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After God

*Richard Kearney and the Religious
Turn in Continental Philosophy*

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Introduction

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Moses desires to see the “glory” (Ex. 33:18) or the “face” (Ex. 33:22) of God, but he is refused and receives a vision of God “only from behind,” *after God*, on going by, had pressed him with his hand into the crack in the rock.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of God*, VI, p. 38

So here we are, like Moses, *after God*.

All the texts in this volume share, in one way or another, the adverbial ambiguity of *after*. The God they seek—the God they are after—is a God who can be seen “only from behind,” that is, without being seen, in the blindness of vision, at the limits of the phenomenological horizon. This is a God who, for several of our contributors, can be known only through the dark cloud of not-knowing. A God who can be named only through the paradox of a name that refers back to itself, without name. A God *without God*, without sovereignty, power, and presence.

Who or what comes, then, after God? Such was the question that befell philosophy following the proclamation of the “death of God.” In the wake of God, as the last fifty years of philosophy have shown, God comes back again, *otherwise*: Heidegger’s last God, Levinas’s God of Infinity, Derrida’s and Caputo’s *tout autre*, Marion’s God without Being, Kearney’s God who may be.

The stakes in this debate could not, in my view, be higher or more topical; the questioning of God has taken on a new urgency and pertinence in this time of religious and cultural conflict. This return to religion became dramatically visible in all its complexity on September 11. The event itself assumed religious dimensions in its sublimity as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. It was immediately registered in terms of two religious idioms: Islamic fanaticism, which “provoked” and “justified” it, and Christian fundamentalism, which proclaimed that the West was under attack and vowed to protect it. As the name of God was invoked by politicians and common people alike, as “ground zero” became more and more a *hallowed* ground with interfaith services and memorials, gradually September 11 became less exclusively a political case, simply because such an impossible event could not be fully appropriated by political language. It called, in time, for a more philosophical discourse, as epitomized by Kearney’s essay “On Terror” in his *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*. The present volume on Kearney, I believe, elaborates and expands on such a discourse, by presenting us with a divinity at last free from the three-headed monster of metaphysics—the Omni-God of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence—and the “triumphalist teleologies and ideologies of power” that it has provoked.

In the Continental tradition, religion and the question of God have always been an integral part of philosophy. Whether theistic or atheistic, intellectual movements such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, structuralism, and poststructuralism have all engaged in various ways with questions of ultimacy, transcendence, and alterity. Two of the foremost thinkers in this dialogue are Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger. Kierkegaard emphasized faith over reason, while Heidegger gave precedence to thought over faith. Both, however, draw from a common Pauline tradition, although they interpret it differently. With the advent of phenomenology, normative questions about theistic claims—for example, the debate about the existence of God—are often bracketed (a method known as the phenomenological *epoché*) for the sake of a different and arguably more meaningful set of questions: Could God be given to consciousness as a phenomenon? What kind of phenomena are religious experiences? What sort of phenomenological method is needed in order to describe them? In recent years, this questioning of God has assumed such acute and arresting proportions as to prompt some scholars to speak of a “theological turn” in philosophy. Kearney’s

work signals one of the most compelling and challenging engagements with this turn.

Following Kierkegaard and Levinas, the Continental philosophy of religion embraces Pascal's distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, giving precedence to the latter over the former. Such a gesture indicates a move away from metaphysics and toward a God who surpasses the old categories of ontotheology. Contemporary French thinkers (Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luis Chrétien) have offered exemplary cases of such thinking. Marion, in particular, has greatly contributed to the formation of a nonmetaphysical thinking of God. First, by following Heidegger's critique of ontotheology, he unfettered God from His ontological burden; more recently, by recovering and reinterpreting the notion of givenness in Husserl; and finally, by developing his own insights on a phenomenology of saturation.

In its hermeneutical trajectory, following Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, Continental philosophy adds a movement both of suspicion and of affirmation to this debate. Richard Kearney's *diacritical hermeneutics* and John D. Caputo's *radical hermeneutics* are two special instances. Besides being the chief exponent of deconstruction's implications for religion (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 1997), Caputo's thought has been of tremendous significance in explicating Jacques Derrida's "turn to religion," represented by a series of recent works.¹ Caputo's *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987) led him to a novel, postmetaphysical understanding of religion "without religion" (*On Religion*, 2001), signaling with this paradox the undecidable mystery of God—"an infinite questionability" that is, at the same time, "endlessly questionable." Kearney's diacritical hermeneutics, on the other hand, attempts to steer a middle path between Romantic hermeneutics (Schleiermacher), which retrieves and reappropriates God as presence, and radical hermeneutics (Derrida, Caputo), which elevates alterity to the status of undecidable sublimity. This debate—exemplified by this volume's concluding exchange among Kearney, Derrida, and Caputo—has already made its mark as one of the most challenging directions of Continental thought.

This volume attempts to represent some of the most considered responses to Richard Kearney's recent writings on the philosophy of religion, in particular *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Indiana, 2001) and *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (Routledge, 2003). Since the publication of these two volumes,

over a dozen international academic societies have devoted conferences, book panels, and seminars to major aspects of Kearney's hermeneutics of religion.² This volume brings together seventeen essays, seventeen different variations on the same theme: philosophy about God *after God*—that is to say, a way of thinking God otherwise than ontologically. Against the monotony—or, as Nietzsche has aptly put it, the monotonous-theism—of a single voice, this volume sings with a polyphony that brings into unison different times and different spaces. First, the thinkers included in this collection hail from different geographical coordinates: in particular, continental Europe and North America. But they also traverse different generations: an older one, comprising figures who have influenced Richard Kearney's thought (Breton, Derrida, Caputo, Marion, Greisch, Janicaud, Helderman), and a younger one that includes several figures who have been inspired by Richard Kearney's thought (Bloechl, Nichols, Ó Murchadha, Treanor, Manoussakis). In any case, it is Kearney's recent attempts to rethink the religious that serve as the central thread that runs throughout this collection.

Richard Kearney is still in the midday of his life (he was born in December 1954); and his work, far from being concluded, is still in many exciting ways in progress. This volume does not aspire to offer a definitive statement on Kearney's philosophy of religion, but only to put on record and make available for a larger readership the lively debates that his writings have already generated. By doing so, this work bears witness to two things: the relevance of Kearney's philosophical writings for the current study of religion, and the relevance of theology and religion for the present study of philosophy as it has been confirmed by the work of major thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic.³

All of the papers presented in this volume share the common problematic of the otherness of the Other—an eminent concern in post-Levinasian philosophy. This problematic can be expressed in the following dilemma: how can we think and speak of the Other *on the Other's terms*, that is, without reducing otherness to a reflection of the Same—while, at the same time, being able to think and speak of the Other without falling into a sort of apophatic mysticism of the ineffable?

Kearney's work, even when it comes to the question of the paradigmatic Other, that is, God—or, *especially* when it comes to questions of God—tries persistently to articulate a middle way (a *via*

tertium) between the two extremes of our philosophical debate: (a) the unmediated, uncritical rapport with the Other epitomized by Levinas's infinity, Derrida's *différance*, and Caputo's *kbora*, and (b) certain rigid and outdated conceptions of ontotheology and metaphysics. Kearney would like to maintain the healthy criticism of a hermeneutics of suspicion without, however, letting go of a hermeneutics of suspension (that retrieves and even embraces forgotten or overlooked treasures in tradition's storehouse, such as Aristotle's *dynamis*, Gregory's *prosopeon*, and Cusanus's *possest*). This position came to be known in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* as *diacritical hermeneutics*. The methodological equivalent of diacritical hermeneutics is the *prosoptic reduction* proposed here.

It is this hermeneutical reduction of reductions—reversing the reversals and returning us to the simple eschatology of the everyday—that the essays of the present book seek to address. Almost all of the authors would agree on the necessity of a critical philosophy for providing us with the resources for discernment when it comes to distinguishing between a “good” alterity (the stranger, the widow, and the orphan) and a “bad” alterity (the monstrosity of evil). They would disagree, however, on the criteria to be chosen and the principles that would guide us in such a diacritical project.

The crucial moment in carrying out Kearney's envisioned philosophy (hermeneutical and phenomenological) comes when the road we follow reaches a fork. At that moment one needs to decide which way to go, and it is precisely in the possibility of such a decision—if, indeed, one can decide—that a number of the papers find potential disagreement. For diacritical hermeneutics seems to want to have its pie and eat it: Isn't the need for criteria canceled out by the *neutrality* of its position? And if such a neutrality is abandoned for the sake of criteria, wouldn't we eventually have to side with one or the other extreme?

The thinkers writing for this volume take two distinct and somewhat antithetical positions. There are those who question Kearney's seemingly equivocal language of the different signs and figures of God, asking how this “God who may be” does not end up to be not a God at all but rather a regulatory concept (Desmond) or a unifying idea (Nichols) around which Kearney is constructing some kind of “ethical monotheism” (Bloechl). Such criticism eventually leads to the arduous task of “defining” what or who God is supposed to be (Treanor)—a question taken up in a controversial way by Breton and O'Leary.

On the antipodes of this line of thinking, there are those who question Kearney's reluctance to cut the umbilical cord of metaphysics, asking whether his religious hermeneutics offers us an alternative *to* ontotheology or just another version of it, namely, an onto-eschatology (Olthuis). After all, as Hart and Olthuis ask, isn't the *possible* a category of metaphysics? Both Ó Murchadha and O'Leary interrogate the Judeo-Christian commitments that, in their view, inform Kearney's hermeneutical and phenomenological reading. Kearney's pledge to an understanding of God that would promote love and justice does not derive (as Janicaud argues in his essay—the last before his untimely death) from a purely phenomenological observation; and thus it seems to vitiate his claim to find God in phenomena such as *posse* or the "face" of the Other: phenomena which, if "allowed to unfold on their own terms and without theological interference, do not necessarily point to the God of Scripture" (O'Leary). As Ó Murchadha observes, "the things to come" (eschatology) are not quite the same as "the things themselves" (phenomenology).

This debate, like any debate that touches upon the fundamental questions of philosophy, cannot receive a definitive answer. It must instead be left open and ongoing. As a provisional and tentative response, however, to the arguments, questions, and objections raised by the essays collected in this volume, we have prefixed a double proposal for a phenomenological prosopic reduction that supplements the preceding three (Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion). This is an attempt to sketch out those premises according to which the conundrum of the Other's alterity, as outlined above, is rethought through an integral phenomenology that allows us to encounter the Other in the relational infinity of our everyday experience. This renewed attention to epiphanies of the ordinary universe is what Kearney calls a *microeschatology*.

Wishing to leave the much-contested question of the relationship between philosophy and religion open, we have organized the seventeen contributions presented here into two major groups: "Philosophy Facing Theology" and "Theology Facing Philosophy." We thought that such a dialogical "facing off" might best capture the relational character of *prosopon* as a being-toward-the-face-of-the-Other.

The final part of the present volume, titled "Recapitulations," provides the reader with lively debates and exchanges among leading figures on the philosophy of religion (Derrida, Marion, Caputo) and theology (Tracy, McFague, Keller) while summarizing and reviewing the main themes of thinking God *after God*.

Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology

RICHARD KEARNEY

That is God . . .

What?

A shout in the street

James Joyce, *Ulysses*

What if we were to return to epiphanies of the everyday? What if we could come back to the end (*eschaton*) in the here and now? Back to that end after the end of time that addresses us in each instant? What if we could rediscover ourselves again face-to-face with the infinite in the infinitesimal? Touch the sacred enfolded in the seeds of ordinary things?

Such a return would invite us to experience the ultimate in the mundane. The first in the last. The most in the least. It would bring us into dialogue with those who seek the divine in the pause between two breaths. Transcendence in a thornbush. The Eucharist in a morsel of madeleine. The Kingdom in a cup of cold water. San Marco in a cobblestone. God in a street cry.¹

In our rush to the altars of Omnipotence we often neglected theophanies of the simple and familiar. We forgot to attend to the germs of the kingdom manifest in what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls “speckled, dappled things.” So doing, we tended to overlook the semaphore of the insignificant. For it is often in the most quotidian, broken, inconsequential, and minute of events that the divine signals

to us—"to the Father through the features of men's faces." This insight into the sacred "thisness" of things is what Duns Scotus, the Celtic thinker, called *haecceitas*. The idea is that Creation is synonymous and synchronous with incarnation, that each moment is a new occasion for the eternal to traverse the flesh and blood of time. *Enskar-kosis*, or enfleshment: the infinite embodied in every instant of existence, waiting to be activated, acknowledged, attended to. The one ablaze in the many. The timeless flaring in the transitory. The holiness of happenstance. And our calling, in the wake of such encounters, is nothing less than this: to give "beauty back to God" (Gerard Manley Hopkins). So that each of our responses serves, potentially, as an opportunity to transubstantiate flesh back into word. And by extension, word into action.

Our highest human vocation, as Hopkins puts it, is to revisit the "inscape" of the sacred in every passing particular. This activity he calls variously "aftering," "seconding," "over-and-overing," or "abiding again" by the "bidding" of the singular. This is what we might term *ana*-aesthetics, heeding the semantic resonances of the Greek prefix *ana*: "up, in place or time, back, again, anew" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). We are speaking of a refiguring of first creation in second creation. Re-creation of the sacral in the carnal. Against the Grand Metaphysical Systems that construed God in terms of formal universals and abstract essences, the Scotist poet invites us back (*ana*) to the first genesis—and *at the same time* forward to the final kingdom: to that *eschaton* dwelling in each unique, material instant, no matter how lowly or profane. Here and now the sacred "selves" and "instresses" through the most transient forms of flesh. "Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells, / Crying what I do is me: for that I came" ("As Kingfishers Catch Fire"). From such instantaneous and recurring incarnation no one and no thing, no single *this* or *that*, is excluded. All are invited to the table. And the table is laden. For "This Jack, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond."² Here the descent into the banal (*katabasis*) takes the form of a rescent to the precious (*anabasis*). And in the process the binary opposition between up and down dissolves.

What, then, if we could return to the *eschaton*? What if we could embrace a philosophical gesture inspired by successive radicalizations of the phenomenological method, culminating in what we might call

a *fourth reduction*? Suppose we were to envisage an after-the-event return to the event. A move back to the everyday moment where philosophy first begins in wonder or pain. Would this not be the simplest of redirections? A recapture of those accidental events that escape the nets of essentialist inspection? This questioning is intended as a modest proposal fashioned in the guise of an epilogue, echo, repetition, recall (*ana-mnesis*)? Like a postscript of some “supplementary clerk” appended to the grand reductions of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion?

Our wager is that such a fourth reduction—this last and least of returns—might eventually lead us back (*re-ducere*) to the *eschaton* curled at the heart of quotidian existence. Such a revisiting of the least of things, in order to retrieve the voice and visage of the highest in the lowest, is what we call an *eschatological reduction*. What follows is a brief sketch of what this might entail.

The phenomenological method, according to Jean-Luc Marion, has been subject to three main reductions since its inception in the early twentieth century. First came the *transcendental reduction* initiated by the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. This involved a bracketing of our “natural attitude” of habit and opinion so as to return to the “essences” of meaning. According to Husserl, the redirecting of our attention from accidental contingencies of existence to the invariant, essential structures underlying them would lead us eventually to an inner realm of transcendental consciousness—a place where we might experience an “eidetic intuition” of timeless truths.

Husserl’s transcendental reduction was followed by Heidegger’s *ontological reduction* (though Heidegger never used this term). This second reduction involved a further reorientation of our awareness, this time from the essences of beings to “being as being” (*Sein als Sein*). This also entailed a “turning” of our attention toward the so-called *ontological difference*, namely, the long neglected difference between being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiendes*).

More recently, we have witnessed what Marion calls a third reduction. This we might call the *donological reduction*. It is largely identified with Jean-Luc Marion’s return to the “gift” in *Being Given* and other works. As such it aims to go beyond both Husserl’s epistemology and Heidegger’s ontology to a tertiary intuition of what Marion calls “the saturated phenomenon.” But it finds several significant prefigurations, it seems to me, in the famous “religious turn” of a third generation of phenomenologists inspired by philosophers such

as Levinas, Ricoeur, and Michel Henry. Here we might also count such postmetaphysical thinkers as Derrida, Caputo, and Chrétien, not to mention Marion himself, who has made the reduction to the “givenness of the gift” a hallmark of his pioneering investigations.⁵

What we are suggesting here, then, is the possibility of a fourth reduction—one that does not aim to supplant the first three but merely to supplement them. We might call this reduction *microeschatological* insofar as it leads us through the horizons of (1) “essence,” (2) “being,” and (3) “gift”—*back to the everyday*: that is, back to the natural world of simple embodied life where we may confront again the other “face-to-face.” Here we recover the stranger as vis-à-vis or visage, as what the Greeks called *prosopon*.⁴ The other who appears to us through the accidental and the anecdotal. This fourth reduction, in short, would reverse the first three reversals (while fully acknowledging their invaluable findings) and bring us right back to the beginning: the face-to-face encounters of our ordinary universe.

While this may appear, at first blush, to be like a return to Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, we recall that Heideggerian *Dasein* has no body, no sex, no unconscious, no unique answerability to the other. *Dasein* remains a universal, transcendental structure. In its most authentic expression, it is always and in each case alone before death. Inauthenticity, by contrast, is signaled by *Dasein*’s immersion in the common society of being-with-others in the mode of the “They.” Our everyday social, moral, and political relations with our fellow human beings are basically, for Heidegger, a distraction from the essential questioning of Being. Everydayness poses the threat of *doxa* to the rarefied insights of the *Augenblick*, understood in terms of *Dasein*’s own self-disclosure. For, we are told, “*Dasein* exists for the sake of itself,” and only secondarily for others. With the fourth reduction we are proposing to move in an alternative direction: from the ontological back to the ontical, from speculative solipsism back to the *sensus communis* of our being-for-one-another.

While our proposal may seem, at second blush, like a reiteration of the Levinasian move from ontology to ethics, it also departs from it in several crucial respects. For example, the eschatological encounter with the *prosopon* differs from Levinas’s account of the face in that for us the eyes of the other *do* have color (they are embodied as particular, living, sensible flesh). We also depart from Levinas in seeking to move *back to being* from beyond being. There is something quintessentially incarnate about the *prosopon* as a way of facing an Other

whose very transcendence traverses and invests its immanence here and now. Every concrete person — understood as *prosopon/persona* — is charged with the *thiness* of a specific narrative identity, of a contingent history that is both conscious and unconscious. *Prosopon* is not a mask (*prosopeion*). It is not a mere pretext for God, some faint trace of transcendence. It is the divine itself manifest in the “least of these”: in the color of their eyes, in the lines of their hands and fingers, in the cracked tone of voice, in all the tiny epiphanies of flesh and blood.

So while Levinas’s notion of the face leads us beyond ontology and aesthetics to a religious ethics of asymmetry between self and other, the eschatological reduction we propose here aims to (a) reconcile ethics with aesthetics and (b) bring the Good back into liaison with being. For the *prosopon* is precisely that: liaison, dialogue, chiasmus, oneself-as-another and the other-as-oneself. This epitomizes a face-to-face symmetry that Levinas and certain deconstructionists decry. For us, the being of *prosopon* is a being-good. A recipe for what we have called elsewhere an *onto-eschatology*. It signals a retrieval of God not so much beyond being as beneath being. God in and through and for being. *Deus sicut transitus ad esse*.

Moreover, the fourth reduction is characteristically “prosopic” in that it embraces the possibility of hermeneutic mediation and detour. This profoundly modifies the tendency of both the ontological and the donological reductions to ultimately sacrifice interpretation to some ineffable sublime. The fourth reduction proposes to return us to the hermeneutic resources of speech beyond the excesses of apathetic silence. And regarding religion, we would suggest that the eschatological reduction might lead us back to a God of the last and least of these (*elachistos*) — divinity encountered as incarnate *prosopon* in what may be described, with Ricoeur, as a “second naïveté” or “second faith.” So that *after* God we find ourselves *returning to* God. We discover ourselves *before* God in a new way, recovering, by way of creative repetition, what was always there in the first place, but remained unseen. The fourth reduction might thus be said to move from meta-physics to ana-physics: that is, back to the most concretely enfolded phenomenon of the *prosopon* in its infinite *capacity to be*. In other words, there is nothing at all new about the *prosopon* in itself. All that is new is our way of *seeing* and *bearing* it. But it was always already there, summoning us, from the start.

So, I repeat, the fourth reduction does not dispense with the three reductions that precede it. Rather it supplements them — to say “completes” would be pretentious — by retrieving the eschatological space

that makes each reduction possible: the *eschaton* which holds and upholds “essence,” “being,” and “gift.” It salvages what is remaindered from the three reductions. Residual seeds of possibility that have been there, unremarked, from the beginning. In other words, the eschatological reduction retrieves the *possibilizing* of essence, being, and gift, which seemed impossible before the return to the gracious gap underlying and sustaining them. Is the fourth reduction religious, then? Yes; but only if we understand here a religion *beyond* religion, *before* religion, and *after* religion. This is a form of *ana-theism*, if you will. Leaving open options of both theism and atheism. It is a repetition forward to a God of the most ordinary things of our most ordinary existence.

By extension, we might suggest that the *ana-theistic* retrieval performed by the fourth reduction is accompanied by a series of related retrievals:

1. *ana-esthetic* (retrieval of radiance after abjection);
2. *ana-dynamic* (retrieval of the possible after the impossible);
3. *ana-phatic* (retrieval of speech after silence);
4. *ana-physical* (retrieval of the natural after the supernatural);
5. *ana-ethical* (retrieval of the good after normativity);
6. *ana-choral* (retrieval of divine chora after the abyss);
7. *ana-erotic* (retrieval of desire after desirelessness).

Each of these retrievals would, of course, require extended hermeneutic explication, which is beyond the limits of this summary sketch.

For now, let me simply say this: like all philosophical enterprises, especially those of a spiritual character, this proposal of a fourth reduction is a hermeneutic wager. A matter of faith, then? Yes, but a faith sustained by as much understanding, interpretation, and wisdom as possible. A belief which never ceases to wrestle with its twin of unbelief. A hope in a light seen through the dark. Jacob’s faith as he struggles with the angel in the night.

It is crucial, I believe, to emphasize this hermeneutic character of the fourth reduction. Why so? Because such acknowledgment of the *interpretive* status of our approach guarantees a pluralist reading of the *eschaton*. It keeps us humble. Whether we call it simply “God,” or the “God beyond God” (with Eckhart and the mystics)—or, indeed, the not-yet-God of atheistic messianism (Bloch, Derrida)—all this is actually a matter of interpretation. A question of listening, of reading, of belief. The *eschaton* is not the prerogative of any one particular reli-

gion, monotheistic or otherwise. It is more generous than that. It is the assurance that every “I am” (and especially the divine) is inextricably linked to an “I am no one.” The *ego sum* is inseparable from the *nemo*: the last and least of beings. This double movement is felicitously captured in the French word *personne*: I am someone and no one at the same time. For the *eschaton* is a creative and loving emptying (*kenosis*) which gives space to beings. It is the gap in God incarnate in the littlest of things. The infinitesimal infinite.

Perhaps this is what Plato was alluding to in the *Timaeus* when he spoke of *chora* as an empty womb that precedes and engenders all intelligible and sensible things. Or what the Upanishads were gesturing toward when they spoke of *akasa*—that infinite empty space within *both* the universe *and* the inner heart, from which all divine energy (*sakti*) flows into the world. A sacredness, at first, smaller than a seed (*bija*). And perhaps it was also what Paul had in mind when he spoke of a capacious “unknown God” who anticipates Christ—and, one might add, Krishna, the Buddha, and the other sacred figures of wisdom and compassion?

The *eschaton* may be construed, accordingly, as the least exclusive of functions. As the very opposite of Hegel’s *telos* and theodicy. And if we wish to read it as One, it would be as an absolute that refuses to be reduced to any one of its manifestations. An absolute that absolves itself. As such, this irreducibility of *L’Un à l’Unique* (to borrow the formula of Stanislas Breton) is the best guarantee of interreligious pluralism.⁵ Because the eschatological One cannot be named absolutely in any one way, it can be named only in multiple ways. The One in the midst of the many is not at the expense of the many. It is, rather, the path that leads to other paths. A refusal of both absolutism (one without many) and relativism (many without one). So that if Christ, for example, famously announces that it is “only” through him that one can get to the Father, we might interpret this “only” as excluding nothing but exclusiveness itself. The *eschaton* is open to everyone. It is, as it were, the germinal space that engenders numerous different religions. Thus, every attempt to define the *eschaton* is already and necessarily an interpretation. In the beginning was the Word, which is always already a multiplicity of words. From the start is hermeneutics! The first and last of methods. And the simplest. Which is why, in this free space of eschatology, we may say that Jesus and the Buddha, for example, converse without seeking to convert one another. The Scriptures and Sutras find themselves in dialogue. Theists and atheists commune.

If some of the preceding terms draw from monotheism, it is not only because this reflects my own hermeneutic wager as someone who hails from a Judeo-Christian heritage; it is also because I believe that this same tradition harbors within itself seed spaces which foster a colloquy of different voices. I am thinking here of several signal events in my own biblical narrative tradition. First, the aboriginal act of withdrawal (*zimzum*), which allows the Creator of Genesis to give space and freedom to its creatures. Second, the eschatological gap at the heart of the deity revealed in Exodus 3:15, which allows the one who “was” and “is” also to be the one who “may be”—a deity, in the guise of a common thornbush, which promises to be with its creatures forever, the God of possibility to come. Third, a Word self-emptying into the flesh of the last and least, an emptying that proceeds from incarnation right up to death on the cross and descent into the dark: kenotic acts inviting all beings to live again more fully. And, fourth, the *germen nibili* returning from the abyss of the empty tomb in the form of what Paul called the germinal or spiritual body.

Four divine descents, then, into the empty space of the ordinary—creation, exodus, incarnation, death—resurrection—each one of which solicits the return of old life in epiphanies of new life. Four revelations of the divine potentiality to plumb the depths of *kbora* in order to bring forth the more from the less. An extraordinary paradox this, no? And one that is ingeniously captured, I believe, in the Patristic metaphor of the Trinity as *peri-choresis*. Three persons dancing around (*peri*) a fourth dimension, an empty space (*chora*)—that sacred milieu of mutual withdrawal, letting be, love. Three persons who would collapse into indifference and indifferentiation were it not for that free feminine spacing opening up between them: an Open that holds them at once together and apart. For *chora* has always been a she. The matrix of all things. As invoked by the anonymous artist of the mother-and-child mural in the monastery of Chora in Istanbul. *Chora Achoraton*. “Container of the Uncontainable.”⁶

This is, of course, an interpretation. A “religious” interpretation, granted. A particular reading of the *eschaton* that acknowledges itself as such and does not exclude other interpretations (theistic or atheistic), but rather invites them to the chorus of philosophical exchange. For where our Western tradition speaks of *chora*, *eschaton*, and *germen nibili*, our Eastern counterparts might invoke such terms as *bija*, *guba*, or *tao*. This decisive and long-overdue conversation between the world’s different wisdom traditions has hardly begun, though hap-

pily figures such as Pannikar, Abhishiktananda, Griffiths, and Thich Nhat Hanh are pointing the way. For if religion has, alas, been one of the major sources of war and hatred, it may also be a crucial ingredient of healing.

The fourth reduction, in sum, radicalizes the three phenomenological reductions to the point where they rejoin hermeneutics. And here we adhere to Paul Ricoeur's counsel that we "renounce the idea of creating a phenomenology of the religious phenomenon taken in its indivisible universality" in favor of an "interconfessional hospitality" that permits us to trace the "broad hermeneutic strands" of specific religions in dialogue with others.⁷ At this critical juncture, we find intuition recovering interpretation. We see the *eschaton* selving itself in various ways, featuring itself in multiple faces, singing itself in many voices. A polyphony of call and response. A banquet of translation.

Let me offer, at this point, a few remarks on the eschatological reduction as "repetition." The fourth reduction leads us back—by leading us forward—to a sacred space at the heart of things. For too long theology and metaphysics have identified the divine with the most all-powerful of Beings. Sovereign, Self-sufficient substances. Transcendental Forms. First and Final Causes. Immutable essences. But in the process, we tended to turn our backs on the "God of little things," the holiness of this and that. Too often we forgot the fact that God is manifest in the least ones calling for a cup of cold water, asking to be fed, clothed, cared for, heard, loved. We ignored the face of the desert stranger who comes in the middle of the night and wrestles with us until we open our eyes and see face-to-face: *Prooipon*. We stopped hearing God in "a shout in the street."

The fourth reduction solicits a retrieval of the lowercase at the other side of the uppercase: after Metaphysics, after Theology, after Being, after God. So we call it a micro-eschatology. Why? To remind ourselves that we are seeking to signpost a path that brings us back to the "end" (*eschaton*) that is after the End (*telos*) and before the Beginning (*arche*). An eschatology, we repeat, that restores us to the simplicity of the face-to-face prior to all First and Final Causes. We are talking, to borrow Ricoeur's formula, about an "eschatology of the sacred" beyond both archaeology and teleology. In other words, our eschatology of the everyday defies the perverse reading of eschatology as some triumphant End of History where the divine trumps the human. It scuppers the fantasy of a Supreme Being disparaging

finite creatures in some Final Settlement. Such a triumphal sense of Last Judgment travesties the enigma of the last-as-first; it betrays the logic of the “least of these.” And, so doing, it remains deaf to the miracle of discernment, which may intervene in the most profane moments of our lived experience.

The fourth reduction also resists the tendency of certain sublime theologies—deconstructive or New Age—to leave us senseless before some utterly inaccessible Other. Departing from the secure syllogisms of metaphysics does not mean we have to embrace a transcendence so transcendent that it disappears off the radar screen, leaving behind not only flesh but word as well. We are not obliged to become sightless and speechless (*apo-phasis*) before the sublimity of God. No. What we seek, with the fourth reduction, is a “repetition” of speech (*ana-phasis*), a retrieval of saying beyond silence. Such saying would, in turn, be accompanied by a seeing beyond the invisible (*ana-aesthesis*) and a touching beyond the tangible (*ana-pathos*). In short, we are concerned with a way of saying, seeing, and feeling over again—of sensing otherwise, anew, for a second time. So that we may “see and touch the goodness of the Lord” in the wounds and wonders of the commonest beings. Disclose the sacramental in *le dernier des derniers*. For the *eschaton* reveals itself in the mundane as much as in the momentous, in the scarred as much as in the beautiful, in the lost as much as in the found. It elicits ways of rediscovering God in the ordinary universe which the gods—*pace* Heidegger and certain postmodern prophets of fatality—have never really abandoned.

This is why we claim that the eschatological reduction signals a return to poetics. A sort of *ana-poetics* after *aporetics*. Such a poetics, we repeat, bids us revisit the primordial sphere of everyday sayings, expressions, presuppositions, beliefs, speech acts, convictions, faiths, and commitments—namely, that realm of primary speech that the first three reductions sought, in their different ways, to bracket. Not that we want to dispense with the invaluable disclosures of *essence*, *being*, and *gift* brought about by the preceding suspensions. On the contrary, we wish rather to push these radical insights toward a recapitulation of the ordinary beyond the extraordinary. Such that one will, hopefully, never again take the given for granted nor remain deaf to the epiphany of a street cry. So that what might first appear as a presumptuous gesture—somehow to outdo such thinkers as Husserl, Heidegger, or Marion—is in fact the opposite. The fourth reduction is no more than a memo, an afterword, an epilogue after

the event. It is intended, in all modesty, as a reminder posted to these great phenomenologists that there are a few small things left behind, unheard and unseen, discarded and neglected, in their seemingly exhaustive wake. In their plunge toward fundamental profundity, phenomenology often turned its sights from the treasures floating in the flotsam and jetsam of the forfeited. It overlooked the “foul rag and bone shop of the heart” (Yeats).

The return to poetics does not require the abandonment of philosophy. In fact, poetics might be said to occupy that in-between site where conceptual reflection finds its limits and poetry finds its illimitable nutrition. In this sense, the idiom of poetics promoted by the fourth reduction invites us to another kind of thinking, what we might call with Rilke an understanding of the heart, which observes a double fidelity to both philosophy and poetry. As such, it hopes to conjoin a certain rigor of mind with a special resonance of imagination. And to obviate dogmatism.

Against the Hegelian lure of a final synthesis, we insist that the four reductions be considered as a fluid interplay where each moves back and forth between the others, resisting the tendency to fix the interrelationship in some teleological hierarchy of progressive fulfillment. The cry of the fourth reduction, no less than that of the first (Husserl’s), is “back to the beginning,” over and over again. Indeed, our commitment to such a poetics of perpetual replay reminds us that the game of the four reductions is not confined to phenomenology per se, considered as some crowning achievement of Western metaphysics. It has been playing itself out, time after time, from the earliest instances of Western (and, no doubt, non-Western) thought. For example, Platonism might be said to mark the first reduction; Aristotelianism, the second; Neoplatonism, the third; and a certain return to the ordinary world (Augustine’s questing heart, Duns Scotus’s “thisness,” Teresa of Avila’s “pots and pans”), the fourth. The variations are multiple and recurring. There is nothing really new in what we are saying here. It has been said before, in numerous ways. The fourth reduction simply offers a poetic license to start all over. To say it again. To do it again.

As we have already indicated, the return to the *eschaton* triggers a renewed interest in the religious. But this return to the religious remains for us philosophers a hermeneutic exercise rather than a theological dogma. It is not apologetics. For the hermeneutic space opened up by the fourth reduction is necessarily a creative conflict

zone of interpretations—a space where, for example, the theistic “messianisms” of monotheism can converse with the atheistic “messianicities” of postmodernism (Derrida, Bloch, Žižek, Badiou, Agamben), not to mention the wisdom interpretations of non-Western traditions. The philosophical hermeneutics we espouse acknowledges that every seeing is a *seeing-as*; every hearing, a *hearing-as*; every understanding, an *understanding-as*. True, the eschatological space disclosed by the fourth reduction is, arguably, the closest that the contemporary philosophy of phenomenological hermeneutics gets to theology. It certainly opens up the possibility of new theological interpretations. But if it may thus serve as prelude to theology, it is not yet, strictly speaking, theology. As philosophy of religion it keeps a certain methodological distance, as philosophy must. (If I were writing as a theologian, I could waive such scruples.) At best, we might say that the eschatological reduction carves out an agora where philosophy and theology may confront one another anew in “loving combat.”

How, then, one might ask, does the fourth reduction relate to the “theological turn in phenomenology”? While my friend, the late Dominique Janicaud, coined this phrase with a specific polemic in mind, we would be prepared to offer a somewhat broader reading. It is not necessary, in our view, to see the encounter between phenomenology and theology as a takeover of one by the other. Rather, I would suggest that the hermeneutic space opened up by the fourth reduction allows philosophy and theology to face off against one another in a process of mutual exchange. This facing off is also a facing toward: *prosopon*. Distance in and through rapprochement. That is to say, the eschatological turn allows theology to surpass itself as theology just as it permits phenomenology to surpass itself as phenomenology. So that the theological turn in phenomenology might correspond to a phenomenological turn in theology. The fourth reduction could thus be said to emancipate both disciplines into a new reinterpretation of the rapport between Being and God. A rapport that, we recall, has preoccupied Western thinkers from its Greek and biblical origins; and that, after a temporary eclipse, is now finding voice again.

The eschatological reduction, therefore, endeavors to amplify the horizons of “theology” and “philosophy” to include neglected possibilities of experiencing divinity and sacredness, alterity and transcendence, ultimacy and depth. That is why eschatology, as I understand it, can include in its range of reference both religious phenomenolo-

gists like Marion, Henry, Levinas, and Chrétien — targeted by Janicaud — and “postreligious” thinkers such as Bonhoeffer, Caputo, and Derrida. In sum, rather than excluding either theology or phenomenology, micro-eschatology explores new possibilities for both by exceeding their conventional limits.

Eschatological repetition calls, lastly, for another notion of *time*. Here we encounter a temporality beyond both the linear chronology of history and the circular reiteration of myth (e.g., the eternal return of the same). We are speaking of a specific kind of *ana*-chronology that might repeat the moment forward. This process of repetitive return operates like a gyre or spiral that carries us through the same experience for a second time, or a number of times, but at different altitudes, as it were — sometimes higher and farther, sometimes lower and closer. To repeat forward is, as Kierkegaard rightly insists, to reignite the possible in the actual. Eschatological repetition undoes the inevitable and deactivates (*katargein*) the actual by recovering the gracious seeds of possibility still lurking in our midst. It alerts us to the grace that can transmute each moment of linear time — past, present, future — into an instant (*kairos*) of eternity: timelessness in time, the not-yet in the now, the possible in the impossible, the word in the flesh. Thus while “recollection” may be said merely to reiterate the fixed actualities of the past, “repetition” retrieves the past in the present in such a way that it opens up possibilities for the future. Rather than simply remember what has been, *qua fait accompli*, repetition reorients time toward the possibilizing *eschaton* still to come. Repetition, in other words, gets the world back, but as different — at another level in the spiral of eschatological time. *Vita mutata non tollitur*: life changed but not taken away. Life returned, turned around. As though life were experienced in reverse — *ana*-logically — so as to be lived forward! For the eschatological instant is the one (and it is potentially every moment) in which we receive the gift of the world anew. The same world, of course, but refigured. The inevitability of what-has-been suddenly transfigured into the possibility of what-may-be. Each instant, suddenly, a portal at which the possible knocks. And seeks to enter.

This recovery of the *eschaton* at the heart of things is nothing less, I suggest, than the rediscovery of *posse* in *esse*. I am speaking here of that *posse* which flows from the divine to the human and back again, like a river in endless flux. There is nothing new here, and yet it is an invitation to constant renewal. It is no secret; it has been recog-

nized again and again by poets and sages (and countless ordinary people) throughout the ages. It is the river that the Dublin poet Patrick Kavanagh invoked in his passionate theopoetics of the common and contingent: “Leafy-with-love banks and the green waters of the canal / Pouring redemption for me, that I do / The will of God, wallow in the habitual, the banal. . . .” It is the river in the Taoist saying that “The best man is like water / Water is good; it benefits all things / and does not compete with them / It dwells in lowly places that all disdain / This is why it is so near to Tao.”⁸ And it is that same “river of compassion” which is celebrated by Bede Griffiths in his religious commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. For here in the confluence of diverse currents, possibilities crisscross and traverse, sounding an “infinite capacity for being.”⁹ In such times and places, the response “I am able” answers to the call “You are able.” Divinity capacitates humanity and, in return, humanity reactivates divinity.

This is perhaps what Paul means by the “*dunamis* of the spirit” which outstrips all the powers of dominion (Ephesians 1). And it is surely what Nicholas of Cusa is intimating when he says that divine *posse*—his preferred name for God—is a “truth that shouts in the streets,” something so obvious that even a child can hear!¹⁰ Such *posse* speaks in many distinct voices: *ebullitio*, *viriditas*, *sakti*, *lila*, *charis*, *gratia*. It is what in a previous work we have described as the *posse* of no-power capable of overcoming all powers.¹¹ This is why micro-eschatology begins, most simply, as a “poetics of the possible.”

Conclusion

So why recommend a fourth reduction if all it does is bring us back to where we began? All the way back to the everyday universe? Why? Because without sundering there is no recognition. Some breaking down or breaking away from our given lived experience is necessary, it seems, for a breakthrough to the meaning of that same experience, at another level, one where we may see and hear otherwise. I do not wish to claim, however, that such a new optics and acoustics are only available through philosophical reflection. Epiphanies are already there “in the pots and pans.” So what is it that triggers the shift of attention?

At its most basic it is, perhaps, the experience of death. The seed dying so that we may grow. Dying unto the world so that we may live again more abundantly. Being in the world still, more deeply than ever, but no longer of the world. No longer subject to the illu-

sions and attachments of Habit. This is, doubtless, what Heidegger meant by *Angst*: an existential mood that “de-worlds” us, throws us off kilter, shatters our cozy preconceptions, so as to open us to the authentic possibilities of our being-in-the-world. But, for Heidegger, this experience seems to be the elitist prerogative of exceptional individuals who renounce life in community with others to bravely face the solitary instant. As he says in *Being and Time*, the traumatic experience of death “individualizes” each one of us in an authentic moment (*Augenblick*) in which one finds oneself utterly alone.

Such “existential solipsism” is not what we are after with the eschatological reduction. As a first step, it is true, such moments—which I would claim are available to everyone—can elicit a certain disenchantment which may then issue in a reverse moment of epiphany. This is an experience that, arguably, resides at the root of most great philosophical beginnings. One thinks of the moment of Socratic ignorance that precedes wonderment (*thaumazein*); the moment of Augustinian disillusionment serving as prelude to radical questioning (*quis ergo amo cum deum meum amo?*); the moment of “learned not-knowing” (*docta ignorantia*), which Cusanus and certain “negative” theologians saw as portal to a *visio dei*; the moment of Descartes’s doubt, which precedes his recovery of the “idea of the infinite”; the moment of Husserl’s suspension (*epoche*), which aims to return us, eventually, to a “categorical intuition” of the being of things. But my point is that epiphanies don’t *have* to be exclusive moments of philosophical insight-through-detachment. The above are exemplary cases, and ones from which we can greatly learn. But they are not primary. They are no more than “repetitions” of more primordial experiences—aesthetic, mystical, spiritual, existential. I think Merleau-Ponty acknowledges this when he admits, in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, that there is nothing that the phenomenological reduction discloses that was not already laid forth, for example, in our cultural life-world. “The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it are not to be taken as a sign of failure, they were inevitable because phenomenology’s task was to reveal the mystery of the world. . . . If phenomenology was a movement before becoming a doctrine or a philosophical system, this was attributable neither to accident, nor to fraudulent intent. It is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—by reason of the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the

same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being.”¹²

In short, the philosophical reductions are doing no more than “repeating” at the level of reflective discourse what Cézanne, for one, was already doing in painting when he “exploded perspective” and solicited a more primordial way of seeing—enabling us to apprehend not just *natura naturata* but *natura naturans*. Or, by extension, what writers such as Proust and Joyce were doing when—in the pivotal “library scenes” of *Remembrance* and *Ulysses*—they showed their young authors (Marcel and Stephen) renouncing Grand Illusions in order to embrace epiphanies of the everyday.¹³ Moreover, it is precisely this homecoming that the poet Patrick Kavanagh calls the reaffirmation of a “second simplicity” after the experience of skeptical loss. Such a moment is movingly captured in his poem “Hospital,” which describes the poet’s reentry to ordinary life after his recovery from a near fatal illness. Suddenly, almost posthumously, he sees the world again as he had never experienced it before—all the broken, battered, throwaway objects suddenly redeemed. “Naming these things is the love-act and its pledge,” he concludes, “to snatch out of time the passionate transitory.”

Does this imply that one must be either a philosophical initiate or an aesthetic connoisseur to have access to epiphanies? Are such insights confined to readers of Heidegger and Proust? Not at all. My argument has been, all along, that they are already available to the most simple of beings in the most simple of experiences—namely, in sacred moments of the ordinary aside from any grand leaps into Art or Metaphysics. They are there in the detritus of a Dublin canal, in stray cries of the street, in the mere “mereness of things” (Wallace Stevens). They are always already there. But we do not heed them unless, at some level, we have an experience of sundering. This can be registered in the simplest prayer of letting-go or in the commonest exposure to pain or disappointment. For dying unto oneself can happen in the most indigent and banal instants. If one follows the call of these dark ruptures in our natural attitude, one reaches a no-place from which one is invited to return to the place of life. One becomes a no-one called back to oneself. Though the world to which one returns is never quite the same. Just as the self to which one returns after such estrangement is always oneself as another.¹⁴ The *moi* comes back to itself as *soi*.

So, we ask one last time, why bother with philosophical reflection at all if the end of our elaborate bracketings and retrievals is already

accessible in the prephilosophical experiences of life and art? The reasons are, I think, twofold. First, philosophy is one of the most formative discourses of our culture. And even if the vast majority of people never actually read Plato or Aristotle, the Scholastics or Descartes our accredited ways of understanding ourselves are deeply marked by their thinking. This doesn't require us to buy into the Heideggerian notion that the entire world picture, governing our technological age, is determined by a forgotten destiny of Being. Suffice it to note that the long history of metaphysics has left indelible watermarks on our most basic forms of thought. (Just as the great texts of the Vedic or Buddhist traditions have profoundly informed Eastern ways of thinking, even if many adherents have no direct familiarity with the original Sanskrit philosophies.) If this be so, then it is incumbent on us to find ways of repeating these decisive philosophical maneuvers *forward*, by letting the flies out of the metaphysical bottles so that we may come back again from perplexity and skepticism to the "habitual and the banal." Though we acknowledge that after the Odyssean detour through the wandering rocks of reflective detachment, the same is never quite the same. One rediscovers oneself as "othered," as never before, as never again. One's life has changed.

But there is a second reason to embrace the philosophical journey of exodus and return. It is this: philosophy sometimes gives us special pause to review things at a more considered remove than is afforded by our usual nights of the soul or exposures to estrangement. This has something to do with that intellectual conversion that Plato called *periogoge* (turning around) and that Aristotle described as *anagnoresis-catharsis* (recognition through purgation). It refers to that peculiar sense of mental inversion that is signaled, today, by such terms as *epoche*, *Überwindung*, or *Kehre*. It is, in short, that indispensable loop on the hill path that enables us to climb higher before doubling back to the valley below. The step forward as step back. And vice versa.

In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum defends this philosophical countermove vis-à-vis our given experience. She makes the point that philosophical reflection on our primary lived experience, and even on our secondary literary experience, can help us "see" things that have gone unnoticed in our daily lives. At best, philosophical deliberation permits a second knowing, which returns us to experience for a second time *as if for the first time*. On occasion, writes Nussbaum, "I think the human heart needs reflection as an ally. Sometimes we need explicit philosophy to return us to the truths of the heart and to permit us to trust that multiplicity, that bewildering

indefiniteness. To direct us to the ‘appearances’ rather than to somewhere ‘out there’ or *beneath* or *behind* them.” And she adds that in certain contexts it is the momentary detour through “sceptical uneasiness,” provoked by philosophy, which can “lead us back to and express a respect for the multiplicity of the everyday.”¹⁵

I would say, in conclusion, that the eschatological reduction aims to bring a second sight to bear on the hidden and often neglected truths of first sight. It seeks to offer a form of recognition newer than cognition and older than perception. And, so doing, it hopes to serve as a modest guide to terrestrial wisdom: “I am the necessary angel of earth, / Since in my sight you see the world again” (Wallace Stevens).

These questions call for extensive detailed investigation well beyond the limits of this brief outline. We can, for now, but sketch a menu and offer a preliminary taste. The essay “Enabling God,” which follows in part 2, is a small offering in this direction.

Toward a Fourth Reduction?

JOHN PANTELEIMON MANOUSSAKIS

In this essay we attempt a redefining of the phenomenological method as this has been developed mainly through three “reductions”¹ represented by three thinkers whose work advanced phenomenological research in novel ways: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Luc Marion. Our rehearsal of the phenomenological tradition aims at formulating a set of controversial questions: Is it, perhaps, time for a *fourth* reduction that would better serve the sensibilities of the so-called phenomenology of the apparent? And if so, what might be its guiding principles, its ways of operating, its scope and aim? Such a fourth reduction, we believe, would not seek to overcome or discard the preceding movements of reduction; rather, it would strive to complete them by rehearsing, retrieving, and repeating them. In some sense, a fourth reduction could be a corrective recapitulation of the transcendent, ontological, and dosological² reductions. In the following pages we will try to flesh out what the basic principles of a fourth reduction might be by clarifying further the definition of the *prosopon* and its pertinence for a phenomenology of the experience of God.

Husserl’s transcendental reduction called for a return “to the things themselves,” where consciousness refocuses on the phenomena as they appear in themselves and by themselves (eidetically), cutting through, as it were, the layers of preassigned signification that common usage has accumulated over them. Heidegger’s ontological

reduction guided consciousness's eye in seeing that phenomena, even before being the manifestation of this or that thing, simply *are*. This understanding of phenomena as beings led Heidegger's thought to a retrieval of the difference between beings and the horizon of Being. The dosological reduction disclosed a structure more ulterior than phenomenality and being, that of unconditional givenness.

The fourth reduction does not seek to overcome or discard the preceding movements of reduction; rather, it strives to complete them by rehearsing, retrieving, and repeating them. In some sense, the fourth reduction is a corrective recapitulation of the transcendent, ontological, and dosological reductions.

What, then, is the fourth reduction? As Richard Kearney has phrased it in the opening essay of this volume, the fourth reduction "leads us beyond the horizons of 'essence,' 'being,' and 'gift' *back to existence*, that is, back to the natural world of everyday, embodied life where we may confront once again the Other as *prosopon*."

We will try to flesh out the basic principles of the fourth reduction by clarifying further the definition (discussed elsewhere) of the *prosopon* and its pertinence for a phenomenology of everyday experience.

It could be relatively easy to accuse the fourth reduction of being partial, especially in comparison with the three preceding ones, since it either reduces phenomena to the experience of the Other as *prosopon* or it excludes phenomena (any other than the Other) by being applicable only in cases where another human being is involved—having little or nothing to say about an entire world of phenomena (things, feelings, events, etc.). Indeed, how does this tree that I see through my window, or this paper that I am writing on, "fit" in such a prosopic reduction? Would it not be absurd, by the very definition of *prosopon*, to subject this kind of phenomena to the fourth reduction, to the extent that they lack a face (and the capacity of relationship that only a face can offer) and, therefore, can never take the place of the Other? In other words, the fourth reduction is said to reduce the world to the Other as *prosopon*, who now becomes its privileged (and unique) example. Its partiality, in other words, would have been a humanism, or personalism.

As a way of responding to this objection, we need to go back for a moment and reexamine the three previous reductions in the history of phenomenology. What we come to realize is that in all of them (transcendental, ontological, dosological) there is always a predominant "structure" through which and by which each reduction itself

takes effect and is occasioned. Even a casual reading of Husserl's work confirms that the operative structure in the transcendental reduction is *intentionality*. It is the intentional movement of consciousness that seeks and constitutes phenomena as objects. In return, the same structure elevates the I of the consciousness to the constituting I; intentionality, in short, holds the phenomenological scheme in place, since it is by means of it that the two poles of phenomenological operation are named and recognized for what they are: the constituting I and the constituted phenomena.

In Heidegger's *Being and Time* we witness how intentionality is replaced by *thrownness-into-the-World* (*Geworfenheit*), which now becomes, if not the only one, then certainly the main operative structure of the ontological reduction. Indeed, it is through the existential experience of finding oneself thrown-into-the-World—and through the two sides of this experience, namely, anxiety and boredom—that one comes to see phenomena as beings projected against the ubiquitous and yet elusive horizon of Being. Our particular thrownness which brings about the disclosure of phenomena as beings (and Being as such) is a key characteristic of what Heidegger calls *Dasein*.

In Marion's *Reduction and Givenness*, both structures, intentionality and thrownness, are criticized as retaining something of the Cartesian/Kantian notion of subjectivity. Both the constituting I and *Dasein* retain characteristics of the old sovereignty of the subject. Against them, Marion suggests a new understanding of the self, beyond metaphysics and subjectivity, namely, the *interloqué*. The *interloqué* recognizes itself as the one to whom whatever givenness gives, is given. What, quite literally, calls the *interloqué* into existence is the gift that givenness gives. That giving, however, being absolutely unanticipated, is characterized by *surprise*. For Marion, surprise becomes precisely the operative structure by which the third reduction is effected.

What is *intentionality* for the transcendental reduction, *thrownness* for the ontological reduction, and *surprise* for the dosological reduction is *relatedness*⁵ for the fourth reduction. I have shown in my "*Prosopon and Icon*" in this volume how relation is intrinsically connected with the etymology and conceptual genealogy of *prosopon*. We will see now how the understanding of *prosopon* as a relational structure can help us in formulating a fuller understanding of the ways the fourth reduction operates.

Richard Kearney's proposal for a fourth reduction summarized such a reduction under the imperative "back to existence"—but

which “existence”? By “existence” do we mean “reality”? And what is real, the fundamental experience of myself as a unity *or* the experience of the world as a multiplicity? How can I have an experience (a discursive concept) of existence (an intuition)? Or, to put it differently, how can the sameness of *my* identity as consciousness be reconciled with the otherness of *my* experience of the world? And in which pole of the spectrum does reality ultimately lie? If the foundations of my ability to know are restricted by such rules as the law of identity, where every “I” equals itself, then how am I allowed to think of the other person, of you, as another “I,” not identical with me? If everything is reduced to (some kind of) the One, how do we escape egotism? And if everything is reduced to the ever-changing manifold of the objective world (the world of experience), how does one escape reductionism? The Other and the Same, the One and the Many: such are the Cyclopes that await the philosopher in his quest. It is not easy to say “back to existence” without, somehow, deciding the matter at stake. The answers provided by the history of philosophy to this conundrum favor at some times the one end (the subject), at other times the other (the objective world).

We refuse to assign fundamentality or priority to *either* the experiencing I (rationalism, idealism) *or* the objects of its experience (realism, materialism). This refusal is our *epoche*. The experience to which the fourth reduction hails a return is that of relatedness. Before an *experiencer* and before an *experienced*, there is *experiencing*. The relation between any two given *relata* is constitutive of them (with regard to their relationship) and, therefore, more primary and originary than their subjectivity or objectivity. For example, in viewing a painting, neither I (the viewer) nor the painting (the viewed) takes precedence (metaphysical, ontological, or epistemological) over the other. For it is our *relation* (the viewing) that reveals me as a viewer and the painting as viewed. Furthermore, I am a viewer *because of* the painting and *insofar as* the painting offers itself to my look; conversely, the painting is such (viewed as such, as a painting) *because of* me and *insofar as* I look at it. Strictly speaking, neither the painting itself nor I as a viewer “exist” outside this relation. There is an infinite number of such relations. *Existence* is this relational infinity.

Our position shows an affinity with two different and diverse theoretical systems that can provide us with examples: the striking conclusions of the Copenhagen School (Niels Bohr, David Bohm, and Max Born) in quantum physics and the theophilosophical work of

the Russian theorist and scientist Pavel Florensky. The Uncertainty or Indeterminacy Principle, proposed by Heisenberg in 1925, boldly asserted that an electron “behaves” in reaction to its observer. Such a statement shattered both a static view of the universe, regulated by its universal and unchangeable laws (à la Newton) and by the certainty of the epistemological claims that scientists can make concerning our physical world. It was David Bohm, however, who radicalized the import of these changes toward an understanding of a desubstantialized (and consequently deobjectified) world. We read in his *Quantum Theory*:

The properties of matter are incompletely defined and opposing potentialities that can be fully realized *only in interactions* with other elements. . . . Thus, at the quantum level of accuracy, an object *does not have any “intrinsic” properties* (for instance, wave or particle) belonging to itself alone; instead it shares all its properties mutually and indivisibly with the systems with which it interacts.⁴

Florensky presents a similar insight, only articulated in a philosophical language. In his attempt to ground Truth on a certainty more foundational even than that of the law of identity, he comes across the groundless ground of antinomy (very much like the *coincidentia oppositorum* of his predecessor Nicholas of Cusa). For Florensky, however, the contradictory character of an antinomy does not exclude either of the two opposite poles, but affirms each on the basis of the other. This leads him eventually to an understanding of contraries (such as sameness and otherness) as terms in relation. For Florensky, truth cannot be anything but relational, for it is defined as “the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third.”

If “another” moment of time does not destroy and devour “this” moment, but is both “another” moment and “this” moment at the same time; if the “new,” revealed as the new, is the “old” in its eternity; if the *inner structure* of the eternal, of “this” and “the other,” of the “new” and the “old,” in their real unity is such that “this” must appear outside the “other” and the “old” must appear before the “new”; if the “other” and the “new” is such not through itself but through “this” and the “other,” and “this” and the “old” is what it is not through itself but through the “other” and the “new”; if, finally, each element of being is only a term of a substantial relationship, a relationship-substance,

then the law of identity, eternally violated, is eternally restored by its violation.⁵

What Florensky calls “a substantial relationship,” we call the *prosopon*. To understand the *prosopon* as only the person (and, thus, the other human being) is a misunderstanding. *Prosopon* defines a *tropos* (a way, a “how”) as well as a *topos* (a place, a “who”). Person indeed becomes *prosopon*’s primary meaning, insofar as a person fulfills the description that *prosopon* signifies (“towards-the-face-of-the-Other”). A *prosopon*, therefore, is to be understood as a dyad of *topos* and *tropos*—these two meanings stand in a dialectical relationship with one another as “obverse” and “reverse.” “All being is, by its very nature as being, *dyadic*, with an ‘introverted,’ or *in-itself* dimension, as substance, and an ‘extroverted,’ or *toward-others* dimension, as relational though action.”⁶

I. The Extroversion of *Tropos*

The fourth reduction gives us indeed the totality of phenomena (every kind of phenomenon) through the prosopic relationship. The tree in front of me and the paper I am writing on, a text or a feeling, an event and a work of art, although they might radically lack a face, are still capable of appearing in a prosopic fashion. For they would never appear if they didn’t relate themselves somehow back to a person. If this pen is not the pen that I use to write (or not write) to you, or for you, or about you, then what is it to me? The pen *in itself* (detached from any prosopic relationship) is meaningless. One could actually pose the question if I could possibly ever see the pen as a pure object (outside of the relational nexus). Only in relation to someone (you, the *prosopon*) the pen, or any other object, acquires meaning. The seed of relatedness is already contained in Husserl’s breakthrough of 1900, the realization that, albeit in perception, imagination, or memory, consciousness is always a “consciousness of. . . .” For what else is this “of,” which unites the intending consciousness with its intended world, if not the indication of a relation? To the extent that the consciousness is intentional, it is also relational.

Heidegger’s analysis of everydayness had already revealed how the World is that referential totality of relations. We add to this definition only one more thing: the World is the totality of relationships that eventually take us back to a person (*reductio ad personam*); relationships with someone and toward the Other. For us, too, the World

is this complex network of relations that become meaningful only through the presence or absence of a concrete Other (*reductio per personam*). In other words, the World (the totality of phenomena) appears only when it is reduced to my personal rapport with the Other. The fourth reduction reveals the things (emotions, thoughts, acts, events) that surround us and make up our World, as things-*for-the-Other* (*reductio pro persona*). Each thing falls into place by taking its place in this multifarious chain of relational connections that leads us to the Other, as the source of all relatedness. The Other is the implicit (and sometimes hidden) core of this configuration that reveals the World to me as such. Without the Other, this complex and elaborate scheme collapses.

With these remarks we have entered the order of the Platonic *exaiphnes*: that sudden, and perhaps urgent, emergence of the *aphanes* (the unapparent) into the “light” of phenomenality. The phenomena of the *exaiphnes* obey a different kind of logic: in the moment of the *exaiphnes*, the things that surround me have to retreat, and indeed “disappear,” in order to allow that-which-is-not-seen to show itself. It is as if suddenly the things around me become transparent; as if the World is made of a see-through cloth, behind which I can still see you. And yet I know that it is not the things that withdraw but, rather, you that overwhelms them.

How, or rather what, do I see when I see you? A body? Isn't it the case that I see *you* only in your body? Are you totally exhaustible by your body? Then what is a gesture? The tone of your voice? Posture? The same questions can be asked concerning a painting. What makes this painting a Van Gogh and not a Rembrandt? What is the style? It is *in* the painting without, however, *being* the painting. It is the unapparent, the *aphanes* that somehow appears (without making itself as such visible). How does style “appear,” since it is not visible? For what is visible in a painting—the colors, the shapes, the strokes of the brush—is precisely *not* the style. It is never the eye (as a physiological organ) or the ear that sees or hears, but “I”—this “I,” however, cannot be seen, heard, or touched. That is why it (the I) can see and hear and touch what we call here the unapparent. This is not to deny embodiment and the flesh—quite the contrary. The “I” does not float in the air; it is always embodied—incarnate in my body (as style is in the painting), but it is not completely exhausted by the body understood as a physical, measurable (i.e., objectified) thing. Who would dare to say that the I is a thing? (That is, who else but Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza?) Strangely, then, the phenomenon

of the unapparent duplicates itself on both ends of the phenomenological spectrum: the *I* is as unapparent as the *you*.

The fourth reduction might be nothing else but this moment of the *exaiþnes*, when, looking at the things, we see the Other (or we become aware of ourselves as seen by the Other—for it is not so much that *we* see the Other; rather, it is the Other that shows itself through the World to *us*).

All of this is best illustrated in unique moments of one's life—as when one falls in love. When I am in love, the song that plays in an airport's waiting lounge (otherwise unnoticeable) comes forcefully to the foreground of my attention as soon as it reminds me of you. I am interested in the things that surround me only because I have been totally uninterested in them by being solely interested in you—however, to the extent that this World is also *your* World, the World *as yours* and only as yours, concerns me. Everything, absolutely everything, becomes transformed by this manifold signposting that points back to you; or, failing to do so (and this is the only alternative), everything remains utterly indifferent for me.

When the dreadful message of Patroclus's death reaches Achilles, the world around him is also lost: "I have lost the desire to live, to take my stand in the world of men" (*Iliad*, XVIII, 90–91); without him, Greece's greatest hero is nothing more than "a useless, dead weight on the good green earth" (104). What weighs on Achilles is the burden of an utterly indifferent world that, left unmediated by the Other, crushes him. The death of Augustine's friend, more than a millennium later, causes an equally severe break in the referential totality of his world: "My own country became a torment and my own home a grotesque abode of misery." The very things that had once defined what was most familiar to Augustine—his home, his homeland—suddenly appear strange. "I hated all the places we had known together, because he was not in them and they could no longer whisper to me 'Here he comes!' as they would have done had he been alive but absent for a while. . . . I had become a puzzle to myself" (*Confessions*, IV, 4).

It is in ways like these that the fourth reduction operates.

And yet, there is more to be said. For the *prosopon* in the fourth reduction is not only the Other, but also and equiprimordially *myself*. Here lies a key difference with Levinasian ethics, as Richard Kearney has already noted, for Levinas would have upheld "the asymmetry between self and Other," while the *prosopon* suggests a symmetrical reciprocity and mutuality. Let us rehearse once more

the three reductions, so that we can see how through each one of them a new understanding of subjectivity or selfhood emerges.

In the transcendental reduction the “subject” assumes the role of the *constituting I*.

In the ontological reduction the “subject” is revealed as the locus of being’s disclosure and, thus, *Dasein*.

In the dosological reduction the “subject” is turned into the *inter-locué*—the one spoken to and called upon.

It might sound strange, but in the fourth reduction the “subject” is not—in terminology, at least—distinct from its “object.” It couldn’t be any different. Both poles of the relationship are the *prosopon* (*reductio ab persona*). We might note here that the prosopic relationship might prove to be the most successful overcoming of the subject/object dualism. And not only because the two, in some sense, have now “coincided” into a twofold one. What is more important is that it now becomes extremely difficult, if possible at all, to use the language of subjectivity and objectivity, that is, to still speak of someone “doing” or “acting” while another “suffers” or “receives” the action. We lose the ability to use language as grammar would command us, for it does not make any sense to use, say, transitive verbs. (Not an accident, for as Nietzsche reminds us, grammar is metaphysics.) This does not mean, of course, that we could not speak anymore. Rather, it forces us to use language differently, that is, reflexively.

To sum up, the fourth reduction is a fourfold reconduction (1) back to the person (*ad personam*); (2) effected *through* my relation with the Other’s person (*per personam*); (3) where the world is revealed as the totality of things for the other person (*pro persona*); (4) from whom I receive back myself as a person (*ab persona*).

II. The Introversion of *Topos*

Another principle of the fourth reduction—perhaps the most obscure, but necessary—is the chiasmic union of the phenomenality of the phenomenon with the phenomenon itself. This is a rather bold move that dares to bring together and think as one what in the terminology of classical philosophy we would have called the form (*Gestalt*) and the content (*Gebalt*). The fourth reduction makes room for a certain kind of phenomena that refer to nothing else but themselves, or rather to the fact that they appear—such are the phenomena of phenomenality. The paradox here, which the fourth reduction helps us to retrieve and rethink, is that every phenomenon, insofar

as it appears, is first and foremost a phenomenon of (its own) phenomenality. Although to the extent that it carries or conveys other information (more than the bare minimum information of its appearance), it registers as a phenomenon of this or that. In exceptional cases, however, *which are no other than the ordinary*, phenomena can, even if it is only for a moment, fully exhaust themselves in their wondrous *phainesthai*. That means that, in exceptional cases (and what is exceptional here is not the sort of phenomena we are to encounter but our attitude toward them) we can let ourselves be enthralled by the extraordinary ordinarieness of the things themselves. That is, I take it to be the case with what Kearney has in mind when he writes: “It is the divine itself manifest in the ‘least of these,’ in the color of their eyes, in the lines of their hands and fingers, in the tone of their voice, in all the tiny epiphanies of flesh and blood.” When we let ourselves take notice of the unnoticeable manifestation of the divine in everydayness, we have arrived back at the original philosophical passion of *thaumazein*.⁷

There is, however, one phenomenon that adheres most strictly to this principle of the hypostatic union between phenomenon and phenomenality. Perhaps because it is itself the very ground of that principle, the archetype, the ur-phenomenon of all subsequent phenomena: *Incarnation*. One can already detect the structure of Incarnation in the passage by Kearney just cited. What else could be behind the divine that manifests itself in the flesh and blood of a concrete human being? Incarnation exemplifies (and with the same stroke also defies) the principles of phenomenology. If I want to offer a definition of the phenomenon of Incarnation, I would have to give an account of the singularity of Christ’s epiphany. In His case, the “what” of the phenomenon *is* its “how.” Its *Offenbarung* is nothing more or nothing less than its *Offenbarkeit*.⁸ The “message” of the Incarnation is neither an “idea” nor a “system” (that would be an oxymoron), no matter how wonderful or lovely—it *is* flesh: body and blood.

Heidegger opens his magnum opus, *Being and Time*, with a particularly “blasphemous” statement: “The ‘essence’ of this being,” he writes of *Dasein*, “lies in its to be. The whatness (*essentia*) of this being must be understood in terms of its being (*existentia*). . . .” What is provocative about this statement is the astounding fact that Heidegger defines the human being (*Dasein*) by assigning to it nothing less than the very definition of God. What Heidegger apparently had in mind was St. Thomas’s definition of God, according to which *only*

God “is His own essence, quiddity or nature” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 21); and again “in God, essence or quiddity is not distinct from His existence” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 22). Of course, such a bold move was not meant as a tacit apotheosis of the human being; it was, rather, God who was sighted as its target. When we strive to redefine the person phenomenologically as *prosopon*, namely, as this coincidence of the phenomenon (essence) with phenomenality (existence), that is, a *hypostasized ek-sistence*, we have in mind nothing else but the event of the Incarnation. *Pace* Heidegger and St. Thomas, we do not think that God’s self-hypostasizing of His existence should be mutually exclusive of man’s potential of transcending his nature by choosing to be (and become) who he is. If man can exist as a person (which is what Heidegger claims concerning the *Dasein*), that is because God (the person par excellence) became man. To undermine God’s incarnate person directly amounts to jeopardizing my own status as a person.⁹ We have witnessed this principle throughout the history of philosophy: any distortion of God’s personhood reverberates in man’s selfhood.

The fourth reduction, then, precisely by being *prosopic*, has also to be *incarnational*. The event of incarnation has to be that center toward which all phenomenological analysis gravitates and against which each phenomenon (no matter how mundane) measures itself.

By being incarnational, the fourth reduction is also *eschatological*. For the Incarnation is the *eschaton* embodied in the incarnate Other, in the voice and visage of my neighbor. For if it were otherwise, if Incarnation were not the unsurpassable *eschaton*, one would have been justified in anticipating a time where I could have a more direct, full, unmediated understanding of the Other. In anticipation of such a time, however, one begins cheapening (relativizing) one’s encounter of the Other as it is given in the here and now of everydayness. Such an *eschaton* beyond Incarnation would offer me the metaphysical excuse to overlook the Other in front of me, to ignore, neglect, or underestimate him/her in expectation of a more authentic encounter with another Other (perhaps the wholly Other, *tout autre*) at the end of History, conceived as some metaphysical totality à la Hegel.

III. The Departure from Religion

By speaking of the *prosopon*, Incarnation, and eschatology, one might wonder how the fourth reduction is not religion’s most triumphal capture of phenomenology to date. Doesn’t the fourth reduction con-

firm the fears of those who were speaking of “phenomenology’s theological turn” and even “philosophy’s turn to religion”? Richard Kearney seems to be fully aware of such an objection when he notes: “Is the fourth reduction religious, then? Yes, but only if we understand here a religion *beyond* religion, *before* religion, and *after* religion.”

We could take this statement a step further: what Kearney understands as “religion beyond religion, before religion, and after religion” is in fact not religious at all in the strict sense. We might suggest, then, that the fourth reduction *has nothing to do with religion* if we recall Mircea Eliade’s claim that all religions, pagan or monotheistic, share a common emphasis on two things: *nature* (which they try to understand by providing a more or less mythic model of its genesis) and (as a result of that) *cosmology*. Contrary to this religious emphasis on nature and cosmology, the *prosopeon*¹⁰ dramatically shifts the emphasis to *history* and *eschatology*. For this reason alone the relatedness of the *prosopeon* cannot be and should not be confined to the strict limits of religion. When St. Paul experienced his conversion, he didn’t change his religion for another—he abandoned religion altogether in order to offer witness to the event of the Incarnation, which surpasses religion.¹¹ That is why all the characteristics of religion (ritual, such as circumcision and sacrifices; observations of feast days; dietary regulations; the place of worship, such as the Jewish temple) lose their meaning and are not important anymore. They become “the shadow of the law” that has faded away or “the old order that has passed away” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Religion poses as great, if not a greater, a risk for the ecclesial event as secularization; for in the name of faceless love and justice it sacrifices the uniqueness of the *prosopeon* by exchanging it for a fleshless ideology.

In fact, the entire objection against a “religious” *mis*reading of phenomena implies an alternative, second possibility: a nonreligious, secular reading. Therefore, such an objection reproduces the pagan (or “primitive,” according to Levinas¹²) distinction between the sacred and the secular—a distinction rendered inoperative by the propoic. To read the eschatological back in the ordinary of the everyday means to contaminate the temporal with the eternal; to blur the distinction between a secular and a sacred world; to let the separation between the holy and the unholy collapse. It is, thus, in vain to raise the question of the “citizenship,” as it were, of the phenomena: Is this face in front of me a phenomenon that belongs to the order of the secular (and thus the face of another), or is it a sacred phenomenon (and thus the face of God)? For the fourth reduction—precisely in

its ability to overcome such a Manichaeian view of the World—this is nothing but a pseudo dilemma; the face of the Other is essentially *both* the face of another and the face of God. Like matter in quantum physics, it can be both, either particle or wave. It depends on how I am able to receive the Other and on how the Other is able to give itself. Phenomenology should not and cannot decide a priori (i.e., prior to my relation with the Other and with the World) how to classify phenomena—as if she were an old librarian shelving books under the right call number. This chiasmus becomes the cross on which religion and secularism would have to sacrifice their logic. Religion, law, and ethics can, in the proper circumstances, play a crucial role in pointing us toward the *eschaton* of the Incarnation, but they are never more than ladders that must be left behind in time.