieu dans la littérature de l'entre-deux-guerres. En examinant *Women in Love* (1920) de D. H. Lawrence, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) de George Orwell et *The Last Puritan* (1935) de George Santayana, j'é mets l'hypothèse que l'agnosticisme est évoqué comme l'alternative propositionnelle à la tension entre foi et infidélité, qui reçoit sa formulation la plus approfondie dans le roman de l'entre-deux-guerres. J'é mets également l'hypothèse d'une thèse jusqu'ici peu accueillante du désir de Dieu. Mon argument repose sur la thèse de l'impiété de la conscience moderne et sur la conception plus large de la disparition de Dieu ainsi que de la « mort de Dieu ». Je soutiens que la conscience moderne est consciente du problème métaphysique et que le désir d'aborder le thème de Dieu émane du désir de Dieu en soi, accentué par une incertitude prononcée et omniprésente. Pour passer de la compréhension à l'interprétation et du réel au fictif (et vice versa), je m'appuie sur l'herméneutique philosophique, l'analyse contextuelle et l'analyse déductive de contenu. Les résultats montrent la récurrence du théisme agnostique alimenté par l'ignorance épistémique et l'incertitude épistémique qui entraînent une suspension retentissante du jugement et de la connaissance en ce qui concerne les questions d'épanouissement personnel, de perte de foi et de crise de foi dans les trois romans respectivement. Ceux-ci, à leur tour, exposent l'étendue de la position agnostique et ses différentes formulations possibles qui ne peuvent être expliquées par des hypothèses athées.

Mots-clés : agnosticisme, incertitude, foi, infidélité, religion, modernisme

## المخلص

لقد تم الاعتراف على نطاق واسع بأن الأزمة الحديثة في الحياة الروحية قد تفاقمت بسبب آثار الحرب العظمى. في المجموعة الأدبية في فترة ما بين الحربين العالميتين، يبدو الوقوع في فخ عدم الإيمان واضحا للعيان، والرأي القائل بأن الإلحاد يفسر التجربة غير الدينية لا معنى له إلا على خلفية التصنيف قصير النظر. ما هو واضح بشكل لافت للنظر هو التوترات بين الإيمان وعدم الإيمان التي تشير إلى وجود تفسيرات متنافسة وتفسيرات تصالحية. وهذا بدوره يتيح لنا سياقاً للنظر في طبيعة ومدى هذا الانقسام بين الإيمان وعدم الإيمان بعيداً عن القراءة القياسية للمصطلحات الاستيعادية (أي الإلحاد باعتباره عتبه عدم الإيمان أو التعافي الإيماني للإيمان). تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى تقديم تفسير واسع ضد القراءة القياسية للمعارضات الثنائية للتجربة الدينية/اللاإيمانية للرواية الأنجلو أمريكية باعتبارها رواية هجينة للمواقف المتنافسة نتيجة للتعايش بين الرغبة في الاله والشكل المفرط من الهروب منه الذي يبدو أنه يحدث في أدب ما بين الحربين. من خلال فحص رواية "نساء عاشقات" لدي إتش لورانس (1920)، و"ابنة رجل دين" (1935) لجورج أورويل، و"البيوريتاني الأخير" لجورج سانتايانا، أفترض أن اللاأدرية يتم استدعاؤها كبديل مقترح للتوتر بين الإيمان وعدم الإيمان، والذي يحظى بأكثر قدر من الشمولية. كما أنني أفترض فرضية غير مرحب بها حتى الآن حول الرغبة في الاله. حتى مبنية على فرضية إلحاد الوعي الحديث والمفهوم الأوسع لاختفاء الاله بالإضافة إلى "موت الاله". أنا أزعم أن الوعي الحديث يعي المشكلة الميتافيزيقية وأن الرغبة في طرح موضوع الاله تنبع من الرغبة في وجود الاله في حد ذاته، والتي يبرزها عدم اليقين الواضح. وللانتقال من الفهم إلى التأويل، ومن الحقيقي إلى الخيالي (والعكس)، أعتمد على التأويل الفلسفي، والتحليل السياقي، وتحليل المحتوى الاستنتاجي. تظهر النتائج تكرار وجود الإيمان اللاأدرية الذي يغذيه الجهل المعرفي وعدم اليقين المعرفي الذي يؤدي إلى تعليق للحكم والمعرفة من حيث صلتها بقضايا تحقيق الذات، وفقدان الإيمان، وأزمة الإيمان في الروايات الثلاث على التوالي وهذا بدوره يكشف نطاق الموقف اللاأدرية، وصيغته المختلفة والممكنة التي لا يمكن تفسيرها بفرضيات إلحادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللاأدرية، عدم اليقين، الإيمان، الكفر، الدين، الحداثة