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What remains after postmodernism? A review of Tor Egil Førland: *Values, Objectivity and Explanation in Historiography*, New York: Routledge, 2017.

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[ABSTRACT] Tor Egil Førland's book *Values, Objectivity and Explanation in Historiography* surveys a series of topics that theories of historiography have to face in the aftermath of postmodernism. The book challenges the appropriateness of the association of anti-objectivism in historiography with left-wing politics and by defending objectivist perspectives on historical research takes a strong stance against cultural relativism and theories of situated truth. Førland also analyzes the implications of dilemmas about ontological and methodological individualism for historical research and proposes an interesting application of the views of Margaret Gilbert to the problem of the explanation of contradictory beliefs of historical figures. The book has been published in a very appropriate moment, and it will help open questions and dilemmas that have received insufficient attention in the past due to the domination of postmodernist perspectives. [ABSTRACT ENDS]

Fifty years ago, Jacques Derrida opened his *Writing and Difference* by imagining what may happen if the "structuralist invasion" (as he put it) recedes one day from the shores of our civilization.[1] Today we can observe these shores after successive invasions of post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-modernism, the linguistic turn, narrativism and a score of others have receded as well.[2] Førland's book maps the shore in these post-invasionist times, from a historian's point of view and in a way that is relevant for historians. The demise of postmodernism is not merely greeted by Førland, but he hopes that his book will contribute to this process; he wants to "take a fresh look at critical aspects of historiography that have been shipwrecked by the inflow of linguistic and narrative approaches." (1) At the same time, his is a book written by a historian interested in the philosophical questions that affect a historian's work; the dilemmas and the judgments used to resolve them are those that a practicing historian would see as relevant and credible in historical research--a valuable

[1] Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture at la différance*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, the year of publication not stated, 9.

[2] There should be no doubt that postfoundationalism should count here as well. Considering the tone, the aims and the achievements of his book, Førland's statement in the Introduction that he wants to "establish philosophically solid ground for a historiography for our postfoundationalist time" and sees himself as joining forces with Kuukkanen, Mark Bevir and Herman Paul (1) can only leave the reader puzzled. In the case of Mark Bevir, these connections indeed exist, not because of postfoundationalism but because of Bevir's principle of procedural individualism. (Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31-77.) However, it is hard to imagine how Førland's position could be compatible with radical anti-realism advocated by Kuukkanen. (See my analysis of Kuukkanen's views in Branko Mitrović, "A refutation of (post)-narrativism, or: why postmodernists love Austro-Hungary: Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist philosophy of historiography*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 15 (2016), BM1)

perspective whose specifics are often missed by authors who approach the philosophy of history from purely philosophical positions, ignoring the assumptions that a historian has to take into account.

Førland's attacks on the core aspects of the post-modernist project in historiography are marked by his defense of the possibility of objectivity in historiography. He strives to show that cognitive values can keep in check ideological and political values and he strongly rejects the idea of situated truth. The perspective that Førland advocates seeks to insulate historical research from external influences, opposes variations of the so-called "strong program" and aims to "eject social factors from historiographical arguments and theory choice, since their intrusion will prevent the establishment of a common ground of historical knowledge on which debate and decisions can build." (8) The book is largely motivated by his concerns about the assumptions that can be and cannot be made in order to account of the historians' communication with other historians, their readers and their capacity to comprehend the historical figures they write about.

Danish questions

The book is in fact a collection of essays; except for two of them, others have been published earlier in *History and Theory*, *Historisk Tidsskrift* and *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*. Unlike many such books, Førland's presentation is coherent and results in a composition of the book that one could almost describe as elegant. There is some charm in the modesty with which he introduces his core topic through a presentation of a vehement debate between Danish historians about the involvement of their country in the Cold War. The beginning may seem inauspicious; it may seem that Førland starts his book by describing a storm in a particularly uninviting tea cup, and one might even smile at the parochial chauvinism of Danish historians who seem to inflate the role of their country in the Cold War. This unassuming opening, however, turns out to introduce important dilemmas about the historian's relationship to his or her patrons and peers and it is on these dilemmas that the book further builds its argumentational structure.

The Danish debate goes like this. During the first decade of this century under the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen the Danish government actively supported the USA in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; subsequently, Rasmussen was the general secretary of NATO during the war in Libya. Internally, these foreign policies were defended by a sort of a culture war against those who were considered soft on Nazism during World War Two, soft on communism during the Cold War and soft on Islamist terrorism during the War on Terror. (27) (Those who were soft on imperialism, colonialism, violations of the UN Charter, the use of cluster bombs or ammunition based on depleted uranium seem not to have been targeted.) It is in this context that the historian Bent Jensen criticized Danish politicians and public figures "for their spinelessness toward, or willful ignorance of, the communist regime of terror in the Soviet Union."[3] (19) Jensen's criticism of Danish governments' soft stance against the USSR during the Cold War made him widely rejected by his

[3] The criticism apparently pertains to the fact that under the pressure of the parliamentary majority, the Danish government insisted on inserting some dissenting footnotes in official NATO documents. (29) If KGB agents really cared about and wasted their energy and resources on such footnotes, and attributed them the importance that (one gathers from Førland's account) Danish historians seem to do, then we should not be surprised that the Cold War ended the way it did.

colleagues who tended to be on the political left and thus, Førland describes, "have a fundamental ideological sympathy for socialism, despite recognizing the many mistakes and deficiencies of socialist regimes." (35) However, it received support from the "center-right" majority in the Danish parliament "in their cultural war against the enemies of liberalism." (19) Jensen eventually received funding to start a Center for Cold War Studies at the University of South Denmark. (29) The support of the political establishment thus went to a historian who opposed the left-wing sympathies and allegiances of the historians' establishment. As one could expect, further complications followed from the fact that the boundary line between the writing of "contemporary history" and investigative journalism is not easy to draw. (Could it be that the very concept of "contemporary history" is an oxymoron? Should we maybe agree with Nicolás Gómez Dávila's view that "In a respectable university, the mere mention of a contemporary problem should be outlawed."[4]) Jensen indeed did not hesitate to popularize his results in daily newspapers and when, in one such article, he accused Jørgen Dragsdahl, a prominent Danish journalist from the Cold War era to have been a KGB agent of influence, this resulted in a long series of lawsuits in which courts had to disentangle historiography from journalism. (50-64)

The lesson that the Danish left-wing historians' establishment had to learn from the Jensen affair(s) is that what goes around comes around. As Førland points out, during the 1960s and the 1970s the attacks on "positivism" and the idea that historical knowledge can be objective were mainly formulated from the Left. (19-20) During that period Western historiography supplanted objective and neutral approach that sought to be impartial and detached by an anti-positivist approach that rejected such more or less critical and empirical objectivism. (20)

> The fall of objectivity entailed that a neutral position was regarded as methodologically unattainable, and any ambitions or illusions of such neutrality were deemed anathema as they served as a form of moral and political (self-)delusion. The new ideal … was that of engaged historiography, one that still adhered to general requirements to scholarly accountability and verifiability but where historians were aware of their political role. … [W]hereas historians were previously seen as dubious if they articulated a clear, political stance, it was now the lack of such a stance that aroused suspicion. (21)

Such views, Førland argues, can be sustained as long as the grip of one ideology (for instance, the Left) on the historians' establishment is firm and unchallenged. In the case of Norway, he elaborates, members of Socialist-Left Party dominate among the authors of history schoolbooks. (25) Similarly, since left political perspectives are dominant among Norwegian historians, it is conceivable that our understanding of the politics of the Norwegian Labor Party in the 1920s would have been different had the historians with alternative political views studied it. (26) Currently, the standard discourse thus disparages the workers who wanted to work when the trade unions wanted to strike as scabs; the circulation of capital is deplored, while military resistance to communist dictatorships is labeled as imperialism, and so on. Førland is

[4] Nicolás Gómez Dávila (1913-1994), *Escolios a un texto implícito* (Bogotá: Villegas Editores, 2005), vol. 2, 216.

not suggesting that one discourse is more correct than another, but that they are different. At the same time, the left-wing position is so predominant among Norwegian historians that (so far) this consensus has been sufficiently strong to leave its explosive force undetonated. In Denmark, however, one can see what happens when the Left loses interpretative hegemony. (27)

In Denmark, the initiative was in Jensen's hands and he directed it against the left-wing historians' establishment. In a way, his positions were in line with the activist views of historian's role in society, and the idea that scholars should involve themselves in the society of which they are part--but while these views traditionally belonged to the Left, he was advancing from the Right. Left-wing historians then opposed this interference of politics into historiography, as well as research whose results are predetermined by the politicians who commissioned it, by defending objective norms of methodology that would not require them to take a stance on political or moral grounds. (33, 37) Contrary to them, Jensen however asserted that it is impossible for a historian to engage in topics such as Bolshevism, Nazism and the Second World War without taking a moral stance. (34) Førland cites Poul Villaume, a prominent Danish historian, who stated that neither he nor any serious historians he knows "have ever said or believed that objective historiography or research exists." (38) If this is so, Førland points out, then it is unclear how Villaume can prevent that the exposition of Denmark's role in the Cold War becomes "a shouting match between various political wings, where the readers only listen to people who agree with them politically or those who shout the loudest." (38) Consider Edward Hallett Carr's statement that "the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation."[5] From this point of view, the political Right can disqualify a competent historian on political grounds. But if we instead take a more empirical standpoint, "one where data and descriptions are in a sense seen as more primary than hypotheses and interpretations, it will be historical craftsmanship rather than political outlook that is relevant for assessing who is to curate the country's past." (40) An example that Førland presents is the career of Søren Hein Rasmussen, a Danish historian whose position in the historical commission that investigated the surveillance of the Left by Danish secret services monitored during the Cold War was blocked by politicians because of his membership in the Communist Party. Again, ideological prejudices can go in any direction, and Førland wonders whether Rasmussen's colleagues and supporters "would have clung as strongly to the notion that political background should be irrelevant had he been a neo-Nazi." (38) For historians who are activists in the first place, ideals of objectivity may be a burden, but once they are abandoned, their opponents may abandon them too, and it is not clear that this even makes the political struggle easier. It certainly does not help historiography.

Can objectivity be saved?

Førland accepts that historiography is barred from strict or total objectivity, which he calls 'global objectivity', where perspective is irrelevant (87). (It is, however, not easy to think of authors who advocated this view.) He considers the positions of a number of philosophers of history whose views are normally considered relativistic, but still allow for objectivity. Hayden White, for instance, still assumed that we can produce

[5] Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History*, London: Penguin, 1990, 23. Cited according to Førland, *Values*, 40.

descriptive sentences without recourse to metaphors and tropes; his position limits, but does not reduce the room for objectivity in history. (87-88) Similarly, Arthur Danto's theory of narrative sentences suggests that the description of events in history is always provisional, always deferred, never stable. (89) However, Førland points out, the fact that new developments imply new ways of describing events, does not entail that new narrative sentences can invalidate the old ones. (89) Even Thomas Kuhn, Førland points out by citing one of Kuhn's articles, accepted that scholars' preference for one theory over others need not be based on or explained by reference to different religious, moral, political or aesthetic values, "since scientists have a common set of cognitive values which they use to evaluate theories."[6] These cognitive values--he further expands beyond Kuhn--function as a bulwark against the influence of other extra-scientific values that otherwise would rip the scientific community apart and cause endless warfare among adherents of competing religious, political, and other groups. (98)

The particular target of Førland's criticism is the theory of situated truth—the view that confuses true beliefs with beliefs that something is true. The latter are often culture-relative. To replace "X was believed to be true by people who lived at the time" with "X was true at the time" is a classic maneuver in postmodernist history writing. In Førland's interpretation, the leading promoter of the poststructuralist assault on the idea of truth in Norway is Erling Sandmo, with his influential *Tid for histori*. (65) Førland analyzes Sandmo's views in his chapter "Witches cannot fly" (65-85). According to Førland's presentation, Sandmo does accept the existence of past reality, but it is not clear whether he accepts that the truth of a description is determined by the description's congruence with the reality. (68-69) Sandmo's position in Førland's description sounds as well-known cultural relativism. This is view that at any given time, beliefs of people are culturally contingent, "as determined" by their concepts and worldviews, for instance concerning whether or not there are supernatural forces in the world. (67) Since we are all situated in our cultures, nobody has a better access to the truth about phenomena and when talking about the views of other cultures we should talk about truths in plural. (67) By making our own truths the yardstick for others we show a lack of respect for these people. (67) According to Førland, Sandmo claims that "if draught had not been a supernatural problem in the fifteenth century, it is impossible to explain that magic was attempted as the solution." (73) Førland points out that it is more accurate to say that people *believed* that draught was a supernatural phenomenon, while our modern theories explain draught better than superstitions of fifteenth century French peasants. (73) If Sandmo were right, Førland points out, we would have to accept that witches existed for seventeenth century people. Also, according to the theory of situated truths, we could not say that Galileo was right in his belief in heliocentric system, and that the followers of Ptolemy were wrong. (73) (Even more significantly, one may add, since the cultural context, culture or similar in such historical theories are said to determine the ideas individuals have, it remains unclear how Galileo could have thought differently from his contemporaries.)

It is, however, the discussion of ontological controversies that arise from the postmodernist attack on the theory of historical truth as correspondence with the past that marks the main line of Førland's arguments. As he points out, in postmodernist writings since the 1980s "the mystical, collective" concept of culture has been

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[6] Førland, *Values*, 98. The article he cites is Thomas Kuhn, "Objectivity, Value Judgment and Theory of Choice," in Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 320-339.

accorded the same privileged status it was the case with not quite so mystical concept of class in previous decades. (70) He criticizes Sandmo for talking about truths of cultures. The criticism pertains to the ontology that such statements imply:

> Truth is a property that individuals, or institutions with suitable decision-making mechanisms, allocate to descriptions. A person can regard something as true, as can a religious community or a political party. A culture cannot do so, however, unless we define culture so narrowly that each institution or person becomes a distinct culture. (70)

The background of this criticism is in the fact that historians today normally reject explanations that rely on spiritual forces or Divine intervention. In another essay, for instance, Førland described the case of two brothers who were reportedly saved from starvation on an islet on a Norwegian lake in 1652 by Divine intervention. (150-167) A historian who writes about the event today cannot credibly rely on Divine intervention in the explanation. People who reported the event believed that a miracle happened, but such explanations are not credible today. If this is so, then why should we accept postmodernist views on historiography that rely on equally mystical entities such as Culture or Language that are conceived to exist and have causal capacities on their own over and above the individuals and interactions between individuals in which they are instantiated?

It is at this point that Førland could have used some heavier ammunition against his postmodernist opponents. (One actually wonders why he has missed the opportunity.) For what is the ontology of Culture, Language, History, Discourse, Episteme and so on that, on the postmodernist account, determine the thoughts and actions of historical figures? If such forces are merely sets of human individuals, their beliefs and interactions, then we have not moved beyond the well-known view that beliefs and actions of individuals are affected by their interactions with other individuals. In that case, the thoughts and actions of individuals cannot be *determined* by the context because it is their cognitive apparatus (and possibly the neurobiology of their brains) that determines their thoughts, while actions may result from their free will or (again) neurobiological determinism of their brains. If human individuals are biological creatures, then they can be affected by Cultures or similar forces only through their senses, and all cultural influence has to have the form of interactions with other individuals. These other individuals also can be affected by Cultures (or whatever else) only via senses--i.e. interactions with other individuals. But if Culture, Language, History, Discourse, Episteme and so on are assumed to have full-blooded ontology and causal capacities on their own, over and above individuals whose thoughts and actions they determine, then are they actually immaterial or spiritual forces to which postmodernists merely prefer to refer using other words? How different is determinism by Culture, Language, History, Discourse, Episteme and so on from Luther's view that "no man has power to think anything good or evil … everything occurs by absolute necessity."[7] What is the difference between the claim that Culture or Language (as independent forces that exist on their own) construct reality from the claim that God created it? Examples of crypto-theological positions in postmodernist writings are not hard to find. For instance, in his polemic with Ernst Gombrich, Norman Bryson insisted that the reality that artists seek to imitate is

[7] Martin Luther, *Assertio* in Martin Luther, *Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1908), vol. 7, 146: "…quia nulli est in manu sua quippiam cogitare mali aut boni sed omnia … de necessiatate absoluta eveniat."

always historically produced--whereby in his description and in a manner suspiciously similar to the role of God in some religious traditions, the historical context has the power both to create reality and determine the thoughts of individuals.[8] Similarly, consider Roland Barthes's claim that the author is a mere 'scriptor' (*scripteur*) and that the force that writes through the author is *language itself*.[9] How different is this thesis from the view Plato formulated in *Ion* that poets do not work by their own skill (τέχνῃ) but are driven by a Divine force (θείᾳ δυνάμει), and God uses them as labourers (ὑπηρέταις)?[10] If Barthes' "language itself" has the same causal capacities as Plato's "Divine force," then in what sense do they differ? Is Barthes merely renaming the entities that Plato called "God" and "labourers" with "language itself" and "scriptors"?

Social ontology and historical contexts

The criticism that by relying on "the mystical, collective" concept of culture (70) (and various other immaterial forces, one could add) postmodernists are writing ontological checks they will not be able to cash is thus additionally aggravated by the fact that we have seen similar checks in the past. Once differences in terminology are taken into account, postmodernist post-humanism suspiciously resembles the positions of Luther, Calvin or various Protestant reactions against Renaissance humanism. While Førland does not develop his criticism in this direction, the charge of inflationary ontology easily converts into a charge of crypto-theology. Theologies are often not only about God, but also about human beings' relationship to God. People (and scholars), it will be pointed out, may reject religion but retain religious anthropology, and attribute to imaginary (pseudo-social) entities the causal capacities that they (or their ancestors) used to attribute to God.

It is thus in the field of social ontology that Førland needs to take a position against his opponents. Ontological individualism, understood as the view that social world consists exclusively of individuals, their properties and interactions--that individuals, their properties and interactions exhaust the social world--is a reasonable default position, and indeed he endorses it. (135) The real dilemma pertains to methodological individualism--the view that social items are reducible to or explainable by sets of individuals and their properties, actions or interactions. In the existing literature ontological individualism is often described as the standard or mainstream view in the contemporary social sciences, while the validity of methodological individualism is debated.[11] In Førland's view, methodological individualism can impoverish our explanations of social behavior, but, at the same time, rejecting it leads to a slippery slope "at whose end lie such monsters as conscious classes and nations with needs and emotions." (135) The relationship between methodological and ontological individualism can be approached from

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[8] Norman Bryson: *Vision and Painting. The Logic of the Gaze*, London: Macmillan 1985, 13. See my analysis in Branko Mitrović, "A Defence of Light. Ernst Gombrich, the Innocent Eye and Seeing in Perspective," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 3 (2010), 3-BM2.

[9] Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur' in Roland Barthes, *Essais Critiques*, 61-66. The origin of scriptor's actions is language itself ('le langage lui-même'). (64) He attributes to Mallarmé the view, with which he agrees, that it is language who speaks, not the author. (62)

[10] Plato, *Ion*, 534C, according to Plato, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univesity Press, 1995).

[11] See for instance Lars Udehn, *Methodological Individualism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2; Brian Epstein, 'Ontological Individualism Reconsidered', *Synthese*, 166 (2009), 187-213, 187; Keith Sawyer, *Social Emergence. Societies as Complex Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66.

different perspectives and both positions can be defined in different ways. Social scientists, who are trying to find social laws, and historians, who typically do not believe in the possibility of historical laws, are likely to be interested in different aspects of the dilemma. Førland's arguments against methodological individualism are thus convincing insofar as they exclude the aspects of methodological individualism that are unlikely to be credible to historians. He rightly points out that historians often have information about a collective entity, but lack information about individuals. (140) Also, a historian may choose a supra-individual level of description just as a scientist may choose supra-molecular level of description when accounting for the movements of a cougar. (140) The important point is that

> by insisting on treating and explaining all action on a methodologically individualist basis we run the risk of depriving ourselves of the social or collective element of what went on at the time. The building of barricades in Paris [in 1968] or the siege of the Pentagon [in 1968] can hardly be fully understood outside of a social group context. (145)

These points are well made. A historian can certainly write that Napoleon's *grande armée* invaded Russia in 1812, but need not be able to identify all participating soldiers nor describe all their individual actions. Nevertheless, it could be responded that Førland defines methodological individualism in a way that makes it easy to refute. Certainly, the reduction of social entities into individuals and their interactions is not possible when the necessary information is not available--but this is why the definition of methodological individualism should state that reduction should be possible in principle, assuming that all necessary information is available. This would correspond to the perspective of natural sciences: when we say that a physical object is reducible to the molecules that constitute it, we do not normally assume that we can identify all these molecules.

Intentionality of groups and individuals

It is hard to disagree with an author whose book get so many things right, but at this moment we come to an aspect of Førland's position which, I believe, many of his readers may find counterintuitive. Some readers may agree with his assumptions, but I assume that many (including myself) will not. The likely bone of contention is the applicability of Margaret Gilbert's discussion of group intentionality to certain types of historical explanations. The debate about group intentionality pertains to the attribution of mental states, such as beliefs, decisions, intentions, desires (and the resulting actions) to groups.[12] The starting assumption is that mental states can be attributed only to living creatures that are biologically capable to have them--and if this is so, then it is not clear that one can attribute them to social collectives, such as nations, institutions, military units, institutions and so on. In his contribution to the debate, John Searle pointed out that

[12] For a general presentation of this discussion see Tollefsen Deborah, 2004, "Collective Intentionality", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://www.iep.utm.edu/coll-int/, accessed on 20 November 2016. See also Schweikard, David P. and Schmid, Hans Bernhard, "Collective Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/collective-intentionality/>, accessed 20 November 2016 and Sarah Rachel Chant, Frank Hindriks, Gerhard Preyer: "Introduction" in Sarah Rachel Chant, Frank Hindriks, Gerhard Preyer, eds.: *From Individual to Collective Intentionality New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), 1-9.

> [S]ociety consists of nothing but individuals. Since society consists entirely of individuals, there cannot be a group mind or group consciousness. … [A]ny account we give of collective intentionality, and therefore of collective behavior, must be consistent with our overall ontology and metaphysics of the world, an ontology and metaphysics based on the existence of individual human beings as the repositories of all intentionality, whether individual or collective.[13]

The participants in the debate--in addition to Gilbert and Searle, one should also mention Michael Bratman and Raimo Tuomela--thus strove to define the types of relationships between and the commitments of individuals participating in a group that would allow us to talk about group beliefs, decisions, expectation, actions of groups, without postulating group minds or similar spiritual entities. In line with this approach, Gilbert, on whose work Førland extensively relies, defined "plural subjects" as social entities in which participating individuals act jointly or have a jointly accepted view. (12, 162) Such understanding of social entities has obvious advantages when we have to understand, in the example mentioned above, the acting of demonstrators in Paris or in front of Pentagon in 1968. They constituted a "plural subject" on the basis of their political convictions and then acted jointly. The same can be said in the case of another example that Førland states--the actions of Gavrilo Princip and other conspirators in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo. In principle, one can say that a participant joins a conspiracy on the basis of his or her beliefs, and as long as he or she acts in accordance to the commitments that participation in a conspiracy implies, we can discuss actions of conspirators as actions of a group.

This all certainly sounds reasonable, but Førland proposes to expand this argument in a way that is less likely to be accepted as a valid explanatory principle (though Førland may be right in many individual situations). One example is his discussion of *Zeitgeist* as an explanatory item. He is careful to point out that *Zeitgeist* can be understood as (part of) the cultural climate of an era, a social emergent that is realized by a multitude of thoughts embodied in texts, music, pictures and so on, but that one should be careful not to endow it with cognition, will or other faculties associated with agents; one should not attribute to it the power to move individuals. Førland's explanation relies on the fact that members of a plural subject can generate such a spirit (presumably something like a generally shared attitude) by suspending their personal beliefs in order to make their beliefs accord with the group beliefs. (143) In the case of 1960s radicals, they can be seen to have "pooled their wills in order to be part of the 'sixties generation' or 'the movement'." (144) The idea of this kind of explanation is that people in such groups act the way they do not because they really believe that they should act so, but because they want to be participants in the group and want to be accepted and appreciated by other participants. Consequently, they act in ways that, they believe, will ensure them acceptance and appreciation. Arguably, this could have been the motivation of many participants in the events of the 1960s, but it would be hard to accept the interpretation that this was the case with all of them or even the majority. It is hard to believe that all participants acted on the basis of their beliefs about the actions that would bring them approval of other

[13]John Searle, "Collective Intentions and Actions," in ed. P. Cohen, J. Morgan, and M.E. Pollack, *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 406-407.

participants and not in accordance with their genuine beliefs how they should act. However, Førland advocates further application of this kind of explanation in other situations as well. (Famously, in Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* the King of Trolls says that highest law for a human being is to be true to oneself--and Førland seems to oppose this by suggesting that people strive to be true to the community they belong to.[14] Possibly there are many situations when people really act with such motivation, but this is hardly always the case.) Førland thus uses Gilbert's concept of plural subject again in order to explain why historians reject supernatural events. When a historian rejects miracles, says Førland, this is

> because as a historian … [he or she] sees himself as part of what Margaret Gilbert terms a 'plural subject' that is constituted by the scientific community. Thus, he is part of 'we' whose ontology is provided by, or at a minimum must confirm to, the findings of nuclear physicists, chemists, evolutionary biologists, and others.

I do not believe this is credible. I think that most historians who reject miracles do so because they do not find miracles credible and not because they want to be members of the community of historians. (Rather, one would invoke Tacitus' warning that such *libido adsentandi*, the desire to agree with one's colleagues, is a *vitium artis* for a historian and should be prevented in historiography.[15]) Førland's use of the same kind of explanation when it comes to the question of why many scientists are religious is equally unconvincing. His explanation is that

> people have a great capacity for what we might call multiple partaking: being part of several plural subjects at the same time, as well as being a private subject, without feeling torn to pieces even when the different subjects oppose each other. (162)

But it is hard to believe that most scientists are scientists because they want to belong to the community of scientists, and not because they want to do scientific work and explore the world of Nature. Similarly, it is certainly more probable that people mostly become Catholics because they believe in Catholic theology and only rarely because they want to belong to that group. One cannot easily dismiss the assumption that in such matters people act on the basis of their genuine beliefs and with integrity. One would rather say that seemingly contradictory beliefs of religious scientists often require additional attention and analysis of the ways scientists understand the religious views they subscribe to. They may, for instance, believe in God as the creator of natural laws but reject faith in miracles, or believe that if God makes the laws of Nature, God can also break them. Situations when religious beliefs may actually stimulate scientific discoveries are also known--a good example is the influence of the Christian-Orthodox sect of "Name Worshippers" on the work of the Moscow school of mathematics early in the twentieth century.[16]

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[14] Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*, according to Henrik Ibsen, *Samlede Verker* (Oslo: Gylendal, 2006), 265-322, 280.
[15] Cornelius Tacitus, *Historiae*, 1.1. According to Tacitus, *Histories* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1925).
[16] Loren Graham and Jean-Michel Kantor, "A comparison of two cultural models of mathematics," *Isis* 97 (2006), 56-74.

Conclusion

Førland's book comes at the moment when the invasions that Derrida described, prophesized and in some cases caused seem to have ceased, and this is a good moment to survey our current situation and their impact. This is a job that his book performs well. If one steps back and looks at the wider picture that it paints, it becomes obvious that questions of ontology come to the forefront. As Ian Verstegen put it, "Ontology is not a philosophical pastime. It is the very basis of social emancipation."[17] Sooner or later, historians will have to face the fact that some kinds of causation and causes are credible according to the worldview that modern sciences are defining with increasing accuracy, and that some are not. Rejections of the materialist worldview, that allow one to postulate immaterial, crypto-spiritual and supra-individual forces, can appear credible only if such non-existent are masked, for instance by giving them new names. Possibly the most important thing that historians can learn from history of historiography in recent decades is that non-existent things or causes do not become any more real if one renames them. This lesson has cost scholars in all fields of the humanities a lot, but if it has been mastered, the cost has been worth it.

[17] Verstegen, *A Realist Theory of Art History* (London: Routledge, 2013), xv.