

The Rhetorical Roots of Radical Orthodoxy:
Augustinian Oratory and Ontology in Milbank's Theopo(e/li)tics

by

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B.A. Trinity Christian College, 2010

A thesis submitted to the Institute for Christian Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy

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August 21, 2013
Institute for Christian Studies
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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For J

Eshet Chayil

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A multitude of people deserve my abundant gratitude for partaking in the labor of love which is this thesis and the degree which it completes. I offer my deepest thanks to my supervisor Bob Sweetman both for taking me under his expansive wing and for kicking me out of my intellectual nest toward new heights. I likewise thank Shannon Hoff for her amicable dedication to my academic, professional, and communal development. I also express my deep appreciation for David Neeland's warm, encouraging wisdom in the crafting of this thesis. I am also grateful for the financial support which ICS has offered me in the forms of the Bernard Zylstra scholarship, a research assistantship, a library work study, and continuing work in donor relations and advancement (not to mention the insanely low tuition costs of Canadian higher education). The ICS community and the congregation of Grace Toronto Presbyterian Church both deserve my profound gratitude for grafting me warmly into their respective folds of friendship and intellectual fellowship. I am likewise indebted to my friends and mentors in the Philosophy department at Trinity Christian College for their work and wisdom in helping me to navigate life (academic and otherwise). I am also eternally grateful to my parents, grandparents, and family-at-large for their constant loving support—in a wide array of forms—of my life and studies. Finally, I lavish fathomless depths of praise on my wise, beautiful, and loving wife Julianne, whose long-suffering grit and grace enabled us to persevere through this season of life together.

Wherever I go, may I remember you all at the altar of the Lord.

— *cf.* St. Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.xi.27

“Christianity... from the first took the side of rhetoric against philosophy and contended that the Good and the True are those things of which we have a ‘persuasion,’ *pistis*, or faith.”

— John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 398.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will argue that the best way to approach the work of political theologian John Milbank is to treat his corpus as *rhetorical*—and not only *philosophical*— in nature. I will enact such a re-description of Milbank’s project by showing how he draws on Saint Augustine—as a rhetor as well as a philosophical theologian—to construct his own character (as a postmodern Christian), argument (the theoretical and practical implications of a Christian-Neoplatonic ontology of peace), and audience (with the categories of orthodoxy, heresy, and paganism). I will draw on the resources of the classical rhetorical tradition (hereafter stylized “CRT”) to provide clues as to the organization and intent of his texts. I will show how Milbank constructs himself as creatively inheriting several traditions: Christianity, Neoplatonism, and Continental post-structuralist philosophy. Taking Milbank at his word that he is following in Augustine’s footsteps, I will extend Augustine’s hermeneutic of charity to Milbank’s work (despite Milbank’s apparent failure to employ this same attitude toward those he interprets).¹ I will argue that the most charitable way to approach Milbank’s *oeuvre* is to locate him (via Augustine) in the classical rhetorical tradition. This positioning will allow me to address the internal contradictions in Milbank’s texts as performative (with regard to his own character—*ethos*—and the disposition of his audience—*pathos*) as well as propositional (with regard to his arguments—*logos*). I will argue that Milbank returns to Augustine and the CRT by constructing a positive *ethos*, by positing a *logos* in the form of philosophical rhetoric (with epistemological, political and aesthetic implications), and by engaging in *pathos* to convert and affect his audience(s). I will conclude that, whether or not he acknowledges it explicitly, Milbank

¹ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, I:xxxvi; Hoffmeyer, 2006, 14. Of course, whether or not Augustine himself consistently abided by his own principle of hermeneutic charity is a matter of some dispute.

implicitly picks up on the classical rhetorical tradition's unique approach to philosophical and theological issues.

I will show that such a rhetorical orientation toward Milbank's work is helpful and significant because it can re-contextualize many criticisms of his project. In addition to engaging with John Milbank's corpus (particularly his books *Theology and Social Theory*, *The Word Made Strange*, and *Being Reconciled*), I will examine secondary literature (both critical and supportive of his project) which focuses on the elements of language, politics, ontology, aesthetics, and the retrieval of ancient and medieval thought in Milbank's work. While I largely agree with Milbank's conclusions, I recognize that his methodology is sweeping and often careless about particularities: his critics are often correct in their nuanced examinations of his claims. Yet precisely because his project concerns itself more with *mythos* than *logos*,² I hope to examine the *rhetorical* impact of Milbank's work and to show how he is (despite his claims to the contrary) retracing Augustine's own Ciceronian path, which is the confluence of philosophy and rhetoric. To this end, I will engage with many primary sources in the classical rhetorical tradition (Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, Cicero's *De Inventione*, *De Optimum Genere Oratorum*, and *De Oratore*, and Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*). In order to reconstruct the world of the ancient rhetorical and dialectical traditions and to plot Augustine's place within them, I will employ secondary literatures from the fields of philosophy, rhetoric, history, and theology.

Because this is a thesis in philosophy, not rhetoric, my methodology will not be primarily a formal analysis weighing the emotive and stylistic purchase of any given textual sample from Milbank's corpus. Instead, I will map the ontological, epistemological, ethical, political, and

² *Logos* in this sense (as paired with *mythos*) denotes the use of reason in clarifying arguments (Aristotle, *Poetics*, IX, XXIII). *Logos* in the rhetorical tradition's definition (as combined with *ethos* and *pathos*) denotes the persuasive content of an argument, as opposed to the persuasive appeals to the rhetor's trustworthiness or the audience's disposition (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.ii.6). I will further explain this distinction in the second chapter.

aesthetic issues in Milbank's project atop the schematic grids of classical rhetoric and Neoplatonic philosophy. I will draw upon the complex historical relationship between the West's twin discourses of dialectics and oratory to locate both the propositional and performative dimensions of Milbank's chastened metaphysical project.

As Kimball and Kennedy demonstrate, the tempestuous history of Western intellectual thought can be narrated as a double helix intertwining the opposing-yet-complementary discourses *dialectic* and *rhetoric*. In the Greco-Roman period, dialectic (or philosophy) was seen as a dialogical disputation, the logical outworking through a series of questions and answers concerning universal and theoretical claims, usually in a somewhat private context. Its rival discourse was rhetoric (or oratory), a monological exposition employing emotion as well as reason, concerning practicalities and particularities, usually in a public or political context. Both discourses constructed themselves upon the foundations of *endoxa* (public opinions and conventional wisdom).³ However, unlike the philosophical tradition which presupposed the possibility of appealing to a universal *physis* (nature), the rhetorical tradition tended to emphasize *nomos* (cultural construction).⁴ "Philosophy in fact *began* as a secularizing immanentism," writes Milbank, "an attempt to regard a cosmos independently of a performed reception of the poetic word."⁵ Despite his Platonic philosophical heritage, Milbank tends to privilege the particular over the general, especially with regard to persuasion. He rejects "the assumption that 'persuasiveness' rests on 'universality,'" which instead he understands as working locally through particular *nomoi* (cultural constructs).⁶ In his focus on radical contingency and the social construction of all truth, Milbank draws deeply from the well of classical rhetoric: unlike philosophy, rhetoric is more concerned with plausibility and

3 Kimball, 1986, 27; Kennedy, 1991, 28.

4 Vitanza, 1991, f.n. 7.

5 Milbank, 1997, 50.

6 Michalson, 2004, 368.

appearances than certainties and essences, and its practitioners are aware that objective, foundationalist truth is impossible to secure.⁷ The primary aim of my thesis is thus to re-describe John Milbank's theo-political project as a *rhetorical* endeavor in order to relativize some major concerns about his strident (albeit post-foundationalistically chastened) return to medieval theology. In particular, I will address several criticisms of contradictions emerging within Milbank's work. In the first chapter, I will argue in response that Milbank returns to Augustine and the classical rhetorical tradition by forming a positive *ethos*, identifying both with post-structuralists and with orthodox Christians. In the second chapter, I will argue that Milbank's argument (*logos*) can be described as philosophical rhetoric which connotes his epistemology, social ethics and poetics. In the third chapter, I will argue that Milbank employs *pathos* to convert and affect his audiences via his grand narrative's grand style. My three arguments are positive proposals about the constructive significance of Milbank's *oeuvre*. However, I have formulated each of them as a response to one of three major criticisms against Milbank.

In the first chapter, I will examine the criticism that Milbank presents himself as a reactionary against modernity, and that his *ethos* (tactic of gaining trust) is compromised by his antagonistic stance, which performatively contradicts the peace which he proclaims. I will argue in response that Milbank does not define himself merely in the negative, but instead seeks to positively identify himself with two distinct audiences: postmodern academia and the traditional Western Christian church. I will use the CRT's concepts of *refutatio* (the repudiation of one's opponents), *inventio* (the artistic selection of already persuasive material) and *imitatio* (the creative patterning of one's self after one's predecessors) to describe Milbank's *ethos* as a constructive self-presentation. I will argue that Milbank's simultaneous appeal to two audiences (postmodernists and Christians) relies on their shared Augustinian heritage, which also extends

⁷ Cicero, *On Duties*, II.7-8; Fortin, 2008, 223.

to modernity. I will examine how Augustine has been taken up in these differing traditions, and how Milbank returns to Augustine in a rhetorical vein as well as a philosophical one. I will conclude that Milbank and Augustine lie in the classical rhetorical tradition, and that Milbank engages in the CRT's tactic of *ethos* by identifying himself positively both with postmodern and Christian discourses.

In the second chapter, I will address the criticism that the combination of Milbank's rhetorical anti-foundationalism and his Neoplatonic metaphysics is inherently contradictory.⁸ I will argue that Milbank considers his project to be post-foundationalist to the degree that no appeal to an autonomous realm of reason (i.e., the secular) is considered possible; instead, he claims, reason is always-already conditioned by pre-theoretical narratives which develop historically out of the linguistic practices of particular communities. Milbank rejects the secularist view of reason as logocentric; in response, he enacts a rhetorical turn by retrieving the ancient opposite of *logos*—*mythos*—as the fundamental dynamic in human epistemic persuasion. However, I suggest that Milbank's mythocentric turn can nonetheless be described philosophically in terms of a Neoplatonic metaphysics' transcendental attributes of Being. This entails as an increased emphasis on the Beautiful (the peaceful harmonization of creational differences), which thus resituates the True (and its non-foundationalist epistemic effects upon persuasion) as well as the Good (and its political effects in pursuit of justice by way of Christian socialism, "complex space," and a substantive, teleological common good).

In the third chapter, I will address the criticism that the violent form of Milbank's rhetoric is at odds with the content of his ontology of peace.⁹ Milbank talks about a beautiful, peaceful story wherein ontological differences are harmonized, but his grand narrative is a series of harsh

8 O'Grady, 2000, 175.

9 Milbank defines "violence" as any creational privation of its full participation in Being. Violence is Milbank's ultimate negative term, his *summum malum*: the worst evil (Milbank, 1990, 4-5).

invectives against an array of “heresies” and “paganisms.”¹⁰ Although Milbank accuses philosophy (i.e., the secular, ahistorical, and non-culturally-conditioned use of reason) of dissimulating its own *mythos* and refusing to engage with the *mythoi* of others, Milbank himself does not seem interested in hearing other stories beyond out-narrating them. There is seemingly a disjunction between the content (Being is harmonious, therefore violence is not inevitable) and the form (violent narratives need to be competitively “outnarrated”) of Milbank’s logos. The intentional manner in which he tries to *affect* his audience via his *mythos* (which is taken to be “orthodox,” the single correct way of describing the cosmos) seems to partake in the very power plays and agonistic violences which his ontology intends to evade. In response, I will examine Milbank’s *pathos* (the attempt to re-shape one’s audience in order that they might accept one’s arguments) by retracing both his theory and practice of *mythos*. I will argue that while Milbank’s narratology (theory of narrative) seems to promote an agonism between contradictory *mythoi*, his grand narrative (proclaimed more often than not in the affective grand style) does not overpower his audience, but rather empowers them to deconstruct the violences which the developments of history mislabel as “natural” and “inevitable.” I will argue that not only is Milbank’s ontology an account of the metaphysical conditions for such peaceful persuasion, but also that Milbank’s rhetorical turn (primarily in its narrative and narratological dimensions) strives to enact his ontology of peace. This chapter will explain Milbank’s reflexive contradictions as a performative rhetorical move to persuade his audience to abandon what he sees as the falsehoods, evils, and uglinesses of late modernity. This type of moving an audience is not Cicero’s moving to win, but perhaps a subversive *moving to lose*, awakening his readership to an emotional conversion—whether for or against his project—because the story which he tells demands a passionate

10 *Ontological peace* refers to the Neoplatonic understanding of beings as harmoniously cohering in Being: ontological differences are not necessarily violent abrasions between beings, but are instead the diverse folds in creation which harmoniously proclaim the manifold glory of Being which makes their being possible (Milbank, 2009¹, 51, 53).

response more than any lukewarm tolerance.

In conclusion, I will argue that, while the three aforementioned criticisms cannot be entirely resolved, perhaps they can be dissolved by re-describing Milbank's corpus as rhetorical, rather than philosophical, in nature. (This follows Milbank's own self-description as rhetorically inclined, an appellation which has nonetheless often been overshadowed by his widespread reputation as a metaphysician). I will address said contradictions by employing the tools of Greco-Roman oratory to situate both Milbank and his predecessor Augustine in the classical rhetorical tradition. Using the *metarhetorical* tools of the CRT (that is, theoretical reflections about oratorical practice), I will examine the rhetorical presentation of Augustine's ontology of peace in his *City of God* and compare Milbank's parallel rhetorical moves in his post-foundationalist proposal of Christian Neoplatonism. I will argue that Milbank's purposes would be greatly aided by more explicitly embracing this tradition: his work already displays evidence of classical oratory's influence, and he would be well served to embrace explicitly the rhetorical avenues which open themselves readily to his metaphysics. I will conclude that Milbank succeeds Augustine and the classical rhetorical tradition in three ways: by manufacturing a positive *ethos* through identifying with both postmodernists and Christians, by presenting as his *logos* a philosophical rhetoric (conveying his epistemology, social ethics, and aesthetics), and by using the grand style of a grand narrative to engage in *pathos* to 'reconstruct' and motivate his audience(s).

Chapter I.

Ethos: Trusting Milbank's Self-Characterization as Postmodern Augustinian

In this chapter, I will examine the trustworthiness of John Milbank's authorial self-presentation, or *ethos*. His self-presentation as a rhetor seems overwhelmingly negative (in the strict sense of the word): superficially, his identity seems to be primarily a *definition-against* rather than a *definition-for*.¹¹ Milbank seems to define his own trustworthiness over and against a number of (ostensibly) untrustworthy paradigms, and his abrasive style of research bristles in its prophetic denunciation of hidden violence in the assumptions of the Western intellectual scene. Milbank presents himself as a speaker deeply distrustful of numerous discourses: the language of nature, rights, and liberty in classical liberalism, the fact-value distinction inherent in modernist sociology, and (most importantly) the notion of objective truth running through every research program and Western worldview in the past several centuries.¹² If John Milbank is a rhetor, as I claim, then he seems to have a peculiar habit of failing to teach, please, or move his audience.¹³ Given that his negative self-presentation tends to diminish his persuasiveness in the eyes of his critics, why exactly does Milbank present himself in such a manner?

My first chapter will attempt to answer this question with a charitable hermeneutic

11 While some might not see this as theoretically problematic, the charge holds weight as an immanent critique: Milbank himself stresses (contra Hegel) that negation is never a self-sufficient condition for inevitable reconciliation of contradiction into identity; instead, negation always dependent on a prior integrality (Milbank, 1990, 155). If Milbank's own self-identification is merely the negative rejection of modernity, then his *ethos* is nothing but a privative turn from a constructive wholeness toward a destructive nothingness. Milbank's project would thus become a nihilism unto itself, which is the epitome of self-contradiction insofar as his project is a fundamental rejection of nihilism (Milbank, 1990, 262-3).

12 Milbank, 1990, 10, 13, 15, 314.

13 However, this is not to say that his audience is not moved by his style or content; indeed, Milbank has not only the attention but the active scorn of many sectors of the academy and the public eye. Many contemporary philosophers and theologians have found John Milbank's *ethos* utterly disreputable and unreliable. For instance, John Caputo notes that Milbank's propensity to divide the world into (Augustinian-Thomistic) Christians and nihilists is ample evidence of why "no one trusts theology" (Caputo, 2009, 1). Other critics suspect that Milbank's authorial identity can be reduced to a negative reaction against other theories, thereby deriving its meaning from positing an opposing meaninglessness (Althaus-Reid, 2006, 114-5; Rivera, 2006, 120). This chapter will not attempt to negate these criticisms so much as relativize them in relation to Milbank's rhetorical intentions.

assuming the best of intentions in the author. I will presume that Milbank is building his character as an *auctor* (textual authority) in a purposeful, artful manner, and that one would miss many of his persuasive moves if one disregards performativity in favor of pure propositional argumentation. Drawing on the conceptual tools of the classical rhetorical tradition (particularly Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine), I will show how Milbank constructs his *ethos* by engaging in the classical tactics of *refutatio* (the denunciation of opposing ideas and figures), *inventio* (the active and artful means of presenting an argument, particularly via the creative interpretation of conventional wisdom), and *imitatio* (the self-conscious adoption and surpassing of the traits of one's teachers). This approach will allow me to argue that Milbank secures his reliability by trafficking in the language games and *koinē* (commonplaces) of two discourses: postmodernist theory and orthodox Christian theology. I will show how Milbank returns to the historically pivotal figure of Augustine because of the latter's influence both upon 'orthodox' premodern Christianity and upon 'heretical' modernity and postmodernity. I will argue that, despite Milbank's explicitly negative self-definition over and against these discourses, he *implicitly* identifies himself in a positive, constructive manner which is consistent—performatively if not propositionally—with his argument.

***Ethos* in the Classical Rhetorical Tradition**

The classical rhetorical tradition follows Aristotle in rendering *ethos* as one of three technical *pisteis* (the artistic or inventive means of persuasion), whereby the rhetor “construct[s] a view of himself as a certain kind of person.”¹⁴ A classical rhetor would build up his *ethos* by canvassing the praiseworthy standards of a given community and by presenting himself accordingly. The goal (as with any fruitful human interaction) is to increase trustworthiness by

14 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.ii.4; Kennedy, 1991, 111.

acknowledging and (to some degree) responding to another's expectations for one's personality and behavior. Aristotle addresses *ethos* as the rhetor's knowledge of the souls of his audience, which allows him to adapt and tailor his style and content accordingly so as to be maximally persuasive to different kinds of audiences.¹⁵ Aristotle writes that *ethos* is typically "the most *authoritative* form of persuasion," since the rhetor's character is the most persuasive element of his speech.¹⁶ Augustine similarly foregrounds the importance of *ethos*, emphasizing paradigmatic orators whose style and Christian wisdom should be imitated.¹⁷ To maximize the impact of *ethos*, Augustine calls speakers to be exemplary in their practice as well as their preaching: the alignment or discord between one's words and one's lifestyle can either amplify or diminish the persuasive power of one's speech.¹⁸ From Aristotle to Augustine, *ethos* is the domain where a rhetor establishes mutuality, trust, and good will with his audience, earning his right to speak with a given audience by appealing to their common beliefs, praiseworthy figures, and other sources of trustworthiness.

Aristotle claims that a persuasive *ethos* will exhibit good will (*eunoia*) towards one's audience.¹⁹ Similarly, Cicero claims that rhetors who are eloquent yet lacking in integrity and good will toward their audiences do not deserve the title "rhetor" at all.²⁰ Cicero presents four ways in which a rhetor can establish such good will with his audience: one such *eunoia*-securing method is *refutatio*, the denunciation of the character of one's opponents.²¹ In the next section, I will examine how Milbank employs this Ciceronian tactic of *refutatio* as a means of securing his

15 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.xii-xiii; Kennedy, 1991, 148. It is important to note that *ethos* and *pathos* are correlative categories. They cannot exactly be distinguished by their subjects: while *ethos* focuses on the rhetor's trustworthiness, this trust is rooted in the audience's disposition. Likewise, while *pathos* focuses on the character of the audience, it assumes that this can be influenced by the agency of the rhetor. Thus, *ethos* and *pathos* can only be distinguished by the *function*, not the nature, of their subjects, rhetor and audience.

16 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.ii.4.

17 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.iii.4; Leff, 2008, 240-1.

18 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xxvii.59, IV.xxix.62.

19 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.ii.4.

20 Cicero, *De Oratore*, I.ix.38; Sutherland, 2004, 3, 6.

21 Cicero, *On Invention*, I.xvi.22.

trustworthiness over-against his modernist opponents.

Milbank's *Refutatio* of Modernity

Aristotle advises that rhetorical delivery should seek “neither to offend nor to entertain.”²² Yet Milbank seems to spurn this advice at every turn, pursuing an offensive yet entertaining grand style to move his audience to action, even if that action is a reactionary rejection of his own project. Milbank presents himself in the character type of the vehement contrarian, who waxes antithetical before admitting any common ground with his opponents.²³ Milbank insists at times that Christianity's antithetical critiques are simply the flip side of its thetical position—namely, the church's *kerygmatic* narration of the Christian *mythos*.²⁴ This is Augustine's approach to pagan oratory, as Baldwin posits: instead of explicitly rejecting sophistic rhetoric in Book IV of *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine rather ignores it and positively promotes his own alternative position.²⁵ However, despite Milbank's theoretical commitment to such positive construction, his antithetical attitude seem at times to win the day over his positive proposals: Milbank's corpus is primarily comprised of rebuttals to modernity, which he characterizes as a “secular immanence” which is “totalizing and terroristic.”²⁶

22 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.i.5.

23 For instance, Milbank displays his prickliness—both in form and content—in his comment, “Once the dialogue with Marxism as an ‘autonomous’ science is ended... we [will] return to the more important matter of Christian socialism” (Milbank, 1990, 208). Critics worry that Milbank's scholarship relies on antagonistic polemics (Lash, 1992, 357; Hankey and Hedley, 2005, xiv; Breyfogle, 2005, 45). The fact that polemic belongs to the grand style (which seeks to *move*) rather than the middle style (which seeks to *delight*) suggests one possible answer to Rosemary Raderford Ruether's bombshell question: if Radical Orthodoxy is a rhetorical project dedicated to winning adherents to the beauty of the Christian narrative, then why is its style so unpleasant, ugly and thus (oftentimes) unpersuasive (Ruether, 2006, 90)? This is a deep inconsistency *within* his project itself. However, I will show below how this contradiction has a performative role. Milbank's style of *refutatio* allows his *confirmatio* to be heard, but his *refutatio* is only the (explicit) shadow of his (implicit) *confirmatio*—a story of the beauty and grandeur of God's cosmos.

24 Milbank, 1997, 249.

25 Baldwin, 2008, 188-9.

26 Milbank, 2003, 5; Milbank, 1990, 5. According to Milbank, modernity is *both* a theory of violence, ontological as well as political, and a practice of violence—at the very least, a violence against its own Christian past (Milbank, 1990, 3-5, 9; Robertson, 2005, 86). Milbank stresses that modernity is essentially a late medieval *heresy*, emanating from the nominalists' theories of univocity and voluntarism (Milbank, 1990, 13-15, 29;

Nonetheless, despite Milbank's flaunting of the CRT's endorsement of *confirmatio* (stating a positive position), his antithetical stance against modernity also has a precedent in the classical rhetorical tradition. *Refutatio*, writes Cicero, is the oratorical tactic of contradicting and weakening an opponent's argument: one way by which to generate good will with an audience is to attack one's opponents publicly ("Bring them into hatred, unpopularity, or contempt") by revealing their vicious and untrustworthy characteristics.²⁷ *Refutatio* is powerful because it directly inverts the opponent's argument with the "same methods of reasoning" employed by one's opponent.²⁸ Likewise, Aristotle notes that refutations are often more persuasive than positive demonstrations: "if the opposition has many good points to make," he suggests, "put the refutations first."²⁹ However, it is important to remember that the primary function of *refutatio* is not negative, but positive—one condemns one's opponents not for the sake of negation, but for the sake of positively securing the trust of one's audience. In the next section, I will examine other ways in which Milbank positively identifies with his audience(s) by turning to the figure held in common—though through very different interpretive lenses—by the Christian tradition, modernity and postmodernity alike.

Augustine: Pre-modern, Proto-modern or Post-modern?

Milbank has been accused (by Breyfogle and others) of suffering from a "split personality" in claiming both theology and postmodernism as his (strange) bedfellows.³⁰ I suggest that Milbank's persona is not split but rather multifaceted, because he is appealing to two

Robertson, 2005, 81). For Milbank, modernity is thus a historically contingent error which "need never have happened" (Milbank, 2003, 119).

27 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xvi. 22.

28 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xlii.78.

29 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.vii.14. Augustine locates polemic (or rebuke) as belonging to the "grand style," which both employs a rhetor's emotion and provokes an emotional response in the audience (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xx.42, IV.xxi.50).

30 Breyfogle, 2005, 62.

different audiences in different ways. To present himself as trustworthy to a hyper-modern audience, Milbank appeals to communities which are more marked by *trust*: premodern Christendom and Western postmodernism.³¹ Milbank traces the histories of modernism postmodernism and orthodox Christianity back to Augustine, the figure with whom he identifies the most strongly and explicitly.³² Milbank senses that Augustine is the pivotal figure leading the Christian tradition out of premodernity into either modernity (which *has* actually happened historically) or postmodernity (in particular, a Christian counter-modernity, which *should* happen as an ecclesial corrective to secularism).³³ Milbank suggests that Augustine opened up the possibility not only for modernity, but also for post- or counter-modernity. The West did not have to proceed on the modern path of secularization, argues Milbank: it could have interpreted Augustine in a vastly different way and thus ended up in a counter-modern condition instead of a hyper-modern (or postmodern) one.³⁴

By retrieving Augustine as a figure located both in the tradition of Western Christianity and in the tradition of Western anti-foundationalist postmodernism, I will argue that Milbank seeks to fuse the horizons of trust belonging to the two anti-foundationalistic discourses (postmodern and premodern Christian) within his own *ethos*. In the next section, I will examine Milbank's appropriation of these discourses in light of the CRT's concept of *inventio*, as the artistic selection and reinterpretation of existing cultural material as a means of persuasion.

31 Premodern Augustinianism shunned foundationalism through an illuminationist epistemology (whereby revelation situates reason), while postmodernism opposes foundationalism by emphasizing the historically constructed and contextual nature of knowledge. Of course, the Christian tradition applauds trust (as faith) as a virtue, while postmodernism is suspicious of it (as ideologically fitting into a constructed social position); my point is that both orientations (unlike modernity) share an anti-foundationalist attitude. Trust is itself a *grounding*: it cannot be *grounded* metaphysically. Milbank attempts to combine both of these approaches, as I will discuss further in chapter two.

32 Milbank identifies himself most clearly with Augustine in the title of the article summarizing his views, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism" (Milbank, 2009¹, 49-61).

33 Milbank is not alone in locating Augustine as the prominent figure who revealed humanity's situatedness in socio-linguistic contexts: Cameron and Tracy likewise propose that Augustine's linguistic sensibilities foreshadow postmodernism's linguistic turn (Cameron, 1991, 227; Tracy, 2008, 314).

34 Milbank, 2003, 119, 150.

Inventio

Milbank emphasizes that his *refutatio* of modernity does not imply a return to the medieval lifeworld; instead, Milbank hopes for “an unknown future that we have missed and must seek to rejoin.”³⁵ The primary way in which Milbank hopes to go ‘back to the future’ is through *ressourcement*, retrieving the Christian tradition’s own historically-constructed resources instead of appropriating those of paganism.³⁶ I suggest that this technique can be mapped onto *inventio* (the classical mode of composition), the oratorical canon which Cicero defines as “the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s case plausible.”³⁷ Aristotle foreshadows the Ciceronian notion of *inventio* by discussing *technic pisteis* (an artistic means of persuasion), whereby a rhetor inventively reappropriates *topoi* (existing cultural opinions and knowledge).³⁸ Copeland shows that by Cicero’s time, the CRT viewed *rhetoric* as a discourse which actively *produces* texts or speeches.³⁹ Later, Augustine redefined rhetoric (especially *inventio*) as the art of active (not passive) textual interpretation: Tracy and Copeland note that Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* essentially places *inventio* power in the hands of the reading audience, fusing the semantic horizons of an author with those of a reader.⁴⁰ Augustine’s

35 Milbank, 2003, 119.

36 Milbank, 1990, 389. Many critics accuse Milbank of perpetrating the “Texas Sharpshooter” and “No True Scotsman” fallacies in differentiating between orthodox and heretical traditions: anyone locating themselves within a tradition will tend both to include in that tradition only those with whom they agree and to exclude any problematic figures, leaving a trail with a deceptive aura of uniformity (Stout, 2003, 106; Breyfogle, 2005, 34; Caputo, 2001, 302). Others note that Milbank’s project cherry-picks amenable moments from the history of theology which can be rechristened as supporting Milbank’s linguistic turn: Milbank’s narrative employs a self-justifying tautology, whereby certain figures, events and texts are justified as significant because of their relative prominence within the story of secularization, and the story of secularization is justified as the master narrative because its scope includes so many significant figures, events and texts (Hoffmeyer, 2006, 12; Hankey, 1999, 390; Bowlin, 2004, 265). I have no dispute with these claims. Milbank’s Augustine *is* invented, but it is not a *false* invention; instead, I suggest that Milbank is more honest about how he uses his historical resources (via creative *inventio*) than are theologians pretending to exegete purely without any *eisegesis*. Moreover, Milbank is reinventing material provided by Augustine, who himself is in the classical rhetorical tradition which promoted active *inventio*.

37 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.vi.8.

38 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.xv.1; Kennedy, 1991, 102.

39 Copeland, 1991, 13.

40 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.vi.7, III.xxv.36-xxvii.38, II.xl.60; Sutherland, 2004, 276; Copeland, 1991, 1-2, 154-8. Augustine stresses the importance not only of hermeneutically seeking an original authorial

emphasis on *inventio* entails an active hermeneutic which self-consciously reorganizes and reinterprets standard authoritative sources (common tropes, time-tested texts, etc.) for a given persuasive purpose. Milbank likewise claims that hermeneutics can never avoid conjecture, but instead always entails a *poiēsis* (human making or constructing): humanity is simultaneously a structured, created being (always-already existing in a world of conventional *endoxa* and *topoi*) and also a structuring, co-creative being (able to reshape those conventions).⁴¹ In the next section, I will show both how postmodern academic discourse (which has effectively radicalized the theories and practices of the CRT) recognizes such human structuredness and structuring, and also how Milbank attempts to re-structure postmodern discourse even as it structures his own project.

Postmodernism: The Rhetorical Turn

The first of Milbank's intended audiences is academic postmodernism. Milbank draws a helpful distinction between *postmodernity* (a "set of cultural circumstances") and *postmodernism* (a "set of theories"); however, both phenomena seem to involve simultaneously an intensification of—and a break with—modernity.⁴² The postmodern intellectual climate serves two functions for Milbank. On the one hand, simply by being alive in the pluralistic, secularized late-capitalistic West, Milbank's *ethos* participates descriptively in the practices of *postmodernity*. On the other hand, his *ethos* calls prescriptively for *postmodernism*, the theoretical project of deconstructing modernist foundationalism.⁴³ The postmodernists (like the more radical sophists in the CRT)

meaning, but also that of interpreting passages in multiple ways.

41 Milbank, 1997, 43, 64, 79.

42 Milbank, 2003, 187.

43 There is some ambiguity in exactly characterizing Milbank's position vis-à-vis postmodernism. At times, he refers to his own strategy as "postmodern" (Milbank, 2009, 49-61). However, at other times Milbank critically distances himself from postmodern philosophy which he considers "nihilistic" (Milbank, 1990, 275). Regardless of terminology, it is clear that Milbank strives for a third way beyond what he sees as nihilistic modernity and nihilistic postmodernity.

highlight the primacy of *nomos* or convention, stressing that the artificial and constructed nature of the human lifeworld goes ‘all the way down.’ Milbank shares with the postmoderns an emphasis on the deep contingencies of historical development, the network (or “constellation”) interpretation of identity (against substance metaphysics) and particularly the linguistic construction and mediation of reality.

The postmodern dimension of Milbank’s project hinges on his navigation of the *linguistic turn*, the philosophical paradigm shift which occurred between the end of the 19th century and the mid-20th century in both Continental post-Kantian philosophy and Anglo-American analytic philosophy.⁴⁴ Both traditions came to recognize (as Lafont and Medina put it) that “meaning determines reference,” that language is performative as well as propositional, and that language discloses and delimits a community’s epistemic access to its shared “world.”⁴⁵ However, both iterations of the linguistic turn remain largely *descriptive* of the nature of language; I suggest that the “rhetorical turn” denotes a *prescriptive* practical dimension alongside a descriptive theoretical one: it is not only the case that language *does* (re-)constitute the reality of human lifeworlds, but also that the power of language *should* be used in beneficial, peaceful and just ways instead of malevolent, ideological and unjust ways.⁴⁶ Thus, the “rhetorical turn” may be a more accurate description than the “linguistic turn” to describe the simultaneity of *is*-claims and *ought*-claims.⁴⁷ I claim even more broadly that all the postmodern humanities disciplines which partake in Continental literary style and content can be validly described as situated within such a rhetorical turn—a “Third Sophistic”, as Vitanza and Ballif describe it.⁴⁸ Various commentators

44 Milbank, 1997, 84-122; Milbank, 1990, 41.

45 Lafont and Medina, 2002, xii.

46 One need not even look so far as Derrida or Foucault to observe this phenomenon: witness the popular-level (although often unpopular) rise of “political correctness” since the 1970s, which can only be described as a hope in the *constructive* use of language’s power to re-*construct* reality.

47 Hinze uses the term “*rhetorical turn*” to describe postmodern theology which “blends rational and affective appeals by offering a hybrid of dialectical and poetic forms of discourse” (Hinze, 1996, 489-90, f.n. 25).

48 Vitanza, 1991, 118-9, 131; Ballif, 1998, 59-60. For Vitanza and Ballif, the Third Sophistic of the 19th and 20th

have identified postmodern thought as rhetorical, but few intellectuals have themselves embraced that banner. However, Milbank occasionally does this explicitly, by claiming to be rhetorical and *kerygmatic*, not apologetic: he seeks to proclaim the Christian *mythos* from within its own discursive boundaries, instead of crossing those boundaries to make it intelligible to other discourses. And yet, as Clack points out, Milbank’s rhetoric seems to have an apologetic dimension, insofar as he employs post-structuralist language to defend the Christian tradition in a postmodern context.⁴⁹ Milbank spends much time reading, reinterpreting and rebutting the postmoderns in order to make himself *heard*.⁵⁰ Therefore, I suggest that the best way to

understand Milbank’s approach is as subverting postmodern philosophy even as he correlates its

centuries is a postmodern era and disposition (Nietzsche, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, etc.) which opposes foundationalism and totalization and stresses that “language is rhetoric” (and therefore is fundamentally deceptive and mischievous). The Third Sophistic rejects the classical dichotomy between rhetoric and dialectic, and highlights the anarchic condition of the rhetorical (performative) dimension of *all* types of language. The First and Second Sophistics were “political” only insofar as they were *particular* regions of public discourse involving the power of the law, while the Third Sophistic is “political” insofar as it (linguistically) turns *every* type of language into a power-seeking speech-act.

- 49 Clack, 2012, 215. In practice, Milbank cannot help but appropriate secular thought (in the mode of *aggiornamento*, or the subjective correlation of an “objective” claim) in his effort to re-construct Christian claims; indeed, many critics have pointed out the inconsistency between Milbank’s theoretical disavowal of the validity of heretical or pagan language games (such as postmodern theory) and his practical colonization and ecclesial repurposing of postmodern discourse (Lash, 1992, 358, Hankey, 2005, 26; Hankey, 1999, 388, 392; Bergen, 2002, 65; Michalson, 2004, 370; Breyfogle, 2005, 32). Such an immanent critique of Milbank’s project is perfectly valid, suggesting that Milbank is dialectical in spite of himself. However, I suggest that the contradiction between Milbank’s explicit dismissal of dialogue and his implicit participation in dialogue does not disprove his claims as hypocritical, but rather reveals his deeper rhetorical purposes: Milbank intends to *move* more than *prove*. I propose that the ways in which Milbank’s *lexis* seem to grate against his *logos* align with Augustine’s rhetorical strategy *performative self-contradictions*: this technique presents a contradiction between the content of a rhetor’s claims and the meaning of his or her performance, thus spurring the audience out of *stasis* (complacent passivity) and into active hermeneutic engagement with the rhetor’s complex intentions (Mackey, 1997, 67, 77). Others have noted this discursive tension, suggesting that Milbank’s practice often gives the lie to its theoretical commitment to drawing rigid boundaries and avoiding conversation (Stout, 2003, 115; Hoffmeyer, 2006, 8). For instance, there are times when Milbank eases back on his anti-syncretist exhortations, admitting that Christians can actually re-receive Christ via other cultures and that “Christianity should not draw boundaries” (Milbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism”, 269). I argue that Milbank actually is committed to some type of inter-faith dialogue—after all, he has already published three books with materialist atheist Slavoj Žižek (Milbank, 2005, 2009³ and 2010). It seems that in practice, Milbank is not as tribalistic as his theories suggest, but that he seeks to identify with—and win the trust of—at least two different audiences: postmodern academics and orthodox Christians.
- 50 Based on the wide array of responses to Milbank from postmodern theologians, it is clear that his anti-foundationalist audience is listening; however, whether they are persuaded by what they hear is a different story. Numerous examples of postmodernists unpersuaded by Milbank’s rhetoric can be found especially in Lisa Isherwood’s and Marko Zlomislčić’s *The Poverty of Radical Orthodoxy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012) and in R.R. Ruether’s and Marian Grau’s *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to Radical Orthodoxy* (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

findings with his own religious commitments.⁵¹ In the next section, I will show how Milbank's religious commitments to Neoplatonic Christianity lead him to present himself as a postmodern Augustinian. I will suggest that his retrieval of Augustine amid the linguistic conditions of postmodern discourse can be best described with the CRT's notion of *imitatio*, the creative emulation of one's predecessor.

Imitatio

I propose that Milbank has chosen to imitate Augustine as a corrective to the postmodern Third Sophistic just as Augustine chose to imitate Cicero as a corrective to the Second Sophistic. However, for Milbank, authentic imitation is active renarration, not mindless mimicry: both Augustine's and Milbank's *imitatio* are "non-identical repetitions" (one of Milbank's favorite Kierkegaardian phrases).⁵² Milbank welds his own *ethos* to that of Augustine by way of a postmodern hermeneutic—primarily, Milbank's linguistically-conscious reinterpretation of a Neoplatonic Augustine.

Not only does Milbank's retrieval of classical theologians such as Augustine have roots in the classical rhetorical tradition to which Augustine himself belongs, but I claim further that Milbank's retrieval of prior traditions itself lies within a *tradition of reappropriation*. I will show that Milbank, his *maître à penser* Augustine, and Augustine's *maître à penser* Cicero are connected in a tradition which is marked by a constant reinterpretation of one's teachers. For Cicero and the CRT, a crucial part of developing one's *ethos* is *imitatio*, the mimetic

51 Milbank, 1997, 36. This is Milbank's characterization of Jean-Luc Marion, yet I suggest that it applies to him as well: the difference is that I do not view this trait as a deficiency. Smith recounts "Milbank's more recent engagement with Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek," but suggests that Milbank's engagement tactic is *kerygmatic*, not correlationist: instead, Milbank "seeks to retrieve the deep theological resources of the Christian tradition—particularly premodern resources in the fathers and medievals—to let them speak *to* postmodernism" (Smith, 2004, 68). My point is simply that Milbank is speaking to the postmodernists in their native tongue, which is a form of rhetorical *ethos*.

52 Milbank, 2003, 8, 31, 70, 156, 203.

appropriation of one's intellectual ancestors.⁵³ The Romans of Cicero's world understood an exemplary model as inhering in both the original and in the imitation; however, Copeland notes that the imitator (in this case, Milbank) reshapes the model (in this case, Augustine) according to his own needs and character.⁵⁴ Augustine follows Cicero in privileging rhetorical *imitatio* (imitating a superior rhetor's character traits) over metarhetorical, theoretical training.⁵⁵ Just as infants learn language through practice and not rules, writes Augustine, so rhetors should learn eloquence by patterning their *ethoi* and styles after excellent rhetors.⁵⁶ Appropriately, Milbank's active reinterpretation of Augustine precisely parallels Augustine's active reinterpretation of Cicero. Milbank's desire for non-identical repetition, for freshness via *ressourcement*, is a heavily Ciceronian (and also, thereby, an Augustinian) theme.⁵⁷

Milbank admits the limitations of the one-sided nature of his reappropriation of Augustine. However, he suggests that it is *precisely because* Augustine has been so massively influential via modernity's particular interpretation (namely, its sense of individualist interiority) that the church father now warrants a (revisionist) re-reading *against* the grain of the West's default understanding of Augustine.⁵⁸ Yet I propose that the cumulative effect of Milbank's

53 Cicero, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, III.8-9; Copeland, 1991, 26-7.

54 Copeland, 1991, 27.

55 Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.xxii.90-4; Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine Teaching*, IV.iii.4; Leff, 2008, 238.

56 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.iii.11-12.

57 Milbank, 1990, 303; Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.177; Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.x.25. Cicero and Augustine both fear *boring* their audience nearly as much as deceiving them, and they stress using a variety of tactics to make old topics fresh and interesting to their audience. Milbank sees this as not only a practical problem, but also a theoretical, metaphysical one. As Smith reads Milbank, neither modernity nor postmodernity can simultaneously grasp the old and the new, the same and the different, because they have jettisoned Neoplatonism's *analogia entis* in favor of Scotus's univocity of being. Thus, Milbank's return to old Neoplatonic theologians (viz., Augustine) is precisely the way to newness of theory and of practice (Smith, 2004, 65-68).

58 Milbank admits some of the default claims about Augustine's complicity in the development of modernity's political liberalism, individualism, capitalism, and desacralizing secularism (Milbank, 1990, 150, 241, 402, fn. 56). Despite such admissions, however, critics suggests that Milbank's Augustine is one-sided and ideologically distorted (Peddle, 2005, 130; Breyfogle, 2005, 62; Hankey, 1999, 395; Hankey, 2005, 18, 22). I counter these criticisms by proposing that Milbank's (re)*inventio* of Augustine's project and *imitatio* of Augustine's figure are valid intellectual positions which the CRT (including Augustine) promoted. It is these classical rhetorical techniques, I suggest, which allow Milbank to assert that "within Augustine's text we discover the *original* possibility of critique that marks the western tradition, of which later Enlightenment versions are, in certain

Augustinian project is not yet another one-dimensional Augustine, but rather a dialectic between Radical Orthodoxy's (Neoplatonic and social-externalistic) Augustine and modernity's internalistic Augustine. Milbank's Augustine has a deliberate bias, because it is meant to round out modernity's opposing caricature of Augustine as a (or even *the*) proto-modern. If Derridean deconstruction holds any weight, then there are surely contradictory elements within the seeds of secularization (due to Augustine, other Neoplatonists, etc.) which can be marshaled against the one-sided contingent historical development of Western modernity. To this end, Milbank returns to the site of proto-secularization—the works and figure of Augustine as taken up reductively by modern secular liberalism—to show why it need not have happened. In the next section, I will examine how Milbank also shapes his *ethos* according to the expectations of a second audience—Augustinian Western Christianity—to open the constructive possibility of a *counter-modern* theory and practice taking its cue from Augustine's *City of God*.⁵⁹

Western Christianity: A Non-Identical Repetition

The other discourse to which Milbank appeals so as to establish his authorial *ethos* and thereby to win the trust of his second audience is traditional Western Christianity, particularly in its premodern Augustinian formulation. Some critics are suspicious that Milbank has invented a tradition for himself, cherry-picking historical figures to form a cloud of witnesses testifying to his “orthodox” trustworthiness. Milbank would not deny this claim, because he asserts boldly that theology is itself a contingent, historically-developed social construct.⁶⁰ In fact, Milbank (following M. F. Illyricus) claims that the Bible itself is both “a human rhetorical construction”

respects, abridgments and foundationalist parodies” (Milbank, 1990, 389).

59 Milbank, 1990, 4, 278; Michalson, 2004, 358. Milbank claims that the most potent seeds of secularization were not planted until the late Middle Ages, when Duns Scotus univocally “flattened” the suspension of beings from Being in Neoplatonism's hierarchical metaphysics (Milbank, 1990, 302-3; Smith, 2004, 93, fn. 19).

60 Milbank, 1990, 2.

as well as being “a divine allegory of the real.”⁶¹ Milbank is therefore opposed to any naive orthodoxy which parrots “identically repeated handed-down formulas.”⁶² Instead, Milbank calls for the church to retain only the helpful elements of the past: theology must both retrieve the premodern, pre-nominalist medieval Christian worldview and “acknowledge human consensus, cooperation and varied free poetic power in a way this (premodern) vision did not fully envisage.”⁶³ Toward that end, Milbank retrieves—or invents—for himself a counter-modern tradition running backwards through the history of the West: from *la Nouvelle Théologie*, through certain existentialists and Romantics, through Vico, through medieval Christian Neoplatonism (Aquinas and Eriugena), through the axial figure of Augustine and the other Church Fathers, through Platonic Greek philosophy and the New Testament.⁶⁴

Milbank thus appeals to distant Christian intellectual figures to reconfigure the shape of the Christian identity while still securing the trust of his Christian audience in his own *ethos* (and while not alienating his other audience of academic postmodernists). Because he sees Western capitalistic modernity as nihilistically eroding previously stable identity markers, Milbank seizes the opportunity to rebuild an *ethos* from even deeper remains of Western culture’s history.⁶⁵ Milbank’s goal is therefore not simply to adumbrate the proper theories or right doctrines, but rather to find an *identity* (personal and communal) both firm enough to witness visibly to God’s

61 Milbank, 2003, 136.

62 Milbank, 2003, 196.

63 Milbank, 2003, 137.

64 Milbank, 1990, 295-6. Steven Shakespeare accuses Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy for their “aesthetic act of self-assertion” of raiding the history of Hellenism and Christianity in vain for a valid authority after rejecting internality, biblicism, papal infallibility, secular reason, and all other religious traditions (Shakespeare, 2005, 147). This charge, of an existentialist creation of meaning in the face of modern nihilism, is by no means unfounded, yet this is so obviously Milbank’s point that it is difficult to read as a criticism. Milbank is hardly the first to engage in this type of project: as I have noted, the classical rhetorical tradition upheld as a virtue the act of inventive imitation and reinterpretation.

65 Milbank, 1990, 314. Milbank ends this chapter on postmodernism by suggesting a return to premodern virtue ethics and metaphysics: “we can reinvok[e], like Augustine, another city, another history, another mode of being” (Milbank, 1990, 321). I suggest that his presentation of this narrative and ontology is not simply an argument, but a *self-branding* as a postmodern Augustinian Neoplatonist.

redemption and flexible enough to embrace difference within identity.⁶⁶ Milbank's oratorical self-presentation is not simply a vehicle to convey the content of his *logos* but is to a large degree a performative invitation to join the ecclesial body of Christ: his kerygmatic call is meant as a gift of meaningful identity to a world whose identities seem to Milbank more than ever to be rhizomatic, synthetic jumbles. The term "radical orthodoxy" connotes *radix*, or roots, and Milbank's *ressourcement* involves retracing the church's growth diachronically—not, however, back to some Eliadean sacred time of origins when identities (such as that of the church) were fixed and perfect, but rather backwards through the accumulative process of the church's discerning of what it itself is and what it is not.⁶⁷ Milbank thus views the Western Christian tradition as a historical achievement which is a gift, not a given; however, this gift from the past must be actively received in the present. I suggest that the best way to understand Milbank's *ressourcement* of traditional Western Christianity (whose axial figure he views—relatively uncontroversially—as Augustine) is to employ the resources of the classical rhetorical tradition which had shaped Augustine himself.

Augustine as Rhetor

Theologians often rush through Augustine's rhetoric to get to his metaphysics, ignoring the fact that Augustine is (in Tracy's words) a "masterful rhetorician and defender of rhetoric."⁶⁸ Augustine studied rhetoric in Carthage, and then taught the subject there before teaching it in Rome and being appointed to the imperial office of *rhetor publicus* in Milan, a post which he abandoned upon his conversion to Christianity because of what he construed as its deceptive character. Trained as an orator, Augustine was much more interested in the nature and use of

66 Milbank, 1990, 304.

67 Milbank, 1990, 389, 402; Milbank, 2008, 5.

68 Tracy, 2008, 268, 313.

language than he was in math or logic.⁶⁹ Milbank stresses that Augustine recognized language's artificially constructed nature long before (post)structuralism did; in fact, he proposes that Christianity has *always tacitly* supported "radical linguisticity."⁷⁰ Milbank's project of rhetoricizing Christianity thus relies deeply on Augustine.

There is an ongoing scholarly debate as to the degree of Augustine's debt to the classical rhetorical tradition.⁷¹ The Second Sophistic (100s-300s A.D.) emphasized theory over practice and style over content, and Sophistic discourse was marked by flattery (entertaining deceitfully instead of proclaiming the truth eloquently). This condition led a number of Christian bishops to a deep suspicion of rhetoric, particularly because it was still bound to pagan Roman culture and religion.⁷² Augustine also despises the pride and self-aggrandizement of the rhetors of the Second Sophistic; however, he sees this as a privation of a potentially beneficial mode of discourse, which could be used either for good or evil. Simply ignoring oratory would allow evil a persuasive advantage, so Augustine returns to Ciceronian rhetoric as a kerygmatic tool.⁷³ Augustine's only metarhetorical work is Book IV of *On Christian Teaching*.⁷⁴ However, this brief foray into metarhetoric (where he transforms the tools of classical political rhetoric into principles for ecclesial homiletics) was incredibly important to the development of Western

69 Fuhrer, 2006, 99-100; Kimball, 1986, 42. Cameron notes that the early Latin Christians in general valued language above all other modes of human action, seeing speech and written texts not only as central religious metaphors, but as the very vehicles of divine inspiration (Cameron, 1991, 15, 19).

70 Milbank, 1997, 85, 89.1997,

71 For instance, Baldwin and Fortin maintain Augustine's metarhetorical originality (Baldwin, 2008, 187; Fortin, 2008, 220) while Cameron emphasizes his debt to—and continuity with—classical pagan rhetoric (Cameron, 1991, 7, 20). Clearly, a scholar with an eye for difference can marshal a case against any Augustinian continuity with Aristotelian and Ciceronian oratory; however, the purpose of my thesis aligns with Milbank's *Geistesgeschichte* (Bowlin, 2004, 265) and I will assume that enough degree of similarity exists between Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine and Milbank to speak legitimately of a singular classical rhetorical tradition.

72 Tracy, 2008, 312; Timmis, 2009, 84. Augustine views the second Sophistic as idling in *delectare* (the pleasing rhetoric of the middle style) without teaching (*docere*) or moving to action (*movere*). The Ciceronian rhetorical tradition of public speaking had been eclipsed by the Second Sophistic, who glorified the means (formal style) over the ends (clear teaching) and whose functional motto was (as Baldwin anachronizes) "art for art's sake" (Baldwin, 2008, 194, 197-8).

73 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.i.1, IV.xii.27; Baldwin, 2008, 203; Camargo, 1998, 35, Sutherland, 2004, Sutherland, 2004, 1.

74 Tracy, 2008, 268.

culture. Tracy recounts that, for centuries in the medieval era, readers of *On Christian Teaching* viewed Book IV as “Augustine’s attempt to Christianize Cicero.”⁷⁵ In the next section, I will argue that Milbank’s postmodern (or rather, counter-modern) retrieval of Augustine follows in the same pattern by which Augustine transforms Cicero: both Milbank and Augustine attempt to adopt the most helpful practices of the CRT while maintaining the trust of their Christian audience in the character (*ethos*) of each.

Explicitly Identifying Milbank with(in) the CRT

Milbank briefly touches on Augustine’s rhetorical dimension in “Sacred Triads”, where he writes that Augustine “‘saves’ philosophy by characterizing reason more as internal speech, something produced in time by power and therefore more akin to a *rhetorical* logos.”⁷⁶ Milbank’s one-off comment here, when combined with his praise of rhetoric across his corpus,⁷⁷ proves that he understands his own postmodern Augustinian project to have deep sympathies with the CRT. However, his acknowledgment of this discourse is so brief and scattered that it can scarcely be considered a robust *ethos* tactic: he may identify with this tradition, but he is not explicitly linking his own *ethos* to its chain of philosophical rhetors.

I claim that, regardless of whether or not he recognizes or proclaims it, Milbank is following in the steps of the classical rhetorical tradition—especially those of Cicero, who “subsumed logic under rhetoric.”⁷⁸ Regardless of whether or not orthodox theology is implicated

75 Tracy, 2008, 290-1. Augustine retrieves Cicero’s stylistic triad: the instructive plain style (*docere*), the pleasing middle style (*delectare*), and the moving grand style (*movere*) (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xvi.34; Watson, 2008, 253). Augustine streamlines and simplifies Cicero’s metarhetoric, focusing on *Inventio* (Invention) and *Elocutio* (Style) over the other three rhetorical canons (Arrangement, Memory and Delivery); however, Augustine never strays far from his Ciceronian heritage (Baldwin, 2008, 190-1).

76 Milbank, 2002, 462-3, italics mine.

77 E.g., Milbank, 2003, 136; Milbank, 1990, 329. He writes, “we should only be convinced by rhetoric where it persuades of the truth, but on the other hand, truth *is* what is persuasive, namely what is attractive and does not compel” (Milbank, 1997, 250).

78 Kimball, 1986, 27.

in Hellenic metaphysics, it is certainly implicated in rhetoric, and Milbank acknowledges this. However, his explicit use of Augustine is almost entirely philosophical, and not rhetorical. I claim that this does not invalidate Augustine's nor Milbank's statuses as rhetors, but that the texts of both must be taken up as being rhetorical as well as philosophical. Because Milbank presents himself as fitting with both the postmoderns (the "rhetors" of the linguistically turned "Third Sophistic") and with Western Christianity (exemplified by the rhetorically-primed Augustine), I conclude that Milbank's *ethos* would be well served by foregrounding his connection to the classical rhetorical tradition as a means of gaining the trust of both Christian and postmodern audiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the criticism that John Milbank's *corpus* often seems more concerned with antithetically identifying itself *against* other traditions rather than identifying itself as being *for* its own tradition's values. In response, I have narrated Milbank's broad theological project as an attempt to gain the trust of two audiences: postmodern theorists and traditional Western Christians. I have shown that both these communities share an ancestor in the figure of Augustine. I have also demonstrated that Milbank's strategy of revisiting Augustine's work in a postmodern key is not a novel and unwarranted usage of a textual resource, but is instead deeply consistent with Augustine's own creative hermeneutic and emphasis on rhetorical *inventio* and *imitatio*. I have explored many of the inconsistencies in Milbank's self-presentation, particularly the discrepancy between his explicit call to end dialogue with rival traditions and his tacit practice of learning from and dialoguing with non-Christian postmodernist philosophers. I have argued that Milbank's self-proclaimed rhetorical turn fits not

only the tenor of this postmodern Third Sophistic age, but also the *zeitgeist* of early Christianity (exemplified by the figure of Augustine). I have shown that Milbank appropriates the *lingua franca* of two communal cultures—Western Christianity and academic postmodernism—in order to fashion his authorial character. I conclude that Milbank’s *ethos* (which relies on the good will both of Christians and postmodernists) would be bolstered by an explicit identification with the classical rhetorical tradition which nurtured Augustine, whose premodern figure paved the way for both modernity and postmodernity. In the next chapter, I will argue that not only does Milbank pattern himself after Augustine and the CRT by sculpting a positive *ethos* (identifying himself with both postmodernism and Christianity), but also that he proposes a *logos* in the form of a philosophical rhetoric which bears on his theories of knowledge, politics, and poetics.

Chapter II. *Logos: The Content and Connotations of Milbank's Neoplatonic Metaphysics*

In this chapter, I will address the *logos*—the logical argument—of Milbank's rhetorical project: namely, the articulation of a Christianized Neoplatonic metaphysics which he retrieves from Augustine. The central contradiction in Milbank's *logos* is that his postmodern rhetorical turn seems at odds with his return to metaphysics.⁷⁹ Thus, his theoretical ontology of peace does not secure differences peacefully in practice. This chapter will examine the logic of Milbank's theology, which draws not only upon Augustine's rhetorical theory and practical example, but also upon Augustine's metaphysics. I will use Augustine's Neoplatonic rendering of the transcendental attributes of Being—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful—to explicate Milbank's anti-foundationalist epistemology, his teleological politics of “complex space,” and his mythocentric aesthetics. In so doing, I will demonstrate that there is a deep philosophical dimension within Milbank's rhetoric, despite his own rejection of the possibility of a universal reason (*logos*).

79 For instance, O'Grady writes that Milbank “advanced arguments to the effect that there were no binding universal arguments. This amounts to an existential self-refutation” (O'Grady, 2000, 175). As a Christian anti-foundationalist, Milbank is compelled to assert that “Christianity does not claim that the Good and the True (and, presumably, the Beautiful) are self-evident to objective reason, or dialectical argument” (Milbank, 1990, 398). Thus, reason is not universally accessible, but is instead conditioned by historical contingencies in the development of particular linguistic traditions (Michalson, 2004, 369). However, I argue that Milbank is not ultimately saying that reason should be discarded in favor of rhetoric, but rather that reason is always-already a species of rhetorical discourse. Aristotle acknowledges as much by enumerating *logos* as a branch of the rhetorical triad (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.ii.6). However, just because Milbank effectively resurrects the ancient distinction between *logos* and *mythos* to move from dialectic's *logocentrism* to rhetoric's *mythocentrism* does not mean that he has no place for *logos*—he is simply reminding us that reason is always-already contextualized. As Milbank himself admits, “There must be some background of assumed agreement for a radical disagreement even to be possible” (Milbank, 1990, 341).

Logos in Classical Rhetoric and Philosophy

For the ancient Greeks, *logos* was such a fecund concept that it involved three different conceptual schemas: *logos-lexis*, *logos-mythos*, and *logos-ethos-pathos*. Kennedy elaborates on this key Hellenic term:

the Greek word *logos* can be taken as the genus of which civic rhetoric was a species. *Logos* has many meanings through the long history of the Greek language; it is anything that is ‘said,’ but that can be a word, a sentence, part of a speech or of a written work, or a whole speech. It connotes the content rather than the style (which would be *lexis*) and often implies logical reasoning. Thus it can also mean ‘argument’ and ‘reason,’ and that can be further extended to mean ‘order’ as perceived in the world or as given to it by some divine creator. *Logos* as a metaphysical principle appears in early Greek philosophy and in Plato; it was taken up by the Stoics and then by early Christians, as in the opening verses of the Gospel according to Saint John, ‘In the beginning was the Word,’ where it refers to God’s plan and thus to Christ. *Logos* is thus a very broad concept.’⁸⁰

Aristotle uses the notion of *logos* in three major ways. First, he employs the term *logos* (in contradistinction to *ethos* and *pathos*) to refer to the speech or argument itself as a *pistis* (a mode of persuasion).⁸¹ Secondly, Aristotle uses the binary *logos* and *lexis* to refer to content and form, to substance and style, to the *what* versus the *how* of a given speech.⁸² In a third Aristotelian binary (*logos-mythos*), *mythos* (or plot) is the signature of tragedy, the poetic form which Aristotle takes to be both the most artistically important and the most philosophically serious.⁸³ As the consummate promoter of *logos*, Aristotle nevertheless reserves space for *mythos* within the pursuit of wisdom. Thus, the CRT understands the binary *logos* and *mythos* as *antistrophoi*, a complementary pair.⁸⁴ However, while the CRT views *mythos* and *logos* both as important

80 Kennedy, 2009, 11-12.

81 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.ii.6; Kennedy, 1991, 15.

82 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.i; Kennedy, 1991, 193.

83 Aristotle, *Poetics*, IX, XXIII.

84 Andersen, Hicks and Witkowski, 2005, xiii, xv; Andersen, 2005, 61. The *logos* of philosophy does not destroy *mythos*, it constructs atop it: *logos* can do its particular work only by intuiting reality as a whole via a *mythos*. This view aligns precisely with that of Milbank.

technical (that is, artistic) uses of language, Milbank explicitly disavows metaphysical *logos* in favor of rhetorical *mythos*, which he claims (following Nietzsche) is an inescapable dimension of any and all human knowledge.⁸⁵ Milbank's rhetorical turn privileges the importance of *mythos* (as woven into *ethos* and *pathos*) in the linguistic construction of reality. This contrasts in theory (though not, I suggest, in practice) with the CRT, which—far from spurning logic—involves *logos* as a fundamental dynamic. Milbank describes *mythos* as that which “opens up reality,” a narrative which both imaginatively presents and approximately represents “the objective natural order,” which is a meaningless abstraction if discussed outside of the experiential horizons of any particular *mythos*.⁸⁶

Milbank's turn toward rhetoric (particularly its narrative dimension of *mythos* and *narratio*) is intended as a peaceful way to lure people toward a unified vision of the truth, thereby moving them toward practices and theories marked by peace.⁸⁷ It is not self-referentially incoherent for Milbank to argue philosophically for the superiority of rhetoric, or to argue logically for the superiority of *mythos* over *logos*: Milbank subtly intertwines his rhetorical *mythos* with his philosophical *logos*, thereby avoiding any contradiction between his historicist mythocentrism and the fact that his own ‘story’ employs a Hellenistic (and therefore static and ahistorical) ontology. Milbank admits that Christian Neoplatonism is “not a once and for all theory,” but rather it is simply the theory which can best account for the sum total of all human stories.⁸⁸ I propose that what he means by this is that Christian Neoplatonism provides a

85 Milbank, 1990, 137. Thus, the true problem with modernity is not that it has actually discovered the cosmos to be desacralized and demythologized, but rather that it deludedly convinces itself that it has done so.

86 Milbank, 1997, 131, 141.

87 Milbank, 1990, 398. He writes that “truth, and non-violence, have to be recognized simultaneously in that by which we are persuaded.”

88 Milbank, 1997, 45; Milbank, 1990, 295-6. Milbank claims that postmodern theology can reject some—not all—metaphysics. Milbank claims that he can validly appropriate Neoplatonic metaphysics only because it remains “no longer inside the horizons projected by the Greek *mythos*, within which the Greek *logos* had to remain confined”; instead, he suggests, the new Christian *mythos* can re-situate the Greek *logos* (Milbank, 1990, 295; Milbank, 1997, 40-1). Unlike some other postmodern philosophers, Milbank does not seek the elimination of metaphysics *per se*, but only the metaphysics of modern *onto-theology* (the confusion or conflation of beings

narratology (theory of narrative) as an implication of its metaphysics.⁸⁹ Milbank goes one step further by suggesting that the Christian *logos*, which he sees as a modified Neoplatonic metaphysics, including a narratology, itself only makes sense within the horizons of the proclaimed Christian *mythos*, which I will relate later in this chapter.

Classical Rhetoric and Neoplatonic Metaphysics

I suggest that even as Milbank theoretically denies any compatibility between logocentric metaphysics and mythocentric rhetoric,⁹⁰ he nonetheless combines them in practice. As Cochran points out, Milbank overplays the division between *logos* and *mythos*, by privileging rhetoric (his metonymy for non-foundationalist, mythocentric discourse) over philosophy (his metonymy for foundationalist, secular discourse).⁹¹ Yet Milbank's model Augustine is enough of a Ciceronian to see a fruitful conjunction between the two diverse modes of discourse. Milbank's over-emphasis on rhetoric at the expense of dialectic veers away from Augustine's unified philosophical rhetoric.⁹² While contemporary scholarship tends to distinguish (as opposing) the

and Being). For Milbank, instead of metaphysics being a dim introduction into theology's truths, theology performs its own metaphysics (Milbank, 1990, 217). It would be helpful if Milbank would more consistently refer to his own project as "theo-ontology," and to that of foundationalism as "onto-theology" (Milbank, 1997, 40-1; Hankey, 1999, 389, 399; Hankey, 2005, 25).

89 For instance, Milbank writes of Augustine that the "non-antagonistic, peaceful mode of life of the city of God is grounded in a particular, historical and 'mythical' narrative, and in an ontology which explicates the beliefs implicit in this narrative... not in universal reason" (Milbank, 1990, 390).

90 Milbank, 1990, 376.

91 Cochran, 2006, 52, 54-55.

92 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.ii; IV.vi. Kennedy disagrees with Cochran over the degree to which philosophy informs Augustine's metarhetoric, claiming that Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* follows Cicero's (ostensibly) sophistic rhetoric instead of the philosophical rhetoric of Plato's *Phaedrus* (Kennedy, 1980, 195). Sutherland doubts that Neoplatonism alone could have offered Augustine such a change in perspective from a pagan focus on the orator himself to a Christian focus on the audience's souls, and he argues that Augustine abandons Neoplatonism in his later years when writing Book IV of *De Doctrina Christiana* (Sutherland, 2004, 10). Following Poster, I disagree with Sutherland: Neoplatonism before Augustine was already concerned rhetorically with its audience in a way that the self-aggrandizing public address of the Second Sophistic tended not to be. By eliminating deliberative and forensic modes of rhetorical address, the Neoplatonists of a conflicted late antiquity (marked by ideological strife, military violence and governmental persecution) mutated the classical tradition of political rhetoric to address the individual souls of their audience (albeit in a mystical, even escapist, manner) (Poster, 1994, 111). This suggests that Augustine was still deeply Neoplatonic during his metarhetorical theorizing when writing *De Doctrina Christiana*, and therefore that Neoplatonic metaphysics and classical oratory could be combined in a consistent—albeit modified—manner. I

philosophical and rhetorical traditions of the late classical era, writes Poster, intellectuals in late antiquity received the two academic discourses as syncretically intertwined and inseparable, offering both a philosophical rhetoric and a rhetorical philosophy.⁹³ Cicero's rhetoric stands out in the oratorical tradition because he explicitly incorporated philosophy into his oratory.⁹⁴ While Plato and Aristotle privilege philosophy over rhetoric and *theoria* over *praxis*, Cicero stresses their interdependence by subsuming theoretical philosophy within practical rhetoric.⁹⁵ For Cicero, persuasive moving (*flectere* or *movere*) is more valuable than *delectare* (pleasing) and *docere* (teaching) because passion supersedes reason.⁹⁶ Augustine reverses Cicero's evaluation of these stylistic goals by privileging *docere*'s instruction over *delectare*'s delighting and *movere*'s winning-over.⁹⁷ While Cicero the pragmatist contents himself with the world of appearances and probabilities, Augustine asserts that truth can be secured.⁹⁸ By way of warning Milbank of the pitfalls of what I have referred to as the "rhetorical turn", Breyfogle notes:

Augustine recognized (especially in *De Doctrina Christiana*) the propensity of rhetoric and narrative to be un-self-critical unless they derive from the authority of truth arrived at through dialectical reasoning and a standard of rational intelligibility... [The] abuse of rhetoric, Augustine saw (especially in *De Civitate Dei* 1-5), risks the worst forms of coercion and political ideology [revealing the] earthly city's own propensity to use rhetoric to deceive others and itself.⁹⁹

agree with Camargo that Neoplatonic philosophy was responsible for leading Augustine from his early Manicheanism to his later spiritual yet kerygmatic (rhetorical) Christianity: the partial truths of Neoplatonism were Augustine's 'Egyptian gold' which he saw as belonging properly to Christianity (Camargo, 1998, 397). Augustine's Neoplatonic metaphysics were not therefore not antithetical, but *antistrophic* (complementary) to his modified, classical metarhetoric.

- 93 Poster, 1994, 120. Kimball portrays Cicero as inheriting both streams of classical oratory, Isocratic *sophistic rhetoric* (e.g., Isocrates) and Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian *philosophical rhetoric* (e.g., Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) (Kimball, 1986, 31, 34).
- 94 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xxxi.51; II.iii.9-10; Fortin, 2008, 224; Kimball, 1986, 27.
- 95 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.v.6; II.ii.6-iii.9; Copeland, 1991, 12.
- 96 Cicero, *De Inventione*, II.xxxiv.104.
- 97 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.x.25. Augustine stresses the importance of the goals of all three styles (instructing, delighting, and moving), but he emphasizes that clear teaching is the paramount discursive virtue.
- 98 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xxix.46-xxx.49; Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, II.xxii.50; Fortin, 2008, 221-3, 226. As Spranzi puts it, Cicero combined into the category "the probable" what Aristotle conceptualized separately as "dialectical opinions ('endoxa'), rhetorical probabilities ('eikota') and what is convincing ('pistis', 'pithanon')" (Spranzi, 2011, 45).
- 99 Breyfogle, 2005, 34.

In light of this danger, Milbank's theoretical unwillingness to embrace the possibility of a universal *logos* may seem foolish. However, Milbank's practice of nonetheless using the universality-seeking language of metaphysics (which he nonetheless positions according to revelation and theology) reveals the impossibility of his claim to abandoning *logos*.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, I suggest that Milbank explicitly—not merely tacitly—follow Cicero's theory and Augustine's practice in uniting wisdom with eloquence. By imitating his teachers, Milbank could claim theoretically (as well as practically) that philosophy's *logos* is not the opposite of rhetoric's *mythos*, but is rather a necessary and complementary element of the latter. I suggest that Milbank's propensity for *via media* should translate into a more nuanced view toward the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy.¹⁰¹ In practice, Milbank already relies tacitly upon discursive logic in service of a greater rhetorical cause. Thus, instead of buying into the classical distinction between the two discourses, I propose that Milbank should follow in the tradition of Cicero (the teacher of Milbank's *maître à penser* Augustine) in affirming the possibility of a hybrid discourse: philosophical rhetoric.¹⁰²

I suggest that Milbank's retrieval of both Augustine's *logos* (metaphysical content) and Augustine's *lexis* (rhetorical style) can be mapped onto the confluences between the twin discourses of Neoplatonic metaphysics and classical oratory: Milbank's reliance on both schools allows him to posit both a narrative and a narratology which account for one another.¹⁰³ Milbank

100 Insofar as Milbank's philosophical claims are externally *intelligible*, they are externally *debatable*. Despite Milbank's assumption that his claims are functionally unintelligible to those who do not identify themselves by the Christian *mythos*, his willingness to debate his claims within the language games of the philosophical tradition reveals the transdiscursive nature of his *logos*. I examine this tension in more detail in the first chapter.

101 Such an approach—blending philosophy and rhetoric—coheres with Milbank's strategy of relativizing dualisms within a continuum of varying intensities. Milbank's typical mediating manoeuvre is to relativize the location of such opposites as moments of differing intensity along the same continuum, thereby simultaneously securing both difference and unity. Milbank's radical orthodoxy deconstructs modernity's dualisms in a manner similar to feminist and postmodern theology, but his project is unique in that it emphasizes reality as a continuum with points of varying intensities (*cf.* Milbank, 2003, 120, 187, 189, 201, 204, 206; Grey, 2012, 176-8; Hankey 2005, 19).

102 Cicero, *De Inventione*, II.ii.8-9.

103 Confusingly, although the term "metanarrative" has a particular definition in post-structuralist discourse,

writes that any “metanarrative requires a speculative ontology to support its meta-status,” and that the ontology appropriate for Christian rhetoric is Neoplatonic (particularly Augustinian) in nature.¹⁰⁴ As Poster writes, the classical rhetorical tradition and the Neoplatonic school of metaphysics did not merely coexist in antiquity, but fruitfully fused their discourses together.¹⁰⁵ Augustine in particular employed critically the two intellectual traditions of Ciceronian rhetoric and Neoplatonic philosophy.¹⁰⁶ Milbank draws a clear connection between these two (seemingly opposed) dimensions of Augustine’s *oeuvre*, noting that Augustine’s doctrine of *methexis* (the participation of beings within Being) is the metaphysical theoretical structure which accounts for his metarhetorical theories of persuasion.¹⁰⁷ Milbank claims that a truly Christian ontology (which unfolds within the Christian *mythos*, not the pagan Greek *mythos*) is anticipated—even inaugurated—by the Neoplatonists and the Patristics, particularly Augustine.¹⁰⁸ This “ontology of peace”, as Milbank puts it, posits first and foremost a distinction between Being and beings: the

Milbank tends to use the term generally as a synonym for the term “*mythos*”, denoting any pretheoretical, lifeworld-orienting story (e.g., Milbank, 1990, 388). According to Merold Westphal, the Lyotardian term “metanarrative” (alternately “grand narrative”) refers specifically to a uniquely modernist species of *mythos*: a legitimation story which attempts to justify (epistemologically and morally) the knowledge gained by the Enlightenment’s scientific and technological discoveries. As Westphal notes, the prefix “meta” here refers not to a narrative’s *scope*, but to its epistemological *level*: a *metanarrative* is an apologetic second-order discourse about a kerygmatic first-order discourse, which can in turn be described as a *meganarrative* (Westphal, 2001, xiii). I suggest that if Milbank needs to use a synonym for *mythos* denoting a pretheoretical story, he should use the term “meganarrative” instead of “metanarrative.” However, to avoid confusion, I will simply continue to use the term *mythos* instead of either of these terms (except when quoting Milbank’s use of “metanarrative”).

104 Milbank, 1990, 388. Milbank writes of such an Augustinian ontology of peace that the cosmos is a “reality suspended between nothing and infinity, a reality of flux, a reality without substance, composed only of relational differences and ceaseless alterations... Christianity can, and should, embrace the differential flux” because of the harmonizing “economic” nature of the perichoretic triune God, who is peacefully different within God’s self (Milbank, 2009¹, 51, 53).

105 Poster, 1994, 88, 92.

106 Camargo, 1998, 395. Camargo claims that Augustine’s elite education (*paideia*) had primed him to view Neoplatonism as “the highest wisdom and classical rhetoric as the supreme eloquence” (Camargo, 1998, 406). Because Neoplatonism systematically “sought to embrace all being in one great structured system of hypostases, or levels,” writes George Kennedy, it “could easily accommodate rhetoric in this embrace” (Kennedy, 1980, 181).

107 Milbank, 1990, 388. Camargo and Poster elaborate on the often overlooked Neoplatonic influences in Augustine’s hermeneutics and epistemology (Camargo, 1998, 394, Poster, 1994, 84, 86). King likewise notes that for Augustine, the activity of engaging with signs (which are limited and veiled by both finitude and fallenness) is “a rite of passage, an initiation”—that is, a theurgic act of participatory *methexis* (King, 1985, 112-13).

108 Milbank, 1997, 50; Hankey, 1999, 390.

creator God (as Being itself) is understood as differing qualitatively—not quantitatively—from God’s creation (the aggregate of beings). Answering Heidegger’s interrogation of onto-theology, Milbank’s Trinitarian theology articulates both ontological differences within the triune Godhead Godself and the ontological difference between Being and beings.¹⁰⁹ Created beings are understood as deriving their existences and essences from Being through a dynamic known as *methexis*, or participation. The differences between creational beings are due to different ways of ontologically participating in Being, suggests Milbank, yet these varying modes of *methexis* (which exhibit goodness, truth and beauty) cohere without violence.¹¹⁰ It is *methexis*’s principle of movement which draws Milbank’s attention, because it functions for him as a *via media* out of a number of dualisms: in addition to connecting universality with particularity, suggests Milbank, participation mediates between unity and difference, and between stability and flux, between the universal and the particular.¹¹¹ Milbank maintains that only Neoplatonic Christianity can envision difference as a positive and productive force, contra modern and postmodern renderings of difference as a negative (and thus violent) force.¹¹² Neoplatonism depicts created beings as differing analogically from God (Being), yet their differences unify and cohere harmoniously the more they participate in divine Being and its transcendental attributes of Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

Milbank’s return to Neoplatonic metaphysics focuses on the unity of the transcendental attributes of Being—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful—which Kantian modernity had pried

109 Milbank, 1990, 297; Hankey, 1999, 392.

110 Milbank understands beings as unique participations in Being, as (in Rivera’s words) “clusters of *differentia* [held] together as grace-given participations in the divine unity and existence of beauty” (Rivera, 2006, 124; Milbank, 1997, 111).

111 Milbank, 2003, 173; Rivera, 2006, 123.

112 Milbank, 1997, 189. This is one of the most contestable positions that Milbank stakes out. For instance, Rivera wonders whether Milbank must be essentialistic in order to posit the possibility of difference (Rivera, 2006, 122).

apart as being non-convertible.¹¹³ According to Umberto Eco, medieval Scholasticism used the Neoplatonic notion of transcendentals to describe the necessary accompanying properties of Being which suffuse every particular being in existence. These characteristics (or “modes of being”) neither diminish nor augment the nature of existence, but instead “inhere in being coextensively.”¹¹⁴ In the Neoplatonic tradition’s understanding, the transcendental forms of goodness, truth and beauty precede creational existence. Augustine claims that for every creature in existence, it is “the good which makes it a being”: existence is constituted by overflowing goodness, transcendental original plenitude flowing *ex nihilo* (out of nothingness) from the gratuitous creativity of God’s nature (as Being, Unity, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful).¹¹⁵ While these transcendentals are coequal and interchangeable, notes Eco, each is nonetheless distinguishable from the others and features its own unique internal style of existence.¹¹⁶ In the next three sections, I will use this transcendental triad of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful to explore how Milbank’s metaphysics bears respectively upon his epistemology, politics, and aesthetics. I will thereby demonstrate that Milbank’s postmodern yet Neoplatonic project can best be understood as *philosophical rhetoric*.

113 Milbank, 1990, 126.

114 Eco, 1988, 20-1, 29.

115 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XII.

116 Eco, 1988, 32-33. Milbank describes the transcendental nature of creation’s being (as well as themes such as grace, incarnation, atonement and redemption) with the root metaphor of “gift”. Conversely, he defines the Fall, evil, violence and sin as a refusal of Gift, and he lists evil, violence, falsity, disunity, nullity, and ugliness as “anti-transcendentals” corresponding privatively to the Neoplatonic transcendental attributes of Being (Milbank, 2003, ix, 28). Milbank’s source Augustine posits that every facet of creation is transcendently “charged”—not neutral—with regard to truth, goodness and beauty: any corrosion of these traits is less real than their magnification (Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XI). Privations weaken created beings, inhibiting them from fulfilling their purpose on a higher level of reality (Eco, 1988, 32-33). Non-being thus functions only to contradict Being (God’s superlatively good, true and beautiful nature) and the created beings which participate in God’s Being; thus, privation does not exist, but rather it is a “nothingness” which “nothings” upon the prior “somethingness” of existence. Milbank retrieves Augustine’s doctrine of ontological privation—a “de-intensification of being”—not only to *metaphysically* describe sin and evil, but also to track *historically* the developments of modernity and postmodernity as (in his view) heretical movements away from Christian orthodoxy (Milbank, 2003, 31). Milbank uses Augustine’s metaphysics to claim that humanity’s propensity toward the violent privation of a peacefully cohering creation is not a necessary or natural characteristic of creation, but is instead a historically contingent development (Milbank, 2003, 34, 42).

The True: Milbank's Epistemology and Hermeneutics

The True is the transcendental attribute of Being concerned with knowledge. Drawing on Augustine and Aquinas, Milbank posits that true thought and reason can only occur inside the field of divine revelation. This is because the supernatural is not opposed to, but continuous with, the natural.¹¹⁷ According to Augustine even the knowledge of a “rational soul” could be ignorant and “depraved” if it is not “enlightened by another light”: namely, revelation’s divine illumination.¹¹⁸ Revelation is the light by which any knowledge at all is obtained, to whatever degree; this is the essence of Augustine’s illuminationist epistemology. Therefore, any knowledge accruing to the human intellect is always-already supernaturally revealed, and not “natural” in any sense autonomous from divine illumination.¹¹⁹ Following Aquinas—yet still in line with Augustine—Milbank asserts that truth (like beauty and goodness) is an “analogical proportion” which participates in the other transcendentals: truth is the intellect’s measuring of the object’s manifest participation in the transcendental traits of the divine.¹²⁰ Milbank follows Augustine in claiming that knowledge is not the correspondence between mind and reality, but is instead the generation of meaning through the active learning process of engaging with the world: truth is the measure of revelatory illumination upon this pedagogical process, and falsehood is its privation.¹²¹ Milbank deepens Augustine’s sense of illumination to suggest that

117 Milbank, 2001, 21.

118 Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.xv.25.

119 Augustine, *Confessions*, X.ii.2.

120 Milbank, 2001, 20. Milbank suggests that *faith* is simply an *intensification* (a “further degree of participation”) of intellectual cognition (Milbank, 2001, 20-1). Milbank likewise locates intuition and proof on a single continuum relating to divine insight, stressing that intuition is a more intense approximation of truth (Milbank, 2001, 24). Similarly, Milbank adopts—in an anti-foundationalist and historicist vein—an Augustinian epistemology whereby desire affects knowledge (Milbank, 2002, 463; Breyfogle, 2005, 32-33; O’Grady, 2000, 176; Hedley, 2005, 106).

121 Milbank, 2009¹, 58. Ignorance is thus the diminishment of participation in the world-revealing light of transcendental Truth (Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, I:xix). As an Augustinian, Milbank claims that desire mediates reality to us: all desire is inherently good insofar as it is drawn to the infinite. Milbank writes that “if all that ‘is’ is good and true, then no positive reality can be false as a ‘mistake’, or as ‘non-correspondence’, but only false as deficient presence, embodying the shortfall of an inadequate desire” (Milbank, 2008, 58-9). In the next section, I will trace the impact of knowledge and desire on the social development of virtue and peace, thereby showing how Milbank’s epistemology (his account of the True and its

such orienting, revelatory insight is always mediated through the conventions of human language.

For Milbank, knowledge and values are only interpretations and fictions, yet they are nonetheless implicated in a real concrete reality (as both reifying causes and conditioned effects).¹²² Milbank argues that belief and reasoning are never neutral or foundationally legitimated, but instead only ever occur within the horizon of a deeper *mythos*. Milbank's epistemology proposes that *reason* is not universal, but instead that *reasons* make sense only within an "unfounded narrative" which "is only 'universal' for those who situate themselves within it."¹²³ Such a symbolic narrative pre-theoretically (and affectively) guides one toward certain conclusions (epistemology) and behaviors (ethics), and away from others. Because his epistemology is rooted in radical linguisticity, Milbank stresses that any and all ethical and political language is artificially constructed within the horizons of a given social imaginary.¹²⁴ In the next section, I will show how Milbank's ethical and political positions (which can be described according to the language of transcendental Goodness) is oriented by his post-foundationalist, Augustinian epistemology.

The Good: Milbank's Ethics and Politics

Milbank's Augustinian (Neoplatonic) metaphysics allows him to address both ethics (as rival visions of human flourishing) and politics (complex communal practices seeking justice) as being informed by a substantive vision of the Good (mediated epistemically by the True).¹²⁵

privations) affects his ethics and politics (his account of the Good and its privations).

122 Milbank, 1997, 249.

123 Milbank, 1990, 173.

124 Milbank, 1997, 24.

125 Milbank, 1990, 329. Milbank writes, "I will argue that a virtue yoked to dialectics, and even to the Aristotelian account of practical reason, finds it impossible [to reconcile differences peacefully]. A solution is only really possible in terms of a tradition like Christianity, which starkly links particular to universal by conceiving its relationship to transcendence in a rhetorical fashion. In this respect, Christianity offers a social alternative to

Milbank uses Augustine's *City of God* to articulate, as Bergen puts it, how "the church gives its own account of the final causes at work in human history as a basis for Christian social theory and ethics."¹²⁶ In order to develop the socio-political implications of Milbank's theory of the Good, I will follow Breyfogle's mapping of Milbank's ethics and politics as two overlapping sets of conceptual triads. Milbank's moral philosophy concerns virtue (as an ethical paradigm), charity (including forgiveness), and (ontological) peace. Milbank's ethics flows into his political philosophy, which revolves around peace (as a positive force, not a negative restraint of violence), political "resacralization" (the denial of secular neutrality vis-à-vis transcendence), and Christian socialism (which safeguards "complex space", a semi-political hierarchy of "intermediate associations").¹²⁷ I will now examine these five dimensions (peace is counted only once, not twice) of Milbank's ethics and politics in turn.

For Milbank, modern ethics (and even postmodern Levinasian ethics) obsesses over absolute self-sacrificial altruism because it is unable to imagine the possibility of non-zero-sum mutual benefit outside of a social-contractualist framework.¹²⁸ This sensibility follows Kant's ethical and political vision, whereby a metaphysical agnosticism about the nature of noumenal reality supports a political anthropology of individual negative rights absent any common good.¹²⁹ In response to this modernist moral climate, which strangely fuses absolute altruism with social-contractualism, Milbank calls for a revival of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Virtue concerns

either the civic mode of sophistry and democratic politics on the one hand, or dialectics and 'aristocratic' politics on the other."

126 Milbank, 1990, 389-92; Bergen, 2002, 17. In the *City of God*, Augustine follows—yet modifies— Cicero in defining a political republic or commonwealth (Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.xxiii-xxiv; Cicero, *On the Republic*, I.xii, I.xxxix-xli; Bergen, 2002, 23). Augustine claims that if Rome never had justice by its pagan own standards, let alone by Christian standards, then it was not truly a *populus* and therefore never truly a *res publica* (Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.xxi). Milbank repeats this style of *reductio ad nihilum* in addressing the political theories and practices of modernity.

127 Breyfogle, 2005, 35, 38.

128 Milbank, 2003, 156; Keller, 2012, 27. Milbank critiques the moral and political language-game of such a modernist worldview, which (according to Milbank) operates largely within a deontological ethical paradigm.

129 Milbank, 1997, 12.

the perfection of individual and communal character, which in turns requires *social* formation—*paideia*—aimed at substantial *teloi*.¹³⁰ Therefore, Milbank understands “human relatedness”—instead of self-assertion or self-denial—as “the primary context of morality.”¹³¹ Milbank extends this sense of reciprocity beyond morality to his understanding not only of justice, but of grace. Milbank understands grace—which he often depicts in the phenomenological language of “gift”—as a generative and non-coercive force inviting a creational response (or “re-gift”) and enabling mutual benefit and empowerment.¹³² Milbank’s intersubjective rendering of morality and justice is sometimes seen as conflicting practically with his theoretical commitment to grace, and his work has come under fire for privileging grace, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice over justice.¹³³ However, Milbank suggests that the imbalanced surd of grace and the balanced equilibrium of justice are not truly opposites: instead, he fondly recalls the Middle Ages as an epoch when Christians assumed the interdependence of justice and grace.¹³⁴

This rendering of grace and justice as positive, non-competing dynamics also finds parallels in Milbank’s definitions of freedom and peace. Milbank prophetically denounces modernity for taking *freedom* (negative liberty, which he sees as ultimately collapsing into a Nietzschean will) instead of a truly harmonizing and productive *peace* as its eschatological *summum bonum*.¹³⁵ Milbank’s counter-politics (in the face of neoliberal governance, which he views as caricaturing the politics of ethically substantive commonwealths) envisions the

130 Milbank, 1997, 25. Milbank accuses other theological schools, such as neo-orthodoxy and liberal theology of succumbing to this deontological worldview.

131 Milbank, 1997, 239.

132 Milbank, 2003, x, 9-10; Keller, 2012, 27, 32-33; Grau, 2006, 145.

133 Cf. Isherwood, 2012, 166. Isherwood charges Radical Orthodoxy as being a “male theology... that valorizes suffering, seeing it as an ontological way to reality,” yet which justifies dehumanization and marginalization.

134 Milbank, 1990, 96. Additionally, Milbank goes out of his way to follow in the steps of Augustine, whose central political motif is a redefinition of *justice* as worshipfully giving the true God his due (Augustine, *City of God*, X.i; Bergen, 2002, 29).

135 Milbank, 1990, 331; Lash, 1992, 359. Neither Milbank nor Augustine posits an absolute distinction between the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Terrena*: instead, the latter city *participates* to a greater or lesser degree in the former, depending on the depth of the *Civitas Terrena*’s recognition of the deeper order of the *Civitas Dei* (Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.xvii).

language, beliefs and practices of discipleship strong enough to resist, re-territorialize and reform a body politic, thereby offering citizens a positive freedom (to secure substantive *teloi*) through the generative force of positive peace.¹³⁶ This is most clear in Milbank’s discussions of “complex space” and Christian socialism.¹³⁷ For Milbank, *complex space* is the social recognition of complicated—even competing—loyalties and jurisdictions (and therefore different ethical and political imperatives) by emphasizing the integrity of institutions which mediate between individuals and the state.¹³⁸ Milbank thus turns from capitalism (including its milder forms in Catholic social teaching) to socialism—not the atheist variety, but the 19th-century religious socialism which he views as promoting such complex space and community participation in extra-political matters.¹³⁹ Despite criticisms (such as Breyfogle’s) that Milbank’s politics heretically exhibit Pelagian perfectionism and Donatist purity,¹⁴⁰ Milbank himself admits that this fallen world presents us with “tragic dilemmas” and “complicity in evil.”¹⁴¹ I will elaborate below on Milbank’s view of this fallenness within the Neoplatonic thematic of *privatio boni*, or privation of the Good.

I propose that the violences with which Milbank concerns himself in the domains of

136 Milbank, 1990, 403-4. Breyfogle writes that Radical Orthodoxy’s central political question concerns how to imagine and practice a peacefully pluralistic yet substantive view of human flourishing—a positive, not merely negative, sense of freedom—which does not ground itself foundationalistically (Breyfogle, 2005, 38-9).

137 Milbank, 1990, 190, 199; Milbank, 1997, 271-73.

138 Milbank, 1997, 281. Three criticisms arise regarding Milbank’s politics of complex space. Firstly, critics such as Lloyd consider Milbank’s Augustinian rendering of the peaceful *civitas dei* a conflation (Milbank would say ‘harmonization’) of ethics and law, a confusion which philosophers such as Gillian Rose see as inherently in tension and irresolvable (Lloyd, 2009, 14-15). Secondly, Lash accuses Milbank of an “Augustinian pessimism” which doubts the efficacy in pursuit of the common good at anything more complex than the minimal social level of a small community (Lash, 1992, 363). Yet Rivera claims that Milbank implicitly supports liberation theology (known as a macro-structural movement) in spite of his explicit denunciations of it, which suggests that (contra Lash) Milbank is indeed interested in large-scale, political common goods (Rivera, 2006, 123). Thirdly, Breyfogle worries that Milbank’s project conflates Augustine’s analogically-related, yet distinct, realms of “the soul, the household, the city and the church” (Breyfogle, 2005, 41). However, I suggest that Milbank’s account of complex space addresses the need for these other institutions as integral to a fractally harmonious society.

139 Milbank, 1997, 269, 271.

140 Breyfogle, 2005, 42.

141 Milbank, 1997, 235.

morality and politics can be described as privations of the Good. The language of *sin* is a way of describing the privation of creation's moral dimension: sin is a willful human impeding of God's continuing creative activity, a "refusal of the plenitude of creation."¹⁴² Milbank adopts Augustine's privation theory of sin, whereby evil is *not* a surd, but is instead a violent diminishment of the gift of creation's being, which *is* a surd.¹⁴³ As privation, evil *parodies* the divine signature upon creation. Milbank's key political example of this is that modern liberalism caricatures the political structure of Christendom.¹⁴⁴ Milbank suggests that 'the secular' was constructed—not merely discovered—as a privative discarding of teleology (in favor of a self-preserving instinct), leaving in its wake only "a sphere of autonomous, sheerly formal power."¹⁴⁵ This effectively means that there is no such thing as a mythologically-neutral sphere of liberal public discourse: instead, the Western political imaginary is currently dominated by the liberal, secularist *mythos*. Liberalism masquerades as ignoring any substantive views of the human good, Milbank suggests, but it smuggles in a view of that good nonetheless.¹⁴⁶

Milbank's ethical and political problems with secularism, modernity and political liberalism are therefore not that they abandon theology or virtue, but rather that they rely on *wrong* theology and a *distorted* set of virtues: these cultural moments are privations of previously

142 Milbank, 1997, 137.

143 Milbank, 1997, 22-3. Critics such as Hoffmeyer and Grey claim that Radical Orthodoxy has failed to address the Christian church's complicity in historical (and not simply ontological) violence, despite its fixation on orthodoxy's ontological peace and paganism's and heresy's ontological violences (Hoffmeyer, 2006, 15; Grey, 2012, 181). I suggest instead that Milbank is not attempting to ignore historical violences, but is instead trying to account for such violences ontologically via his Neoplatonic privation theory of evil.

144 Milbank, 2003, 18. Milbank writes that Christian theology helped to invent the new human realities of personal property, capitalism, and the nation state (Milbank, 1990, 15, 18-19, 247; Milbank, 2003, 163).

145 Milbank, 1990, 9.

146 Milbank opposes modern secular liberal politics because it ostensibly precludes any particular definition of virtue as a legitimate end of the public order (Milbank, 1990, 186). Thus, political liberalism's definitions of freedom and power revolve around the state-market binary instead of around any deeper philosophical anthropology (Milbank, 1990, 13). However, Stout muses that Milbank seems to ignore the possibility that liberal modernity might also be ripe for redemption (Stout, 2003, 104-5), which would seem to cohere with Milbank's claim that for privation theory, greater tragedies imply greater potential for reconciliation (Milbank, 2003, 55). Milbank's response to this would be that liberalism—like modernity or secularism—is *itself* a privation, and therefore unredeemable *per se* (unlike the underlying social practices which liberalism deprivates, which are redeemable).

substantive practices and theories of a grace-infused cosmos.¹⁴⁷ As Michalson writes, Milbank’s post-foundationalist retrieval of virtue ethics “hints at social and political possibilities that make strong demands on the imagination.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, Milbank’s ethical-political project is deeply intertwined with his aesthetics. In the next section, I will show how Milbank’s account of the socio-political implications of the Good is rooted in his account of the Beautiful.

The Beautiful: Milbank’s Aesthetics

Milbank’s rhetorical turn toward non-coercive persuasion cannot be adequately addressed merely by ethics or political philosophy (under the auspices of the Good), but that his rhetorical turn especially demands a theological aesthetics (under the auspices of the Beautiful). Remes shows that Neoplatonism’s root metaphor for beauty is *harmony*, instantiated by symmetry, rhythm and right proportion.¹⁴⁹ For Augustine, beauty is found in the patterns of proportionality which present themselves to the human senses according to the “Rhythm of Reason.”¹⁵⁰ On this Neoplatonic account, Remes notes, the transcendental form of the Beautiful inheres uniquely in material beings as proportional order and symmetrical design. Formal causality—the principle of intelligibility as well as of beauty—imprints its pattern on matter, whereby beings proportionally reflect the infinite contours of Being (God) itself.¹⁵¹ According to Augustine, *analogia*—correlationality—is the logic by which the Beautiful orders the cosmos: “No part of [creation] is unlike the whole of it.”¹⁵² Creation is thus intended to be *fractal*, evidencing a harmonious interconnection of parts with other parts and of parts with the shared whole. Immanent material beauty is thus measured by the human intellect against the ideal form of Beauty. For Milbank,

147 Milbank, 1990, 42.

148 Michalson, 2004, 358.

149 Remes, 2008, 97.

150 Augustine, *De Musica*, xi.33, 38.

151 Remes, 2008, 207.

152 Augustine, *De Musica*, xvii.58.

harmony—paradigmatically characterized by baroque music—is a synecdoche for the peaceful metaphysical *fittingness* of every facet of creation vis-à-vis God’s own transcendental triunity.¹⁵³ Although transcendental Truth and Goodness are understood to be convertible with the Beautiful, Milbank effectively privileges Beauty as ontologically foundational.

Because Milbank views language as fundamentally metaphorical, and because he views metaphor as fundamentally narratological and poetic, his project demands that “linguistics is re-located inside poetics” (which is a “pre-reflective” semiotic domain).¹⁵⁴ Following Vico, Milbank argues that different narratives entail different grammars, and that lexical meanings change according to the presupposed *mythos* animating a given linguistic economy.¹⁵⁵ Milbank proclaims that the orientation of secular reason “is only a *mythos*, and therefore cannot be refuted, but only *out-narrated*, if we can persuade people—for reasons of ‘literary taste’—that Christianity offers a much better story.”¹⁵⁶ Milbank’s theology operates according not to *logical* criteria (within the dialectical discourse of philosophy), but rather to *narratological* criteria (within the poetic and persuasive discourse of rhetoric). Intelligibility—let alone judgments of truth, goodness or beauty—can only arise within the parameters of plot (*mythos*), which connects disparate elements of reality. Such *fittingness* is the appropriate standard of aesthetics, and Milbank employs it to show how only the particularity of the Trinitarian *mythos* can find a fitting place for

153 Milbank, 1990, 429-30. However, Rayment-Pickard rejects Milbank’s ontological harmonizing of difference: not only does Milbank never exactly explain “how this apparently ‘impossible’ divine harmony is achieved”, particularly since harmony defeats dissonance *agonistically*, not peacefully (Hugh Rayment-Pickard, 2005, 163, 165-6). Milbank might reply that difference of any type need not be necessarily interpreted as violent (Milbank, 1990, 308-9), and that dissonance is simply a privation upon an always-already given (or rather, “gifted”) harmony. Milbank can offer no deeper response to the first critique, because his ontology of peace is woven into a *mythos* which one either accepts or rejects.

154 Milbank, 1997, 107, 130. Hankey and Hedley characterize this poetic and rhetorical shift as a “reliance on metanarrative as a replacement for metaphysics” (Hankey and Hedley, 2005, xiii). In Bergen’s characterization of Milbank’s theo-poetics, the Christocentric metanarrative “cannot be founded by rational argument... or any other strategy of control” but can instead only be shared via the “*aesthetic* appeal of word and peaceful practice” (Bergen, 2002, 20, italics mine).

155 Milbank, 1997, 108.

156 Milbank, 1990, 330.

the material formed into other (violent, nihilistic) *mythoi*.¹⁵⁷ Milbank's rhetorical turn and privileging of the Beautiful can be understood as a radicalization of Augustine's insight that although truth-teaching is paramount, the truth should be presented eloquently and attractively.¹⁵⁸

However, Milbank's aesthetics draws so deeply on Neoplatonism's static ontology that he occasionally seems to forget his commitment to linguistic constructivism. At times, Milbank espouses a critical historicism: the process of contingent development yields knowledges which must be judged discerningly from within a tradition, not from some ostensible Archimedean point of foundationalistic objectivity.¹⁵⁹ As Milbank admits, the standards of what counts as *true* or *good* are historically conditioned in particular linguistic communities, and a rhetor must partially play to those standards in order that his *logos* might be intelligible and acceptable to a particular audience. Yet Milbank is strangely quiet when it comes addressing the standards of beauty as being historically constructed in a given community, because he holds out the possibility of the Christian *kerygma* alluring people from other linguistic communities (which presumably share different aesthetic standards as well). On the surface, Milbank seems unwilling to address other traditions' existing standards of *beauty* or adapt the Christian *kerygma* to them.¹⁶⁰

Milbank's chief concern with pagan and heretical *mythoi* (as animating modernity and

157 According to Copeland, the classical rhetorical tradition conceived of such timely fittingness as *kairos*: the opportune, transformative embrace of an audience's beliefs, stories, or mood in the poetic and persuasive flow of one's oration (Copeland, 1991, 19).

158 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.v.23. Wetzel claims that Augustine was not so much concerned to show that pagans lacked the ability to be virtuous, (the Good) but rather that they lacked the *narrative imagination* (the Beautiful) to envision the breadth and depth of true virtue (Wetzel, 2004, 272).

159 Milbank, 1990, 306.

160 Critics have challenged Milbank's aesthetics by pointing out that standards of beauty (like standards of truth and goodness) are not neutral nor objectively available, but are instead communally and historically conditioned (Althaus-Reid, 2006, 111; Rayment-Pickard, 2005, 165-6). Milbank emphasizes the ubiquity of historical construction and redefines truth in a coherence model relative to the constructions of a given community, yet he seems to assume that beauty (unlike truth or goodness) is a normative criteria which is available to all. Other critics point out that opinions seem to vary more widely and conflict more wildly over issues of aesthetic taste than factual issues of truth or ethical issues of goodness, and wonder what is gained by the transition from the democratic agonism of logical debate to the elitist agonism of "connoisseurship" (O'Grady, 2000, 171; Lloyd, 2009, 22).

postmodernity) is not only that they are *false* (privations of the True) or *evil* (privations of the Good), but especially that they are *ugly* (privations of the Beautiful). Milbank writes of such aesthetic privations,

God's superabundant impulses of creation and redemption arrange [things] in their proper place in a sequence, and hence 'privation' implies not just inhibition of the flow, but also a false, ugly, misdirection of the flow. Although evil is negative, it can be 'seen' in an ugly misarrangement. All the same, nothing is positively wrong here, for every scene can be adjusted by rearrangement, omission, and re-contextualization... [building for] new and unexpected beauty.¹⁶¹

However, some critics have noted that aesthetics frequently aligns with ideological legitimation of violence and injustice, thereby rendering suspect Milbank's identification of beauty with peace.¹⁶² In response, I propose that Milbank's historicism offers a strong critique of whatever ideological function his metaphysics might come to serve. I will address this issue in my next chapter on narrative and *pathos*, in which Milbank employs *mythos* to renarrate stories which have become ideological, losing all sense of their historically contingent development. In so doing, I will use the conceptual tools of Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine to trace the narratological and affective impact of Milbank's shifting of the criterion of truth from the epistemological (*logos* and *sapientia*) to the aesthetic (*mythos* and *eloquentia*).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed how John Milbank disavows the possibility of metaphysics as universalizing, foundationalistic reasoning while simultaneously returning to Augustine's

¹⁶¹ Milbank, 1990, 431.

¹⁶² Althaus-Reid, 2006, 112, 116; Tallon, 2011, 134. However, I suggest that Milbank answers his own critics in his discussions of *ideology*, which he defines as "social self-occlusion": ideology is the process by which a society hides its own contingent construction from itself, pretending that its values are instead natural and necessary (Milbank, 1990, 133). However, Milbank's commitment to a *privatio boni* hamartiology suggests that while no instance of beauty is ever beyond the possibility of (dys)functioning ideologically, neither is any instance of beauty ever beyond the possibility of functioning redemptively.

Neoplatonic metaphysics to account for his epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics (albeit through a post-structuralist hermeneutic). After explaining the CRT's understanding of *logos* as the logical content of persuasive speech, I showed how the content of Milbank's rhetoric is primarily an argument for Neoplatonic metaphysics, which—despite Milbank's rejection of foundationalism—is philosophical insofar as it asks and answers questions of reality. I have explored Neoplatonism's own rhetorical strategies in order to show the ways in which Augustine's metaphysics accounts for his metarhetoric, and how his rhetorical practice promotes his metaphysics. I have argued that Milbank's reliance upon Augustine's Neoplatonic metaphysics does not contradict Milbank's explicit disavowal of philosophical *logos* in favor of rhetorical *mythos*, but that his rhetorical practice reveals the extent to which he (like Augustine) follows in Cicero's footsteps fusing dialectic with rhetoric. I have shown that this tactic coheres with Milbank's *via media* strategy of relativizing dualisms within a continuum of varying intensities. I have revisited Milbank's embrace of Augustine's ontology of peace, whereby creation (beings) is depicted as differing analogically from God (Being) yet creation's differences unify and cohere harmoniously the more they participate in Being and its transcendental attributes of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. I have used this transcendental triad to flesh out Milbank's epistemology, ethics, and political theory, and aesthetics. I have explained that Milbank retrieves Augustine's illuminationist epistemology and Aquinas's analogical ontology in a post-foundationalist, linguistic mode. I have shown how Milbank's ontology of peace not only commits him to a substantive view of the public good (as a religious commitment binding people together in habitual practice), but also reveals how secular liberalism dissimulates its own implicit vision of the good. I have traced Milbank's rhetorical turn to the aesthetic basis of desire, knowledge, and action, and I have explained how his historicism accounts for how a given community's standard

of beauty participates (to a greater or lesser degree) in the Beautiful. Additionally, I have explored the dark undersides of each of these branches of metaphysics (falsehood, evil, and ugliness) as privations of the transcendentals (truth, goodness, and beauty). I have concluded that Milbank's Augustinian metaphysical theories (which culminate in his aesthetics) give justification for his unique rhetorical practices (elevating *mythos* over *logos*). Having argued that Milbank emulates Augustine and the classical rhetorical tradition both by proffering a *logos* exhibiting philosophical rhetoric (a non-foundationalist approach to metaphysics which suggests his epistemology, social ethics, and aesthetics) and by fashioning a positive *ethos* (identifying with Christians and post-structuralists alike), I will argue in the next chapter that Milbank utilizes *pathos* to 'rebuild' and move his audiences (via the grand style of his grand narrative).

Chapter III.

Pathos: Affect, Style, and Narrative in the Transformation of Milbank's Audience

As I articulated at the end of the second chapter, Milbank effectively subordinates epistemology (the logic of the True) to aesthetics (the logic of the Beautiful). In light of this shift, I will examine how Milbank's narration of Western intellectual history depends on what the CRT refers to as *pathos*, the use of speech to re-form an audience into the right kind of listeners appropriate for the rhetor's needs (which often involves appealing to an audience's emotions).¹⁶³ In this chapter, I will show how Milbank's narrative relies on the grand style aims to move his readers (*movere*) at the affective and imaginative level as well as at the cognitive level. To this end, I will examine Milbank's deployment of both an Augustinian *narrative* (the cosmic trek from the original goodness of *creatio* to the fallenness of *lapsus* to the beatific restoration of the *eschaton*) and an Augustinian *narratology*, whereby stories lay bare what a culture loves and transform audiences into a certain type of listener. Stories are simultaneously descriptive and performative, entailing both *logos* (describing that which deserves praising love and that which deserves blaming hatred) and *pathos* (creating the right type of listener who loves and hates the proper things). I will show that this affective purpose focuses more upon *mythic* imagination than upon logical propositions.¹⁶⁴ I will go on connect Milbank's use of *pathos* and imagination with his theory and practice of *style*, primarily by examining the linguistic power wielded by the classical rhetorical tradition through *pathos*-laden control of discourse. In the next section, I will show how Milbank's call to mythic re-imagination cannot rely solely upon the content (*logos*) of one's argument, but involves performative style (*lexis*). In particular, I will argue that Milbank

163 Milbank, 1990, 306.

164 In Milbank's reckoning, modernity suffers both from overly shallow *theories* and *practices* of imagination (Milbank, 1997, 238). The imaginative insufficiencies of heretical and pagan *mythoi* restrict the horizons of reason to an (apparently) purely secular (or "natural") realm. Thus, for Milbank, rectifying such an anemic *logos* can happen only by re-imagining the *mythos* lying beneath that *logos*.

employs what Augustine refers to as the “grand style” in narrating his *mythos* to generate *pathos* in his audience.

***Pathos* in the Classical Rhetorical Tradition**

Milbank cannot be understood primarily as a teacher whose goal is to instruct minds, but instead as an Augustinian orator who intends to transform the hearts of his audience.¹⁶⁵ Augustine claims that eloquence moves (*movere*) an audience’s passions more than it instructs (*docere*) an audience’s intellects.¹⁶⁶ For the CRT, the power to move an audience falls under the metarhetorical category of *pathos*, which Aristotle defines as the *pistis* (means of persuasion) which concerns “how the emotions are created and counteracted.”¹⁶⁷ Milbank’s rhetorical purpose is not merely to instruct his audience, but to *affect* his audience. Milbank returns to theurgic Neoplatonism in order to propose that reason (*logos*) is always-already implicated in *pathos*, worship and the poetics of *mythos*.¹⁶⁸ In light of this claim, I address a third cluster of criticisms against Milbank’s project, which is concerned that the intentional manner in which he tries to *affect* his audience via his *mythos* (which is taken to be “orthodox”, the single correct way of describing the cosmos) partakes in the very agonistic violences which his ontology intends to evade.¹⁶⁹ Milbank focuses on the emotional and imaginative tectonics beneath rational thought, and connects them to worldview-shaping metanarratives. Milbank both *proposes* a

165 Milbank intends to move his readership out of a lukewarm liberal tolerance, *either* toward his proposal *or* away from it: he demands that “Christian morality is a thing so strange, that it must be declared immoral or amoral” (Milbank, 1997, 219). In Milbank’s reckoning, no neutral middle ground is possible, because a lack of participation in God’s transcendence—even in one’s theorizing—is necessarily a nihilistic backsliding toward the nothingness from which it was called into being (Milbank, 1999, 26; Smith, 2004, 102).

166 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xii.27-28; IV.viii.22.

167 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.xi.7. Cicero refers to this capacity as *flectere*, while Augustine refers to it as *movere* (Müller, 2012, 306).

168 Milbank, 2003, x; Hankey, 2005, 21.

169 Critics take Milbank to task for violently homogenizing the multiplicity of Christian narratives into a single narrative (Hoffmeyer, 2006, 16; Caputo, 2001, 313; Milbank, 1990, 173, 332; Milbank, 2003, 128). Milbank’s narratological unification seems to follow the Christian tradition’s construction of orthodoxy through disciplining differences (paganism and heresy) into conformity (Cameron, 1991, 5; Caputo, 2001, 313).

theory of metanarratives and *performs* a grand narrative (in the form of a series of harsh invectives against a series of “heresies” and “paganisms”). I suggest that the *pathos* embedded in Milbank’s *mythos* is meant to help his audience feel strongly about his *logos*, and his *logos* accounts for the conditions under which he can tell a story about peace in a peaceful way. He intends for his reading audience not simply to learn, but to fall in love with the alluring world which he reveals. I will now show examine how Milbank accounts for not only his own narrative but for the narratological structure of all human experience and understanding.

Narratologies: *Mythos*, *Diḗgēsis* and *Narratio*

Milbank writes that his return to teleological final causality (out of the nihilism inaugurated by modernity’s rupturing the participation of immanence in transcendence) entails “a ‘narrative’ vision of human life.”¹⁷⁰ Yet Milbank understands narrative as an element inherent in all matters of human understanding: human *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poiesis* are forever positioned by the given narrative in terms of which we emplot ourselves.¹⁷¹ Milbank claims by way of example that both anti-foundationalist theology and foundationalist social science alike offer ultimate narratives, which generate different patterns of meaning by perceiving and ordering phenomena differently. However, Milbank sees the difference between secular social theory and orthodox Christian theology in the fact that social theory denies that it relies upon such a metanarrative, while the Christian tradition has always emphasized its enframing *mythos* (the proclamation of the good news of Christ’s life, death and resurrection) as the church’s *raison d’etre*.¹⁷² For Milbank, *mythos* is inescapable, regardless of one’s religious background.

Milbank’s mythocentrism, as the central element of his rhetorical turn, has deep roots in

170 Milbank, 1997, 127.

171 Milbank, 1990, 339.

172 Milbank, 1990, 249.

the classical rhetorical tradition. However, the CRT has more than one understanding of the concept “narrative,” which differs in some ways with Milbank’s emphasis on story. Milbank seems to use the terms “rhetoric” and “narrative” (or “metanarrative”) as substitutes for the general categories “apologetics” and “worldview.”¹⁷³ Rhetoric for Milbank is a universal practice of proclaiming *mythoi*, which portray the gamut of philosophical and theological issues rendered meaningful by and for a given community. However, as Kennedy recounts, rhetoric traditionally concerned concrete, specific speeches given to juries or public assemblies.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, the CRT (especially as manifest in Aristotle and Cicero) understands narrative to be only a single facet of rhetoric; however, Milbank wishes to identify the two practices, thereby conflating grand-storytelling (*mythos*) and persuasive speaking.¹⁷⁵

As addressed in chapter two, Aristotle presents *mythos* as a significant complement to philosophical *logos*.¹⁷⁶ In exegeting Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Paul Ricoeur translates *mythos* as “emplotment”, the poetic and inventive ordering of discrete events into a formal unity: a linear stream with a beginning, middle, and end.¹⁷⁷ In the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, Aristotle also employs another term for “narrative”: *diēgēsis*, narratively leading the audience through the facts of a judicial case. According to Ricoeur, Aristotle understands *diēgēsis* as a subspecies of *mythos*,¹⁷⁸ and he locates *diēgēsis* within the specific discourse of *forensic* rhetoric (not within epideictic or deliberative oratory, which have their own types of narration).¹⁷⁹ Likewise, Cicero considers

173 In opposing “narrative relation” to “causal explanation,” Milbank suggests that only narrative—not logic—can connect separate “unique, historical constellation(s)” (Milbank, 1990, 83). As Hoffmeyer notes, narratives (like worldviews) are fluid, not static phenomena. Not only do individual narratives change, but they also merge together over time. Despite his historicism, Milbank (as a narrative orator) occasionally seems to forget that the Christian *mythos*—like all *mythoi*—is not an unchanging, ahistorical substance (Hoffmeyer, 2006, 16).

174 Kennedy, 1991, 9.

175 Milbank, 1990, 329-30. Milbank writes here of both rhetoric and *mythos* as non dialectical ways of “linking... universal with particular” and concrete content.

176 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.ii. Aristotle writes that “even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom.”

177 Ricoeur, 1983, 31, 33.

178 Ricoeur, 1983, 36.

179 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.xiii.3. Deliberative and epideictic have their own varieties of narration. Aristotle proposes that *diegesis* (narration) should be employed at a length proper to helping the audience understand

narrative (*narratio*) as only one among six elements of oratorical invention and arrangement (which are themselves only two out of five canons of rhetoric).¹⁸⁰ Augustine similarly delimits the scope of *mythos*: he positions Varro’s language of “mythical theology” (the primarily narrational, dramatic, and poetic discourse about the gods) as only one of three types of discourse about the divine (including philosophical theology and civil theology).¹⁸¹ Therefore, although the CRT would reject Milbank’s equation of the two types of discourse by subsuming the species “narrative” to the genus “rhetoric,” its adherents would agree with him that narrative and rhetoric are deeply connected. In the next section I will show how Milbank’s narratology (his epistemological account of the ubiquity of pre-rational *mythoi*) unfolds itself within his performative narration of his *mythos*.

Milbank’s Narrative

Milbank’s genius is found not only in his *narratology* (his metarhetorical account of a mythocentric approach to knowledge and persuasion) but also in his *narration* (his performed action of storytelling).¹⁸² Milbank himself (following Berkeley) suggests that doctrine is not merely propositional, but *performative in nature*.¹⁸³ I suggest that Milbank’s theoretical arguments (including his narratology of agonistic pretheoretical metanarratives) only cohere within the giant story of the West which he tells: once upon a time, a holistic Augustinian-Thomistic ontology fell prey to a reductive Scotist modernity, yet hope for restoration remains in moments of counter-modern Christianity. In his storytelling mode, Milbank makes it clear that he

clearly what has happened (Aristotle, *Poetics*, xxiii). Milbank’s sweeping narrative project has the dual effect of rendering visible many unknown figures of intellectual history, and re-emplotting many well-known ones.

180 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xiv.19; I.xix. Cicero discusses *narratio* as a crucial element in forensic rhetoric, because it establishes *plausibility* by connecting disparate particularities (instead of establishing *certainty* by appealing to universality, which would belong more properly to deliberative rhetoric).

181 Augustine, *City of God*, VI.v; VIII.

182 Milbank, 1990, 76.

183 Milbank, 1997, 105.

is not engaged in dialogical dialectics; instead (as his critics readily point out) he is narrating a story wide enough to fit together everything which he considers significant.¹⁸⁴ This is in line with Cicero's advice that a skillful rhetor "must bend everything to the advantage of his case, by passing over all things that make against it which can be passed over... and by telling his own side of the story carefully and clearly."¹⁸⁵ The cumulative impact of Milbank's books and articles can be understood as episodes in a grand narrative: Milbank *performs* his narratology (his anti-foundationalist account of the *mythos* underpinning any given linguistic community) by embedding it within a grand narrative about the fall of the West into modern secular liberalism by way of medieval nominalistic voluntarism and Machiavellian "neo-paganism."¹⁸⁶

Milbank suggests that a new human future can become possible by rewinding modernity through a reinterpretative re-narration of the history of its development.¹⁸⁷ To this end, Milbank self-consciously constructs (in the mode of *inventio*) a novel *story* of the world to "reappropriate our Western legacy," not as a subtraction story of secularization, but "rather as the history of a tremendous revolt against *either* particularism *or* the cult of universalizable power, in the name

184 Lash, 1992, 354; Bowlin, 2004, 264.

185 Cicero, *De Inventione*, I.xxii.31. Such "bending" of the facts sounds to the modern ear dangerously close to "propagandizing." However, Bowlin claims that theology and history are *inextricably* intertwined and equally implicated in prescription as well as description. If Milbank is guilty of propagandizing, suggests Bowlin, it is not merely for viewing history through a normative lens, but rather for viewing history through a *distorted* normative lens which he refuses to let be corrected (as it were) by external critical consideration (Bowlin, 2004, 261-3).

186 Milbank, 1990, 428.

187 Milbank, 2003, 126. Milbank focuses on the re-interpretive power of narration as a vehicle of highlighting the historical contingency with which any human construct develops (Milbank, 2003, 84). Milbank warns Christians against embracing any theory (let alone any story) which accepts current configurations of social life as fixed and final: the story of creation is always still developing (Milbank, 1997, 249). Milbank stresses that the narrative embeddedness which makes such developments intelligible entails that "meanings and events [located within a narrative] are normally inseparable" (Milbank, 2003, 94). Bowlin charitably reads Milbank's corpus as a *Geistesgeschichte*, an intellectual history whose purpose is found in the prescriptive moral provided by the whole (the overall *fit* of the parts) more than in the truth value of particular elements. However, Milbank's hermeneutical blunders at the level of particularities tend to weaken the overall effect (and affect) of the *mythos* which he narrates, diminishing the persuasiveness of his rhetorical project (Bowlin, 2004, 265). I suggest that Milbank is at least honest about what his project is trying to achieve; however, whether his tale is actually superior to other such grand narratives is a different matter altogether.

of the transcendent Good.”¹⁸⁸ I suggest that Milbank’s narrative (from orthodoxy to heretical modernity to counter-modernity) can be described as a synecdoche of the larger Christian tale (from creation to fall to *eschaton*). Secular modernity thus becomes a *privation* of a prior full-bodied theology until a withered philosophy emerges. Milbank’s tale of orthodoxy, secularism and counter-modernity takes place within and draws upon the traditional Western Christian *mythos*. In particular, he draws on Augustine’s grand narrative which opens with God’s created paradise, which is ruined by human sin in the fall, yet which perseveres toward a future eschatological return to paradise through God’s grace.¹⁸⁹ Milbank asserts that, “in the life of Christ, a new *mythos* is established which replaced and resituated the *mythos* of antiquity.”¹⁹⁰ Unless one adopts this master narrative, warns Milbank, all other stories collapse back into the *nihil*(ism) from which they were created: only this Christian story of stories can simultaneously secure newness *and* order, difference *and* identity.¹⁹¹

Because of his historicism, the “creation” moment of Milbank’s narration—the development of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy—seems to have occurred not *ex nihilo*, but

188 Milbank, 2003, 175.

189 Augustine, *City of God*, XI.xii.

190 Milbank, 1990, 69.

191 Milbank, 1990, 375. For Milbank, non-Christian *mythoi* are privative upon the true Christian *mythos* because they fail to *fully* narrate the depth and breadth of the cosmos *vis-à-vis* the Creator: such stories cannot fit everything in, and so they become reductionistic parodies of the true *mythos*, which alone can account for all of reality. However, this position invites an immanent critique. Milbank offers both a *narratology* (which relativizes metaphysics to *mythoi*) and a *metaphysics* (which must account for the possibility of multiple *mythoi*, most of which—as paganisms or heresies—can be considered privations of the True), both of which must fit peacefully together in Milbank’s coherence model of truth. The problem is that while Milbank’s metaphysics is rooted in differential peace, his narratology is rooted in differential agonism: there is a tug-of-war between competing *mythoi*. Thus, creational differences are supposed to hang together without ontological violence, yet creation is only ever encountered through epistemological or hermeneutical violence, in an agonism between rival *mythoi*. If Milbank’s ontology of peace can only narrate a harmonious reality by conquering rival narratives, there is a deep inconsistency in his project. If *logos* is reducible to *mythos*, and Milbank’s *mythos* claims to be the *only* story ‘long’ enough to narratively “fit” all of reality within the scope of ontological peace, then Milbank’s ‘ontology of peace’ is simply a deceptive epiphenomenon concealing the agonistic violence of his narrative *vis-à-vis* other (wrong) *mythoi*. Yet if *logos* cannot be entirely reduced to *mythos*, then Milbank’s ontology and his narrative cannot account for one another, and a different inconsistency plagues his project. The first problem is tautological yet performatively contradictory, while the second is paradoxical. I will examine the problems raised by Milbank’s mythocentric agonism and ontological peace in the third chapter’s subsection entitled “*Contentio*: Against Agonistics.”

instead as a historical process, culminating in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁹² The “fall” in Milbank’s tale occurs in the 13th century with the onset of Scotist voluntarism and nominalism, which eliminated the ontological difference between Being and beings and laid the political, social and ecclesial groundwork for secular, liberal modernity.¹⁹³ Milbank’s tale reveals that the secular has been created by transformations within Christian theology (that is, heresy), not by the external jettisoning of Christian theology (that is, paganism).¹⁹⁴ After Hobbes, modern political theorists forgot that they were practicing theology: mistakingly thinking that they had abandoned the notion of God, such a notion nonetheless smuggled itself into their theories as onto-theology.¹⁹⁵ According to Milbank, secularism was originally an ecclesial, not political, reality: it was the not the state but rather the church which first developed the “traits of modern secularity” (contractualism, sovereignty, etc.).¹⁹⁶ Milbank provides a genealogy of “villains” who ostensibly embrace ontological violence, and he employs the terms *paganism* and *heresy* to describe two erroneous directions of theory and practice which presuppose ontological violence. “Heresy” refers to intra-Christian *de-ethicizing* (the acceptance of fallenness as being natural), while “paganism” refers to extra-ecclesial *re-ethicizing* (the praising of fallenness as being virtuous).¹⁹⁷ Milbank’s narrative of pagans and heretics begins in the ancient world (e.g., Polybius’s paganism, the natural-law-abiding Stoics, and non-theurgic Neoplatonists such as Plotinus),¹⁹⁸ runs through medieval scholasticism (Avicenna, Roger Bacon, Henry of Ghent, Ockham, Duns Scotus),¹⁹⁹ continues through modern philosophy (Hobbes, Descartes, Machiavelli, Spinoza,

192 Milbank, 1990, 381.

193 Milbank, 1990, 54-55, 302-3; Hedley, 2005, 104.

194 Milbank, 1990, 29.

195 Milbank, 1990, 28.

196 Milbank, 1990, 16.

197 Milbank, 1990, 42. Here and elsewhere, Milbank refers to the modern instantiations of paganism as “neo-paganism.”

198 Milbank, 1990, 22; Smith, 2004, 106.

199 Milbank, 1997, 8-16; Milbank, 2009, 33; Smith, 2004, 106.

Kant),²⁰⁰ and culminates in the hyper-modern angles of postmodernist thought (Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard).²⁰¹ Yet Milbank asserts that Christianity's antithetical critiques of paganisms and heresies are simply the flip side of the church's thetical positive assertion—namely, its *narration* of history in relation to God's creative gift and fall-redeeming “re-gifting.”²⁰² Thus, Milbank lambastes the ‘villains’ of intellectual history only to bring into intelligible relief the more basic Christian-Neoplatonic tradition proclaiming ontological peace.

The moment of “redemption” in Milbank's narrative is the hope for a postmodern return to Christian Neoplatonism, as proleptically articulated by a series of counter-modern defenders of orthodoxy.²⁰³ As Smith notes, Milbank's narrative is driven not only by “villains” (pagan and heretical philosophers and theorists) but also by “heroes” (orthodox theologians).²⁰⁴ Milbank narrates a list of such heroes embracing ontological peace, running from the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil the Great),²⁰⁵ through early medieval Neoplatonists (Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena),²⁰⁶ to figures in the late middle ages and early modernity (Aquinas, Eckhardt, Erasmus). His heroic narrative continues through certain Romantics (Vico, Hamann, Jacobi, Herder, Coleridge),²⁰⁷ through the early existentialists (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, if only in a subversive way),²⁰⁸ through *la Nouvelle Théologie* (de Lubac, von Balthasar and Blondel).²⁰⁹

I suggest that these praiseworthy (redemptive) and blameworthy (fallen) intellectual figures within Milbank's grand narrative can be understood according to the CRT's category of

200 Milbank, 1990, 19, 22, 126.

201 Milbank, 1990, 315.

202 Milbank, 1997, 249.

203 Milbank, 1990, 150, 200, 207.

204 Smith, 2004, 89.

205 Milbank, 1990, 14.

206 Milbank, 1990, 295.

207 Milbank, 1990, 4, 150, 181, 296.

208 Milbank, 1990, 4, 213, 288.

209 Milbank, 1990, 207, 219-20.

epideictic rhetoric, the discourse of praise and blame which evaluates the actions and characters of public figures.²¹⁰ Epideictic rhetoric, writes Aristotle, is that mode of persuasive speech concerned with praising instances of the good and blaming instances of the bad.²¹¹ Augustine agrees that both positive and negative emotions are proper to epideictic rhetoric: following Cicero, he claims that the middle or “mixed” style—belonging most properly to epideictic rhetoric—is not only reserved for delighting, but for “censuring or praising” alike in the mode of *exhortation*.²¹² Augustine writes,

To move... hard-heartedness one must speak in the grand style. In the mixed style speeches of praise or blame, when given eloquently, move some people not only to a delight in the eloquent expression of praise or blame but also to a decision to live a praiseworthy life.²¹³

This practice of passionately rendering historical figures, writes Cicero in a similar vein, is meant to move (*movere*) an audience toward virtue and away from vice:

Who more passionately than the orator can encourage to virtuous conduct, or more zealously than he reclaim from vicious courses? Whose invective can more forcibly subdue the power of lawless desire? Whose comfortable words can soothe grief more tenderly?²¹⁴

In the next section, I will examine an apparent contradiction between Milbank’s practical deployment of such *epideictic* tactics in the pursuit of *movere* (a power technique which agonistically pits his own metanarrative against others) and his theoretical opposition to violence.

210 Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.lxxxiv.340. Aristotle uses *epideixis* vaguely as a catch-all category for all rhetoric which is neither judicial nor deliberative (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.vii.11).

211 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.iii. In the same vein, Cicero writes that *epideixis* demands a knowledge of virtues and vices which are to be respectively praised and blamed (Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.lxxxv.349).

212 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xix.38; IV.xx.40.

213 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xxiv.54.

214 Cicero, *De Oratore*, II.ix.35.

Persuasion and Power

For Milbank, what counts as peace or violence—including coercive power—is measured only by the criterion of a *mythos*.²¹⁵ Violence is Milbank’s *summum malum*, but he does not equate coercion with violence;²¹⁶ instead, violence is understood as *inappropriate* coercive force, the ultimate form of which is “power for *its own sake*.”²¹⁷ Milbank writes of coercion,

even most forms of persuasion (and if we eschew violence, but still want to encourage virtue, only persuasion is left) are thoroughly coercive. We need in consequence to find a language of peace... Truth and persuasion are circularly related. We should only be convinced by rhetoric where it persuades us of the truth, but on the other hand truth *is* what is persuasive, namely what attracts and does not compel.²¹⁸

Milbank claims that theology should be the only master discourse, because only theology—as the alluring narration of the unfolding gift of creation amid conditions of ontological peace—is a “discourse of non-mastery.”²¹⁹ Yet Milbank may be ignoring the extent to which the rhetorical use of language can itself be violent. Milbank’s continuity with the CRT runs the risk of repeating the power plays of classical oratory in ways which may be more coercive and violent than Milbank’s hope in rhetoric may permit. A brief historical contextualization will help clarify Milbank’s complex relationship to linguistic power and coercion.

215 Milbank, 1990, 398. Some critics reject Milbank’s Nietzschean reduction of power to dominating violence, claiming that Milbank falsely dichotomizes between power and peace. This inability to imagine power apart from violence is seen as leading to internal contradictions in Milbank’s project (Lash, 1992, 358-9; Doerksen, 2000, 54). Other critics take issue not only with Milbank’s theoretical issues of power, but the practical power-plays which his project enacts: his theology is seen as rhetorically shoring up the interests of the ecclesial powers-that-be, resulting in continued hierarchical oppression and domination of all types of minorities (Althaus-Reid, 2006, 114; Caputo, 2009; Grey, 2012, 178; Clack, 2012, 228).

216 Milbank, 1990, 4-5.

217 Milbank, 2003, 37. This is the nihilistic direction taken by the *libido dominandi*, or will to power. However, Milbank muddies the waters by claiming that some apparent violences are actually redemptive, while some apparent peace is actually violent (Milbank, 2003, 80).

218 Milbank, 1997, 250. He writes that “the political theorists of antiquity correctly realized that politics was to do with power exercised (and, we can now add, constructed) through language, or with rhetoric” (Milbank, 1997, 241).

219 Milbank, 1990, 6. Keller warns that Milbank’s theological narrative is a threatening “power discourse” (Keller, 2012, 30).

Classical oratory in the time of Augustine's Rome was still political, but not in the same explicit way as it had been in Aristotle's Greece and Cicero's Rome. Russell tracks a shift in location of the primary power discourse from imperial statesmanship to Christian episcopal pastoring.²²⁰ Brown similarly notes that Augustine (as an elite member of the classically educated—and thus politically powerful—episcopacy) wielded language in a somewhat coercive manner, insofar as he was able to frame and shape the contours of public discourse, interpretation and understanding.²²¹ However, I propose that one can easily distinguish between the ever-present threat of bodily to the community and the linguistic violence employed by bishops such as Augustine. As Peter Brown recounts, despite the lack of official restraint against ubiquitous violence, the *paideia*-trained local elites participated in formal rituals of etiquette which allayed some of the social chaos.²²² Thus, instead of amplifying antagonisms through his rhetoric, suggest Brown and Russell, Augustine was among the minority of bishops actually calling for an end to violence among Christian factions.²²³ However, this condition of linguistic power checking political biopower can be understood as an *agonism*, a constructed condition of conflict, which assumes that domination and subjugation are inevitable. Milbank explicitly opposes such agonistics for presupposing ontological violence, “a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force.”²²⁴ In the next section, I will examine how Milbank may inadvertently be perpetuating the same agonisms which he decries in modernity and postmodernity.

220 Russell, 1999, 115.

221 Brown, 1992, 39-41. Cameron and DeBruyn argue that Augustine's rhetoric was a totalizing discourse which helped to construct the hermeneutic matrices delimiting and shaping the community's understanding of important subjects. Augustine and other bishops were aware that their philosophical interests were uninteresting to the masses; yet their philosophical and rhetorical work shaped the discursive horizons enveloping the beliefs and practices of uneducated people (Camargo, 1998, 223; DeBruyn, 1993, 421).

222 Brown, 1992, 50. Russell elaborates, “Naked force as the normal way of functioning was balanced by the practice of persuasion. The rhetoric of persuasion was very much part of functional manipulation and patronage network” (Russell, 1999, 119).

223 Brown, 1992, 48; Russell, 1999, 120.

224 Milbank, 1990, 4.

Contentio: Against Agonistics

Milbank spills much ink lamenting and lambasting modernity's propensity toward *agonism*, an artificially constructed and “‘playful’ warfare within limits” which produces winners and losers out of a false sense of “‘necessity.’”²²⁵ Milbank claims that modern agonisms—capitalist economics, democratic politics, deontological ethics, etc.—were invented in the modern era to maintain the development of “‘taste” discriminations (such as truth, virtue, and beauty) without actual bloodshed.²²⁶ Milbank uses the term “philosophy” as a catch-all for liberal secular modernity (which exhibits agonisms) and privileges the concept “rhetoric” as an opposite metonymy for a counter-modernity (which refuses to recognize the necessity of violence and domination).²²⁷

However, critics such as Lloyd suggest that Milbank may not avoid agonistics so easily simply by jumping ship from the philosophical tradition to the rhetorical tradition.²²⁸ I suggest that Milbank must come to grips with the agonisms inherent in the CRT's genealogy. For instance, Cicero's root metaphor for rhetoric is *contentio*, combative competition: Cicero assumes an *agonism* (a competitive power struggle, a zero-sum game producing winners and losers) between rhetor and audience, and between rival rhetors in a law court.²²⁹ I suggest that the CRT's agonisms have crept into Milbank's own account. Milbank assumes that either theology must position other discourses (which are *heretical*—misguidedly theological, however tacitly) or else be positioned by them.²³⁰ Milbank himself does not seem interested in *hearing* other

225 Milbank, 1990, 34

226 Milbank, 1990, 34. Milbank connects dialectical philosophy (ranging from non-theurgic Hellenic *elenchus* to Hegel's ostensibly absolute idealism) with agonistics, the presupposition of conflict among differences.

227 Milbank, 1990, 398.

228 Lloyd, 2009, 24.

229 Cicero, *On the Orator*, II.xx, II.xvii; Sutherland, 2004, 6, 8. By emphasizing *contentio* between orators, Cicero hereby continues Aristotle's attitude that agency rests with the rhetor(s) while the audience remains passive and compliant. Augustine, as I will show, rejects this unilateralist view in favor of a model of mutuality between speaker and audience.

230 Milbank, 1990, 6; Doerksen, 48. Milbank writes that the Christian “narrative is also a continuous reading and positioning of other social realities... only Christian theology now offers a discourse able to position and

stories, but rather only in *out-narrating* them. The odd thing is that he loudly insists that his Christian narrative is the most (aesthetically) compelling *mythos* because of its ontology of peace.²³¹ This seems to contradict Milbank’s own rejection of agonism, his central tenet of peace, and his hope for rhetoric (theoretically, if not practically) as a fundamentally peaceful and alluring discourse.²³² In the next section, I will articulate how Milbank, in his hope for speech which is non-coercive yet persuasive, relies upon what the CRT referred to as *protreptic* rhetoric: the call for *out-groups* (e.g., “pagans” and “heretics”) to convert to the beliefs and practices of an *in-group* (e.g., “orthodox” Christianity).

***Protrepsis*: Milbank’s Call to Counter-Modern Conversion**

In later antiquity, training in virtue was understood to entail *protrepsis* (the negative call to conversion, particularly to the practice of philosophy).²³³ *Protrepsis* calls an audience to conversion in its beliefs and behaviors. Through performing an immanent critique of an audience’s current shared principles, protreptic rhetoric calls for the audience to embrace an alternate communal identity.²³⁴ Communities beyond the Greek philosophers (e.g., the Church Fathers among Christian congregations) appropriated this philosophical discourse to construct

overcome nihilism itself... theology, alone, remains the discourse of non-mastery” (Milbank, 1990, 6).

231 Milbank, 1990, 330. In light of Milbank’s admission of the epistemological groundlessness of his particular *mythos* (alongside that of any other), Michalson wonders whether there is any compelling reason to accept Milbank’s Christian narrative (the story of orthodoxy and pre-modern paganism and [post]modern heresy) above any alternative worldview or story (Michalson, 2004, 360). Milbank repeatedly answers this question by underscoring the role of beauty in gripping the hearts and minds of his reading audience: alternative *mythoi* “cannot be refuted, but only out-narrated, if we can persuade people—for reasons of ‘literary taste’—that Christianity offers a much better story” (Milbank, 1990, 330). Breyfogle laments, “Despite its (theoretical) attention to aesthetic beauty, Radical Orthodoxy’s expression lacks the clarity, beauty, and worshipful character that marks Augustine’s work,” preferring a propositional didactic approach (Breyfogle, 2005, 44). Milbank’s corpus certainly involves the didactic plain style, yet the chief goal of Milbank’s project as a narrative is (as Milbank himself asserts) not teaching, but *moving*: he writes that “to entertain the narrative seriously is... to enact it” (Milbank, 1990, 249).

232 Milbank, 1990, 398. He writes that Christianity’s “commitment to a rhetorical, and not dialectical path to the Good” entails that “only persuasion of the truth can be non-violent, but truth is only available through persuasion.”

233 Aristotle, *Protrepticus*, LX.xii; Kennedy, 2009, 252.

234 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.xxi; Swancutt, 2005, 145.

their own in-group identities over-against out-group identities. However (as Swancutt records), as philosophy gained an audience with the politically powerful Roman elite, minority groups (including Christian bishops such as Augustine) used protreptic techniques to chastise the politically and culturally powerful, and not simply to convert those outside their community.²³⁵ I suggest that Western Christianity's frequent theorizing of absolute boundaries between right belief (orthodoxy) and wrong belief (heterodoxy in the form of paganism or heresy) is a position which is often more *rhetorical* than *philosophical*: it is simply impossible to imagine that a religious community could co-exist in the world without sharing some practices and beliefs with its neighbors.²³⁶ The *kerygma* of Christian doctrine, orated most forcefully by the Patristics, often served as an *auxesis* (hyperbole) urging one's audience toward a different rhythm of living describing the Kingdom of God. Such *protrepsis* is more of a prophetic call than a philosophical proposition: Milbank's philosophical project is complemented by such protreptic rhetoric through his narration of the history of (what he considers) ontotheological idolatry. His immanent critique of modernism (including voluntarist Christianity) and postmodernism reveals how the internal logics of these positions both collapse into nihilism and cry out for the meaning which Milbank finds in anti-foundationalist Neoplatonism. Through calling his Christian audience away from modernist "heresy" and his postmodernist audience away from a "pagan" nihilism, Milbank protreptically calls his audience to convert to the in-group of counter-modern Augustinianism.²³⁷

Aristotle writes that a rhetor should prepare his audience to receive his speech by refuting

235 Swancutt, 2005, 143. Because Augustine is aware that oratory's weakness is, in Kimball's words, a "reliance upon unexamined appeals to a tradition of noble virtue" (Kimball, 1986, 35), Augustine employs a critical rhetoric, often rebuking his audiences—the powerful and the powerless alike—for buying into the conventional wisdom of paganism (Augustine, *City of God*, II.xxix; DeBruyn, 1993, 414).

236 Cameron proposes that Christianity has always been implicated in intercultural practices, if only as a rhetorical strategy to convert its neighbors (Cameron, 1991, 38).

237 Milbank, 1997, 45.

opposing arguments and mistaken assumptions: one should “make room in the hearer’s mind for the speech one is going to give” through removing the impression that has been left by past opposing arguments.²³⁸ I follow Michalson in suggesting that Milbank’s reliance on the grand style in his narrative clears a space in contemporary religious and philosophical discourse for him to critically analyze the political and religious assumptions of late modernity.²³⁹ Such protreptic techniques of *pathos* (the reconstruction of an audience to accept one’s persuasive speech) often involve the grand style, upon which I will elaborate in the next section.

Lexis: Milbank’s Grand Style

Aristotle writes that *lexis* (stylistic delivery beyond the bare factual presentation of *logos*) is only necessary because the audience’s *pathos* is “corrupt” and is in need of remolding.²⁴⁰ Aristotle only understands *lexis* as a virtue insofar as it seeks a mean between poetry and prosaic mundane language.²⁴¹ Milbank’s *lexis* thus finds an ambivalent evaluation in Aristotle’s metarhetoric: most notably, Milbank²⁴² spurns Aristotle’s advice in discussing *lexis* to “guard... against the poetic.”²⁴³ Similarly, Milbank ignores Aristotle’s cautioning that only the immature

238 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.xvii.15.

239 Michalson, 2004, 359.

240 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.i.7.

241 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.xx.1; Kennedy, 1991, 197. Aristotle writes, “The *lexis* will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character and is proportional to the subject matter [thus fitting *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*]... The proper *lexis* also makes the matter credible” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.vii.1, 4-5). For this reason, Augustine (following Varro) acknowledges that “people in general are more inclined to listen to poets than to scientists” (Augustine, *City of God*, IV.xxxii). Rhetors patterned themselves to a large degree after poets, because speeches with poetic styles tended to be more emotionally effective with respect to their audiences. As Bassett recalls, “Rhetoric had its origin to a considerable extent in the attempt to give to prose the same qualities of beauty which its elder sister, poetry, already possessed” (Bassett, 1920, 59).

242 Milbank tends toward the poetic both in theory and in practice, occasionally in the same passage: “In the perspective of infinitude, ornamentation overtakes what it embellishes; every detail... is a ‘fold’ within an overall design, but the design itself is but a continuous unfolding, which reaches out ecstatically beyond its frame toward its supporting structure” (Milbank, 1990, 428-9).

243 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.vi.3. Aristotle allows that a poetic style (for instance, the interpretive flourishes of Milbank’s grand narrative) is more acceptable when a speaker and an audience share a common *pathos* or mood with regard to what they lovingly praise and what they hatefully blame (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.vii.11). Aristotle writes that the poet summons pleasure in comedy and tragedy alike, calling forth emotion through the artistic, emplotting work of *mythos*. The poet—or rhetor—narrates the events of life in order to elicit an audience’s

exaggerate, and that the rhetorical heat thereby generated can be alienating instead of attractive.²⁴⁴ Yet despite Milbank's hyperbolic tendencies, his style is exonerated by Aristotle's suggestion that rhetors should exploit every opportunity for amplification (*auxesis*) of the topic.²⁴⁵ Thus, Milbank is not abandoning classical rhetoric's rules about poetic style, but instead adapting them to his circumstances.

Cicero and his protégé Augustine conceptualize such poetic modes of oratory within a threefold schema of *lexeis*: the instructive plain style, the delighting middle style, and the moving grand style.²⁴⁶ Instead of following Augustine's call to undertake philosophical instruction in its appropriate *lexis*, the restrained plain style,²⁴⁷ Milbank tends to philosophize metaphysically in the grand style, employing obscure, obtuse language laced with emotional evaluations.²⁴⁸ Augustine also claims that important matters (namely, theology and biblical and spiritual teaching) should be addressed in the grand style because they are ultimately aimed at *moving*—not simply *instructing*—an audience.²⁴⁹ The grand style's purpose is the overhaul of the character of one's audience, writes Augustine: such *pathos*-laden *lexis* intends “to make

natural emotional reactions (especially pity and horror) connected with those occurrences (Aristotle, *Poetics*, XIV).

244 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.xi.15. “Hyperboles are adolescent; for they exhibit vehemence,” Aristotle counsels, after suggesting that “carelessness lacks merit, moderation lacks fault” (*Rhetoric*, III.iii.3).

245 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II.xx.26.

246 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xii.27.

247 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.vii.14. Augustine praises Christian orators for being humble in both the form and content of their speeches, praising their restrained plain style as a form of eloquence which is often mistaken as uneloquence “because they do not make a show of it” (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.vii.14).

248 Milbank, 2009, 47. Rayment-Pickard suggests that Radical Orthodoxy's style thus conditions its content, and suggests that Milbank's loaded language is meant “not to weigh evidence but to present it to maximum effect” (Rayment-Pickard, 2005, 161-2). Milbank's work is frequently in the grand style, employing polemics to *move* an audience and thereby connoting a continual state of emergency. According to Hedley, Milbank's “rhetoric of confrontation” admits little middle ground between orthodox saints and heretical villains (Hedley, 2005, 100).

249 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xviii.36; IV.xix.38. Augustine recommends that a speaker's intensity should ebb and flow, mixing and varying the three styles according to the speech's context, although sometimes all three styles must be employed simultaneously. He stresses that the Christian orator should excel in all three styles, simultaneously seeking “to be listened to with understanding, with pleasure, and with obedience” (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xxii.51; IV.xiv.31).

people love good behaviour and avoid the bad.”²⁵⁰

Augustine notes that eloquent Christian rhetors who rely on the plain style instead of the grand style are often mistaken for being oratorically clumsy, because they tend to avoid flaunting their stylistic abilities.²⁵¹ Augustine’s own emphasis on the clear logic of the plain style traffics in a much deeper rhetoric than he acknowledges explicitly: the plain style itself is an artificial construction which indeed presents the facts (*docere*), but it is meant to prime one’s audience for further *movere*.²⁵² I suggest that Milbank’s persuasive intention likewise is deeper than his surface claims (in the grand style) suggest: Milbank’s proclamations are deliberately hyperbolic, and anyone who consistently takes him at face value is bound to miss the overarching purpose of his performance: *movere*. Through such destabilizing tactics of *movere*, Milbank intends to convert his Christian audience to a historicized post-foundationalism as a way of contextualizing revelation, and he intends to convert his postmodernist audience to a chastened Neoplatonic metaphysics as a way of avoiding onto-theology. Milbank’s preferred manner is the exhortatory grand style, which employs *pathos* more than *logos* or *ethos*.²⁵³ The goal of the grand style is to *move* the audience, both in the sense of shaping their emotions and in the sense of driving them to act differently.²⁵⁴ Milbank’s rhetorical calls to conversion thus converge upon a counter-modern vision of the cosmos, portrayed through both a mythocentric narratology and a highly

250 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xxv.55. For Augustine, the grand style is “grand” not because of (possible) ornamentation or embellishment, but rather because of the (necessary) passion and emotion. The power of the grand style is due not to its elegance and style (which is admissible but superfluous), but rather because of the importance of its subject matter (Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xx.42).

251 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.vii.14. Tracy suggests that Augustine’s excellent writing led to audiences misunderstanding as dialectic what is actually a subtle type of rhetoric, the instructive plain style (Tracy, 2008, 268). Many of the Church Fathers used their rhetorical training to effectively denounce the Second Sophistic’s middle style in favor of the plain style. Murphy writes that this stylistic shift may have been a strategic decision (and not simply a distrust of ornate oratory) on the part of bishops, many of whom had actually been teachers of rhetoric (Murphy, 1960, 406).

252 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xii.27-28. He writes that the purpose of the grand style is “not to make known to [the audience] what they must do, but to make them do what they already know must be done. If they are still ignorant, they must of course be instructed rather than moved.”

253 Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*, IV.vii.12, IV.x.14; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.ii.5; Auksi, 1995, 54.

254 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xxiv.53; Müller, 2012, 307.

stylized grand narrative.

The tension between Milbank's employment of *movere* and his narration of an ontology of peace can be relaxed by attending to further kerygmatic resources in the CRT. For instance, Milbank's model Augustine opposes Cicero's model of the powerful rhetor and also sophistry's model of the (vain)glorious rhetor. Augustine's metarhetorical emphasis on loving, neighborly humility transforms the power dynamics of classical rhetoric, *empowering* the audience as active listeners. Augustine transcends classical rhetoric's *goodwill* toward one's audience by calling for a full-blown *love* for them.²⁵⁵ I suggest that Milbank holds out hope for the weak and oppressed by suggesting that they have the freedom to narrate a counter-narrative, to posit subversive metaphors to challenge the violent *status quo*.²⁵⁶ Milbank posits a postmodern skepticism toward the powers-that-be, offering through a metanarrative and narratology the deconstructive possibility of re-interpretatively imagining that things might be structured—emplotted—otherwise than they presently are.²⁵⁷ Despite his employment of *pathos* in the grand style, Milbank is not trying to agonistically *conquer* his audience and their extant rival *mythoi*; rather, he is trying to provide them with the linguistic and imaginative tools to re-envision reality in a *peaceful* manner. Milbank does not wish to coerce members of nihilistic out-groups into his own camp; rather, he hopes for the “possibility of a non-violent, non-deceptive grammar” which allures his audience to the beauty of his story.²⁵⁸ Such *movere* is not merely a means to peace, but—at its best—is itself a peaceful discourse. The power of Milbank's grand-styled grand narrative

255 Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, IV.xi.26; Sutherland, 2004, 10, 13-14. As Bergen puts it, Augustine sees the goal of the citizens of the *civitas Dei* as loving their enemies into becoming neighbors and citizens of the City of God (Bergen, 2002, 76).

256 Milbank, 1990, 288. Long before Nietzsche used the genealogical method to posit a transvaluation of values, posits Milbank, Augustine (in the *City of God*) “already adopted the ‘counter-historical’ strategy of retracing the story of the pagan virtues...[as being] hopelessly contaminated by a celebration of violence.”

257 Milbank, 1990, 130. In the face of how rival *mythoi* reify themselves in the construction of a given human society, writes Milbank, “all one can do is question the arbitrariness of the entire complex and point out that things ‘could be otherwise.’”

258 Milbank, 1997, 79. Milbank opposes as ontologically violent any social theory which assumes that no unity is possible without violence, and that no desire is possible without coercion (Milbank, 1990, 81).

—even through stylistic violence—lies in its performative ability to sweep the audience’s imaginations into a *mythos* marked by the harmonizing of differences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how the CRT conceptualized *pathos* as the attempt to affectively move one’s audience to action. I used this theme to examine how Milbank’s project is not intended merely to instruct (as in the plain style) nor to delight (as in the middle style), but is ultimately intended to shake his readers out of their default secular assumptions. This *protreptic* tactic (calling his reading audience to convert) hinges on Milbank’s narration of the history of paganism and heresy (populated by a cabal of blameworthy nihilistic “villains”), which seeks epideictically to turn his audience’s emotions against such figures. Likewise, Milbank offers a complementary narration of the history of orthodoxy (replete with a pantheon of praiseworthy “heroes of the faith”) which seeks epideictically to rally his audience’s emotions in support of such counter-modern figures. I have explained both how Milbank relativizes all thought (including metaphysics) to the *mythic* (metanarrative) level of human imagination, and how Milbank’s anti-foundationalist Neoplatonic metaphysics accounts for the possibility of the emergence of multiple (agonistic) *mythoi*. I have examined the power struggles inherent in classical rhetoric, and the problematic implications such agonism holds for Milbank, who turns to rhetoric as a practice of peace while nonetheless rendering *mythoi* mutually agonistic. I have argued that Milbank’s Augustinian care for his (Christian and postmodern) audiences may overcome the apparent violences of his mythocentric agonism, his protreptic call away from the religious onto-theology and (post)modernist nihilism, and his powerful grand style. I have argued that Milbank’s exhortation to imagine reality otherwise (deconstructively and reconstructively) is

meant to empower his audience, not to conquer it. I have concluded that Milbank patterns himself after Augustine and the CRT in three modes: by transforming and motivating his audiences through the grand style of his grand narrative (*pathos*), by promoting a philosophical rhetoric with epistemological, ethical and aesthetic implications (*logos*), and by identifying positively with the Western Christian tradition and postmodernism alike (*ethos*).

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have recapitulated the impact of Milbank's theoretical project upon theology, philosophy of religion, and classical studies in the last two decades. Having identified a constellation of criticisms of his work, I redescribed Milbank's project in such a way that the philosophical (i.e., metaphysical) is enframed by the rhetorical, particularly with regard to the latter's sensitivity to affect and desire. I have shown both how Milbank himself describes and prescribes such a rhetorical turn in theology, and how his own rhetorical turn has been misconstrued as simply more onto-theology. I have shown that this rhetorical turn is not *opposed* to, but actually *central* to Milbank's project of retrieving an Augustinian ontology in a post-metaphysical age. Having explained the significance of CRT's three means of persuasion (*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*), I suggested that Milbank follows Augustine and the CRT by composing a positive *ethos* (being fluent in both postmodern discourse and traditional Christian discourse), by employing philosophical rhetoric to advance a *logos* (viz., a metaphysics with implications in epistemology, politics, and aesthetics), and by wielding *pathos* to remodel and motivate his audiences (through the grand style of his grand narrative). In each of the chapters, I explained how Milbank's project (as a postmodern *ressourcement* of Augustine) can be understood through the prism of each of these *pisteis*, or means of persuasion.

In my first chapter, I explained the ways in which Milbank presents himself as trustworthy to his reading audience by exploring the CRT's notion of *ethos*. I canvassed a series of critics claiming that Milbank's *ethos* is a *definition-against* instead of an *identification-with*. I responded by arguing that Milbank's *ethos* is an attempt to identify himself with two audiences (postmodern academics and traditional Western Christians). I then argued that Milbank's *ethos*

would be strengthened by more explicitly identifying himself with the classical rhetorical tradition. By retracing the tempestuous relationship between rhetoric's lineage and the dialectical tradition, I reinterpreted the *ethos* of Augustine as primarily that of a rhetor. I suggested that, because Milbank has already openly embraced rhetoric over dialectics (in his linguistic turn) and because his primary source is Augustine, his reputation would be strengthened by interpreting Augustine not merely as philosophical theologian, but as a rhetor in the vein of Aristotle and Cicero. I examined Milbank's self-presentation as vehement polemicist as a self-consciously Augustinian tactic: both theologians wax antithetical (engaging in the Ciceronian tactic of *refutatio*) before they admit common ground with their opponents. Milbank presents himself as a reactionary against modernity in order to gain the trust of two different (though occasionally overlapping) audiences: he speaks fluently in both the language of post-structuralist Continental philosophy and in the creedal tongue of the Western Christian church(es). I examined how Milbank traces the history of both of these communities back to Augustine, the figure with whom he identifies the most strongly and explicitly. By employing the CRT's concepts of *inventio* (the creative selection of existing cultural topics) and *imitatio* (the self-conscious appropriation of the *ethos* of an intellectual predecessor), Milbank identifies his *ethos* as a *postmodern Augustinian*, thereby attempting to simultaneously gain the trust of these two (often opposing) audiences. Finally, I examined both the persuasive avenues which this antagonistic approach closes down for Milbank and also the discursive space it clears for him to critically analyze the political and religious assumptions of late modernity.

In chapter two, I demonstrated how Milbank retrieves not only the antithetical style of Augustine's *ethos*, but also the *logos* (argumentative content) of Augustine's Neoplatonic theology. I recounted criticisms of Milbank for promoting a contradictory *logos*: his Christian-

Neoplatonic ontology of peace seems to contradict his postmodern rhetorical turn. I responded by claiming that Milbank's theoretical privileging of rhetoric over philosophy is itself a rhetorical exaggeration; in practice, he follows Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine in employing a philosophical rhetoric to explicate his epistemology, ethics, and politics, and aesthetics. I argued that although the early Milbank explicitly disavows *logos* (as the principle of universal reason) in favor of *mythos*, his consistent reliance upon Neoplatonism's logocentric metaphysics reveals that (as Aristotle, Cicero and the classical rhetorical tradition had insisted) logic is not the opposite of rhetoric but is rather a necessary element of it. By returning to the metarhetorical works of Aristotle and Cicero which influenced Milbank's paragon Augustine, I relativized Milbank's explicit denunciation of dialectics to his tacit reliance on discursive logic in service of a greater rhetorical cause. I reviewed how Milbank (especially in *Theology and Social Theory*) embraces Augustine's ontology of peace found particularly in the *City of God*. On this account, creation (beings) is depicted as differing analogically from God (Being), yet creational differences unify and cohere harmoniously the more they participate in Being and its transcendental attributes of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. I used this transcendental triad (a key conceptual structure in Milbank's retrieval of Augustine's metaphysical *logos*) to examine in turn three dimensions of Milbank's project: his post-foundationalist epistemology (the True), his account of virtue ethics, justice and the political (the Good), and his narratological, mythocentric aesthetics (the Beautiful). In each of these categories, I showed how Milbank employs the *logos* of Augustine's theory of ontological privation to explain the mistakes of modernity and postmodernity. In my subsection on the True, I examined how Milbank's anti-foundationalist epistemology (which recognizes that knowledge is conditioned by historical contingencies in the development of particular linguistic traditions) depends upon yet exceeds Augustine's

epistemological theory of divine illumination. I then discussed Milbank's depiction of power dynamics, political peace, and rival visions of human flourishing by exploring how his reliance on Augustine's metaphysical notion of the Good allows Milbank to cohesively address a plethora of political topics: his anti-liberalism, his Christian socialism, his theological and economic concept of the Gift, his account of forgiveness, and his emphasis on complex communal practices informed by a substantive vision of the Good. I argued that all of these theo-political moves are oriented by Milbank's commitment to Augustine's Neoplatonic rendering of Goodness, and that Milbank conceives of power, order, and coercion as legitimate so long as they participate in the Good. I proposed that the violences with which Milbank concerns himself (in the domains of language, morality, identity, and politics) can be described as privations of the Good. I concluded that Milbank's call for non-coercive persuasion cannot be adequately addressed by either epistemology or ethics and political philosophy, but that his rhetorical turn especially demands a theological aesthetics under the auspices of the Beautiful. I then briefly articulated Milbank's Augustinian aesthetics in order to introduce my final chapter.

In the third and final chapter, I used the CRT's category of *pathos* (the dispositional transformation of a rhetor's audience) in order to analyze the affective purpose of Milbank's use of style and narrative. I attended to critics who claim that Milbank's *pathos* (his attempt to transform his audience's disposition, particularly through the grand style of his grand narrative) is a power play under conditions of rhetorical and mythocentric agonism, which contradicts his ontological opposition to agonistics. I responded that Milbank's narrative proclamation is not meant to conquer his audience (who are under the influence of rival *mythoi*) but to empower them (à la Augustine) by emplotting them within an alternate metanarrative. I compared the CRT's narratologies (particularly the Aristotelian notions of *mythos* and *diēgēsis* and the

Ciceronian category of *narratio*) with Milbank's mythocentrism, concluding that Milbank equates story with rhetoric whereas the CRT subordinated the species "narrative" to the genus "oratory." I articulated how Milbank's narratology (viz., his theory of the ubiquity of pre-rational metanarratives) is complemented by the narrative which he tells throughout the course of his corpus (though primarily in *Theology and Social Theory*), which is a tale of two traditions: orthodoxy and heresy. I proposed that Milbank's "heroes" and "villains" can be interpreted by CRT's concept of *epideixis* (the evaluative discourse of praise and blame). I argued that Milbank's use of epideictic rhetoric within his narrative participates in a narratological agonism (of competing *mythoi* and their attendant value systems) which grates against his commitment to ontological peace and against agonistics. I relativized this concern to Milbank's use of *protrepsis* (the CRT's notion of a call to conversion) in his demarcating of counter-modern orthodoxy from modernist heresy, particularly in its secularist and liberal forms. I argued that Milbank's style, or *lexis*, tends to fit the definition of what Cicero and Augustine refer to as the emotional "grand style," the purpose of which is *movere*: moving one's audience to action. I proposed that this dynamic is intended not to conquer or overpower Milbank's audience agonistically, but rather to empower them to re-envision the cosmos as being suffused with divine goodness, truth, and beauty which holds the power to restore and harmonize any discordant violences at work in creation.

By foregrounding Milbank's own admitted rhetorical tendencies, I have redescribed Milbank's post-foundationalist Augustinian project in the categories of the CRT. In particular, I have shown how Milbank builds a positive *ethos* in order to identify both with postmodernists and traditional Western Christians. I have demonstrated how Milbank offers a *logos* marked by philosophical rhetoric with a Neoplatonic metaphysics which accounts for his epistemology,

social ethics, and aesthetics. Finally, I have articulated how Milbank wields *pathos* to transform and move his audiences via the grand style of his grand narrative which demarcates a pagan-heretical lineage from an orthodox tradition of Christianity. Regardless of whether or not Milbank's audiences have been instructed, delighted, or moved by his rhetoric, I propose that he deserves to be recognized for his bold attempts to practice and theorize a peaceful persuasion.

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