"Beyond postmodernism"—one can almost hear a sigh of relief. Finally we can say out loud what a growing number of books admit: postmodernism as a movement of renewal has run its course. In literary studies it is not just the inclusion of postmodernism in encyclopedia entries but also its own evident inability to come up with engaging new readings that signal the end of postmodern literary theory. This does not mean that we have already reread the traditional literary canon in postmodern terms but rather that any such readings have become more or less predictable. Postmodern literary theory was born of a desire to liberate from the predictable, a desire for constant renewal and unexpected interpretations, but it has clearly exhausted this potential.

Where shall we go from here? Recent studies that try to answer this question indicate that the future of literary theory involves a renewed desire for humanism. The following review of this trend toward humanism suggests that the greatest obstacle in reconceptualizing theory after postmodernism is the failure to ask foundational questions about our reading practices. I shall propose that daring to ask such questions connects the future of theory inevitably with ontology, humanism, and theology. If we agree with the trend of theory after postmodernism and yet desire to affirm postmodern concerns about humanism, the future of theory depends on our ability to define this neo-humanism ontologically by acknowledging the hermeneutic nature of all self-knowledge and the end of metaphysics. With the help of Incarnational theology, we can sketch a reading practice that takes postmodern concerns seriously while allowing us to recover the humanist idea of self-knowledge as the purpose of literary theory.

**Theory’s Return to Humanism**

Recent assessments of the death of postmodernist theory are united in
their desire to recover some kind of humanism. At least one recent publication views theory as the outright betrayal of a long humanistic tradition. In *Humanism Betrayed: Theory, Ideology, and Culture in the Contemporary University*, Graham Good explains that theory’s dehumanizing effects stem from its rejection of individual freedom and objective realism (59). Theory, for Good, constitutes the predominantly Franco-German onslaught on Anglo-American common sense, an invasion that “enacts the theory that discourse is speaking rather than an individual human being” (59). Good argues that postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism incarcerate the human subject in language, history, and social structures; they reject “humanist centuries and their legacy” by denying a continuous human nature, ignoring the past, and neglecting primary texts (71-73). Good suggests that the university return to a humanist model of education, preferably one modeled on Northrop Frye’s liberal humanism, because it enshrines the very values theory opposes: “human liberty, creativity, and progress—and indeed the very possibility of a common humanity” (102).

Good’s vision for the university is very attractive, yet can we really go back to “the authority of logic and reason, of demonstrable and repeatable experiment, of established fact, of compelling imagination” (Good 95)? Should we not ask why and how reason is common to all? Good’s nostalgia consists in simply returning to Enlightenment rationalism with its commitment to objective universal reason and science’s strict procedures of verification. Can we neglect the criticism of Enlightenment rationalism by philosophers and scientists of the last century and assume that they are simply wrong? It would be wise to remember that the autonomous individual subject died because the emphasis of liberal humanism on universal rationality modeled on the sciences did not, in fact, bring about universal peace and prosperity. Nor has rationalist epistemology satisfied the complex demands of human knowing.

Good is not alone in interpreting the demise of postmodern theory as a welcome opportunity for returning to humanism. In *Reading after Theory* Valentine Cunningham celebrates the fall of theory as a possible return to humanistic reading practices. Like Good, Cunningham presents a compelling argument against the excesses of literary theory. He writes against Theory (with a capital T)—that is, against “the modern kind [of theory] which took over from the 1960s on” (1), especially the deconstruction of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida.

In contrast to Good, however, Cunningham acknowledges some important gains of Theory. He believes that Theory should be credited for revitalizing literary study in crucial areas, and not merely by expanding the canon. The great good of deconstruction, for example, “has been to make readers all at once uneasy about easy meanings, and relaxed about polyphony, mul-
tiplicity, puzzle, and meaning over-spill" (39). Correctly understood, Derrida's notion of the play or jeu of signifiers validates the text for its own sake and encourages close reading. Cunningham also thinks that deconstruction's hermeneutics of suspicion is "far truer to the reinterpretable nature of serious and classical writings" than formalist mathematical formulae that freeze the text into predictable and controllable units. Theory's most enduring legacy for Cunningham is its insistence on the function of literature as a shaper of the realities we perceive.

In the final analysis, however, Theory's positive contributions are outweighed by its self-contradictory and self-destructive tendencies. Cunningham brilliantly deconstructs Theory's identity as radical innovation by pointing out its own limits and shortcomings. Theory's radicalism is limited by the undeconstructable trinity of author, text, and reader that governs all human communication (29-30). Furthermore, Theory's correct denial of neutral interpretation—that is, the fact that all interpretation begins from within a history of interpretation—also undermines Theory's self-proclaimed status as the guardian of innovativeness (37). New readings that initially freed marginalized voices quickly became imprisoned in their own political-historical contexts. Instead of following the humanist ideal by introducing readers to horizons different from their own, postmodernist interpretations quickly replicated the predictable template of ideologies and their victims (49). I paraphrase Cunningham only slightly in saying that humanism dies on the operating table of ideological criticism.

The irony is that Theory's suspicion of ideologies results in blindness to its own interpretive frameworks and so comes to embody the very humanism it despises. Forgetting that its own motivations are ideological, Theory leads to willful violations of texts. In fact, these misreadings have become so formulaic that students learn to produce them on command. In the end Theory embodies a vicious hermeneutical circle, because, for all its close reading, Theory uses the text to confirm what the reader set out to find (123).

As an antidote to this destructive tendency, Cunningham suggests that literary theory return to humanism, pretty much with all that this entails. Humanism means that the reader is a stable self but open to change. It means that the text has substance and determinable meanings. Cunningham concludes that "if there is one feature of what reading should do and engage with, and yes, theorize, 'after' Theory, it is the presence, the rights, the needs of the human subject, in texts, in the origins of texts, in the reception of texts" (142). What is literature, after all, if not the archive of the human, and what is reading if not character formation? Cunningham projects our return to an "ancient reading programme, in which the best kind of reading is envisaged as a complex affair of whole-person engagement with the text" (148). He wants us to recover the ethical force of literature so that reading can once
again result in “a scene of complex, whole-person ethical instruction, deeply rooted in rationality but particularly in emotionality” (149). We need to return, in other words, to classical humanism, the notion that “literature is about human behaviour and preoccupied with questions of how to live” (150).

Cunningham ends his book with an accurate and moving description of the classical humanist position on interpretation. Reading is the slow movement “towards realization, meaning, truth, a transformative ethical result.” Unlike deconstruction, this theory encounters no final aporia. “This is reading, hermeneutic, epistemology, beyond aporia” (152). Cunningham reveals the theological basis for his interpretive approach when he compares reading to participation in the sacraments. As with the Eucharistic blessing, “the reader is, in some way or another, also graced, blessed, marked as the text’s own” (148). This Christian-humanist hermeneutic promises reading for pleasure and self-knowledge, a fusion of horizons from past and present that helps the reader to increase understanding of self and world (153).

**Whose Humanism? Whose Theory?**

Many of us, myself included, undoubtedly resonate with Cunningham’s enchanting restatement of humanist ideals. Others may also agree with Good that the death of Theory finally marks the end of humanism’s betrayal and prepares for its recovery. I also believe, however, that these calls for humanism are vulnerable to being dismissed as sheer, unfounded nostalgia. Much depends on the audience, of course. Perhaps there are enough convinced Christian or liberal humanists in the intellectual catacombs to reconquer our post-secondary institutions. There are also many academics, however, whose deep affinity for postmodern theory’s insistence on the radically hermeneutical nature of human knowledge does not permit a simple return to old-fashioned humanism.

One wonders whether comfort is not the unconscious desire of many commentators on the future of theory after postmodernism. Another contributor to the future-of-theory debate, Jean-Michel Rabaté, astutely points out that our view of theory’s future depends on our definition of theory. Those who call for a return to common sense after theory betray their view of it as an aberration that began in the 1960s. Rabaté argues, however, that postmodern theory was more than a mere attempt at subverting common-sense ideas. He defines theory broadly as hermeneutical reflection and recognizes that behind attacks on certain notions of authorship, selfhood, and textuality lie deeper world-view questions. Rabaté reminds us that theory cannot be equated with common sense because its task as hermeneutical reflection is precisely to contest such notions. Theory is about ultimate horizons of interpretations, of which literary questions are an extension.
Whose common sense and whose humanism, after all, are we talking about? Rabaté formulates what I take to be the central question in this debate:

While I agree with most of these astute remarks about the need to revise concepts of literary criticism insofar as they deflate bombast and correct obvious exaggerations, I cannot help noticing that this problematic remains excessively literary and thus fails to touch upon the core of what I tend to understand by Theory. For instance, if we may agree that a measure of common sense will put an end to projective and philosophical over-interpretations of texts, will we have to return to the old humanism based on universal values our grandparents believed in? (145)

In contrast to Cunningham and Good, Rabaté has grasped the interconnectedness of literature and philosophy. He defines theory broadly as critical philosophical reflection whose necessary ties to literature and texts establish its interdisciplinarity. Theory thus understood “is as much concerned by the critique of ideologies as by close reading, as much invested in broad cultural issues as in the patient classification of literary processes” (145).

We may extend Rabaté’s insight by claiming that theory is poised once more to combine the reading of books with self-knowledge and character development. Unlike the “old humanism” of our grandparents, however, a neo-humanism can grow in the interdisciplinary climate that postmodern cultural theory has established. Some remain deeply skeptical of this interdisciplinary aspect of literary theory. Frank Kermode has recently expressed his apprehension about theory’s interdisciplinary tendencies that often come at the price of close attention to texts. For Kermode literary theory is, by definition, unable to respect texts. Nostalgia is usually accompanied by anxiety, and Kermode too concludes on an apprehensive note: “Nobody, I think, would want to go back; but it is reasonable to be apprehensive about the future, and the possibility that literature itself, let alone literary criticism, may not easily survive the onslaught of undisciplined interdisciplinarity” (204).

Balance is, of course, important; it is, in fact, an ancient humanist virtue, and we would do well to heed Kermode’s warning. We must equally avoid, however, practicing literary criticism for its own sake by ignoring the deeper world-view questions demanded by all good literature. In fact, it is this desire for foundational questions concerning human existence that theory has in common with the best literature. Nostalgia, the ahistorical yearning for a liberal or Christian humanism that we reconstruct in our fondest memories, is not helpful and may in fact become dangerous. After all, one major problem with nostalgia is its blindness to political-social realities and its romanticizing of the past. If theory has done anything, it has left us with a deep suspicion of systems based on trust in human ability.

We simply can no longer advocate the humanistic ideal that reading good
books somehow produces better people without addressing the foundation for such a claim. Whether we advocate Christian humanism with its Eucharistic model of reading or appeal to secular liberal humanism with its belief in a common humanity on the basis of universal reason, neither mode of humanism will attract anyone who has learned from theory to suspect the inauthenticity of ungrounded commitments. This is not to say that concepts of universal reason and a common humanity are impossible, but merely that they need to be reconsidered in light of fundamental ontological considerations. The future of theory depends on a radical humanism based on a hermeneutic ontology.

I want to argue that, for all its faults, the best of postmodern theory reminds us that genuine thinking cannot occur without reflecting on the interpretive frameworks from which we derive our conceptual language and that such reflection must be ethically motivated. Merely hoping that "liberal values are still strong enough within individuals in the academy and in the society at large" is nostalgic traditionalism (Good 110). The engine that used to drive these values has long ago run out of steam. We are in dire need of recovering ontological sources for ethics that possess inherent explicatory power for the way we should interpret and act.

The only recent voice that addresses this issue head-on is that of Terry Eagleton in *After Theory*. In joining the recent discussion about theory's future, Eagleton demonstrates once more his usual perceptiveness by providing cogent historical-political reasons for the decline of postmodern theory. His book also stands out in realizing the need for a rearticulation of universal objectivity and truth but one that is conducted in *historical* terms. Eagleton understands well that postmodern theory is by and large an allergic reaction to fundamentals with universal significance. Theory "dislikes the idea of depth, and is embarrassed by fundamentals. It shudders at the notion of the universal, and disapproves of ambitious overviews. [...] It believes in the local, the pragmatic, the particular. And in this devotion, ironically, it scarcely differs from the conservative scholarship it detests, which likewise believes only in what it can see and handle" (72). If we think of theory simply as a "reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions," postmodern theory turns out to be as anti-theoretical as so-called traditional literary scholarship (2).

Eagleton argues that this fashionable neglect of fundamental world-view questions is a luxury the West can no longer afford, for just as our culture has adjusted to thinking small, history has begun to act big. Intellectuals are no longer used to thinking globally and politically, yet current societal and political crises force the West "more and more to reflect on the foundations of its own civilization." Far from dismissing theory, Eagleton urges its necessity, for "the West [...] may need to come up with some persuasive-sound-
ing legitimations of its form of life, at exactly the point when laid-back cultural thinkers are assuring it that such legitimations are neither possible nor necessary. [...] It will need, in short, to sound deep in a progressively more shallow age” (73).

This need explains Eagleton’s distaste for “anti-theorists” of all stripes. He specifically targets the pragmatism of Richard Rorty, who shrugs off any deeper justifications for literary or political practice in favor of the rather fideistic notion that “we do what we do because we do what we do” (150-51). Such a “remarkably dim-witted” political naivété merely colludes with the grim logic of capitalism that sells itself to the highest bidder (16). What makes Eagleton’s book easily the best in the “after Theory” chorus is his realization that theory requires a metanarrative of purpose. Theory must ask, “What is the function of human beings? What are human beings for?” (120). He realizes that all other criticisms of postmodern theory pale in comparison to its fundamental failure to address this ethical question. Eagleton’s own answer, an Aristotelian-Marxist approach of grounding ethics in human nature itself, remains finally unconvincing because it depends for its success on the Christian realization that “we become the occasion for each other’s self-realization” (122). It simply won’t do to harness the biblical idea of selfhood while ignoring its theological foundations, whose implications contradict the very ethic Eagleton wants to support.

Despite this weakness Eagleton’s Aristotelian-Marxist ethic provides a welcome corrective to ethical idealism by grounding meaning firmly in history. He argues that this desire for an embodied ethics does not require the “metaphysical outer space” of idealism and that it must remain suspicious of the ethics of deconstruction (134). Eagleton dislikes the immateriality of deconstruction’s neo-Kantian ethics and its “mysterious, unknowable moral law, embodied for us in some Other, which laid upon us an absolute, unconditional demand, and which evoked from us an equally infinite sense of responsibility.” Because thinkers like Derrida have jettisoned any notion of human nature, moral judgments are completely deontological, as if “left hanging in the air, demanded of us in apparently gratuitous fashion by some sublimely enigmatic Law or Other” (153).

His Marxist sensibilities also prompt Eagleton, unlike other theorists advocating this humanist direction, to insist on the radically hermeneutical nature of ethics. He insists on truth and objectivity but recognizes that these must be hermeneutically conceived. Objective truth, he argues, “is not just a condition outside the self. In the form of self-knowledge, it is the pre-condition of all successful living” (137). By raising self-knowledge to a central position in the future of theory, Eagleton joins the emerging consensus that this future lies in the direction of a new humanism. In a surprising alteration of classical Marxism, he also admits the necessity of religion for this
new humanism, a topic neglected by theory although “[r]eligion has been for most of human history one of the most precious components of popular life.” Theory without religion cannot even begin to answer questions about evil, suffering, and purpose because religion connects the “routine conduct of everyday life with ultimate spiritual importance” (99).

This revision of humanism, however, must avoid idealism, whether in its metaphysical or anti-metaphysical (deconstructionist) form, and remain grounded firmly in time and history. How can this occur, however, without succumbing to relativism? How can we have an ethic that is neither oppressive in its universal validity nor impractical in its utter transcendence of history? What emerges as central in the renewed quest for humanism and the future of literary theory is the tension between transcendence and immanence.

On the immanent side of things, Eagleton quite rightly points out that Derrida’s insistence on an ethics outside of all norms makes one hope that “he is not on the jury when one’s case comes up in court” (154). One may well respond in defense of the transcendence camp that neither would we wish to have Karl Marx (or Eagleton, for that matter) preach our confirmation sermon. The injunction “Now go and flourish according to your human nature” lacks the transcendence that Levinasian and Derridean ethics so relentlessly advocate.

Eagleton fails to appreciate, however, that deconstruction’s deontological ethics are also motivated by a humanistic desire. The real impulse behind deconstruction comes from the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his suspicion of Western ontology as wedded to an autonomous human self and the reduction of knowledge to rational cognition. Given that Levinas’s philosophy is deeply inspired by the Bible, there should be at least some links among Levinas, Derrida, and humanism. Indeed, when we go to the philosophical roots of deconstruction, we find not anti-humanism but a profound concern for humanism at its center.

Levinas’s central concern is to shelter the unique identity of every human being against any possible totalities, to affirm the absolute uniqueness of our individual humanity. Levinas’s philosophy is thus fundamentally a humanism of the “other,” an ethical obligation imposed by the irreducible dignity of one’s neighbor (6-8). When Levinas diagnoses the fundamental problem of Western thought as loss of humanness, he targets our inability to conceive of thought and knowledge otherwise than within closed, totalizing ways. The autonomous self of Enlightenment rationalism and the decentered self of Martin Heidegger’s fundamental ontology both fail to conceive of the human self in ethical terms. Assessed by Levinas’s ethical standard of absolute transcendence, even the most radical philosophical critique of reason is still a continuation of modernism. Levinas’s entire work represents an attempt to disrupt our inherited notion of the self and consciousness by focusing on
“limit experiences” in our perceptions of reality. According to Levinas, phenomenological analysis points us to the limit experiences in human consciousness that reveal the deeper ethical relation that is the beginning of knowledge.

Taking his cue from Levinas, Derrida focuses on aporias to find in the limitations of human reason a transcendence that disrupts and explodes our expectations. In essence, deconstruction is Levinas’s ethical philosophy stripped of its theological inspiration and repackaged in linguistic terms. Deconstruction is thus an attempt to implement Levinas’s radical humanism on the level of textual interpretation. We can hear Levinas’s voice in Derrida’s description of deconstruction as an ethical calling. Derrida defines deconstruction not as nihilism but as a vocation in Levinasian terms—as a response to a call from the other:

Deconstruction is therefore a vocation—a response to a call. The other, as the other than self, the other that opposes self-identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. (Kearney 168)

Deconstruction, in other words, turns out to be an application of Levinas’s concept of ethical transcendence and subjectivity, a humanisme d’autre homme. Let us not miss the importance of this claim. For Derrida, texts are important precisely because they are human communication, based on another’s attempt to communicate his or her vision of reality. Thus for Derrida, as for Levinas, reading is profoundly an ethical activity. Deconstruction functions as the constant reminder that ethics both founds and frames interpretation and that no one interpretation can do full justice to a text. Deconstruction is the guardian of the text’s irreducible excess that makes interpretation possible in the first place. This irreducible surplus of meaning “withdraws itself from any assembling through a hermeneutic. Rather, hermeneutics becomes first necessary only because of this surplus; hermeneutics becomes only possible through [this surplus]” (17).

Given Derrida’s own understanding of deconstruction, Eagleton commits a category mistake when he judges its ethics impractical. Derrida, in other words, would never want to sit on the juror’s bench in court. We can learn from both thinkers, however, that the central theme in discussing the future of theory is justifiability. Eagleton is certainly correct in this. We cannot simply return to traditional liberal or Christian humanism; however much we desire such a homecoming, none of its recent advocates provides an ontological justification for this move. Why should we return, say, to Frye’s lib-
eral humanism with all its unquestioned assumptions about reason and human nature? Or why should Cunningham's sacramental model of reading possess a universal claim to truth unless it can be shown as rooted in the very fabric of reality? These are precisely the questions that theory has taught us to ask.

The Way Forward

Even if we equate theory with postmodernism and everything bad that happened in literary studies from 1968 to 1998, it should be clear that postmodern concerns are merely another instance of human self-questioning. Perhaps this point will become clearer if we take up Rabaté's definition of theory as critical reflection about our basic hermeneutical assumptions. We may recall his suggestion that thoughtful reading requires a dialectic between close reading and interpretive assumptions or philosophical reflection. A future without theory would mean reading without reflection, hardly a humanistic ideal.

The quality of reflection, however, is another matter altogether. Recent advocates of humanism urge us to return to common sense and humanistic values that are offered without ontological justification. If anything, the future of theory depends on reflection that cuts deeper. Such reflection must be grounded in an ethically based hermeneutic and ontology.

Most readers accept the fact that reading proceeds hermeneutically. Reading as hermeneutics, however, means that we resist the assumption that close reading comes before interpretation, that exegesis (establishing what the text says) precedes hermeneutics (its application). This is merely to say that all our readings are motivated by application. Clinging to supposed neutrality in reading merely ignores the presuppositions we bring into play, and often such uninformed close readings are as violent and disrespectful to the text as the worst excesses of postmodern theory. An example from theological exegesis illustrates this point. The so-called historical school in biblical interpretation is perhaps the purest embodiment of presuppositionless close reading in exegetical history, yet this school's failure to reflect on its interpretive assumptions led to the destruction of the biblical text as the Word of God. Common sense was here defined as Enlightenment rationality, ostensibly doing exegetical work while suspending reflection on interpretive assumptions. Scriptural exegesists naively assumed that such hermeneutical considerations were the problem of systematic theology, not of biblical studies. Literary theory must not repeat biblical studies' error of presuppositionless exegesis; we cannot separate literary analysis from philosophical reflection by which we affirm, reexamine, revise, and reaffirm why and how we read in light of the most pressing current issues.
Secondly, reflection itself is hermeneutical. If we acknowledge our radically historical existence, we must also acknowledge that our interpretive frameworks themselves are constantly revisable. This is what the term "hermeneutic ontology" tries to convey. The idea that our interpretation of reality is always on the move often scares people. Is this not the very deconstructionist position that Derrida advocates? In a way it is. And, while this view accounts for the richness of textual interpretation, it also seems to convey an arbitrariness that causes anxiety for theologically oriented readers. I hope to show, however, that an Incarnational hermeneutic allows us to hold this position without anxiety, if not without risk.

The hermeneutical nature of reflection does put paid once and for all, however, to the illusion that the future of theory lies in a return to liberal humanism (Christian or otherwise) or to "traditional" common sense. These nostalgic yearnings are understandable, but they raise the very questions that gave rise to the hermeneutics of suspicion in the first place: "Whose humanism? Whose theory?" Nonetheless, the books I have reviewed, and many other recent publications in philosophy and literary theory besides, indicate that theory's future lies in articulating a neo-humanism that combines literary analysis with hermeneutic ontology.

Thirdly, the neglect of theology in most recent publications on the future of theory indicates a need for such reflection. While Cunningham's model of sacramental reading may sound desirable, without theological grounding it lacks any ontological weight and becomes an easily deconstructed Christian metaphor. Conversely, in Rabaté's future vision for theory, theology is conspicuously absent from his list of theorists and approaches. The demand for admitting theology into discussion of theory's future raises the immediate problem that modern reflection on ontology has been conducted in the virtual absence of theology. Heidegger, easily the most innovative ontological thinker of modernity, was convinced that theology is inherently incapable of the risk demanded by genuine thinking (Introduction 7), yet his ideas on hermeneutic ontology and the overcoming of metaphysics are vital to the future of theory as a neo-humanism.

Theory, Atheism, and the End of Metaphysics

I have argued that the future of theory beyond postmodernism depends on our ability to identify and debate the foundational world-view questions at issue in interpretation theory. More precisely, the future of theory hinges on the question of ontology. Postmodernism's legitimate criticism of ungrounded trust in human reason or any forms of structuralism demands that theory revisit ontological questions. Theory should follow the invitation of thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida to radical reflection, remem-
bering the big questions asked by these thinkers and bringing them to bear on the nature of interpretation. The common response that asking such metaphysical questions is no longer valid in the wake of postmodernism demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of “the end of metaphysics” and surrenders uncritically to an atheistic interpretation of reality.

Heidegger’s notion of overcoming metaphysics does not mean that we can do without metaphysics; it rather denies new philosophical formulations about ultimate reality. Metaphysics defined as the “end” of philosophy means that such reflections have exhausted all possible variations. Heidegger’s point is not that the completion of metaphysics signifies the cessation of philosophy but that it frees philosophy for the task of thinking because only now are we in a position to survey its entire history. Thinking requires nothing less than the historicization or deconstruction of the philosophical concepts on which we depend in all of our intellectual undertakings, whether in the natural or the human sciences (“End of Philosophy” 378).

Heidegger envisions this deconstruction in order to clear an opening in which things themselves appear to us in fresh ways without occlusion through our technological and utilitarian attitude. Here he outlines his phenomenological notion of aletheia or unconcealment. The way things show themselves to us, however, is not in straightforward fashion. Instead, due to our human limitations and the nature of things themselves, revelation also entails concealment, so that our encounter with them retains a certain ambiguity. Aletheia means that things appear to us as they are but that they do not reveal everything to our gaze. In Heidegger’s original version of Derridean deconstruction, real thinking lingers in this opening, in the transcendent truth of Being that reveals itself through language (“Letter” 199).

Heidegger insists that such thinking does not abrogate humanism but reinstates it in post-metaphysical terms. To subordinate human being to Being itself does not deny the basic humanist idea that “man become[s] free for his humanity and find[s] his worth in it” (“Letter” 201). Heidegger opposes traditional definitions of humanism (Christian or non-Christian) because they operate within onto-theology, making man one being among others (“Letter” 203). Placing man alongside the animals, however, does not do justice to his actual essence and dignity as a reflective being.

When we understand Heidegger’s notion of the end of metaphysics as an invitation to critical thinking, we see that humanism emerges from, but cannot be conclusively defined by, traditional categories and ideals. The immediate question that traditional humanists will ask is how such revisability escapes relativism since it cannot offer a conclusive ethical or educational norm. Before we can address this objection, however, we must deal with Heidegger’s second claim that genuine reflection requires atheism.

It is well known that Heidegger reserved this ability to think for philoso-
phy, excluding theology altogether. Somehow this Nietzschean myth that religion hinders reflection persists. Simon Critchley, a philosopher intensely interested in the intersection of philosophy and literature, articulates this position with admirable clarity:

Heidegger notes in a striking remark from 1925, thinking of Nietzsche, [that] "philosophical research is and remains atheism, which is why philosophy can allow itself the 'arrogance of thinking.'" Philosophy is nothing if not arrogant, and furthermore it should be arrogant, a continual arrogation of the human voice [...]. So, in my view, philosophy—at least under modern conditions—is atheism, and to have an experience of faith would mean stopping doing philosophy [...]. (3)

Thus Critchley, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, disqualifies about 1,500 years of Western intellectual history from the adventure of thinking. This impoverishment of philosophy is as grievous as it is disingenuous. To put it simply, without theology there would be no philosophy. One can also deflate Critchley’s claim by observing that faith, defined as trust in tacit assumptions on which we rely in our thinking and doing, underlies every human endeavor.

More to the point, however, is the fact that faith, defined in the narrower religious sense as trust in an identifiable deity, in no way restricts the agony and risk of thinking but rather intensifies it by giving it an ethical grounding. Faith, as dialogue with the ultimate Other, demands a deeply personal quality of thinking and allows us to define reason in a hermeneutical way founded on social categories. This ethical foundation provides an ontological basis for a hermeneutical definition of truth as ongoing revelation that tends toward the good and requires aesthetics for its perception.

Before we reach this conclusion via Incarnational theology, however, we must address the deferred question of how Heidegger’s hermeneutical ontology, with its interpretive unfolding of truth as aletheia, escapes subjectivism. I shall answer this objection indirectly by offering Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy as the most useful adaptation of Heidegger’s work for the future of literary theory.

Gadamer’s Hermeneutical Humanism

Gadamer’s provocative answer to the question raised by liberal humanists or advocates of Enlightenment common-sense rationality—namely, whether truth as interpretation does not necessarily end in relativism—is that their position is actually the relativistic one (Truth and Method 364). The notion of reason’s autonomy on which liberal humanism depends is itself the source of subjectivism. As long as the self defines itself as independent consciousness, thinking cannot escape subjectivism. The notion of univer-
sal, ahistorical reason does nothing to mitigate this problem. Heidegger set out to free Western thinking from this scourge of subjectivism, and his student Gadamer has continued the effort for interpretation theory.

Heidegger's entire project is an attempt to assert the historicity of human existence and to embed human meaning in the larger structures of Being. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics carries this line of thinking forward by grounding our interpretive efforts in a rationality that is historically embodied in language and tradition. Most importantly for our discussion of literary theory, Gadamer's postmodern hermeneutics is articulated as a humanism with its typical emphasis on education and character formation.

Gadamer's concept of self-knowledge through the fusion of tradition and horizon is supported by a hermeneutically tempered and Hegelian notion of rationality—the Greek *logos* or the rationality of being. He learned from G. W. F. Hegel that reason should not be defined with idealism as something interior to us over against an irrational nature. Rather, reason is our participation in the rationality of the universe: "There is then another way in which a human heightening of awareness penetrates and discovers itself—not the way inward to which Augustine appealed but the way of complete self[-]donation to what is outside in which the seeker nevertheless finds himself. To have seen and retained this notion of Greek rationality is Hegel's great contribution to philosophy." Gadamer goes on to posit what he calls "the exigency of reason, which presses us to keep on bringing about the unity of our knowledge" (Reason 18).

Gadamer also adopts Hegel's notion that self-knowledge is the goal of humanistic education. He agrees with the basic hermeneutical notion of self-understanding proposed by Hegel: "To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other." This process begins in childhood when "every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own" (Truth and Method 14). Thus, individuals are always engaged in the process of *Bildung* and in getting beyond their naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which they are growing is humanly constituted through language and custom.

Self-knowledge and education depend on the recognition of, and openness toward, otherness. Gadamer calls this sensibility "tact," an essential ability in the human sciences. Tact describes how a tradition is studied—namely, with "a receptivity to the 'otherness' of the work of art or of the past." The "general characteristic" of *Bildung*, Gadamer continues, is that of "keeping oneself open to what is other—to other, more universal points of view." *Bildung* "embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and
hence consists in rising above itself to universality” (Truth and Method 17). Gadamer concludes that the task of self-understanding, which involves all disciplines, is ever before us.

Gadamer anchors his hermeneutics ontologically not in an ahistorical, universal reason accessed through contemplation or intuition but rather in the human ability to reason at all. Reason is not opposed to history but grounded in it. Moreover, reason occurs only in a social context, such that truth emerges only through our conversation with others. Gadamer’s hermeneutics allow us to distill three basic axioms in charting the future of theory as the humanistic pursuit of self-knowledge.

Hermeneutics as the Future of Theory: Three Axioms

The first axiom is that self-knowledge, the kind of truth conveyed in the humanities, is always interpretation and never unmediated intuition. This assertion is no longer controversial and should serve as the foundation for literary theory. For Gadamer, reason, the universal logos, is embodied in language and hence in historically determined forms of reflection that require translation from one culture to another. Contrary to popular misreadings, Gadamer does not envision one Western tradition but makes the rather obvious point that thinking does not occur in a cultural or linguistic vacuum. All attempts at reflection and education begin in some specific tradition. This fact is not a condemnation of subjectivism but the proper acknowledgment of our finitude. To say that truth is hermeneutical means that we know only in a mediating dialectic between the familiar and the new without ever having utter and complete clarity.

If the first axiom of literary theory after postmodernism is that truth unfolds hermeneutically, the second is that truth is ethical. By Levinasian standards, this assertion may appear contradictory. In the wake of Levinas’s ethical philosophy, deconstruction has attacked Gadamer’s concept of “horizon fusion” as unethical because its account of understanding neither respects irreducible otherness nor emphasizes radically enough the limits of human understanding.

The most lucid proponent of this criticism, John D. Caputo, has lately revised his initial criticism of Gadamer by recognizing that Gadamer and Derrida “share a common commitment to the interchange between what Levinas calls the ‘same’ and the ‘other,’ between my own and the other’s interpretive horizon” (42). Caputo still fears, however, that Gadamer’s idea of finitude conceals a “latent theory of essence.” Gadamer’s hermeneutic, according to Caputo, suffers from Hegelian infinity in which difference is ultimately resolved in sameness. Nevertheless, this critic underestimates Gadamer’s faithfulness to Heidegger’s hermeneutical ontology. He also ig-
nores Gadamer’s assertion that repeated discussions of this difficult issue have led to Derrida’s concession that hermeneutics and deconstruction agree on the infinite deferral of final meaning. In deconstruction as in hermeneutics, “the horizon of interpretation changes with every step we take” (Gadamer, Lektion 67).

Caputo would do well to drop all charges against Gadamer and admit that he is as radically post-metaphysical as Derrida. Gadamer, like Derrida, affirms transcendence but refuses to give this transcendence definite contours beyond vaguely gesturing toward an “exigency of reason.” Like his teacher Heidegger, Gadamer remains a strictly secular philosopher by refusing to define transcendence in ethical and thus religious terms (Zimmermann 208). The real problem in asserting the hermeneutical nature of truth is that neither Gadamer nor Derrida offers an ethics of interpretation that is radically transcendent and yet ethically normative enough to provide an overall purpose necessary for any kind of humanism. The solution to this dilemma requires a model of interpretation that allows self-revelation of an object in its uniqueness in such a way that we can perceive and understand it without any compromise of transcendence.

Finally, the third axiom of theory beyond postmodernism is that interpretation requires aesthetics. Human reflection requires aesthetics, and aesthetics requires ontological grounding if we are to avoid aestheticism, the separation of art from existence. Consideration of the ontological grounding of aesthetics affirms philosophical hermeneutics as the foundation for the future of literary theory. Gadamer bases the phenomenological experience of reality outlined by Heidegger in the experience of art. When he draws on Plato to harness his conception of beauty for hermeneutics, Gadamer isolates the beautiful as the self-attesting radiance of truth. Being discloses itself in the beautiful as aletheia or unveiling. In the beautiful the gap between idea and appearances is transcended: “It is the beautiful itself which both creates and supersedes this contrast. Just as in the beautiful the thing itself really reveals itself even in a copy, so in the hermeneutic experience truth has something intrinsically worthwhile about it” (Truth and Method 487-88). While truth is self-attesting, the experience of truth is ambiguous. That is not a weakness but a strength. Ambiguity is only a weakness if we conceive of truth in terms of scientific objectivism, the kind of knowledge that guarantees the same result with each repeated experiment (Truth and Method 489).

I have argued that the future of literary theory lies, at least in part, in three main axioms. If we agree with Gadamer that humanistic education is about self-knowledge, about our orientation in this world through asking the abiding questions of existential meaning and purpose, then we should work with the assumption that truth is interpretation, that interpretation is ethical, and that truth requires aesthetics for its apprehension. The future of literary
theory depends on its ability to uphold the importance of humanist ideals while addressing the legitimate postmodern concern about ideological criticism. This balancing act is possible only if we can imagine a humanism that can ground its claims on an ontology of difference. As I will show, such an ontology must include Incarnational theology.

Before sketching a theologically conceived neo-humanism as the future of literary theory, we must address the question of whether humanism's goal of self-knowledge is a category worth retaining. Even Heidegger affirmed a humanism beyond humanism, an ontological quest that describes attunement to Being as the way to live authentically. There are, however, philosophical rumblings about the suitability of this ideal of human redemption through reflection. One German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, has asked whether the humanities are the best discipline for discussing this question.

Sloterdijk and the Question of Humanism

The suggestion to maintain humanism as integral to literature and consciousness does betray, of course, a certain world view. Two defining features of liberal humanism are its anthropological belief that man is a rational animal and its eschatological hope that reading good books tames our baser instincts while encouraging the nobler ones. These very tenets, however, are hotly debated. Sloterdijk has caused a great stir by rejecting both ontology and humanism as educational categories. He chides literary humanism for its elitist attitude that reserves knowledge for the literate.

Those of us who love humanism and literary culture should consider Sloterdijk's claim that belief in a normative, homogeneous literary world may have been existent from 1789 to 1945 but is no longer possible because through "the media-established mass culture after 1918 (broadcasting) and after 1945 (television), and even more through the [I]nternet revolution, human co-existence in current societies" has changed from a humanistic model to "a post-literary" and "post-humanistic" one (Nicht Gerettet 306-07; my translation). Sloterdijk is certainly correct that literature as a culture-forming medium has been replaced by electronic and mass media. His objections to humanism, however, run deeper. For example, Sloterdijk rejects Heidegger's Humanismusbrief because it is not enough simply to denounce ontologically unfounded or misguided humanisms in favor of a universal humanism oriented toward Being. As he reminds us, Heidegger disdains the definition of human as animal rationale and tries to overcome the veneration of individual authors by exalting Being itself as the Great Author whose letters may be read by all who learn how to listen (Nicht Gerettet 317). Heidegger ups the humanist ante, so to speak, by demanding not merely a good reader but a good listener to Being itself, whose voice is mediated by none
other than Being’s primary shepherd—Heidegger himself (Regeln 28). Sloterdijk accuses not only Heidegger but also all humanists of excluding biological and evolutionary factors from their considerations (Regeln 33).

In an effort to correct this oversight, Sloterdijk inverts the customary humanist priority of intellect over animal instincts and argues that, while the reading of books may have been of tremendous influence in forming human values, the more decisive power has always been some form of natural selection (Regeln 43). At stake is the domestication of the human animal in the service of our survival, and literary humanism is merely a surface phenomenon of this underlying biological and sociological dynamic. While one may not want to share Sloterdijk’s overstated conclusion that gene manipulation may render traditional educational efforts obsolete, one would do well to heed his point that the future of literary theory must also include a dialogue with the natural sciences (Regeln 46).

Is this, then, the end of humanism? Sloterdijk’s own claim about the primacy of the biological is a world view that requires careful examination. Heidegger may carry the day after all, for his existential hermeneutic can certainly accommodate the biological even while it seeks to transcend it. What, however, is the nature of this transcendence? If we define it as our developing human consciousness or our increasing power as an evolving species, should we not follow Heidegger’s admonition and give up the term humanism altogether because it is precisely this exclusive focus on the human rather than on something greater (i.e., Being) that has caused the tremendous dehumanization and suffering of the twentieth century? As Lévinas has argued, however, Heidegger’s own inability to distinguish Being from Nazi ideology illustrates the inverse problem that transcendence without contours is as dangerous as surrendering to biologism.

Theology, more specifically Incarnational theology, allows us to address these concerns. First of all, in Christian theology the human is tremendously important yet neither autonomous nor absolutely central. God’s becoming flesh for the sake of humanity affirms human dignity while establishing divine sovereignty. Theology also allows us to settle the question concerning the precedence of biology over ontology. The divine authorship of Creation establishes ethical and ontological categories rather than biological ones as primordial. We can thus affirm with Heidegger, albeit on more concrete historical grounds, that existential questions of purpose and meaning run deeper in human nature than supposed animal instincts and cannot be tweaked by DNA sequencing.

Ontology of Difference

Most importantly, theology provides an interpretive model that allows for
the potential value of all human self-expression and that accommodates all three axioms outlined above. The interdependent doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation offer important ontological possibilities for the future of theory. The Trinity places at the heart of reality an ontology of difference. The three distinct “persons” as one deity present us with an ideal of being in communion that encourages us to think of truth as a mode of existence that stands opposed equally to rationalism and individualism. The Incarnation adds to this ontology of difference the notion that transcendence may be communicated without loss. These two central Christian doctrines provide proper ontological grounding for the three aspects I claimed earlier as determinative for the future of theory as a neo-humanism.

1. Self-knowledge (truth) requires ethical transcendence.

Genuine self-knowledge requires an objectivity that lies outside human consciousness. The ultimate barrier to human consciousness, and thus the only means of overcoming a definition of human existence in either idealist or naturalist terms, is the personal transcendence afforded by the Incarnation. The doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation give us what Levinas desires by providing radical, incomprehensible otherness; contrary to Levinas, however, the Incarnation allows us to articulate such otherness without any loss of transcendence. Moreover, if we follow Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in interpreting the Incarnation within a Trinitarian context, transcendence and otherness occur only in the form of community.

On this account Levinas's ethical transcendence is possible only because there is a social configuration of God at the heart of reality:

If one does not wish to fall back into idealism (or into collective sociologism), to sink into materialism and hedonism, or to break oneself on the absolute limit of the thou (the “Thou” as Hell: Sartre), then the only path open is the Christian path, which can attribute endless value to the human “Thou” because God has attributed and truly granted this value to him in the act of election and in the death on the cross. And this is possible only if the “I-Thou-We” relationship has itself absolute, divine worth and dignity [Würde]: in the triune being of love. (7:441)⁴

God in the flesh establishes language and human communication not as loss of transcendence but as foundation for reflection. In Christian theology all contemplation is in some way participation in the divine Logos, whose historical manifestation grounds understanding in difference rather than in sameness. The Incarnation means that irreducible transcendence has found a way to communicate itself without loss and hence to make possible a hermeneutics that does not begin in sameness.
The transcendence offered in the divine Logos is radical but also ethical in the two current usages of this term. Christ's words "I am the Truth" (particularly in conjunction with a Trinitarian model of reality) indicate that understanding begins in social rather than rationalist or scientific categories. Moreover, the Incarnation establishes truth as ethical not only because it occurs in social terms but also because it offers the ultimate norm for human subjectivity and moral action. The Incarnation is God's kenosis, His ultimate commitment to humanity. The mandate "Love your neighbor as yourself," even to the point of death, is inscribed in history by the divine example of the Cross as a meta-ethical norm.

2. Self-knowledge (truth) is hermeneutical.

Contrary to fundamentalist and atheistic ideas, the Incarnation offers a model of divine truth that is radically hermeneutical. God's self-disclosure occurs historically so that, while its authenticity and authority are asserted, its appropriation occurs in accordance with the limitations of human finitude. If indeed the self-disclosure of the divine is indicative for all revelation, this affirms phenomenology. Engagement with reality is not gained by seizing objects of understanding and squeezing them into the mold of our preconceptions. Rather, our preconceptions are the initial point of approach to the object under investigation. The object, however, reveals itself to us and often resists our preestablished notions, which then require revision in accordance with the nature of the thing examined.

Self-knowledge is hermeneutical because God's self-interpretation within being and time establishes the twofold nature of all knowledge. As Balthasar has argued, all of reality is shaped by God's principle of self-revelation, yet this revelation occurs in a dialectic of concealing and revealing. Throughout history God reveals Himself as the incomprehensible God: "While he is quite comprehensible in his revelation and even demands the understanding of faith, the God of Israel proves himself in history to be ever more incomprehensible and, as such, exhibits himself ever more truly as who he is" (1:456). God is, after all, a personal entity, and the concealing-revealing dynamic also applies to our human relationships. In the Incarnation, we might say, God's revealedness is fulfilled in concealment. The more God reveals Himself, the greater the paradoxes become.

Since the incarnate Logos configures reality, we find this model in the daily structures of human knowing. We gain knowledge of the world not in some immediate way but in dependence on texts and contexts. Classical or "eminent" texts, as Gadamer calls them, works that seem timeless in their power and relevance, are not, of course, outside time. Even the most radical historicization, however, will not succeed in rendering them completely rela-
tive to their time period because they address the great questions of human purpose, of humankind's misery and nobility, that find fulfillment in the Incarnation. We must make room for cultural preferences and prejudices, but even so the literary canon's formation owes much to common questions of ultimate meaning.

3. Self-knowledge (truth) requires aesthetics.

Finally, theology establishes aesthetics as integral to self-knowledge. Balthasar, for example, regards form (Gestalt) and beauty as the primordial phenomena of appearance. He thus advocates a phenomenology wherein objects show themselves to us in their Gestalt and their beauty. The Incarnation is the model (Urphänomen) for how things appear to us because in God's bodily self-disclosure the object and its transcendent radiance are coexistent:

We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing. Similarly we are confronted with both the gathering and the uniting of that which had been indifferently scattered—its gathering into the service of the one thing which now manifests and expresses itself—and the outpouring, self-utterance of the one who was able to fashion by himself such a body of expression (Sprachleib): by himself, I say, meaning "on his own initiative," and therefore pre-eminence, freedom, sovereignty, out of his own interior space, particularity, and essence. Here exist at the same time both interiority and its communication, the soul and its body, free communication within the constraints and intelligibility of language. (1:20)⁵

Human beings share this essential characteristic of self-expression. Balthasar follows Levinas in stating that human culture begins with ethics, with the social relation. Human beings, however, are not the original phenomenon; they are not Urbild but Abbild, not original but image. We are not "masters of ourselves" because neither do we control our existence in total freedom, since we are "thrown" into existence, nor are we free in our communications. All our acts of self-expression are embedded in history and leave traces we cannot alter. We are "not original in being and spirit but copy, not original word but answering word, not freely speaking but expressed meaning, and therefore completely under the demand of the beautiful which we ourselves cannot control" (Balthasar 1:21). In this sense human existence is in its entirety (body and spirit) a "mirror of God," and art participates in the divine transcendence.

Balthasar's theological aesthetic goes beyond Gadamer's recovery of the beautiful for the future of theory by accommodating the full spectrum of
human experience. Aesthetics must include the disfigured and the violent. The drama of redemption, insists Incarnational theology, presents us with the divine form of beauty that is Christ. This beauty, however, incorporates also the trauma of violence. Art that wants to be taken seriously, argues Balthasar, has to incorporate the demonic if it wishes to avoid becoming irrelevant aestheticism (1:460-61). The violence of the Cross has meaning because it involved a sacrifice not only for humanity but also for every individual human being. The divine aesthetics of the Cross thus informs human art and self-knowledge.

As we can see, theology does not negate Gadamer's ontology but subsumes the Greek *logos* into the divine *Logos*. All that Gadamer asserts concerning *aletheia* is true for Incarnational theology because the divine *Logos*, both in eternity and concretely in history, is the center of reality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has expressed this classic Christian position with great clarity:

> There are, however, not two realms, not a *regnum gratiae* and a *regnum naturae*, but only one realm of Christ-reality [*ein Raum der Christuswirklichkeit*], in which the profane and sacred realities are united. Not two competing spheres coexist that contend with each other about their limits, so that the question of boundaries [between the sacred and the profane] becomes central to history; rather, the entire world reality is already taken up into Christ, and from this center and toward this center does history move. (44; my translation)

Both Bonhoeffer and Balthasar ground their hermeneutical understanding on this ontological verity. Truth is both existential and radically hermeneutical because faith is “participation in the free self-disclosure [*Selbsterschliesung*] of God's interior life and light” (Balthasar 1:157). Heidegger's hermeneutical ontology becomes an ethically determined ontological hermeneutics when we see that the light of Being is the radiance of the divine *Logos*. To see that, however, requires eyes that only God can bestow by the miracle of grace (Balthasar 1:158). All human beings as made in the image of God, however, can perceive the values that most ennoble our humanity. While Incarnation theology recognizes the Church as the exemplar of the new humanity whose *poiēsis* is to represent God's righteousness, all human activity responds in some way to the divine *Logos*.

One is tempted to apply this conviction to the recent calls for the renewal of humanism. Cunningham, for example, would find here a clearly expressed ontology for his Eucharistic reading model, and Rabaté a structure of truth as divine address and sustaining power that touches on all the questions the human sciences will ever think of asking. In fact, it is this model that continues to shatter preconceived notions of selfhood, goodness, justice, truth, and beauty. Liberal humanism could find in Incarnational on-
tology a foundation for its values of freedom and the self, albeit redefined in their relational contingency. Eagleton's Marxist humanism finds here an ethic that is firmly rooted in history and that links theory to social justice while maintaining transcendence as the measure for human dignity.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that theory means first of all the examination of world-view issues, more specifically ontological issues that underlie our belief in the value of literature and close readings. If we define theory in this way, it must be seen as indispensable to any literature department with a sound curriculum. Theoretical reflection is important if we desire our literature classes to impinge on the abiding existential questions of humanity.

I have also argued for retaining the label of humanism in some sense, be it as neo-humanism or in another form, because of my conviction that the humanities remain the best discipline for reflecting on what it means to be human. With the critics of humanism, however, I agree that we must maintain a real and lively dialogue with other fields of inquiry. We must work hard, in other words, to be interdisciplinary without relinquishing detailed knowledge in our particular field, and we must strive continuously to rearticulate why we do literature. We must do theory.

Finally, I have suggested that the ontological questions posed to theory by the current interest in ethics, transcendence, and self-knowledge are most fruitfully answered with the help of theological considerations. If we approach the reading and teaching of literature, art, and media, indeed all reflection in the humanities, by addressing foundational questions with an interdisciplinary attitude, with the participation of religion, and with enduring enthusiasm for the intoxicating power of language, the future of theory promises to be very exciting indeed.

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NOTES

1Good is correct, of course, in opposing the excesses of theory, especially its obsession with suspicion that turns everything into an ideology (54-56).

2I take the "old humanism" to mean what R. W. Southern has called "literary humanism," the renaissance movement whose suspicion of science as yielding ever-changing insights prompted it to withdraw to the eternal haven of moral persuasion by which our animal nature and its passion would be restrained in the service of civil society (18).
Eagleton advocates an Aristotelian ethic in which the purpose of being human lies in fulfilling our true humanness. In order to provide ethical contents to this humanness, Eagleton incorporates the Christian idea of selflessness and then turns this mixture into socialism: "The political form of this ethic is known as socialism, for which, as Marx comments, the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. It is, as it were, politicized love, or reciprocity all round" (122). Eagleton realizes that "not everyone, however, agrees on what love or self-fulfilment is, or on which virtues are important, or indeed on this model of the good life at all" (122-23).

I have slightly modified the standard English translation by retaining the German term for "dignity" to avoid the word "value," whose utilitarian connotations are problematic.

I have modified the English translation where its deviations from the German original slightly distort Balthasar's emphasis on the linguisticality of our existence.

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