

# NEITHER EARTH NOR AIR BEYOND ROOTEDNESS AND TOWARD AN INDEXICALIST THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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“The Void is not of the nature of a black abyss / or a bottomless pit.  
Rather is its nature vast and expansive as space itself.”  
– Unattributed Chinese Saying<sup>2</sup>  
“Knowledge is not all.”  
-Raimon Panikkar<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This investigation explores questions of rootedness and pluralism through a comparative analysis of the thinking of Martin Heidegger, Hilan Bensusan, and Raimon Panikkar. Bensusan’s “metaphysics of the others” is akin to the active openness for which Heidegger himself would later advocate, but it also moves beyond Heidegger’s thinking by envisioning a rootedness that is simultaneously determined by and responsive to otherness. Bensusan’s indexicalism and his metaphysics of the others have many points of convergence with Panikkar’s pluralist theological ontology. After considering their respective and complementary approaches to thinking otherness, this investigation concludes by considering new possibilities for regrounding theological inquiry afforded by joining Panikkar and Bensusan’s rethinking of rootedness.

**KEYWORDS:** Bensusan; Indexicality; Heidegger

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<sup>2</sup> Although its attribution ultimately remains unclear, this quotation, which I first encountered in Panikkar’s *The Rhythm of Being*, seems to trace back to S.C. Malik. Cf. S.C. Malik, “Dimensionless Space as Eternal Silence”, in Kapila Vatsyayan (ed.), *Concepts of Space Ancient and Modern*, New Delhi, Abhinav Publications, 1991, p. 43, and Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2010, p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 247.

Whether they are located in class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, geographies, personal histories, tribal or family ties, or religious traditions, questions regarding roots and rooted identities have long been a matter of concern for thinking. Thinking of roots can give rise to the inclusivity of communal belonging, but it is also difficult—if not impossible—to separate the constitution of such collectivities from a simultaneous act of boundary setting and extra-communal exclusion.<sup>4</sup> A brief consideration of the politically noxious contenders vying to hegemonically interpret the meaning of “our roots” should suffice to bring into view the menacing potential of this tendency toward exclusivity.

Thinking about rootedness conjures an array of epistemological, ontological, and ethical challenges, but foregoing such thinking is no less problematic. Martin Heidegger initiates his theorization of rootedness in the 1920s. By the 1930s, he arrives at a notion of rootedness that is fundamentally characterized by constancy (*Ständigkeit*) and hardness (*Härte*). His early formulations symptomatically register problems that are endemic to the search for and defense of roots. Indeed, thinkers as diverse as André Gide, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas—who is himself an essential interlocutor in *Indexicalism*<sup>5</sup>, all offer critical variations on the theme of rootedness and identify Heidegger as the primary target of their critiques.

This investigation begins by engaging with the particularly problematic rendering of rootedness that grows out of Heidegger’s early search for a new philosophical beginning. Its second section then explores how Hilan Bensusan’s indexical interiority surpasses the limitations of Heidegger’s initial formulation of rootedness and instead cultivates a radical openness to otherness. Bensusan’s

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis’s brief visit to Hungary on Sept. 12, 2021 demonstrates the persistent tension between belonging and exclusion that accompanies talk of roots: “‘Religious sentiment has been the lifeblood of this nation, so attached to its roots,’ he said. ‘Yet the cross, planted in the ground, not only invites us to be well-rooted, it also raises and extends its arms toward everyone.’ He said Hungarians should stay firm in their roots while ‘opening ourselves to the thirst of the men and women of our time.’” Cf. Nicole Winfield and Justin Spike, “Pope to Orban’s Hungary: Open your arms to everyone”, *AP NEWS* (Budapest, Hungary), September 12, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-hungary-viktor-orban-a4b22835a4549c109bf1acoce3c8190d>.

<sup>5</sup> Hilan Bensusan, *Indexicalism: Realism and the Metaphysics of Paradox*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021, p. 9.

metaphysics of the others is akin to the active openness that Heidegger himself would later advocate, but it also goes further by making the reality of rootedness into something that is simultaneously determined by and responsive to others. For Bensusan, the hole in the whole is also an aperture enabling communion with the Other.<sup>6</sup> The investigation's third section examines some of the possibilities that accompany that space for communion and presents a series of other points where Bensusan's metaphysics converge with the pluralist theological ontology of Raimon Panikkar. A final section concludes by focusing on how, in addition to safeguarding ethical communion with the other, joining the strengths of Panikkar and Bensusan's respective approaches can disclose unforeseen, untotalizable possibilities that herald a new beginning for theological inquiry.

#### THE POISONED ROOTS OF HEIDEGGER'S *BODENSTÄNDIGKEIT*

Heidegger's theorization of rootedness is initially guided by his reading of the *Correspondence between Wilhelm Dilthey and Count Paul Yorck von Wartenburg*.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly evident in his reconceptualization of Yorck's notion of *Bodenständigkeit*.<sup>8</sup> Charles R. Bambach argues that Heidegger's reading of Yorck leads him to focus on "the constancy (*Ständigkeit*) of tradition and the rootedness in one's native soil (*Bodenständigkeit*) as something dynamic and in need of continual revision and interpretation."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps unexpectedly, the desire for dynamism causes Heidegger to insist that patriotism, the fatherland, and the standard Nazi articulation of *Boden* (ground or soil) are incapable of sustaining the *Ständigkeit* (constancy) necessary for establishing a new opening onto the

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<sup>6</sup> As a means of distinguishing it from other usages, I follow Bensusan's appropriation of the Levinasian capitalization of "Other" when referencing the other that transcends the situation, forms a horizon, and is defined by radical alterity (to name just some of its features). Cf. Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 17. Yorck's language echoes in Heidegger's critique of Weimar Germany and the rootlessness of "various world-views associated with liberalism, cosmopolitanism, relativism, and sociological theory." Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16. There is a clear trajectory from such verbiage back to Yorck's own lamentation that "with the alienation from the soil the sustaining force has been lost. This rootless status yields an unsteady balance in the human being and in his life-forms gives way to every convulsion." Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger's thinking of rootedness generally prefers the word *Bodenständigkeit* to the word *Verwurzelung*, both of which can be translated as "rootedness." Cf. Christy Wampole, *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 19.

possibilities of history.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he held the same to be true of any static, substantial tradition or concept of identity. This fundamentally changes the question of rootedness. Instead of asking where and in what people should be rooted, the focus of inquiry becomes *how* rooting happens and what its happening requires.

The multiple connotations of the word *Bodenständigkeit* should be understood in terms of this rearticulation of the question of rootedness. Translations of *Bodenständigkeit* into English vary widely.<sup>11</sup> All current renderings attempt to capture how rootedness maintains a relationship with the ground where roots take hold. For Heidegger, the customary immobility of rootedness is replaced by a dynamic directionality. His rootedness traverses a long-obscured path back to the original Greek experience of being.<sup>12</sup> He argues that the whole of Western thinking about being and truth since Plato has been decisively shaped by a misunderstanding of that experience.<sup>13</sup> For Heidegger, that originary experience should give rise to a questioning that would make possible a decisive

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<sup>10</sup> Heidegger emphasizes that whatever grounding potential these signifiers may have had was already exhausted during Bismarck's Second Reich. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nature, History, State. 1933-1934*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 52. This insistence separates Heidegger from traditionalists like Böhm who think of rootedness in terms of the preservation of historical German traditions and folkways. Cf. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Metcalf enumerates the following common renderings: "... There is no particularly good English equivalent of the German word, *Bodenständigkeit*, just as there is no particularly good English equivalent of *Gelassenheit*. The difficulty involved in translating *Bodenständigkeit* is shown by the fact that it is rendered in English with the words, "autochthony," "subsistence," "indigenous character," "native ground," "ground-hold," "groundedness," "rootedness" or "rootedness in the soil"—all of which are correct, to be sure, though each falls short in some specific way. In certain contexts, something like "rootedness" seems the best choice and for this reason has been chosen by translators, but it misleadingly suggests that Heidegger is using one of the many words he uses with the root, *Wurzel*, "root"—such as *Verwurzelung*, *Entwurzelung*, etc. "Autochthony" is the preferred translation by Alfred Denker, Theodore Kisiel, and Joan Stambaugh; this rendering has the advantage and disadvantage of being a word seldom ever used in English—which is an advantage, certainly, inasmuch as it thereby catches the attention of the reader as a concept worthy of noting; the disadvantage, however, is that the adjective, "autochthonous" does not parallel the ordinariness of *bodenständig* in German, which means something more like "native" or "grounded" or "down to earth" in English. Schürmann's "ground-hold" has what may be the greater advantage of being a word never used in English—although, conversely, it has no adjectival form whatsoever." Cf. Robert Metcalf, "Rethinking '*Bodenständigkeit*' in the Technological Age," *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 42, 2012, p. 50 fn 2. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916412x628748>.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth", in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 181-182.

reconfiguration of the *Boden* of *Bodenständigkeit*. Accordingly, attentiveness to the grounding question that constitutes *Boden* is what determines the *Ständigkeit* or constancy underlying his *Bodenständigkeit*. This constancy manifests as an unrelenting, questioning search through which Heidegger hopes to return rootedness to a fundamental grounding. Nevertheless, because of Heidegger's rejection of substantial identities, the grounding that he seeks has more to do with the action of return than with that return's destination. Such a return is perilously difficult. It requires sacrificing identities, preconceptions, comfort, and security. It must be endured, not just once, but constantly. Heidegger insists that such endurance demands hardness. Furthermore, inasmuch as the constancy of such a thinking would be unending, the hardness demanded to guarantee its persistence would also have to be limitless.

Heidegger's emphatic assertion of the necessity of hardness is initially modeled on the romanticized bellicosity of two sources: Ernst Jünger's tales of iron wills forged in the crucible of World War I<sup>14</sup> and Werner Jaeger's heroic portrayal of the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus in his "Tyrtaeus on True *Arete*."<sup>15</sup> Heidegger's focus on constancy and hardness reached its apex with his adoption of Nietzschean vocabulary in general and the concept of hardness in particular.<sup>16</sup> Both the indispensability of hardness and its function are explicit in the lectures that Heidegger gave during his rectorate from 1933-1934:

[...] The reverse is needed from the start: to create and to awaken *fundamental moods* through *originary courage*—that then all things become visible, decidable, and durable. I repeat: this is the courage for what is originary as one's own. [...] And if we now want to grasp the essence of truth, that is, work it out, then this means that, through our acting, we must experience and demonstrate how much truth we can endure and withstand.<sup>17</sup>

This philosophical trajectory is doomed from the outset. The flexibility necessary for constant questioning is inimical to the hardness that he requires.

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<sup>14</sup> Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010, p. 70. Original emphasis.

Heidegger's constant questioning is supposed to counteract and overcome the desire for a static, substantial *Boden*, but the hardness of its rigid, unfeeling execution instead petrifies its destination, secures a perimeter, declares who is worthy of entrance, and thereby asserts the mutual exclusivity of a confrontation. The result is a scene with insiders and outsiders that mutually define each other through a constant, hardened opposition.<sup>18</sup> Such opposition leads to an unwillingness to give ground and provokes the paralysis of trench warfare. It replaces the dynamic motion of revision with constant immobility and reinforcement of identity. Heidegger hopes for a mobile, renewed, and renewing thinking, but the interconnection of constancy and hardness within this version of rootedness counteracts any such potential.

Neither the search for grounding nor its failure are new to philosophy. However, beyond exposing the limitations and failures of this initial search for another rootedness, its emphasis on constancy and its attendant hardness also illustrates the dire consequences of a rootedness gone wrong. Despite his erstwhile disavowal of antisemitism, the interdependence of constancy and hardness in Heidegger's *Bodenständigkeit* also evinces how his thinking in this period remains fatally rooted in antisemitic prejudices.

As the authors of *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-semitism* make clear, there is a two-fold danger in this formulation of rootedness. On one hand, the positive valorization of *Bodenständigkeit* develops in opposition to a negative valorization of the putative rootlessness of nomadic peoples emblemized in the antisemitic stereotype of the "Wandering Jew." Sander L. Gilman has conclusively shown that, rather than being an idiosyncratic feature of Heidegger's philosophy, "when it comes to the Jews [Heidegger] falls into the well-worn tracks of anti-Semitic hysteria from centuries past."<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the situation grows even darker when we note along with Peter Trawny how Heidegger's early formulations of rootlessness deepen their antisemitism by going beyond ontic

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger's conception of this form of confrontation, wherein one element is defined by and through its opposition to another, is *Aus-ein-ander-setzung* (confrontation). Cf. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 19. A similar dynamic of identity through oppositional determination is also fundamental for the thinking of Carl Schmitt. For example, this dynamic is an essential feature of his *Theory of the Partisan*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sander L. Gilman, "Cosmopolitan Jews vs. Jewish Nomads: Sources of a Trope", in Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny (eds.), *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 35.

stereotypes regarding particular Jews and instead making rootlessness into an essentially Jewish feature with being-historical significance.<sup>20</sup> This means that, from Heidegger's perspective, the thinking of rootedness requires not only a rejection of rootlessness, but also the affirmation of an inevitable confrontation with the Jewish people so construed.

Exposing a logic similar to the one undergirding defenses of Heidegger's antisemitism through an appeal to his anti-biologism, Bambach concludes that Heidegger's understanding of *Bodenständigkeit* "is no less 'National Socialist' than the theory of race."<sup>21</sup> If this were the end of the story, perhaps it would be best to reject all talk of rootedness outright. The thinking of rootedness explicated above coincides with the nadir of Heidegger's moral and philosophical trajectory and, as such, it might seem as if the question has been poisoned from the roots up. Nevertheless, Bensusan's theorization of indexical interiority remedies the problem of constancy, hardness, and antisemitic essentialism that precipitated Heidegger's downfall.

#### BREAKING GROUND: STANDING LOCATION AND THE INDEXICAL SITUATION

Bensusan's approach to rootedness both responds to and differentiates itself from Heidegger's in a way that supplants and supplements many of the limitations and hazards that rot Heidegger's *Bodenständigkeit* from the inside. The basic features that emerge within the proximity of indexical interiority forestall appeals to any sort of pure racial, historical, cultural, or linguistic *Boden*. Indexicalism instead converts rootedness into the proximal deixis of a standing location that makes cohabitation possible. The fact that the genesis of the standing location is not predicated on any deeper or prior substantial or processual elements makes it a space that is especially capable of accommodating otherness. Such a space resists and dismantles all attempts at asserting fundamental identities and origins. Rather than challenging its surroundings to come forth and reveal themselves in opposition to an identity defined through confrontation, the indexical

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Peter Trawny, "The Universal and Annihilation: Heidegger's Being-Historical Anti-Semitism", in Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny (eds.), *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 65.

environment is marked by a recognition of partiality and abhorrence of totality that allow an environment's denizens to emerge without compulsion or anatomization through comprehension and abstraction.<sup>22</sup> By rejecting the temptation to begin his account by presupposing the substantial presence of anything or any thing, Bensusan picks up on a trail that Heidegger himself began to explore in the early 1930s. However, Bensusan's results are arguably more faithful to Heidegger's initial goals than Heidegger's ever were, entangled as he was in his prejudices regarding the preeminence of Western philosophy and the German language.<sup>23</sup>

"The indexical notion of horizon" entails a form of vision grounded in the impossibility of seeing or having everything all to oneself.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to Heidegger's assertions, no amount of endurance will allow one to bear the universal alone because all perspectives are both partial and shared. There is no room here for a solitary contemplation of the destiny of all things, because "whatever takes place takes place not in a showcase that can be viewed from nowhere, but rather within the horizon shared by everything else."<sup>25</sup> Rather than being dependent on the view from a particular metaphysical horizon, Bensusan's notion of horizon instead acknowledges the shared strength of a plurality of

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<sup>22</sup> In this and many other regards, the indexical standing location shares features with the idea of exposure that comes to the fore in Heidegger's later thinking. As Andrew J. Mitchell shows, this notion of exposure emerges in part through his revisions to the concept of animality that was initially elaborated in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Cf. Andrew J. Mitchell, "Heidegger's Later Thinking of Animality: The End of World Poverty", *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* vol. 1, 2011, pp. 74-85,

<https://doi.org/10.5840/gatherings201114>.

<sup>23</sup> The priority that Heidegger assigns to the German language and German philosophy is both explicit and directly connected to rootedness in "Europe and the German Philosophy" (1936): "And yet, this is precisely the most intimate self-concealed trait of German philosophy: along with the configuration of modern mathematical thinking in the Systems of Idealism, it constantly desires to return to an original point of departure and ground of the first question about Beyng; to the truth that is not only a determination or assertion about things but essence itself; to Beyng that is not only object and idea but Beyng itself. Meister Eckhart and Jakob Böhme, Leibniz and Kant, Schelling and Hölderlin, and finally Nietzsche repeatedly seek to get back to the ground of Beyng, which in the different interpretations becomes for each one of them an abyss. [...] In asking the *fundamental question* of Western philosophy again, from a *more original* beginning, we only stand in the service of *that* task that we called the saving of the West. It can only be accomplished by winning back the original relations to beings themselves and by *grounding anew* all essential actions of the *Völker* on these relations." Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Europe and German Philosophy (*Europa und die deutsche Philosophie*)", trans. Andrew Haas, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* vol. VI, 2006, p. 339.

<sup>24</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,



particular perspectives. Indexical interiority entails an interdependence with other perspectives that transforms isolated stances of particularity into a ground for community. I am not the others, but the interiority inhabited by our encounters is a communal space. The standing location is connected with but also irreducible to other proximal relations and situations. Indexicalism sketches a picture of interlocking interiorities wherein heterogenous realities are conversant and shareable.

Bensusan's prioritization of interiority allows indexicalism to achieve the simplicity of vision that Heidegger earnestly sought to recover from the horizon that sustained the thinking of Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Plato. Instead of trying to locate that simplicity through an experience of the vision made possible by that particular ancient Greek horizon, indexicalism recognizes that simplicity in the experience of *any horizon in particular*.<sup>26</sup> The experience of thinking from a situated interior and toward an inward-facing, external horizon reveals a primordial perspective common to thinking, experience, and existence. It unmoors the common ground of an eminently fungible and dynamic standing location. Its fundamental components are deictic markers which are always context-dependent and subject to change.<sup>27</sup> Indexicalism holds that thinking from this metaphysical locus enables an experience of the transcendent Other without assimilating or dominating its alterity.

As Bensusan rightly signals, this experience closely resembles the Heideggerian notion of *Nähe*, an open proximity that makes it possible to wait for, anticipate, and attend to the presence of another and the Other without recurring to force or compulsion.<sup>28</sup> At bottom, indexicalism's standing location is nothing more than a possible locus for the instantiation of deixis, but the complex of interiority that results from those deictic operations is nevertheless fundamentally determined from the outside. The Other is involved in the interior as an ever-present and unsurpassable exterior or horizon. Whether as "outside, outer, the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>27</sup> "Surely, it is only with respect to a standing location that a deictic operation like *horizon* can work; from a fixed standing location, things appear and disappear, much like events that take place." Ibid.,

<sup>28</sup> "Heidegger opposes proximity (*Nähe*) to that which knows no distance [...]. *Nähe* is about a presence that is not forced; it's about not placing something on a map but waiting until it makes itself present. It is akin to having something on one's horizon." Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 56.

Outdoors, [or] the Other;”<sup>29</sup> the exterior is what makes the thought of a deictically-constituted interior possible. The exterior as the Other in its radical alterity is a component of “a reality that is more like a horizon than something that can be mapped. Reality is therefore not only incomplete but incompletionable.”<sup>30</sup>

The need to save the Other from assimilation into the interior and prevent the closure of reality within totality are primary motivators of Bensusan’s critique of metaphysics. That motivation makes the metaphysics of the others an indispensable feature of indexicalism. Accordingly, although the interiorities composed of deictic operations are the ultimate constituents of indexical reality, that reality is itself paradoxically determined by what remains outside of it. This makes relationships of proximity a part of all interiorities, but as their boundary. The external, as that which cannot be assumed or subsumed into the interior, constantly determines the possible proximal relations without itself being determined. It creates a proximity that cannot be exhausted, consumed, or reduced to being just another instantiation of the beings situated within. The paradoxical centrality of the exterior in indexical interiority lends that space an ethical orientation. It becomes a site of resistance against the imposition of totality. The interior perspective requires a transcendent concern for alterity that overcomes the temptation of thinking that what there is is all that there is, and nothing else.

The paradoxical status of the exterior within the metaphysics of the others has profound ramifications for a thinking of rootedness and community. What it means to be rooted changes because the proximal community that makes such rootedness localizable and renders it intelligible is itself determined by an Other that transcends that community. In contrast with Heidegger’s account of *Bodenständigkeit*, the hardness that delimits communal proximity is no longer possible in such a situation since the Other is both determinative of and—albeit in a peculiar way—included within the community as its boundary. Bensusan’s paradoxical exteriority both touches the interior and remains out of reach. The result is an ethically-charged form of proximity that allows for rootedness to be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 98. Also Cf. Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

reconceptualized in terms of responsibility, attentiveness, and tenderness. In line with Heidegger's initial insight, indexical rootedness does not depend upon a static ground. No *Boden* can circumscribe it, because its constitutive Other always escapes circumscription and comprehension. Unlike Heidegger's *Bodenständigkeit*, its activity is based not in overcoming and relentless searching, but rather in an inhabitation characterized by attentive sensitivity, responsive hospitality, and tender reception.

This transformed and transformative mode of rootedness is augmented by Bensusan's embrace of Silvia Benso's notion of tenderness. Benso argues that such tenderness is the ethical disposition most befitting the indexical interior's orientation toward the exterior other. This conception of tenderness is a mode of "attention to things" characterized by "passivity, patience, susceptibility to what is other than itself and the subject in which it is experienced."<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, tenderness functions as "a metaphysical horizon" that is "oblivious to universality" and contrasts with "the violence and aggression" that can be associated with ontology.<sup>32</sup> Tenderness operates according to an ethical concern for those in our proximity because it "is situated, directed to singularities and guided by a claim to responsibility."<sup>33</sup> Instead of constantly returning to the self, it perseveres "as it sticks to an aim that is not guided by an agenda but by a need to respond."<sup>34</sup> The tenderness of this approach echoes the meditative mode of being that Heidegger would later envision after rejecting the attitudes of constancy and hardness that prevailed in his early theorization of rootedness.<sup>35</sup> The proximal interiority of the standing location and its concomitant ethical epistemology of tender receptivity signal the new ground that Heidegger longed to uncover, but it is wholly unlike a *Boden* forged through hardened struggle and the unyielding endurance of a constant return.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>35</sup> In his *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger opines that "if releasement toward things and openness to the mystery awaken within us, then we should arrive at a path that will lead to a new ground and foundation. In that ground the creativity which produces lasting works could strike new roots." Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York, Harper & Row, 1966, pp. 56-57.

The metaphysics of the others is rooted, but not like a tree. It is much more akin to an aerophyte than a terrestrial plant. It is nourished by the air of its surroundings instead of being grounded in and immobilized by an absolute location. Instead of latching onto a site to extract its nourishment and ensure stable development, the disposition that permeates the indexical standing location and the attitude that responds to a world oriented according to the metaphysics of the others both flourish within the openness, receptivity, and instability that define that situation. This orientation and the understanding that it cultivates are fundamentally ethical, but they also resonate with theological understandings of mystical experience. A world so understood is amenable to the call of the Great Outdoors and the call of the infinite other, but its spatial configuration also accommodates the kind of encounters with the divine spoken of in the mystical strands of many religious traditions.<sup>36</sup> The combination of the peculiar features of indexicalism and the metaphysics of the others can accordingly enshrine and illuminate an environment that is propitious for reimagining the groundwork of a decidedly pluralist theological thinking.

To be sure, Bensusan does not aspire to be a theologian. The priorities that shape indexicalism and the metaphysics of the others prompt him to eschew totality and insist that the big Other does not coincide with reality.<sup>37</sup> Those same priorities are also what lead him to join company with Heidegger in his condemnation of ontotheology and the ease with which talk of God leads to the dangers of *Gestell*,<sup>38</sup> both of which are antithetical to Bensusan's thinking.<sup>39</sup> From this, we may conclude that whatever notion of God is posited in indexicalism's confrontation with totality is itself equivalent to that big Other, "the reader of an official version [of reality] that doesn't admit that anything is concealed except circumstantially"<sup>40</sup> who thereby provokes "the forgetting or concealment of being

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<sup>36</sup> As only one example, we might compare this vision of the world with Hermes Trismegistus's elegant description of the divine in the *Emerald Tablet*: "God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference no-where." Cited in Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>38</sup> In a translator's note, Andrew J. Mitchell defines "positionality" (*Gestell*) as "a process of conscription [*Gestellung*] that adopts and compels whatever it encounters into the order of standing reserve." Cf. Andrew J. Mitchell, "Translator's Foreword", in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. xi.

<sup>39</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

as what escapes any metaphysical protocol.”<sup>41</sup> Such a God would amount to little more than a patch fashioned out of epistemological hubris to cover the fundamental incompleteness of reality and hide the horror and obligation that emerge from unlimited exposure to an unpredictable and indeterminate other.<sup>42</sup> As seen in the following claims, Bensusan’s explicit talk of God almost always proceeds in the negative: Bensusan agrees with Quentin Meillassoux’s claim that “the supposedly extraordinary advent of God coming to existence” would not allow a general principle to overcome the transcendence of exteriority;<sup>43</sup> not even the hyper-impersonal God of Spinoza can escape the influence of deixis because it is tied to an entity that bears predication;<sup>44</sup> the “outdoors is beyond the very reach of a judgment of God” because the former “is oblivious to God”;<sup>45</sup> and, in another echo of Meillassoux, even if God were to exist, “not even a God could exorcise the principle of facticity.”<sup>46</sup> Indexicalism clearly harbors no explicit theological aims, and yet, as I will now show, its metaphysical innovations nonetheless have extensive, productive ramifications for the development of a pluralist theology.

#### NEITHER EARTH NOR AIR: THEOLOGY UPROOTED

Bensusan’s indexicalism represents a challenge to any thinking grounded in assertions of traditional authority and dogmatic exclusivity. Inasmuch as the rootedness of circumscribed, dogmatic traditions leads to claims of both oppositionality and uniqueness, localization within them entails the rejection of pluralism and the denial of any experience of truth that might contradict the dogmas that define them. Theological thinking often suffers from the imposition of these limitations, but the determinative role of the exterior Other in indexicalism and the metaphysics of the others provides a key to unlocking new

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>42</sup> Such an image is antithetical to the indexicalist project: “Not only is our access to it limited by what is intrinsically opaque, but reality is never complete and therefore cannot do away with exterior borders. The idea of a complete or total account of things—although always tentative—flies in the face of the metaphysics of the others, for the Great Outdoors is such that it cannot be definitively tamed into an all-pervasive image.” *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

theological pathways.

Consonant with the indexicalist spirit, Raimon Panikkar's advaitic<sup>47</sup> theology also struggles against the dependence upon totalization that characterizes the exclusivist theological traditions just described. Advaita or a-dualism (often translated as "non-dualism") asserts neither monism nor dualism, but rather a negation of both possibilities that consequently points toward a third option which defies conceptualization or positivization. The centrality of advaita to Panikkar's theology is just one trace of the comparative, conversational intertwining of multiple theological and philosophical languages that informs his thinking. It also coincides with the structures of indexical interiority and the priorities that shape the metaphysics of the others. The ramifications of those many points of overlap for both theological and religio-philosophical discourse are manifold. Here, I will limit myself to a brief survey of some of the homologous features of Bensusan and Panikkar's respective systems, including: the paradoxical impossibility of both metaphysics and theology; the priority of deixis and the rejection of totality; the impossibility of exhausting or objectifying the other; the emptiness of interiority and its centrality to how reality is modeled; the shared conversational structure of their respective accounts; and their emphasis on both ethics and emotions as fundamental features of cognition. By examining these points of convergence, I hope to both indicate how theology might respond to indexicalism and to signal the affinities between Bensusan's thinking and the stipulations and desiderata of Panikkarian theology.

By eschewing the constancy and hardness of exclusivity entailed by dogmatic rootedness, the indexical standing location offers theology a uniquely suitable metaphysical standpoint. Speaking from the indexical standing location, theology may begin to intone what nonetheless remains an intrinsically unstable

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<sup>47</sup> The adjective "advaitic" refers to *Advaita Vedānta*. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides a cursory definition of Advaita as "nominally a school of Indian philosophy, although in reality it is a label for any hermeneutics that attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads or, more formally, the canonical summary of the Upaniṣads, Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtra. Advaita is often translated as 'non-dualism' though it literally means 'non-secondness.' Although Śaṅkara is regarded as the promoter of *Advaita Vedānta* as a distinct school of Indian philosophy, the origins of this school predate Śaṅkara." Cf. Sangeetha Menon, "Advaita Vedanta", in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed 9/15/2021. <https://iep.utm.edu/adv-veda/>. Panikkar often prefers to render "advaita" as "a-dual" in order to avoid a reading where "non-dual" is interpreted as a mere negation of duality. Where possible, I have preferred to leave "advaita" untranslated.

conversation surrounding an encounter with the divine mystery. Indexicalism presents an admittedly “cosmological” picture of a “deictic common ground” where humans, human societies, and the non-human “[partake] in the exercise of being situated” in a “standing location [that] is transcended by its outer, its others, its beyond, its strange, and its unexpected.”<sup>48</sup> Given these peculiarities, it is hard to imagine a metaphysics that would be more commensurate with the demands of a Panikkarian theology. Said theology refuses to take any god as its object and instead seeks to cultivate communion with the unobjectifiable mystery of reality. Rather than reinstating the closed totality that is common to many religious cosmologies, Panikkar aims at addressing the “all.”<sup>49</sup> This all is never wholly complete because it is endlessly revised through constant creation.<sup>50</sup> Its fullness can never be confined to a given moment or manifestation. The Panikkarian all is linked with the “open-ended character” of reality.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly—and despite appearances to the contrary—, rather than the “overarching all” that Bensusan rejects, Panikkar’s all is formally homologous to Bensusan’s “transcending Other.”<sup>52</sup> Panikkar’s image of reality emphasizes how its incompleteness stems from an opening that is both epistemological and ontological in nature. The site of the other’s appearance as exterior is an irremediable gap. And yet, in an echo of the limitations described in the *Kena*

<sup>48</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> “All is not an object; it is not a knowing determined by its object. The object does not exist. It is a creative knowing, out of nothing, since it springs from emptiness.” Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 248.

<sup>50</sup> For Panikkar, freedom is synonymous with what keeps the fullness of reality from being equivalent to completeness: “One could object that we are assuming that reality is order, the final seat of truth, and that by letting the real be, Being will really reach its ‘fullness.’ The manner of thinking of this objection, however, turns into a vicious circle. If we speak of reality, we have no criterion ‘outside’ it to judge what is good or evil, true or false, the ‘ought’ or even the ‘is.’ Therefore, either freedom is tautological with Being (a qualified tautology)—‘Being is Being,’ each being is, insofar as it is being—or else we superimpose upon Being a world of ideas that will supposedly let us know what the right order of things ought to be.” Cf. Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 316. This construal of freedom parallels Bensusan’s account of the role of the other in making freedom possible: “The Other is not a result of my sovereignty but rather a transcendental condition for my spontaneity. Responsibility for the Other is what grounds my freedom—and not the other way around. The Other is a third-person [...] inside my intentional acts, which are hostage to what the exterior asks. It is not quite that my cogitations depend on the Other because the Other is fully brought in and made present in them but rather that they are hostage to the Other—my cogitations are vulnerable to the exterior, in a limitless way.” Cf. Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 108.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Prabhu, “Foreword”, in *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2010, p. xx.

<sup>52</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 78.

*Upanishad*, recognizing that opening makes it possible to know along with the knower without forcing the knower to become the known.<sup>53</sup> Panikkar holds that God is not and cannot be an object—whether of knowledge or otherwise. Accordingly, a Panikkarian approach to the mystery of reality calls for a theological thinking that recognizes the very impossibility of theology. The task of theology benefits from the insight that “the only possible metaphysics is one that paradoxically accounts for the impossibility of metaphysics.”<sup>54</sup>

Bruno Latour has suggested that being faithful to religion requires the wholesale acceptance of a tradition.<sup>55</sup> This idea stands in stark contrast to the Panikkarian conceptualization of tradition as a part of life that is intrinsically incomplete and susceptible to growth, appropriation, and the need for continual (re)creation.<sup>56</sup> To grasp the living character of traditions, we must recognize the need for breathing room, or room to grow, within, between, and among different traditions. Following this logic, adopting the indexicalist perspective and recognizing that the boundaries between traditions are porous and interconnected becomes a way of remaining faithful to the divine mystery. The indexicalist perspective dissolves the exclusive substantiality of the One whose

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<sup>53</sup> The *Kena Upanishad*, a text containing one of the central poetico-philosophical dialogues of the Indic tradition, both expresses and questions the dynamic that irrevocably separates the knower from the known: “You cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think the thinker of thinking; you cannot know the knower of knowing.” Cited in Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 202. To this we might add another line from the same meditation: “We do not know, we cannot understand because he is different from the known and he is different from the unknown.” Eknath Easwaran, *The Upanishads*, Tomales, Nilgiri Press, 2007, p. 214.

<sup>54</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> Although I hold to a rather different definition of tradition, there is still something admirable in the consistency of Latour’s convictions: “But does this mean we should keep everything? Understand everything? Swallow everything? Accept everything? Yes, that’s the only solution. I don’t want to have to pick and choose; mental reservations exhaust me unnecessarily; heresy doesn’t tempt me, nor does reform, or revolution, or any kind of upheaval. There is no dead wood in religious utterance, for everything in it is connected branches, experiment, trial, deeprootedness, roots and rootlets. Either we understand what made these grow, and everything can be kept; or we don’t, and everything can be burnt. If we have to revive the word once more, that means reviving everything, saving everything, clarifying everything, renewing everything, without abandoning a single sheep along the way; not a single bit of piety will be lost, not one vapid remark, religious trinket, holy souvenir, churchy knick-knack. I want to salvage all the treasure I was promised as my inheritance, for it to be mine for keeps—and for me to be proud of it.” Bruno Latour, *Rejoicing: Or the Torments of Religious Speech*, trans. Julie Rose, Malden, Polity Press, 2013, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> “Our task and our responsibility are to assimilate the wisdom of bygone traditions and, having made it our own, to allow it to grow. Life is neither repetition nor continuation. It is growth, which implies at once rupture and continuity. Life is creation.” Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. xvii.



uniqueness is often presupposed in order to reinforce dogmatic boundaries of difference and opposition. Accomplishing that dissolution immerses us in the milieu of Panikkarian theology, a critical communion with the divine, its symbols, and an ineluctable failure to make the meanings of the latter wholly coincide with the reality of the former. The standing location of Bensusan's paradoxico-metaphysics is an ideal *locus theologicus*<sup>57</sup> for a theology that rejoices in its epistemic limitations and reads the inability to accede to totality as a guarantee of the necessity of a communal sharing of theological perspectives and intuitions.

A substantialized entity or hypostasis of the sort critiqued by indexicalism often serves as a referent for theological discussions of the divine. By contrast, instead of some substantial entity, Panikkar's understanding of theological conversation is inextricably tied to the particularity of deixis. Bensusan asserts that "deictic operations are the building blocks of what is real."<sup>58</sup> Recasting that claim in a theological vein, Panikkar argues that, rather than being a closed totality, the all is an inexhaustible whole that is only ever partial in its manifestation because access to it always depends upon its ability to be a "this." In line with the Vedic notion of *idaṁ sarvaṁ*, any approach to the divine whole of reality is contingent upon the paradoxical coincidence of a transcendental "all" and a particular, deictic "this":

Idaṁ sarvaṁ is not only "all this" that we actually perceive. It is also "this all," but not as a notion or idea of the "All." It has to be this All. Not "this (is) all," or "this (is the) All." And much less "all (is) this." The two words are

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<sup>57</sup> The concept of the *locus theologicus* has a long and varied history of usage. Philip Melanchthon elaborated the first modern iteration of loci-based topical theological argumentation, thereby initiating a trajectory of thought that seems to reach its apogee with the work of John Gerard. J. Wilhelm notes that Gerard's works also mark the beginning of the disappearance of this form of argumentation: "The greatest work of this kind is *Loci communes theologici*, by John Gerard, professor at Jena, published in nine volumes (1610-1622); it is the greatest and also the last. After Gerard the loci theology gives place to systematic theology; the unconnected exposition of 'topics' in the light of the Bible gradually disappears." Wilhelm, J. "Loci Theologici", in Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, et al. (eds.), *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church Vol. IX (Laprade-Mass)*, New York, The Encyclopedia Press, Inc., 1913, p. 320. Writing at the beginning of the 20th Century, little could Wilhelm have known that this disappearance was greatly exaggerated, and that the trope of the *locus theologicus* would find a new life in emergent majority world theologies. While the concept is used differently in many systematic theologies, I deploy it here in a sense that is more akin to its function in contextual theology, i.e., as a space from which one speaks. In this sense, it also bears a close resemblance to the concept of a "locus of enunciation."

<sup>58</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 78.

placed together without a verb. *Idaṁ sarvaṁ* denotes All that can be this, because this can be all. Reality is all that can be addressed as this. Real is anything to which a this may be applied—the this together with the all.<sup>59</sup>

Panikkar holds that the “this” which we encounter in our proximal relations is what enables an understanding of anything at all, up to and including the whole or all, which itself cannot be everything inasmuch as everything cannot be “this thing.” There are two sides to this deictic negation, and both are requisite features of the advaitic intuition. On one hand, advaita negates any access to the all that does not depart from and remain contingent upon the particular. On the other, it asserts that the all remains untotalizable in terms of either the particular or the all:

The formulation of advaita consists in two negations: *neti, neti*, “not this, not this.” Reality is-not one; reality is-not two (a-dvaita). This famous formula *neti neti* refers to the description of the *ātman*, which is “not this, not this”—incomprehensible, indestructible, unattached, unfettered, impassible, the highest, and the real of the real (the truth of truth).<sup>60</sup>

Most essential to advaita is the insistence that this twin negation is not a positive doctrine but rather the affirmation of a further, persistent, and generative negation:

This double negation does not allow conversion into an affirmation, except a formal one, like affirming: reality is nondual. This is a merely formal or logical sentence and cannot be used as a principle from which one may draw conclusions or make deductions. From “reality is nondual” we cannot deduce therefore “it is one”; it could equally be triadic, quaternary, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Resonating with the incomplete and incompletable structure of indexical reality, “Advaita denies both that ‘reality is one’ and that ‘reality is two’ precisely because it discovers that the real is not reducible to intelligibility.”<sup>62</sup> This negation is therefore also an affirmation of the impossibility of substantivity.

The deictic situatedness of Bensusan’s model forefronts responsibility toward

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<sup>59</sup> Panikkar, *Rhythm*, pp. 76-77. The phrase “*idaṁ sarvaṁ*” appears in multiple Vedas, but the sense emphasized here is likely an indication that it has been drawn from the *Isavasya Upanishad*. I owe this insight to a conversation with my colleague, pandit Shyam Maharaj.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*,

others and the obligations that the Other places upon us. Panikkar's assertion of the primacy of the deictic mediator likewise enables a mode of relation that he refers to as "interdependence."<sup>63</sup> He posits this kind of relationality as a solution to what he argues would otherwise be an insoluble binary between monism and dualism.<sup>64</sup> Bensusan is right to critique similar notions of interdependence in thinkers like Whitehead for failing to leave room for anything to be external to transparency.<sup>65</sup> Panikkar likewise insists that the advaitic intuition requires both epistemological and ontological opacity.<sup>66</sup> As in indexicalism, the realization of advaita emerges from situated relations that cannot be reduced to either substantial entities or processes. In both Panikkarian theology and indexicalism, intelligibility is always contingent on the presence of something that escapes it. Knowing everything is the one thing that forecloses any knowledge of the incompletable all.

This implies that the rational intelligibility wielded within consciousness and the way that consciousness knows the all are not the same. Indeed, Panikkar's appeal to advaita is reliant upon this very distinction. Panikkarian theology posits that our conceptual understanding is more limited than our consciousness, but also that our consciousness exhibits an awareness that exceeds the boundaries of an individual's experiences. The advaitic intuition is encountered within this third range of awareness, one which strikes consciousness in its communion with the all.<sup>67</sup> That which this awareness encounters outstrips rational intelligibility

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<sup>63</sup> Panikkar defines the notion of interdependence by way of a reference to classical jazz: "Each musician has a degree of freedom. All are attuned to the music. The rhythm is paramount. If one instrument improvises a new sound or a new compass the others follow and vice-versa. Each musician is independent and all are inter-in-dependent. There is no conductor, one is attentive to one's own instrument and to the sound of all the others. The Divine, the Human, and the Cosmic are correlated and interconnected, but each is independent in an interdependent way. For an exclusively rational mind this is difficult to grasp. In fact, it cannot be com-prehended by reason. This is also the challenge of advaita." *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-222.

<sup>65</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>66</sup> This opacity is essential to the advaitic negation. The a-dual is opaque from the perspective of both being and non-being: "This is the advaitic intuition: the awareness of the relation without which the two poles of the relation would not be poles. To be aware of a thing as a pole we need to know 'previously' the relation that makes the thing be [a] pole. The relation is neither one (it needs the poles) nor two (it is not two relations). It is a-dual" Cf. Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 218.

<sup>67</sup> The precise meaning of what I refer to here as a "third range of awareness" has shifted throughout Panikkar's career. It has been a constantly elaborated theme ever since the writing of his dissertation, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. A plurality of approaches to this way of knowing is already evident there in his

because, like the Panikkarian God, it rebuffs all attempts at objectification. As Panikkar is careful to emphasize, “the object of this awareness is not the individual thing but the net itself, the whole of consciousness, the Whole as such. In other words, the object of the advaitic experience is not an individual thing but a field of consciousness, as it were.”<sup>68</sup> This statement might seem to imply the presence of some object, namely, a conscious subject, but Panikkar’s logic nonetheless insists on flatly rejecting both objectification and subjectification. The peculiarity of the advaitic double-negation is such that whatever conscious subject it might seem to posit is actually neither subject nor object because the reality of consciousness participates in an all which itself is not susceptible to the completion of individuation necessary for delineating subject and object.<sup>69</sup> Instead of being the product or object of an individual experience, the communion between this awareness and the field of consciousness is an encounter with an incomplete whole, the indivisibility of which ultimately makes the distinction between subject and object unintelligible. The all is as

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discussion of the desire for Brahman in the context of the *Taittirīya Upanishad*: “As is clear from the desiderative verbal form of the substantive *Jijñāsā*, it is not a question of will, desire, impulse, or the like, *as such*—as an independent faculty—but it is a *knowing* inclination, an appetite to *know*. [...] Is it an extra-cognitive desire that impels us to know, or is it a knowledge that makes us desire? A longing to know or a further urge of the very knowledge? Obviously it is both. [...] Even after this desire has undergone thorough examination on the part of epistemology and psychology, there remains an ontological factor which can only be interpreted as a perceptible ‘point’ of this transcendence itself, a point where the transcendence finds an echo, an answer. The ontological structure of this desire appears, then, as a certain communion with its end or goal. There is a yearning for Brahman not only because Brahman calls and manifests itself as desirable, so to speak, but also because that desire, that deep point where the desire transcends the bounds of epistemology and psychology, is already in communication, indeed in communion, with Brahman. Brahman is not only the goal (‘object’). It is the very ground of this desire” (Original emphasis). Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981, pp. 122-123. In the same work, he explores the possibility of “extra-cognitive” knowing by contrasting the Western notions of reason and faith: “We must emphasize that this is not the traditional Indian attitude, principally because the clear-cut distinction between reason and faith as the West knows it (due to Christian influence) is foreign to Indian philosophy, where the problem arises differently. Yet, if our interpretation is not completely mistaken, our *sūtra* expresses a cognitive dynamism conducive to the discovery of the contingency of the World. I shall leave open the question as to whether this knowledge is *arthāpatti* (inference) or faith; nor shall I engage in a discussion of the possible existence of a higher human ‘intellect’ by which Man discovers the existence of the transcendent without penetrating to its essence: [...] it would not be difficult to show that reasoning reason itself is founded in a peculiar rational intuition.” *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>69</sup> This is because “the subject of the advaitic experience is not an individual mind. The advaitic experience is not that of an individual subject apprehending an individual object.” *Ibid.*, p. 221.

constitutively partial and incomplete as everything else that might be “this all.”

Bensusan and Panikkar both present a basic metaphysical situation that is devoid of subjects and objects. For Bensusan, what there *is* in the situated interiority of perception is at bottom only the potential for deictic designation.<sup>70</sup> The indexical perspective, wherein “there is nothing to be perceived but deixis,” posits a situation of proximity that is formally homologous to the Panikkarian field of consciousness. Moreover, Panikkar argues that the field of consciousness should also be understood as a field of emptiness. As is also the case for the indexical standing location, Panikkar’s field of consciousness/emptiness is devoid of any inhabitants other than the deictic markers that await potential inhabitation. And yet, awareness of that emptiness exists.<sup>71</sup> Like “knowledge” of the exterior other, awareness of the field of emptiness is awareness of the limits of our conscious knowledge.

This notion of a field of emptiness is neither nothingness nor the negation of being. To be empty is not simply to be not something. Said otherwise, it is not to be a negation of a something that might be. Emptiness is instead a space for something, a place of vacancy signifying a potential for occupancy.<sup>72</sup> Like indexical deixis’s potential for predication, Panikkar’s emptiness features a potential for assignation that allows for the emergence of something that, *qua* something, always appears as already assigned and related to others in an interdependent, non-absolute way. Indexicalism emphasizes the external determination of interiority. The Panikkarian rejoinder to indexicalism’s insistence on the determinate presence of the exterior Other lies in a correspondent emphasis on the interior as a locus for the reflexive appearance of the exterior as the interior’s limitation. Panikkar points out that the mystical traditions of both Upanishadic and Neoplatonic thinking rely on the paradoxical

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<sup>70</sup> “Indeed, indexicalism entails that there is nothing to be perceived but deixis. No interiority can perceive without the deployment of deictic operators. What is perceived is already indexically placed.” Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 245.

<sup>72</sup> “We may designate it [that space] with emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This word seems to be free from having to assert itself by the negation of Being. Emptiness suggests leisure, being vacant, which is also related to vacuity. If I had to choose a word, I would say *ākāśah*, usually translated as “space” in the sense of the platonic *χώρα*, as that symbol which provides ‘space’ for all beings ‘to live, move and have their being’—for Being to be.” *Ibid.*, p. 313.

assertion that “openness to the other and the exterior requires a concentration on our interiority [...]”<sup>73</sup> Highlighted in Panikkar and deemphasized in Bensusan is the way in which encounters with the limits of rationality engender a reflexive understanding of both the thinking that occurs there and the one thinking:

If the intellect reflects on itself, it is because it has bumped into a wall beyond which it cannot go, and so turns to itself. [...] The intellect discovers that there is something behind the wall that is not intellect. [...] This fact implies that the intellect transcends itself without at the same time destroying itself, that is, without ceasing to be intelligent. It sees that it can see all that there is to be seen, but it “sees” also that it has no guarantee, no assurance, that beyond the “barrier” of what it sees there may not still be Being, reality, or perhaps emptiness.<sup>74</sup>

The encounter with deictic operators in the field of emptiness cannot render the ineffable intelligible. However, those operators can provide knowledge of our limits and, by the same token, of ourselves.

The structures—or lack thereof—shared by Bensusan’s indexical interior and Panikkar’s field of consciousness/emptiness give rise to complementary modes of thought. Bensusan is careful to insist that a deictically-constituted interiority is not transparent.<sup>75</sup> The indexical paradigm admits of no absolute “view from nowhere.”<sup>76</sup> Analogously, what is known from and through Panikkar’s emptiness is neither total nor transparent. On one hand, Panikkar conceives of emptiness as a site of “mystical experiences.”<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, those mystical experiences

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>75</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 93.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 250. “While the other [sensorial or bodily] experiences translate from the reality of the *logos*, the mystical is at home in the field of emptiness, and this field is empty; it is *nada*, unborn (into Being). Mystical language comes, as it were, out of ‘nothing.’” Cf. Ibid., For Panikkar, the word *nada* provides a lexical contrast with “nothing” that is particularly provocative, especially granted the Lusophone origins of Bensusan’s thinking and Panikkar’s own Catalanian point of departure: “Here may lie a fundamental difference between dialectical and advaitic thinking. Not to put the burden on the eastern reflection of *śūnyatā*, I may base this reflection on the Spanish and Portuguese symbol of *nada*, which incidentally may serve to stress the cultural differences between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe. Our human spirit is aware of Being. In this very awareness we are conscious that we could not be aware of anything if we were not dimly aware of its limits. This applies also to Being. What do we call this

transpire through a language of silence that is just as impenetrable and incommunicable as the emptiness that it inhabits. This is one of the great theological upswings of the convergence of advaitic inhabitation and the situated interiority of the metaphysics of the others: the indexical standing location maps to the proximity of the field of emptiness where Panikkarian theology locates the mystical hearing and speaking proper to divine communion through the language of silence.<sup>78</sup> Thinking from indexical interiority as a *locus theologicus* cultivates both an attitude of epistemic humility and the special sort of ineffable understanding that theology hopes to achieve in its endless translations of the mystery of reality. The extraordinary suitability of this *locus theologicus* springs from the indexicalist insistence that “a neutralization [of what is exterior] amounts to a perceived indifference to what transcends, to what is outer or beyond. Finitude is an incapacity to realize that the Great Outdoors is already fully available on the very borders of our interiority.”<sup>79</sup> For both Bensusan and Panikkar, the vantage point of situated interiority promotes a trepidatious but concerned embrace of the infinite that maintains a distance needed for alterity to thrive.

#### TOWARD INDEXICALIST THEOLOGY OR THEOLOGICAL INDEXICALISM

Bensusan and Panikkar’s respective approaches consider conversation to be the most apt metaphor for a thinking of and from situated interiority. That conversational emphasis is essential to Bensusan’s advance beyond Heidegger’s *Bodenständigkeit*. It manifests in the way in which indexicalism and the metaphysics of the others are “driven, not by the danger that being is in, but rather by the appeal of the others and the effort to do justice to what is perceived.”<sup>80</sup> The metaphysics of the others is accordingly a “conversational metaphysics. As is the case for any true conversation, it is open and situated; every previous assumption

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limit? One name is Nothingness as Non-Being; another name is *nada* as absence of Being. Nothingness implies the dialectical approach; *nada* entails the advaitic approach.” *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>78</sup> “Emptiness is not language and is not *logos*, and mystical language has no model. It does not allow any ‘verification’; we cannot check with the original, which does not exist. Mystical language does not signify. It has, as such, no meaning in the field of consciousness. The hearer of the mystical, if having an empty heart, will understand in the measure that that hearer has gone under, into the abyss (of the mystery) and stands there.” *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>79</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 95.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

can be revised and reconsidered.”<sup>81</sup> Like Bensusan, Panikkar arrives at this conversational model in an explicit attempt to surmount the limitations imposed by Heidegger. For example, Panikkar contends with Heidegger’s assertion of the Parmenidean paradigm whereby thinking and being are the same.<sup>82</sup> Panikkar argues that this equation is invalid for two primary reasons. Firstly, while our capacity to think is finite, there is no reason to suppose that being is finite as well.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, the false binary of thinking and being can be productively rearticulated when a third term, speaking, is introduced between them as a register of the indeterminacy of their interrelations. Affirmation of the thinking-being binary implies that thinking can totally comprehend being. There are limits to what we can think, but there is no reason to think that being has to conform to those limits.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, rejecting the thinking-being binary makes it possible for “being to stand for the whole reality that overflows the caged enclosure under the surveillance of thinking” in a manner homologous to Bensusan’s Great Outdoors.<sup>85</sup> This rejection also enables the emergence of a new model whereby the totalizing tendencies of rationality and the inexhaustible depths of emptiness are mediated—but not exhausted—through speech and conversation.<sup>86</sup> For both thinkers, the structure of reality is like a conversation. Following the conversational metaphor, changes in that conversation also change

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Panikkar, *Rhythm* pp. 314-315. For Heidegger’s elaboration of the Parmenidean binary, cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity”, in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969.

<sup>83</sup> “The scheme of Being-Speaking-Thinking may perhaps help us here albeit with one important qualification. The Parmenidean schema I am trying to overcome plays with the dual paradigm Being-Non-being, where the former is and the latter is-not. If we accept it as point of departure there is not much to add, but then an almost universal human experience which ‘speaks’ about the ‘unspeakable’ is sheer contradiction and makes no sense at all. If we do not presuppose that Parmenidean framework at the very outset we do not need to reduce our paradigm to the dilemma of Being or Non-Being, and could take Being to stand for the whole reality that overflows the caged enclosure under the surveillance of thinking, in the sense we have already described.” Panikkar, *Rhythm*, 88-89.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 223. “These limits are the very limits of Being only inasmuch as Being is assimilable, that is, cognizable by the intellect. Unless the intellect postulates its own absolute dominion over Being, however, it cannot know anything outside its own field (of knowledge) (which is a tautology), and cannot therefore proscribe reality from having some dimension that is off limits to knowledge.” Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>86</sup> “There is a speech as a primal manifestation of Being which oversteps the realm of thinking, as so many traditions witness. The speaking field of Being is wider than its thinking field. Thinking reveals Being as at least potentially intelligible. Speech is the revelation of Being as Silence. It is through the door of speech that we enter into that silence which is neither Being nor Non-being.” Ibid.,



reality and our experience of it.

Tender solicitude and loving responsiveness are essential to this conversation. In what might strike the reader as a surprise granted the admittedly alien—and sometimes alienating—indexicalist landscape, this loving responsiveness is a feature common to both thinkers' models. This is evident in Bensusan's attempts to exorcise the myth that the epistemology of perception is fundamentally a matter of passivity and is therefore susceptible to description in terms of "physiologically described mechanisms."<sup>87</sup> The metaphysics of the others replaces all such mechanical accounts with a description of sensory intuition wherein "perceptual acts are acts of responding"<sup>88</sup> and "the doorstep complexities of receptivity are the very intricacies of hospitality."<sup>89</sup> Perception is accordingly more akin to solicitous accommodation and caring attentiveness than to a passive or disengaged registration of the impacts of sensory bombardment. These metaphysical innovations have direct implications for Panikkar's call for the epistemological framework of theology to be reformulated.<sup>90</sup> Panikkarian theology redefines the search for knowledge of and an encounter with the divine as a pursuit of the whole by the whole person. This reformulation involves resisting rationalist reduction and emphasizing the indispensability of loving accommodation and reception: "If knowledge is a total human activity and not just an epistemological function of a disincarnated mind, it is an assimilation of the being known, a personal embrace in which love is as necessary as cognition."<sup>91</sup>

This commonality alone would suffice to prompt multiple convergences in Bensusan and Panikkar's treatment of others, the Other, the Great Outdoors, and the divine. Indeed, for Panikkar, the essence of theology resides in the fact that it

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<sup>87</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>90</sup> Panikkar describes that necessity thusly: "Since concepts have proved themselves to be so rich and useful, the *sophia* intended by philosophy and theology has been overshadowed by the *epistēmē* of concepts, specifically, of general concepts. Theology then slowly becomes a conceptual system, and once the concept has emancipated itself from all its emotional constituents, theology can dispense with love as a constitutive ingredient. The concept does not need love to be a clear and distinct concept. Love becomes relegated to piety or devotion and no longer to theology, which increasingly grows into a conceptual science." Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 195.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

is the kind of knowledge that is only opened up through love: “Reason alone cannot reach the advaitic intuition because the adualistic structure of reality opens up only to a loving knowledge or a knowing love.”<sup>92</sup> Through the lens of Panikkar’s thinking, Bensusan’s rearticulation of the character of perception in the metaphysics of the others is a gesture of indisputable theological import. Panikkar also forefronts another facet of the Other that remains unmentioned in Bensusan: yes, the Other claims, captivates, captures, and obliges us, but is it not possible that the Other might also love us with a “rebounding love [*reflectens ardor*] [that] belongs to the ultimate nature of the whole”?<sup>93</sup>

Understanding these approaches to the Other requires a distinction between the ineffable and the unknowable. Panikkar’s divine and Bensusan’s Other are ineffable, but they are not unknowable. For these thinkers, knowledge is a matter of relation and response, not abstraction and conceptualization. This distinction is evident in the homology that obtains between the interior externality of Bensusan’s Great Outdoors and what Panikkar describes as the “apophatic factor of theology,” that which “discloses not only an unknown or even unknowable feature of the Divine Mystery, but makes us aware that there remains a factor that cannot be put into words.”<sup>94</sup> For Panikkarian theology, this apophatic factor is present within all interiorities, including both the field of emptiness that makes space for emergence and the emptiness within the emergent.<sup>95</sup> And yet, as Bensusan notes, our ability to be the unknown Other is also what exposes the lack of differentiation and thereby the indivisibility of my fellow humans, non-humans, and the Great Outdoors: “The Other that is my fellow human is also the Great Outdoors—the distinction between the human and

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 216. Panikkar adds that the poverty of our current language might play some part in obscuring the crucial role of love in this form of knowledge because “we lack a proper word since the divorce between *gnōsis* and *eros* (or *agapē*, or for that matter, even *philia*).” Ibid.,

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>95</sup> For Panikkar, this means that all theological reflection should recognize the basic truth that “those very ‘objects’ have, as it were, an ingredient of silence, that their ‘essence’ (all words fail) is untranslatable into concepts, ideas, and words. The unknown things in our scientific knowledge are on the same ontological level as the known facts; these unknown things have to be ‘scientific truths.’ They are enigmas belonging to the epistemic order; they are un-known. On the other hand, the ‘referents’ of apophatic theology are not modifications or even transformations of kataphatic statements; these referents transcend the ontological order. They are mysteries—the *logos* stands at the threshold. In spite of its name, theology transcends the *logos* dimension of everything. The ineffable is different from the unknown.” Ibid.,

the non-human alien is not metaphysically salient.”<sup>96</sup> As we see from his description of “the realm of *śūnyatā*,” Panikkar’s field of emptiness is similarly devoid of metaphysical differentiation so that “only there does nothing interfere between ourselves and the real, *ātman* and *brahman*.”<sup>97</sup>

Indexicalism and the metaphysics of the others chart the parameters and possibilities of the same place that Panikkar calls the field of emptiness. It may also be a theological space that births the mystical realization that “the ‘inner heart of Man,’ smaller than the kernel of a grain of millet and yet greater than the sky, is *brahman*.”<sup>98</sup> The ground covered thus far has taken us beyond the earth and the sky. In his search for a ground for questioning, Heidegger attempted to escape the stasis of identity but was held back by the hardness and constancy at the roots of his thinking. By forwarding the indexical model of situated interiority and the relationality described by the metaphysics of the others, Bensusan breaks new ground and makes room for a radically new thinking that is free from grounding and rooted in the open air of contextualized proximity and responsiveness to the Other. Then, in his convergence with the pluralist aspirations of Panikkarian theology, Bensusan’s interiority ascends to another, unexpected atmosphere where communion with the divine might be unrestrained by substantivist religious dogmas and renewed beyond the confinement of exclusivist theological traditions. This next horizon is not the end, but it might well herald a new beginning. Loosed from the strictures of earth and air by the metaphysics of the others, theology might again venture out to answer the call of the Great Outdoors and abide with silence’s ceaseless speech.

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<sup>96</sup> Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 79.

<sup>97</sup> Panikkar, *Rhythm*, p. 248.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

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