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Worship as Meaning

A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity

GRAHAM HUGHES

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Worship as Meaning

How, in this Christian age of belief, can we draw sense from the ritual acts of Christians assembled in worship? Convinced that people shape their meanings from the meanings available to them, Graham Hughes inquires into liturgical constructions of meaning within the larger cultural context of late twentieth-century meaning theory. Major theories of meaning are examined in terms of their contribution or hindrance to this meaning-making: analytic philosophy, phenomenology, structuralism and deconstruction. Drawing particularly upon the work of Charles Peirce, Hughes turns to semiotic theory to analyse the construction, transmission and apprehension of meaning within an actual worship service. Finally the book analyses the ways in which various worshipping styles of western Christianity undertake this meaning-making. Taking account of late modern values and precepts, this groundbreaking book will appeal to teachers and students of theology, to clergy, and to thoughtful lay Christians.

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For Donika,
who was there at the beginning as at the end.

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Introduction

Like many books, this one began in a classroom. The project began (though I did not know it then) in my classes in liturgical gesture now many years ago. Each week students would be required to demonstrate to the class their ideas about movement, proxemics, posture and gesture for some specified point in the liturgy. Because in Protestantism we have no ‘race-memory’ of these kinds of things – even less a *General Instruction* – the suggested offerings frequently seemed to me idiosyncratic and, more pertinently, obscure as to their intended signification. But on those occasions on which I ventured such an opinion, the dialogue almost inevitably drove itself into the corral: ‘Well, that’s your opinion and I disagree.’ The problem seemed to be that, whereas in spoken (or written) language there is a relatively high degree of precision about the received meanings of linguistic units (‘You mean “perspicacious”, not “perspicuous”’), our other forms of human signification are much less ‘rule-governed’ – almost to the point, in some cases, of there seeming to be a lack of *any* clear syntax or semantics. The task at this earliest stage, then, was to give an account of meanings for those significations in worship other than the linguistic ones, which account might allow a higher degree of conversation about the nature of the signs and their signification.

Rather obviously (though this is said more quickly in retrospect than at the time) the direction in which to look was, or is, the still emergent discipline of semiotics. And indeed, as the middle part of this book shows, that proved to be a rich and productive seam.

Being now launched into the question of meaning in worship, however, I began to see (no wondrous discovery, either, though somehow these things take longer than they might) that meanings are not made in a vacuum. In other words, I began to see that the entire constellation of

significations called a service of worship could only be meaningful for worshippers, individually and collectively, to the extent that these meanings were capable of being joined to, or set in relationship with, what, since Edmund Husserl, we have learned to call the worshippers' 'lifeworld'.

This consideration thus led to a prolonged meditation on the condition of 'modernity' which, I take it, Christians from western, industrialized societies inhabit as fish proverbially live in the sea. There are various ways of characterizing modernity, some of which I explore in greater detail in the body of the book. Max Weber, however, has given us the term 'the disenchantment of the world' as a means of encompassing these: western, technological society is a way of being in the world which has detached that world from any enveloping skein of religious reference.¹ 'Disenchantment' means two things: first, that the world is no longer seen religiously; and, second, that the fundamental mechanisms of society – legislature, judiciary, economy, medicine and education – once held within that encompassing web of meaning have, in their detachment from it, become discreet 'disciplines', each functioning in its own right and without perceived obligation to a larger social enterprise.² Of course, classical modernity is now widely assumed to have given way to postmodernity. While much did clearly change following the crucial decade of the 1960s, much remains unchanged too, including religious disenchantment.

It is hardly a secret that at the beginning of its twenty-first century institutional Christianity finds it increasingly difficult to portray itself as a viable source of meaning for people in such societies. It is hard not to suppose that 'the disenchantment of the world', now far advanced, is a major contributing factor in this. Of the multiple options available to people,³ theism is less and less seen as efficacious. Admittedly, the case is mixed. There are people, still, who find in the mythic and ritual forms of

1. See, particularly, e.g., Weber's essays, 'Science as a Vocation' and 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions' in (H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, eds.) *From Max Weber: essays in sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 139, 155, 350–1, 357; or again, Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an outline of interpretive sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 506. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of the modern identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 500, says that Weber appropriated the term 'disenchantment' from Schiller.

2. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 83; or Habermas, 'Modernity: an unfinished project' in (Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, eds.) *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 45; see also Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: thinking and practicing Christian faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), esp. 133, 135, 256–7.

3. 'Availability' is a more or less technical term coined by Charles Taylor on which I draw in the body of this work. Taylor uses it to describe the force that an idea or practice has for the members of a given society, as a way of enabling people to 'make sense' of themselves and their world; Charles Taylor, *Sources*, particularly 313–14. See further, below, page 43.

Christianity a frame of reference which is both meaningful and meaning-giving. When the Pope travels to another country, for example, tens or hundreds of thousands of people can still be drawn together. Protestant fundamentalism seems also able to offer a religious form of meaning for a significant minority. Around these convinced believers, however, there are a great many others who attend church from a sense of obligation or habit, but who come away wondering what it all meant or was supposed to mean. There are others who, in moments of bereavement or catastrophe, dimly glimpse the point of religious reference, but find the point more elusive in ordinary circumstances. And both these groups (who are perhaps not exclusive of each other) are surrounded by an even larger populace in all the industrialized countries who may once have attended worship, or were taken by their parents when they were young, but for whom it is now, as they themselves will say, 'meaningless'.⁴

Academic theology, in its various disciplines, has scarcely been able to isolate itself from the now near-global dimensions of disenchantment. Systematic theologians especially – charged as they are with formulating faith in contemporary idioms – have, by and large, been concerned with questions of theistic meaning in the age of modernity for at least a century and a half. Biblical scholarship, in its dedication to the hermeneutical questions entailed in finding for our time meaning in ancient texts, has similarly grasped the nettle of modernity, and, more recently, post-modernity. Liturgical scholars have tended to be more historicist in their approach,⁵ though, as I am reminded in conversation, 'most liturgists, except those hopelessly lost in a kind of romantic dream, are engaged in the project of persuading and inviting to participation.'⁶ Engagement with contemporary intellectual method in liturgical studies has mostly taken the form of ritual studies and the study of symbols.⁷ In the most recent period a new development seems to have emerged, bringing to the study of worship sociological, hermeneutical, philosophical and ethnographical points of view.⁸ There is also a small but vibrant literature on the semiotics

4. See Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: the renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 13–20, 260–6, on *meaning* as more fundamental than questions of *validity* (truth or falsity); then see e.g., *ibid.*, 417, 420, 425, on the relationship of meaning and validity.

5. So, for example, Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, 5.

6. Gordon Lathrop in a private communication.

7. See below, ch. 4, nn. 5 and 83.

8. I am thinking, for example, of Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith: a liturgical methodology in the mode of Paul Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988); Kieran Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy: re-presentations of the holy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1991); Bridget Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics: interpreting liturgical rites in performance* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994); Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: on*

of worship, on which I comment in my own text, though in less detail than it deserves.⁹ I have not, however, found another work which attempts to relate worship to the theoretical discussion of meaning through the twentieth century, which is what I felt I needed to do.

Soon after beginning, I saw that to have chosen ‘meaning’ as the field of inquiry was to take the largest, most cumbersome, least sharply honed instrument available. There are many other words in English which might have offered greater precision. ‘Denotation’ and ‘connotation’, for example, is a pair which appealed to some theorists earlier in the twentieth century. ‘Sense’ and ‘reference’ is an even older pair. ‘Signification’ is a conceptualization on which I have heavily depended, along with its more or less adjacent neighbour, ‘significance’. ‘Intention’ and ‘intentionality’ also offer themselves. ‘Meaning’, by contrast, is a kind of catch-all grab-bag word that we throw around all of these. ‘Meaning’ can range from the entries in dictionaries to ‘the meaning of life’. Not only is the subject matter elusive; it is well-nigh inexhaustible. There have been times in my study for the book in which it has seemed to me that the human quest for meaning is not much different from, and not much less slight in scale than, the quest for God. I am indeed inclined to think the two quests or questions are not so far removed from one another.

Yet it does seem to me that this *is* the word, in all its breadth and complexity, which we want – for the reason that the subject matter in which we are interested, worship, itself contains this great range of senses and references.¹⁰ Sometimes the question a worshipper asks is with respect to our most sharply defined sort of meaning: that of the preacher’s words or concerning the arcane language of the prayers. On other occasions it will be more equivocal: why does the priest move to this place in the sanctuary for this part of the liturgy? And on yet other occasions the question of meaning will be as large as the worshipper’s life – what would it mean for her to try to live in the way suggested. At some points what is at stake perhaps has more to do with what we might call ‘disposition’ or ‘ambience’ or ‘feeling’ – for example the effects of the architecture,

the liturgical consummation of philosophy (Oxford: Blackwells Publishers Ltd., 1998); and Martin D. Stringer, *On the Perception of Worship: the ethnography of worship in four Christian congregations in Manchester* (Birmingham University Press, 1999).

9. See below, pp. 129–34.

10. Taylor, *Sources*, 18, similarly remarks on the useful complexity of ‘meaning’: ‘Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate. There is thus something particularly appropriate to our condition in the polysemy of the word “meaning”: lives can have or lack it when they have or lack a point; while it also applies to language and other forms of expression . . . The problem of the meaning of life is therefore on our agenda.’

or the way in which the space is lit, or the style and arrangement of the furnishings. The music will always have been of central importance. And hardly less significant will have been the style, the manner, the bearing of the leader(s) – whether this communicated distance, officialdom, ritual propriety or pastoral warmth; or perhaps, at an opposite extreme, informality and conviviality. In the end, each of these things will have contributed directly to the meaning – and the ‘meaningfulness’ or otherwise – of the event. Enveloping all of these – that is, on its largest and most daunting scale – is the question whether ‘God’, as represented in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, can ‘mean’ anything for people living in our thoroughly secularized age. All these angles are held within the question of ‘the meaning of worship’.

In my own search for illumination I began with the theories of meaning which were (just) still being explored in Anglo-American analytic philosophy. This was to some extent because the term ‘theory of meaning’ had been especially associated with this style of philosophy. It was quickly apparent to me that any theory of meaning for worship would have to be funded differently. I mentioned just now, for example, the great range in *kinds* of meaning transacted in a worship service. Much, perhaps the preponderance, of such meaning is transmitted not in linguistic signifiers as such, but in what has been called the ‘the grain of the voice’ – not just *what* is said but *the manner of its being said*.¹¹ But of this, analytic philosophy could have no comprehension; it methodically excluded all meanings other than semantic and syntactical ones. Nor do meaning theories conceived in this style have a sense of what has been called ‘the creation of... a public space’ – a shared perspective from which speaker and hearer are able to ‘survey the world together’;¹² whereas one of the most critical aspects of the meaning of a worship service is that it is constructed collaboratively – by those who are the sign-producers (those who have been its planners and who now bring it into effect) and the sign-recipients (those who must ‘make sense’ of the signs in the comprehensive way I have already suggested).

For these and associated reasons I turned to what are loosely called (by English speakers!) ‘Continental’ styles of philosophy. These used to be grounded either in Husserl’s phenomenological ‘constitution’ of

11. Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice’ in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 179–89.

12. See Charles Taylor, ‘Theories of Meaning’ in *Human Agency and Language: philosophical papers 1* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 259.

meaning by a perceiving subject, or in Saussure's structuralist and semi-otic analyses of language. The one lives on, though massively and critically adjusted, in 'construction of meaning' theorists such as Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, more recently, with these writers' disciples. The other legacy has passed to the so-called post-structuralists or deconstructionists, of whom I suppose Jacques Derrida is still the most widely known.

Notwithstanding major differences between these 'late-modern' theorists of meaning or signification there are certain similarities: Derrida's 'difference' has affinities with Ricoeur's 'distanciation' and with Merleau-Ponty's 'gap' or 'dehiscence'.¹³ No one, that is, is able now to endorse the notion of 'pure' meanings – self-evident independently of any context and stripped of all material signification. On the other hand those standing in the phenomenological tradition do still argue that one can speak of the production of meaning, albeit through what Ricoeur calls 'the round-about route' – 'through the mediate comprehension of human signs.'¹⁴ I have generally followed this way.

In the middle part of my book, I join to these middle and late twentieth-century theorists the writings of a thinker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, grievously overlooked in his own day but now widely recognized as perhaps the foremost thinker produced in the United States, Charles Sanders Peirce.¹⁵ In the company of much more erudite students of his work, I have come to think that Peirce perhaps offers the best chance we have at this time of theorizing our construction and transaction of meaning.

By the 1970s all the major theoretical frames within which twentieth-century theorization of meaning had been undertaken – analytic philosophy, phenomenology, structuralism and formalism – had pretty much fallen into desuetude. Further, in the widely influential deconstructionist postmodernity which ensued, the question of meaning was itself deemed virtually to be meaningless. One of my convictions – a kind of axiom for

13. Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance: the difference between the thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); and M. C. Dillon (ed.), *Ecart & Différence: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on seeing and writing* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1997).

14. See for example, Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 112, 155, or 266.

15. See the 'Open Letter to President Bill Clinton Concerning the Fate of the Peirce Papers', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 33 (1997), 836, signed by twenty eminent German philosophers who, among other things, say: 'Peirce is considered by many scholars and scientists as the most important, versatile and profound American philosopher.'

which I find it difficult to give further substantiation – is that people for the most part shape their meanings from the stocks of meaning available to them.¹⁶ It also seems to me that, though there may *seem* to be a ‘great gulf fixed’ between academic formulations and such forms of thought as occur naturally to people in everyday life as ‘making sense’, in fact powerful lines of continuity can be traced between them – even when such connections are submerged or not apparent. Especially in a postmodern age, but before that, too, the most abstruse theorizations are immediately present to people in the forms of the built spaces they move through every day, in the technologies of mass communication, in the effects of globalized economies, and doubtless in other carriers of public meaning.¹⁷ If my suppositions are correct, both these large cultural circumstances – our dependence on cultural norms and the immediacy to people of postmodernist precepts – will, in their combination, have contributed to an ongoing sense of difficulty experienced by people in personal and public life in ‘making sense of anything’.¹⁸ One does have this impression. Paradoxically, I have found it equally impossible to rid myself of the conviction that people do succeed in meaning things every day, as they also constantly seek to apprehend the meanings of others. Some theorists thus have the candour to admit that the business of meaning goes on even when our most powerful intellects are unable to say how that happens.¹⁹ More directly, notwithstanding the deleterious condition of institutional Christianity from which I began these remarks, there continue to be priests and leaders (on one side) and worshippers (on the other) who greatly desire to know how to let these ancient mythic forms on which – for whatever reasons – we have come to depend as our sources of meaning, be *meaningful*. The work which follows has been directed and empowered by this simple need on my own part. I think this is the only reasonable explanation for a classroom assignment becoming the virtually all-consuming obsession of a decade.

The great sweep of the word ‘meaning’, in its application to worship, has given to the work something of an hourglass shape, wide at either end, narrow in the middle. Led by my conviction about people shaping their meanings from the meanings available to them, the work attempts in Part I to set liturgical constructions of meaning within the larger cultural

16. So Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (University of Chicago Press, 1975), 66: ‘Man [*sic*] lives in the meanings he is able to discern. He extends himself into that which he finds coherent and is at home there.’

17. See further, below, p. 45. 18. See below, ch. 1, n. 9, and pp. 50–1.

19. See below, ch. 1, n. 8.

context of late twentieth-century meaning-theory. This, then, is one of the wide ends of the work. In the middle part, drawing upon Charles Peirce's semiotic theories, I attempt to say how meaning is constructed, transmitted and apprehended actually within a worship service. But – again because the meanings of worship cannot be sealed from the meanings available to people in their lifeworld generally – the last part opens out once more to consider the question of theistic meaning for people deeply ensconced in, and shaped by, the axioms of disenchantment.

No such undertaking will escape an equivocation between description and prescription. My supposition that we can only make meanings from meanings available to us has meant that I have tried to be descriptive – descriptive, that is, of our time and of our cultural dispositions. I have tried to understand what makes sense to us and why it does so, but, of course, I can scarcely conceal from myself (let alone anyone else) that in all this there is little that is strictly objective. At every point I have been making hefty judgements – about how we *should* or how we *could* make meaning, not least theistic meanings, in such an age.

Perhaps the simplest thing, then, is to come back to the quasi-confession; to own that it has from the beginning been my own quest, my own question. I have wanted to know as well as I could how, in this age of Christian belief, we might 'make sense' of – i.e., draw sense from – the ritual acts of Christians assembled in worship. That the chronicle of this personal quest has become a book perused by others strikes me as a happy accident – a 'surplus' Paul Ricoeur might have called it.

Part I

The making of meaning

Meaning in worship

Meaningful worship

A worshipper attends a worship service. Perhaps the event is for her deeply meaningful. Or conceivably she will leave doubtful as to its point and purpose. Someone, a priest or minister or possibly a team of people, had planned and administered the service of worship presumably with the intention of undertaking some meaningful thing in the world.

What sort of meaning is this which some people construct and in which other people participate which we call a liturgical event? Or, to put the question in a slightly different way, what would a theory of meaning look like which could guide or facilitate the achievement of this kind of meaning? Or, to have yet a third shot at it, is it possible to give some account of the ways in which the meanings of worship are organized and transmitted by those who lead and are appropriated by those who participate in a worship service?

In many respects this question in its multiple versions is my quarry in all that follows. The subject matter, meaning, will lead us soon enough into various kinds of abstraction. But we are also to speak about an urgent practical assignment undertaken weekly (at least) by those who lead public Christian worship, and about a lived experience on the part of those who participate. (If this seems at this early stage to suggest an essential bifurcation between leaders and participants, let me indicate in advance my steady insistence that these are symbiotic engagements.) I propose therefore to begin by constructing a typical scenario in which something of 'the meaning of worship' is played out. Of course, two or three hundred such conjectural scenes could be regarded as

typical somewhere within the geographical and denominational spread of western Christianity; but the scene I shall draw is, I think, as recognizable as any.

My hypothetical worshipper approaches a building which in various ways indicates itself as a place where Christians gather to worship, a church. Already there will be certain signs which speak in a preliminary but reasonably reliable way of continuities with practices which are familiar to my subject, but there will also be some features quite particular to the place. In order to sharpen both these dimensions I will hypothesize that she is in an unfamiliar setting – in a town not her own and approaching a church which she has not previously attended. Still, already the design and proportions of the building speak: first, about the continuities which knit the opinions of those who initially constructed the building and of those whose worship it now accommodates into the broad bands of agreement that make these ‘Christian’ or ‘Catholic’. But the building will speak, also and secondly, of the differences, the particular assumptions and convictions of the people to whose worship she has come. Some of these indicators of familiarity and of strangeness will impact themselves upon my subject.

She enters the vestibule and passes into the main worship space. Already, whether or not she construes the matter in this way, questions of ‘meaning’ are up and running. What sense is to be made of this space and its dispositions? What is she to make of its physical dimensions: its height or otherwise, and its shapes and proportions? For example what meanings are to be drawn from the relationship – distance or proximity – between the area specified for the people who are the congregation and the spaces dedicated to those who lead? What is suggested by the colours used, and the lighting? What of the building’s warmth or its coldness? What are the objects within it, what are they intended to mean both in themselves and in their disposition to each other? What do the sounds mean: here the hushed tones of preparation strike her almost physically in their contrast to the buzz of conversation with which she is familiar in her own place of worship. So then what is to be made of other aspects of the demeanour of those already assembled – their posture, their interaction or lack of it, and so on? And, finally, what does the bearing and general appearance (particularly the dress!)¹ of those who seem to be designated leaders indicate about

1. See Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy*, 97–105, on the significance of human dress generally and of liturgical dress specifically.

their understanding of what is to happen within the next few minutes as the worship commences?²

All these are still preliminary (though not misleading) indicators of what the act of worship means, at least in the understanding of this community of people among whom my subject finds herself. And, as I said a little earlier, all these significations (many of which are constituted for her by their similarities with and differences from that with which she is familiar) generate lively questions of meaning for the visitor. But, with the commencement of the service proper, a good many other factors will be drawn into this question-and-construction of meaning: the linguistic elements, both the words used and the manner of their utterance; the gestures and facial expressions of the leader(s); the proxemics (where people place themselves in relation to others); the coherence of the events or their disconnectedness; and, perhaps more powerfully than all of these, the music – its choice and its execution – will each and in conjunction importantly become bearers of meaning (or conceivably ciphers without meaning) for the person whose experience we are trying to touch. By the time of the final blessing and dismissal, our worshipper will have heard, seen, touched, tasted and smelt a plenitude of thickly woven sense impressions, the totality of which she will judge either to have been ‘meaningful’ or otherwise.

Of course, to put it like this is to point towards yet another level of meaning or meaningfulness, one which lies somewhere within all these significations but which also goes beyond them. That is, the action within which she has been participant for the previous hour or so will find its most far-reaching degree of ‘meaningfulness’ in terms of its capacity to interpret to her, or for her, some dimension of her ordinary lived experience. It will be meaningful for her if it has helped to ‘make sense’ of otherwise discordant elements of her experience; it will have accomplished this if it has enabled her to ‘comprehend’ our human condition generally and her own circumstances particularly; if it has helped her to ‘see’ things more clearly or to ‘make connections’ which otherwise had eluded her. Eventually we shall want to say that one of the connections which is critically in view, if the action as a whole is to be deemed ‘Christian’, will be a connectedness between herself in her particularity and the tradition within which Christianity is carried. But for the moment we may leave

2. See Herbert Muck, ‘Die Rezeption einer Dorfliturgie’ in (Rainer Volp, ed.) *Zeichen: Semiotik in Theologie und Gottesdienst* (Munich and Mainz: Chr. Kaiser and Matthias Grünewald, 1982), 266–91, where such details are analysed from a semiotic point of view.

these considerations out of view and stay simply with those conditions which permitted the event to be, for this worshipper, a meaningful one (or, as I have noted, meant that it was meaningless).

All this has been to describe the process from the point of view of a worshipper, a person who has been the recipient of this series of significations called a worship service. ('Recipient' here is not to be taken in any sense as passive; I shall want to insist that 'sign-reception' is a role as actively constructive as 'sign-production'.) That is, on the other side of this concentrated work of 'making sense', there had been an equal engagement in the construction of meaning on the part of those who were the planners and leaders of the worship. Just as my hypothetical worshipper could have been represented in many different ways, so the assumptions and intentions of those who are leaders of worship cover a broad spectrum. At some point, perhaps towards one end of such a span, there will be leaders whose chief confidence for the event's being meaningful is vested in the familiarity and durability of the liturgical forms – the words, the actions, the vestments, the rubrics. Such leaders see their role as subordinate in some sense to the ritual prescriptions, as the facilitator or enactor of these. But other leaders will presume a great deal more personal intervention, taking it for granted that their words, their style, their formulations will be the means which persuade, convince or convert. Most leaders, I suppose, fall somewhere between the two, allowing to the familiar forms an importance of signification and yet assuming that they, the leaders, also have the capacity to render those forms meaningful or otherwise.³ In all this – that is, given the diversity of supposed sources of meaning in worship and the variety of ways in which such meanings will be realized – the constant factor is that people are attempting to offer a meaningful account of the world, of God, of our human condition. (Not quite out of view, and therefore important as a sort of counter possibility, I suppose we should not overlook a cynicism in which the performance is undertaken without conviction – the extreme form of what Max Weber called 'routinization'.⁴ The possibility always haunts, but most practitioners I have known do still believe and hope that their work 'means something'.)

The activities on both sides of this construction of meaning are presumably sufficiently recognizable to be scarcely in dispute. The much more

3. Gordon Lathrop, for example (*Holy Things: a liturgical theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)), can say: 'The *liturgy* is a sanctuary of meaning for us' (p. 217); but he also says (p. 204), 'This book . . . has attempted . . . to discuss how . . . traditional symbolic actions and words *might be taught* as meaningful' (my emphases).

4. Weber, *Economy and Society*, e.g., 246–54, 489, 492, 530.

elusive question, announced at the outset, is whether, or how, we may give some *account* of this human undertaking. There appear to be many different reasons which conspire to make this difficult.

Perhaps the first complication already lies in the breadth and mobility of the notion itself: meaning. I take it that it has not escaped my reader that I have already slipped between the notions 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness'. But this easy commutation conceals the fact that they are not exactly the same things: the second is a quantitative notion, something is or was more or less meaningful. The first idea is a qualitative one: which meanings? Whose meanings?⁵ We can practically assume that the meanings intended (by the leaders, shall we say, or by the designers of the liturgy) will not coincide identically with the meanings apprehended by the worshipper. In one sense all that accords with standard semiotic or communication theory. But the liturgical theologians Lawrence Hoffman, Margaret Mary Kelliher and others have given a sharpened particularity to this in their distinctions (Hoffman's taxonomy) between private, official, public and normative meanings.⁶ Meaning, it turns out, is a very slippery commodity.⁷

Second, and still in a very general way, while human beings constantly, endlessly and (in some respects!) unthinkingly go about the business of making and exchanging meaning, the achievement of a coherent and theoretical explication of this process appears to be extraordinarily elusive.⁸

5. On 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness' see further, below, pp. 170–1.

6. Lawrence A. Hoffman, 'How Ritual Means: ritual circumcision in rabbinic culture and today', *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993), 78–97 (esp. pp. 79–82). See also Margaret Mary Kelliher, 'Liturgical Theology: a task and a method', *Worship* 62 (1988), esp. pp. 6–7; also the same author's essays 'Liturgy: an ecclesial act of meaning', *Worship* 59 (1985), 482–97, and 'Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance', *Worship* 67 (1993), 292–318. David Power, 'People at Liturgy' in (Paul Brand, Edward Schillebeeckx and Anto Weiler eds.) *Twenty Years of Concilium – retrospect and prospect* (Concilium 170) (New York and Edinburgh: The Seabury Press and T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1983), 9–10, speaks of 'three kinds of meaning that one may distinguish in the actual celebration of liturgy.' Finally, see Stringer, *Perception of Worship*, 67, 69–72, 125, who similarly distinguishes between 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses, and between 'official teaching' and 'popular belief' (pp. 172, 177).

7. All this is still in terms of how the English language works. Things become yet more complicated when one starts to look into the way(s) in which 'meaning' works even in other closely related European languages. See John R. Searle, 'Meaning, Communication and Representation' in (Richard E. Grandy and Richard Warner, eds.) *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality: intentions, categories, ends* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 209.

8. Nearly every writer on theories of meaning notes this curious discrepancy between our ability, on the one hand, to partake in meaningful intercourse and, on the other, to explain this ability. See for example: L. Jonathon Cohen, *The Diversity of Meaning* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1962), 24; Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning', *Synthese* 17 (1967), 308; Mark Platts, *Ways of Meaning: an introduction to a philosophy of language* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 1–2; Gilbert Ryle, 'The Theory of Meaning' in (C. A. Mace, ed.) *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century: a Cambridge symposium* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957; second edition 1966), 239; Gerhard Sauter, *The Question of Meaning: a theological and philosophical orientation* (Grand

Then, third, beyond the realm of theoretical discourse, we are constantly reminded on every side that our western, industrialized culture is one in which, or for which, meaning has become a global problem, i.e., one affecting people's perspectives or attitudes to life at all levels of society.⁹ In every bookstore popular treatments of 'the search for meaning' abound.¹⁰

A more particular version of this (i.e., with respect to a theory of meaning for worship) rests in the cultural circumstances in which institutional Christianity now finds itself in such societies (to which arena my discussion is confined). I shall want to urge the point that, immersed as they are in this culture, and as its products, believing Christians cannot suppose themselves immune from the corrosion of theistic meanings deeply embodied in that culture, for which condition I have already invoked Weber's term 'disenchantment'. The circumstance, now publicly apparent for at least a century and a half and doubtless underway for something closer to four centuries, seems only to become more exacerbated with time, a growing popular quest for 'spirituality' notwithstanding.

In this next section I want to confine myself to the multi-stranded history of meaning-theory in academic or theoretical discourse through the century just now closed. In the light of this I will return to the question of meaning in worship. In the subsequent chapter I turn to the broader cultural and societal aspects of meaning.

'Theory of meaning' at the end of the twentieth century

Any rehearsal of the history of 'theories of meaning' in the western world through the twentieth century, in such limited compass as I can here give it, will suffer distortion by compression and omission. That said, to

Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 75, n. 5; and Taylor, *Human Agency*, 248. Earl R. MacCormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 23, makes the same point about metaphors.

9. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or the cultural logic of late capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); 53–4; or see Mark C. Taylor, 'Postmodern Times' in (Michael Griffith and James Tulip, eds.) *Proceedings of the Religion, Literature and Arts Conference, 1995* (Sydney: The RLA Project, 1995), 77: 'In the absence of an overarching [spiritual, social and political] framework, questions of meaning and motivation become unanswerable and the problem of legitimation becomes irresolvable.' See also Sauter, *The Question of Meaning*, 6–10, where he shows that in the German language at some point in the nineteenth century the sense of the word *Sinn* ('meaning') moved from being a reference to lexicalizations (the meanings one looks up in dictionaries) to 'a category of reality'.

10. The citation of examples is surely redundant; I refer here for convenience to the title of a popular series of radio broadcasts given by the Australian Broadcasting Commission conducted by Caroline Jones.

characterize that discussion as having operated for the first six or seven decades of the century within three relatively well-defined theatres – for the most part in surprising isolation from each other – until all of them collapsed from exhaustion, whereupon the void was filled by two newer aspiring claimants, would not, I think, be wholly inaccurate. By any account, the decade of the 1960s stands as a watershed in intellectual method. There would also be widespread agreement that the three dominant approaches to meaning prior to the 1960s were: first, the so-called ‘English language’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon’ style, generally described as ‘analytic’ and said to be ‘objectivist’ or ‘empirical’ in its general orientation; second, the ‘phenomenological’ method deriving from Edmund Husserl and thus standing within the heritage of German idealism; and, third, ‘structuralism’, taking its departure from Ferdinand de Saussure’s revolutionary method of linguistics and having certain affinities (though not a lot of direct commerce) with the ‘formalist’ or ‘explanatory’ tendencies operating in the Anglo-American world.

The situation created by their demise is widely described as ‘post-modernity’; though by the century’s end it had become notoriously difficult to say exactly what that meant or wherein it consists. To say, as I am inclined to do, that the postmodern period is characterized by two styles of thought – the deconstructive programme most usually associated with Jacques Derrida, and the newly emergent (but in fact very ancient) field of study calling itself semiotics, the study of signs and signification – will thus be more contentious.

My motivation in attempting to sketch, however briefly, the course of these movements through the twentieth century is (to reiterate) my conviction that people make meaning, can only make meaning, from the meanings which are ‘available’ to them. Accordingly, the meanings we can find for ourselves at the dawn of the new millennium are tied directly back to those mighty disputations in which, in one way or another, we have participated, and their outcomes; and – since I also assert that the meanings of worship cannot be insulated from the meanings available to us in the world at large, even when the academic clashes seem distantly stratospheric – neither are the effects of these struggles absent from the construction of meaningful liturgy.¹¹

11. So Rainer Volp, *Liturgik: die Kunst Gott zu feiern*, 2 volumes (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Mohn, 1991–3), 43: ‘The meaning of a service of worship waxes and wanes to the degree that its asseverations engage with those of the specific time and place; they integrate and transform them or they distance themselves from them.’

Analytic philosophy

According to one of its foremost exponents, the question which its founders placed at the centre of analytic philosophy was: how does language 'hook on' to the world.¹² The sentence usefully gives us three points of reference: analytic philosophy saw itself as taking an *objective world* in total seriousness; it conceived meaning entirely in terms of *linguistic meanings*; and it saw as its task the *explication* of how these two things related.

First, then, the 'objectification of the world' was self-evidently a general and central part of modern consciousness almost from its beginning,¹³ reaching its apogee by the mid-twentieth century with those stages or aspects of the analytic approach known as 'logical positivism' and the 'verificationist' theories of meaning.¹⁴ We can pick up the thread, however, already at the beginning of the century in Gottlob Frege's famous essay on sense and reference (first published in 1892), often seen as the *point de départ* for analytic theory.¹⁵ Frege's opening sentences already flag the issue pinpointed by Putnam, namely the nature of the relationship between words and things. Hence his famous and influential distinction between the *sense* of a word and its *reference*. Frege says that its sense is that aspect of a word which allows a competent speaker of the language to recognize it as a sign. We might say that a word's sense is that dimension of its meaning which is catalogued in dictionaries, the kind of meaning we are seeking when we ask: what does such-and-such word *mean*? Its reference, on the other hand, is that dimension of its capacity for meaning which allows it to pick out one item from another in an objective world: "Air" means this gaseous substance which keeps us alive.' As we shall see in a moment, Frege noted that a word's sense can move about disarmingly. On the other hand it is its power of reference, that is its capacity for attachment to an extra-linguistic reality, which alone allows us to decide questions of truth and falsity: 'We are therefore justified in not being satisfied with the sense of a sentence, and in inquiring also as to its reference... Why...? Because, and to the extent that, we are concerned with its truth value... It

12. Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 43, 105. An almost identical sentence is given by John Deely, *Basics of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 18.

13. See Taylor, *Sources*, 160–1; or Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*, 311.

14. Putnam, *Human Face*, 105–6.

15. G. Frege, 'On Sense and Reference', *Philosophical Studies* (P. T. Geach and M. Black, eds.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 56–78 (originally published as 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100 (1892), 25–50).

is the *striving for truth* that drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference.¹⁶

The objectivity of the world as that against which truth or falsity is decided, and thus where linguistic meanings are to be tested, becomes the touchstone for analytic philosophy, beginning with the Vienna Circle of the 1920s, and then in its translation to an English-language setting through the migration of members of the circle to the United States in the 1930s, and through Bertrand Russell's influence at Cambridge University. It is encapsulated, for example, in Moritz Schlick's sentence (a leading member of the Vienna Circle): 'data have no owner,'¹⁷ and in the notion of 'meaning as verification'.¹⁸ In some strong sense, the preoccupation (with the relation between 'language' and 'meaning') is emblemized in the 'truth-condition' theories of meaning pioneered by Alfred Tarski¹⁹ and carried forward in an English-language setting by Donald Davidson.²⁰

Turning to the second item specified in Putnam's sentence, language as the seat of meaning, it is of utmost importance to recall that Frege came to questions of meaning primarily as a mathematician or logician.²¹ This fact predetermined that linguistic meanings would be seen – by all means, in continuity with the long tradition of western philosophy – as ideal entities. *Meaning*, it is supposed, *transcends space, time and local usage*.

16. 'On Sense and Reference', 63 (my emphases). On the great difficulties of translating Frege's terms into precise English equivalents, see the two essays by Eugeniusz Grodzinski: 'Some Remarks on Joan Weiner's *Frege in Perspective*', *Semiotica* 99 3/4 (1993), 348–51, and 'The Defectiveness of Gottlob Frege's Basic Logical–Semantic Terminology', *Semiotica* 103 3/4 (1995), 291–308 (on 'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten' particularly, see pp. 302–3).

17. Moritz Schlick, 'Meaning and Verification' in (Herbert Feigl and Wilfred Sellars, eds.) *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), 168.

18. Classically, A. J. Ayer in his *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 16: 'We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, he [*sic*] knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express – that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false.'

19. Alfred Tarski, 'The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics' in (Herbert Feigl and Wilfred Sellars, eds.) *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), 52–84.

20. Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning' (see n. 8 above). Taylor, *Human Agency*, 252–3, singles out truth conditional theories of meaning as particularly representative of Anglo-Saxon styles of philosophy. The two-part essay of Michael Dummett, 'What is a Theory of Meaning?', now in (Gareth Evans and John McDowell, eds.) *Truth and Meaning: essays in semantics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), is generally said to have exposed the deep flaws in theories of meaning predicated on truth conditions.

21. See the Preface written by Newton Garver for the English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. xiii. Garver's brief introductory essay is one of the most succinct and accessible treatments I have come across of the issues here being discussed.

A mathematical formulation or logical proposition does not change in changing circumstances. Similarly the meaning of a word, a sentence or an intellectual concept must remain identifiable across time and space; it cannot mean one thing today and another tomorrow. One cannot – Humpty-Dumpty like – make words mean anything one wants them to. One thus catches a hint of impatience in Frege's recognition that linguistic units of natural languages do *not* in fact behave as they should! They can slip in and out of meanings. Strictly this is an aberrance. Meaning needs to be stable and words should remain so too.²² The assumptions, first, that meanings are conceptual – we might say metaphysical – entities not subject to the vagaries of spatio-temporal existence, and, second, that language does nevertheless name real entities in the world, is the conundrum with which meaning-theory for the entire length of this tradition will find itself entangled.

This brings us, then, to the third item in Putnam's sentence: the question of how language 'hooks on' to the world. Given that meanings are ideal things and given that they must refer to a material world, analytic philosophy was committed to what Putnam calls in other places, 'A God's Eye View of the Universe'.²³ This is the conviction that the universe consists in a fixed number of extra-linguistic entities, which, even if they are not known and named in human languages, nevertheless *could*, in principle, be so named.²⁴ The task of philosophy thus becomes that of achieving as 'true' an account of the world as human language can manage; that is, to arrange the best possible 'fit' between the meanings carried in words, sentences or descriptions and extra-linguistic reality. In the end – these things are invariably seen after the event – the system could only collapse under the weight it placed on itself (one can only speak of it as a 'God's Eye View' when one realizes its impossibility). The problem is not just in the obvious impossibility of achieving a 'God's Eye View'. It is that the language through which, or in which, we encounter the world has as much to do with shaping the reality so encountered as whatever 'objectivity' that reality may carry in itself. Moritz Schlick had

22. Frege, 'On Sense and Reference', 58: 'The regular connexion between a sign, its sense, and its reference is of such a kind that to the sign there corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite reference . . . To be sure exceptions to this regular behaviour occur. To every expression belonging to a complete totality of signs, there should certainly correspond a definite sense; but natural languages often do not satisfy this condition'.

23. Putnam, *Human Face*, c.g., 11, 50; also in his *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), c.g., 48–9.

24. See Putnam's essay 'Truth and Convention' in *Human Face*, 96–104.

perhaps caught half the truth in his insistence on 'ownerless data'. But another writer from within the analytic tradition completed the truth with his equal insistence that 'Language is the knife with which we cut our facts.'²⁵

It becomes clear that the analytic theories of meaning both struggled with and remained ensconced within the ancient dualism of ideality and materiality, given such massive impetus for the modern period by Descartes's splitting of reality into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. One observer thinks that 'the last timbers of this intellectual scaffolding' were already being dismantled from the middle of the nineteenth century, and that the 'objectivist' tendencies of positivism (the analytical method) were only hastily reinstated in order to meet the cultural anxieties unleashed in the catastrophic First and Second World Wars.²⁶ However one views this historical thesis, it is clear that by, or from, the 1960s this way of attempting to account for meaning had reached its termination.

Such was the (from our perspective, astonishing) degree of separation between English-language philosophers and those styles they chose to regard as 'Continental', that the circumstance that the latter consisted in two quite different approaches was mostly unnoticed. The two were: the phenomenological legacy of Edmund Husserl, and structuralism deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure. Coincidentally or otherwise, Frege, Husserl and Saussure were all relatively contemporaneous.

Phenomenology

If the self-appointed task of the positivists had been to deliver certainty for an age of cultural and political upheaval,²⁷ this was, strikingly enough, identically the agenda assumed by Husserl and his 'phenomenological' project. For Husserl, the most anxious-making aspect of modern thought was its rupture of intellectual method into endlessly fissiparous disciplines: the newly emergent sciences. Philosophy – the subject matter of which is 'pure', not 'applied' like the sciences – seemed to him to be in the greatest conceivable danger. He believed this to be the product precisely of the 'objectivist' tendencies of modernity, its predilection for impartiality or distanciation, a style of thinking he termed 'naturalistic': 'All

25. Friedrich Waismann, 'Verifiability' in (G. H. R. Parkinson, ed.) *The Theory of Meaning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 58.

26. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: the hidden agenda of modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 143–60.

27. Toulmin, *ibid.*

natural science is naive in regard to its point of departure. The nature that it will investigate is for it simply there . . . It is the aim of natural science to know these unquestioned data in an objectively valid, strictly scientific manner.’²⁸

Husserl believed that such ‘science’ was illegitimately so-called; the true science would attend to things, not in terms of their natural appearance (which, we learn, is always deceptive), but in terms of their true ‘essence’. It was to this end that he developed his theory of ‘reduction’ or ‘suspension’ or ‘epoché’. This is a kind of radicalization of the Cartesian doubt:²⁹ one must suspend one’s natural *intuitions* of the world in order to become conscious of one’s *apprehensions* – otherwise expressed, to attend to the fact that what one encounters are not things, objectively present, but rather the *phenomena* (appearances) which present themselves in one’s mind. Hence, his ‘phenomenological’ approach.³⁰

Exactly opposite, then, to the decision of the analytic philosophers to turn towards the objective world as the place against which truth, and hence meaning, is to be tested, Husserl saw such a world as consisting only of constantly changing forms. He thus sought an irrefragable basis for truth and meaning, the only basis of philosophy as the true science, in the subjective world of one’s innermost apprehensions of reality. Diametrically opposite to an understanding of a world in which ‘data have no owner’, Husserl saw the only *truly trustworthy* datum as that given by ‘the infinite field of absolute mental processes’.³¹ For Husserl, then, the world is not so much ‘out there’ as it is ‘constituted’ by my own interaction with it:

28. Edmund Husserl, ‘Philosophy as Rigorous Science’ in (Quentin Laura, ed.) *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 85. See, similarly, his *Cartesian Meditations: an introduction to phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), 117/84. (It is conventional to cite Husserl’s original pagination for the *Cartesian Meditations*; I will observe this convention but I will also give the page numbers in Dorion Cairns’ English translation following the slash).

29. *Cartesian Meditations*, 56/16.

30. See for example the summary statement in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology: first book* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1982), 114: ‘Let us make this clear to ourselves in detail. In the natural attitude we simply *effect* all the acts by virtue of which the world is there for us. We live naively in perceiving and experiencing . . . In the phenomenological attitude . . . we *prevent the effecting* of all such cogitative positings, i.e., we “parenthesize” the positings effected . . . Instead of living *in* them, instead of effecting *them*, we effect acts of *reflection* directed to them; and we seize upon them themselves as the *absolute* being which they are. We are now living completely in such acts of the second degree, acts the datum of which is the infinite field of absolute mental processes – the fundamental *field of phenomenology*’ (his emphases).

31. The reference is to the passage cited in the previous note; see also Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 158.

Anything belonging to the world, any spatiotemporal being, exists for me – that is to say, is accepted by me – in that I experience it, perceive it, remember it, think of it somehow, judge about it, value it, desire it, or the like . . . I can enter no world other than the one which gets its sense and acceptance or status in and from me, myself.³²

Not the least interesting aspect – for us – of this ‘constitution’ of reality is that it is, for Husserl, an act of ‘meaning’:

Each *cogito*, each conscious process, we may . . . say, ‘means’ something or other and bears in itself, in this manner peculiar to the *meant*, its particular *cogitatum* . . . The house-perception means a house – more precisely, as this individual house – and means it in the fashion peculiar to perception; a house-memory means a house in the fashion peculiar to memory; a house-fantasy, in the fashion peculiar to fantasy.³³

In short: ‘every *cogito* is indeed . . . a meaning of its meant [*Meinung seines Gemeinten*].’³⁴

Husserl’s phenomenology was always vulnerable to the accusation of solipsism – the ‘disconcerting glide from the “for me” into the “from me”’.³⁵ He was himself already sensitive to this and his latter works are dedicated to the attempt (generally judged to be less than successful) to ward off the charge. Through the early and middle parts of the twentieth century his disciples were for the most part engaged in saying how Husserl’s insights into the actively constitutive nature of human meaning-making could relate to a world *actually extant* beyond the subject’s constitution of it. The significant names in this respect are: Heidegger, in turning phenomenology towards the question of Being;³⁶ Roman Ingarden, in deriving from phenomenology a theory of literary reading;³⁷ Merleau-Ponty in his preoccupation with ‘the phenomenology of perception’;³⁸

32. *Cartesian Meditations*, 60/21.

33. *Ibid.*, 71/33 (his emphases).

34. *Ibid.*, 84/46.

35. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: an analysis of his phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 89; similarly, *ibid.*, 10.

36. See John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: repetition, deconstruction and the hermeneutic project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 38, 52–8.

37. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: an investigation on the borderlines of ontology, logic and theory of literature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) and *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

38. E.g., Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962); but one should take cognizance of James Edie’s introductory note to Merleau-Ponty’s *The Primacy of Perception*, to the effect that *Phenomenology of Perception* was never intended other than as the presentation of a thesis for a much more wide-ranging application of phenomenology ‘on imagination, language, culture, reason, and on aesthetic, ethical, political, and even religious experience’ (Introduction to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. xv; see also, *ibid.*, p. 25).

Alfred Schutz's phenomenological sociology;³⁹ Emmanuel Levinas' studies on alterity;⁴⁰ and Paul Ricoeur with his interest in 'the long and more sure way of reflection upon the dynamics of the great cultural symbols'.⁴¹ The several mid-century 'existentialists' (for example, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre) also derive from Husserl's phenomenology.⁴²

It has been Jacques Derrida's deconstructive critique, however, which has perhaps exposed the deepest flaw, or troubled inconsistency, in Husserl's work. Strikingly – in view of their virtually opposite approaches to the matter of meaning – this turns out to be the same fault-line as that which underlay the analytic project, namely, a conflict between the supposed ideality of mental events and the materiality of the world on which such cognitive processes must fasten. Derrida shows that the distinctions which Husserl wishes to draw between what he, Husserl, calls 'expression' and 'indication' will not stand.⁴³ 'Expression', for Husserl, consists in 'pure meaning' known immediately to the thinking subject (i.e., without the intervention of material signifiers). 'Indication', by contrast, is such meaning when mixed with the material elements – vocalization or writing – on which human discourse depends. Derrida shows in his characteristic way that this separation of the ideal from the material, and the protection or privileging of the one from or over the other, is impossible: 'Just as expression is not added like a "stratum" to the presence of a pre-expressive sense, so, in the same way, the inside of expression does not accidentally happen to be affected by the outside of indication. Their intertwining (*Verflechtung*) is primordial.'⁴⁴ We are bound to agree with the critique, I think.⁴⁵ We must now accept that human beings are irresolvably

39. Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations: selected writings* (Helmut R. Wagner, ed.) (University of Chicago Press, 1970).

40. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an essay on exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

41. E.g., Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 290.

42. A concise overview of Husserl's phenomenology and that of his major interpreters will be found in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *Phenomenology: the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its interpreters* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967).

43. The work to which Derrida is directing his critique is Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

44. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 86–7.

45. The issues are, admittedly, complicated. I agree with Derrida in terms of the 'entwinement' of physicality and expressivity, yet I stop before the word 'primordial'. What does this mean? Further on in my text I will urge – in dependence on Julia Kristeva's notion of the *chora*, the 'place' or 'space' whence comes language and thought – that one *can* speak meaningfully of some form of prelinguistic awareness. But Kristeva, too, would say that by the time we can speak of 'consciousness', 'thought', or 'language' we have the interweaving of both for which Derrida is arguing. Pickstock, *After Writing*, 106–7, criticizes Derrida's analysis of Husserl; her own treatment in terms of 'the necrophilia of modernity' is at least as elusive, however.