

Area of Research

Overview

The research interests that my colleagues and I pursue in the discipline of fundamental theology at the University of Vienna fall under the areas of *Eschatology/Philosophy of History* and of *Theodicy/Philosophy of Religion* within the schema of classical theology/philosophy. Nevertheless, this very schema has become inadequate, as the clearly delineated religious worlds and their corresponding theological terminology have either been transformed or simply exhausted. Therefore, contemporary theology must forge relationships with other disciplines (philosophy, literary studies, physics, the social sciences, etc.) and create new space for a questioning oriented toward the original *social-political* and *mystical task of theology*, namely a *critique of culture, cognition, and religion*.

Within this context, five questions emerge as leading themes as part of a larger project of developing a *new humanism*. Interested parties of all disciplines are invited to participate in this project, e.g., in the form of dissertation and diploma projects. The background to this project is the diagnosis that, given the current situation in which humanity itself is at stake (the extinction of the diversity of life and languages, the loss of memory, the virtualization of the life-world, the replacement of humans with technological and biological machines), there is a need for a new approach to the human in its singularity, vulnerability, and indispensability. Intimately related to this view is the search for a disclosure of possible horizons of the meaning of history, both in perceiving its disruptions and in affirming the richness of narratives and ways of life. In this quest, Christianity is especially entrusted with the task of developing a critical awareness of the disconcerting (not assimilable) dimension of the DIVINE, from whose creative and hospitable texts and signatures the history of life emerges.

Leading Theme

Christianity as a Project for a New Humanism

Disclosure of the Meaning of History in the Hospitable Textures of the DIVINE

The Five Questions

APOCALYPSE or the question concerning the essence of time

HEGEL or the question of the concealed humane

GOD or the question concerning the ultimate question

EUROPE or the question concerning the hospitable reception of plurality

RESURRECTION or the question concerning the gift of mortality

The five questions

Apocalypse

or the question concerning the essence of time - related to the question concerning the purpose of history

Given how time is conceptualized in today's society, the question concerning the essence of time takes on great urgency.

The first challenge is constituted by prevalent *cosmological models* of time: these have led to an enormous expansion of chronology in which human history amounts to a mere vanishing point that faces the entropic "Big Freeze" of all known cosmic structures. The thought of humane and living existence bearing the character of a mere footnote is reinforced by the emerging ecological crisis that confronts mankind with a plethora of potential catastrophes, including annihilation.

A second significant challenge for the understanding of history is posed by an *increasing virtualization of culture* along with the attempt to replace man with immortal biological and technical machines which depreciate time to arbitrary repetition and nihilistically drain human memories and narratives and even the death of man.

Faced with the loss of meaning, it becomes even more important that the Bible engenders textures about the essence of time and the goal of history. Here, the essence of the human and the human world are narratively created in a new way and critically brought to language in a manner that both commemorates the past and looks forward to the future. This process, which has undergone a manifold of advancements and transformations in philosophy and literature, is consummated in an "alienating" encounter with the DIVINE (not least in his signature as YHWH), where man is liberated from his self-mirroring. Special significance accrues to the apocalyptical parst of this texture, which, recapitulating time in all of its dimensions (past, presence, future), perceive the future of the humane precisely through those who have been excluded from all narratives and associations—culminating in the destiny of surviving their own death.

The main question of this project therefore is whether, in the signature of the DIVINE, an exit from a world, which has retreated from re-ality into virtual phantasms and where there no longer seems to be a place to envision humanity, has opened up.

Hegel

or the question of the concealed humane - tied to the conviction that Hegel does not deserve to be buried in scholarly pedantry and to be taken as a totalitarian monster of thought

Hegel's work, particularly his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is a central point of reference for many important thinkers in the philosophy of history, from Heidegger to Benjamin, from Ricoeur to Levinas and Agamben. Moreover, Hegel provides an alternative to the violence of the positivistic character of knowledge that masks the humane in our time. For this reason, philosophies and theologies should not prematurely situate Hegel's dialectic of the living/human/spiritual, which can never be grasped in positivistic immediacy, in statements such as "totalitarian system", "a world spirit that has come to itself", "pantheism" and "Eurocentrism", as Hegel's speculative philosophy has already left these behind. The attempt to treat Hegel's philosophy philologically is an even greater danger. In contrast to this approach, the subversive, analytical, and often surprising potential of Hegelian thinking, especially contained in the dialectical transitions ("between the lines") of his major works, ought to be explored anew in order to reveal the vulnerable and ever-eluding humane.

God

or the question concerning the ultimate question

During extended epochs in human history, the question concerning God was the first and the final question. This question not only differentiated man from animal, but also elevated man above the ontological status of a machine. Having moved beyond the controversy concerning theism and atheism, the question has now given way to other, "world-immanent" concerns. However, both the persistence and the new arrival of the notion of God are not only evident in non-European cultures, but there are hints at a transformation of the question also in the West. This is suggested by the fact that in an encoded way the question concerning God seems to be virulent in literature, film, and music, which will be understood once our conventional system of world and knowledge is no longer effective. In this sense, at a time when other questions serve to cloth the world in one's own horizon of knowledge and expectations, the question constituting the humane and bringing forth a hope which will carry again and again the signature of the DIVINE, is moving closer with great urgency.

Europe

or the question concerning the hospitable reception of plurality - related to the question concerning signatures of God's new arrival

"Europe," whose roots lie in Africa and Asia and which owes its existence to founding histories of hospitable rootlessness (Odysseus, Virgil, Abraham, and Jesus), is that historical place where the great discoveries of human self-determination combined with the democratization of all realms of life in its manifold possibilities have entirely permeated the culture of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, the drawback is the superficial and egocentric consumerism that is leveling Europe's plurality of languages, its religious and non-religious narratives, and its cultural and historical traditions. Still, there is the faint hope that a further signature of the European spirit might emerge, namely the ever-suppressed collective memory of an endangered and violable humanity now cognizant as a moral duty. Will this remembrance be able to merge the many-voiced narratives of the violated lives of the countless migrants and also the sedimented narratives of religions and states into a new affirmative perception of the plurality of humanity? And will the new arrival of God, perhaps emerging at the cultural and societal fringes, transform current signatures—"Christian," "Jewish-Christian," "Abrahamic," "humanistic," "enlightened," "secular," "democratic," "universal" — into a new horizon of experience??

Resurrection

or the question concerning the gift of mortality - related to the question concerning an exit of this world of the living dead

In pagan antiquity, it was deemed right to keep the world of the dead away from the living, whereas for Christians the community of the living and the dead was regarded as essential. Today, the mortality of man is again vehemently concealed from the living and this is becoming more and more the *Arcanum* (secret) of a secular society that sees in *death* the horrible emptiness of an all-annihilating *nothingness*. Linked to this suppression of death is the attempt to prolong life to infinity—an attempt whose mirror can be observed in the endlessly repeating media landscapes and in the machineries of our time. This attempt presents us with the gruesome foreboding of a "world" beyond life and death in which even death can "outlive" itself and which leads to a "world of the living dead." Maybe we could just escape the aporia of an *annihilating* death and a *futureless eternity* if we began to perceive the *mortality* and *violability* of man as (although being the most disconcerting and bitter) a *gift* and an invitation to a farewell to the bondage of possession (Lk 17, 33; Joh 21, 22 et al.)? And, in this context, could not the conjecture emerge that the central Christian phrase "Jesus has been resurrected"—and the expectation of the resurrection of the body to eternal life tied to it—is primarily a statement about the mortality of man, not his immortality?