Zubiri and Contemporary Ontology

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Abstract

Ontology is defined as the study of what there is in the most general sense. Depending on the philosopher, ontology may or may not be a synonym for metaphysics. As is universally admitted, the definitions of "ontology" and "metaphysics" are generally contested, and some philosophers, such as Xavier Zubiri as we shall see, have tried to distinguish them. In this essay, I will first outline one particular position that is central to contemporary debates in ontology, a version of trope theory. In particular, the one-category "bundle theory" (the idea that things are bundles of tropes) that I will present will draw heavily (but not exclusively) from Peter Simons' work. Ultimately, I've synthesized ideas from several trope-theoretical positions to formulate what I take to be somewhat strengthened version of trope theory. Let's call this a Plausible Trope Theory (PTT). By "plausible," I certainly don't mean uncontroversial, nor do I mean there could not be a more plausible trope theoretical ontology. I simply mean that if one were committed to developing a trope theoretical ontology, PTT would not be a bad place to start. Second, I will consider some significant criticisms of trope theory in general and bundle theory in particular, and how PTT might address them. Third, I will highlight key elements of Xavier Zubiri's understanding of the nature of real objects as constitutionally sufficient unified systems of notes, which on the surface bears a resemblance to trope theory. In the process I will discuss Zubiri's understanding of the distinction and relation between metaphysics and ontology, presenting a condensed version of Zubirian metaphysics (ZM). I will compare and contrast the basic understanding of the terms "trope" and "note," in part to determine whether Zubiri's theory is committed to a one-category ontology. Finally, I will show the similarities and differences between PTT and ZM and raise some questions for further ontological reflection.

Resumen

Ontología se define como el estudio de lo que hay en el sentido más general. Según el filósofo, la ontología puede o no puede ser sinónimo de la metafísica. Como se admite universalmente, las definiciones de "ontología" y "metafísica" generalmente se disputaron, y algunos filósofos, como Xavier Zubiri como veremos, han tratado de distinguirlos. En este ensayo, voy a esbozar una primera posición particular que es central en los debates contemporáneos en la ontología, una versión de la teoría de tropo. En particular, el de una sola categoría de "teoría del paquete" (la idea de que las cosas son paquetes de tropos) que presentaré se base en gran medida (pero no exclusivamente) sobre las obras de Peter Simons. En última instancia, he sintetizado las ideas de varios puestos de tropo teóricos para formular lo que estimo una versión mejor de la teoría de tropo. Vamos a llamar a esto una Teoría Plausible de Trope (PTT). Al decir "plausible" ciertamente no quiero decir "incontrovertible," ni me refiero a que no podía haber un tropo ontología teórica más plausible. Simplemente quiero decir que si uno se compromete a desarrollar una ontología teórico tropo, PTT no

sería un mal lugar para comenzar. En segundo lugar, voy a considerar algunas críticas significativas de la teoría del tropo, en general, y el paquete teoría en particular, y cómo PTT podría abordarlos. En tercer lugar, voy a destacar los elementos claves de la comprensión de Xavier Zubiri de la naturaleza de los objetos reales como sistemas unificados constitucionalmente suficiente de notas, que superficialmente parece relacionada a teoría de Trope. En el proceso voy a hablar de la comprensión de Zubiri de la distinción y la relación entre la metafísica y ontología, la presentación de una versión condensada de la metafísica zubiriano (ZM). Voy a comparar y contrastar la comprensión básica de los términos "tropo" y "nota", en parte para determinar si la teoría de Zubiri se ha comprometido a una categoría única ontológica. Por último, voy a mostrar las similitudes y diferencias entre PTT y ZM y plantear algunas preguntas para la reflexión ontológica.

I. Ontology and Trope Theory: Towards a Plausible Trope Theory (PTT)

Thomas Hofweber, in his article "Logic and Ontology" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,[1] generalizes the issues of concern to contemporary ontologists as follows:

The larger discipline of ontology can thus be seen as having four parts:

(O1) the study of ontological commitment, i.e. what we or others are committed to,

(O2) the study of what there is,

(O3) the study of the most general features of what there is, and how the things there are relate to each other in the metaphysically most general ways,

(O4) the study of meta-ontology, i.e. saying what task it is that the discipline of ontology should aim to accomplish, if any; how the questions it aims to answer should be understood; and with what methodology they can be answered.

In the process of addressing these broad concerns, ontologists involve themselves with a variety of specific questions about objects, universals, properties, tropes, time, events, change, identity, sets, numbers, persons, free will, God, and so on. We cannot, of course, deal with all these matters in the confines of this paper in the manner each deserves. Instead, we will explore one particular ontological position, trope theory. Indeed, we will only have the opportunity to examine one subset of trope theories, that of "bundle theory"—in short, the idea that things are bundles of tropes. This is what ontologists call a *one-category ontology*, meaning that the category of trope is, according to these philosophers, adequate for articulating a sufficient understanding of the basic nature of real things. In the main, we will be engaged with (O3) in this discussion, but the other issues will no doubt arise.

Allow me to address briefly a set of related questions that might arise for the reader at the outset: Is not science – in particular, physics – sufficient for answering the concerns of (02) and (03)? Does not science tell us what there is and explain the most general features of reality? Is it not the case that, today, metaphysics simply reduces to physics?[2] Does the trope-theoretical ontology to be discussed in these pages consider itself in competition with the ontology of science?

To fully address these concerns would take us far afield of our theme here, but it must suffice to say that although these seem like reasonable questions, in fact, these questions rest on significant confusions about both science and ontology. Trope theorists (as is the case with most mainstream ontologists and, for that matter, Zubiri) are not concerned to develop a *competing* ontology. "Science," if there is such a unitary thing, must necessarily have ontological commitments. Both working scientists and ontologists are, in a sense, triangulating towards a plausible ontological view of reality, one that squares with the practice of science but

that is logically and metaphysically coherent. So it is not a matter of an ontology competing with science so much as it is a matter of (possibly) competing ontologies. And it is not even necessarily a matter of competing ontologies, as I hope to show in this paper, but rather of complementary ontological insights. Both trope theorists and Zubiri mean for their philosophical considerations of what there is in its basic structures to be a complement to and elucidation of the findings of the natural sciences.[3]

Tropes are "ontologically unstructured (simple) abstract particulars."[4] Although Santayana first used the term "trope" in a philosophical sense, it is generally considered that the *locus classicus* of trope theory is an essay by Donald Williams.[5] He proposed that tropes (he adopts the term "abstract particular")

> ...are the primary constituents of this or any possible world, the very alphabet of being. They not only are actual but are the only actualities, in just this sense, that whereas entities of all other categories are literally composed of them, they are not in general composed of any other sort of entity."[6]

Thus, on this view, things are composed of tropes and the relations of location and similarity.[7] Now, this understanding of tropes as primitive — i.e., considered as a one-category ontology[8] — leads directly to the "bundle theory" of objects: objects are nothing but bundles of tropes.

A question arises for bundle theory: what makes this object (this bundle of tropes) *this* object?[9] Specifically, must there be some substrate in which the tropes inhere or which in some other fashion binds the tropes in such a way as to constitute *this* object? Let's take for an example a white billiard ball. Among the key tropes that constitute this object are "white," "spherical," "smooth-surfaced," and "weighs six ounces." How shall we think about this? Some philosophers argue that there would have to be some who-knows-what (Locke called it a "bare particular") that "underlies" these tropes and

in which the tropes "inhere." This, of course, should seem unsatisfying to one-category trope theorists, as it would introduce the distinct ontological category of *substance* and treat tropes as properties inhering in substances. But, on the other hand, to say that a cue ball just is the conglomeration of certain tropes leaves the theory vulnerable to saying that if a trope *white* is over here and a trope *spherical* is over there and a trope *weighs six ounces* is at some third place and *smooth-surfaced* is in yet another place, we'd still have a cue ball. That stretches credulity.

Thus it is said that the "compresence"[10] of these tropes constitutes the object. But, again, how should we understand "compresence"? And what all is compresent? The four tropes, *white*, *spherical*, *smooth-surfaced*, and *weighs 6 ounces*, are compresent, but is that *compresence*, itself, a trope? And *white* and *spherical* are compresent - is that particular compresence a trope as well? In other words, are there *relational tropes* such as compresence? And if so, are there further relations between the *compresence* trope, itself, and the "atomic" tropes (*white*, *spherical*, et. al.) of the kind we named? If so, does it lead to an infinite regress? And even if that regress is infinite, is it vicious or benign?[11] Call these sorts of relations "internal relations."

Of course, we have not mentioned the further tropes, which Williams for one would countenance, of "external relations": the compresence of the white-spherical-smooth-weighs-6-ounces and the green-felt-flat-surface of the pool table. Must we consider such tropes, if tropes they be, in understanding the constitution of the cue ball?

And what are we to say of two identical cue balls? Is it even possible to have two *identical* objects at all? And what about the trope "white," which constitutes both cue ball A and cue ball B? In classical ontology, the white in cue ball A and the white in cue ball B are instantiations of "whiteness," a *universal* (e.g., a Platonic form). The concern with universals for trope theorists (but not only them) is that

they seem to commit us to ethereal, independently existing abstract objects, which conflicts with the commitment of modern science to a physicalist metaphysics. As mentioned, PTT is meant to be a complement to the modern scientific worldview, not an alternative to it. But if tropes are particulars rather than universals, they cannot be in two places at once, as universals allegedly can be. So how does trope theory explain two white cue balls?[12] Trope theory holds that tropes are particulars, and so either does not countenance universals or reduces them to *classes* of exactly similar objects (with very little analysis of in what "exact similarity" or "exact resemblance" consists)[13].

One hopes that in addressing these sorts of issues we can come to a better understanding of the constitution of real objects. Setting aside the question of universals for the time being, let's at this point keep in mind that tropes ought not to be considered as *parts* of a thing such that a thing is "made up of" tropes. Despite the way Donald Williams puts it (see above), that is not the best way to understand bundle theory's tenets. According to Peter Simons, "Trope bundles are not meant to be mere collections, and certainly not collections of self-subsistent individuals which could first exist and then be assembled into a whole like an army is built by putting men together, or a ship is built out of divers bits of steel, etc."[14] Some philosophers would say that tropes are not parts but *ways* things are.

On the other hand, Simons reminds us,

> We should not however take seriously the view that tropes, whether they are ways or not, are not entities at all. Clearly a bundle theorist cannot, because then he would be building entities out of non-entities. Ways and tropes are not nothing, hence they are something, hence they are entities. But they are not THING-like, if by that we mean substance-like. They are not *res*, they are *rei* or *rerum.*[15]

Tropes are not independent *things*, but are ontologically dependent. However, in their bundling tropes can also yield something *emergent*, something *more* then just an agglomeration, something with an independence of its own.

The notion of dependence, here, is still problematic. As we saw, one-category ontologists do not want anything in their theory that would commit them to a second (let alone a third or fourth) ontological category. So upon what are the tropes of a given thing dependent? It certainly cannot be a "bare substance," on this view.

Simons proposes what he calls a *nuclear theory* to attempt to address this question. It is a "pure" bundle theory, if I may put it that way, a one-category ontology. There is no thought of substance or an "extra" substratum or otherwise propertyless something-or-other that bundles tropes together. Simons's theory, though, will hold that there is "something" upon which tropes are dependent. But can he have his cake and eat it, too? Can he hold to a one-category ontology that (1) answers the question of how this object is *this* object; (2) accounts for the distinction between essential and accidental features of things, and thus accounts for the intuition that things can indeed undergo accidental change; (3) does not sneak in through the back door some notion of substance or substratum under another guise, thus vitiating the claims of the sufficiency of one-category ontology?

To see what he intends by this "something" that is not another ontological category, we have to see how Simons thinks objects are constituted. Objects can be thought to be constituted generally in two (non-temporal) stages. To understand what follows, we must make a brief detour to discuss the meaning and the weakness of *foundation relations* as Edmund Husserl sees them. According to him, a right understanding of foundation relations will stave off the threat of an infinite regress that arises if two objects can only be unified via some third entity. Husserl recognizes two forms of foundation relations that are immune to this threat:

An individual A is *weakly founded* on an individual B iff A is necessarily such that it cannot exist unless B exists.

For instance, if B is an essential proper part of A, then A cannot exist without B (or any other of A's essential proper parts).

There is, however, a second type of foundation relation recognized by Husserl:

A is *strongly founded* on B iff A is weakly founded on B and B is not a part of A.

Strong foundation works like this: A cannot exist unless B exists, but B is not a part of A. For instance, a color trope could not exist without an extension trope, but extension is not part of color.

One can wonder, however, whether these conceptions are really helpful or whether they are not, in fact, merely vague and confusing. Simon proposes this puzzler:

Suppose that A and B are strongly mutually founding, that is, neither is part of the other, and neither can exist without the other. We may now ask, what is it about A and B that makes this so?

Consider that it may be an essential proper part of a Dry Erase Marker that it be *some* color (there can be no Dry Erase Marker that is no color at all), and yet that fact alone does not account for the fact that some Dry Erase Markers are red. Simons chalks up the problem to Husserl's carelessness about what holds at the *species* level and what holds at the *instance* level. Color is such (viz., as species) that it requires (is strongly founded upon) extension. But a given instance of an extended object, while requiring color, does not require an instance of *red*.

So Husserl's solution to our problem of the constitution of particular entities is insufficient.

In an effort to have this thing be *this* thing, what about if we say that A and B are compresent if they are at the same place, P? Simons objects that, first, it presupposes an absolute concept of place or space that is physically and metaphysical-

ly dubious—again, PTT intends to complement science. Second, it treats place as a substratum—just what one-category trope theory hopes to avoid. Finally, it makes the whole idea of movement (and identity throughout movement) to be mysterious. On this (mistaken) view, a trope is what it is based on the place it occupies, so if it were to move (along with the thing it comprises) it would cease to be what it is (and the thing it comprises would no longer be the *same* thing).

None of these solutions captures what our intuitions tell us: that things have properties that can change while the thing remains the "same" thing. Traditional substratum theory would be a strong contender for a satisfactory explanation were it not for the fact that, as we have seen, the notion of "substratum," itself, is highly problematic. [16]

Simons' own proposal for understanding the constitution of objects applies a somewhat different concept of foundation relation, although it owes much to Husserl.

Firstly, two particulars are said to be *directly foundationally related* if either is founded, whether weakly or strongly, on the other. Two particulars are then *foundationally related* iff they bear the ancestral of the relation of direct foundational relatedness to one another. A collection forms a *foundational system* iff every member in it is foundationally related in it to every other, and none is foundationally related to anything which is not a member of the collection.

If A is either weakly or strongly founded on B or if B is weakly or strongly founded on A, then A is directly foundationally related to B.

The condition, "bears the ancestral of the relation" (in this case of direct foundational relatedness) is derived from Frege. Edward N. Zalta explains it by an example:

The intuitive idea is easily grasped if we consider the relation x is the father of y. Suppose that a is the father of b, that b is the father of c, and that c is the fa-

ther of d. Then Frege's definition of 'x is an ancestor of y in the fatherhood-series' ensured that a is an ancestor of b, c, and d, that b is an ancestor of c and d, and that c is an ancestor of d.[17]

In the present case, foundational relations can be traced back to the direct foundational relations in the given object. That object, here considered as a *foundational system*, is such if and only if every member (here: trope) in it is foundationally related to every other member (trope) in it, and none is *foundationally* related to anything that is not a member of that collection of tropes. This gives the object its "independence" and its organic unity.

So consider a collection of co-occurring mutually founding tropes. This collection forms a foundational system (every member of the collection is foundationally related to every other member and not to any non-member). This foundational system forms the nucleus of the object. It is the individual essence or individual nature of the thing.[18] It is not a mere collection of tropes, but a *"connected unity"*.[19] But this will most likely not be a complete thing, as it will also have a variety of other properties. Considered as tropes, non-essential properties can be borne in a strong foundational relation with the nucleus. These leave us with a view of objects that is consistent with our intuition that things (thought of in terms of the nucleus) can change (by addition or subtractions of non-nuclear tropes) and remain the same thing (again, in terms of the nuclear foundational trope system). Simons asserts that his theory combines the best of bundle and substratum theories.[20] That which plays the role of substratum avoids the who-knows-what character of the traditional view of substratum — it is, itself, nothing but a nucleus of mutually founded essential tropes.

The preceding was a brief introduction to the idea of tropes, of one-category ontology, and some of the issues with which trope theory must contend. In particular, I have singled out Peter Simon's "nuclear" version of "bundle theory" as the basis for a plausible trope theory (call it "PTT"). In the next section, we will explore several objections to trope theory and its attendant bundle theory ontology.

II. Criticisms of Trope- and Bundle-Theories

A. Problems with tropes

Jerrold Levinson, in his "Why There Are No Tropes,"[21] supplies many of the reasons some philosophers have rejected trope theory.

First of all, says Levinson, a trope is defined as a particularized attribute. Now, there are two kinds of attributes, properties and qualities. Levinson defines "property" as follows:

> Properties are exemplified by being red, being heavy, being wise, being vivacious, being a bachelor, and are standardly designated by gerundive expressions, most notably, 'being _____'. They are conceptualized as conditions objects can be in, and are not quantizable, that is, not things an object can have more or less of. In other words, they are indivisible, non-partitionable things. Properties can also be conceived, although awkwardly, as being-a-certain-ways, that is, as entities that have ways of being, or ways things can be, at their core.

On the other hand, "qualities"

> ...are exemplified by redness, heaviness, wisdom, vivacity, and are standardly designated by abstract nouns. They are conceptualized as stuffs of an abstract sort, and thus as a rule as quantizable, that is, as things an object can have more or less of. In other words, they are inherently divisible or partitionable things.

Given this understanding of the terms, Levinson notes that tropes would have to be *particularized qualities*. Tropes cannot be "particularized properties," as that phrase, says Levinson, is oxymoronic. Properties cannot be quantized or partitioned. So if there are tropes, they would

have to be particularized qualities (i.e., abstract *stuff*).

But can there be particularized abstract stuff? Only if there can be abstract stuff (i.e., *qualities*) in the first place. On reflection, Levinson came to think that such abstract stuff is incredible. There cannot be qualities, bits of stuff that are somehow like material bits of stuff but *abstract*, and so there cannot be *particularized* qualities. So there cannot be tropes.

Levinson takes Williams to task on his idea that there are "subtle parts" of objects in addition to "gross" parts. Williams' somewhat famous example is of three variously similar lollipops.[22] Each lollipop has an exactly similar "gross" part: their respective sticks. But they also share exactly similar "subtle" parts, such as their shape. Levinson finds the latter "parts" to be incredible. How can there be parts that are non-decomposable and intangible? What is it to say that an object is "made up of" (in part) its shape?[23]

Simons, as we have seen, does not go as far as Williams in claiming that tropes are "parts," but Levinson still objects to Simon's talk of tropes as "particularized ways" things are. Tropes, by definition, are particulars (and not universals and thus shareable). But even though it is clear that for two objects, A and B, which seem to share a particular way of being, W, that A's being W and B's being W are different (by the simple fact that A is not B), nevertheless there is no reason for not saying that W, itself, is exactly similar (or identical) in each case. For instance, if W = "weighs 10 pounds", there is no reason to think that W is not a shared attribute. Ten pounds is ten pounds.

Levinson criticizes Cynthia MacDonald's proposals for tropes[24] by saying, in effect, that trope theory is less explanatorily efficient than traditional (universal attribute) theory. Levinson writes,

> Standard attribute thought doesn't need tropes, whereas trope thought, assuming there were any good reasons to think there were tropes, would ulti-

mately presuppose attribute thought. Thus tropes are not only either incoherent or unbelievable posits, but metaphysically otiose ones as well.[25]

In this thoroughgoing attack on the very idea of tropes (abstract particular attributes), Levinson raises many other objections that I shall leave to one side. The upshot is that Levinson finds conceiving of tropes as particularized attributes is highly problematic, if not completely implausible or incredible. He notes, however, that if tropes are conceived some *other* way, then this particular set of criticisms may very well not hold. Levinson writes,

> Thus, if tropes are proposed as *non-attribute-like abstract particulars* of some sort, their claim to recognition is not touched by what I have said here. Similarly, if tropes are proposed as *property instantiations* or *property exemplifications*, then since these are simply varieties of states of affairs, they too are unaffected by the brief I have presented. But in the sense of tropes as originally introduced into modern philosophical discussion, that is, as *particularized, necessarily unshareable, attributes*, able to serve as the primitive building blocks of a coherent alternative ontology, there are, I maintain, no tropes.[26]

B. Problems with bundles

Even if Levinson's objections to tropes as the building blocks of all reality, as Williams would put it, can be answered, what are we to make of the attendant "Bundle Theory" of objects? The notion that objects are nothing but bundles of tropes is problematic. Even in a fairly sophisticated bundle theory as that proposed earlier by Peter Simons, wherein there is both a nucleus of essential tropes to which other, adventitious tropes adhere in some way, is open to significant questioning.

To meet the criterion of self-identity of objects, tropes must be compresent. This notion is under-analyzed in the literature,

however. We've already seen some issues that arise with this notion of compresence, including the fact that it may imply an unwarranted conception of absolute space and time. In addition, as Maurin points out, either compresence is an "internal" relation, in which case the tropes that are compresent *must* always be compresent[27] -- an unacceptable consequence -- or compresence is an "external" relation, which would then lead to different metaphysically unpalatable consequences (viz., Bradley's Regress[28]). Again, the question is always: What makes this object *this* object?

C. A brief rejoinder from PTT

The Plausible Theory of Tropes I've been sketching in this paper may be able to address some of the key objections leveled by Levinson, generally by taking a cue from Levinson's own parting remarks. The strategy would be, first, not to conceive of tropes in the traditional language of attributes (whether properties, qualities, or ways). Second, discussion of tropes should take place in terms of *states of affairs*.

However, this latter piece of advice raises other sorts of problems. If a particular state of affairs consists in part of a "property instantiation" or "property exemplification," we are still left with the problem of the *means* of that instantiation or exemplification. Or we could put it this way: what are we talking about when we talk about *properties* in this case? We return, thus, to the problem *universals*, and however we solve it, we are sure to be committing ourselves to at least a two-category ontology. In other words, there might be tropes, but there has to be *more* than tropes.

PTT, which is committed to a one-category ontology, might propose the following workaround for this objection: states of affairs are adequately *describable* in terms of abstract particulars that are the constituents (not parts) of a given state of affairs.[29]

III. Zubirian Metaphysics

At the time of his death, Zubiri was at work on a book that was, in effect, the culmination of his lifetime of philosophical endeavors. That book, entitled *Man and God* (*El Hombre y Dios*), was left uncompleted.[30] Although *Man and God* is an ambitious and wide-ranging work, it does provide a convenient summary of Zubiri's metaphysical vision of reality as it was laid out in his earlier works, especially *On Essence*[31] (*Sobre la esencia*)[32] and *The Dynamic Structure of Reality*[33] (*La estructura dinimica de la realidad*).[34]

Zubiri would make a distinction between the terms *metaphysics* and *ontology*, viewing the latter as founded upon the former. For Zubiri, reality is not merely a field of things. Thus to understand what contemporary ontology might learn from a Zubirian point of view, it is important to establish what Zubiri means by the word "reality."

He begins his discussion by saying that "everything real is constituted by certain *notes*."[35] Each note exhibits two moments of a thing. First, each note "belongs" to the thing, and, second, each note serves to determine what the thing is to which it "belongs." I put the term "belongs" in scare-quotes to indicated that there is not a relationship between, on the one hand, a thing and, on the other, a note. Certainly, for Zubiri, there is no "thing" that has a metaphysical (let alone temporal) priority over its notes. His example: heat is a note of a thing, and heat determines that the thing is a hot thing (and not some other kind of thing). Zubiri spurns the traditional term "property" in his exposition because of his objection to the traditional coupling of property with substance. On this traditional view, substance is conceived as a subject in which properties inhere. I like to call a simplistic version of this traditional substance-metaphysics the "Mr. Potatohead Metaphysics." *Mr. Potatohead* is a children's toy that consists in a brown ovoid plastic potato with a variety of small holes in it, as well as a separate set of attributes (eyes, mustache, ears, lips, etc) that can be interchangeably plugged into the holes, thus giving Mr. Potatohead a variety of possible looks. On the simplistic view of substance-

metaphysics that Zubiri rejects, the "potato" represents the substance and the ears, lips, eyes, etc., represent the properties. Zubiri objects to the Lockean idea that there must be something underlying the features or properties that is in itself, somehow, featureless.[36]

But what is *reality*? For Zubiri, reality is the fact that notes belong to a thing in their own right.[37] The "in their own right" is the key. This is the *formality of reality*. To be formally real, a thing must have its notes in its own right. Notes cannot simply be imputed to a thing, nor can they be simply signs of a stimulus-response relation if the thing to which the notes belong is to be a real thing. What does this mean? Suppose I imagine I am experiencing a dragon. The dragon is large, green, scaly, and fire-breathing. But none of these notes of the dragon belong to the dragon in their own right, but are merely imputed by me. Thus the "dragon" is not real (because "its" notes do not belong to "it" in their own right). Take another example: I am at work on a table. Its notes include that it is a fine workspace and it is aesthetically pleasing. According to Zubiri, a table is not a real thing - or as he puts it more informatively - a table is a "meaning-thing" but not a "reality-thing." Yes, there is a real thing here in my office, a thing whose notes belong to it in its own right. That thing has a certain mass, shape, physical makeup, etc. It is a physical object. The fact that it is a "table" is a function of my having a need for this physical object according to some project I am pursuing. Tables do not have their notes *as tables* in their own right, but only as imputed by some person or other. Meaning-things are not independent from reality-things, of course, and certain reality-things and not others have the capacity to be certain meaning-things. As Zubiri says, the reality-thing water has no capacity to be a table.[38]

How do we know that certain things are real? We apprehend reality directly, says Zubiri. Reality is not a concept or abstraction nor is it the conclusion of a line of reasoning. It is - as he likes to put it

- something "physical" (by which term he does not mean simply material; he is distinguishing "physical" from "theoretical" or "conceptive," which are *mere* for Zubiri). Only certain kinds of things can apprehend reality. To illustrate this point, Zubiri compares humans and dogs as they encounter heat. For a dog, heat is the signal for a certain response (move away, come closer). That just is heat for a dog, and, if I may put it this way, *it's all about the dog*. But for a human, heat *is a warming*, and not simply a stimulus invoking a response. It might invoke a response in a human, for instance if the heat causes discomfort in the human. But the human apprehends the heat *in its own right*, immediately (i.e., does not have to reason towards that as a conclusion).

This, by the way, is the answer to "Cartesian anxiety" concerning the "exterior world." How do I know there is a world "out there" that's not just in my head? Zubiri answers: Before you even come to know the world at all you apprehend the otherness, the in-its-own-rightness, of things. That is a precondition of knowing (and hence questioning) anything at all. This capacity of human beings forms the basis of what Zubiri calls "sentient intelligence."

We can see – as we always do in metaphysical exploration – that the epistemological quickly enters into the discussion. However, what Zubiri is describing here is not, at bottom, epistemological but metaphysical. He is not addressing the question of *how we know* but of *what reality is*. Reality is not a function of human knowing; rather, he says that reality is "activated" in sentient intelligence.[39] Reality is neither a concept nor an idea. Reality is fundamental and, for Zubiri, an obvious fact. Where we philosophers go wrong is in the "entification of reality"[40]—adopting the idea that reality = things, and the "logification of intellection"[41]—the idea that reality is a function of predication.

To continue, things (generally) have a variety of notes, and real things have those notes in their own right. Those notes form a unity, but that unity—the unity of a real

thing—is not simply an *additive* unity but a systematic unity. A real thing is a *unified system of notes*. What does this mean? Zubiri explains that every note of a thing should be understood as a "note-of" the thing. In other words, there are no free-floating notes, and a thing is not a mere conglomeration of pre-existing notes. To say that a note is always a note-of is to say that a note is what it is as a function of all the rest of the notes of the thing. And it is to imply that the thing is what it is solely as a function of the notes that it possesses in its own right.[42] There is no Mr. Potatohead apart from his notes, and the systematic unity of his notes just *is* Mr. Potatohead. The unity makes the notes to be what they are, and the notes make the unity what it is. The key here is the preposition "of." Zubiri says that the "of" is a moment of a thing's reality. Things are, in effect, particular forms of "of-y-ness" (if you will forgive me this atrocious locution).

So is Zubiri saying something like, "A thing is nothing more than its notes"? No, he is not. Every note, insofar as it is a note-of, always points to something "more."[43] Your notes, for instance, are "your notes"—not mine or anyone else's. Your notes are notes at all only because they are yours. It is not as if there is a big bucket of notes somewhere and someone (say, God) grabs up a bunch of these pre-existing notes and glues them together and comes up with you. If that were the case, you would be nothing more than these glued-together notes. Hume perhaps thought something like this. There is no "substance" at all (that's just a manner of speaking); all there is are properties. But that is not what Zubiri is saying. He does not think that Hume's position is defensible. What would it mean to say that there is "big" or "green" or even "hairy" all by themselves? If that is incoherent, things won't get any better if you string them together into a "big-green-hairy"—all by itself it won't result in a big, green, hairy *monster*. You need something *more*. But the "more" is the question. Is it a substance, something in some way "independent" of the accidents?

Zubiri does not think the "more" is some extra *thing*, even though every real thing is not just the sum of notes, not just a string of notes. Each note is constitutional in character, and the system of notes has constitutional sufficiency—meaning that this systematic unity is sufficient for constituting this thing. The formal notes (as opposed to the "adventitious" notes, notes that are a function of the thing's relationship with other things in the world) in their systematic unity *just are* the real thing; they constitute the real thing. So where is the "more"?

Here, Zubiri makes another important distinction. He coins another term, *substantivity*, and then opposes it to "substantiality." The latter term refers to Aristotle's (and St. Thomas') notion of substance. In Zubirian terms, a substantivity is not a substance. The way Zubiri would put it, each organism is one substantivity comprising a multitude of "substances." He gives the example of the substance, glucose. It is a substance, not an "accident." But it is taken up by an organism (say, a human being) in such a way that it loses its (on Aristotelian terms) substantiality as it becomes note-of the human being. Zubiri reserves the term "substance" in the contemporary sense of "stuff" or "material." Things are substantivities.[44]

Again, this is the reason Zubiri wants to speak of "notes" rather than "properties." On Aristotelian terms, properties inhere in a subject (the word "sub-ject" literally means "thrown underneath"). For Zubiri, notes cohere among themselves, comprising a systematic unity. The systematic unity is substantivity.

Further, Zubiri makes the distinction between notes that are *constitutive* and notes that are not constitutive. All notes, says Zubiri, are constitutional; some are constitutive. He gives the example of "all white cats with blue eyes are deaf."[45] He says these notes are constitutional (of blue-eyed, deaf, white cats), but not constitutive. Why not? Because these notes are "grounded in others." What others? The notes of the cat's genes. These genetic notes are constitutive of the cat (i.e., ac-

count for its bare existence, so to speak), unless of course science comes to show that genetic notes are further grounded in more "fundamental" notes. But this, he says, is a matter for biology, not philosophy.[46]

Compare this to Aristotle's understanding of the structure of the human soul. According to him, that structure is based on functions. For instance, there are the rational functions of the soul. What mechanism allows for these functions (e.g., brain, neurons, central nervous system, etc.) is a biological question. The metaphysical question is: What are the constitutive functions of any human being (no matter how they happen)? Or in other words, what functions are essential if a thing is to be a human being? This is something like what Zubiri is after here. He finds the essence of things in their constitutive notes, the systematic unity of notes that are not grounded upon other notes and that are necessary and constitutionally sufficient for the thing. He writes,

> The constitutive notes comprise the radical subsystem of substantivity: they are its essence. Essence is the structural principle of substantivity. It is not the correlate of a definition. It is the system of notes necessary and sufficient so that a substantive reality may have its remaining constitutional notes, including adventitious notes."[47]

Here again, Zubiri is distinguishing himself from Aristotle. He is trying to define what the essence of something is. Traditionally, essence is presented in terms of an idea or a definition. For instance classically, the essence of a human being was to be an appropriate body with a rational soul. A human being is an "embodied soul."

For Zubiri, this seems "definitional," merely a way of speaking. For him, the essence of anything is the substantive system of constitutive notes. That's the technical definition of (the word) "essence," but essence is *not* a technical definition. It is a reality.

The unity of the system of notes determine a thing's "interiority," what Zubiri calls its *in.* These notes form a constitutional systemic unity. But at the same time, notes project outward. This is the system's *ex.* Zubiri, then, defines *dimension* as "the projection of the whole 'in' into the 'ex.'"[48] Each constitutional sufficiency (laypersons call that a "thing") has multiple dimensions, multiple ways it projects "itself" outwards. And each dimension projects the entire unity of the system of notes.

Even though notes are always "notes-of," each note, itself, is a form of reality. They are real. "The color green is the greenish form of reality."[49] An entire system of notes as a constituted reality is a form of reality. There are various forms of reality. Zubiri says that the notes of a living being are "reduced to physico-chemical elements."[50] The living being *qua* living being, however, has its own form of reality (different from a star or a stone, he says). The corollary to this is that a living being is *not* reducible to its physico-chemical elements. Those are different forms of reality.[51]

You might say that they are different realities, but for Zubiri reality is always numerically one. There is just one reality, but it is comprised of multiple *forms* of reality. And each form of reality determines how that reality is "implanted" in the one reality. Personhood, for instance, is a "way of being implanted in reality."[52]

Zubiri summarizes:

> [E]verything real, be it an elemental note or substantive system, has two moments. There is the moment of having these notes: this is suchness. And there is the moment of having form and mode of reality; which technically I shall call 'transcendental,' designating with this term, not a concept, but a physical moment....[53]

We said that a substantive reality is "more" than the sum of its notes. What is the "more," we wanted to know. It is not a subject, a *subjectum,* that is standing under an array of properties. Zubiri writes,

Each real thing, through its moment of reality, is "more" than what it is through the mere content of its notes. The moment of reality, in fact, is numerically identical when I apprehend several things as a unit. This means that the moment of reality is, in each real thing, an open moment. It is "more" than the notes, because it is open to everything else. This is the openness of the real. The openness is not of conceptual character. Nor is it the case that the concept of reality can be applied to several real things; rather, reality is a moment physically open in itself. That is the reason why transcendentality is not a mere concept, common to everything real; transcendentality is not community. It is actually about a physical moment of communication.[54]

"The moment of reality is numerically identical," just means there is one reality. Each "thing" has its form of reality and each collection of things (say, a landscape) has its form of reality. But there is just one reality.

The "more" of each substantive reality lies in its openness to everything else. A tree is a tree and as such it is open in its implantation in reality to be an element of the landscape (which in turn has its own form of reality, different from the mode of reality of the tree). Zubiri calls this the *openness of the real*. When Zubiri writes, "transcendentality is not community; it is actually about a physical moment of communication," he means that openness does not merely mean that things can be set next to each other and considered as a collection of things, a "community" of things. He means that openness of the real entails that all things are communicating (in a manner of speaking) with each other; they are *being together essentially* because anything real is always open to everything else. Respectivity is always necessary; relations are possibly accidental, but always and necessarily founded on (prior) respectivity.

Notice at this point that Zubiri is not saying "in relation," because a relation implies that there are at least two separate things that then come together in that relation. But openness is a constitutive element of anything real to be real at all. To be the note that it is, the note has to already be open to other notes and be constituted by its openness to other notes. Relations can only come *after* this constitutional openness, are only possible *because of* this openness of the real. If there were no openness of the real, there could never be any relationships at all. There are thus systems of systems of notes, based in the end on the most fundamental or constitutive notes (in biology, this might be the notes of genes; in physics, perhaps it is superstrings).

This insight leads Zubiri to a further point about reality, the difference between relationality and *respectivity*. He says, "Everything real, both in its suchness and in its reality, is intrinsically respective."[55] He writes, "Respectivity remits ["sends forward"] each real thing to another." Real things are like this because of their constitutive openness. The ground of the in-its-own-rightness is respectivity. Each real thing is what it is in its respectivity towards what else is, in its constitutive (which means "that which makes something to be what it is") openness. Each real thing is implanted in reality in a determinate way, based on its capacities for respectivity, based on its role (so to speak) in the system. The thing determines the system and the system determines the thing – and all this is before anything like "relationships" develop. This is a constitutive fact – not a choice or an option, not just a way of looking at things – according to Zubiri.

> Nothing is real if it is not "its own" reality, and nothing is "its own" reality unless it *has to be*, by virtue of being constitutively open. […] The result is that every real thing is open "towards" other real things, and each form and mode of reality is open to other modes and forms of reality."[56]

Radical respectivity is not thing-to-thing but mode/form of reality-to-mode/form of reality. So, for Zubiri, the world – and there can be only one – is "the respective unity of all realities insofar as they are realities." There might be more than one cosmos, by which Zubiri means an already constituted system of things (maybe there are other possible *kosmoi*, i.e., a multiverse), but there can only be one world, one reality. What Zubiri is saying here does not contradict what we said above about there being one reality, that reality is "numerically always one." Ultimate reality is this total respective unity of all modes and forms of reality that, to one implanted in reality in that way, certainly feels like the "only" reality, and that makes the forms/modes of reality of others seem like different "realities". One world, one ultimate reality.

And that reality is respective. Even if there were only one real thing, it would be "formally respective in and of itself." It would be its own world.

Zubiri makes a further distinction between actuality and actualness. He explains that *actualness* is just like St. Thomas' understanding of act. It is the opposite of potency. *Actuality*—and he thinks this word is the one most philosophers equate with Thomas's idea of "act"—for Zubiri means, in effect, the way in which any real thing is here, now. Viruses—his example—were always real, always had actualness (there were not mere potencies). But humans didn't always know about viruses, didn't always have to deal with viruses. Viruses were not a part of our reality, so to speak. But now they are. Now, they are actual, they have actualized, they have *actuality*. Actuality is founded upon (or grounded by) "prior" actualness (the founding/grounding is not temporal, of course).

Why is Zubiri making this point? He wants us to see the relationship between what *is* real, on the one hand, and what we *know* to be real, what we *experience* as real, on the other. There are those philosophers—Bishop Berkeley, to give one example—who like to think that only if hu-mans (or something with consciousness) experience something does that something exist. This is called "idealism," and it has its roots in Platonic thinking. Idealism holds that what is real is the idea. Plato thought the ideas—the forms—were the most real things and that they somehow possessed eternal being. Other idealists think ideas are only found in people's minds. In either case, there is a distinction between idealism and materialism (which holds that what is real is matter).

Zubiri is neither an idealist nor a materialist in the classical senses of these terms. He is a philosopher of *reality*, and for him both ideas and matter are real. That means reality is not based on ideas or on matter; rather, these are based on (or founded in) reality.

So Zubiri is, in a sense, equating "actuality" with being manifest to us, having a role in our reality. "Actualness" is just the idea that real things *are* (and, as real, are open and respective). Things attain actuality as a function of sentient intelligence. There would be actualness without sentient intelligence, but not actuality

Zubiri writes that "Whatever is real because of its respectivity is real as a function of the other real things. This is the *functionality of the real.*"[57] Now, everything is real because of its respectivity, so everything that is real is real as a *function* of other things.

"Function" is a familiar Aristotelian term, but the functional analysis that Zubiri presents differs markedly from Aristotle's functional analysis of the human soul, for example. Functionality points to something deeper in the actualness of real things. Before anything can have a function (*ergon*) or a set of functions in the Aristotelian sense, it must be recognized that all real things are what they are as a function of everything else. Zubiri means the word "function" in something like the sense of "My buying Elton John tickets was a function of wanting to see him in concert." *Buying tickets* is nothing at all except with reference to the show and my wanting to go to it. However, Zubiri does not necessarily mean function in the sense

of something I do, some act or set of acts I perform. He means function as in "function-of" (as he means note as in "note-of"). This is more or less a restatement of the lesson that any "thing" is a constitutionally sufficient system of real notes, and both the notes and the system they comprise are constitutively open to the rest of reality. The notes determine the thing; the thing determines the notes; and everything determines (in one way or another) everything else. This is not because we think it's this way; it's because it *is* this way. Everything is the way it is as a function of the way everything else is.[58]

Finally, Zubiri makes a distinction between being, the province of ontology, and reality, the province of metaphysics. He bases that distinction on the difference between actuality and actualness. Being is to reality as actuality is to actualness. The latter term in each pair is the ground or foundation for the former term in each pair. A key implication of this distinction is that whatever we say in ontology ought to be grounded in reality, properly grasped. In *On Essence*, Zubiri makes a conceptual cut in this manner:

> The view from without inward is a way of viewing as inhesion and leads to a theory of the categories of being. The view from within outward is a view of actualization or projection and leads to a theory of the dimensions of reality. These two manners of viewing are not incompatible; rather, both are necessary for an adequate theory of reality.[59]

Real things are unified systems of notes in their own right that can be understood from the point of view of either the "*in*" (the "of-y-ness" of the respective notes) or the "*ex*" (the outward projection, the dimensions, the actualness of the thing as a *function* of all other things). Zubiri would say that an Aristotelian-inspired category ontology can (and must) be developed based on the former perspective, just as a metaphysics of reality in all its dimensions would need to be developed on the latter. The latter project would have to take into account sentient intelligence,

i.e, would have to make reference to our human way of apprehending reality, in order even to get started.

Having brought to light some of the key ideas of Zubiri's quite elaborate metaphysical vision—and before attempting to map his work onto contemporary discussion in ontology—we should pause to highlight some key questions and problems raised by this work.

1. Have we hit bottom?

In philosophy, starting points matter. Despite the last century's philosophical preoccupation with anti-foundationalism, anyone hoping to develop a systematic theory—especially of reality, itself—has to make a start somewhere, beyond which the theory cannot go. All sensible philosophers agree that at some point one has to put one's foot down, so to speak, and accept that other philosophers can always question this starting point. There is no getting around this, and we must remain humble about our choices of principles.

Zubiri—in some ways like Descartes—begins his metaphysical quest from an experiential or epistemological standpoint. Reality, for Zubiri, is the foundation for all that follows. There is no getting outside, underneath, or beyond reality. But we "get at it" immediately. We apprehend the "in-its-own-right-ness" of things (and do not have to argue towards it or deduce it). It is our starting point.

Now, there is a long-standing drive in thought for "objectivity," a point of view that is not any particular point of view, a position that is absolute, and this for fear that a subjective and relative position could only yield a parochial theory, perhaps no better than a idiosyncratic taste or predilection. This purported Holy Grail of theory has been described as view of things as if we never existed.[60] But is such a goal attainable? I think not. I know of no one who has fundamentally doubted the veridicality of one's own general experience (even accounting for error as a modulation of the veridicality of experience). It seems, to me anyway, acceptable to start with this reality that we apprehend directly in its

"in-its-own-right-ness" and see where this methodological starting point leads us.

One possible objection that could be levied against this option can be drawn from deconstructions of what is called the "metaphysics of presence," the idea that being is not fully, transparently present to apprehension but subject to position in differential systems and temporal deferring (what Derrida called *différance*). Zubiri's thought, I might argue, tends to be immune from such criticism. A defense stems from the distinction Zubiri makes between reality and being and with the notions of "openness," "functionality," and "respectivity." However, this argument cannot be made here. Suffice it to say that any philosophical position – including deconstruction—has a certain "aboutness." To the extent that a philosophical position is not just meaningless chatter, it has an object. Deconstruction is, to my mind, still too wedded to a philosophy of language. Zubiri's philosophy—while not reverting to pre-Kantian naïveté—is about reality.

2. What is the ontological status of "notes"?

But what, exactly, in addition to the formality of reality (i.e., the "in-its-own-right-ness"), do we apprehend? What is, besides the formality, the content of that basic apprehension? It is the notes of individual things. Zubiri holds that "there is nothing real that is not individual."[61] Those individual things are unified systems of notes. Now, we know that Zubiri does not think that notes themselves are things, and so he does not hold to some idea that things are mere conglomerations of notes. But what exactly is the ontological status of notes? How shall we think about what he is calling notes? Notes are not the imputation of human beings. They are realities or forms of reality (if not *things*). But what does this mean, ultimately? In many ways, "notes" is an unanalyzed concept in Zubiri's thought. What accounts for the fact there are different notes? Different things are different because they are each a systematic unity of different notes. It is the notes that ac-count for the difference between things. But what differentiates one note from another? Is it that notes, themselves, have notes? Does this lead to some sort of regress? Would such a regress be vicious or benign?

3. What accounts for the systematic unity? I.e., why are there certain things rather than others?

Again, to say that different things differ due to the different notes that form their systematic unity raises the question of why are there different systematic unities? What even accounts for these unities?

4. Is there a phenomenological basis of metaphysics, and if so is this legitimate?

This may be a complementary question to the first one raised here. I think we would agree that there is a difference between asking about what there is and asking about what we apprehend that there is. We would all wager, I'm sure, that there are things we do not apprehend (to say nothing of comprehend). Does Zubiri's principle, that reality is apprehended immediately by sentient intelligence, leave us with a merely subjective or correlationist view of reality? Has he, in spite of himself, missed the point that reality exceeds our apprehension? This is the gist of the knock on Kant made by Quentin Meillassoux.[62] Kant rightly recognized that human modes of apprehension deny access to things-in-themselves – his "Copernican revolution." But then Kant, says Meillassoux, limits reality to what is structured by the structure of reason—"correlationism." Meillassoux suggests that Kant should have quit while he was ahead, having undone anthropocentric notions of reality. The problem, it seems to me, however, is that there is no way to *not* have some degree of "correlation" between our thought and our world. Otherwise, our thoughts are about nothing and the world infinitely withdraws. Certainly, we cannot plumb the depths of reality with anything like comprehensiveness, let alone completeness. There is an irreducible mystery

to being. But this does not mean we can make no headway in trying to understand reality to some extent. It is a story for another time, but Zubiri's analysis of sentient intelligence may provide substantial tools for the project of understanding reality that does not simply determine things to be correlates of thought or consciousness.

As we will now see, Zubiri's philosophy is hardly the only one open to these kinds of questions and objections.

IV. Conclusions: Similarities, differences, and some further questions

Clearly, similarities and differences exist between a plausible trope theory ("PTT") and Zubirian metaphysics (ZM). Let us explore some of them.

1. Both Zubiri and PTT reject what I've called the "Mr. Potatohead" substance-attributes ontology. Both ZM and PTT reject the idea of an underlying who-knows-what to which adhere various properties. Both find the trouble with this notion of underlying subject (or bare substance) to be that it is an empty notion. A that-which-lacks-any-features-in-its-own-right is literally unthinkable.

2. Both ZM and PTT (as opposed to, say, Williams' understanding of trope theory), reject the Humean version of bundle theory. ZM rejects it as strictly insufficient to account for the constitution and identity of things, and PTT rejects it for its insoluble logical difficulties, as outlined above.

3. Nevertheless, both ZM and PTT recognize the importance for reasons of object identity (especially through change and over time) to posit *something* that counts as the *essence* of the thing that remains (essentially) the same over time and through change.

(a) ZM maintains that an object, O, is a unified system of notes whose essence is its irreducible core of fundamental, constitutionally sufficient constitutive notes. The unification of the system is a function of the respectivity or openness of reality – the notes of O are what they are as a function of (or with respect to) all of the other notes

(that are likewise respective). The core or essence is a matter for science to determine (for instance, that it is the genetic material of organic beings that constitutes the essence of those beings). That there is such a core is a "physical" (i.e., not merely theoretical or conceptive) fact. Is there a "more" to O? Yes, but only in the (important) sense of "transcendence *in*", as Zubiri puts it—in other words, in the openness of the real, i.e., *vis-à-vis* respectivity.

(b) PTT, while not countenancing a featureless substratum, nevertheless holds that there is a core or nucleus of mutually founding tropes, each of which is founded upon the others members and none of which is founded upon any non-member. This nucleus might then serve as a one-way foundation for other tropes that might themselves be founded on other non-members of this essential nucleus.

(c) We can see, therefore, that ZM and PTT have similar intuitions as to the sufficient constitution of any object, O. But in neither case is there some *thing* in addition to the notes or tropes that constitute O.

4. Neither ZM nor PTT accepts the existence of free-floating notes/tropes. However, there is a difference.

(a) PTT seems to agree with all trope theories (whether they be exclusive or an element of a multi-category ontology) in seeing tropes as abstract particulars that have an "identity" of their own. Tropes come ready made, so to speak (despite their not being free floating). Levinson, as we saw, criticized this position on a number of fronts, but a key complaint is that this conception of trope would automatically entail at least one additional ontological category: a universal. It would do so because to even understand the trope is to see a trope as a token of a type (and there seems no getting around this with the suspect notion of "exact similarity").

(b) ZM, on the other hand, finds the "identity" of any note to be a function of all the other notes to which it is both respective and open. In other words, a note is what it is because of all the notes of

the object as well as of the object itself (considered as a unified system of those notes) it characterizes. In addition, that note is what it is as a function of how the object as a whole is open and respective the rest of reality. Not only are there not free-floating notes, there are also no substantially independently identifiable notes at all.

(c) The question is whether PTT or ZM is more satisfying of our explanatory objectives. Short of a (paradoxical) Platonic view of a particularist ontology (i.e., trope theory), there is no adequate way of understanding tropes themselves, as Levinson has argued quite vigorously. On the other hand, ZM leaves us in the same bind as some of his illustrious predecessors, including both Parmenides and Heraclitus, as well as any contemporary process-relational metaphysicians (for instance, Whitehead): How can we tell what O "really" is if its notes are subject to a constant flux of respectivity (or, the flip side of the same coin, if it is melted into a single Reality)?

(d) But what if Zubiri is a nominalist after all? What if "reality-things" are, themselves, (merely) "meaning-things," things that derive their identity and meaning as a function of their place in a human experiential scheme of one particular sort or another (physics, say, or metaphysics)? Thomas Fowler[63] identifies nominalism, the metaphysical view that only particulars exist, that so-called "universals" and "abstract entities" are simply manners of speaking, [64] as one of the three pillars of the "unholy trinity" in much contemporary philosophy of science (the other two pillars being *naturalism* and *reductionism*).[65] Zubiri's view of what he calls "meaning things" is clearly nominalist in the sense that a table *qua* table has no *de suyo* (i.e., in-its-own-right) features. But what of the "reality thing" that can manifest as a table? For Zubiri, the table *qua* thing has its reality *de suyo*, and not simply as a function of human perception or practical interest.

But here it pays to recall Zubiri's insight into the levels of intellection. At the fundamental level, that of *sentient intelligence*, the intellect actualizes the reality that the table *qua* thing is in its own right. But the truth of this intellection is prior to *logos*, prior to the articulation even of the thing's *de suyo* features. Does the intellect's ability to articulate such features imply a realist commitment to universals or abstract entities? If the formality of reality is the in-its-own-right, then are articulations themselves *real*? Or, if they are indeed real, would they have any *necessary* connection to that of which they are articulations? It is hard to see how they would, and if they do not then articulation appears nominalistic. "Reality things" in *logos* turn out to be "meaning things" relative to particular theoretical programs of one kind or another.

The possibility I am raising here is certainly arguable and depends on possible interpretations of Zubiri's metaphysical position. I raise the issue in consideration of the question raised earlier: How can we tell what object O "really" is if its notes—the ones it has *de suyo*—are subject to a constant flux of respectivity? It would seem the answer is that we cannot.

The lesson to be drawn from this (possible) conclusion is that the ontological project, whether in the guise of a quest for an plausible trope theory (a desideratum of those adhering to the "unholy trinity" of nominalism, reductionism, and naturalism) or rather in the terms of Zubiri's metaphysical program, is always a practical project, a *praxis*, and as such is a function of human projects generally. Neither PPT nor ZM—nor any other metaphysical program—could possibly bring the quest to get at the basic structures of reality to a close.

Recognizing this, the terms of the debate have changed. It is no longer a matter of seeking "adequacy" but rather a question of the nature of the praxis itself. What are we *really* after?

In any case, both PTT and ZM make a substantial contribution to our metaphysical and ontological project. Both, though, have their weakness. PTT tries to account for things in isolation in a way that Zubiri

would find, in fact, implausibility and the openness of reality demand at least the addition of other strategies. ZM, on the other hand, may be holistic to a fault, unable to account adequately for the identity and perdurance of objects without the supplement of categorical ontology.

Notes

1 Hofweber, Thomas, "Logic and Ontology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/logic-ontology/>.

2 For instance, here is a view that can be found repeated throughout the contemporary critique of metaphysics: "Metaphysics nowadays pretty much amounts to microphysics and macrophysics, particle physics and astrophysics, made possible first by microscopes and telescopes, and now by computer-driven microscopic and macroscopic instruments that probe the unimaginably small and the unimaginably large…". John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 113-114.

3 This desideratum is not universally shared among all metaphysicians and ontologists, of course. This is a key issue in metaphysics generally: What is the relation between our ontological commitments and our engagement in the world – including our scientific engagement? Which drives which? The two views under consideration here, however, are strongly committed to consistency with modern science.

4 See Anna-Sophia Maurin, "Tropes," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/tropes/, accessed 6/24/14 1:19 pm.

5 Donald C. Williams, "On the Elements of Being: I," *The Review of Metaphysics* 7(1953).

6 Williams, p. 7. Readers unfamiliar with trope theory may detect a similarity with Leibniz's *monads*. The resemblance, however, is quite superficial. Mention of Leibniz in trope-theoretical literature is almost non-existent. Leibniz saw the "building blocks" of reality to be immaterial, non-extended, soul-like spiritual substances. One will search in vain for such language among contemporary ontologists. Aristotle and Locke are the real progenitors of trope theory.

7 "Any possible world, and hence, of course, this one, is completely constituted by its tropes and their connections of location and similarity." Williams, p. 8.

8 I.e., a single category is sufficient for adequately explaining the basic structure of reality.

9 This is the most commonly raised question in terms of getting at the heart of trope theory. See, for instance, Márta Ujvári, *The Trope Bundle Theory of Substance: Change, Individuation and Individual Essence* (Walter de Gruyter, 2012). P. 164

10 Williams lists as alternatives terms to compresence, "collocation," "belonging to," "concresence," "coinherence," "togetherness," and "concurence." Williams, p. 8.

11 Anna-Sofia Maurin, "Bradley's Regress," Philosophy Compass, 7.11 (2012) pp. 794-807; Maurin, "Trope Theory and the Bradley Regress," Synthese, Vol. 175, No. 3 (August 2010), pp. 311-326; Ross P. Cameron, "Turtles All the Way Down: Regress, Priority and Fundamentality," The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 230, pp. 1-14.

12 One solution is to say that exact resemblance is simply the ontologically innocuous supervenience of the tropes being the tropes they are. It is an internal relation. It is, as David Armstrong would say, an "ontological free lunch." See Peter Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Sept. 1994), p. 556.

13 Generally, "similarity" is taken to be primitive, i.e. admitting of no further analysis.

14 Peter Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54(1994)., p. 562.

15 Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance.", p. 565.

16 Note that in the case of the third objection, traditional (i.e., non-place) substratum theory holds the advantage: the whole bundle ("attached" to its substratum - whatever that is) moves.

[17] Edward N. Zalta, "Frege," S*tanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/frege/ Accessed 10/14/2014 18:11.

[18] Simons uses the term "substance" in this discussion, but there is an ambiguity at work. Substance can mean one of two (along with property) metaphysical co-principles of things. This is the propertyless something-or-other of what I will refer to later as the "Mr. Potatohead version of substance theory. But substance can also mean that which is apt to exist in itself, a whole existing in its own right and not as an intrinsic part of anything else. Here, Simons means the latter. To keep matters - to my mind, anyway - more clear, I will just use "object" or "thing" instead of "substance."

[19] "A foundational system is not just a mere collection or plurality of things, but a connected system." Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance.", p. 563.

[20] Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing: Three Trope Theories of Substance.", pp. 567-568.

[21] Jerrold Levinson, "Why There Are No Tropes," *Philosophy* 81, no. 04 (2006).

[22] See Williams, "On the Elements of Being: I." pp. 4 ff.

[23] Levinson, "Why There Are No Tropes." p. 570.

[24] See Cynthia Macdonald, "Tropes and Other Things," in *Readings in the Foundations of Contemporary Metaphysics*, ed. S. and C. Macdonald Laurence (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

[25] Levinson, "Why There Are No Tropes." p. 527. E. J. Lowe is criticized in a similar fashion. See pp. 575-6.

[26] Levinson, "Why There Are No Tropes." p. 579.

[27] As an example of an internal relation, if John is shorter than Mary, that is simply by virtue of the fact that John is the height he is and Mary is the height she is. There is nothing "additional" at work here. If John is the height he is and Mary is the height she is, then they will always be in the height relation they happen to be in - necessarily. Note that an internal relation would not, therefore, be a trope, as it has no "independent" reality. I.e.,

it could not serve as a building block of reality, as trope theorists want tropes to do.

[28] See Anna-Sofia Maurin, "Trope Theory and the Bradley Regress," *Synthese* 175, no. 3 (2010). and Anna-Sofia Maurin, "Bradley's Regress," *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 11 (2012). "Bradley's Regress" is the same sort of objection that Aristotle's "Third Man" argument held against a Platonic theory of forms.

[29] What I have in mind here as a strategy is akin to Donald Davidson's "anomalous monism" theory of mental events. His view on that issue is that all mental events are physical events, but that they are anomalous. That means we have not two different *ontological* categories (mental and physical), but rather two irreducibly different *explanations* of mental events. See "Mental Events" in Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events (Philosophical Essays of Donald Davidson)* (Oxford University Press, 2001)., pp. 229-244.

[30] *El Hombre y Dios* was originally organized and completed by Ignacio Ellacuría and published in 1984. That version of the book went through five editions. The English translation, *Man and God*, by Joaquín Redondo (with critical revisions by Thomas Fowler and Nelson Oringer) was made from (apparently) the 2nd or 3rd edition of *El Hombre y Dios*, both from 1985. That translation appeared in 2009 (University Press of America). In 2012, a greatly expanded New Edition of *El Hombre y Dios* appeared. This has yet to be translated to English. In this paper, I will be citing from the English translation [hereinafter MG] and the 5th edition of the Spanish original [hereinafter HD].

[31] Xavier Zubiri, *On Essence.* Translation and Introduction by Robert Caponigri (Catholic Univ. of America, 1963).

[32] Xavier Zubiri, *Sobre La Esencia / About the Essence (Obras De Xavier Zubiri) (Spanish Edition)* (Alianza Editorial Sa, 1962). Originally published in 1962.

[33] Xavier Zubiri and Nelson R. Orringer, *Dynamic Structure of Reality (Hispanisms)* (University of Illinois Press, 2003).

[34] Xavier Zubiri, *Estructura Dinamica De La Realidad / Dynamic Structure of Reality (Obras De Xavier Zubiri) (Spanish Edition)* (Alianza Editorial SA, 1994).

[35] Xavier Zubiri, *Man and God* (University Press of America, 2009)., 24.

[36] "The idea then we have, to which we give the general name substance, being nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substante,* without something to support them, we call that support *substantia*; which, according to the true import of the word, is, in plain English, *standing under* or *upholding.*" John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding;* book 2, chapter 23*; "*Of our Complex Ideas of Substances*"*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Substance_theory

[37] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 24.

[38] Unless, I suppose, the water is in the frozen state and is shaped in a particular way. See Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 25.

[39] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 38.

[40] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 48.

[41] Xavier Zubiri, *Sentient Intelligence* (Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, 1999)., 35.

[42] Again the phrase, "it possesses," here can be misleading. There is no separate, metaphysically independent "it" that then "possesses" notes. To say, "it possesses," is just a manner of speaking.

[43] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[44] To be clear: Zubiri contrasts his idea of "substantivity" with that of the traditional notion of "substance" in the sense of the Mr. Potato Metaphysics. But there is an ambiguity. For Zubiri, a substantivity is a unified system of notes, and some of those notes are "substances." This latter usage, however, does not refer to classical metaphysics. Rather, "substance" in this latter usage means something like "material" or "stuff" of a certain kind. I do not believe Zubiri is implying that this latter usage was Aristotle's or St. Thomas's, and the difference between their metaphysical theories still holds (despite this ambiguity).

[45] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 26.

[46] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 26.

[47] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 26.

[48] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 26.

[49] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[50] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[51] Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, this insight might be fruitfully applied to issues in the philosophy of mind by those theorists hoping for a viable non-reductive physicalism.

[52] Technically, a form of reality has a particular mode of implantation. See Zubiri, *Man and God*, 27.

[53] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[54] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[55] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 27.

[56] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 28.

[57] Zubiri, *Man and God.*, 29.

[58] Note that this idea consonant with concept of evolution and natural selection.

[59] Zubiri, *On Essence ; Translation and Introduction By a. Robert Caponigri.*, 148.

[60] One contemporary school of philosophy that goes by the name of "speculative realism" (and sometimes "object oriented ontology") finds the central flaw of both Anglo-American analytic philosophy and continental philosophy to be their adherence to "correlationism," the idea that things are merely correlates of human thought. The speculative realists want to get at what things are in themselves beyond any correlation that might exist with consciousness. What this project could amount definitely remains to be seen. It should be noted, though, that one important proponent of this school, Graham Harman, specifically names Zubiri as a key influence on his thinking "from the point of view of objects." It is not the purpose of the present paper to unpack and assess this relationship between Zubiri's ideas and those of speculative realism.

[61] Zubiri, *On Essence;* Translation and Introduction by Robert Caponigri., p. 156.

[62] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

[63] Thomas Fowler, "Reductionism, Naturalism, and Nominalism: The "Unholy Trinity" and Its Explanation in Zubiri's Philosophy," *The Xavier Zubiri Review* 9(2007). 72

[64] Stathis Psillos, *Philosophy of Science a-Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). 163

[65] Fowler, "Reductionism, Naturalism, and Nominalism: The "Unholy Trinity" and Its Explanation in Zubiri's Philosophy." 71