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2007

Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society

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Original citation:

Lett, D., & Vardy, M. (2007). Religion, science, and origins: On the metaphysics of intelligent design and Darwinian evolutionism. *Illumine*, 6(1), 7–15.

<https://doi.org/10.18357/illumine6120071533>

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Religion, Science, and Origins: On the Metaphysics of Intelligent Design and Darwinian Evolutionism

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Abstract

In the US and the UK a debate has arisen over the introduction of “intelligent design theory” to school curricula as an alternative to the scientific orthodoxy of Darwinian evolutionism. In popular representation, the debate has been predominately articulated in terms of an apparent antagonism between science and religion. This paper examines the historical and philosophical significance of the issue in order to suggest one possible route for rethinking, and perhaps reconciling, the antagonism. We argue that science and religion cannot be allocated two discrete “magisteria,” and that attempts to do so may obscure a common metaphysical nature. Finally, we show how Gianni Vattimo’s concept of ethics allows us to rethink science and religion, and we offer a practical perspective on the teaching of intelligent design in schools.

Introduction

Recently, in some societies,¹ a debate has arisen over the introduction of “intelligent design theory” to school curricula as an alternative to the scientific orthodoxy of Darwinian evolutionism. Contrary to Darwinian evolutionism, which holds that organisms arrived at their current biological forms through a process of change over time due to various material factors, intelligent design theory employs the language of scientific reasoning to argue that organic

forms exist as designed by an “intelligent agent.”² This debate has attracted the attention of, or otherwise involved, scientific and religious intellectuals, the judiciary, prominent political figures, legislative bodies, and the wider public; it has increased in volatility, and at the time of writing, no conclusive settlement has been reached. This paper examines the historical and philosophical significance of the issue, and suggests one possible route for rethinking, and perhaps reconciling, the terms of the dispute.

In popular representation, the debate has been articulated predominately in terms of a long-standing antagonism between subscribers to the rational/empirical paradigm of orthodox science (biologists in particular) and those who propose religious/metaphysical explanations for natural origins. Proponents of intelligent design theory attack evolutionism as limited, incomplete, or erroneous in its claim to account for the origins of life; furthermore, scientists are said to be dogmatically exclusionary in their rejection of alternative hypotheses.³ In response, some prominent scientists have pronounced intelligent design theory to be “creationism in disguise” and have opposed its teaching as unscientific: “[I]nvoicing a supernatural Designer is to explain precisely nothing.”⁴

2 Davis and Kenyon 1993. This is a simplification of the debate, as manifold conflicting religious and scientific positions are involved. But for the purposes of our argument, this distinction satisfactorily summarizes the central controversy. Additionally, because of an incontrovertible historical symbiosis with arguments for intelligent design, we implicate certain forms of Christianity in particular when we speak of “religion” in this paper.

3 Hewlett 2003.

4 Dawkins 1986, 141.

1 To the best knowledge of the authors, the debate in question has manifested in a similar fashion in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Evidently, the irreconcilability of the debate stems in part from its being presented as “superstition versus rationality.” In response, using an analysis guided by Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of metaphysics, we suggest that both religious *and scientific* efforts to explain origins can be understood as metaphysical.

In seeking a way to defuse the intelligent design debate, we put forward Gianni Vattimo’s concept of *nihilism*—an overcoming of “the violent essence of metaphysics.”⁵ At the heart of Vattimo’s thought is a certain democratic ideal that accedes to the plurality of beliefs present in a multicultural, globalizing world. This ideal, according to Vattimo, is best realized by an ethics that seeks to reduce violence through reducing the hold of foundational principles that underlie metaphysics. This paper applies Vattimo’s concept of nihilism to the intellectual effort to ascribe to science and religion separate “magisteria,” and to the debate about teaching intelligent design in public schools.

“Non-overlapping Magisteria”? Intelligent Design Theory and the Relationship between Science and Religion

In November 2005, the Kansas Board of Education voted to allow intelligent design to be included in the state science curriculum.⁶ In a separate case one month later, a Pennsylvania judge, ruling over a case brought by parents against the Dover District School Board, found that the teaching of intelligent design amounted to “creation science”—a religious concept pedagogically prohibited in science lessons by a US Supreme Court ruling in 1987.⁷ In the United Kingdom, as of November 2006, fifty-nine schools were using materials distributed by the “Truth in Science” organization, which had sent intelligent design-based teaching materials to every secondary school in Britain.⁸ These materials teach that “science can identify features of the natural world that are best

explained by an intelligent cause,”⁹ a claim reproduced across a growing body of intelligent design literature.¹⁰ The chairman of the UK parliamentary science and technology select committee responded on behalf of the British government that “neither intelligent design nor creationism are [sic] recognized scientific theories,” adding that “treating [intelligent design theory] as an alternative centralist theory alongside Darwinism in science lessons is deeply worrying.”¹¹

In November 2006, prominent scientists gathered at the SALK Institute for Biological Studies’ Forum on Science and Religion, “Beyond Belief,” in La Jolla, California. The Nobel Laureate in physics Steven Weinberg delivered this statement: “[W]e will miss religion, but ... the world needs to wake up from its long nightmare of religious belief.”¹² Attending colleagues, including the evolutionary biologist and outspoken opponent of creationism Richard Dawkins, argued that Weinberg’s condemnation had not gone far enough. Nobel Prize winner Sir Harold Kroto’s further allegation that we dwell in a “McCarthy era against people who don’t accept Christianity”¹³ denotes a marked departure from the sympathetic chords struck between religion and science in the United States in the early nineteenth century. At that time, there was a spirit of optimism among American Protestants that science (particularly Francis Bacon’s empiricism) could contribute to the orthodox ideal of a “religion free of all doubt.”¹⁴ This *natural theology*—popularized by an influential book of the same name by prominent New England Anglican priest William Paley in 1802—promised a fusion of Christian philosophy and empirical science through the premise that “nature contains clear, compelling

5 Vattimo 2004, 11.

6 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4419796.stm>.

7 See <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8498>.

8 See <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1957858,00.html>.

9 See <http://www.truthinscience.org.uk/site/content/view/43/49>.

10 Davis and Kenyon 1993; Behe, Dembski, and Meyer 2000; Dembski 1998, 2002; Strobel 2004.

11 See <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1957858,00.html>.

12 See <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/21/science/21belief.html?ei=5090&en=1248e2f606e1e138&ex=1321765200&pagewanted=print>.

13 See *New Scientist* 2578, November 18, 2006.

14 Hovenkamp 1978, x.

evidence of God's existence and perfection."¹⁵ Perhaps ironically—in view of the contemporary situation—the wide adoption of natural theology led to an enthusiasm for science in college curricula, and the academic hiring of full-time scientists *en masse*. By 1860, the experiment was an apparent failure, as natural theology fought a gradually losing battle to align Protestant orthodoxy with the inconveniently contradictory “facts” emerging from geology and biology,¹⁶ and was compelled to reject the fruits of an empiricism it had helped to entrench.

Science historian Herbert Hovenkamp concludes that the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* sealed the demise of natural theology as a mainstream movement in American education. Yet, by the 1850s, a growing scientific uniformitarian movement had already sought to limit the influence of catastrophism, progressionism, and other tenets of natural theology within national politics and education.¹⁷ By corollary, various Protestant denominations were fragmented by the respective theological concessions they were prepared to accept to maintain a relationship with scientific orthodoxy. Although the immediate ramifications appear to have been pedagogical and political, Hovenkamp indicates the durable *philosophical* problematic foregrounded by the failure of natural theology: put simply, “facts and values are not easily mixed.”¹⁸ This historical articulation of the question of the relationship between facticity and morality post-dated Hume's famed ruling-out of an arrival at the latter purely through the former in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) by a century. Despite countless philosophical attempts to tackle the fact/value problem, science and religion continue to be popularly thought of in terms of this apparently

15 *Ibid.*, ix.

16 For example, new geological techniques allowed the dating of the earth as far older than most Protestant teachings allowed; even before Darwin, taxonomists and early evolutionists challenged the “absolute species” paradigm adopted by natural theology by problematizing clear species distinctions, and demonstrating generational changes in some organisms, respectively (see Hovenkamp 1978, 187–210).

17 Hovenkamp 1978, 206–7.

18 *Ibid.*, x.

fundamental incongruity.¹⁹ For example, in a 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II overcame the “apparent contradictions” between evolutionary theory and Catholic scripture by acceding to the historical facticity of evolution, whilst withholding for the Church the authority “to offer criteria for discerning the moral conduct required of all human beings.”²⁰

As Pope John Paul II's address reveals, the idea of dividing science and religion along a fact/value distinction has arisen as one response to the quandaries posed by evolution and other scientific theories. In the most influential representation of this line of thinking, the late Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould put forward a “blessedly simple and entirely conventional resolution to ... the supposed conflict between science and religion”²¹: “Non-Overlapping Magisteria” (NOMA). By “magisterium” Gould designates “a domain where one form of teaching holds the appropriate tools for meaningful discourse and resolution.”²² According to this schema, science and religion each have particular realms that are proper to them, and to which they are exclusively capable of attending: “the magisterium of science covers the empirical realm: what the Universe is made of (fact) and why [it works] in this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry.”²³ Speaking on the scientific creationism debate in particular, Gould refers to Pope Pius XII's *Humani Generis*²⁴ in arguing that evolution represents

19 Brooke 1991; Wilson 2002.

20 View the complete address at http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_jp02tc.htm.

21 Gould 2002, 3.

22 *Ibid.*, 5.

23 *Ibid.*, 6.

24 *Humani Generis* is an encyclical, bestowed in 1950 by Pope Pius XII, that considered the issue of evolution in a fashion precursory to that of John Paul II's 1996 address. Pius famously accepted evolution as a scientific theory, but with reservations that retained for the church what Gould has gone on to discuss as “magisterium” over matters of the spirit, morality, and values. *Humani Generis* is reproduced in full here: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_

a difficult area where the domains of science and religion press close together.²⁵ Adherents to Gould's formulation might conclude that the controversy over intelligent design and evolutionism is owing to breaches of the NOMA principle wherein religion trespasses upon the empirical, or science posits values that infringe upon the magisterium of moral value.

Gould's NOMA principle asks us to make an ontological commitment to a separation of fact from value, the empirical from the moral, and the phenomenal from the metaphysical. But can such an ontology correspond to science and religion as they present in lived actuality? We argue that while facts and values may be split analytically, this split dissolves immediately upon contact with the actual world in which we live—the world in which both science and religion come into being and have meaning for individuals. For example, for some evangelical Christians, the Bible is literally true, and associated moral codes derive from an adherence to values gleaned from the life that Jesus Christ, in matter of fact, is believed to have lived. Similarly, many environmentalists base their moral codes in ecology, a scientifically derived vision of “what is.” In both cases, the moral codes that inform individual and collective worldviews arise in relationship with a certain understanding of what the world of facts consists of and how it can be apprehended. This was recognized by the scholar Walter Benjamin, who argued that truth demands an interpretive understanding. Benjamin stated: “Truth is not an intent which realizes itself in empirical reality; it is the power which determines the essence of this empirical reality. The state of being, beyond all phenomenality, to which alone this power belongs, is that of the name.”²⁶ Truth is not an *a priori* that can be revealed through the correct application of intentional investigation, scientific or otherwise. This quality of truth leaves both inductive and deductive methods wanting; philosophical thought must be rooted in the description of the world of ideas.²⁷

By asserting that religion's proper domain is that

of value, and that science is calibrated to comprehend the material world, NOMA implicitly prioritizes the given-ness of material actuality: crudely put, science first describes the mechanics of the physical world; religion deciphers and gives it meaning. We argue, *contra* NOMA, that the world of facts is not ontologically prior to its apprehension and interpretation. The concept of non-overlapping magisteria is not rooted in a reading of how science and religion appear in the world, or how truth, in Benjamin's terms, “leaps out.”²⁸ Rather, it is rooted in a pre-conceived idea of an appropriate dualistic foundation for understanding the world. While on the basis of this foundation an analytical distinction can be made between fact and value, in the actual phenomenal world the two arise in a relationship that can not be undone. NOMA's dualism overlooks the very thing that grants religion meaning in this world. That is to say, the ability to interpret the world of facts as it is given on a sensory level grounds religion as meaningful for individuals. In other words, each form of religion must make reference to a foundational, material context in which it dwells—without which it would collapse into an arbitrary and unaccountable dogmatism.

Notwithstanding Gould's admirable reconciliatory attempts, under scrutiny the NOMA principle reveals its limitations. Furthermore, the impracticality of a neat fact/value division points to another commonly taken-for-granted distinction made between science and religion that must be interrogated before we can arrive at a new formulation for ethical mitigation. It is an aspect of religion—its situating of the ultimate foundation for values beyond the realm of human knowing or experiencing (a foundation often understood as God)—that compels us to speak of it as *metaphysical*. Science, on the contrary, is usually discussed in terms of “objectivity,” “neutrality,” and even “nature,” as it professes to speak only of the most concrete and knowable circumstances and proves its theories through experiment, replicability, and practice rather than faith. Although man-made disasters (for example, nuclear meltdown and climate change) and ethical debates over technologies (for example, abortion and human cloning) often bring science into

enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html.

25 Gould 1997.

26 Benjamin 2003, 36.

27 Benjamin 2003, 43.

28 Benjamin 2004, 404.

dialogue with socio-cultural values, science is generally not regarded in terms of metaphysics. However, the following section draws upon Heidegger's philosophy of metaphysics in order to show how science, as well as religion, is rooted in a metaphysical foundation.

Technological Enframing: The Metaphysics of Science

Heidegger uses etymology to recover essential meanings of words used by ancient Greek philosophers. Aletheia was the Greek goddess of truth; the Greek term *aletheia* means "revealing." Heidegger argues that, in contemporary Western thought, "truth" typically means "the correctness of an idea."²⁹ However, for the ancient Greeks, truth was that which is revealed. That is to say, truth is that which, moving from concealment into unconcealment, appears in nature of its own accord. But as we know, that which appears can be shaped one way or another. For example, the shoes that a cobbler makes could take any number of different forms. Thus, for the Greeks, the word *techne* designated that which, through man, shapes things to turn out one particular way instead of another. In this usage, *techne* is not merely a manufacturing, it "is a mode of revealing."³⁰ Keeping in mind that for the Greeks truth was that which is revealed, Heidegger can say that *techne* is a mode of revealing truth. Thus *techne* belonged to the fine arts as well as to human activities of a more instrumental nature—the poet revealed truth through the shaping of his poetry.³¹

Technology as we know it today has its roots in *techne*. For Heidegger, modern technology is still a mode of revealing; however, it now challenges nature and compels it to come forth, or reveal itself, as "standing-reserve." That is, modern technology demands that nature yield itself up as resources to be manipulated and managed.³² Following the Greek concept of *techne*, we can then say that modern technology is a way of revealing nature as resources for instrumental use by humans. Furthermore, because

techne is a way of revealing truth, this instrumental way of perceiving nature is legitimated as the correct or true interpretation of the human relationship to the world. Heidegger argued that this way of perceiving the world—which he termed *Enframing*—is the essence of technology. In itself, enframing is nothing technological; rather, it is the way in which nature comes to be seen as resources to be exploited.³³

Heidegger argued that technological enframing prefigures the objectives and practices of modern science.³⁴ But how does this relate to our argument that science has a metaphysical foundation? Science strives to achieve knowledge of truths that exist independently of humans *via* its method of research.³⁵ Yet scientific research cannot proceed in a void; there must first be a space in which research can take place. That is, there must be some idea—what Heidegger calls the "ground plan"—of nature in which research can unfold. Through the geometry and mathematics that, *via* Galileo and classical physics, established idealized shapes as those through which the empirical world is filtered, science conceptualizes nature as a "self-contained system of motion of units of mass related spatiotemporally."³⁶ Only through this ground plan are events in nature recognized as events. Thus research must bind itself to this particular view of nature for its procedure to be considered valid.³⁷ Of course, science recognizes the incredible diversity, complexity, and changeableness of interweaving phenomena; thus scientific research requires procedure to be able to apprehend, out of constant flux and change, objectively representable facts. But the ground plan that designates that which from these facts is ascertained is always already set. Thus before it has even begun, science has established a normative conception of the world, a conception that is then validated by subsequent research. Through science, man creates a model of the universe and his place in it.³⁸

We can say, then, that science rests on metaphysical

29 Heidegger 1977a, 12.

30 *Ibid.*, 13.

31 *Ibid.*, 34.

32 Heidegger 1977a, 14–15.

33 *Ibid.*, 20–23.

34 Heidegger 1977a, 23.

35 Heidegger 1977b, 170.

36 Heidegger 1977c, 119.

37 *Ibid.*, 119.

38 *Ibid.*, 128.

foundations. Metaphysics here does not mean a system of thought attributable to a particular thinker or group of thinkers.³⁹ Rather, metaphysics is “thought as the truth of what is as such in its entirety.”⁴⁰ Metaphysics is thinking that accounts for existence only through principles or foundations that rest beyond actual phenomenal experience. Thus we can say science is a metaphysical enterprise because it relies upon a concept of what nature is as the foundation for all its findings. This concept then confronts us as the “truth” of existence.

Nihilism and Metaphysics

If Heidegger allows us to view science in terms of the dominant metaphysical expression of our era, Vattimo charts possibilities for an ethical politics that proceeds from this realization. Democratic ethics require values, yet as we have observed, values often belong, in our era, to metaphysical systems of thought. It is therefore not immediately clear what form ethics might take without inhabiting a metaphysical position that posits its own fundamental assumptions, or, as Aristotle would have it, a “golden mean” beyond experiential existence to which our values and morals are calibrated. Indeed, Vattimo recognizes a great peril in metaphysics and orients his philosophy to its overcoming: “the effective rationalization of the world through science and technology unveils the true meaning of metaphysics: will to power, violence, the destruction of liberty.”⁴¹ In order to show what form this overcoming might take, and how it may be enacted with respect to philosophical problems that have been politicized in the way that intelligent design has been, we must first understand the nature of the danger posed by metaphysics.

Drawing on Heidegger’s thought, Vattimo argues that European philosophy, from the pre-Socratics to Nietzsche, was characterized by the “oblivion of Being” that is the core of metaphysics. Since the beginning of philosophy, Being itself has been thought of not in its relationship to the “concrete

historical situation of users of language”⁴² but as some kind of condition, or status, that has an inherent character and that may be “discovered” or “revealed” through proper thought.⁴³ This oblivion “forgets” that Being is not an object, but is the very “aperture within which alone man and the world, subject and object, can enter into relationship.”⁴⁴ For Heidegger, the externalization of Being from human immediacy meant the objectification of the relationship of man and world into something to be “discovered” and “revealed” rather than simply lived. This “forgetting” of Being allowed philosophy to take as its task a certain searching for the nature of Being—which took the form of the seeking out and securing of “ultimate foundations” to which human actuality was subsequently oriented. And, as we have discussed, the privileging of thought originating outside experience as the context in which to consider our lived actualities is the very essence of metaphysics.

The dominance of certain foundational thought is understood by Vattimo as the “violent essence of metaphysics.”⁴⁵ In our current era, “the foundationalism of metaphysics is ... responsible for modern rationalization, its violence, and its fragmentizing effect on the significance of existence.”⁴⁶ Violence is commonly thought of in terms of the denial of rights, an unwelcome imposition, or a physical harming—but Vattimo does not mean only the instances and conditions that confront us as ostensibly violent but also the very unquestioned principles that allow, bring upon, and “legitimize” those conditions. We have discussed the specific hazards of the total rationalization of society through technological enframing—hazards that Karl Marx articulated when he spoke of the “alienation” of man from his “species-being,” as did Max Weber when he described the “iron-cage” of unrestrained bureaucratization—but metaphysics also poses the more general violence of the imposi-

39 Heidegger 1977d, 54.

40 *Ibid.*

41 2004, 11.

42 Vattimo 2004, 4.

43 Consider, for example, Plato’s theory of forms that views all earthly objects of sensory perception as but “pale shadows” of the unchanging, ultimate forms that belong to a higher realm beyond human experience.

44 Vattimo 2004, 6.

45 2004, 11.

46 *Ibid.*

tion of normativities on others. For example, moral codes, whether derived from religion or the realm of scientific “facts,” may ascribe a negativity to certain activities or conditions and therefore legitimate their violent oppression. Metaphysics, therefore, oppresses in that it designates the intelligibility and moral textures of the aperture of Being through which the world presents itself.

In contemplating overcoming this violence, Vattimo rejects the popular recourse to “critical” thinking, “which could only arise through reliance upon another first principle . . . and thus a foundation.”⁴⁷ He holds that the proper response to metaphysics is *nihilism*. To some, nihilism could signify *atheism* or *anarchy*, which would be wholly imprecise. Rather, Vattimo means “what Nietzsche called nihilism: not just the nihilism that acts as a solvent of all principles and values but also an ‘active’ nihilism, the chance to begin a different history.”⁴⁸ The dissolution of principles must prefigure an ethics equipped to counter the violence of metaphysics, otherwise we “[repeat] the metaphysical game of the first principles by taking a specific and particular myth as an ideological absolute.”⁴⁹ The question arises: Surely principles exist precisely to *prevent* violence; without them are we not opening ourselves up to the possibility of unchecked exploitation, oppression, and other harms? To the contrary: “the temptation to violence may never be extinguished—any more than it is within any other frame of reference. The difference here is that the temptation is stripped of all appearance of legitimacy: something that is not the case with essentialist ethics.”⁵⁰

To arrive at an ethics from a position of nihilism, we must adopt what Vattimo calls an “ontology of actuality.” This is a philosophical position, otherwise known as “weak ontology,” that abandons its orientation to the Truth of Being—which, in our era, is actually the oblivion of Being—and instead attempts “to clarify what Being signifies in the

present situation.”⁵¹ In other words, weak ontology forgoes what is ordinarily thought of as the matter of ontology: the underlying “strong” terms of Being, the lasting matter of “is-ness.” Instead, it becomes “weak” by contemplating the meaning of Being as it confronts us through lived actuality—that is, as Being is presented by the governing metaphysical principles of an era. Weak ontology is ethical when it beholds violence and asks: From what principle(s) does this violence obtain its legitimacy? The ethics of weak ontology is therefore a hermeneutical engagement with metaphysics in order to reveal the violence it legitimizes. This hermeneutics conceptualizes the world as a conflict of interpretations and reinterpretations, rather than lasting Truths, and thus weakens metaphysical foundationalism.

Nihilism and Intelligent Design

The foregoing analysis equips us to rethink the intelligent design debate in at least three ways. First, we have shown that attempts to distinguish science and religion as the proper magisteria of fact and value are symptomatic of the metaphysical tendency to compartmentalize reality in accordance with certain ordering principles. Therefore, the intelligent design debate—as it is articulated in terms of science and religion—owes its volatility to its appearance as “a dogmatic clash between conflicting truths.”⁵²

Second, by calling into question any ontologically “strong” foundation of reality, truth, or the legitimacy of knowledge, and by recognizing any such ideas as metaphysically contingent, we open the way for a hermeneutic acceptance of the ideas, theories, and values of various schools of thought that ask to be considered “scientific” or “religious,” and so on, without orienting this acceptance to a hierarchical or exclusionary principle of legitimacy. This allows a contemplation of intelligent design and Darwinian evolutionism—or any other constellation of thought—in their unique “provenance and heritage.”⁵³ In this way, we can reclaim thought in

47 2004, 11.

48 *Ibid.*, 40.

49 *Ibid.*, 41.

50 *Ibid.*, 47.

51 Vattimo 2004, 3–4.

52 Vattimo and Zabala 2002, 454.

53 Vattimo 2004, 40.

its historical and cultural situatedness, rather than permitting it to stand over us, and dispel the finality of facticity from which violence draws its power.

Third, and most importantly, the terms of the intelligent design debate reveal something of the irresistible hold of technological enframing in our current era. This can be observed in the fact that proponents of intelligent design can be seen to adopt what metaphysics has secured as the dominant legitimizing discourse of our era: that of scientific evidence. Perhaps the most threatening and objectionable element of intelligent design to orthodox scientists—and certainly what has prompted responses such as that at the SALK institute—is the appropriation of a language that, in our current era, is deemed proper to the project of universal rationalism legitimated by technological enframing. NOMA speaks of technological enframing when it rationalizes a separation of the spheres of religion and science to nullify the mutual threat of de-legitimization felt by those with the slightest insecurities about their position *vis-à-vis* Truth. We must ask: What do some scientists fear from a contradictory explanation, and what do some people invested in a theological principle fear from the theories of Darwinian evolutionism, unless both obey the logic inherent to technological enframing that permits, indeed *legitimizes*, only one dominant principle?

That intelligent design theory reveals the metaphysical foundations of our era points to the possibilities of nihilism's "chance to begin a different history."⁵⁴ The political impasse reached on this subject calls for a radical rethinking, and we have put forward the case for a weak ontological reconciliation. Immediate practical solutions with respect to the question of the pedagogy of origins may only be tentatively arrived at until a rigorous analysis of nihilism's implications is carried out. However, a democratic ethics as outlined here does not advocate an "anything-goes" approach that would permit without proviso the teaching of intelligent design in science classes. Rather, in recognition that education must (pragmatically) be compartmentalized into certain subjects, nihilism—as elaborated herein—

would suggest that science should not be privileged with an aura of authority over that which is real, but presented as much as possible in its own "provenance and heritage." It would be the duty of science teachers to incorporate a hermeneutics to their pedagogy that explicitly qualifies the theories of science as historically situated, always only hypothetical, and contingent upon an ordering vision of the world. Of course, Darwinian evolutionism as a scientific theory should be subject to questioning—but it would breach the ethics of weak ontology to do so through the import of a foundationalism. Whether or not intelligent design theory speaks of, explicitly or implicitly, any form of fundamental principles whatsoever is the question that must be asked first. Second, the question of whether intelligent design theory actually emanates from the provenance and heritage of science—or from some other influence—remains in some doubt. If these concerns cannot be met, and if our analysis is accepted, it is difficult to ethically justify the inclusion of intelligent design theory, at least in science curricula.

Nihilism does not deny scientific rationality, Darwinism, or, indeed, God—to do so would require a strong ontology of the universal. It opposes only the imposition of normative frameworks that proceed from such ontologies. And it is most crucial to the limiting of future violence that this imposition is resisted as far as possible in the education of our children.

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54 Vattimo 2004, 40.

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