

**RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES IN DIALOGUE:
CHRISTOS YANNARAS' AND JOSEPH KAIPAYIL'S DISTINCT "RELATIONAL ONTOLOGIES"
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Abstract: Two thinkers with radically different backgrounds and no other connection to each other or information about each other, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Dr. Christos Yannaras in Athens, Greece, and Professor of Philosophy Dr. Joseph Kaipayil in Bangalore, India, both articulate a 'Critical Ontology' and a 'Relational Ontology' with striking similarities as well as substantial differences; one of the most interesting aspects of this parallel philosophical production is the observation of both philosophers that a 'relational ontology' cannot but be a 'critical ontology', and vice versa. In this article I will attempt to briefly present the relevant theories of both philosophers and to highlight the common points and differing aspects that call for a direct dialogue between them.

Key words: ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, relational, relationality, relationalism, critical, comparative, India, Greece, person, Christos Yannaras, Joseph Kaipayil

In the course of my research, I have come across a noteworthy similarity in contemporary philosophical currents in Greece and India: two thinkers with radically different backgrounds and no other connection to each other or information about each other¹, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Dr. Christos Yannaras in Athens, Greece, and Professor of Philosophy Dr. Joseph Kaipayil in Bangalore, India, both articulate a 'Critical Ontology' and a 'Relational Ontology' with striking similarities as well as substantial differences and not undeserved claims of philosophical fertility in a post-modern context. One of the most interesting aspects of this parallel philosophical production is the observation of both philosophers that a 'relational ontology' cannot but be a 'critical ontology', and vice versa, for reasons that will be expounded in the following pages. In this article I will attempt to briefly present –in the limitations of a

¹ As I have been informed by them.

short article– the relevant theories of both philosophers and to highlight the common points and differing aspects that call for a direct dialogue between them.

I. Joseph Kaipayil

Joseph Kaipayil (born in 1959) is an Indian philosopher and a Professor of Philosophy at the Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy, Bangalore, India. He expounds a relationalist theory of reality which he proposes as a corollary of a critical stance towards ontology and names it ‘ontic relationalism’. His works include: *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay* (2002), *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology* (2003), *An Essay on Ontology* (2008) and *Relationalism: A Theory of Being* (2009).²

The Indian philosopher expounded his critical ontology with his second book, *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*. For him, “critical ontology considers philosophical questions as ultimately ontological questions and tries to address them from its critical ontological perspective”³. Following a Kantian path, he states that “if we start our philosophical reflection from assumptions and presuppositions, we will surely end up with antinomies”⁴. “An ontology solidly established on critical reflection on the empirical and yet transcending the empirical in search of the being-principles of things is what we call Critical Ontology”.⁵ “A theory is ‘critical’ if it is based on empirical experience. This notion of ‘critical’ may be found in Kant's first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Critical ontology is basically in agreement with the Kantian critique that philosophical knowledge should be grounded on empirical experience”⁶.

But, given Kant’s rejection of ontology and metaphysics, how could one speak of a critical ontology in a Kantian sense? Kaipayil strongly criticizes the tendency of Western Philosophy either to omit ontology and metaphysics from the time of Hume and Kant until our days, or to disconnect philosophical questions pertaining to epistemology, ethics etc. from their ontological roots.⁷ He rejects Kant's claim that all metaphysics is philosophically unproductive, while retaining Kant’s ascertainment that “philosophical conclusions should be based on empirical facts” and on “concrete human experience”, thereby making it critical in nature. He rejects the nullification of

² Kaipayil, Joseph: *An Essay on Ontology*, Kochi: Karunikan Books 2008. *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*, Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy 2002. *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology*, Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy 2003. *Relationalism: A Theory of Being*. Bangalore: JIP Publications 2009.

³ Kaipayil, Joseph: *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*, p. ix.

⁴ See *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶ Kaipayil, Joseph: *An Essay on Ontology*, Kochi: Karunikan Books 2008, p.30-31.

⁷ Kaipayil, Joseph: *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*, pp. 22-24.

metaphysics by Kant: “Not all metaphysics is of pure speculative reason, as the Kantian critique wanted us to believe”, objects Kaipayil.⁸ So, not only does Kaipayil retain Kant’s critical method while rejecting his anti-metaphysical stance, but he argues that exactly this critical method is the prerequisite for every sound ontology: “only an ontology that is critical in character does give adequate rational justification for metaphysical thinking, especially the philosophy of being”⁹.

In this first treatise on critical ontology, Kaipayil observes that a critical ontology can see the human being only as a relational being that can manifest consciousness, freedom and self-transcendence through relation: “consciousness and freedom are instances of human self-transcendence. By self-transcendence we mean our ability to transcend some of the objective limitations of our existence [...]. In knowing the object I know that I am a knower, a subject, and not merely an object in the world.[...] And in the exercise of freedom, I choose between alternatives and I come to know I am not confined to mere circumstances”.¹⁰ The delicate balance between relation and individuality or otherness, what Kaipayil later calls ‘difference’, is that gives birth to the possibility of freedom. Relations *manifest* the otherness of each person.

These ideas are further expounded in *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology*¹¹. In it the author argues that a critical ontology is simultaneously a relational ontology, as it cannot but recognize the relations as constitutive of being and most especially the human being, not only of his ‘character’ but also of his biological existence.

In *An Essay on Ontology*, Kaipayil traces examples of ontological propositions that have a critical or relational character in the history of philosophy.¹² “Alongside speculative or transcendent ontology and metaphysics, there existed in the history of philosophy what might be called *critical* ontology and metaphysics. [...] By critical ontology and metaphysics I mean the ontology and metaphysics that is grounded on empirical experience. While based on empirical experience, critical ontology and metaphysics is not limited to empirical experience”.¹³ However, Kaipayil himself voices a different opinion in the course of his essay: “Critical ontology makes it absolutely necessary that

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰ *Critical Ontology*, p. 54.

¹¹ Kaipayil, Joseph: *Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology*, Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy 2003.

¹² See chapter 2, *Some Ontologies of Critical Nature*, pp. 36-58. The first “critical ontology” that he cites is Aristotle’s ontology: see chapter 2.1, *The Aristotelian Ontology*, pp. 36-39.

¹³ Kaipayil, Joseph: *An Essay on Ontology*, Kochi: Karunikan Books 2008, p.12.

we postulate ontological concepts and categories only on the basis of the analysis of empirical experience”¹⁴.

While expounding his relational ontology, his ontology of relationality¹⁵ or relationalism, Kaipayil stresses that “Relationality signifies the relational nature of reality. Ontic relationalism, therefore, denotes the theory that reality is relational and for any thing to exist and to be known is to exist and to be known in its relatedness. The real (the existent) is relational, and the relational, real (existent)”¹⁶. However, this does not mean that there is no otherness or individuality or ‘difference’¹⁷: just like Yannaras, as we will see, Kaipayil stresses the balance between relation and otherness and states what Yannaras and the Greek philosophical tradition would articulate by saying that there is no essence without hypostasis, without particular realization: there is no ‘ousia anypostatos’. Kaipayil writes: “The essential properties, which together make the essence, are those qualities an object should necessarily possess to belong to a designated category. All objects having the human essence belong to the class of humans. Essence, thus, gives the categorial identity to a particular; essence is the class identifier of an object. Essence as such, however, does not exist. [...] It is a concept signifying the unity of the essential properties that determine a thing's what-it-is.”¹⁸ Only the existence of the particular realizations, of the hypostases, gives being to the essence.

In *Relationalism: A Theory of Being*¹⁹, Kaipayil puts relationalism in perspective by trying to find its footprints in other traditions, like Sankhya Dualism, Buddhist Processism, Vaisheshika Pluralism and Vedantic Monism - not so much by drawing on these traditions, but rather in critiquing them and taking a point beyond them, in illustrating relationalism as a more inclusive and more realistic position than monism, dualism, pluralism and even processism.²⁰ He also illuminates some misunderstandings: “Relationism is not anti-substantivism. On an anti-substantivist view, things are not objects in their own right, but only events dependent on other events for their existence. Even if we grant the argument that relations are ontologically more fundamental than entities themselves, the question is, if there are no entities with some enduring substantivity, how do relations themselves exist? Relation is ‘holding’

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, see chapter 3: *Towards an Ontology of Relationality*, pp. 59-84.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, see chapter 3.4: *Essence and Difference*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁹ *Relationalism: A Theory of Being*. Bangalore: JIP Publications 2009.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-38.

between two or more things. If entities disappear, relations will also disappear”.²¹ And Kaipayil recapitulates his relational ontology as such: “Being (all that exists) is relational. Relationality (relatedness) is the very characteristic of reality, both existentially and structurally. The real (that which exists) is relational. Reality is irreducibly pluralistic and inescapably unitary. Then relationalism is our search for the ontological principles that account for the unity and diversity of the world. As the main task of relationalism is to show rationally and systematically how the world is a unity and a plurality at the same time, relationalism turns out in the end to be a theory of the one and the many. [...] The identity of an entity is defined by its relations.”²²

II. Christos Yannaras

Christos Yannaras (born in 1935) is a Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Cultural Diplomacy at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, Greece. Holding doctorates from the University of Sorbonne (Paris) and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, he has been a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Paris, Geneva, Lausanne and Crete and has been awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Belgrade, St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York and the Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts. His books and monographs have been translated into twelve languages²³, and the former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams considers him as “one of the most significant Christian philosophers in Europe”, whereas the late Olivier Clément has characterised him as “contemporary Greece’s greatest thinker”. Yannaras has focused on highlighting the differences between the Greek/Hellenic/“Byzantine” and Western European philosophy and tradition.

Two of his monographs are of exceptional importance for our endeavour: in 1985 he published his *Propositions for a Critical Ontology*. (*Protaseis Kritikis Ontologias*²⁴, not yet translated in English) and in 2004 his *Relational Ontology*²⁵, a direct corollary of his work and research up to then, from the time of the first publication of *Person and Eros* in Greek as a doctoral dissertation in 1970.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

²³ English translations of his works, as opposed to earlier French translations, have been published quite recently, mostly in the last ten years. These include, among others: Yannaras, Christos: *Postmodern Metaphysics*. Brookline Mass.: HC Press 2004. *Variations on the Song of Songs*. Brookline Mass.: HC Press 2005. *Person and Eros*. Brookline Mass.: HC Press 2007. *Relational Ontology*. Brookline Mass.: HC Press 2011. *The Enigma of Evil*. Brookline Mass.: HC Press 2012.

²⁴ Yannaras, Christos: *Protaseis Kritikis Ontologias*. Athens: Domos 1985.

²⁵ Yannaras, Christos: *Relational Ontology*. Brookline MA: HC Press 2011. Translated from the Greek original *I Ontologia tis Schesis*. Athens: Ikaros 2004.

To arrive at Yannaras' critical and relational ontology, one must first study (a) Yannaras' *communal epistemology* of apophaticism and (b) his *ontology of the Person* (*prosopon*), which constitute the answer to the question, why his ontology is to be termed (a) 'critical' and (b) 'relational'.

Yannaras understands apophaticism not as the theological *via negativa*, but as a stance towards the verification of knowledge; "In the context of post-Newtonian epistemology", he writes, "the apophaticism of the Greek tradition of the theory of knowledge acquires a new importance. We call *apophaticism* (1) the denial that we exhaust knowledge in its formulation; (2) the refusal to identify the understanding of the signifiers with the knowledge of what is signified; and (3) the symbolic character of every epistemic expression: its role in bringing together atomic (i.e. individual) experiences and embracing them within a common semantic boundary marker, a process which allows epistemic experience to be shared and once shared to be verified"²⁶. For Yannaras, "the social criterion for the verification of knowledge links the mode by which we know with the mode by which we exist, and the topos of this linking is the struggle to attain *relation*, or *communion*. Truth is that knowledge that is assured by the knowledge of each person (his or her relation with reality) and that is confirmed by a testimony, or a verbal expression, in which all persons coincide - through which all are brought into a relation among themselves and with reality".²⁷ Reality itself arises is a relational event, an event of relationality: "we signify the reality of the world as the consequence and the totality of activated relations [...]. We situate both universal-natural becoming and human-social becoming within a set of relations. Consequently, we speak of relation as the mode by which something that exists does so"²⁸. However, a precise definition of relation is needed in this context, and Yannaras offers it by writing that "relation is knowledge as immediate experiential assurance, the mode by which we recognize reality. It is the mode by which we participate in the communion of experiential assurance, the mode by which each person can verify knowledge of reality. It is the mode by which what we recognize as existent exists, the mode by which existence is both realized and manifested."²⁹ The observation (a) that knowledge arises from experience, (b) that experience arises from relation, (c) that every relation constitutes an experience³⁰ and (d) that, in turn, knowledge arises from

²⁶ *Relational Ontology*, point 2.6, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, point 2.5.1, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, point 1.2.2, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, point 2.5.3, p. 9.

³⁰ *Hexi Philosophikes Zografies*, Athens: Ikaros 2011, p. 58.

relation, links communal epistemology and relational ontology in a whole that cannot be divided, and in which the possibility of *a priori* truths, prescribed doctrines and axiomatic theories is excluded.

The otherness of the individual or of anything that constitutes an otherness is fundamental for the possibility of an ontology based on relation and a prerequisite of freedom. “The otherness of the rational subject is an existential fact: it is activated or manifested as a uniqueness that is not subject to general, common predeterminations, which belong to the essence or nature. That is to say, the otherness of the rational subject is activated or manifested as an existential fact or a product of indeterminacy, or *freedom*”³¹. However, it is relation that manifests the otherness of the related, their otherness arises from the relation: “The meaning of *otherness* can only be comparative (i.e., morphic) when the *other* is defined in relation to a given homotropy. In its hypostatic (i.e. particular) expression, every natural operation (of any natural homotropy) has a specific, or morphic, otherness. The difference between the homotropy of the natural operation and the otherness of its hypostatic expression is a difference signifying *logos*: natural homotropy signifies the *logos* of the species, and hypostatic otherness signifies the *logos* of the subject. Both *logoi* are situated (as is their difference) within humanity's rational (*logiki*) capacity, or the rationality that is accidental to human nature - the mode by which a human being recognizes and signs reality”³². However, is relation only a *capability* of humanity or is it the mode in which man is? Yannaras would answer that “in the ‘logical space’ that determines the signifier *anthropos* (human being) we also include the possibilities of self-transcending referentiality -relative existential freedom- which are always made operative (by the natural operations of self-conscious rationality and creative difference) as *relation* or *invitation-to-relation*”.³³ The human being cannot but be relational, the question is to what extent, what is the extent of his attainable freedom from natural individuality and existential freedom from necessities and predeterminations. In this context, the *other* of the relation is the way to freedom, albeit relative freedom: “the meaning of otherness can be one signifying freedom when the *other* is defined, and confirmed, as an existential detaching of the subject from the limitations, or necessities, of nature. The only mode accessible to empirical confirmation by which the natural operation, hypostatically expressed, constitutes a fact of (relative) freedom

³¹ *Relational Ontology*, point 2.1.4, p. 5.

³² *Ibid.*, point 3.7, p. 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, point 3.5, p. 14.

from the limitations, or necessities, of nature is that which we call *relation* - for example, the mode of *language* and the mode of *art*”³⁴.

For this to be attained, the way that we see the human being is of critical importance. If we define the subject merely as an individual, as *atomon*, as an undifferentiated unit of a whole that cannot be further divided,³⁵ then it is bound to the inclination to exist individually. Only the person, *prosopon*, can manifest that freedom, and *prosopon* is a word with an exceptionally interesting semantic content. It is constituted of the words *pros* (towards, with direction to) and *ops/opos* (eye, face), so that it defines someone whose face looks at, or rather is directed towards, someone or something.³⁶ Someone that exists in-relation-to, only in relation and in reference to other beings, someone who refers his existence to the other, coming out of his existential individuality; someone who exists only by participating in relations and relationships.³⁷ The transcendence of individuality by the *prosopon* is the only path to existential freedom, because self-transcendence is really self-transcendence when the subject can be freed even from the necessities and prerequisites of his own essence (*ousia*). This can happen if the hypostasis of the subject, the actual and specific manifestation of its essence, the *particular*, has an ontological priority over its essence and is not restricted to the limitations and prerequisites of its essence.³⁸

It is with the coordinates of person, relation and otherness that Yannaras builds his *relational ontology*. He states that “otherness is realised and known in-relation-to-the-other, always relationally. It is an outcome and an experience of relation and relationship. Through this perspective, we can speak (with logical consistency) of a relational ontology”.³⁹ Given the apophatic nature of the epistemology on which we base “propositions for an ontological interpretation of existence and reality that are subject to critical verification or refutation”⁴⁰, Yannaras ascertains that a relational ontology can only be a *critical ontology*. Propositions for a critical ontology are never finite, granted, or ‘closed’: they are always subject to the communal criterion of truth, to communal verification or refutation. He defines *critical ontology* as follows:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, point 3.7.1, p. 16.

³⁵ See *Hexi Philosophikes Zografies*, Athens: Ikaros 2011, p. 61.

³⁶ See *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁸ For a more detailed presentation of the basic tenets of Yannaras’ philosophy, see S. Mitralexis’ article “Person, Eros, Critical Ontology: An attempt to Recapitulate on Christos Yannaras’ Philosophy” in the journal *Sobornost*, Volume 34:1 (2012), pp. 33-40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

We term onto-logy the theoretical investigation of existence (ton logo peri tou ontos), the logical propositions for the interpretation of reality. We try, with our rational faculties, to interpret reality and existence as to the fact that it is real and that it exists. We try to interpret the meaning of existence, the cause and purpose of existence.

With the word 'critical' we term the process of evaluating ontological propositions, evaluating the logical accuracy of these propositions on the grounds of 'koinos logos' (common sense, word, rationality, language and understanding), evaluating the capability of the ontological propositions to be empirically verified through shared, communed experience accessible to all.⁴¹

III. A Brief Comparison

The above introduction should have highlighted the common points in both philosophers' thought: (i) the relational nature of existence, (ii) the relational prerequisites of man's freedom, i.e. self-transcendence, *eros*, (iii) the realization of absolute otherness *through* relation, which in turn (iv) underlines the abysmal gap between substance and hypostasis, the genus and the particular and (v) the ontological priority of the particular, of the hypostasis; (vi) the fact that a relational ontology constitutes a critical ontology, without which any attempt at constructing an ontological theory cannot but remain an ideological proposition and that (vi) elements of a relational and critical ontology can be found in traditions of the past: Kaipayil finds them in Indian streams of thought (while criticizing them and unveiling what he sees as inconsistencies) and Yannaras discovers them in the ancient Greek and christianized Hellenic and Eastern Roman ('Byzantine') tradition and philosophy.

However, there are also major differences between the two philosophers, which we will attempt to expose:

(i) Kaipayil seems to build his ontology strictly within the boundaries of existence, of reality as we know it. Ontology for him is an internal matter of existence, without any reference to *beyond* the boundaries of existence. For him, even the search for a first and supreme principle, for the 'ultimate being' as he puts it, is limited inside the world, although even that search is not necessary: "critical ontology is open to the possibility of discovering the being-principle of the world in and through its search for being-principles of entities. However, critical ontology need not necessarily be a search for the ultimate being. One can do critical ontology without reference to the ultimate

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51. For another definition of critical ontology, see point 2 of *Protaseis Kritikis Ontologias*, p.21. See also *Person, Eros, Critical Ontology: An attempt to Recapitulate on Christos Yannaras' Philosophy*.

being”.⁴² For Yannaras however, the ontological question itself, the search for the *meaning* and *sense*, the *cause* and *purpose* of existence refer the philosopher to *beyond* existence – even if we cannot *speak* about it. In answering to Kaipayil, Yannaras would most probably cite Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, as he often does: “The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value”.⁴³ So, for Yannaras a relational ontology would entail a *personal* and *relational* cause of existence *outside the world and in relationship with* each human personal hypostasis, *personal* because it is made *in the image* of this personal *Other* of the relationship, an answer to a call ‘from non-being into being’.

(ii) Kaipayil observes that man is relational. For Yannaras, the fact that man is constituted as a *person* (*prosopon*) calls for a more radical approach: freedom in this sense is not simply the right to choose, but the ability to choose between existing (hypostasizing the human substance) in the mode of individuality, autonomous existence and death or in the mode of relation, self-transcendence, *eros* and life – i.e., in the likeness of the relational (in that case, triune) *Other* of the relationship.

(iii) Kaipayil maintains that the relational nature of man grants him freedom. Yannaras, as a corollary of his position as exposed in the previous points, wonders about the *limits* of that freedom. He asks if the affirmation of the human person to exist relationally could preserve his absolute otherness and his will to relate as will to exist even beyond natural individual onticity: “How should we conceive of the subject of existential referential ecstasy as a hypostatic reality not exhausted in natural individual onticity? By which categories (capable of empirical confirmation) can we signify the hypostatic fact of subjectivity as activated by means of brain functions but realized existentially as an unlimited fact of relation? The question permits the quandary whether death – the supreme manifestation of evil for natural individual onticity – also dissolves the hypostatic rationality, which is not subject to definite localization”.⁴⁴ “The possibility that the rational individual should not be subject to the law of biological death can be traced only through uncertain indications, indirect epistemic probing – as ‘in a mirror, dimly’. These uncertain indications or indirect probing constitute a proposition of the meaning of existence and of that which exists. They amount to a thematic analysis of the signifier relational ontology”.⁴⁵

⁴² Kaipayil: *Critical Ontology: An introductory essay*, p. 36.

⁴³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 6.41.

⁴⁴ Yannaras: *Relational Ontology*, point 18.3.3, p. 105-106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, point 20.5, p. 120.

(iv) For Kaipayil, it is with the intellect that we move from the empirical to the transcendent: “the ability of the human intellect to draw logical conclusions from the analysis of experience”⁴⁶ is that unveils ontological truths, even in an empirical context. “Critical ontology [...] believes in the dynamism of the human intellect to move from the empirical to the transcendent. The very same human intellect that knows the empirical world makes this cognitive passage or transcendence. This cognitive transcendence is inherent in the intellect and the intellect is not satisfied until it arrives at the knowledge of the ultimate principles of the world”.⁴⁷ For Kaipayil, the intellect as a separate function, as a *facultas rationis* is the subject not only of ontological research, but of human life itself. However, for Yannaras it is the human *existence* as a whole, the human *person* and *hypostasis* in its totality and unity, without divisions or dualities, that experiences existence and *knows*, for relation is a cognitive event in itself – and cognition a relational event in itself. In the greater context of Yannaras’ and Kaipayil’s philosophy, a context which cannot be expounded in detail here, this difference plays a major role.

(v) It could be said that there is room for misunderstanding Kaipayil’s rejection of ‘objective truths’ as a road to solipsism, which could turn relationalism to mere relativism – the leap towards a communal verification of knowledge, an explicitly apophatic epistemology, could perhaps remedy this. Kaipayil states that “critical metaphysics does not maintain that there exist objective truths out there and we discover them. Rather, critical metaphysics sees its task as one of interpretation. Reality permits us to have metaphysically different interpretations of it, but each interpretation must be an interpretation of the ‘texts’ of our empirical experience”.⁴⁸ The philosophical path from these formulations to relativism or solipsism might be recognized as a short one. Yannaras clearly accepts the objective realities that constitute the horizon of relations: “If relation is a real presupposition of existence and knowledge for humanity (the mode by which we exist and know)”, he says, “then the factors -essential for perception to function- of cause and purpose, space and time, beginning and end, although constituted as experiential givens by relation, are only the horizon of every event of relation, boundary markers or measures of the event of relation. And, as measures or boundary markers, they inevitably have some character of objectivity - that is, they cannot be taken as subjective products of rational

⁴⁶ Kaipayil: *Critical Ontology: An introductory essay*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Kaipayil: *An essay on Ontology*, p. 17.

referentiality; they have at least the ‘objectivity’ of language”.⁴⁹ Apart from that, the communal and apophatic epistemological stance locates the validation of knowledge not in the individual intellectual faculty, but in the Heraclitian “*for if we are in communion with each other, we are in truth, but if we exist privately, we are in error*”⁵⁰.

The brevity of this article limits us from exposing the common points and the differences between these parallel *relational and critical ontologies* more thoroughly. However, such an undertaking would surely be most interesting, and we strongly hope that it will be researched in the near future.

⁴⁹ Yannaras: *Relational Ontology*, point 20.3.4, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Band I, pp. 148, 28-30.