



Prayerful Dispossession and the Grammar of Thinking Theologically: Sarah Coakley and Gillian Rose*

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Abstract

Gillian Rose's re-thinking of Hegel in the wake of twentieth century 'right' and 'left' wing Hegelianisms has offered occasion for a recovery of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as more than simply the narration of the way consciousness absorbs its objects, as textbook accounts often suggest. Rose's suggestion is that Hegel offers a program of radical criticism that destabilises the modern ego in speculative thought itself. Sarah Coakley's recent first volume, of a proposed four, of her systematic theology triangulating Trinity, prayer and dispossessive spiritual practices provides a fruitful dialogue partner for Rose's project in that Coakley offers a mode of thinking about prayer deeply attentive to the shape of spiritual discipline and its relation to theological grammar. This paper contests that it is precisely in the non-objectivity of divine being, as thought by Rose and Coakley, that we find resources for conceptualising thinking itself as a dispossessive spiritual act. The theological and the spiritual (theory and praxis) cannot, therefore, be partitioned out without violence being done to the act of thinking itself.

Keywords

Sarah Coakley, Gillian Rose, Prayer, Thinking, Neo-Kantianism

1. Introduction

This is a paper in exploration of a theo-logic of prayer. The suspicion I have is that there is a convergence between the work of Gillian Rose and Sarah Coakley in the way both come to think about the relationship between practices of prayer and patterns of thought. One

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of the often lamented problems of ‘modern’ theology is the seeming dislocation of the academic discipline of theological reflection from contemplative practices. This, I want to suggest with Rose, is a result of a certain kind of neo-Kantianism that enters theological discourse at a critical moment driving a wedge between theory and praxis by placing certain concepts in a ‘transcendental register’, so determining the relationship between subject and object *a priori*. These neo-Kantianisms of different forms preclude learning as something immanent to the consciousness itself by supplying a certain mythology, “the myth of the subject in possession.”¹ Vincent Lloyd summarises this well,

One of Gillian Rose’s insights was that philosophy, since Kant (and before Kant), has most often conducted its investigation by placing certain privileged concepts in a transcendental register. These concepts determine the conditions of possibility for the empirical world. The content of the transcendental register is immune from criticism; nothing in the empirical world can affect it. But where does the content of the transcendental register come from? What is the source of its authority? Perhaps it seems self-evident, perhaps it seems god-given, or perhaps it seems the result of exhaustive reflection.

In fact, any content of the transcendental register is merely an elevated, sanctified aspect of the ordinary world. Any content of the transcendental register is rhetoric usurping the place of philosophy.²

The convergence with Coakley’s project comes when we begin to consider the careful ways in which she comes to think the re-ordering of desire in contemplative participation in the Spirit. Improvising on her work we might say, contemplative practices foster forms of self-dispossession that enlarge and simultaneously re-order the possibilities of thought, speech and silence available to us as we participate in the Son’s prayer to the Father in the Spirit. There is an epistemic enlargement and slippage that takes place precisely in an ordered dispossession. The life of God is no static moment that can be communicated in conceptual refinement, but is a participative event in which we re-learn thought again and again as we are given to approach God in prayer. As we ascend into divine darkness we find, paradoxically, that we are opened up in new ways to ever richer epistemic possibilities.

¹ Rowan Williams, ‘Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose’ in *Modern Theology* 11:1 (1995), pp. 3–22.

² Lloyd, *Law and Transcendence: On the Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 97. Lloyd’s argument goes on to suggest that there is little space for transcendence in Rose. However, following Andrew Shanks, I want to suggest that there is a latent form of transcendence in Rose’s thought. Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose’s Reception and Gift of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2008) p. 41–97.

However, this implies a radical discomfort, which does not allow for the refuge of the transcendental register. It implies we need to learn how to speak of *loss* and of *error* in ways that are theologically significant not simply as moments of epistemic negation, but as a radical dislocation of the moral subject – Gethsemane – thus moving us beyond the evocation of a transcendent noetic register. The Son’s cry, ‘*Abba, Father*’, which we are given to echo in the Spirit (Rom 8:15), is a cry from a moment of incomprehension and loss, but also of obedience and renewed comprehension of the ethical task. Rose’s project then becomes important at the moment we find the need to think a kind of phenomenology of consciousness’ recovery of itself in loss, of the theological importance of error, misrecognition and silence. The two projects intersect as we think prayer as a participation in a divine knowing, as the progressive *re-ordering* of our *disordered* perceptions in a movement of dispossession.

2. ‘The Transcendental Register’: Kant and Modernity

‘Neo-Kantianism’ becomes identified, for Rose, with a number of diverse philosophical projects that ‘dirempt’ law from ethics, the universal from the particular. “‘Diremption’ draws attention to the trauma of separation of that which was, however, as in marriage, *not* originally united”.³ Diremptions, politically, indicate the ways in which modern philosophy, in the wake of neo-Kantianism, becomes uneasy with the relationship between a discourse of human rights and the actualities of power mediated to us in political institutions. The corruption in Kant’s project is then read as lying in his distinction between the knowable realm of experience and the unknowable realm of things in themselves and the moral law. This then works to distinguish the ‘question of fact’ from the ‘question of law’; that is, in the former, the acquisition of concepts in experience, and, in the later, the establishment of an *a priori* relationship with objects. In turn, this enables a mode of thinking law that is detached from the *difficulty* of the negotiations of experience, for the establishment of the possibility of the apprehension of experience is not derived from reflection upon experience. *Reason* and *actuality* are held at a distance by ‘general logics’ (Hermann Cohen); logics that function in a linear fashion starting from an abstract proposition.⁴ This leads to the “debasement of experience” and “excludes any inquiry into empirical reality”.⁵

³ Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), p. 236.

⁴ See Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 2–14.

⁵ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 9. Cited in, Vincent Lloyd, *Law and Transcendence*, p. 17.

At this point we need to drive back into the way Rose sees this form of neo-Kantianism shaping the subject. She rehearses a neo-Kantian criticism of Kant: a transcendental approach to knowledge functions in such a way that knowledge “is the synthesis of the manifold of perception into appearances. These appearances do not exist in themselves, but only relative to the subject in which they inhere.”⁶ Appearances are not, then, things in themselves, but are contingent upon the subject’s apprehension. Because of this, objective validity belongs to “the synthesis of experience, but not to any things in themselves.”⁷ So, then, “if the idea that the mind synthesises the objects of knowledge is accepted, then it can be argued that it makes no sense to retain ‘reality’ for something beyond our knowledge.”⁸ The (Marburg) neo-Kantian criticism of Kant, then, is in that the ‘unity of consciousness’ does not refer to the opposition between subject and object but, “to unity based on the principle of pure logic, the logic of scientific consciousness. Scientific thought is the unity of the creating and its creations and its activities of unifying and diversifying are a never-ending, infinite task.”⁹

It is important that we take this back into the way the subject is being construed because it is the “subject in possession” of her intellectual faculties that is able to do this. This is seen as being a product of the Enlightenment search for ‘authority’, which is read, in turn, as a continuation of the crisis of the reformation. So, Rose boldly claims, “Modernity is Protestant, not humanistic”.¹⁰ The problem is “Kant in all his pietism.”¹¹ The Kantian subject becomes “divinely confident that no work needs to be done for his salvation”¹² because “ignorance is the only fallen condition, not sin”,¹³ which is indeed the Gnostic condition with which Rose diagnoses modernity *and* postmodernity. Kant, then,

... knew that, since Luther, authority and scepticism keep changing places: one person’s authority is another’s scepticism. ... When Scripture was substituted for sacerdotalism by the Protestant Reformation, it was claimed that reason had replaced superstition and worldly authority. “Subjective whim has replaced the apostolic tradition,” ripostes the counter-claim. Once this exchange had been launched, all authority is relativised, because both sides are ultimately sceptical ...¹⁴

⁶ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 4.

⁷ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 5.

⁸ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 5.

⁹ Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Rose, *Paradiso* (London: Menard Press, 1999), p. 20.

¹¹ Rose, *Paradiso*, p. 20.

¹² Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 127.

¹³ Rose, *Paradiso*, p. 26.

¹⁴ Gillian Rose, *Love’s Work* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), p. 127.

Kantian logic functions in binary oppositions grounded in the subject's difficulties apprehending the object. The *ding an sich* [thing in itself], hidden from view as we only apprehend through the senses mediated by *a priori* categories of judgement, precludes the subject from ever really apprehending the object, and so isolates us from ever engaging the world in any generative or creative way, hence neo-Kantianism's radicalising of Kant's subject. Because God is only apprehended in reason, we are equally unable to apprehend God as he does not present himself to us in the world of sensory experience thereby engaging the faculties of judgement, and so suspending and reframing our action. *God has nothing to do with thought itself*. These binaries are set, never to be overcome, and it is this that is deeply problematic (particularly as it radicalises itself in Fichte's self-positing subject).¹⁵

3. Overcoming Kantian Oppositions: Rose's Hegel

Against neo-Kantianism, Rose's project is interested in the shape of error, of misrecognition, in the process of knowing. The retreat of post-modernity into "a playful Sophistry, replacing knowledge with 'discourses', critique with 'plurality', conceptuality with 'the Other', renouncing in general any association with law or with mediation"¹⁶ is the result of a retreat from the supposed totalising ideologies of modernity. Yet, this retreat is seen simply as the flip side of a totalitarian epistemology. For, as she identifies in postmodern 'new ethics', "'The Other' is misrepresented as sheer alterity, for 'the Other' is equally distraught subject searching for its substance, its ethical life... *New ethics* would transcend the autonomy of the subject by commanding that I substitute myself for 'the Other' (heteronomy) or by commending attention to 'the Other'."¹⁷ This heteronomous substitution of myself for 'the Other', Rose contends, denies the "immanence of the self-relation of 'the Other' to my own self-relation"¹⁸ thus denying the *pathos* of the process of coming to know, the *broken middle* out of which we come both

¹⁵ See Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 98–107.

¹⁶ Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. xii.

¹⁷ Rose, *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), p. 8. Again Rose notes, "Post-modernism is submodern: these holy middles of ecstatic divine-milieu, irenic other city, holy community – face to face or Halachic – and the unholy one of the perpetual carnival market, bear the marks of their unexplored precondition: the diremption between the moral discourse of rights and the systematic actuality of power, within and between modern states." p. 47–48.

¹⁸ Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*, p. 8.

to misknow, and to know.¹⁹ Post-modernity therefore “disallows itself any conceptuality or means of comprehension for investigating its own implication and configuration within *the broken middle*. Whereas post-modernity remains dualistic and pits its others against domination, the broken middle is triune. It will investigate the breaks between universal, particular and singular, in individuals and in institutions.”²⁰

Oppositional forms of thought continue to resolve the object in the transcendental conceptual apparatus (the structuring of consciousness *a priori*), or retreat from knowledge into something like sacred terror of the other, with the subject remaining in firm possession of herself. Introducing the Spirit, however, introduces a moment of interruption of that possessive subject accumulating knowledge without ever being called into question. Rose’s contentious reading of St Augustine is illuminating:

St Augustine’s account of the third person of the Trinity in his great work, *De Trinitate*, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, who is the mediator of holiness – enabling us not only to perceive the change of the Transfiguration but also to communicate what we know – is *insipid* by comparison with his great evocations of Father and Son. To put it in literary terms, *the lack of irony* in St Augustine’s *oeuvre* indicates a troubled contrast between his appearance and his hiddenness, his power and his powerlessness.²¹

This text is located in a discussion of the roots of modern Western thought regulated by a Gnostic temptation. If I can indulge mild, yet textually justified, anachronism to make a point: Rose is locating the problem in this oppositional Kantian logic in the way it places divine and creaturely agency in opposition in a deeply modern *theistic* fashion. Augustine’s supposed discomfort with irony, then, is in the ‘troubled’ contrast between his exercise of power, and his powerlessness; a speculative relation is not established *in existence* that might reframe the ways we speak of both power and powerlessness, human and divine action. There is no tensive maintenance of the two terms in the inhabiting of the relation, establishing a visibility and invisibility of the self.

Contrasting the *Confessions* with St Teresa’s *Autobiography*, Rose notes, “[St Teresa’s] mystical experiences, her charismas of levitation and tears, are juxtaposed with her institution building, her organisational and managerial skills, her tremendous worldly power, in a way

¹⁹ This transpires, Kate Schick argues, into something like a mirroring of modernity wherein alterity creates a new essentialism in that the Other alienates rather than creates solidarity. Kate Schick, *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 86–87.

²⁰ Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. xii.

²¹ Rose, *Paradiso*, p. 24.

that *enlarges our rational powers* as it approaches the actuality of eternal life, keeping her soul hidden.”²² Returning to Kant, then, we might say that he is unable to inhabit the world as *a subject in speculative (dispossessed) relation*. The oppositions between the subject and the object, transcendent and immanent, place the subject in a deeply *unspeculative* relation; there is nothing sustaining the relation between the subject and object. Theologically, creaturely agency cannot participate in divine agency through a speculative maintenance of the two terms in inextricable relation, for they are constantly in opposition in the act of thinking as thought overcomes its objects with the only reserve being the obscure *ding an sich*. That is, thought is not a participatory event interrogating our faculties of thinking, and so God becomes rational *object* to be mastered by the knowing subject, even if by a kind of negative natural theology whereby appearances are evacuated of divine presence and so the divine from the understanding.²³

Retreat into placing a concept in the transcendental register is a safe option. It does not require *risk*. Thinking cannot really begin there, because it already controls its end. So, as Rowan Williams notes, “The only honest beginning is with difficulty; that is to say, we cannot ‘start thinking’, but ‘begin’ only with the acknowledgement that what we say is already put in question, already involved in the fertile error and misperception that Hegel and Kierkegaard alike identify as, in the most ironic sense, natural to thinking.”²⁴ That is, what is ‘natural’ to thinking is to lead itself to error, to the kinds of pre-speculative oppositions that Rose bemoans in Augustine. Overcoming these is not a matter of intellectual mastery of a third term, but a willingness to begin in the middle, in the brokenness between the terms. We must learn how to fail. For, any system that has forgotten how to fail is always going to be a roadblock to truly liberating praxis, as it has forgotten how to re-think itself.

²² Rose, *Paradiso*, p. 24. italics added

²³ Rose’s criticism of Kant’s oppositions offers us a way into her reading contemporary political liberalism. Liberalism offers no way of negotiating struggle, for it fails to see the trauma between the utopian promises of Enlightenment rationality in its bestowal of rights and the systematic actualities of power and domination. However, she does not let this lead her, as she accuses many postmodern theorists, to a celebration of (phenomenologically irreducible) difference that forgets the struggle of the maintenance of complex social orders (law). In other words, postmodernity is melancholic; it retreats from actual political engagement into utopic ‘communities’ of shared interest, unable to engage in shared struggle. See, Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, p. 15–40.

²⁴ Williams, ‘Between Politics and Metaphysics’, pp.11.

4. Ordered Dispossession, Dispossessed Order: Coakley, Rose and Prayer

One of the fascinating gestures that is posed at this point is the relation between order and dispossession that presents itself as we think about what it means to think.²⁵ In many ways this brings us to the heart of the issue I am exploring in this paper. A Gnostic rationality can only posit a primal order that has fallen, escape from embodied historical complexity is salvation. Gnosticism becomes a gesture in the direction of a certain form of power: knowledge as content or primal point of departure functions to trump the historical particularities of embodied relations; order is ‘mastered’ in the intellect. Being dispossessed of one’s own apparent mastery is therefore to be thrown into a certain kind of trauma in confrontation with *difficulty and misapprehension*.²⁶

‘True orthodoxy’, Coakley suggests, is elusive, because we are constantly given to idolatry:

At the heart of this book has been a paradoxical assertion that ‘orthodoxy’ is very rarely what it seems. The potential for cultural and patriarchal distortion is endless, and the mere ‘complementary’ addition of some new, well-intentioned focus on the Spirit or ‘feminine’ language for God is not in itself going to shift this problem. A deeper sense of our own capacity for self-deceiving idolatry (yes, even potentially a feminist ideology) has to come into play, precisely in and through the ‘purgations’ of prayer: only the primacy of divine desire can attend to this deeper problem. Likewise, and as Freud above all knew so well, ‘to kill the Father is to remain with and reaffirm the rule of the Father’; so there has to be another way out other than enforced repression. So now we know why ‘true orthodoxy’ is so elusive. It can only occur when the idolatrous twoness of the patriarchal dyad is broken open to transformation by the Spirit.²⁷

That is, our naming of God continually stales before us as it approaches analogy. Language of Fatherhood, understood by many feminists, rightly, as bearing witness to an oppressive patriarch projected back into the deity, is not overcome simply by its overturning in favour of divine Motherhood. This simple linguistic switch does nothing to re-order our language of Fatherhood, and so ‘witness’ to

²⁵ Here my language is indebted to Rowan Williams’ exploration of revelation as “learning about our learning”. See Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 131–147.

²⁶ Trauma is a critical word in Rose’s oeuvre, indicating the tension of the middle and the never mended character of our rationality. See Schick, *A Good Enough Justice*, p. 57–80.

²⁷ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 326.

what is being communicated in the act of prayerful encounter. That is, divine Fatherhood is not to be identified with human fatherhood, in the same way that any other name finds itself inadequate to its indicated divine reality. Slaying patriarchy, for Coakley, is not a matter of linguistic switching, but of contemplative, prayerful engagement. “‘Can a feminist call God Father’, then? One might insist that she, above all, *must*; for it lies with her alone to do the kneeling work that ultimately slays patriarchy at its root.”²⁸ The language signifies an alternate reality, borne witness to in the practices of patient waiting in prayer as our ‘thought gone stale’ is cracked open by the Spirit’s prompting, our thought is reinvigorated.²⁹ So it is that divine Fatherhood is only understood in reference to divine Sonship, into which we are given in the Spirit. That is, we cannot think God as Father apart from thinking him as Son and Spirit.

Coakley turns to Paul’s remarks in Romans 8:18–30 as suggestive of the basis of a ‘prayer-based’ doctrine of the trinity. That is, the believer’s prayer to the Father, in the explicit evocation of sonship in the Spirit, hints at a doxological development of trinitarianism in primitive Christianity. One of the connections Coakley does not make explicit, however, is that of the ‘*Abba*’ of Paul and the ‘*Abba*’ of Jesus in Gethsemane.³⁰ This connection is helpful for coming to

²⁸ Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 327.

²⁹ The language of ‘thought gone stale’ is borrowed from Andrew Shanks. Shanks’ appropriates Hegel’s ‘unhappy consciousness’ [*das unglückliche Bewusstsein*] as the “un-toned state of mind”. This state of unatonement is reflexive of the master-slave dialectic out of which *das unglückliche Bewusstsein* emerges in that in the servile state of mind ideological *a priori* order the consciousness such that the subject cannot be laid open to fresh experience, and so be interrogated and transformed. Andrew Shanks, *Hegel and Religious Faith: Divided Brain, Atoning Spirit* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 45–49. Terry Pickard reads the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ as “the way in which the skeptic must live his life. The skeptic holds that only his own *activity* of evaluating all claims to knowledge is authoritative; he thus holds that he achieves independence in taking that detached attitude to every kind of claim-making activity. Yet he also holds that there is nothing that *can be* affirmed, including this affirmation of his own independence, because any such affirmation would require a non-contingent, universal point of view that is itself impossible to attain.” Therefore those who participate in the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ believe certain things but are unable to see or justify their belief. This is rather different to Shanks in that the religious overtones of the language of ‘atonement’ are shed in favour of a way of thinking the processes of the rational itself in opposition to the theological intellectual total pictures. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 69.

³⁰ This connection is made explicit by Karl Barth. “Remarkably, and certainly not by accident, this is the same cry as the Gospel narrative (Mk 14:36 Mk. 14:36) puts on the lips of Jesus when He is at prayer in Gethsemane. So then, in this form, the Son of God is the prototype of the sonship of believers. The children of God have put on this Christ.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* vol 1. part 1. trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), p. 458. Rowan Williams also follows this lead from Barth, noting the suggestiveness of Barth’s remarks regarding the Spirit’s ‘historicity’. Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 107–128.

terms with how we might think the relation between prayer, thought and action. The agony of Christ in Gethsemane is, suggestively, the moment in which we learn to say Father. Yet, paradoxically, Gethsemane is where Fatherhood comes under pressure. Is Christ's Father a capricious deity giving his Son over to a cold death for the sake of a wrath which does not proceed out of grace? Christ has to obey from, in Barth's powerful image, the depths of the 'far country'.³¹ He could turn back, he could take mastery of the situation, not trusting the Fatherhood of the Father, but it is precisely a lack of mastery that is required, a faith that coercive forms of power do not bear witness to the life of his Father. For, what is the resurrection but the vindication of the *form of life* Christ inhabits as ultimately imperishable precisely in its vicarious perishing? And what distinguishes this lack of mastery from servility is precisely this vindication that re-orders the very ways we speak of power. Coakley's insistence that it is the feminist who is called to do the kneeling work that slays patriarchy is an insistence upon a participation in the Son's relation to the Father in the Spirit, slaying idolatry in generating liberated faithful action. For Christ to back out at Gethsemane would not simply be a failure to trust in the Fatherhood of the Father, but a failure to receive his own Sonship. So it is that re-thinking Fatherhood is, by the same token, to re-think Sonship, and so to re-think what it means to be human.

Returning to Rose, Hegel's 'speculative good friday' might not sound quite so problematic for theologians if it were read in something like this light.³² The cry, 'God is dead', is not a claim that some metaphysical agent has gone belly-up, but that a false image, an idol, has died in the speculative refusal of false oppositions. The key here, though, is *experience*. As Andrew Shanks notes, in the speculative Good Friday a picture of God "which has hitherto been kept safe from any serious questioning in actual concrete experience" has been exposed as an abstraction, the reification of human conceptuality into metaphysical space.³³ For Hegel, and for Rose, this speculative moment requires a special kind of attention to the particular. For to think the particular is not simply to think an atomised 'thing', but to think a thing in its relations – here and not there, now and not then – and so it is to see the particular as only thinkable in the universal. For the thing does not exist in abstraction from its location within a reality, and so "to think is, ultimately, to step beyond all local determinations

³¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol 4. part 1. trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), p. 157–210.

³² See Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 98–127.

³³ Shanks, *Hegel and Religious Faith*, p. 50.

of reality”.³⁴ Determinate experience shatters false notions of ‘Fatherhood’ and ‘Sonship’ as we are drawn by the Spirit into the life of God. Not that we ever arrive, but that we continually confront failure, error, and loss along the way as idolatries are destroyed in our being opened up to the other, to reality.

As we have seen in Coakley, prayer is a movement of dispossession whereby our epistemological certainties are held in suspense as we encounter a jarring divine desire. We might now say that prayer is a movement in which we learn to think. As we are drawn by the Spirit into divine childhood, we are drawn into a moment of noetic purgation whereby not simply the conceptuality of ‘Fatherhood’ and ‘Sonship’ are called into question, but the very ways in which we learn and think these relations are purged. For God is not an object in and among other objects, and as such God is not to be located in any refined conceptuality; there is a certain plunging into darkness that we are invited into. Yet this is *not* a darkness of Kantian nescience, an exhaustion of the rational, but a darkness of divine plenitude as it is the Spirit who leads us into this speculative death. We find ourselves dispossessed of intellectual mastery, and rather drawn into something more like a process, we find ourselves *in via*. This is not a lazy identification of transcendence with immanence, but realisation that God has to do with the very process of coming to know as much as the content of knowing itself. The Spirit leads us into an ever expanding field of relations in which, slowly, we come to speak of the world in different terms, in terms of an intrinsic relatedness to a dispossessively ordered divine life. This is inextricable from the life of prayer, for what is prayer but the practice of being laid open to this communicative and generative activity?

5. Conclusion

We might say there are two visions of the self here. A self ordering the world as if by a process of labelling and mastering the objects of experience; epistemic dividing and conquering. This self is aloof from the world, the intellect coming to lay hold of its objects so as to master them under the authority of the transcendental register. Then there is a self which comes to locate itself *in* the world, a self that locates its knowing in a process of return to divine luminous darkness, and so is dispossessed of epistemic mastery. The dispossession of Friday is, therefore, deeply *ordered*. We are *ordered* away from a mythology of mastery and control and invited into an ever greater

³⁴ Williams, ‘Logic and Spirit in Hegel’, in Mike Higton ed., *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 36.

enlargement of thought. This is deeply uncomfortable at times, as Coakley's project of re-thinking Fatherhood bears witness, but this is precisely the point. To remain with the discomfort, to resist facile resolution of complex realities, is the project of prayer. As Rose was prone to say, "To know, to misknow, and yet to grow."³⁵

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³⁵ Rose, *The Broken Middle*, p. 264.