



'extraordinary language' and its efficacy sheds considerable light on Buddhist practice in East Asia and how it is related to earlier Indic ideas and practices. His critique of Western conceptions of language – the conception that language is meaningful because it communicates propositional content – allows Indian and East Asian conceptions of language to be understood within their own intellectual frameworks. Thus, while at first glance, Payne's work may appear rather narrow in its scope, he successfully shows the wider context and importance of the themes he discusses. The book will be of interest not only to those interested in Japanese Buddhism but also to anyone who wishes to deepen their knowledge of Buddhism in East Asia and its relationship to earlier Indic ideas and religious practices.

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**Christos Yannaras: The Apophatic Horizon of Ontology**, Basilio Petrà, James Clarke & Co., 2019 (ISBN 978-0-227-17704-4), vii + 132 pp., hb £65

In this fascinating book, written in Italian by Basilio Petra and translated by Norman Russell, the reader encounters a historical introduction to Christos Yannaras' philosophical thought. Christos Yannaras (1935) is an extremely influential Orthodox theologian from Greece, an emeritus professor of philosophy in Panteion University (Athens), and a prolific author.

In Chapter 1, Petra begins by referring to Yannaras' early readings, highlighting his gradual discovery of the work of Russian Orthodox theologians/philosophers such as Berdyaev, Lossky, and Florovsky, under the guidance of some significant intellectuals of modern Greece, such as Dimitris Koutroubis. The work of these Russian thinkers, as well as that of others, inspires Yannaras who begins to form a rudimentary version of one of the most long-standing ideas of his later work. There is a fundamental difference between the Western form of Christianity, which is moralistic (pietistic) and oppressive and the version of Christianity of the Eastern world, which is based on *personalism*. Historically, given the cultural domination of the West, even Christianity in Orthodox countries is being subject to a moralistic change and young Yannaras feels that his Christian life in Greece up to that period attests to this. As Petra shows, Yannaras reads Dostoevsky and, fascinated by Dostoevsky's opinions about Orthodoxy, adopts his idea of the responsibility towards the West: The orthodox intellectuals are responsible for answering to the problems

of the contemporary Western Man, distinguishing Christianity from its Western alienation. This means, for Yannaras, a return to the teachings of the Eastern Fathers of the Church.

Yannaras' inquiry into the alienation of Christianity leads him to the field of ontology (1966) and, more specifically, to Heidegger as described in Chapter 2. During that period, where he studies philosophy in Bonn, he is deeply influenced by both Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche and his criticism against Western metaphysics in general, which results in a metaphysical 'gap': nihilism. One reason for nihilism is that God has been reduced to a concept, mainly because of the rationalistic nature of classic Western metaphysics. Petra describes Yannaras' work, *Theology of the Absence and Unknowability of God* (1971), which suggests a way to overcome this problem. Initially, Yannaras employs some concepts introduced by the Eastern Fathers including Dionysius the Aeropagite and Gregory Palamas, such as the distinction between Essence and Energies in God, as well as 'apophaticism'. He argues that God cannot be approached cognitively as an idea but only as a *person*, through his Energies – therefore empirically, after one's renunciation from any rational (affirmative or negative) method of discourse. Both the method of renunciation and the experiential approach to knowledge constitute the Eastern version of apophaticism, which is different to the Western one. Apophatic gnoseology is very central in Yannaras' work and, as Petra writes in this chapter, besides saving ontology from nihilism, it should also be the core of Orthodox Apologetics on the theological level for Yannaras.

In Chapter 3, Petra presents Yannaras' next steps of research in ontology, departing from his magnum opus, *Person and Eros* (1976). Yannaras attempts to offer a complete ontological proposition, which has the concept of 'person' as its basis; a refined personalist ontology based on the Eastern Fathers of the Church, which is post-nihilist and self-sufficient; and an alternative to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. 'Person' could be summarized as an individuality existing as a relational and completely unique entity (otherness). It cannot be reduced to its essence, but it rather defines it; essence is the content of the 'person'. In this book, 'person' is used as a foundational concept for discussing other topics such as relation, the relation between Being and beings, freedom, and God. After Yannaras' attempt to create a complete ontological proposition, other works follow to address ethics, epistemology, economics, and more, always in the context of personalist ontology. In this chapter, Petra focuses on two other books that signify Yannaras' transition from the personalist ontology to an ontology which aspires to be critical ('critical ontology'), although without any significant convergence from the initial personalism. The first is *Correct Reason and Social Practice* (1984), an epistemological work, where the philosopher mainly discusses rationalism and criticism. Being in a constant dialogue with Western thinkers, for example, the Frankfurt School, Marx, and Lacan, he argues that the only

way for ontology to avoid the two extremes, namely, 'dogmatism' (by being critical) and 'skepticism', is apophaticism. Apophatic, critical ontology, both in this book and in the next book that Petra refers to, *Propositions of a Critical Ontology* (1985), accrues from Yannaras' perception of the apophatic way of verifying/refuting knowledge: A proposition (ontological or other) can be formulated according to the rules of rationality, but these rules do not suffice for its verification or refutation. Verification or refutation comes once the proposition is shared with everybody, each one tests its content according to their experience, and an agreement is reached. Moreover, the attempt for intersubjective knowledge clearly replaces the demand for 'objectivity' in knowledge, as shown in *Propositions of a Critical Ontology*.

Chapter 4 is devoted to a new phase in Yannaras' thought, during which Ludwig Wittgenstein is one of his bigger influences. In the first work that Petra discusses, *What Can be Said and What Cannot be Said* (1999), Yannaras deals with the relations among human knowledge, language, and reality based on his critical ontology. Indicatively, he focuses on topics such as early Wittgenstein's idea of the impossibility to talk about things that exist outside the world, since they are outside of human language and knowledge. Confronting this idea, Yannaras suggests that language has a 'symbolic' use. In this view, a word, a signifier is a symbol in the etymological sense. That is: It places together, 'symballei' (p. 77), each one's subjective experience of the same signified thing and allows for communication to occur. Subjective knowledge of reality is experiential anyway, as Yannaras has already argued in his earlier works, and, thus, a symbol only shows or points towards the signified reality; it does not exhaust it. Symbolic language is crucial for the second definition of Eastern apophaticism that Yannaras proposes, that is, apophaticism as the denial to exhaust truth or knowledge in its formulation. In this sense, the possibility for doing metaphysics (talking about things that are 'outside the world') remains open, especially if they are grounded on human experience, as critical ontology does. In the second work of this phase, *Relational Ontology* (2004), Yannaras focuses on the concept of 'relation'. He argues that 'relation' could be conceived as an event that constitutes existence and does not, simply, presuppose existence (e.g. two existents related to each other). He bases his inquiry on authors like Lacan and also supports his argument by incorporating data from his contemporary research in neuroscience.

Having described Yannaras' attempt to confront Western-alienated Christianity, and his effort to offer an alternative to nihilism through a refined patristic ontology (which he calls 'critical'), Petra devotes Chapter 5 to Yannaras' theological thought. In this chapter, Petra illustrates Yannaras' reflection on the possibility for a change in the West. This should be, primarily, based on the distinction between religion and the church (ecclesia). Apart from the rationalistic ontology, one reason for

the alienation of Christianity is that it has become subject to 'religionization', it has become a religion: a system that refers to the individual human being, an egocentric moralism of an individual's merit and salvation. 'Against religion' – which is also the title of a 2006 book discussed by Petra in this chapter – is ecclesia/church: Christianity began as a church, that is, a gathering of persons aiming to actualize a communal and loving mode of existence, far from any religious and, therefore, egocentric one.

After the epilogue, Petra includes a whole, translated chapter of Yannaras' book, *Six Philosophical Paintings*, which can be viewed as a collection of some basic elements of Yannarian thought. For instance, Yannaras refers to the continuity between the Ancient Greek culture and Christianity in which they share the same apophatic way of accessing knowledge, the generation of 'polis' and political life in Ancient Greece, the symbolic use of language, and some fundamental differences between Greek and Western culture originating from the different perception of the concept of 'truth'.

Petra's book requires some degree of familiarization with Yannaras' work in order to be understood properly. Namely, given the book's introductory character, it only scratches the surface of each period of the development of the Yannarian corpus, often containing long quotes. However, apart from being extremely helpful for the scholar that studies Yannaras in general, the remarkable contribution of this book is the historical dimension that it adds to the increasing contemporary scholarship which deals with Yannaras, particularly as a philosopher and not strictly as a theologian, at least since 2013.

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**Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology**, Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John A. Kincaid, Eerdmans, 2019 (ISBN 978-0-8028-7376-7), xviii +310 pp., pb \$35

This work of Pitre, Barber, and Kincaid sets out to offer a thoroughgoing study of select theological *topoi* in the Pauline letters. As with most in the 21st century New Testament guild, they work self-consciously in the wake of E. P. Sanders's account of Paul and Judaism. In doing so, they characterize Paul as a 'new covenant' Jew and highlight the importance of this designation with respect to Paul's apocalyptic perspective, understanding of Jesus, theology of the cross, writing on justification, and view