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## PREDICAMENTS

▣ A review of Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.

**P**OSTMODERN THEOLOGY. In some sense it is a new game and in some sense it is an old one. Somewhere between the 1979 birth pangs of the immature *Alchemy of the Word*<sup>1</sup> and the 1999 publication of *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*,<sup>2</sup> a contemporary field has been constructed upon which a handful of thinkers have “created a new space for theological reflection by paying attention to certain limits of or foreclosures in philosophical systems.”<sup>3</sup> The game has progressed over these two and a half decades to the point that, as Graham Ward notes, “It no longer seems necessary to argue for postmodernism’s fascination with things religious.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is no need for such an argument, though there are arguments a-plenty within the fledgling concern—arguments concerning who will best account for these new spaces, how “theology” itself will be evoked into a response and by which strategy the ubiquitous “post-” will best be put to use. For better or worse, tacticians have coalesced into camps. Teams have been formed, scrimmages scheduled. One might, if prone to such metaphorical flights, even understand the Atlantic as a trench co-opted to separate the combatants—an image supported by ascendance of a particularly British community and the responsive title of the 2001 Routledge publication *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought*.<sup>5</sup>

As much of contemporary thought inspired by 20th century continentalists, the postmodern position of theology is consciously parasitic on older contests. Whether one considers theology’s relevant concern, along with Mark C. Taylor as a new logic of the interface between Kierkegaard and Hegel, along with

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Raschke, *The Alchemy of the Word: Language and the End of Theology* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979); republished as *The End of Theology* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Theology: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Graham Ward, “Theology and Postmodernism” in *Theology*, v. 100, Nov/Dec 1997, 435.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Clayton Crockett, ed., *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Clayton Crockett as a modulation of the Kantian problematic, or along with John Milbank as the re-recovery of a distinct revision of pre-nominalism, the working out of postmodern theologies is a practice of having in one's sight a *certain* historicity. These historical sensibilities may have originally had the character of "a room of one's own," but, of late, this too has come under the magical gameship of the pitch.

The somewhat heated, ludic component of the contemporary theological scene might very well have to do with the "post-" itself. This is intimated by Gavin Hyman in the recently published incarnation of his doctoral dissertation, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Textualist Nihilism?* Among the myriad tropes available to elucidate the slippery and somewhat disappointing moniker "postmodern," Hyman concentrates his attention almost solely on the early Lyotardian variety. Lyotard's analytic in *The Postmodern Condition* lays out the interaction of difference within opposing *recits* in terms of contestation. Such a contestation is necessary within a world-picture increasingly uncomfortable and critical of the foundationalism of world-pictures. The predicament (from the Latin, *praedicare*, to proclaim or preach) of postmodern theology delimited by Hyman is a contest between two positions attempting, based upon this unease, to conditionally "out-narrate" each other. The first "claims that the end of foundationalism brings with it also the 'end' of theology, whereas the second response, on the contrary, claims that the 'end' of foundationalism actually opens the way for the 'return' of theology."<sup>6</sup> As the figureheads of these rubrics, Hyman selects Mark C. Taylor and Don Cupitt for the former, radical orthodoxy and, predominantly, its most prodigious exemplar, John Milbank, for the latter.

These two positions have a little something in common, says Hyman. They understand their projects as intimately involved in the issue of narrativity. Cupitt and Taylor (a tenuous, and ultimately ineffective matching, I shall argue), through Hyman's lens, form a textualist enterprise characterized by "the fictiveness, lightness, and nonseriousness of narratives; the overcoming of the distinction between signifier and signified; and the consequent emphasis on surface and secondariness." (26) Their theological, or post-theological projects are read as a demand for an acquiescence to Lyotard's insight into the language games which keep narratives in play while concurrently denuding the establishment of metanarratives. For the most part, this broad stroke does not necessarily contradict Milbank's constituting premise. The Milbank presented by Hyman finds no reason to deny the narrative nature of knowledge. Rather, the postmodern narrative condition performs several tasks desirable to those

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<sup>6</sup> Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 2. Further quotations from this text will be noted parenthetically.

interested in opening the way for an orthodox theological rendering. First and foremost, if knowledge is constituted by narrative structures, then the dominant narrative of secularism, read by Milbank as the constitutive tale of modernity, can be all the more swiftly dismissed. This is the strictly “postmodern” element of radical orthodoxy by which Hyman orients his predicament.

The position of radical orthodoxy, however, diverges from the purely textualist theologies by insisting that the Lyotardian structure Hyman finds implicated in the entirety of the debate is necessarily paradoxical. The denial of metanarratives is itself a metanarrative—a paradox that, Hyman admits, does not go unnoticed by the “postmodern community.” As such, postulates Milbank, we are in a position by which a metanarrative *must* be *chosen*. It is this *choice* which occupies the orthodox imagination. “For Milbank, postmodernism is to be welcomed because it means the end of the particular metanarrative of secular reason and thereby opens the clearing for the return of a (different) theological metanarrative. This theological metanarrative is the best story for us to live by.” (28) The Christian metanarrative is the desirable choice because, on the one hand, its power may be readily committed to the variability and anti-foundationalism of the narrative critique and, on the other, because it is the only metanarrative to successfully abjure the violence and agonism of historical metaphysics. Theology “returns as a metanarrative which (to use Milbank’s word) ‘positions’ all other narratives, discourses and disciplines completely and without reserve.” (4)

Here is the either/or of Hyman’s title. Postmodern theology’s predicament lies in the encounter between a textualism written in Cupitt’s immanentalism or Taylor’s semiotic death of God, matched up against Milbank’s metanarrative of Christian harmony. Or rather, as Hyman points out, the *real* predicament is the lack of such an encounter. “It may be said that radical orthodoxy and nihilist textualism provide two radically antithetical theological responses to our postmodern predicament. What is particularly striking, however, is that these two responses have largely failed to confront and engage each other.” (4)

For the most part, Hyman blames Cupitt, Taylor and the like. Where are their responses, he asks? The challenges of radical orthodoxy are, for Hyman, real claims which demand the attention of those whose “postmodernism” is avowedly more pervasive. Hyman devotes an entire chapter to the absence of such an engagement, focusing singularly upon the difficulty within Cupitt’s relationship to his British compatriots (an equally intensive examination of Mark C. Taylor is, unfortunately, nowhere to be found in Hyman’s text). Entreating Wittgenstein, Hyman proffers that, for any discursive encounter to be successful, each party must be able to judge her opponent’s position as distinct from her own. Any failure to do so results in confusion. Cupitt’s particular mistake is treating radical orthodoxy as if it is simply a permutation of his own liberal

philosophical heritage. For Cupitt, the predominant characteristic of a post-Christian analytic is the pivot upon which philosophers and theologians either swing towards realism or anti-realism. Hyman argues that such a distinction is a fundamentally *modern* one, and, as such, Cupitt is unable and unwilling to account for the difference between his position and a, albeit conditional, *postmodern* radical orthodoxy. With Cupitt out of the game, Hyman senses an absence which ought to be rectified, stating, "It is the primary aim of this book to disrupt this absence by providing a rigorous critique of radical orthodoxy from a postmodern perspective." (4)

Beginning such a serious project, Hyman addresses the issue of the explicit modernities to which the various examined postmodernisms react. It is here that Hyman lightly touches on what may be the most important of the narrative disagreements between the parties in question. The debate that infects the very *history* of the history of metaphysics is, most certainly for the radically orthodox, a high-stakes event. Summarizing the revisionist analytic of Hans Urs von Balthazar and more recent successors, notably Eric Alliez and William Placher, Hyman points to a reading of the development of modernity which extends the modernist genealogy back to a time well before its generally noted stirrings in Descartes. "They have convincingly shown how these various 'beginnings' of modernity may all be regarded as manifestations of a much more fundamental shift that took place within theology itself during the fourteenth century." (33) This shift regards the question of *being*, in relation to God, as it plays out in the theological ascendance of Duns Scotus over the Thomism of the time. The argument avers that Thomas Aquinas' notion of analogical language provided a manner of signification that emphasized the discontinuity between predications about creatures and predications about God. Duns Scotus, however, following in the path of Averroes, and armed with an unhealthy and unfortunate craving for the pleasures of philosophical form, preferred a notion of being that exhibited a little more conceptual stability. The Scotian shift instated a univocity of being by which creatures and God were separated quantitatively and not qualitatively. The upshot of this legacy is that, although the created and uncreated share something which might be called existence, that existence is a radically fissured one insofar as the quantitative distinction must eventually be understood as infinite. Hyman ably recounts the consequences of such a history, including the well-noted modern phantoms of certainty, scientism, and the much-attended toil and trouble caused by the problem of representation. The philosophy of Immanuel Kant represents the height of Scotism in this story. Even before Balthazar, et al., it was apparent that Kant performs a succinct reversal of Thomism, in which knowledge of God's existence is swapped somewhat cleanly for knowledge of God's nature. For radical orthodoxy, however, Kant's insistence upon thought's abyssal nature represents the final act of a tragedy—indeed, a Sophoclean tragedy, as the Thomistic possibility of theology

is finally rendered obsolete in a modernity created *by mistake*. The Scotist legacy is an error and Kant is its greatest and most accomplished dupe.

Upon noting this topology, Hyman diverges, strangely, to account for the explicit Kantianism of John Hick, a British theologian in the modern liberal tradition, as well as the aforementioned Cupitt's inheritance of the same. He does so, he claims, in order to point out the heteronomous modernities at work. However, this endeavor ends the discussion. Failing to isolate this antinomy as a major point of disagreement immensely formative of the separation between radical orthodoxy and its opponents, Hyman unfortunately misses a line of inquiry that very well may exceed the importance of narrativity and nihilism among the predicaments of postmodern theology. Milbank spends considerable energy directing his attention to the critique of postmodern theology's Enlightenment heritage (read *Scotism*), and in particular its reliance on the expostulation of the Kantian sublime as a theological point of emergence. And he is well to do so, for the young tradition has, there is no doubt, just such affiliations (q.v. the work of Charles Winquist, Mark C. Taylor and most recently Clayton Crockett). As Hyman's retelling of the narrative engendered by Balthasar is a sympathetic one, and as he finds the analysis "convincing," there is some expectation that the consequences of the differing genealogies, narrative or otherwise, would be significant. If the metaphysical ruination of the modern mind begins on a certain day in the fourteenth century, rather than with Descartes or, as Heidegger would have it, in Greece, then the very occurrence of theology as a mode of discourse is involved in a medieval and, consequentially, Enlightenment legacy made suspect by a very specific disputation of univocity and *analogia*. Furthermore, if this revisionism truly is compelling, then the very constitution of Hyman's reliance upon Lyotard, Wittgenstein and de Certeau is in need of radical reflection. For the swath of continentalist thinkers constituting postmodernism's vague canon, the occasion of the Enlightenment constitutes an important and insistent host object for its parasitical activities. Indeed, as Derrida has found it necessary to comment, even if the Enlightenment is in dire need of a critical repetition of the traces of transcendence, "We cannot and must not—and this is a law and a destiny—forgo the *Aufklärung*."<sup>7</sup> An interrogation of the compulsion and value of the Enlightenment after the genealogical critique may significantly shift the entire tenor of its impact. Yet, as if to repeat one of Hyman's concerns, this issue of divergent genealogies has gone relatively unchallenged by those under Radical Orthodoxy's critique.

In Milbank's analysis, one critically fundamental consequence of the Scotist-Kantian error, is the reification and even apotheosis of "nothing." Alignment with Kantian epistemology, even as it is expressed with an eye to corrective by

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<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Derrida, "On a Newly Risen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy," trans. John Leavey, Jr. in *Semeia*, Vol. 23 (1982), 8.

Hegel and the post-Kantians, leads necessarily to the objectification of the abyss marked by the wake of subjectivity's origin. The transcendent, cut off from the understanding, leaves a crisis of accountability in its movement. This crisis and its exploration within philosophy and theology soon becomes more legitimate and compelling than the transcendent itself, according to Milbank. The choice, for any subject born of this historical project, is between the insistent problem of the crisis and a fulfilling account of the restoration of the void. "This means, for Milbank, the ultimate and unavoidable choice lies between theology and nihilism." (51)

For Hyman, however, Milbank fails to prudently account for the possibilities of nihilism. A distinction needs to be made, Hyman insists, between two sorts of nihilism. First, there is nihilism of a *metaphysical* and *positivist* nature, one that remarks a presentable *nihil*. Alternately, there is nihilism of a *fictional* nature, which, by virtue of its commitment to narrativity, entertains deferral completely and thus avoids the perils of metaphysics. At the center of this distinction is the figure of Nietzsche, who has occupied, in the hands of various readers, both of these possibilities. In a capable recounting of Nietzsche's historical legacy, Hyman reviews first the profound reading enjoined by Heidegger and then the second order critique of Heidegger's survey by contemporary continentalists. Of course, Heidegger is famous for his analysis of the "reversal of Platonism" engendered through Nietzsche's iconoclasm. Such a reversal, in this reading, never resists metaphysics as it promises, precisely because its terms are fundamentally determined by the historical and philosophical discourse which occurs outside the question of Being. In Heidegger's ear, this reversal still sounds as an interrogation of what "is." Hyman asks, "Is this not a metaphysics of the nothing, the nothing that 'is'? And is the will-to-power not a metaphysical principle that represents the "truth" of the human condition?"

Situating Milbank in this tradition opens his view of nihilism to the more contemporary Nietzsche of Vattimo, Derrida and others, who find cause for reading his iconoclasm as a process or a style rather than a system. If this is the case, then any "truth" or "being" which occurs as an event within the Nietzschean world-picture is abjured by the process of its own elucidation. In other words, nihilism in its metaphysical appearance is always only departing or deposed toward a fiction or narrative. This is the primary fault in Milbank's either/or of theology and nihilism and it raises questions, for Hyman, about how that choice is reflected in other terms. If nihilism is a positivist endeavor then it is responsible for a certain ontological consequence. Milbank's reading of nihilism, then, involves an understanding of the nihilist metanarrative as an *ontology* of conflict, war, difference and violence. Against this, the Christian metanarrative offers an ontology of peace and unity that is, perhaps, more desirable. However, if postmodern nihilism is of the fictional variety, and its proponents are more

akin to the narrativist Nietzsche, then, "May we not do better to say that they refuse ontology? This would be more consistent with what the nihilists themselves want to say. They would refuse any suggestion that they are 'speculating' about the 'way things are' and, as we have seen, would say that nihilism is itself merely (?) a *mythos*." (112) Further, in terms of the clash of ontologies, Hyman rightly notes that there is something rather suspect about the singularity and reductionism of Milbank's blanket use of the term "nihilist." It seems to substitute all too neatly for the names of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida. So much for a narrative of peace, or, as Hyman offers, "In a particularly violent act, therefore, Milbank obliterates all difference both within as well as among these thinkers." (108)

Fictional nihilism, the broad side of the either/or choice we get from Hyman's own title, it seems, provides a finer-grained and more successful engagement with metaphysics than Milbank's alternative, which slips easily into a positivism of its own. Hyman goes on to posit a fundamental and necessary connection between nihilism and theology that the theologian may not elude. Only through this engagement might theology enact an overcoming of metaphysics. "So it is here that one twists free of metaphysics and of the quest for the pure nihilism that was never attained and emerges on its far side—into fictionalism ... This is both the accomplishment and the overcoming of nihilism. It is the accomplishment of nihilism because metaphysics is now overcome." (105) However, the notion that theology, armed with its indefatigable fictionalist flip-side, enacts this "twisting free" is a troubling conclusion. It is rare that any thinker involved in the 20th century tradition surrounding the critique of metaphysics or ontotheology might make such a claim. Certainly, since Heidegger made explicit the historically implicit critique of metaphysics, the task of the thinker at the end of philosophy or theology has been set toward such an impossibility. But is not the very importance and compulsion of fictionalism's "deferral" ensconced in the given-ness of its irrevocable failure? The overcoming of metaphysics is itself the final act of the positivist tragedy. This is why Heidegger himself always seemed to view *thinking* as interminably *preparatory*, why Derrida has insisted on the parasitical nature of deconstruction in relation to enduring institutional structures, and why Mark C. Taylor has consistently asked after the very possibility of "a/theology". That fictionalism would overcome metaphysics demonstrates a certain lack of complexity with reference to Hyman's consideration of nihilism, for the overcoming of metaphysics is superlatively metaphysical. The choices repeated again and again in continentalist thought are almost never choices related to this overcoming, but rather are choices concerning vital existence in the difficult face of its endless deferral. The fictionalization of nihilism makes the abyss no less abyssal, for fictions vitalize experience with an incorrigibility all their own.

The greater strength of Hyman's encounter with Milbank regards the question of metanarrative itself. "Milbank claims that the metanarrative is an inescapable fatality, and that the way must be prepared for the return of the metanarrative." (68) The strictly "postmodern" quality of Milbank's theology lies in his reading of narrativity—and its theological consequence abides in his insistence that the Christian *recit* deserves to occupy such a determinative role. Hyman correctly points out that a metanarrative, in Lyotardian fashion, is functionally legitimized not through the rigor and exactitude of positivist argumentation but, rather, by persuasion. Employing a stylistic reading of Milbank, Hyman interrogates the theologian's presentation and makes a solid case that Milbank fails to refrain from argumentative legitimation (an angle somewhat compromised, however, by Hyman's own very dissertative style, replete with thesis statements, chapter summaries and intellectual mile-markers). Even more effective, though, is Hyman's analysis of the assumed Christian metanarrative. If it is to actually occupy the position of a determining master *recit*, the theological construction must position all other narratives. Hyman insists that Milbank (and theologians in general) might have a bit of trouble accessing and assessing such a message, for the Christian story elucidated in his particular theological practice is positioned by another narrative, Milbank's own. As Hyman hints, the possibility of *articulating* a metanarrative that determines the power and position of all other narratives is bound up with the position of the interpreter or translator. In other words, the Christian metanarrative is always just one Christian narrative, activated and stylized by the theologian. He notes, "... Milbank provides a distinctive supplement that 'interprets,' 'positions' and 'translates' the theological narrative from which it is clearly distinguishable." (87) Isolating one instance of this translation—in fine Tillichian fashion—Hyman offers, "...Milbank's assertion of the priority of theology over philosophy is itself philosophically determined. His anti-philosophical theology is itself positioned by a particular philosophy...." (89) Milbank's supplement, which Hyman locates in his particular reading of Augustine and, further, within his Trinitarian sensibility, reflects the relationship of theology to the nihilism of the *recit*, and, as such, to an "other" in and of theology. This other marks theology as a superlatively heterological discourse and engages Milbank in the very practice which he seeks to deny.

In the closing chapters, Hyman engages the question of this "other" and its treatment by Cupitt, Taylor and de Certeau. Reviving Cupitt at the conclusion of the text is a rather strange choice, as throughout the text Hyman generally spends far too much time demonstrating the obvious fact that Cupitt is simply not equipped to play this game. Even stranger, however, is the treatment given Mark C. Taylor. Certainly, Hyman agrees, Taylor writes within a place or site that is responsive to the heterological significance marked out by the varied supplementarities of fictional nihilism. This can be seen in Taylor's unending

critique both of modernity and immanentist postmodernities of the likes of Cupitt. However, relying predominantly on a few pages of *Disfiguring*, Taylor's meditation on art, Hyman takes great issue with Taylor's commitment to the heterological project.

Taylor, in seeking to escape dialectical mastery, assumes the neither/nor logic of Hyman's fictional nihilism—a logic which realizes the chthonic supplementarity of every positioning narrative. "This neither/nor opens up a space in which otherness and difference are irreducible to identity and sameness. In this space, every habitation is uninhabitable, and every 'location' is displaced or dislocated. This process of displacement or dislocation gives rise to a constant movement, a movement of exile, a movement of perpetual departure." (126) In the wake of this affirmation of perpetual departure, the problem on Hyman's mind reduces to a query of the very position of the critic—the *where* of the critical endeavor. "But this raises the question of where we *are* then able to dwell. If every (meta)narrative and every location is to be refused or left behind in the name of the 'other,' and if the 'other' itself can never be attained, does one not then become exiled to the non-place of nowhere?" (127) The pressure or pulsion of nihilism necessitates a turn away from the modernist assault on the infinite towards an embroilment within a multiplicity of narratives. These narratives must be embodied, says Hyman. Herein lies his rejection of Taylor. Noting little more than Taylor's image of "the desert" as a trope for the state of exile induced by perpetual departure, Hyman fears that Taylor insufficiently engages the world of difference—the world of powers and potentialities marked by the overabundance of narratives. One may, it seems, traffic in perpetual departure in two ways. On the one hand, the fictional nihilist may retreat to the non-place of the desert and "pass over" the particularities of all narrative determinations. On the other hand, one might become invested in narratives in order to "move through" them, a strategy Hyman attributes to Michel de Certeau. The former description most aptly fits Taylor, according to Hyman, and implicates him in the rejection of all commitments to particular traditions. "We saw that a fictional nihilism precisely *opens the way* to such commitments as a result of the weakening of its own ontological status. Taylor's refusal of all habitations seems to preclude such commitments. Furthermore, to what extent does such a movement really respect *difference*?" (127-8)

Such an indictment, and one textually unsupported by a sophisticated reading of Taylor, seems hasty at best. Hyman specifically reads Taylor's "desert" as an image of what he has called "pure nihilism." (128) A simple glance at Taylor's extensive meditations on the history of nihilism should dispel such a notion. The choice of the desert t(r)opology is not a milestone of nihilist methodology whereby the critic comes to reside in an atemporal outside, but rather a reminder that no particular determination will allow the stasis and resignation which

Hyman so rightly sees as an impossibility. If Taylor understood the “desert” in the former sense he would be making a decisive mistake in his reading of deconstruction—the mistake of assuming that deconstruction has the capacity to show itself as an ontological entity, possessed of its own discrete integrity and existing apart from its relationship to material structures, commitments and traditions. Such a grievous misreading is not one I would be quick to accuse Taylor of. Furthermore, such a misreading would require Taylor to affirm the possibility of being *without a positioning narrative*. If Hyman would make such a claim, its defense might require another dissertation. Certainly, Taylor’s oeuvre, be it finally important or not, would offer some apologetic in its engagement with traditions ranging from the postmodern fascination with architecture and media to the bodily excesses of disease, fashion and self-mutilation.

Perhaps, however, Hyman isn’t accusing Taylor of engaging in the construction of a *synchronic* detachment with its requisite ahistorical consequence, but rather a more diachronic one. This is to say, perhaps Taylor doesn’t *seem* to abide *long enough* within the bounds of traditional commitments. If this is the case then what separates Taylor from Michel de Certeau, who Hyman lauds as a proper exemplar of fictional nihilism, is not a distinction of kind but degree (perhaps raising some very interesting questions about *taste*). In fact, Hyman’s distinction between “passing over” and “moving through” in regards to Taylor and de Certeau seems simple on occasion. Take, for example, Hyman’s regard for de Certeau’s “embodiment” of the mystical tradition. “He maintains that mystical writings are themselves ‘other’ in that there is a distance between us and them, a recognition that they belong to a past apart from us; we should follow the movements of the mystics, though at a distance. This is another instance of how de Certeau’s movement of departure does not *pass over* locations and traditions but *moves through* them. We must ‘follow’ the movements of the mystics but ‘at a distance’; we must ‘commit’ ourselves to them but also ‘leave them behind.’” (132) The relationship Hyman applauds seems to bear a certain resemblance to *repetition*, to which de Certeau holds no unique claim. In addition to the aforementioned repetition of the Enlightenment in the continental tradition, Hyman’s example definitely calls to mind Taylor’s own repetition of the tradition of negative theology.

Hyman’s reflection on the “embodied” exile of de Certeau ends in a defense of that exile from those, like Graham Ward, who would cast its neither/nor logic and concern for the “other” in a theologically conservative or eucharistic light. Theology, it must be reckoned, is one of those particular sorts of habitations or commitments that must be embodied, followed, or repeated and then moved beyond. De Certeau, in the name of the fictionalist project, cannot be kept and hindered in the theological realm. Finally, the neither/nor logic of fictionalism must be understood as a process or becoming which elides the more static and

physical structures of both theology and nihilism. Fictionalism notes “an alogic which is *neither* theological *nor* nihilistic. We have seen that although theology ‘returns’ for de Certeau, it also departs. As a heterological project par excellence, theology must be moved through, but it must also be exceeded and left behind ... The alogic of his wanderings says of every place and every object that it is *not that*.” What might be necessary to lock down such a claim is some consideration, as is present across the continental tradition, of the ontotheological mechanisms of negation and the complexities of denial itself.

After the short, yet bitterly emphatic, denial of Mark C. Taylor’s project in favor of de Certeau, it is almost comical that Hyman wraps up his considerations with a concluding chapter absurdly mirroring Taylor’s own seminal theological manifesto, 1984’s *Erring*. *Erring* begins and ends with a meditation on beginning and ending, respectively demarcated through the chapter titles “...Prelude” and “Interlude...”. Hyman specifically frames his closing remarks in similar fashion, even venturing to offset the same terms and ellipses in the center of the page. Though this chapter centers upon a final jab at Taylor’s desert tropology, via Carl Raschke, without the persuasive probity to back it up, this aping of Taylor, complete with the miming of *Erring*’s final “Amen,” is flaccid rather than ironic, inexpensive rather than effective (a flaw exacerbated by the completely unexamined appearance of the term “a/theology,” *Erring*’s complex and pivotal neologism, within the title of four of the book’s six chapters).

*The Predicament of Postmodern Theology* is at its best when it sticks with its critique of Radical Orthodoxy. Hyman’s isolation of the theological discourse of ontology in a certain and particular sort of postmodern context successfully raises important questions regarding the powers and claims of this theological agenda as it is set forth by John Milbank. And, it may be justly stated, Hyman’s offering is inarguably the most pointed and specific publication yet produced as a response to this new theological landscape. However, the book is much less successful when it becomes entangled with trivial peripheries such as the thought of Don Cupitt and John Hick. Further, Hyman’s significantly short-shrifted engagement with the breadth of the continental tradition and final rushed and out-of-place attempt to offer a productive methodological vision hold back his aims.

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