Debating
OTHERNESS
with Richard Kearney

Perspectives from South Africa

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EDITORS

Daniël P. Veldsman
Yolande Steenkamp

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Research Justification

Richard Kearney is one of the leading global thinkers in both Continental philosophy and post-metaphysical philosophy of religion. He is an esteemed Irish professor in philosophy, currently teaching at Boston College, Massachusetts, USA. Professor Kearney first visited South Africa in May as joint visiting academic of the Universities of Stellenbosch, Pretoria and North-West. The visit prompted the publication of this scholarly collected work, authored by South African and international scholars. These specialists in philosophy and religious studies analysed Kearney's influential work and brought his scholarly perspectives into dialogue with other leading thinkers in the field, both from Africa and abroad. This publication will be the first collective attempt to engage his work from the perspective of the African continent. This collected work contributes significantly in an interdisciplinary way to Ricoeurdian studies. The target audience of the book is peers and specialists in the field of Continental philosophy and philosophy of religion. None of the chapters contains plagiarism. Twelve of the 16 chapters are completely original and have never been published before. Four of the 16 chapters are based on formerly published material but have been substantially reworked with a changed scope and objectives. They are:

- Aspects of Pieter Duvenage's chapter, entitled 'Phenomenology in South Africa: An indirect encounter with Richard Kearney'.
- Sections in Yolande Steenkamp's chapter, entitled 'Kearney between poles: Is too much lost in the middle?' have been reworked from her Master of Divinity dissertation (2011), as well as from her Master of Theology dissertation (2012), later published by Scholarium (2014).
- Some of the analyses in the introductory part of the collected work, authored by Schalk Gerber, and titled 'Strangers, Gods and Africa: In dialogue with Richard Kearney on Otherness', have similarities with an article, published under the Creative Commons licence (cf. Gerber, S. H., 2018. 'From dis-enclosure to decolonisation: In dialogue with Nancy and Mbembe on self-determination and the Other', *Religions* 9[4]).
- A re-publication of the article co-authored by Daniël P. Veldsman and Mirella Klomp titled 'After God but behind the Cross: The procession as a way to re-encounter God in a culture beyond classical liturgy' was published in a non-Department of Higher Education and Training accredited journal (cf. *Studia Liturgica* 47/1[2017], 15–29) and in a section of a book published by Rowman and Littlefield (London).

Prof. Daniël P. Veldsman: Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Dr Yolande Steenkamp: Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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List of Abbreviations appearing in the Text and Notes

INLA   Irish National Liberation Army

IRA   Irish Republican Army

SAC   South African College

SI   Sacramental Imagination

TRC   Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UCD   University College Dublin

Notes on Contributors

Wessel Bentley
Wessel Bentley is associate professor at the Research Institute for Theology and Religion (University of South Africa). He specialises in science and religion and Methodist theology. He is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1167-4858.

Pieter Duvenage
Pieter Duvenage (b. 1963) has studied philosophy in South Africa and Germany. In 1994, he received his doctorate at the University of Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela University). In 1995, he was appointed a senior lecturer, and from 1997 associate professor, professor (2001) and visiting professor at various South African universities and two Australian universities with campuses in South Africa. He was professor and head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein (2011-2018) and his currently Dean of the Humanities at Akademia – a private tertiary institution in Centurion, Pretoria. He is the author and co-author of various books and 40 accredited articles in journals and books. Pieter Duvenage specialises in political and social philosophy within the fields of critical theory, phenomenology–hermeneutics and South African intellectual history. He has been an accredited researcher in the National Research Foundation since 2003, member of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (since 2004) and a past president of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (2005–2008). Since 2015, he has been appointed as honorary professor in political philosophy at the University of Cardiff (UK) and has been editor of the Journal for Contemporary History (University of the Free State).

Schalk H. Gerber
Schalk Gerber is a doctoral candidate at Stellenbosch University and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He studied philosophy in Pretoria, Konstanz and Amsterdam, and theology and psychology in Pretoria. His research is located at the intersection

of Continental philosophy of religion and postcolonial thought. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8342-1198.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's research is focused mainly on two strands. The first is exploring ways in which the impact of the dehumanising experiences of oppression and violent abuse continues to play out in the next generation in the aftermath of historical trauma. For her second research area, she expands her earlier work on remorse and forgiveness and probes the role of empathy more deeply by engaging a perspective that makes transparent the interconnected relationship among empathy, *ubuntu* and the embodied African phenomenon of *inimba*, in order to find a richer, deeper and more complex understanding of empathy that takes into account an African knowledge archive. Her critically acclaimed book, *A Human Being Died That Night: A Story of Forgiveness*, won the Christopher Award (2003) in the USA and the Alan Paton Award in South Africa (2004). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7008-9467.

Richard Kearney

Richard Kearney holds the Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College and has served as a visiting professor at University College Dublin, the University of Paris (Sorbonne), the Australian Catholic University and the University of Nice. He is the author of over 20 books on European philosophy and literature (including two novels and a volume of poetry) and has edited or co-edited 16 more. His best-known works are *The Wake of the Imagination* (1988), *Poetics of Imagining* (1991), *On Stories* (2002), *Hosting the Stranger* (2004) and *Anatheism* (2011). He was formerly a member of the Arts Council of Ireland, the Higher Education Authority of Ireland and chairman of the Irish School of Film at University College Dublin. He is also a member of the Royal Irish Academy. As a public intellectual in Ireland, he was involved in drafting a number of proposals for a Northern Irish peace agreement (1983, 1993, 1995). He has presented five series on culture and philosophy for Irish and British television and broadcast extensively on the European media. He is currently international director of the Guestbook Project – Hosting the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality, with fellow

Boston artist and academic Sheila Gallagher. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts, where he is married to Anne Bernard and has two daughters, Simone and Sarah.

Mirella Klomp

Mirella Klomp is a Protestant theologian specialising in practical theology, more specifically in ritual liturgical studies. Coming from a Lutheran background, her research focus is mostly on ritual and music. She works as assistant professor of practical theology, and as executive manager of IRiLiS at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam. Her areas of expertise include *The Passion* and other contemporary passion performances; worship in late modern network culture; ritual and (Christian) music; religion and media; public theology; Lutheran theology in relation to music; ethnography and other qualitative research methods; migrant churches; and Christian worship in African (Ghanaian) culture. Mirella Klomp is an ordained minister in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

Johann-Albrecht Meylahn

Johann-Albrecht completed his first PhD in postmodern theology at the University of Pretoria and his second PhD in philosophy of religion at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, where he brought Heidegger, Levinas and Derrida into conversation on the limits and possibilities of post-metaphysical God-talk. Johann-Albrecht's research interests are in philosophy, and specifically philosophy of religion and the ethical challenges of living in a global village. On these topics, he has published numerous monographs and articles in various scholarly journals. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1460-9338.

Helgard Pretorius

Helgard Pretorius lives in Cape Town where he is an ordained minister. He has taught theology and philosophy at Stellenbosch University and is enrolled for a Ph.D. in a joint-degree programme at Stellenbosch University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His current research project at the intersection between theology and phenomenology is called 'Being Human after the Ascension of Jesus Christ'. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3163-2436.

Justin Sands

Justin Sands is a postdoctoral fellow at North-West University, South Africa. Originally from the USA, he received his doctorate in theology at KU Leuven, Belgium, in 2015 and has lived in South Africa ever since. His monograph, *Reasoning from Faith: Fundamental Theology in Merold Westphal's Philosophy of Religion*, has just been published by Indiana University Press in their well-regarded Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion. He has published several articles in philosophy and in theology on several topics but primarily has focused on issues pertaining to phenomenology and metaphysics. Currently, Justin Sands is pursuing a second doctorate in philosophy at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa, where he will explore a decolonial and African philosophical critique of Martin Heidegger's concept of temporality presented in *Being and Time* and in Heidegger's adjacent texts. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3536-5467.

Yolande Steenkamp

Yolande Steenkamp started her tertiary education at UP in 2001 and completed her BTh (2004), MA Ancient Languages and Cultures (2005), MDiv (2012) and MTh (2013). In 2013, she proceeded with her doctoral studies in Dogmatics and Christian Ethics at the University of Pretoria, under the supervision of Prof. Daniël P. Veldsman. Her thesis applied the philosophy of Richard Kearney to explore possible ways of reimagining hamartiology and soteriology. Yolande is an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, and has lectured at the University of Pretoria on a part-time basis since 2004. She is currently completing a postdoctoral fellowship at the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership, University of Pretoria, on the role of narrative and imagination in leadership. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1577-1938.

Daniël P. Veldsman

Daniël studied at the Universities of Port Elizabeth and Pretoria and completed his PhD as *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* scholar on Ritschl, Herrmann and Bultmann at the *Kirchliche Hochschule*, West Berlin, Germany. He was a minister (Arcadia, Pretoria) and lecturer (University of South Africa) before his appointment at the Faculty of Theology

and Religion, University of Pretoria, in August 2007. He is currently head of the department. In his research, he mainly focuses on the reconceptualisation of religious experience from evolutionary perspectives, including concepts such as transcendence, consciousness and embodied personhood. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8734-2171.

Rian Venter

Rian Venter teaches systematic theology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, and his research focuses on the doctrine of God and on the transformation discourse of theology at public universities. He is editor and co-editor of the recently published volumes *Theology and the (Post)apartheid Condition: Genealogies and Future Directions* (2016) and *Making Sense of Jesus: Experiences, Interpretations and Identities* (2017).

Anné H. Verhoef

Anné Hendrik Verhoef is an associate professor in philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. He studied at the University of Stellenbosch and at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. In 2008, he received his doctorate with a thesis on the relation between time and the Trinity. His interests are in the philosophy of religion, metaphysics, the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ethics and the philosophy of happiness. His research focuses mainly on transcendence and the transcendent in contemporary culture and its relation to ethics, politics, the meaning of life and happiness. He is the author or co-author of various chapters in books and articles in national and international scientific journals and conference papers. He is the associate editor of the academic journal *Transformation in Higher Education*. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9627-1969.

Wilhelm Verwoerd

As a former researcher within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995–1998) and a reconciliation practitioner in Northern Ireland (2001–2012), Wilhelm Verwoerd is particularly interested in approaching the dynamics of (re)humanisation and reconciliation from the perspective(s) of former combatants, veterans and perpetrators. He is currently working on a book based on the international reflective

learning project Beyond Dehumanisation with ex-combatants and survivors from the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, Israel–Palestine, South Africa and the USA. Another book project addresses the need for a contemplative spirituality of reconciliation. Dr Verwoerd is a senior researcher at the Historical Trauma and Transformation Studies, University of Stellenbosch, and a teaching associate at Trinity College, Dublin (Irish School of Ecumenics, Belfast).

Robert Vosloo

Robert Vosloo is professor in systematic theology at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and a senior researcher at the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the same institution. His most recent book is entitled *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History* (Sun Media 2017). His research interests include themes such as memory and historical justice; 20th century South African church and theological history; philosophical and theological discourses on hospitality and recognition; and the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7144-9644.

Acknowledgements

Human moments

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela Ⓓ
Office of the Chair for Historical Trauma and Transformation
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa

As a child, I was always fascinated by how the adults around us interacted, the way they used gestures and linguistic expressions and the patterns of greeting that unfolded in their conversations into rich dialogue to welcome familiar faces and strangers alike. My father's interaction with the men and women who came to his shop intrigued me the most. My parents owned a general dealer's store in a shopping centre in the heart of Langa Township, a black residential area near Cape Town where I grew up. Langa was the first black township built after the passing of the *Urban Areas Act* of 1923 that forced black people out of areas where they lived in close proximity with whites throughout South Africa and moved them to areas designated as black 'locations'. One might expect only stories of misery and destruction of the soul and spirit to emerge from this kind of social engineering of the pre-apartheid and apartheid eras. It is easy to assume, as Jacob Dlamini (2010) says in his book *Native Nostalgia*, that black people were 'nothing

more than objects of state policy' during the bad old days and that the effect of colonial and apartheid oppression on black life was a 'vast moral desert' that produced no social orders and sense of values in black community life. Yet, many in my generation remember with fondness the values of care and community instilled by our parents and the wider community – the capacity to welcome a stranger – despite apartheid.

My father was known as a 'people's person' – *umntu wabantu* – and my mother's name, given to her after marriage by the elders in my father's family clan because of her natural kindness, was *Nobantu* – she who cares for others. In my parents' shop, my father often stood near the entrance, and he would greet a person approaching the shop with his or her clan name – 'Dlamini!' 'Mthembu!' 'Qwathi!' 'No-Zulu!' These clan names became a familiar sound in my childhood. Not only the first given clan names but also the long list of clan names that each was associated with, for one's given clan name is a product of a long lineage of others through which her or his origins can be traced. Calling someone by her or his clan name is one of the most respectful forms of welcome. Being able to trace the person's line of descent by saying the various other clan names associated with the given clan name is the highest form of welcoming a stranger. My father's knowledge of the various clans and his capacity to trace the genealogy of each of the clan names was something to behold. He would shout his welcome of a person approaching the shop using the person's clan name: 'Dlamini!' Then the rest of the names of the Dlamini clan would roll off like a praise poem: 'Zizi, Fakade, Jama ka-Sjadu, Ngxibinoboya!' And when he was encountering someone for the first time he would ask: *Ndizakuthi ungowasemanini kanene?* [To which clan shall I say you belong?]. Note that the question is not 'what is your name?' Rather, the question asks who are your ancestors, or what is the wider 'story' of your ancestral lineage by which you can be identified? The question seeks to recognise the position of the other's dignity and worth as a person with a history, a member of a line of honourable others with names imbued

with meaning. It is recognition that extends far beyond the person before you and says, 'your worth and dignity is a given by virtue of this long line of others to which you belong'. The person would then respond by giving their clan name. My father might then say, 'Oh, are the so-and-so's [the clan name given] of such-and-such a clan?' I would later realise that this was not so much a question seeking confirmation, but rather a manner of communication that showed respect in order for the stranger to have agency in the encounter as the one giving the blessing for my father to roll out the 'praise poem' for the person's ancestry.

I begin with this story to show what the concept of *ubuntu* means in action. When we say in my language, Xhosa, *umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu* [which, loosely translated, means 'a person is a person through other people'], we imply an ethic based on the understanding that one's subjectivity is inextricably intertwined with that of others in one's community through reciprocal mutual recognition of the other's human dignity. In other words, a person is a person through being witnessed by and engaging in reciprocal witnessing of other persons. Alternatively, human subjectivity is defined by the multiplicity of relationships with others. The meaning conveyed by the expression is twofold. Firstly, human subjectivity depends on being witnessed; the richness of subjectivity flows from interconnectedness with the wider community and from the reciprocal caring and complementarity of human relationships. Secondly, the phrase conveys the kind of reciprocity that calls on people to be ethical subjects. Mutual recognition inspired by *ubuntu* is fundamental to being a fellow human being, a relational subject in the context of community. This becomes an experience that allows entry into the other's life in a way that makes it possible to reconstitute the other's experience within the self. In this sense, then, recognition is not simply recognition of the physical face of the other – it may not even be about the other's physical presence – but rather about something subtler, less visible than any of the physical elements of the encounter. When my

father asks the question *ungowasemanini?* – 'to which ancestral lineage do you belong, or who are your ancestors?' – the question seeks to know the other's identity as part of a wider human community and already creates the possibility of crossing any boundary that may separate the self from the other. In contrast to the 'I think therefore I am' philosophy that positions the self at a distance from the other, this is a stance that allows the self to feel the other, and to stand within the other's historical circumstances in order to evoke a sense of shared humanity across time and place.

This, in my view, is what drives the stories of reconciliation between survivors and victims that seem to defy comprehension in Rwanda. I have just returned from Rwanda, where I participated in a workshop in which young Rwandans presented their research on various aspects of the post-genocide period in their country. One of the studies described an encounter in a facilitated group process between a woman survivor of the genocide and one of the men who perpetrated this crime. The woman described the horrific scene of mass killing that she survived during the genocide in Rwanda. She then told the group that the last time she saw the man was in the church where he shot and killed families who had sought refuge in the church. 'His hands are full of the blood of an incredible number of the Tutsi he killed in the church', the woman said. 'He was like a killing machine [...] and I am sure he honestly does not know how many Tutsi he killed Ntigurirwa (2018:n.p.). Her testimony led to uncontrollable sobbing in the room. The man then crawled out of his chair and went to kneel in front of the woman, sobbing and asking for her forgiveness. After some relative calm, the woman, now standing next to the kneeling man, extended her hand and helped him to get up. She then embraced him and told him that she wanted to forgive him and not to think of him as a killing machine, 'but as a fellow human being and brother'. Hyppolite Ntigurirwa, the researcher reporting on this encounter describes the moment as follows: '[They] stood in an embrace with arms folded tight across each other's backs'.

This is recognition of the other not from the distance that bestows such recognition from a position of power but one that does so from a place of proximity to the other's life-world. It is an 'experience-near' that opens up the possibility of an embodied recognition that seeks to repair the brokenness of the other – because now it has become (it is like) one's own brokenness. A story that crystallised this for me is that of Lindiwe Hani, the daughter of Chris Hani, who was assassinated in the driveway of his home in April 1993. Chris Hani was believed to be Nelson Mandela's heir apparent, and Mandela described his killing as an act that was 'so foul' that it led to countrywide protests that brought South Africa 'on the brink of disaster'. When Lindiwe Hani's memoir, *Being Chris Hani's Daughter* was launched, I was asked to facilitate a public conversation about the book. In the book, she describes her first visit to meet the man who killed her father, Janusz Waluś, and shares 'little human moments' that emerged during the visit. One of these is when Waluś thanked her for her visit before expressing deep regret for killing her father: 'If it means anything to you, Lindiwe, I am very, very sorry for what I did to you and your family [...] I am very, very sorry' (Hani & Ferguson 2017:n.p.). Hani writes that Waluś seemed overcome with emotion, and that she too, could feel a lump in her throat. At the end of that first visit, she resolved to visit him again, and by the time she wrote the book, she had visited him a few more times. During the public conversation organised for her book, she told the audience about Waluś daughter, who is the same age as hers. 'My wish', she said, 'is for Waluś to be released from prison so that his daughter may have her father back. If one of us has her father back, for me it will be as if my own father is returned to me'.

In his Intellectual Biography in this volume, Richard Kearney writes about the capacity to '*remake* history by imagining otherwise' (2018:53). The stories from South Africa and Rwanda in the aftermath of the tragic histories in these countries exemplify the transformative moments that open up reparative possibilities that transcend recognition. It is reclaiming humanity in order to

remake a new humanity that gives 'a future to the past', in Kearney's words (2018:53). There is no word for 'stranger' in my language; you would have to say something more descriptive in Xhosa to capture its English meaning, which might be along the lines of this explanatory phrase: 'a person you do not know'. Even so, the fact that the stranger is a human subject – *umntu* – demands recognition of the person in the way that I have illustrated in the first part of this foreword. It does not mean that one avoids the truth about a person's dark past. Staring into the abyss, confronting it and talking about it allows a level of reflection, an entryway that may lead us to discover that a person is not merely his or her deeds. The vision of 'hosting a stranger' opens up the space for the unfolding of much more than what is suggested by words that imply a goal (such as 'reconciliation', or 'forgiveness'). It is a vision that invites us to stand within the other's brokenness in order to transcend our own. As I write this foreword, the world is celebrating International Nelson Mandela Day. If people can learn to hate, Mandela said, they can also be taught to love, 'for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite'. Hosting a Stranger is a model that gives us hope for the kind of human solidarity that Mandela's life exemplifies and opens an ethical path for us to expand the horizon of what is possible in our relationships.

Wrestling and arguing with God: Between insider and outsider African perspectives

Daniël P. Veldsman Ⓘ
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

Yolande Steenkamp Ⓘ
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

■ Crossing borders

Transfigurational events often typify our crossing of borders. Not only has this notion long characterised the work of Richard Kearney, but we were reminded of it once again during his visit to South Africa in May 2017. While the scholars whose thoughts

are presented in this volume were indeed to a greater or lesser degree already familiar with Kearney's work, the arrival of Richard and his wife, Anne, was anticipated with the usual interflow of fascination and trembling that the strange often elicit from us. For the Kearneys, however, the encounter that awaited them was utterly strange. They had not engaged with scholars from Africa to any significant degree, and neither had they ever set foot on this continent of final frontiers.

The story of Africa's strangeness to the (Western) world is written across the pages of history in many forms. These range from well-to-do ladies of society, sitting captivated while gripping the tales of explorers in their hand, brave men describing how they dared cross ocean, jungle and desert to discover lands so foreign that their sketches and sagas sounded more like fiction than accounts of real people. At the other end of the spectrum are the consequences of such objectification, ranging from versions of blackface to ethnological exhibitions or 'human zoos', as well as slavery and the colonisation of the continent on a massive scale.

Not surprisingly, then, welcoming strangers leaves a bad taste in the mouth of many Africans. It is exactly for this reason that Kearney's work on otherness, storytelling and hospitality to the stranger is of particular significance to the continent of Africa. But it is also the reason why, in many ways, Africa may serve as a crucible for this sort of philosophy, laying its darker finger on oversimplifications and further objectifications that remain hidden to Western eyes and enriching it with a perspective that reflects powerlessness rather than historical abuses of power.

When, through such critical dialogue, an exchange of Otherness is allowed to take place on its own terms, the results may be, of course, transformational in unpredictable ways, creating new worlds. We know of such a story of semantic innovation from the New Testament's account of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8), at a time when Christianity was beginning to cross many borders, both seen

and unseen. So captivating is this story of an African encounter with Otherness that we wish to begin our contemplations in this volume from this typically narrative point of departure.

The eunuch in our story goes without a name, though he is said to come from Africa and to be an important official in the court of the Ethiopian kingdom. This is, of course, not the same Ethiopia as we know today, but refers to a geographical area south of Egypt in the area of what was known as Nubia (or Cush in the Old Testament). Between the fifth and sixth cataracts of the Nile, the Nubian kingdom was a significant African power between 540 BCE and 339 CE,[1] and it is here that our African had the prominent position of treasurer of the Candace (Witherington 1998:295; cf. Holladay 2016:188; Huizing 2016:252; Yoon 2016:15).[2] He is an official with access to political power and wealth, literate and eloquent, as seen from his command of the Greek optative (Wilson 2015b:115; cf. Pilch & Malina 2008:65). If we can say nothing more exact about this location, we can at least surmise that, in the mind of the biblical author, this man came from Africa proper. The eunuch was a black man,[3] in skin tone and language a foreigner,[4] and he will have had to cross many boundaries to reach Jerusalem, the destination of his sacred voyage.

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1. This finds a biblical parallel in Job 28:19 and Isaiah 45:14, which bear witness to the wealth of Ethiopia, and 2 Kings 19:9, 2 Chronicles 14:9–13, Isaiah 37:9 and Jeremiah 46:9, which reflect its military power (Talbert 2005:75).

2. 'Candace' was a title for the female ruler of this land, not a personal name for the queen (Talbert 2005:75; Witherington 1998:296; cf. Yoon 2016:16).

3. Cf. Talbert (2005:75) and especially Jabini's discussion of ancient sources that refer to inhabitants of Nubia as 'black' or having 'burnt faces' (Jabini 2012:53; cf. Holladay 2016:188; Witherington 1998:295; Yoon 2016:19–21).

4. While interpretations of this story have traditionally underplayed the ethnicity of the eunuch, the text intends quite the opposite (Huizing 2016:253). Through the narratives of the eunuch and Cornelius, the author shows that the gospel reaches different ethnic groups and thus engages and challenges the insider–outsider boundaries of formative Judaism, reinterpreting it to a Roman mindset (Huizing 2016:254). Together with other landmark texts in Acts (e.g. Pentecost; the inclusion of gentiles through the story of Cornelius; Paul's appointment as apostle to the gentiles), this text signals the fulfilment of the prophecy in

Such political and geographical boundaries were, it seems, the lesser of his obstacles. It was the socio-religious boundaries, drawn so clearly by the Israelites to denote themselves as a people set apart from the 'other' nations, that proved insurmountable to the stranger. In some way, this stranger had learnt of the Israelite faith, and despite the fact that he most likely could not become a full proselyte (Huizing 2016:251) nevertheless did everything within his power to approach the inner sanctum of this faith. Yet, despite his considerable devotion to the God of the Israelites and despite his considerable effort to draw near to the most holy navel of the earth, the city of God, he would forever, it seemed, remain an outsider. Israelite law prohibited eunuchs from setting foot in the temple in Jerusalem.[5] The holiness of Yahweh, signified by the progressively holier sections of the sanctuary, was strictly safeguarded against the questionable bodies of foreigners, women and anyone whose

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(footnote 4 continues…)

Acts 1:8, which itself gives voice to the Old Testament vision of God's final restoration, which includes the ends of the earth. Indeed, ancient authors often referred to Ethiopia with the phrase 'end of the earth' (Jabini 2012:52; Wilson 2015b:116; Witherington 1998:290; Yoon 2016:17), and so the link between this story and the prophecy of Jesus and the prophets is clear. Huizing rightly remarks that, '[I]t should be with some degree of shame that the church has minimised this passage throughout its history. Ethiopia becomes the anticipated fulfilment of Jesus's words and the ushering in of the restoration of God and yet Ethiopia rarely ever makes it onto Bible maps (Martin 1989:121). Luke does not seem to know of any such diminishment because of race or geography. He rejoices, along with the Ethiopian eunuch, that God's restoration has begun' (Huizing 2016:256). It is important to see how this text functions within the larger Lukan development of the salvation history theme, which he developed from the Old Testament, through the life of Jesus and the history of the early believers, culminating in Paul's ministry. As the final of the three synoptic authors, the immediate expectation of the Parousia necessitated the shift in focus for Luke–Acts (Dube 2013:2). So significant is this focus in Luke–Acts that Charles Talbert has called it a 'narrative of fulfilment': 'What is being actualized in the various prophecies' fulfilment is the plan of God that stands behind the events narrated' (Talbert 2005:xv).

5. Talbert notes how Josephus mentions foreigners who made the difficult journey to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, only to find themselves excluded from it or from full participation in cultic activities, on account of ritual impurity (*Ant*. 3.15.3 paras. 318–319; *War* 6.9.3 paras. 426–427; cf. Talbert 2005:76).

body had been made unclean by physical ailments or any lack of wholeness.[6] Eunuchs could never enter the temple of God.[7]

Apart from boundaries that excluded the eunuch from the Israelite faith, he was also faced with the challenge of negotiating an identity amidst the complex intersection between status (treasurer), gender (eunuch, therefore unmanly)[8] and ethnicity (Ethiopian) in the Graeco-Roman world, as so clearly illustrated

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6. This applied specifically to eunuchs, see Deuteronomy 23:1. While eunuchs were at times valued in antiquity, both the Israelite and early Judaic textual tradition regarded them with hostility, seeing them as 'emasculated', 'physically blemished' and 'in a permanent state of ritual impurity' (Talbert 2005:75; cf. Holladay 2016:189; Witherington 1998:296).

7. Huizing provides a good summary on scholarly debate on this matter (Huizing 2016: 252–253; cf. also Jabini 2012:54–56; Yoon 2016:22–27). Opinions on the extent of the eunuch's participation in the Israelite faith range from, on the one hand, those who argue that he was, in fact, a full-fledged Jew who served in the courts of Nubia, or was at least a proselyte, or even was not necessarily a physical eunuch (any court official could be described by the word *eunuch*, which did not mean they were necessarily one physically). On the other hand, we have those scholars who take seriously the restraints placed upon him as both a foreigner and a eunuch. Huizing himself follows the indicators in the text that the eunuch's participation in the Israelite faith was limited, which is also the position taken here. As a God-fearer, the eunuch may have been permitted to worship in the Court of the Gentiles (1 Ki 8:41–43), but the fact that the Acts 8 text mentions 'eunuch' and 'court official' in the same sentence (Ac 8:27), and the fact that the eunuch is said to serve a queen, suggests that this eunuch was indeed one physically and for this reason would be excluded from becoming a full proselyte and entering the temple (Dt 23:1; Huizing 2016:253; cf. Wilson 2015b:118). Perhaps, Wilson solves the scholarly stalemate well by regarding both the ethnicity and gender of the eunuch as 'liminal', 'The eunuch may appear to be a Gentile within Acts 8 itself and a Jew within the larger Acts narrative, but either way, he overlaps with both these ethnic categories and that is precisely the point. Indeed, Acts 8:26–40 is at a pivotal point in the narrative by virtue of its liminal posture: the eunuch's conversion sits at the intersection of the acceptance of the gospel by Jews (2:1–8:25) and Gentiles (10:1–11:18), signalling that something new is occurring even as it provides continuity with what has transpired beforehand.' (Wilson 2015b:117, cf. Barreto 2010:25).

In the book of Acts, then, this narrative illustrates that, 'the gospel was taken not only to the "half-breed" Samaritans, but even to those who could never fully participate in Judaism (Martin 1989:109), not to mention the first gentile' (Spencer 1992:173; Huizing 2016:253; cf. Yoon 2016:27).

8. Philo described eunuchs as 'neither male nor female' (*Somn* 2.184), while Josephus encouraged the excommunication of 'those who have deprived themselves of their manhood […]' because 'their soul has become effeminate […]' (*Ant*. 4.290–291; Wilson 2015b:123). Cf. Yoon's analysis of the Ethiopian eunuch's complex identity, where he considers Graeco-Roman dynamics, Old Testament (LXX) allusions to the Elijah–Elisha narratives and the quotation in the narrative from Isaiah 53:7–8 (Yoon 2016, esp. 32–34 regarding gender categories).

by Wilson.[9] Indeed, according to these standards, too, the eunuch did not quite live up to elite representations of masculinity. For various reasons, then, the African stranger returns home still an outsider but perhaps more so now that he had done everything conceivable to draw as near to the Israelite God as possible. An educated man, and wealthy because he possessed his own scroll, he reads aloud on his chariot during his journey to Jerusalem. Most reading in the ancient world was out loud, but in our story it serves to enable Philip to hear the words of the foreign traveller and to pose an important question (cf. Witherington 1998:297), '[d]o you understand what you are reading?' (Ac 8:30).

The hermeneutic question is central to any encounter with otherness,[10] and as we read along we will see that our narrative proceeds by means of questions. The wager of opening to the stranger can take place only amidst questions of how to interpret what arises before me, how to reinterpret myself in view of it and how to conceive of an (im)possible new world where such strangeness might enter into and forever change me. Risk lies at the heart of every encounter with the stranger, for in some way it predicts the end of the familiar: the other may destroy me or may leave me enlarged by its otherness. Philip's question to the African official invites such an exchange, and the eunuch's answer is poignant, '[h]ow can I, unless someone guides me?' (Ac 8:31).

Is it small wonder that, following his repeated exposure to cold shoulders and relentlessly persistent (and excluding) boundaries, this educated man, evidently from the well-born elite (Pilch & Malina 2008:66), still experiences himself as an outsider to the Israelite faith? Although his education, status and exposure would certainly make him a teacher to Philip,[11] an uneducated

9. Cf. Chapter 4 of Wilson's (2015b) publication, or the earlier article in *New Testament Studies* (Wilson 2015a:403–422).

10. This is one of Richard Kearney's central points regarding hospitality (cf. Kearney 2011:37–39).

11. The irony of the eunuch's status as government official, likely traveling with his full entourage (Huizing 2016:252), meeting with the simple, singular character of Philip should be

follower of the Jesus movement, the African nevertheless imagines that he needs someone to guide him into the intricacies of the Israelite faith and disclose to him the meaning that he yearns for. These words capture what could in itself be called an African lament, consisting in the continent's struggle for self-definition amidst versions of imposed leadership–followership identities whenever Africa engages with the Western world.[12]

But it is here, in the words that Luke has the eunuch read, that the seed of transfiguration lies, for Luke places in the mouth of the stranger words about yet another outsider.[13] When Philip ascends the chariot and sits next to the Ethiopian, he interprets the words of Isaiah's Suffering Servant as referring to a strange, unlikely messiah. In Jesus of Nazareth, the African official meets someone who shares his own experience of being ostracised by the religious powers centralised in Jerusalem.[14] The servant of

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(footnote 11 continues...)

seen against the other 'dichotomy in status', namely, between what the eunuch enjoyed at home and what was denied him in Judaism (Huizing 2016:252). The roles are completely reversed in the present narrative, where the lowly becomes the teacher (Philip), while the excluded becomes an insider – one of the first non-Israelite believers in the book of Acts.

12. Consider Zorodzai Dube's deliberation on Philip's question, 'Do you understand what you are reading', as reflecting the Western missionary and academic perspective 'that they were dealing with illiterate, uncouth and unenlightened people who were in need of their mission and cultural salvation' (Dube 2013:1).

13. The passage from Isaiah 53:7–8 about Isaiah's Suffering Servant is interpreted by Philip to refer to the 'good news' of Jesus, which within the perspective of Luke–Acts means that God's raising of Jesus from the dead established him as Messiah and Lord, signalling the imminent Israelite theocracy (Pilch & Malina 2008:66). Cf. Talbert for his understanding of what such a Christological interpretation meant in light of the interpretation of scripture by Jesus in Luke and by the church in Acts (Talbert 2005:77–78).

14. Pilch and Malina have pointed out that Luke–Acts is concerned with 'what the God of Israel gives to faithful Israelites by means of Jesus with the help of the apostles, while being opposed by Israelite elites'. The intended audience of this gospel clearly identifies with this faithful Israelite in-group, who recognise God's activities in and through Jesus. In this way, and as is clearly seen in the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch as well, Luke polemicises the Israelite elite who denied Jesus as an agent of God. This indicates that the main social opposition of the intended audience came from Israelite Jesus-deniers (Pilch & Malina 2008:10). Read in context, then, the Lukan theme of the 'Gentile mission' means firstly the expansion of the gospel to Israelites living in far-off lands. This could include proselytes or

Isaiah is described as someone without offspring[15] who, like him, was deemed unworthy and 'unclean'.[16] Someone whose following consisted of the similar 'questionables' of society. Someone who was ostracised to the point of a shameful death on a cross but whose honour was affirmed through the resurrection by the God that this outsider had dared call 'Father'. Philip calls this story that he shares with the Ethiopian the 'good news' about Jesus, and it is indeed good news to anyone whose religious life had been characterised by the same exclusion as that of both the Ethiopian and the Nazarene.

'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptised?' (Ac 8:36). The Ethiopian's next question, as they happen to pass a body of water by the roadside, raises the concern of his acceptability, calling to memory his experience of exclusion at the temple because of his bodily disfigurement. The fact that he finds the boldness to ask the question illustrates that one moment of understanding has left him transfigured and his entire world changed. In contrast to the multiple experiences of exclusion, in this instance, the response, which is never spoken

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(footnote 14 continues...)

God-fearers, of course, who had accepted the Israelite faith even though they were ethnically non-Israelite. Given such narratives as that of the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, this constitutes an important element in Acts. The Israelite in-group, therefore, here consists of all those who had drawn near to the Israelite God, seen as having acted through Jesus, irrespective of ethnic identity.

15. For this reading, see Witherington (1998:298–299).

16. Four lengthy quotations from Isaiah illustrate the prophet's significant influence on Luke–Acts (Lk 3:4–6; 4:17–19; Ac 8:32–33; 28:25–27). Significantly, third Isaiah anticipates a time when boundaries and the exclusion of eunuchs and foreigners would cease, promising to eunuchs a name that 'shall not be cut off' (Is 56:3–8). Reading of the excluded Suffering Servant whose descendants were 'cut off', therefore, would lead to the eunuch's identification with both the servant and Jesus. The fact that Jesus was proclaimed to him as raised from the dead, and therefore exonerated and honoured by God, would recall the promise of Isa 56 and lead to further identification with Jesus, but this time as one included by God. In the words of Witherington (1998:296), 'In view of the focus on the Servant Songs in this very passage, it may be that Luke wishes us to see this story as a whole being about the fulfillment of that promise in Isaiah 56. The point would be that nothing hindered the eunuch from being a full-fledged follower of the one in whom Isaiah's promises were being fulfilled in the present, even though he could not be a full-fledged Jew.'

but enacted through the rite of baptism, is that nothing prevents him from fellowship with the community of God's followers (cf. Wilson 2015b:124).[17] The African has passed over from one identity, that of an excluded stranger, to that of radical inclusion in a community characterised by radical hospitality. This is affirmed by the fact that, following the baptism, Philip immediately disappears, 'snatched away' by the Spirit of God, so that the 'guide' the Ethiopian thought he needed is no longer present. Instead, the man goes on his way rejoicing and, as tradition would have it, becomes instrumental in bringing the gospel to the early church in Africa.[18] While this later tradition does not shed light on the author's intention, what is clear is that through the author's inclusion of this narrative in the *Book of Acts*, he establishes the transfigured eunuch as a prototype[19] for the new community that is being formed, where outsiders become insiders (Huizing 2016:248).[20] Even the location of the wilderness emphasises this

17. The conditional clause in verse 37 is not original and therefore not included in many of the newer translations. Cf. Holladay (2016:187–188, 191).

18. Irenaeus (*Haer* 3.12.8–10) relates that the eunuch was instrumental in evangelising the Nubian Kingdom, even though official Christianity only reached the region in the later part of the 4th century CE (Huizing 2016:249–250; Witherington 1998:301).

19. He was already a person of influence before his conversion, 'as an ideal convert who joyfully receives the good news (v. 39), the Ethiopian eunuch appears at a pivotal point in the progression of 'the Way' and in turn models the way to receive the gospel' (Wilson 2015b:115). Insofar as his gender liminality 'exemplifies Jesus' own embodiment of paradoxical power', Wilson has pointed out that Luke represents the Ethiopian eunuch as a 'model convert' who embodies 'impotent power' (Wilson 2015b:115, 137–140).

20. Like the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts can be divided into two sections along insider–outsider lines. In the Gospel of Luke, this takes the form of Jesus among Galileans, on the one hand, and his activities among Judeans on the other. In Acts, the activities among Judeans living in traditionally Israelite lands and surrounding regions (such as Antioch), with a majority Israelite population, progress to Judeans living in traditionally non-Israelite regions, where Israelites were a distinct minority (Pilch & Malina 2008:9). It is important to remember that Luke writes not for outsiders but for members of the Jesus in-group (Pilch & Malina 2008:9). By his including narratives of outsiders becoming insiders in this gospel to the Jesus in-group, we catch a glimpse of what we may call a Lukan ecclesiology, where the in-group has become radically redefined. The story of the Ethiopian eunuch is such a narrative, exemplifying the 'boundary-crossing nature' of the gospel (Wilson 2015b:115). Indeed, 'all sorts of people are included in the messianic community: Ethiopians, Samaritans, eunuchs,

point, because the wilderness symbolised that which lay beyond the boundary of the known world, often associated with questionable spirits and wild animals. No holds are barred for the radical hospitality of the new community, however, epitomised by the fact that the transition from insider to outsider takes place in the wilderness, simultaneously calling to mind the activity of John the Baptist in the wilderness (Pilch & Malina 2008:65). Yoon (2016) aptly captures the intent of the story in the summary to his doctoral thesis:

> First, Luke depicts the Ethiopian eunuch as the consummate outsider – geographically, morally, socially, ethnically, and in terms of gender – and indicates that the eunuch represents other marginalised outsiders. The eunuch shows no one can prevent outsiders like him from inclusion in the kingdom of God. Second, Luke portrays Philip as a prophet, specifically a prophet like Elijah and Elisha. Philip emulates Elijah and Elisha by reaching out to the outsider (in this instance, the Ethiopian eunuch). Third, Luke presents the Isaianic Suffering Servant as a religious and social outsider and identifies the character with Jesus and the Ethiopian eunuch. The indescribable descendants of the Suffering Servant signify a universally inclusive messianic community and fulfil the outsider's inclusion within the people of God as Isaiah prophesied (Is 56:3–8). (p. iv)

This story of how the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth managed to cross boundaries during its early expansion touches upon many aspects that still inform our discussion around otherness in general, and Africa's engagement with the world in particular.[21] That the author of the eunuch story finds it necessary to justify the inclusion of this outsider by having not only an angel of God

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(footnote 20 continues...)

women as well as men, magicians as well as those impressed by magic. All can believe in Jesus, all can be baptized, all can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, all can be fully included in the church. In Luke–Acts, however, inclusiveness is not an absolute value. It is a contingent value. Such inclusion demands radical repentance' (Talbert 2005:80).

21. Cf. especially Dube's reading of the text from the perspective of the eunuch rather than within the context of the Lukan salvation history theme, and then especially through the lens of migration studies. Read in this way, he also regards it as a story about an outsider who wishes to be regarded as an insider, which reflects the experience and longing of migrants who undergo a similar renegotiation of their identity (Dube 2013:1–7).

prompt Philip to follow the road to Gaza but also the Spirit of God tell him to approach the chariot (Witherington 1998:293), points to just how formidable our boundaries may seem, and how impossible hospitality to the other may appear. Many of the chapters in this volume indeed huddle together around this very theme.

A central point in the narrative is certainly the quotation from Isaiah 53. The image of the Suffering Servant was so easily transferrable to Jesus of Nazareth in the early church precisely because, compared to the religious elite centralised in Jerusalem, this outsider from Galilee embodied strangeness at the heart of the gospel. Perhaps, the reason why Kearney's philosophy has facilitated such a fruitful exchange on the theme of hospitality is that he did not start out merely writing about hospitality for hospitality's sake. Instead, his hospitality project formed part of a larger search for new ways to conceive the sacred. Kearney's God question, namely, of finding new ways to speak of God in a world that in many ways narrate its existence *after* God, has led him to formulating conceptions of God that locates vulnerability in the God-concept itself. The idea that we may encounter God in the otherness of the stranger at our door, and may possibilise God *to be* God by offering impossible hospitality, intersects with the hermeneutic lines of our political, economic, spiritual and even artistic ways of being-in-the-world. It renegotiates identity in dialogue with the other in ways that expose our denial of the other in our own discourses of power and therefore places our own God-talk in parenthesis, suddenly vulnerable for the way it exposes and reveals our will to power.

■ The African lament

The story of the eunuch, an 'outsider', black man from Nubia, finds a significant transfigurational 'insider' echo almost 2000 years later, and on the very same African soil, although semantically and existentially clothed in a different socio-religious garment. The innovative echo sounds from

Ugandan Catholic theologian Emmanuel Katongole's recent *Born from Lament*, with the directional subtitle, *The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (2017). In his book, Katongole speaks of a 'turning to God', and at the outset we wish to indicate how we relate his 'turning to God' to the 're-turn to God' by the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney. We do this for two reasons, firstly to sketch the context for and space of this publication in its connectivity to existential lament and anatheism (cf. section 'Turning to God and the return to God'), and secondly to provide a guiding map for the reader with regard to the chapters to follow (see section 'Katongole and Kearney: Africans debating otherness with a continental philosopher').

■ Turning to God and the return to God

Katongole's work is hailed on the back cover of his book by the Cameroonian-American academic Elias Kifon Bongmba of Rice University as a 'refreshing political theology' that represents a 'compelling invitation to rethink the theology of hope'. It is a theology, according to the Catholic scholar Stan Chu Ilo from DePaul University, that gives 'voice to those on the margins' by arguing that (Katongole 2017):

> [*H*]ope in Africa should be presented not simply as a wish or pious claim but as light that one can discover in Africa by following stories of faith, courage, and the practice of hopeful living among many African Christians. (n.p., back cover text)

Reformed pastor Mark Gornik of the City Seminary of New York appreciatively states that Katongole is 'one of the most remarkable and transformational theological leaders of our time', helping us 'to see how God and the everyday, lament and hope, Scripture and prayer, church and public life all hold together' (Katongole 2017:back cover). For Katongole himself there is no more urgent theological task than to provide an account of hope in Africa (cf. Katongole 2017:xvi). This is because of the challenge posed by its endless cycles of violence, war, poverty and displacement (cf. Katongole 2017:21, 260). In such contexts,

hope takes for Katongole the form of arguing and wrestling with God in the midst of suffering (Katongole 2017:xi, xiii, xvi [especially], 57–61, 261). He existentially labels his theological accounting of hope 'lament', in telling the stories of Christian activists for nonviolent change in the Great Lakes Region of eastern Africa. Lament for him is not merely to be understood as a 'cry of pain' but as a way of 'mourning, protesting, and appealing to God' (Katongole 2017:xvi). It implies not only listening to their cries and stories but also listening for a particular story (Katongole 2017:37ff., 260–261). He carefully explains that the notion of lament holds the key to a full explication of the nature and reality of hope in the midst of Africa's turbulent history (Katongole 2017:xiii), because lament is a form of turning towards God in the midst of ruins. In short: lament is a way of dwelling amidst ruins (Katongole 2017:19), an active engagement with the world of suffering.

When the stories of the African eunuch and the African priest are read together, one may notice a certain progression that we wish to connect with Kearney's concept of anatheism and hospitality to the stranger. Whereas the eunuch responds as outsider to the question '[d]o you understand what you are reading?' with words implying dependence on some insider insight to which he can lay no claim – '[h]ow can I unless someone guides me?' – the priest approaches God in protest with the faith and confidence of an insider. This progression is seen as well in the changing of the question – from the possibly patronising '[d]o you understand' to the engaging and challenging '[w]hat carried a person forward through the dark nights of not knowing?' (Katongole 2017:xiii). Katongole finds the answer to this question in lament, representing a wrestling and arguing with God. Read together, we can clearly see the movement from an outsider 'questioning', to an insider 'questioning'. A movement from that of an African eunuch, seeking to be let in and for boundaries of exclusion and alienation to be abolished, to that of the African theologian, engaging the tradition with a deep sense of dependency that comes with belonging. In the questions posed

by Katongole, we hear a gripping contemporary voice of an African theology confident enough to engage God critically. In this sense, both outsider and insider represent an arguing and wrestling in search of God, although from very different socio-religious spaces and with different objectives. While for the first African, the outcome of his search was transfiguration as he found the boundary between outsider and insider obliterated, the second challenges the tradition as insider, overwhelmed by the penetrating existential questions that flow from the mouths of those who have suffered or continue to suffer in dehumanising ways. How can and does one turn to God when foundations are destroyed? What does the turning look like in the midst of violent destruction and the shattering of the foundations of human and social existence? What words and what kind of language does one use to express the ineffable (Katongole 2017:19)?

As insider wrestling with 'destruction and shattering of foundations', Katongole reflectively turns to God anew in hope through the portraiture methodology of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Davis (2017:33ff.). He adapts their methodology for his own aim of theological storytelling for the purpose of bringing a theology of hope to Africa. For Katongole, an account of hope in Africa would have to be shaped around narratives or portraits of hope on this continent, but then not only in listening to stories but also in listening *for* a story. The latter he finds as the reason for hope at the intersection of Christ's suffering and the gift of his resurrection. Although the Jesus story represents for him the more immediate story to listen for, it is itself located within a broader story of God's journey with humanity and creation (cf. Katongole 2017:38). The story of hope begins and finds expression in lament as a way of wrestling and arguing with God (cf. Katongole 2017:41, 106–107), a turning towards God and also a turning around God (cf. Katongole 2017:107, 119) that ultimately reflects a deep immersion in the covenant relationship with God and the community of faith. In short: biblical lament is for Katongole (2017:107) a structured and complex language of

complaint, protest and appeal directed to God. It is faith language. It is a way of knowing through tears (Katongole 2017), a:

> [*W*]ay to hurt with God when one is in the midst of a storm [... *the*] potential to bring one to a new place, to a new depth. And thus to a new song of praise which is qualitatively different from the praise before. This new place is also a kind of seeing, not simply in terms of mental insight, but in the sense of knowing and experience. (pp. 108–109)

While both Africans have yearned for a spiritual homecoming, and while this homecoming took different forms, we wish for a moment to reflect on the 'turning to God' present in both narratives in view of Kearney's anatheistic 're-turn' to God. While the first narrative points to the human boundaries that separate outsiders from the divine, or from insider spaces, the second narrative of an Africa all but destroyed by suffering, yet still calling upon her God in the voice of protest demanded by the suffering, brings together two strands of Kearney's anatheism. It is, firstly, in the willingness to question the God of triumph, according to which all will be well with the in-group, who find themselves at the receiving end of omnipotent benevolence, that a new way is opened to a totally new, totally strange, totally unexpected God, not simply one who confirms but also one who destabilises the past experience of God (Katongole 2017:112). It is a 're-turn' that now carries both 'insider' and 'outsider' dimensions, a deep-reaching mixture of a sense of belonging and an atheistic hermeneutic moment. It is a movement to an acoustic place where God's call can be heard anew. This God is to be heard and found, secondly, in the telling of the small stories of hope as they persist and insist on embodying to a suffering continent the story of hope – that of the Suffering Servant who paid no boundaries between strangers any respect. In Kearney's words, to continue to speak of God after some of the most horrifying terrors of our world is an insult, unless we find new ways of speaking (Kearney 2011:xvi). It is in the stories of hope where boundaries between strangers become obsolete in the face of kindness to the widow, orphan and enemy that a new possibility for thinking about God is born.

◼ Katongole and Kearney: Africans debating otherness with a Continental philosopher

From Katongole's risk of finding in our lamentations of arguing and wrestling with God a totally new, totally strange and unexpected God, we turn in our African initiative to enquire into the radical stranger, the God of otherness and the radical hospitality that we find in the philosophical discourse of Richard Kearney. The discourse concerns an anatheistic wager and return to God, having lost God altogether, and is marked by a deep fusion of outsider–insider dimensions. Do Katongole's turn to and around God in lament and Kearney's anatheistic re-turn to God have anything to say to each other?

Although this dialogical question is neither the explicit vantage point of the chapters that follow nor pursued in any of the questions posed in them, it nevertheless represents an implicit existential–theological vantage point of God-talk in the spaces and contexts of African cries and longing for hope. Through this vantage point, we wish to locate within the larger continent of Africa the specifically South African engagement with Kearney's insider–outsider discourse on God with another contemporary discourse on God. This 'placing' is informed by certain guiding questions posed specifically within the African context by South African scholars on the philosophical contribution of Richard Kearney. Such questions include the following:

1. How do the philosophical 'third way' discourse of the anatheistic wager, the welcoming of the stranger and otherness, and radical hospitality relate to the African lament, that is, arguing and wrestling with God amidst suffering on the African continent?
2. Are there boundaries to be deconstructed and borders to be crossed in a constructive manner that may render us transfigured, giving birth to new and hopeful ways of experiencing and conceiving the sacred in our everyday experiences?

In the first chapter on Kearney's work (Ch. 1), American postdoctoral fellow Justin Sands from North-West University, Potchefstroom, poses a hermeneutical question that sets the stage for what follows in the book - 'Where do you come from, Richard Kearney?' (Sands 2018:22). Sands remembers how he encountered the same persistent question as an American scholar in Potchefstroom, in this way creatively opening the engagement with Kearney in the African context by reminding us that narrative matters (Sands 2018):

> From Afrikaners, Indians, Coloureds, to Xhosas, Zulus and everyone in between, the stories and histories that one tells about themselves matter more than mere introduction. It announces a lived history and connection to others. It is in this vein that I welcome Richard Kearney to our ongoing discussions in South Africa and ask him: 'Where do you come from, Richard Kearney?' (p. 22)

Kearney takes up Sands' important question in Chapter 2 by telling his own story, explaining and describing in biographical detail how he came to the philosophy of the Stranger. His story unfolds as the explication of the relationship between hermeneutics of hospitality and his intellectual itinerary.

With the Kearney intellectual narrative as background, the South African philosophers Pieter Duvenhage (University of the Free State, Bloemfontein) and Anné Verhoef (North-West University, Potchefstroom) delve exploratively into and around his philosophical story. In Chapter 3, Duvenhage poses the same probing questions against the background of the main trajectories of the institutionalisation of a philosophical discourse in South Africa, exploring from where (which horizon) Kearney is coming. Verhoef, in turn, engages with another philosophical horizon, namely, that of metaphysics. In Chapter 4, Verhoef turns his philosophical focus to the question of what type of transcendence is described, implied or motivated by Kearney's anatheism.

Chapters 5–10 represent engagement with Kearney's philosophical viewpoint on the stranger, otherness, anatheism and radical hospitality.

In Chapter 5, the practical theologian and philosopher Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, from the University of Pretoria, sketches in a

gripping manner how the poetics of Kearney's *Anatheism* drew him into its wager and captured his imagination. It challenged him but at the same time inspired him. From the very words that Kearney has provided him with, then, he moves to question the possibility of a book such as *Anatheism* itself.

Is there not too much lost in the middle? This is the question posed in Chapter 6 by the systematic theologian Yolande Steenkamp, research associate of the University of Pretoria. She critically engages with Kearney's preference for middle ways as a means of steering clear of polar opposites.

In Chapter 7, the doctoral philosophical student Schalk Gerber of Stellenbosch University takes a relevant question as the starting point of his engagement with Kearney: What may the thought of Kearney contribute to the challenge of thinking otherness – translated as decolonisation – in the context of South Africa?

The thought-provoking title of Chapter 8, 'Approaching the threshold: Hospitality as a pedagogical wager in the work of Richard Kearney', captures what Helgard Pretorius, systematic theologian from Stellenbosch University, asks of Kearney concerning the heart of his philosophical approach: How does one learn of the other? Is it possible to become better at responding to the experience of strangeness? If the presence of the Stranger calls for hospitality, is that something one could cultivate in oneself or in others?

Chapters 9–12 focus on God-talk, with the different contributions pursuing the significant question in related but diverse ways. Daniël P. Veldsman, systematic theologian from the University of Pretoria, explores in Chapter 9 the relationship between God-talk within biblical prophetic literature and Kearney's philosophical contemporary discourse on God, searching for possible comparative elements of continuity and of discontinuity. In turn, the systematic theologian Wessel Bentley of University of South Africa explicates in Chapter 10 the scene that Kearney sets for a re-appraisal of God-talk in his philosophical

construct of the encounter of God as stranger and subsequently explores the implications of such a 'strange' theology in the practice of Holy Communion. In Chapter 11, systematic theologian Rian Venter from the University of the Free State takes up the interesting engagement as conversation between a theology of the Trinity and a theopoetics of anatheism, which respects otherness, and generates the possibility of new self-understanding. Venter emphasises how Trinitarian theology could be enriched by this conversation, through a greater attention to imagination, possibility, everyday life, alterity, human agency and space. In Chapter 12, 'After God but behind the Cross: The procession as a way to re-encounter God in a culture beyond classical liturgy', practical theologian Mirella Klomp from the Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam, and Daniël P. Veldsman pursue a deeper understanding of public liturgical ritual after the demolishing impact of secularisation on religious institutions in contemporary late modern Western Europe. They do this in direct appropriation of *The Passion*, a popular musical representation in the Netherlands of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ – a ritual that has grown into a large, open-air media event that is celebrated annually on a square of one of the country's larger cities. The authors pose the question: How do participants from a 21st-century secularised society encounter God in the processional shapes of *The Passion*?

Chapters 13 and 14 shift the focus to the contextual heartbeat of South African society, considering the country's deeply disturbing and complex processes of dealing with its traumatic past in light of Kearney's viewpoint of radical hospitality. The systematic theologian from Stellenbosch University, Robert Vosloo, discusses in Chapter 13 the work of the South African clinical psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela against the backdrop of Ricoeur's articulation of the tension between love and justice. Her work is marked by the question of how notions such as remorse, forgiveness, empathy and restitution can play a role in the complex processes of dealing with the trauma of the past in a way that has the potential to rehumanise victims

and perpetrators. He explores possibilities for responsible engagement with the past by stating that it requires an embodied historical hermeneutic, akin to what Kearney, in conversation with Ricoeur's thought, calls 'carnal hermeneutics'. In Chapter 14, 'Towards hospitality between enemies', Wilhelm Verwoerd, a peace practitioner and senior researcher at Historical Trauma and Transformation, University of Stellenbosch, focuses on the profound and challenging question of what it really means to extend genuine hospitality to the stranger, especially when the stranger turns out to be a sworn enemy.

Chapter 15 consists of a transcribed dialogue with Richard Kearney that transpired on 16 April 2018, in which Kearney addressed questions and concerns posed by the various scholars who engaged with his work in the chapters included in this volume. We consider it a thought-provoking contribution to offer in print such an exchange between African scholars and one of the thought leaders in contemporary Continental philosophy.

Introduction to Richard Kearney's intellectual autobiography: Where do you come from, Richard Kearney?

Justin Sands Ⓘ
School of Philosophy
North-West University
South Africa

When I first arrived at Potchefstroom in October 2015, the one persistent question I was asked by now-friends and friendly strangers was, 'Why are you here? What brings you to South Africa?' At first, I thought that this was basic curiosity – what is an American doing in Potchefstroom? – yet, it was not until later that I recognised this question's significance to South Africans: in this country of 11 national languages and various cultures, narrative matters. This is something that Kearney also recognises

in *On Stories* (2002), a work devoted to exploring narrative and identity. From Afrikaners, Indians, Coloureds, to Xhosas, Zulus and everyone in between, the stories and histories that one tells about themselves matter more than mere introduction. It announces a lived history and connection to others. It is in this vein that I welcome Richard Kearney to our ongoing discussions in South Africa and ask him: 'Where do you come from, Richard Kearney?'

Richard Kearney readily and continually asks himself this question, especially in the introductions to many of his works. Drawing from his mentor Paul Ricoeur, Kearney often begins his work by asking himself, 'D*'où parlez-vous*?' In effect, 'From where do you speak?'[22] Not just what is your historico-cultural context, but who are you and what brings you to this discussion? In both the following and final chapters, where he will engage the authors of this anthology in dialogue, I anticipate that Richard Kearney will give us many details about from where he speaks and what brings him to this discussion, but I would like to modestly focus our understanding of his intellectual autobiography through three smaller, more accessible questions:

1. Where have you been?
2. Where are you now?
3. Where are you going?

In what follows, I will say a little bit about these questions from my own perspective in hopes of opening this conversation.

■ Where have you been?

Richard Kearney is widely influential in philosophy of religion, particularly after his *Trilogy: Philosophy at the Limit,* which, in addition to *On Stories* (2002), consists of *The God Who May Be* (2001) and *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* (2003). One often

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22. Cf. the introduction to Kearney (2001:5–6).

sees academics in this field mainly explore his understanding of the God of possibility. After Kearney published *Anatheism* (2011), research on this possible God and what an anatheism may entail became a central and prevailing theme throughout the field. However, even though his notions on God have progressed the field greatly, I wonder if his works on hermeneutics and alterity have been overlooked. Interestingly, only the *God Who May Be* solely focuses upon God, whereas the other two works mainly explore alterity and narrativity.

Kearney's work before this trilogy was extremely diverse, focusing on poetry, Irish culture and nationalism, and hermeneutics, in addition to more straightforward phenomenological enterprises. If I may, I would like to ask him to emphasise and review some of his work before his trilogy – giving us an understanding of what important earlier texts of his we may need to read or otherwise revisit while also telling us how they set him upon his current trajectory. I imagine that his new research on carnal hermeneutics finds its headwaters in these prior texts, and shedding some light upon them would help us better understand from where he comes and where he is going.

■ Where are you now?

Speaking of which, this leads me to my second question for Richard Kearney, 'where are you now?' One of the main constants in Kearney's work is his fidelity to the hermeneutical–phenomenological method. In my own research, I explored this connection with Merold Westphal, another devotee of Paul Ricoeur (Sands 2016). I found two primary divergences between Kearney's and Westphal's appropriation and employment of Ricoeur's thought: For Kearney, Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology is solely a method of description, a seeking of understanding, and his use of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion mainly keeps him on track when employing the sympathetic imagination; he always walks alongside the believing soul or the

person in question, he never inhabits their shoes but re-feels their steps along the way to better understanding. Westphal, on the other hand (and in the process of developing great insights, I should add), employs Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology not only for description but also for prescription. He uses hermeneutical phenomenology to locate instances where onto-theology occurs but also appropriates the hermeneutics of suspicion as a tool for the believing soul to better enact and understand his or her faith. Kearney, in other words, always maintains a rigour to Ricoeur's method, whereas Westphal, among others as well, develops it and appropriates it beyond phenomenological description.

I find that a fidelity to method and an understanding of the limits to that method is a running thread throughout Richard Kearney's work. Whereas Ricoeur's trilogy, The Philosophy of the Will, ran up to the limits to a Husserlian phenomenological method – a project that he never completed – Kearney's work, particularly Philosophy at the Limit, in addition to his other articles and books, also seeks the limits of its methodology while never traversing over these limits. He only peeks over at what may be. This is especially so in *Anatheism*, where he often states that the work should not be considered a theology nor even a part of a theological tradition (Kearney 2002:xvi). Thus, I wonder about his new project, carnal hermeneutics, and how this might be a continuation of his exploration and adaptation of his chosen methodology (or methodologies), and I ask him 'where he is now?' Where have his philosophical endeavours taken him, particularly his fidelity to methodological rigour, and where does he currently stand? Or, in simpler terms, how has his previous work revealed to him the necessity of a carnal hermeneutics?

■ Where are you going?

This ultimately leads me to ask, 'Where are you going?' Again, I think Richard Kearney's hermeneutics may prove to be his most important contribution to our discussions today and to

South African society at large. For how does a country with 11 national languages and cultures survive? In South Africa, a young nation crafted in the wake of a historic and systematic delegitimisation of several of those cultures, this question arises often in daily living. Currently, I think it is safe to say that many are cynical about a 'rainbow nation' and think the task of understanding alterity, of co-existing and integrating with other cultures, is nigh impossible. It is here that I find Richard Kearney's carnal hermeneutics to be the most influential, and I would like to spend the rest of my time elaborating how.

In his programmatic essay, 'What is Carnal Hermeneutics?' (Kearney 2015:99), Kearney argues that we must unfold our understanding of sense, particularly touch, in order to 'discern the world *as* this or that, *as* hospitable or hostile, *as* attractive or repulsive, *as* tasty or tasteless, *as* living or dying'. By *sense*, he means *sensation* - for example, the sight, sound, smell and taste of the world around us – secondly, as how we derive '*meaning'* in the world – in the gist of 'I get the sense of what you say' – and finally as '*direction'* – denoting 'how we orient ourselves in space and time, how we move towards or away from, fore and aft, hither and thither'. 'Wisdom', he (Kearney 2015) states:

> [/]s about taste and tact. That is what we mean, isn't it, when we say someone *sensible* is someone *sensitive*, they have 'the touch,' as healer, teacher, artist, lover. They are attentive, careful, tentative. They get it. To have the right touch is to touch and be touched wisely. (p. 100)

His carnal hermeneutics, then, explores how this wise touch is exhibited in both a textual and embodied understanding of the world around oneself. The separation between the two is replaced with a cooperation, because a person, according to Kearney, cannot wisely interpret the world without sense, without sensation, without the touch of the world. His carnal hermeneutics, then, explores how this wise touch is exhibited in both a textual and embodied understanding of the world around oneself.

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Kearney first turns to Aristotle to show how this emphasis on touch runs deep within our understanding of the world. He also shows how this sense of touch is eschewed through various strands of philosophical thinking, particularly within Platonism and Kantianism, but I will let him and others explicate this for the sake of time. What I would like to emphasise here, and what I think Richard Kearney can share with us, is how this touch reveals the world to us and how it in turn reveals us to the world.

Following Aristotle, Kearney (2015:103) states that 'in touch, we are both touching and touched at the same time, but we do not for all that collapse into sameness. Difference is preserved'. We feel the other as they are feeling us; we are both exposing ourselves but also remain ourselves while the other does so in turn. There is difference but also a connection. This is similar to Husserl's description of one hand touching the other, where my left hand feels this sense of being touched, but my right hand does not lose the sense that it is touching my other hand. This touch with identity and difference can reveal how we are 'exposed to otherness across gaps, to navigate and negotiate sensitively between other embodied beings. From the beginning, contact always involves an element of *tact*' (Kearney 2015:103). This sensing, which involves not just touch but also the other senses – smell, taste, sight – is a pathway to '*making* sense and *receiving* sense from someone or something *other* than myself. Flesh mediates this otherness, crossing back and forth between self and strangeness. This is where hermeneutics arises' (Kearney 2015:104). Or, when we touch we do so through a fleshy mediation, which causes us to discern, to tactfully make sense of what or who we touch and to form an understanding or opinion of it; is what I touch disgusting or is what I touch pleasing?

Touch is an affective action that changes our sense of things within the world. Yet, what is remarkable about this carnal, fleshy interpretation is that it also reveals ourselves to the world. It is an empathetic action that feels the other over a distance while also revealing who we are to that other. 'As such', Kearney (2015:105) explicates, 'touching finds its social beginnings in the handshake: open hand to open hand – the origin of civilisation. War and peace are skin deep in the profoundest sense'. What this means is that touch enables us 'to feel with others, flesh mediates what is strange and alien' but it also allows us to expose ourselves to the others, where we 'risk being bare-skinned, feeling the other who is making me feel – from outside, from what is not me' (Kearney 2015:105). So carnal hermeneutics is more than just hermeneutics – it takes on a phenomenological character that describes our own exposition to the world; we touch and feel, taste and savour the world and thus interpret the world. In doing so, we also expose ourselves to that world. This double action, or reversibility, keeps the world at a distance while also bringing it close to us in quite literal fashion.

I will let Richard Kearney expand further on the importance of carnal hermeneutics to our understanding of the world. However, I anticipate that where he is going with carnal hermeneutics may provide a bridge between current trends in Western phenomenology and decolonial thought, where the latter's emphasis on black bodies and consciousness – as well as those bodies' inscriptions into local and global narratives – has become a prevalent issue. Achille Mbembe, for example, expresses that his thought is an attempt to 'Write Africa', or make his body and thought an inscription into the historico-cultural soul of this continent, as a rupture that criticises and questions pre-existing colonial narratives (Mbembe 2013; Spivak 2007). Mbembe (2013), it seems, may also follow carnal hermeneutics of a different sort.

Mbembe draws heavily from Frantz Fanon, who also expresses a carnal necessity throughout his work. In the chapter, 'The Fact of Blackness' of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) describes

his blackness as a nausea that is inflicted upon him by an outside world that sees him as an other. 'When people like me', he says:

> [*T*]hey tell me it is in spite of my colour. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my colour. Either way, I am locked into the infernal cycle. (p. 88)

Here, one can see that sensation, the gaze of whiteness, inflicts upon Fanon and other black men and women an ontological disposition as othered, as non-white. He goes on to describe how reason and 'un-reason' develop a strange relation where the Negro, in the words of Fanon (1967), can be understood scientifically as human along with white humans but that:

> There will always be a world – a white world – between you and us [*he is speaking about an encounter with a Jewish person who links antisemitism to racism*]. The other's total inability to liquidate the past once and for all. In the face of this affective ankylosis of the white man, it is understandable that I could have made up my mind to utter my Negro cry. Little by little, putting out pseudopodia here and there, I secreted a race. (p. 92)

What Fanon is describing, in crucial detail, is how the world he inhabits cannot move beyond its past, for the 'past will not pass', as the French say, and how the fact of his blackness will always bring itself about within the world. His race is crucial to how the world sees him; his identity is linked to the gaze, the sight, levied upon him by a white world. One can see how the senses – a carnal hermeneutics – make sense of this world and this black man. 'We are in the world', Fanon (1967:96) writes, 'and long live the couple, Man and Earth! Besides, our men of letters helped me to convince you; your white civilisation overlooks subtle riches and sensitivity'.

Perhaps, Richard Kearney is going somewhere, showing us a better way to reveal – and not overlook – this sensitivity through sense. I do not wish to levy upon him such a burden of solving all the world's crises – especially the issue of race in South Africa! – yet, I still think that he has something to share with us, something that we have overlooked. Perhaps, something that can, ever so slightly, push us forward to better understanding ourselves and our world.

I would like to close with an example of what carnal hermeneutics might look like within this paradigm. It is an American example, admittedly, but one that I think opens a discussion of how our touch opens us to the world while leaving us exposed, revealed, to the world. I think it also shows the significance of how carnal hermeneutics may uncover the subtle riches and sensitivities of which Fanon speaks.

In 2009, at the beginning of President Barak Obama's presidency, White House photographer Pete Souza took a picture of President Obama and a little African-American boy named Jacob in the Oval Office. The picture has President Obama bending over to let Jacob touch his hair. As Pete Souza (Calmes 2012) recounted the story to the *New York Times*, Jacob asked:

> 'I want to know if my hair is just like yours', he told Mr Obama, so quietly that the president asked him to speak again. Jacob did and Mr Obama replied, 'Why don't you touch it and see for yourself?' He lowered his head, level with Jacob, who hesitated. 'Touch it, Dude!' Mr Obama said. As Jacob patted the presidential crown, Mr Souza snapped [*the photo*]. 'So what do you think?' Mr Obama asked. 'Yes, it does feel the same'. (n.p.)

Numerous commentators have argued that this picture symbolises the reality of Mr Obama's presidency with the actuality of the first black body *to embody* the power and authority of the USA. For me, this picture represents carnal hermeneutics at play. For Jacob, this touch opens to him a plenitude of realisations and possibilities – of impossible possibilities, even. He probably does not know the historical significance of this presidency but still feels it in his touch. For Obama, this touch allows him to fully recognise the significance – symbolic and literal – of his historical role as the first black president of the USA and he eventually placed this photograph in a place of honour in the White House to remind him of this significance, a remarkable event given his reticence to evoke his race in public. For Americans like myself who gaze upon this picture, of this touch within the picture, we ultimately see where we have been, who we are and where we are going.

Carnal hermeneutics, then, might provide us with a better way to understand moments such as this one. It will not save the world, for carnal hermeneutics is not just about the hopeful, joyful and sacred sensation but also describes the despair, sadness and profane sensations of the world. However, it may help us realise how important these moments are to our own consciousness as well as to our cultures and perhaps our national consciousnesses. When I ask Richard Kearney, 'where are you going?', with this picture that I have in mind, this particular touch that touched all who looked upon it in some way, I foresee an answer that will help us better understand where we all are going, who we are now as carnal subjects and who we have been as well.

Where I speak from: A short intellectual autobiography

Richard Kearney[a,b]
[a]Charles Seelig Chair of Philosophy, Boston College,
United States of America
[b]Research Associate, Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics,
University of Pretoria, South Africa

I am grateful to have the opportunity to respond here to the question posed by my hosts during a recent visit to South Africa: How did I come to the philosophy of the Stranger? Or more precisely, what is the relationship between a hermeneutics of hospitality and my own intellectual itinerary?

In what follows, I will attempt a brief response by tracing the genealogy of my thoughts on God and religion – a key theme of 'anatheism' as a hosting of the Other – from my early education in Ireland through some critical junctures in my professional life as a philosopher abroad. In so doing, I will retain something of the 'personal' and 'anecdotal' tone of the presentations I gave

at the Universities of Pretoria and Johannesburg and Stellenbosch in May 2017. I am very grateful to Professors Daniël P. Veldsman, Robert Vosloo and Dr Yolande Steenkamp for so generously welcoming me and arranging some of the memorable exchanges featured in this volume.

■ Family upbringing and early schooling

To begin: I grew up in the city of Cork, in Southern Ireland, in a Catholic family with devout loving parents, Kevin and Ann Kearney.

My father was a good man who suffered from severe war trauma[23] and had a streak of survivor guilt mixed with old-fashioned Irish Jansenism. This made for a melancholic version of Christianity, but he was never judgemental and when, for example, my unmarried elder sister became pregnant at the age of 20, losing her job as a teacher 'for fear of scandal', he was the first to stand by her. My father had a horror of what he called 'holy Joes' (who put rules before compassion); and he was always humble before his God: he would kneel and say the night rosary with our family during the Easter Season and was always discreet in the public practice of his faith. But he never missed Sunday Mass and went on a ('dry') pilgrimage to Lough Derg's healing waters in Northern Ireland every spring – which managed somehow to salve his hurting soul for a while.

As for my mother, Ann, she was also a devout Christian, combining a deep love of the Catholic sacraments with a sense of compassionate liberty in the face of punitive church orthodoxies regarding 'sex and morals' – a dissident liberalism perhaps inherited from her father's Protestant background. Some of my earliest memories were of us both preparing beautiful May

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23. He had served as a naval doctor in the Red Cross during the Second World War.

altars to Mary on the window sills of our house, brimming with vases of lily of the valley and bluebells. We would sing hymns – 'O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May' – and smell the spring flowers and laugh together. I also still recall how she would wake me from my sleep in the early morning when I was seven years old and walk me through freezing winter streets to a convent on Montenotte Hill where I served as an altar boy at 06:00 Mass for the nuns. I loved my mother and Mary with equal fervour (with Mary a close second, to be honest) and could never believe, for the rest of my life, that the God they loved could be anything but a God of love. The Eucharist always remained for me a host of the mother as much as of the father of God; and to this day, bread and wine are my favourite food.

My five brothers and one sister were uniquely spiritual people and very close siblings. Four of them worked as healers of the sick, dying or disabled (two with Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities in Europe and Africa). They are all more spiritually evolved than me and I continue to learn from them, especially during annual walks on the Camino de Compostela and on the windy hills of Myross, West Cork, where all the family congregates every summer – a wild, sacred sanctuary throughout our lives. And a powerful reminder that God lives in and through nature, as Ireland's first pantheist philosopher, John Scotus Eriugena, already taught in the 9th century: *Deus currens*: a divine current runs through all things.

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Then there was school. My education began with the Christian Brothers in Cork where I first learnt that the church could also have a violent streak. I regularly witnessed cruel beatings delivered to unfortunate fellow pupils for not knowing the right Catechism answers or not wearing clean white shirts for Communion. And that was not the only wrong (as recent national tribunals on child abuse revealed). The 'first naiveté' of faith was

over and I never forgot the lesson that Christianity can be the best and worst of religions. *Corruptio optimi pessima* [The corruption of the best is the worst].

At the age of 13, my parents sent me to Glenstal Abbey, a boarding school in County Limerick, run by very enlightened Benedictine monks. There I learnt the beauty of Gregorian chant, elegant liturgy and theological excitement. I was introduced to philosophies of religion – both atheist (Sartre, Nietzsche, Camus) and theist (Marcel, Buber, Simone Weil) – and learnt the invaluable lesson that one most genuinely embraces faith when one has read the strongest arguments *against* it. In class, we read the arguments of non-believers before those of believers – observing Dostoyevsky's adage that 'true faith comes forth from the crucible of doubt'. My first teacher of religion at Glenstal was Father Andrew Nugent, who looked like a dried prune with foggy glasses and dandruff but constantly glowed with great ideas! Another of my influential mentors there, Brother Patrick Hederman, remains one of my closest intellectual friends to this day. I return to Glenstal Abbey regularly with a wonderful group of artists – among them Fanny Howe, Sheila Gallagher and Nóirín ní Ríain – and have had the great privilege of working with them on a recent volume entitled *The Art of Anatheism* (2018). A regular meeting point of our Glenstal group has been a special underground chapel housing ancient Russian icons, one of which, *Christ the Healer,* remains an abiding focus for my daily meditation.

I might also mention that Glenstal was famous for hosting an annual ecumenical meeting for all the Christian denominations of war-torn Ireland in the sixties and seventies – Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic – and serves to this day as a place of daring dialogue with the Orthodox Church and non-Christian religions of the East.

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At 17, I received a scholarship to study literature and philosophy at University College Dublin (UCD). This was in the mid-seventies

when a 30-year war between Catholic nationalists and Protestant loyalists raged in Belfast and Derry north of the 'border' (Belfast was only 160 miles from Dublin). The philosophy department at the time was largely run by Catholic clergy – including a future Cardinal of Ireland, Desmond Connell. But this clerical hegemony did not prevent the mandatory dose of metaphysical 'Realism' (another word for scholastic Thomism) being accompanied by new thinking coming in from Continental Europe, and especially post-sixties Paris: existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, humanist Marxism and critical theory. This opening was further aided by the 'Lonergan movement' of Vatican II renewal, which argued for dialogue with innovative forms of secular and scientific thought. Of particular influence on my thinking as an undergraduate in UCD was Patrick Masterson, author of *Atheism and Alienation* (1971), who introduced me to the intellectual splendours of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Ricoeur. And I was also deeply moved by the brilliant lectures of Denys Turner, who taught me the power of humanist-Sartrean Marxism, and of Dennis Donoghue, who introduced me to the dazzling enigmas of Derridean deconstruction. It was Masterson, a close friend to this day, who encouraged me to apply for a scholarship to do graduate work with Charles Taylor – author of *A Secular Age* (2007) and *Sources of the Self* (1989) – at McGill University in Canada. Taylor was a kind and compelling teacher, drawing generously from both Continental (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) and analytic (Austin, Wittgenstein) traditions. His lectures on the philosophy of language in the Fall semester of 1976 were spell-binding. During my time in Montreal, I was also deeply impressed by his role as a public intellectual in Canadian politics[24] – a role that has remained a model of 'applied philosophy' for me ever since. Taylor showed how one could be a practising Catholic and a politically engaged thinker, making a mark in the public media in important popular debates. Once I completed

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24. He was a founder member of the National Democratic Party and ran against Trudeau for the premiership.

my master's with Taylor in 1977, he recommended that I pursue my doctoral studies in the phenomenology of imagination with his friend Paul Ricoeur in the University of Paris.

■ Paris apprenticeship

I arrived in Paris in September 1977. I will never forget my first encounter with Ricoeur. I walked into a packed seminar room at the Centre Herméneutique et Phénoménologique at Avenue Parmentier where a number of Ricoeur's close colleagues sat around a table – including Emmanuel Levinas, Stanislas Breton, Jean Greisch and Françoise Dastur. In a second outer circle sat a dozen or so doctoral students. I joined them and waited for Ricoeur to arrive. When he did he was wearing a bright multicoloured jacket that he had just bought in Chicago, where he was teaching for a semester each year. I was expecting a sober Protestant intellectual dressed in black. Ricoeur warmly welcomed everyone and proceeded to ask each student his initial hermeneutic question: *D'où parlez-vous?* [Where do you speak from?] When it came to me, I explained that I came from Southern Ireland and had been educated in philosophy at UCD – at which Ricoeur happily observed, 'that is excellent, I will call on you whenever we need commentaries on Aquinas!' Little did Ricoeur know I was a rebellious refugee from orthodox scholasticism.[25]

From then on it was plain delightful sailing through multiple theories of narrative in phenomenology and the philosophy of history and religion. Each Wednesday seminar was a treat and Ricoeur always proved his commitment to 'intellectual hospitality' by inviting visiting scholars and friends to give presentations. The title of one of his volumes, *Le conflit des interprétations*, took on real meaning as different voices chimed and clashed in what Ricoeur liked to call *un combat amoureux* (a phrase he

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25. Although as Joyce wrote of Stephen Dedalus – he had 'the cursed Jesuit strain in (him), only injected the wrong way'. Metaphysics was in the blood whether I liked it or not.

learnt from Jaspers). When it came to religious questions, Ricoeur was invariably open to 'interconfessional translation' between Christian, Jewish and Muslim perspectives.[26] The model of traversing multiple 'hermeneutic detours', where one exposed oneself to a 'polysemantics' of diverse readings, was central to Ricoeur's method of teaching and writing. As he liked to say, 'the shortest route from self to self is through the other'. Looking back, I can now see the seeds of my interest in the Guestbook project, with its central themes of 'hosting the Stranger' and 'exchanging narratives'[27] – themes that, as a public intellectual in Ireland, I tried to translate into a number of philosophical proposals for a peace agreement in Northern Ireland in the nineties.

I became a good friend of Ricoeur over the years, hosting him twice on visits to Ireland once I returned to UCD in the early eighties to take up my first job as a professor of Philosophy. I completed my doctoral studies under his direction – with Levinas and Breton as examiners – at the University of Paris in 1980 and went on to publish several books on his work and organise international conferences on his thought (including co-directing the Cérisy Colloque on Ricoeur in 1987). Without a doubt, Ricoeur has been the most formative influence on my thinking about narrative imagination, hospitality and religion. Indeed, I think it is true to say that without Ricoeur there would have been no *God Who May Be* (2001), *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003) or *Anatheism* (2011).

But there were other figures in my philosophical apprenticeship in Paris. Breton, Levinas and Derrida were also critical interlocutors on the 'God question' during that time and since. So let me say a brief word about each.

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26. In the seventies in Paris, the turn towards Eastern religions had not yet made a big mark – though Mircea Eliade was a close friend of Ricoeur's at Chicago.

27. Refer to Chapter 15 in this book.

Levinas invited me to attend his last lectures at the Sorbonne in 1979 on 'Kant and Ethics' (co-taught with his ex-Dominican friend, Jacques Colette). Levinas spoke in stuttered whispers that Colette translated for the class – about ten of us – in a cold, bare room with no handle on the door. This was just before Levinas's fame spread widely in the eighties when the French embargo on philosophy conversing with theology was finally lifted. Levinas challenged Heidegger's absolute separation of phenomenology and religion (outlined in his 'Phenomenology and Theology' lecture of 1927 [1998]) and dared invoke the word 'God' in his first classic work, *Totality and Infinity*, published in French in 1961. But Levinas, like his Sorbonne colleague Ricoeur, was still sensitive to the *séparation universitaire* between philosophy and theology: the latter was not permitted in any public academies of the French Republic but only in denominational establishments like the Instituts Catholiques or Facultés Protestantes. Levinas published his more phenomenological work as philosophy and his more religious work as Talmudic lectures (although the border was sometime porous). I think it was in some sense thanks to his Judaism – which demanded tolerance in post-Holocaust Europe – that Levinas was allowed more latitude than other religious thinkers in France (e.g. the Protestant Ricoeur, the Catholic Breton or Marion) in blending secular and religious thinking. And one cannot underestimate the importance of Levinas's disciple, Derrida, in making the God question respectable again in public discourse in France, with the publication of his ground-breaking essay on Levinas ('Metaphysics and Violence' in *Writing and Difference* [1978 {1967}]). The fact that Derrida was both Jewish and the master of fashionable deconstruction was not irrelevant. The God who was cautiously re-entering French intellectual discourse during my time in Paris was in many respects a deconstructed messianic God, a factor that surely informed my own thinking about God – up to a point – in *La Poétique du Possible* (1984b) and *The God Who May Be* (2001).

But before leaving Levinas, let me say a word about a very special meeting I had with him in his home on Rue Michel-Ange in 1980. He invited me for tea shortly before my doctoral defence – of which he was a jury member along with Ricoeur and Breton – and kindly gave me the questions he would ask me the next day. As we talked, his son, Michaēl, a concert pianist, rehearsed his scales in the background to the evident delight of his father. The main topic of our conversation – and of my dissertation – was the relationship between a poetics of the possible and an ethics of justice. When I confessed to Levinas that I found his ethics of asymmetrical responsibility to the other – I am always more responsible for the other than the other is for me – impossible to actually *live*, he gave me two simple examples of such a hyperbolic ethical demand working in everyday practice. Firstly, he spoke of how one says *après toi* when going through a doorway with someone. That is ethics: standing back to let the other go first (without the other being expected to do likewise). And secondly, he cited his recent experience of a group of young scholars who travelled all the way from Latin America to ask him how his ethics was practicable – to which he replied, 'your travelling thousands of miles to ask me the question is itself ethics'. The concern to do justice is the first act of doing it. Several weeks after my defence, Levinas made another gesture of generosity in agreeing to participate in a colloquium I was organising with my compatriot, Joseph O'Leary, in the Collège des Irlandais in Paris. It was the first time Levinas had agreed to meet with France's leading Heideggerians (Beaufret, Fédier, Vézin) since he had lost relatives in the Holocaust. Ricoeur and Marion also agreed to join the conference, which was published a year later as *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu* (1980). I never forgot Levinas's act of intellectual trust and forgiveness. Ethics in action.

And then there was Stanislas Breton, the third member of my doctoral dissertation (June 1980). A professor at the Ecole normale supérieure and a priest of the Passionist Order

(who presided over my marriage in Normandy), Breton had a unique ability to combine mysticism, Marxism and metaphysics. He remained a lifelong friend and confidant and was what I would call a 'holy' man. He loved to play with children (including our daughters Simone and Sarah), getting down on all fours and becoming a child himself as he did so. He gave credence to the idea that children are first in the Kingdom; and like other genuinely holy people I have encountered in my life – Jean Vanier, Chokyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama, my mother – he knew how to laugh from the core of his being as the best response to the contradictions and complexities of existence. It was Breton who introduced me to the illuminating trope of *perichoresis* – the Greek orthodox figure of three divine persons moving in a circle – by drawing a picture on a white table napkin in my Paris apartment the night before my dissertation defence. The image still returns again and again in both my academic and spiritual life. He was also the person who helped me find the title for my first single-author book, *Poétique du Possible* (1984b), and who introduced me to Duns Scotus' notion of *haecceitas* (thisness) as the particularity of each person created by God. I always think of Breton when I read these lines by Gerard Manley Hopkins (Hopkins 1996):

> 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.
> […] for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces
> ('When Kingfishes Catch Fire').

It is an image that has remained central to my thinking on hospitality ever since – namely, the call to host the quintessential inimitable strangeness of each human person. Responding to the other's singular 'thisness' co-responding to one's own. So that each one is saying, in their bodies and souls, 'Behold (*ecce!*) this (*haec*)!' The Latin term, spelled variously *haecceitas* or *ecceitas*, plays on this double sense of annunciatory wonder and singular address. Or as Joyce puts it in *Finnegans Wake*, 'here comes

everybody' (HCE – *Haec-Ecce*). Each person, Breton taught me, is everyone. The particular is the universal. The concrete is the cosmic. The infinitesimal the infinite. Epiphanies are ordinary, everyday things. God is a god of little things – the last and the least (*elachistos*). The strangeness of every stranger (Mt 25). It is a lesson I never forgot.

There is one other mentor and friend I came to know during my Paris days whom I would like to honour here: Jacques Derrida. My first encounter with Derrida was in 1980 when I invited him to participate in my forthcoming book, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (1984a)[28]. To my great relief, he said yes – largely because I was introduced by his mentor Ricoeur – and proceeded to share his intellectual confidences and convictions (later published in our exchange, 'Deconstruction and the Other', 1984). This somewhat surprised me as Derrida had taken vehement critical exception, around that time, to Ricoeur's hermeneutics of dialogue, reciprocity and metaphor. But it became quickly clear to me that Derrida had a profound generosity that went beyond philosophical differences to welcome a fellow student of his former master.[29] My 1980 exchange with Derrida was to be the first of several published conversations between us over the years, the last two appearing as 'Desire of God: an exchange'[30] and 'Terror, Religion and the New Politics'[31].

In each of our exchanges over two decades, Derrida was always charming, modest and humane – belying the common caricature of him as a cranky, egotistical intellectual rock star. For many who did not read Derrida closely, deconstruction spelled nihilism

28. Which also featured conversations with Levinas, Ricoeur, Marcuse and Breton.

29. Derrida had been a *maître assistant* for Ricoeur – presenting the material for his first breakthrough book *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry* (1987) in one of Ricoeur's doctoral seminars.

30. Villanova dialogue (1997), published as Derrida, Caputo and Kearney 2006:301–308.

31. Conducted in New York City in the shadow of the fallen Twin Towers in October 2001, published as Kearney and Derrida (2004:3–14).

and relativism. Indeed, I recall when I invited him to give a talk in Dublin in 1998, his notoriety preceded him in the form of a British media campaign berating Cambridge University's decision to award him an honorary doctorate. Thousands turned up to hear him in Dublin. He arrived at UCD with a massive wad of pages that he had every intention of delivering. But as we walked down the aisle of the amphitheatre, I swept it from his arms and said – 'You are not reading *that*!' He clung to it like a mother to a baby the social services are taking into custody; but he soon let go and faced the public, paperless and disarmed. He spoke from the heart about the 'lie' (the topic of his talk) for a brisk 50 min rather than the 3 hours his paper would have taken to deliver (a month previously he had spoken for 6 hours at the Freud Museum in London). The audience, both academic and popular, were utterly entranced. Derrida could charm birds off trees when he was not hiding behind a 200-page paper. And he did just that. The question–answer session afterwards was a lesson in good listening and responding. No question, no matter how naïve (e.g. 'Mr Derrida, what does it mean to be human?'), was considered unworthy of response. Indeed, the final questioner of the evening added this remark, delivered in a broad Dublin accent:

> Monsieur Derrida, I am delighted you came all the way from Paris to talk to us today. Reading the British gutter press this week I was expecting to see a vampire here today. But you are a grand good man. I always believed the Marquis de Sade to be the most maligned man in philosophy, but now I realise it is Jacques Derrida! If I was the Lord Mayor of Dublin I would offer you keys to the city. (n.p.)

The audience broke into applause and Derrida was deeply moved, bowing deep, his two hands clasped in thanks.

Another incident I would like to share concerns a conference we both participated in at Philadelphia in the nineties. It was the second Villanova University meeting on postmodernism and religion and at one point my good friend, John Caputo, objected to my challenging Derrida with the question:

> [*H*]ow can deconstruction's maxim that 'every other is every other' (*tout autre est tout autre*) be reconciled with a hermeneutics of

discernment: namely the need to differentiate between different kinds of others – e.g. a madman or a messiah? (n.p.)

But Derrida took my question on the chin and graciously responded: 'Richard's problems with my thought are my own problems with my thought'. I was saved a lynching and all three of us went on to discuss the issue in perfectly cordial fashion.

One last story I am moved to mention here, but which, for reasons of discretion, I have not done before, concerns Derrida's final reconciliation with Ricoeur. After Derrida's Dublin lecture on the lie we retired to my house for dinner. During the course of the conversation, the question of Derrida's depression came up – we had both experienced 'dark nights' in our lives – and he happened to mention how one of his worst bouts followed his doctoral defence when Ricoeur (his director) never showed up for the post-dissertation toast. Derrida confided that this withholding of the ceremonial blessing (as he read it) had devastated him, because Ricoeur had been an intellectual father for him since leaving his own family in Algeria to come to Paris as an émigré student. When I informed him that Ricoeur had not come to my doctoral toast either, Derrida was speechless. You too? He exclaimed. 'Were you not shocked?' I said not at all. I had simply picked up the phone and asked Ricoeur why he had not shown up – and had received this frank and moving response:

I am sorry Richard, but I never attend any of my student's dissertation toasts. I have so many and must also look after my own family. I am a bad father to both my intellectual and actual children. I never give either enough time. Such is my life. I do two jobs badly, but it is all I can do. (n.p.)

Derrida was deeply affected and as soon as he returned to Paris the next day phoned Ricoeur. They agreed to meet that same afternoon in the Jardin du Luxembourg (it was early May) and stayed talking non-stop until the *gardiens* sent them home when the gates closed at 21:00. What they realised during their exchange was that for 30 years their respective philosophical positions (deconstructive and hermeneutic) had been speaking

past each other – mishearing, misreading, miswriting – in part because of a *dialogue manqué* at a pivotal moment in their lives: Derrida looking for a surrogate father, Ricoeur unable to respond to a surrogate son.

Ricoeur confessed to me subsequently that after this reunion, they continued to talk on a weekly basis right up to Derrida's untimely death from pancreatic cancer in 2002. Ricoeur wept at Derrida's passing, confiding to me: 'It was not fair. He should not have died before me'. Ricoeur joined his adopted spiritual son two years later in 2004. In one of the last conversations I had with Ricoeur, he told me that when he and Derrida had read my book, *The God Who May Be*, Derrida thought it too hermeneutic while Ricoeur thought it too deconstructionist! I shared with him a line from Seamus Heaney: 'Two buckets are easier carried than one, I grew up in between'. He smiled.

In addition to these philosophical friendships during my Parisian sojourns, I also had the good fortune to enjoy the intellectual acquaintance of other good colleagues like Jean-Luc Marion, René Girard and later Julia Kristeva, with whom my French wife, Anne, and I spent many memorable evenings discussing God, Being and the Unconscious with much good cheer. And I should also mention that my Paris apprenticeship included learning from several other inspirational thinkers 'at a distance', from Sartre and De Beauvoir (whose funerals I attended) to such teachers as Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan, Eliade and Lévi-Strauss, whose Paris lectures I was fortunate to attend in the late seventies. It was indeed a golden age.

And a final debt: It was also during my Paris years that I developed a creative and lasting relationship with my compatriot, Joseph O'Leary, who was studying theology at the time and went on to become a collaborator on many intellectual projects, beginning with our co-chairing the *Heidegger et Dieu* conference at the Collège des Irlandais in Paris in June 1979 (published as *Heidegger et la Question de Dieu* in 1980 and republished as a Livre de Poche in 2009). Joe went on to teach for three decades at

Sophia University, Tokyo, where I had the pleasure of visiting the Buddhist temples of Yanaka and Kamakura in his company. He has become a leading international scholar of East–West philosophical relations (especially Christian–Buddhist) and remains one of my closest intellectual colleagues on questions of interreligious dialogue. We were both born in the same city of Cork, Ireland, in the 1950s and will probably die there too, in good time, God willing.

■ Between Dublin and Boston

After my doctoral studies at the University of Paris, I married my French partner, Anne Bernard, and returned to a post in the department of metaphysics at UCD. Here I taught from 1981 to 1999, when I moved to take up a Chair of Philosophy at Boston College. During my two decades in Dublin, I had the joy of introducing undergraduate and graduate students to the radical questions of existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and post-structuralism. I also edited a journal, *The Crane Bag*, with my Benedictine friend, Mark Patrick Hederman, which brought together writers, artists, educators, politicians and journalists in a common questioning of Ireland's present and future cultural condition. We were denounced in the British House of Commons for being 'too nationalist' and by ministers of the Irish government (at the Forum for a New Ireland at Dublin Castle in 1984) for being 'not nationalist enough'. To boot, senior members of the Irish Church condemned us for impiety and iconoclasm, while the media often dismissed us as too utopian and elitist. Because so many disliked what we were doing, I suppose we were doing something right. The driving principle of our journal was to open Ireland to 'other' modes of thinking, beyond the narrow tribal nationalisms fuelling much of the violence in the North. We followed James Joyce's vow 'to Europeanise Ireland and Hibernicise Europe'.

During the eighties and nineties, I worked with academic colleagues north and south of the Irish border on a number of

proposals for peace in Northern Ireland, including 'Towards Joint Sovereignty', 'Towards a Council of the Isles' and 'Towards a Post-Nationalist Archipelago'. These and other essays on political and cultural reconciliation on our island were later published under the title *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997a). The main idea running through these projects for a shared governance of Ireland was a pooling of hitherto exclusivist sovereignty claims – to 'one and indivisible nation states' – in the name of greater regional or transnational power sharing. It was, throughout the Ulster Troubles, an attempt to shake hands with one's traditional adversary and exchange narratives.[32]

During my time back in Ireland, I also served as a so-called public intellectual on a number of semi-state bodies like the Irish Arts Council, the Irish Higher Education Authority and the Irish Film Center Board. This service brought me into contact with public life and politics in a way that was exciting and enlightening but also acted as a reminder, after a number of bruising polemical encounters, that politics was not for me. I also enjoyed a number of years combining my academic life with an extra-curricular career as public broadcaster on Irish and European media (RTE, BBC, ITV, France Culture). I presented several programmes on literature, philosophy and culture, which included exchanges with philosophers like Marcuse, Gadamer, Lyotard, Umberto Eco and Martha Nussbaum, as well as more political figures like Vaclav Havel, Mary Robinson and Noam Chomsky.[33] In the mid-nineties, I ventured into fiction and published two philosophical novels, *Sam's Fall* (1995b) and *Walking at Sea Level* (1997b), which were translated into several languages[34]. There followed a modest volume of poetry, *Angel of Patrick's Hill* (1991). They were heady days – endeavouring to conflate the struggling

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32. I will return to this later.

33. The dialogues were later published in the collections *States of Mind* (1995c) and *Debates in Continental Philosophy* (2004).

34. The French and German translations drew more readers than the English.

efforts of a public intellectual with the responsibilities of a regular academic life involving teaching at UCD and annual visiting semesters in the USA (Boston) and France (Paris in 1992 and Nice in 1994). But it could not last. The double fidelity to academic and public life proved too much and I suffered a series of burnouts and black nights leading to my decision in 1999 to pack my bags and migrate with my wife and daughters to Boston, where I have been living and teaching since.

The move to Boston was in many ways 'a retreat'. Retreat in the dual sense of a withdrawal from an over-committed life in Ireland and a philosophical stepping-back in order to take stock. Or as Heidegger put it: *ein Schritt zurück* in order to engage in 'another thinking of beginning' [*Andenken als ein anderes Denken und ein anderer Anfang*]. This also involved, truth to tell, a certain 'come down'. Right after the move to Boston College, I began to experience what my old McGill friend, John McNamara, called the 'silence of the phones'. No one ringing to ask for a media interview or book review in the *The Times Literary Supplement* or *Irish Times*. No one calling in with agendas for the next crisis meeting of some semi-state cultural venture or organisation. No one announcing that the cameras were rolling in 15 min. But with this eclipse from public life, I found time to reflect more on the direction of my own intellectual and spiritual life and to spend more time with my family. Boston College offered a much lighter teaching load than UCD and a half sabbatical every 3 years for research and writing. It afforded me the opportunity to teach advanced doctoral seminars with leading thinkers in my field of contemporary European philosophy. I succeeded Hans-Georg Gadamer as professor of hermeneutics at Boston College and worked closely with Continental thinkers like Bill Richardson (expert on Heidegger and Lacan) and Jacques Taminiaux (expert on Arendt and phenomenology), while also conversing with non-Continental thinkers in the Boston area like Noam Chomsky (MIT) and Hilary Putnam (Harvard). The former became a family friend while the latter exchanged ideas and writings on Levinas, as he began to mix analytic with Continental

thinking in his last years. And then there was the extraordinary Boston Consortium, which permitted gifted graduate students from different Boston universities to cross-register courses – meaning that my seminar rooms had students from Boston College sitting beside counterparts from Boston University, MIT, Harvard, Brandeis and further afield. It is, to my knowledge, a system of pooled intervarsity collaboration almost unique in the great university cities of the world, and one of the highlights of my teaching at Boston College to this day.

The move to Boston also afforded me the chance, as mentioned, to re-evaluate my path in philosophy. It was during my initial years at Boston College that I began to concentrate explicitly on a hermeneutic phenomenology of the Stranger. This work on a 'narrative imagination of otherness' resulted in a sequence of seminars, leading to the publication of my trilogy, Philosophy at the Limits, in 2001–2003, namely, *Strangers Gods and Monsters* (2003), *On Stories* (2002) and *The God Who May Be* (2001). Whereas most of my books in the 1980s and 1990s had focused on imagination – from *The Wake of Imagination* (1998b) and *Poetics of Imagining* (1998a) to *Poetics of Modernity* (1995a) and *Transitions* (1985) – at the beginning of the new millennium I decided to revisit the hermeneutics of religion first adumbrated in *Poétique du Possible* (1984b). The publication of the trilogy was followed by a series of books on interreligious hermeneutics, including *Traversing the Heart* (2010), *Hosting the Stranger* (2011) and finally *Anatheism* (2011). As I look back now, I realise that these writings on religion were deeply informed by a series of research trips I made abroad where I engaged in dialogue with thinkers of other religious traditions. These intellectual odysseys included meetings with Sufi masters in Egypt, with Hebrew and Talmudic scholars in Jerusalem, with wise lamas in Nepal (most memorably Chokyi Nyima in the White Monastery of Kathmandu) and finally with Hindu gurus and sadhus in India. Two extensive research journeys to India involved stays in the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, the Fireflies Intercultural Centre in Bangalore, the interreligious monastery of Kurisumala (Kerala) and, perhaps

most movingly, the Ramana Maharshi Ashram in Arunachala, where the Benedictine pioneer of Christian–Hindu dialogue, Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB), spent many formative years in the 1950s. My reflections on these Indian itineraries were published in *Traversing the Heart: Journeys in Interreligious Imagination* (co-edited with Eileen Rizo-Patron), so I will not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that these encounters with great teachers from other wisdom traditions had a lasting impact on my philosophy of religion – almost exclusively Christian up to then – and confirmed Ricoeur's maxim that 'the shortest route from self to self is through the other'. The impact was, I readily avow, as much spiritual as intellectual, a transformation of heart as much as mind. Returning from these foreign trips, I brought home practices of yoga and meditation that I continue to this day. Though I am always still a beginner.

But my testimony of debt to 'other lands' would not be complete without mention of one last journey. In 2015, I visited a series of Buddhist temples in Japan and China (Taipei and Shanghai), where I was profoundly moved by the sacred figure of Guan Yin. Guan Yin means 'one who hears the cries of the world' and was originally known as Avalokiteshvara – an East Asian bodhisattva associated with compassion and venerated by Mahayana Buddhists and followers of Chinese folk religions. She was invoked as a female Buddha or 'Goddess of Mercy' and was known by Christian missionaries as the 'White Mary'. This sacred woman of heart-wisdom and compassion recalled for me my childhood in Cork making shrines to a White Mary of May with my mother and raised again the vexed question of why Mary was never celebrated as a fully-fledged female divinity in the Christian tradition? For all the talk of immaculate conceptions and heavenly assumptions, Mary remained the 'handmaid of the Lord' – a gender subservience evident throughout the long history of misogynist patriarchy in Western Christendom[35].

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35. With the exception of the Celtic devotion to Brigid as both saint and goddess – known as 'Mary of the Gaels'.

Not that Orthodox Judaism or Islam fared much better. Men ruled there, too. But perhaps in the growing encounter with non-Abrahamic spiritualties of the East, patriarchal monotheism can learn from 'strangers' to let women back into divinity. We might then recall that the female 'Sophia' who plays with the Lord in Proverbs 8 was there from the beginning and calls to be reintegrated into the biblical tradition. Sophia speaks in many tongues and shows herself in multiple ways – from Genesis and the books of Wisdom to Hosea and the Song of Songs. If Heidegger was struck, on reading Brentano, by the 'manifold meanings of Being', I confess to being struck, on my short journeys to the East, by the 'manifold meanings of God'. This persuasion has made me a committed follower of the interreligious Centering Prayer and Contemplation movements pioneered by people like Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr and Cynthia Bourgeault. A commitment that chimes with the ecumenical spirit of Benedictine monasticism, which nourished my early education in Glenstal. The key maxim of St Benedict's Rule still rings in my ears: '*Ausculta*! Listen! [...] Treat every stranger who knocks as Christ'.

■ The Guestbook Project: From Boston to South Africa

As a last chapter of my odyssey through otherness, I would like to mention the work of Guestbook – a project that ultimately brought me to South Africa in the spring of 2017 and enabled me to participate in a series of animated philosophical exchanges that gave rise to the present volume. This concluding section takes a somewhat more formal tone, while remaining largely a matter of narrative testimony.

I founded Guestbook in 2008 as a largely scholarly venture. It began as an interdisciplinary seminar at Boston College on the theme of 'Hosting the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality'. The idea was based on the fact that, in most

Indo-European languages, the word for 'guest' and 'enemy' is the same – for example, *hostis* in Latin is the common root of both 'hostility' and 'hospitality'. Our aim was to explore how enmity could be transformed into empathy, how cycles of violence could be overcome in imaginative moments of welcoming the stranger. The first year of the project (2008–2009) consisted of 13 seminar presentations, two international conferences (philosophical and theological), an internationally streamed poetry festival (Poetries of the Stranger), a music concert (Songs of Sacred Strangeness) and a number of visiting lectures by artists like Dorothy Cross and Ann Carson. The activities were archived on guestbookproject. org and resulted in the publication of two special journal issues (*New Arcadia* [2009], *Religion and the Arts* [2010a, 2010b]) and two academic books (*Hosting the Stranger* [2011], *Phenomenologies of the Stranger* [2011]).

In the second year, I was joined by my Boston College colleague and professional artist, Sheila Gallagher, as co-director and we jointly embarked on a decade-long project of expanding Guestbook beyond a university programme to embrace an international outreach of partnerships in five continents under the umbrella title 'Exchanging Stories Changing Histories'. This was to become our signature tune, comprising a Peace Story project where two young people shared their respective narratives across a divide and co-created a new third narrative. These were recorded as short videos and posted on our Guestbook website, serving as a 'classroom without walls' freely accessible to peace leaders, teachers and community activists in diverse educational contexts throughout the world.

When I was asked once what motivated me to set up Guestbook, I gave a number of philosophical reasons – invoking the hermeneutics of hospitality learnt from Ricoeur, Levinas and Derrida – and then avowed the more biographical reason of growing up in Ireland in the 1960s–1990s during a 30-year war of sectarian strife, culminating in the Good Friday Peace Agreement

of April 1998. The following is a personal testimony from the time:[36]

> In the 1980s, at the height of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland, I was invited as a young professor of philosophy to come to Derry, a city divided by war, to moderate a workshop between republican and loyalist prisoners. During the workshop, one of the IRA [*Irish Republican Army*] prisoners told of how one night he was asleep in his bed when a loyalist gang broke into the house, bound, gagged and blindfolded him, threw him into the boot of a car, and drove him to a barn outside Derry. Strapped to a chair and about to be shot, he asked if he could smoke a last cigarette. His captor consented and offered him one. And as he smoked the cigarette – very slowly – he told the story of how he had become involved in republican violence: how his grandfather had been brutally murdered by the British armed forces, how his father had been incarcerated and tortured, how his mother had become an alcoholic and suffered a nervous breakdown, how his brother had been knee-capped and maimed for the rest of his life [...]. And he went on until he finished his cigarette. Then waited for the gun to go off. But it didn't. There was no sound. No movement. He waited for five minutes, ten minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes – Nothing. Eventually, he managed to free himself and looked around. There was nobody there; the barn was empty. He walked home. When the IRA prisoner finished sharing this in the workshop I was chairing, another man, a loyalist paramilitary prisoner, stood up at the back of the hall and said, 'I was the assassin who gave you that cigarette. And I *would* have shot you. But I couldn't shoot you because, when I heard your story, I realised it was *my* story'. (n.p.)

I was very struck by how this basic act of narrative imagination could trigger a transfer of empathy between these two sworn enemies, leading eventually to reconciliation.

A second story that inspired Guestbook was that of 'chancing your arm'. This goes back to 1492 when a terrible civil war was raging in Ireland and the Earl of Kildare, Gearóid Mór FitzGerald, hunted and eventually besieged James Butler, Earl of Ormond, in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. At one-point FitzGerald realised,

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36. What follows is a rewritten version of the testimony from an opening promotional video on www.guestbookproject.org (under the 'Who we are' section). For a transcription of this video, see Kearney (2015).

'It can't go on, this vicious cycle of blood-letting must end'. He asked his adversary, Butler, to open a hole in the door and announced:

> I'm going to remove my armour and stretch my arm through the gap – you can cut it off or shake my hand. If you cut it off war continues, if you shake my hand, war ends. (n.p.)

Fitzgerald 'chanced his arm', as the saying went. Butler shook his hand and peace happened.

These two stories, from the history of my native war-torn Ireland, told of transformative acts of enemies becoming friends, of strangers becoming guests.

Guestbook now operates as an international non-profit, devoted to the fostering of peace stories through the work of empathic imagination, straddling divides of religion, class and culture in places as far afield as Asia, Africa, the USA and the Middle East. Examples to date include young Turks and Armenians sharing forbidden histories, Israeli and Palestinian students exchanging symbols (hijab and Star of David), Ulster Protestant and Catholic school girls switching school uniforms, Congolese and Rwandan refugees confiding traumas, Bangalore Muslims and Hindus performing rituals, Korean and Japanese youths trading memories and dreams. Each of these exchanges involves crossing borders of heart and mind where young people in divided communities dare *remake* history by imagining otherwise. They give a future to the past by transforming deep legacies of transgenerational hurt into narrative forms of healing. The aim of Guestbook is to empower young people to 'chance their arms' – to make bold leaps of imagination towards impossible possibilities of peace.

My philosophical work with the Guestbook project finally brought me to South Africa. In May 2017, I flew to Johannesburg at the invitation of Professors Willie Van der Merwe and Daniël P. Veldsman, and was privileged to engage in conversations with philosophers and theologians at the University of Pretoria, University of South Africa and Oos Gemeente (Ooskerk).

The visit also included the negotiation of an international partnership between Guestbook and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town and featured what for me was an unforgettable exchange with South African peace activists and scholars Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Wilhelm Verwoerd at Stellenbosch University. I was deeply moved by these visionary people – Wilhelm, a former academic before becoming director of the Irish Peace Center in Glencree, County Wicklow (bringing together former belligerents from Ulster and South Africa), and Pumla, a brilliant scholar who served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the 1990s and since. One story related by Pumla – and recorded in her book *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid* – reminded me of the Irish legend of 'chancing your arm', although this time it was a case of 'chancing your hand'. It is an episode that recalls the handshake as the first gesture of civilisation, epitomised in great peace breakthroughs in history, taken by people bold enough to dare the impossible and shake the hand of their sworn enemy. Think of Mandela and De Klerk, Martin McGuiness and Ian Paisley, Begin and Sadat, and Gandhi and Mountbatten. Pumla's story also exemplified for me the basic wager of my *Carnal Hermeneutics* (2015), that the most humane of the senses is 'touch', for it alone involves a 'double sensation' of touching and being touched, as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both showed in their phenomenologies of sensation.

Here is the story: Pumla resolved, during a sensitive moment in the reconciliation process, to meet Eugene de Kock, a brutal apartheid executioner known popularly as 'Prime Evil', then imprisoned. She bore no illusions (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:6): 'De Kock had not just given apartheid's murderous evil a name. He had *become* that evil'.[37] Pumla was prompted to meet with this

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37. I am indebted to Robert Vosloo's illuminating essay (2016), 'Touch Gives Rise to Thought: Paul Ricoeur and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela on Dealing with the Past, Mutual Recognition and Embodied Performativity' (published in this volume), for most of the following information and citations.

notorious assassin after she heard a widow of one of his victims express a willingness to forgive him after witnessing his testimony to the TRC in September 1997. 'I would like to hold him by the hand', the widow had said, 'and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:14–15). Pumla interpreted the widow's readiness to reach out to her husband's murderer as an astonishing, almost impossible, act of empathy, for the widow was not only shedding tears for the loss of her own executed spouse but for the loss of De Kock's moral humanity. For Pumla (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:15) this raised the crucial question: 'Was De Kock deserving of the forgiveness shown to him […] Was evil intrinsic to De Kock, and forgiveness wasted on him?' Or as Augustine would have it: Was it possible to unbind the agent from the act? (Ricoeur 2009:489–493).

Robert Vosloo, who convened the colloquy between myself, Wilhelm and Pumla at Stellenbosch University, offers this lucid analysis of the moral dilemma involved in Pumla's meeting with De Kock (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002):

> What Pumla drew from this enigmatic gesture of pardon between the widow and De Kock was that a remorseful apology can contribute to the vocabulary of forgiveness in the context of evil. She is aware of the asymmetrical relationship between the admission of guilt and the word of forgiveness, and that the request for forgiveness can have an empty ring to it, adding insult to injury. (p. 13)

However, the power and significance of an apology lies in its ability 'to *perform* and to transcend the apologetic words' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002:13).[38] The emphasis on embodied 'performance' is key here. Why? Because, as Pumla insists (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002):

> [*E*] mpathy is what enables us to recognise another's pain, even in the midst of tragedy, because pain cannot be evil. Empathy deepens our humanity […]. When perpetrators apologise and experience the pain of remorse, showing contrition, they are *acting as human beings*. (p. 20)

38. The larger citation is from Vosloo's chapter included in this volume.

During her encounter with De Kock in prison, Pumla (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003) was at one point moved by his tears as he confessed not only his regret at murdering the widow's husband but his desire to undo the wrong:

> I wish there was a way of bringing the (body) back alive. I wish I could say, 'Here (is) your husband,' he confided, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, 'but unfortunately […] I have to live with it'. (p. 32)

And then the impossible happened – an unthinkable act of embodied empathy was enacted in a moment of carnal transference. Almost unbeknownst to herself, Pumla found herself reaching out her hand towards his, only to find it was 'clenched, cold and rigid'. Reflecting back on this gesture afterwards, she (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003) observed:

> This made me recoil for a moment and to recast my act of reaching out as something incompatible with the circumstances of an encounter with a person who not too long ago used these same hands, this same voice, to authorise and initiate unspeakable acts of malice against people very much like myself. (p. 32)

Clearly this was no matter of cheap grace, no act of facile sentiment. If anything this strange unpredictable moment signalled what Jacques Derrida terms an act of 'impossible hospitality'. Summing up the encounter, Vosloo (2002) astutely notes:

> This unsettling encounter with De Kock left Gobodo-Madikizela with a sense of feeling guilty for having expressed some empathy, and this made her wonder if she had not 'crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows some measure of distance, to actually identifying with De Kock'. (p. 33)

The encounter also had an impact on De Kock himself, who confessed during one of their later meetings: 'You know, Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:39). This chillingly candid admission left Gobodo-Madikizela with a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, she felt vulnerable, angry and invaded, and on the other hand she

realised that De Kock's statement might also carry another underlying subtext (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003):

> My action may well have been the first time a black person touched him out of compassion. He had previously met black people only as enemies, across the barrel of a gun or, for those who were on his side of the firing line, as comrades in murder. Perhaps de Kock *recognised my touch as a kind of threshold crossing*, a new experience for him. (p. 42)

As is plain, such liminal crossing was far from self-evident. Pumla was painfully aware of the complex contradictions involved in touching the 'trigger hand', but in that moment of carnal exchange she did not withdraw her hand. She made a wager in the impossible possibility of a shared humanity. 'His world was a cold world', she (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003) realised:

> [*W*]here eyes of death stared accusingly at him, a world littered with corpses and graves […] But for all the horrific singularity of his acts, de Kock was a desperate soul seeking to affirm to himself that he was still part of the human universe. (p. 39)

What is so revealing about this 'trigger hand' episode is, I submit, that it was Pumla's carnal experience of De Kock's remorse that reciprocally triggered her ability to acknowledge his humanity (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:67–68).[39] That momentary gesture worked, it seems, because both De Kock's remorse and Pumla's empathy were *carnally performed* rather than *conceptually calculated*. It was less about cognition than recognition, less about sense than sensibility. 'A genuine apology', as Pumla subsequently observed (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003):

> [*F*]ocuses on the feelings of the other rather than on how the one who is apologising is going to benefit in the end. It seeks to acknowledge full responsibility for the act, and does not use self-serving language to justify the behaviour of the person asking forgiveness. It must communicate, convey, and *perform* as a 'speech act' that expresses

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39. Cf. our analysis of such critical carnal encounters with the stranger/other/enemy in Kearney (2003); Kearney and Treanor (2015), Kearney and Semonovitch (2011).

> a desire to right the relationship damaged through the action of the apologiser. (pp. 98–99)

In short, the act of double performativity embodied a dual recognition of common humanity between self and stranger, forgiver and criminal, peacemaker and perpetrator. Or as Pumla (Gobodo-Madikizela 2008) herself put it:

> When remorse is triggered in the moment of witnessing […] the perpetrator recognises the other as a fellow human being. At the same time, the victim, too, recognises the face of the perpetrator not as that of a 'monster' who committed terrible deeds, but as the face with enough humanity to feel remorse. (pp. 176–177)

Such moments of forgiveness – to the extent that they are humanly possible (which is perhaps why Ricoeur calls them 'miraculous') – lie in the search 'not for the things that separate us but for something common among us fellow human beings, the compassion and empathy that bind our human identity' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2014:1, 35).[40]

So why, we might ask again, the importance of hands? Triggering or counter-triggering, acting or suffering, fallible or forgiving? I think what most struck me about Pumla's account was the witness to a kind of practical wisdom that operates at the level of the body, a discerning sensibility that functions at the level of skin and flesh, nerve endings and sinews, complexion and touch. This is a carnal knowing prior to reflective knowing, a form of tact within contact, of savvy as *savoir* in the original sense of tasting and testing (from *savourer-sapere-sapientia*). This embodied wisdom operates in the three senses of *sens* – sensation, orientation and meaning – and it is at this level that the primal scenes of openness to the Other are recorded in the great wisdom traditions. One recalls Abraham and Sarah turning

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40. One might ask here why a similar miracle of pardon and healing, of remorse and empathy, did not occur between SS officer Adolph Eichmann and his benign jailor (Captain Less) in the famous Holocaust trial in Jerusalem, as scrupulously documented by Hannah Arendt (1963)?

hostility into hospitality by extending empathy to the three strangers at Mamre, offering them food rather than the sword. Or the scene in Homer where the nurse Euryclea welcomes Odysseus, the disguised beggar, home to Ithaca by touching the childhood scar (*trauma*) on his thigh. Or the scene in Ovid where Baucus and Philemon host Hermes the masked stranger in their home and give him all the food they have. Or Jesus feeding his disciples at the last supper or on the shores of Galilee or at the Inn at Emmaus. These classical and biblical scenes of radical hospitality feature hands offering nourishment or healing (almost all Jesus's cures, for example, work through touch). And one finds similar instances of healing and hosting throughout the history of art and literature (right down to the table scenes between Jean Valjean and Monseigneur Myriel in *Les Misérables* and between Babette and her townsfolk in *Babette's Feast*). All these scriptural–literary scenes – and we already cited a number of iconic political handshakes – testify to a carnal power of savvy and tact, of flair and taste, pre-existing our conceptual consciousness: an embodied navigation between enemy and friend, hostage and host, often miraculously turning the former into the latter.

Commenting on one of Pumla's exchanges during the TRC, Archbishop Tutu remarked: 'We should all be deeply humbled by what we've heard [...]. Now we've got to turn our backs on this awful past and say: life is for living' (cf. Krog 1998:30). 'After such knowledge what forgiveness?' asks T.S. Eliot. And we might add, in the spirit of Tutu and Pumla: 'After such forgiveness what knowledge?' For if there *is* knowledge, what do we do with it? Do we go on remembering, working through wounds, setting the record straight? Or do we decide to forgive and forget? This is a key problem not only for the TRC in South Africa but for other truth tribunals and memorials in post-traumatic communities throughout the world. It has been a real question, on a smaller scale, for my own performative therapy work with Sheila Gallagher, both in Guestbook's Exchanging Stories in Northern Ireland and in our recent multimedia performance,

Twinsome Minds.[41] Complex and challenging questions of memory and forgetting confronted us here. For story often comes up against history and has to rub it against the grain if one is to revisit hidden sufferings. Genuine remembrance goes beneath the Grand Narratives of Official History to identify hidden or neglected 'micro-narratives' – stories that turn 'backward memory' (addicted to repetition compulsion) into 'forward memory' (alert to unfulfilled possibilities of the past). Or to use Freud's term: we need a working-through of pain (*Durcharbeitung*) that can turn 'melancholy into mourning'. Such work involves a difficult process of therapeutic anamnesis – while always mindful that 'amnesty is never amnesia' (Ricoeur). We must remember rightly before we can rightly forget. We must pay our 'debt to the dead' before we can live again. Reliving through cathartic imagination.

I think it is no accident that one of the most powerful testimonies to the traumas of apartheid – *Country of My Skull* – was written by a South African poet, Antjie Krog. And I am also reminded here of Atom Egoyan's extraordinary testament to the Armenian genocide in his film *Ararat* as well as countless writers, artists and film-makers who have kept the memory of the Holocaust alive – Amos Oz, Paul Celan, Claude Lanzmann, Stephen Spielberg and Art Spiegelman – all observing Primo Levi's plea to 'keep retelling the story of Auschwitz so that it can never happen again'. But we must also honour Adorno's question – 'after Auschwitz who can write poetry?' – acknowledging the limits of narrative imagination. (Is not silence sometimes the most appropriate response to horror?) And yet one cannot deny the indefatigable call of healing. It does not go away. History needs story to bring the past to life again, so that we can 'feel what wretches feel', empathise with the pain of the

41. The latter comprised an act of 'double remembrance' regarding the historical traumas of 1916: those sacrificed in the Dublin Easter Rising and on the battlefields of Flanders and France during the First World War – often Irishmen from the same parish or family wearing the different uniforms of opposing armies.

persecuted and be 'struck' by the terror of it all. Or to repeat the lesson of Aristotle's *Poetics*: we often need a narrative plot to reconfigure past sufferings into a meaningful act of *katharsis*. Otherwise there would be no purgation, no reckoning, no release – just a bare chronicle of facts: irresistible fatality. Story and history need each other for unspeakable wounds to become visible scars. For archive to become art. In sum, a poetics of imagining is necessary for inexperienced experience to be *re-experienced* – again and again.

■ Last words

In conclusion, I would like to record with gratitude several other special moments during my visit to South Africa: In Stellenbosch, the challenging and illuminating conversations with Professor Louise du Toit at her graduate philosophy seminar on carnal hermeneutics and with Prof. Bernard Lategan at the Institute for Advanced Studies on intercultural hospitality; the very fruitful encounter with peace activists Ayehsa Fakie and Sindi Nosindiso and their team at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town – a meeting that resulted in the signing of a partnership with the Guestbook Project for Exchanging Stories (already underway). In Pretoria, the exchanges with Professor Christo Lombard and his students at the University of South Africa and with his 'anatheist' colleagues afterwards *chez lui* where we explored together possibilities of a new 'acoustic space' for the call of the Stranger; the meetings with Professor Anné Verhoef and his passionately committed students from Potchefstroom on the hermeneutics of religion at our seminar at the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria; and finally the deeply enlightening and engaging dialogues with Yolande Steenkamp and members of the Dutch Reformed Church on the subject of theopoetics in Ooskerk, Pretoria.[42]

42. I am also very grateful to a number of people not mentioned in my text who kindly hosted me and my wife Anne during our visit to South Africa. These include Bernard, Esther and

I returned from my trip to South Africa to begin work on another project of narrative reconciliation, 'Stories at the Borders' – an event at Boston College in 2018 marking the 10th anniversary of the founding of Guestbook and the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Peace Agreement in Northern Ireland. All I can say after my encounters with such remarkable South African thinkers and peacemakers is that I feel newly emboldened to re-engage the daunting task of changing pain into peace through storytelling. A double work of heart and hand: striving to give a future to the past through narratives of healing and gestures of touch. The shortest route from self to self is indeed through the other. There are many others and there is much to be done.

(footnote 42 continues...)
Nerina Lategan, and their families, who welcomed us to their homes and to the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies, of which Bernard is director; Reza Hosseini of the University of Stellenbosch, who escorted us on a beautiful journey to the Cape of Good Hope with Professor Chielozona Eze; Keran Elah, Bernice Serfontein, Marinus Schoeman and Philomene Rust, who introduced us to the culture and nature of Pretoria and its environs with so much expertise, grace and generosity.

Phenomenology in South Africa: An indirect encounter with Richard Kearney

Pieter Duvenage
Department of Philosophy
University of the Free State
South Africa

■ Introduction

It is interesting to study the main trajectories of the institutionalisation of a philosophical discourse in South Africa. Such a kind of intellectual historical thinking enables one to start reconstructing a broad outline of what could be called a South African philosophical approach.[43] Because of its (post)colonial past, South African philosophy has been generally influenced by

43. For earlier versions of my interest in this topic, see Duvenage (2005, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014).

philosophical movements of Anglo-American and Continental origins. In a sequence of waves (since the latter part of the 19th century), philosophy in South Africa has been influenced by British idealism, analytical philosophy, European Continental thinking (which includes phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, and critical theory), religious philosophical approaches (such as Reformational philosophy and neo-Thomism) and African philosophy.

In this contribution, my main focus, but not exclusively, is the kind of phenomenology that emerged in the Afrikaans world from the 1940s onwards. In dealing with this intellectual tradition, I cannot but acknowledge the perspective or the horizon I am coming from. My own philosophical training and education in South Africa is closely intertwined with the kind of phenomenological philosophy that mainly Protestant-influenced philosophers in Afrikaans passed on to their students in the last 100 years or so. Here, I am thinking more specifically about the Pretoria and Stellenbosch schools of philosophy – where I received my initial philosophical formation. The outstanding figures here are C.K. Oberholzer (1904–1983) and P.S. Dreyer (1921–1999) with their students at Pretoria, and Johan Degenaar (1926–2015) and Hennie Rossouw (b. 1936) at Stellenbosch with their students.[44] The training I received in Stellenbosch and Pretoria introduced me to three fields of philosophy that still remain at the heart of my interests: phenomenology and hermeneutics, critical theory and South African intellectual history. My training in these three fields by South African philosophers is obviously not to be divorced from the international figures who have shaped these fields – especially the first two. This is why I start this contribution, in the next section, with a short reconstruction of Richard Kearney's work on phenomenology and hermeneutics and how it has been relevant for my own work as a philosopher in South Africa.

44. In a recent book on Afrikaans philosophy (Duvenage 2016), I refer to at least six systematic research fields that have emerged in this context – an issue that will be explored further (in the section titled 'Phenomenology in Afrikaans') later in the chapter.

After these more personal remarks on my training and influences in the broad field of what could be called *critical hermeneutics*, we take a step back in history, by considering the institutionalisation of philosophy and the *migration of ideas* (Duvenage 2012) in the South African context (the section titled 'Institutionalisation of philosophy in South Africa and British idealism'). At the end of this section, the institutionalisation of philosophy in South Africa is linked to the interesting phenomenon of British idealism in the last part of the 19th century. The section 'Three reactions to British idealism' then problematises the phenomenon of British idealism by considering the reaction against it from (1) analytical philosophy (2) Afrikaans philosophy and (3) African philosophy. It is at this point of the contribution that the horizon that has shaped my work, namely, Afrikaans philosophy and phenomenology, will be sketched (the section titled 'Phenomenology in Afrikaans'). In the final section, the historical and more systematic features of this contribution are brought to a close by reflecting critically on how the horizon that has shaped my thinking could possibly play a role in the future of philosophy in South Africa.[45]

■ Encountering Richard Kearney

I first came across the name Richard Kearney through his (first) book, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*

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45. When it comes to *critical hermeneutics*, historical arguments are used in a manner where there is a dialectic between culture and power. This is an alternative to arguments that freeze cultural and material aspects in an ahistorical and apolitical manner. André du Toit (1991:6) has argued that South African intellectual history is the result of historical forces characteristic of a colonial and postcolonial society. Philosophy is thus part of a larger picture reflecting the complex relation between those intellectual and material factors that contributed to the scientific, industrial and technological revolutions of 'first world' societies in the 'centre', on the one hand, and its impact on the processes of social and intellectual development in 'peripheral' (post)colonial societies, on the other. Consequently, indigenous cultures were displaced, and 'central' ideas and values introduced and imposed, often in advance of the relevant and corresponding material and social development in the local society (Du Toit 1991). Against this background, the liberation from the political rule of 'central' powers does not mean that the history of postcolonial societies has been adequately addressed.

(Kearney 1984), in 1987 and 1988, when I was finishing my master's on hermeneutics as practical philosophy and postmodernism (1988). In this study, I considered the work of Gadamer, Arendt and Lyotard. When I did my doctorate afterwards on Habermas (1994), I also considered his other early book, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (Kearney 1987). What is interesting in this latter book is that Kearney not only considered thinkers from the phenomenological–hermeneutical tradition (Husserl, Heidegger, Ricoeur and Derrida) but also from critical theory (Benjamin and Marcuse to Habermas) and structuralism (De Saussure to Kristeva). Kearney (1987) writes in this regard:

> Phenomenology and existentialism attempt to relocate the origins of meaning in our lived experience prior to the impersonal 'objectivism' of a narrow scientific attitude. Structuralism emphasises the hidden or the 'unconscious structures' of language which underpin our current established discourses – social, cultural, and economic. Critical Theory develops the insight of Hegel and Marx into a radical interrogation of ideologies at work in advanced industrial societies. (p. 1)

Throughout the years, Richard Kearney's work has influenced me in at least three ways:

- Firstly, the creative way in which he discussed phenomenology and critical theory in his *Modern Movements* has influenced me profoundly. These two philosophical traditions as well as South African intellectual history are still at the heart of my interests and research in philosophy today.
- Secondly, his earlier works, as mentioned above, have not only been influential for me as a postgraduate student but also in my career as a scholar in writing a recent book. In this regard, the mentioned early book on interviews (Kearney 1984) and its later incarnations (Kearney 1995, 2004), as well as a book that Peter Dews edited of interviews with Habermas (Dews 1986), served as inspiration when I published my book on Afrikaans philosophy. In it (Duvenage 2016), I used interviews to complement my interpretation of the phenomenon of Afrikaans philosophy and the role of phenomenology in the last 100 years.

- Thirdly, after my initial encounter with Kearney's work, I followed his career and saw how it took shape by addressing important issues such as the image and imagination, history, visions of Europe and Ireland's role within Europe, peace and reconciliation, religion and the issue of faith and reason, the stranger, the nature of stories and narratives, and carnal hermeneutics.[46]

My aim in this contribution is not to engage with Kearney's work in philosophy *directly*. I leave this to the other contributions in this book on important themes such as faith and reason, anatheism and the reimagination of the sacred today. All of these themes are of the utmost importance in a world (especially Western Europe) where secularism has brought about a profound cultural crisis. In this regard, I would rather like to engage with Kearney *indirectly* by asking: From where (what horizon) is he coming? Is there specifically something Irish that set him on a path to becoming a very important interlocutor in the broad post-phenomenological debate globally? What is there specifically in Irish Catholicism that finds an alliance with a philosophical movement in the 20th century? Who were Kearney's Irish influences here, mentors that set him on his way to do his postgraduate work under the Catholic-influenced Charles Taylor in Canada and the Protestant-influenced Paul Ricoeur in Paris?[47]

As stated, I am not going to answer these questions directly but rather bring them into conversation with the intellectual history of phenomenology in South Africa in the spirit of *Horizonverzmelzung* [the melting of horizons], as Gadamer puts it. The rest of this contribution will thus be a reconstruction

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46. See in this regard works on image and imagination (Kearney 1988), visions of Europe and Ireland's role within Europe (Kearney 1997), religion and the issue of faith and reason (Kearney 2001, 2011), the stranger (Kearney 2003), the nature of stories and narratives (Kearney 2002) and carnal hermeneutics (Kearney & Treanor 2015).

47. For his interpretation of Ricoeur, see Kearney (2005).

of the phenomenological horizon I am coming from – as an invitation to encounter Kearney in the spirit of mutual learning.

■ Institutionalisation of philosophy in South Africa and British idealism

It is only after Britain took over the Cape (from the Dutch) as the colonial power in 1795 (finally in 1806) that a formal educational system emerged during the 19th century. The first institutions of higher education, such as the South African College (SAC) in Cape Town (1829), St Andrews in Grahamstown (1855), Grey College in Bloemfontein (1855) and the Victoria College in Stellenbosch (1874), were all strongly influenced by British intellectual and administrative traditions.[48] In 1873, the University of the Cape of Good Hope was established to coordinate the examinations of these colleges. In the northern parts, the first tertiary institutions only emerged after the Anglo–Boer War when the Transvaal University College was founded in Johannesburg (1906) and in Pretoria (1908). In 1910, the name of the university college in Johannesburg was changed to the South African Mine School, while Pretoria continued under the original name.

In 1918, the University of the Cape of Good Hope became the University of South Africa with its seat in Pretoria, while the SAC and Victoria College became the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, respectively. They were followed by the Universities of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) in 1923 and Pretoria in 1930. Although other universities were subsequently founded,

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48. The first known philosophical textbooks in South Africa dates back to the first half of the 19th century (Bacon 1836; Changuion 1848), while the first institutions of philosophy have only relatively lately been instituted (from the latter part of the 19th century). For example, there has only been a national South African philosophical society in existence for a few decades (since 1951). It is thus, as indicated, premature to refer to South African philosophical tradition and more prudent to study the history of the institutionalisation of a philosophical discourse in South Africa.

'these four can be considered as the founding residential universities in South Africa'.

It is also at these four universities where philosophers found an institutional foothold. In the British colonies, philosophy was established in the context of universities, which were to a large degree funded by the state. This is also a context where the political order of the day could not be separated from knowledge production.[49] At issue here is the specific colonial situation where thinking starts to migrate from the centre (in this case London) to the colony (in this case South Africa). Such a perspective on the history of British academic institutionalisation in South Africa allows one also to gain a deepened understanding of further developments in the 20th century – the way that philosophical discourses were influenced by social and historical forces. A reflection on the relationship between knowledge and power is further necessary, because subjects (individuals) are embedded in institutional power relations, which makes it difficult to see philosophical reflection as a pure and neutral activity. It is against this background that the influence of British idealism on philosophy in South Africa can be mentioned.

The initial institutionalisation of philosophy in South Africa (1873–1920) took place in an atmosphere closely associated with a movement called 'British idealism', one in which figures such as Bradley, Bosanquet and Green played a central role. This movement is an interesting deviation of British philosophy, which is usually characterised by being empirical, practical and 'common sensical.' For Isaiah Berlin, the British empirical approach stands in close relation with the everyday British mentality. During the second half of the 19th century, though, British philosophy was influenced by a kind of Hegelian idealism. Various aspects were important in this interpretation of Hegel. Here, history, as the unfolding of spirit, is a movement of progress that leads eventually

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49. Not all universities and their forerunners were centrally created by the state. In the case of Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom and to a certain extent Pretoria, local communities played an important role in the institutionalisation of these universities.

to the highest good (Absolute). Other aspects are the relationship between subject and object, a dialectical way of thinking, the central place of freedom in modern life and an understanding of the common good (*Sittlichkeit*). Hegel also considered the relationship between state and civil society and education (*Bildung*).

The interesting question, though, is how did British idealism interpret Hegel with reference to imperialism and colonialism? In this process, it made the arguable point that certain cultures or peoples (and the individual among them) had the task to lead other people. One possible interpretation of this argument was that the peoples of Europe had to lead the way. In the British context of imperialism and colonialism of the 19th century, the 'white man's burden' entailed that it was their task to assist the colonised people on the long and winding road to the absolute spirit. In the context of South Africa, the concept of trusteeship was also used. It is thus possible to argue that this specific reading of Hegel was used by British idealism to provide some form of legitimation for colonialism.[50]

The first philosophers who gained institutional positions at places such as Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Johannesburg were almost without exception products of British idealism.[51] The prime example in this regard is R.F.A. Hoernlé. More than his predecessors at Cape Town (Bindley, Foot, Fremantle and Loveday) he interpreted his appointment as professor in philosophy at the SAC (1908–1911) as a calling. Andrew Nash (1985) provides a fine reconstruction of how Hoernlé arrived with this idealistic-inspired philosophy at this far off corner of the world, Cape Town, to be confronted with totally different circumstances than he was used to at Oxford.

50. It is important to note that another aspect of Hegel's legacy, for example, his view of the tension between master and slave, did not figure prominently in this context.

51. These philosophers were trained in the United Kingdom, just like many of the first philosophers in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India. On the phenomenon of British Idealism, see Sweet (2010), Boucher and Vincent (2012) and Mander (2011).

At Stellenbosch Thomas Walker was professor in philosophy from 1874 to 1916. Walker, who was not known for his academic prowess, was also a product of British idealism; he identified with the local Dutch-Afrikaner community. In the northern parts of South Africa, the philosophy department at Pretoria University was established by the Oxford-trained Scot W.A. Macfadyen.[52] At the University of the Witwatersrand, Hoernlé, after a spell as lecturer at Harvard, returned to fill the chair (1923–1943).[53]

■ Three reactions to British idealism

It is interesting to note what happened to the philosophical legacy of British idealism at Oxford and in South Africa (and specifically at the institutions mentioned above) in the 20th century. These reactions, and especially the second one, bring us back to the topic of phenomenology in South Africa – and more specifically in the Afrikaans world.

■ First reaction

Within the first decades of the century, analytic philosophy became the dominant force at Oxford (and most of the English-speaking world), thereby eclipsing British idealism completely. It is an open question whether the decline of British idealism was in a way connected to the collapse of British colonialism.[54] The reaction of analytic philosophy, led by Moore and Russell, against British idealism was no coincidence, because it linked up with the earlier British empirical and common-sense tradition. The neutrality of science, logic and the analysis of everyday language play an important role in this approach. In South Africa, analytical

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52. For a case study of Pretoria under MacFadyen, see Duvenage (2005).

53. British Idealist philosophers were also the founders at philosophy departments elsewhere in South Africa. At Grahamstown and Bloemfontein, the first philosophers were Richie Lord and Thomas Forsyth.

54. The move away from idealism almost coincided with the Anglo-Boer War.

philosophy became influential at different times at all the historical English-speaking white universities. The first department to follow the analytical line was Witwatersrand after the death of Hoernlé. This department was followed by the University of Natal, Rhodes University (under the influence of Daantjie Oosthuizen since the 1960s), the University of South Africa (from the 1960s until around 2000) and lastly the University of Cape Town.[55] It is interesting that of all the so-called homeland universities under apartheid (Fort Hare, Zululand, North and Transkei) only the latter department became analytical.

■ Second reaction

In comparison to the historically white English-speaking universities, another reaction against British idealism stemmed from the historically white Afrikaans-speaking universities (Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Bloemfontein). The earliest Afrikaans philosophers at these institutions were all influenced by the three branches of the Dutch Reformed Church, whose theological positions were determined by Continental debates (stemming from Holland and Germany) rather than Britain. The biggest of the three, the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, though, had strong links with Scotland, while the other two (*Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* and *Gereformeerde Kerk*) had strong links with the Netherlands (and to a lesser extent Germany). Against this background, philosophers who had links with these churches were open to religious experience and they were critical about an overly scientistic *weltanschauung*. Their outlook was further influenced by the struggle of Afrikaner nationalism against British imperialism, the Afrikaans language struggle against English and a certain historical consciousness.[56]

55. On the University of Cape Town being an interesting case study in this regard, see Duvenage (2005).

56. For an elaboration of these aspects, see the six systematic research fields in Afrikaans philosophy mentioned in this chapter.

Afrikaner philosophers such as N.J. Brümmer and Tobie Müller (Stellenbosch), Tommie (T.J.) Hugo, C.H. Rautenbach and C.K. Oberholzer (Pretoria), Hendrik Stoker (Potchefstroom) and Nico Diederichs (Bloemfontein) found themselves culturally in opposition to British traditions in the first half of the 20th century. In these circles, Oxford and Cambridge were not the intellectual reference points, but the emphasis was rather on debates in Continental Europe. Although all of these philosophers associated themselves with the social and cultural struggle of Afrikaners (white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans), there are also notable differences between Stellenbosch and Pretoria, on the one side, and Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein, on the other.

At Stellenbosch, Brümmer (and his successors F.J. Kirsten, Johan Degenaar, Hennie Rossouw and Anton van Niekerk) were all influenced by a certain blend of Continental philosophy and Protestant theology (influenced by the powerful Dutch Reformed Church Seminary). Kirsten was influenced by Bergson; Degenaar by phenomenology, existentialism, analytical philosophy (in a qualified sense), Marxism and postmodernism; and Rossouw and Van Niekerk by philosophical hermeneutics. Of the four, Degenaar is an interesting figure because of his open critique of apartheid from the 1950s onwards. The Pretoria tradition also followed a Continental tradition like Stellenbosch, but Rautenbach, Oberholzer and Dreyer took a more conservative political line than Degenaar at Stellenbosch. Some of their most important students include Fanie de Beer, Bert Olivier, Marinus Schoeman and Danie Goosen.[57]

At Potchefstroom, Stoker started an indigenous Calvinist philosophy – philosophy of the Idea of Creation (*Wysbegeerte van die Skeppingsidee*). This religiously informed philosophy also became very influential in an altered form (via the work of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven) from the 1950s at Bloemfontein.

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57. For interviews with Bert Olivier and Danie Goosen, see Duvenage (2016:164–193, 221–248).

In the latter case, Danie Strauss is the outstanding figure. As indicated above, most of the so-called homeland universities under apartheid (Fort Hare, Zululand, North and Transkei) overwhelmingly followed a Continental line in philosophy, mostly influenced by Stellenbosch and Pretoria.

■ Third reaction

Although the broad trajectories of the institutionalisation of philosophy have so far followed the contours of a kind of 'white writing' (J.M. Coetzee), it does not imply that there were no black voices. Already in the 1940s, Anton Lembede wrote a fascinating MA study on the concept of God from Descartes to the present day. Writers such as Eskia Mphahlela and Credo Mutwa contributed to an indigenous thinking and writing tradition. There was also the influential Black Consciousness movement of the 1960s, with figures such as Steve Biko, Barney Pityana and Mamphele Ramphele. In academic circles, it is well known that Black Consciousness philosophers such as Magobe Ramose, Percy More and Joe Teffo found their philosophical grounding in the 1960s and 1970s at the University of the North from Freek Engelbrecht and the kind of phenomenological training that he received from the Pretoria school of philosophy. Although there were obvious political differences between Engelbrecht and his students, they still used the kind of existential–phenomenological training they had received as a basis for their later thinking on Black Consciousness philosophy.

The appointment of philosophers of mixed race in the South African academy only followed from the 1960s onwards. The first lecturer of mixed race in philosophy, Adam Small, was only appointed in the early 1960s at the University of Fort Hare. He was followed by a sprinkling of black philosophers at the homeland universities from the late 1960s and early 1970s onwards. Since 1994, the number of black South Africans with tenure has increased. In 1995, Joe Teffo was appointed as the first full professor in philosophy at the University of the North. Appropriately, he titled his inaugural lecture 'The Other in African Experience' (1995).

In 2000, Ben Ramose was appointed as professor and head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa, while Percy More has become an important voice for African philosophy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and after his retirement at the University of Limpopo. Although themes in African philosophy made earlier inroads at the historically black universities in the 1970s and 1980s, it only entered the curricula of philosophy departments at the historically white universities in the 1990s, where it was much on the periphery until the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns of 2015–2016.

■ Phenomenology in Afrikaans

Returning to the reaction against British idealism, as mentioned in the previous section (the second reaction), the focus here will be on the type of phenomenological thinking that started among philosophers at Pretoria and Stellenbosch that was eventually also important for my own philosophical training in the 1980s and onwards. Before this issue is addressed, this section will start with a succinct definition of phenomenology, followed by the different directions that have emerged from phenomenology as it has been formulated by Husserl initially.

Phenomenology stems from the Greek word *phainomai* [I appear *verskyn*, I give *vertoon* myself]. It means that phenomena disclose themselves and secondly *legoo* [I speak, I let myself hear] (Oberholzer 1967:86). Phenomenology as we know it today, though, starts with Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* [*Logische Untersuchungen*, 1900–1901]. This start is closely intertwined with the catchphrase *zu den Sachen selbst* (to the things themselves).[58] In this

58. Before Husserl the concept of phenomenology was already used in the 18th century amongst German thinkers such as Lambert, Kant, Herder, Fichte and Hegel (Moran 2000:6). Hegel, for example, calls his investigation of the unfolding of human history the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

process, the concept of intentionality is important. For Gadamer (1977), Husserl asks:

> [*H*]ow what is intended is revealed, for which consciousness it is revealed, and in what form. Hence from the very beginning he did not conceive of the situation in terms of a subject existing for itself and choosing its objects. Instead he studied the attitudes of consciousness correlated with the phenomenal objects of intentionality – the 'intentional acts' as he called them. Now 'intentionality' [*Intentionalität*] does not mean 'an act of meaning' [*Meinen*] in the sense of a subjective operation. (p. 118)

This description of intentionality makes it possible to describe phenomenology as a radical, antitraditional seeking for truth – a practice rather than a system. In the early phases of Husserl's career, he worked descriptively and transcendentally. Here, phenomena are described as they appear to the consciousness of the experiencer. In this process, what restricts experience must be avoided – such as cultural practices of tradition, folk assumptions or indeed the practice of the natural sciences itself. The point is that explanation cannot be imposed before phenomena are understood from within. In this sense, phenomenology comes against encrusted traditions and the domination of external methods. Criticising any dogmatism is a return 'to the things themselves' – the living contact with reality. In this sense, there is a return to the existence of the living human subject – with his or her concrete and living experience. A mere empirical and psychological explanation of human beings is challenged as well as a representalist account of knowledge, in the Lockean sense, which explained knowledge in terms of an inner mental representation or copy of what exists outside the mind (Moran 2000:4–5).

As an alternative, 'Husserl proposed a number of steps, most [notable] the phenomenological *epoché* or suspension of the natural attitude, as well as a number of methodological reductions and alterations of viewpoint' (Moran 2000:11). Moran (2000) writes:

> Husserl thought phenomenological practice required a radical shift in viewpoint, a suspension or bracketing of the everyday natural attitude and all 'world-positing' intentional acts which assume the

existence of the world, until the practitioner is led back into the domain of pure transcendental subjectivity. (p. 2)

Not all of Husserl's followers, though, were comfortable with his reconstruction of transcendental subjectivity, because it came close to a kind of neo-Kantian idealism from which he wanted to protect phenomenology. The following five reactions to Husserl's phenomenology can be mentioned:[59]

- Firstly, there is realistic and constitutive phenomenology, which still stands relatively near to Husserl's original descriptive method of experience. In *constitutive phenomenology*, transcendental phenomenological methods such as *epoché* and reduction play a role.
- Secondly, there is *ontological or existential phenomenology*, which has a close link with Martin Heidegger's work *Sein und Zeit* (1927). With a more fundamental critique of Husserl, Heidegger steers phenomenology in a new direction. Heidegger challenges Husserl's concept of transcendental idealism and first philosophy as ego-logy with his concept of *Dasein* where phenomenology asks the question of Being. Here phenomenology becomes ontology. Moran (2000:21) aptly writes that phenomenology is here, 'attentive to *historicity* and the facticity of *human living*; to *temporality*, or the concrete living in time, and furthermore it must not remain content with description of the internal consciousness of time. [...] all description involves interpretation; indeed that description was only a derivative form of interpretation.'
- Thirdly, there is *hermeneutical phenomenology*, which takes Heidegger's insight in *Sein und Zeit*, about the interpreting nature of human existence, further. The best example here is Hans-Georg Gadamer's phenomenological study of Plato's ethics (Gadamer 1931) and his later masterly *Wahrheit und Methode* (Gadamer 1960). Although Heidegger's ontology remains a source of inspiration, Gadamer developed hermeneutical phenomenology in the direction of a 'method' of the human sciences in

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59. This is an elaboration of the three reactions that Embree (1998) mentions.

which interpretation plays an important role.[60] One could also place the work of Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney here.

- Fourthly, there is the *post-structuralism* of Derrida. From Derrida's arrival in Paris in 1949 until his work in 1967, he almost exclusively worked on Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas. This is the basis of his post-structuralist project of deconstruction. In Derrida's first public lecture of 1959, 'Genesis and Structure', as Powell (2006:41) indicates, the Husserlian transcendental subject is challenged: 'This is achieved by reading the outline of the transcendental subjectivity as a structure with a history. But a structure cannot have an explicable history unless it changes beyond recognition at each stage of its history, that is, its change cannot be explained. This means that the structure must not be as structured as Husserl thinks, but more fluid, more open, less exclusive, and less unjust than it attempts to be. It is Derrida's task always to paint the totality and the imposing mastery of a system first, so that he then can undo it.'
- In the fifth place, one could position critical theory as a further reaction to phenomenology through the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse.

◼ Six systematic reactions in Afrikaans philosophy

These five reactions (as sketched above) indicate a diversity in the practice, interpretation and application of phenomenology (Moran 2000:3). On the other hand, there are quite a number of aspects that phenomenological and post-phenomenological thinkers share: for example, a healthy scepticism of naturalism (or objectivism or positivism) – a worldview that has been the basis of Western natural sciences and technology since the Renaissance. As an alternative, the research and the knowledge process is rather understood as an *encounter* – an approach

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60. Embree (1998) refers to the following hermeneutical phenomenologists: Paul Ricoeur, Patrick Heelan, Don Ihde, Graeme Nicholson, Joseph J. Kockelmans, Calvin O. Schrag, Gianni Vattimo and Carlo Sini.

that entails reflexive reciprocity between subject and object (Embree 2008). These basic insights also play a role if we look at six systematic reactions of Afrikaans philosophy, against British idealism, from a phenomenological point of view:

- Firstly, there is the issue of modern life or modernity, which is most of the time synonymous with the natural scientific way of looking at the world, which is closely allied with technology. In South Africa, this way of looking at the world has been strongly influenced by the sudden development and expansion of the mining–industrial complex since the 1880s and the sudden move of the vast majority of South Africans (including Afrikaans people) from the rural areas to the cities – especially from the 1930s onwards – and their struggle to come to terms with it.
- Secondly, there is the issue of science and faith (or faith and reason). This is a sort of primordial issue in Afrikaans philosophy and it stems, among others, from the 1862 synod of the Dutch Reformed Church at Stellenbosch, where liberal and orthodox positions came to loggerheads. In the 20th century, this issue has also been broadened in the secularisation debate where atheism has become an option for an influential group.[61]
- Thirdly, there is (hopefully) the creative tension between particular and the universal. This is not just an epistemological issue but also a political–ethical one, where the latter links with issues such as diversity, pluralism and a more political–federal perspective – where an Aristotelian concept such as *phronesis* could be possibly helpful.[62]
- Fourthly, there is the relationship between language and thinking. Since Herder in the 18th century argued that language influences thinking, it has been on the philosophical agenda.[63] The way you think in Afrikaans or Zulu (or Welsh or Irish)

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61. The work of Richard Kearney on religion is obviously relevant for contemporary debates within this systematic area.

62. See my inaugural lecture on the issue of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in a divided society (Duvenage 2013).

63. One can just think of Heidegger and Gadamer's 20th century formulation of language being the house of being; or that we do not speak a language, but a language speaks us; or being that can be understood is language.

is different than in English – and it must be respected. The point here is not language relativism but rather a plea for multilingualism and the wonderful challenge to translate and interpret between the languages in South Africa (and in Europe). In this sense, South Africa is not an English land but a *translating* land.

- Fifthly, there is the issue of historical trauma (with the Anglo–Boer War and apartheid as central reference points), which no authentic thinking in South Africa can escape.

- Finally, there is the issue of the kind of criticism that a more phenomenological-influenced philosophy could follow. In the Afrikaans world, the debate about committed or non-committed critique in literary world of the *Sestigers* has its version in Afrikaans philosophy. Here, Walzer's distinction between an attached and non-attached critic is important, with regard to a thinker such as Albert Camus and a poet thinker such as Breyten Breytenbach, as examples of attached critics (Duvenage 2018; Walzer 2002 [1988]).

In summary, it should be clear that these systematic fields within phenomenological-influenced Afrikaans philosophy (science, religion, politics, language, historical trauma and criticism) can all be fruitfully brought into encounter with the thinking of Richard Kearney. There are good grounds to believe that the specific Irish-phenomenological horizon Kearney is coming from has much to offer for philosophers working in the South African context.

■ On the future of philosophy in South Africa

Phenomenology in South Africa, and more specifically in the Afrikaans world, has been the focus of this contribution. After some more personal notes on a specific philosophical career in South Africa, being influenced by South African and international scholars in the broad field of phenomenology (including the work of Richard Kearney), a case study in South African intellectual history followed. Here it was shown how Afrikaans philosophy, as a reaction to British idealism, was influenced by a kind of Continental phenomenological thinking. This kind of phenomenology was influenced by Husserl's

phenomenology and its offshoots in the 20th century – for example, Heidegger's ontological thinking, existentialism, hermeneutics, post-structuralism and Critical Theory. The way that a phenomenological kind of thinking became influential in South Africa, though, was not sketched as a type of one-way traffic from Europe to Africa but in more dialectical terms. This was done with reference to six systematic fields in Afrikaans philosophy, namely, modernity and science, religion, the universal and the particular, language and thinking, historical trauma and critique. Against this background, it is now possible to make some (preliminary) remarks about the future of thinking (and philosophy) in South Africa.

In the first place, it should be clear by now that a *critical hermeneutical* approach takes intellectual history very seriously. The issue here is not just the historicity of ideas and concepts, but the challenge is to explore those intellectual traditions that have shaped philosophy in South Africa, to know where they are coming from and to understand how they were transformed under (post-)colonial conditions.

Such an approach (which is related to Foucault's genealogical perspective) 'is worthwhile by providing a historical and material corrective to arguments that might otherwise strive to reconcile cultural values and ideas in an apolitical and ahistorical manner'. It further entails a good understanding of the development of (post)colonial societies, how the colonial centre is of primary significance here and how it provides much of the intellectual context for an emergent (post)colonial thinking. As André du Toit (1991:6) has indicated, (post)colonial societies do not develop autonomously, but they are the result of the transplantation of fragments of cultures and traditions rooted in the parent societies. Against this background, 'local traditions [have] to define their own ideas, values and aims within the ambit of "foreign" discourses even (perhaps especially) where they deliberately set themselves against these'. In such a situation, there is a need for *sensitive interpreters*.[64]

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64. *Sensitive interpreters* is my version of André du Toit's concept of *ambiguous intermediaries*.

Apart from having a good historical sense, a sensitive interpreter should have the ability to deal with *difference* and the lived experience of pluralism or diversity. A training in phenomenology and its offshoots can be of help here in an epistemological, ethical and political sense. *Epistemologically* we know the danger of just one truth or metanarrative for a complex and even divided society. In such a context, the Gadamerian concept of the *melting of horizons* could be helpful. Such a melting takes place where the horizon of another culture (artwork or historical text) is brought into critical dialogue with the horizon of the interpreter. In other words, the interpreter opens the horizon of the other (culture, text and artwork) by allowing it to question the interpreter's prejudices towards the case at hand. The point is that my own cultural horizon must be in principle open to the horizon of the other's culture so that we can question one another in the dialogue about one another's prejudices. What follows is a dialogue of question and answer where the interpreter not only questions the truth claim of the case at hand but also allows his or her prejudices to be questioned by that with which he or she is confronted. This is a risk, because one puts one's theoretical positions (and prejudices) on the line in an open dialogue of question and answer. An authentic fusion of horizons leads to a situation where the respective interlocutors in a discourse can understand differently (Wright 1998). So, the fusion of horizons in a multicultural society is the precondition for taking the right ethical decisions when a decision concerns me and the other.

Obviously, the issue of a certain kind of Western thinking, but also its counter-discourse in the form of Western philosophy itself or African philosophy, is at stake here. There are examples of philosophers who got their training in phenomenology in South Africa, and more specifically in the Afrikaans world, who have used their position as *sensitive interpreters* to problematise Western intellectual traditions. In philosophical terms, it means a problematisation of both analytical and Continental philosophy and how they have been practised in South Africa.[65]

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65. Here one can think of the work of philosophers such as Johan Degenaar, André du Toit and Rick Turner. There is also the interesting case study of the University of the North/ Turfloop mentioned previously.

From the preceding discussion, which is mainly epistemological by nature, a more *ethical* and political perspective is possible. An important concept in this regard is Aristotelian *phronesis* [practical wisdom], which has been reactivated in our time by Gadamer. This concept is not only important for our practical in-the-world-being (Heidegger), against a scientific–theoretical stance, but it also enables us to mediate the particular with the universal in our actions of the life-world. *Phronesis* as practical-oriented understanding and interpretation is important for actionable insight and self-knowledge in the life-world. It is action-driven [*handelende*] insight that cannot be learnt as a blueprint or by recipe (Malpas 2009). Gadamer uses this Aristotelian concept to mediate between the universality of the law, which relates to the necessity of absolute and unqualified responsibility, on the one hand, and the multitude of concrete lived life situations, which constitute the historicity of humankind, on the other. For Gadamer, *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue is a form of hermeneutical knowledge. It is not pure or without interests (or objective in the sense of the natural sciences), because deliberation and application are basic elements of practical wisdom. *Phronesis* is thus not a logical deductive application of universal truth on a particular case.[66] It rather attempts to mediate the human striving for the universal with the reality of historically informed situations (Lawn & Keane 2011:114–115).

This bring us to the *political* side of a critical hermeneutical approach. In the first place, an atomistic conception of the individual is challenged – especially whereby he or she supposedly floats around in the infinite ocean of the present without any historical and cultural moorings.

The target here is that form of liberalism that Michael Sandel (1984) calls the *unencumbered self*, that is, the idea of the self as completely non-aligned, detached and only responsible for her

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66. Paul Ricoeur (1992:269) writes in this regard, '[p]ractical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception that solicitude requires by breaking the rule to the smallest extent possible'.

or his own interests.[67] This question is important because it is ironically enough precisely in divided societies where a shared fate is not so apparent that such an atomistic idea of the self can easily take root. The extent to which such a conception took root in South Africa after 1994 can be seen in the scale on which a civil ethos characterised by the common care for one another and for infrastructure is undermined by the ruthless pursuit of instant wealth acquired through dubious means.

Secondly, as discussed earlier on, 'we must not deal with the world in an exclusively rigid, law-like technocratic fashion but in a practically enquiring fashion'. There are obvious dangers attached to planning or managing a multicultural or divided society according to a technical or technocratic blueprint – for example, where we read the constitution of a country in a purely technical sense without any contextualisation or where we enforce quotas, racial or otherwise, in a complex society.

Thirdly, Gadamer's alternative on these two points again makes us aware of the historical dimension of understanding as explained above (Chen 1987:186). He links such an attitude to the working historical consciousness that each of us must have. The lessons 'for multicultural societies is that any attempt [to construct] an argument, theory or institution [must] be [acutely] aware of [their] historical roots'. The hermeneutic circle implies that the dialogue or conversation between different elements of a multicultural society must never stop. In other words, one-sided views of history that often characterise divided societies can precisely not be afforded in such societies and must always again be subject to further dialogue and mutual deliberation. It should be a never-ending conversation, even though the melting of horizons could end in some kind of fragile consensus. Such a consensus, though, must always be open to further improvements. We must hold onto dialogue.[68]

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67. See about this in Sandel (1984:9) and more fully, Sandel (1982).

68. On hermeneutical citizenship, see Alejandro (1993).

Obviously, the place to hold onto dialogue is a vibrant public sphere and civil society. A space where metanarratives and binaries in a divided society can be tested and critically discussed. A space where not only race, but class, culture, gender speciesism, our relationship to nature and to technology and so on can be critically discussed, and where the forceless force of the better argument (Habermas) can hopefully prevail. As the various South African perspectives are moving nearer to one another at the start of the 21st century – because of industrialisation, modernisation and the founding of a political unitary state – the need for such a critical public sphere is of the utmost importance. A public sphere in which there is an awareness for cross-cultural communication and sensitive interpretation.

Transcendence and anatheism

Anné H. Verhoef ⓘ
School of Philosophy
North-West University
South Africa

■ Introduction

This chapter sets out to analyse Richard Kearney's concept of anatheism in terms of transcendence. The main question is what type of transcendence is described, implied or motivated by Kearney's anatheism. In the first part, the importance of this question will be highlighted by first giving an overview of the current post-metaphysical philosophical debate with regard to transcendence. In the second part, the focus will be on the concept of anatheism and its link to transcendence. The question here will be why Kearney opts for this type of transcendence of anatheism. Some possible critiques of this position will also be raised. In the last section of the chapter, Kearney's 'anatheistic

transcendence' will be brought into conversation with the work of other contemporary philosophers who have explored this theme. The aim is to provide further elucidation of Kearney's anatheism and its transcendence.

■ Transcendence in a post-metaphysical age

To live in a post-metaphysical age implies, at least at face value, the end of transcendence, or 'post-transcendence' (Verhoef 2016:3). Ironically, in the past 15 years, a variety of disciplines have shown renewed interest in the concept of transcendence. This interest is especially evident in Continental philosophy, in which various philosophers and theologians have engaged in exploring the concept of transcendence. To a large extent, this interest arises from the publication in 2007 of the influential book *Religion and Postmodernism 4: Transcendence and Beyond*, edited by John Caputo and Michael Scanlon.[69] After 2007, other important books followed like *Homo Transcendentalis* (Du Toit 2010), *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics* (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012b) and *Culture and Transcendence – A Typology of Transcendence* (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a). These books not only 'give an indication of the importance of the concept transcendence in contemporary philosophical–theological discourses but also [highlight] the need to reconceptualise [transcendence]' (Verhoef 2016:2). Hence, it may be emphasised that (Verhoef 2016):

> One of the main reasons why transcendence is attracting [*renewed*] attention is [*that*] the [*recognition of*] the transcendence–immanence pair [*was shaped*] in the late modern period by the critique of metaphysics. (p. 2)

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69. This book of Caputo and Scanlon was preceded by *Mutations culturelles et transcendence* (Gaudette 2000), *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion* (Faulconer 2003) and *Transcendence*: *Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (Schwartz 2004).

This must be understood in a broader historical context. The composition of the word *transcendence*, with the prefix *trans-* (from the Latin *trans*, 'across') and the action of ascending (from the Latin *scandere*, 'to climb'), points to a type of 'crossing over' to some place above or outside the world – an ascension to an 'outside'.[70] In philosophy, the question of 'an outside' has been linked to the Supreme Being, the divine and the ultimate cause or foundation. 'Such a metaphysical way of speaking about the transcendent (as mostly God) was immensely criticised in the modern period by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, among others' (Verhoef 2016:2). They all criticise in their unique ways that there is no 'true' foundation, no ontotheology, no other reality that determines our reality. This critique of metaphysics urged philosophers to move away from metaphysics as a whole. This led to the notion of our age as being 'post-metaphysical', which seems to imply a 'post-transcendence' as well.

In light of the above, the inevitable and intriguing question is: Why is there still an interest in and a search for transcendence in our post-metaphysical age? Why are there 'recurring appearances of transcendence, wittingly or unwittingly' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012b:1) in our apparently post-metaphysical landscape? Some of the 'main reasons for the persistence of transcendence in post-metaphysical philosophy, theology and [even] in our secularised Western culture [include] the [following]' (Verhoef 2016:3–6).

• *The experience of self-transcendence.* There is a need to account for our human experience of 'transcending our world' and of 'transcending ourselves', and the notion of having or

70. While the origin of the concept of transcendence can be found in Parmenides, Plato's distinction between the world of phenomena and the world of ideas is better known (Stoker 2015:514). Phenomena in the material world are only copies or images of the true forms which are in the real 'outside' world. For Plato, the idea of the good, for example, is radical transcendent, beyond all being, and the cause of all right and beautiful things (Warmington & Rouse 1956:316), but the archetype form of it is in an unchanging and unseen world of forms.

living in radical immanence normally does not allow for the expression of this experience (Verhoef 2016:4).

- *The need for value and meaning of the world.* Traditional concepts of transcendence fulfilled the role of helping people to understand the world and to value their and others' existence. These concepts have been strongly criticised by Nietzsche, as being nihilistic, but he also points to the necessity of finding new ways of conceptualising transcendence.[71]

- *The problem of the self-referential character of immanence*. The problem is that (Van der Merwe 2012:509), 'a valuation of radical immanence' as the only and ultimate reality is 'either circular (what is ultimate is immanent because what is immanent is ultimate), and thus self-refuting, or clandestinely rests on some assumption of ultimate value or necessity'. Transcendence, metaphysics and its 'ontotheological constitution' seems to be inevitable (Schrijvers 2013:29).

- *The normative character of transcendence.* 'Traditionally transcendence determined people's orientation in life' and has provided humanity with ethical normativity (Verhoef 2016:4). The attempt and the need to reconceptualise transcendence thus aim at finding new normative frameworks for living ethical lives.[72]

- *The problem of the reductionist nature of immanence.* 'Critique of immanence as our final and total closed off reality is [to be found] in different interdisciplinary [counter movements] and voices' (Verhoef 2016:5). In art and (post-)phenomenology, this critique arises from an existential longing for or an experiential claim related to 'an ultimate sense of life breaking

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71. The Dutch philosopher Paul van Tongeren (2012:180) says, for example: '[…] in an age in which God is supposedly dead, reflection on transcendence is not just interesting, but of utmost importance'.

72. In his book, *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche described the 'death of God' in his well-known parable of the madman searching for God at the marketplace. Nietzsche argues here that belief in God has effectively died – God is no longer a convincing hypothesis. This death of God (as the traditional concept of transcendence) has the implication that we have no grounding for moral values and that morality must be created anew by us. We cannot anymore ground one universal system of moral values in one overarching reason (transcendence), religious or not. All values argues Nietzsche (most thoroughly in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* [1887]), must be revalued and recreated.

in from beyond human relations and history' (Van der Merwe 2012:510). This 'ultimate sense of life' and the experiences of reality as a subjective force (Being, God, the Other and fate) lead to the continuous shifting views or 'frontiers of transcendence' (Du Toit 2011:1) in philosophy, theology, art, politics and literature.[73]

• *Transcendence as an outcome of postmodern thinking.* The dimension of transcendence is reintroduced by various 'postmodern' philosophers in new guises like (Schwartz 2004:viii), 'the postmodern notion of transgression, the phenomenological notion of the other, the scientific notion of the impenetrable mystery of an infinite universe, the aesthetic notion of excess, the psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity, the political notion of revolutionary ecstasy.' In this postmodern context, the interest in transcendence is not to return to (or rehabilitate) transcendence as principle beyond question or critique, neither as an authority beyond reason, nor as a totalitarian deity, but as the ground of humility: epistemological, ethical, aesthetic and political (Verhoef 2016:5).

• *The future as something transcendent.* One of the main reasons for the persistence of transcendence in contemporary post-metaphysical thought is the 'inescapable link' between transcendence and the future. This is especially true when the future is defined as the unknown, the unexpected, the undefinable and the unforeseeable – all terms that imply the transcendent as that which 'lies beyond' or 'surpasses' our experiences of time and reality (Verhoef 2016:6).

In the introduction of *Religion and Postmodernism 4: Transcendence and Beyond* (2007), John Caputo and Michael Scanlon emphasise the need to investigate postmodern and post-metaphysical thinking in respect to transcendence. They explain the aim of this book as an attempt to 'press forward beyond the beyond' (Caputo & Scanlon 2007:2). In this process, they identify two tendencies in post-metaphysical thinking about transcendence, namely, 'hyper-transcendence' and

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73. In theology, transcendence resurfaces, for example, as 'the mystical', and in literature it points to 'that within representation that nonetheless exceeds representation' (Milbank 2004:212).

'post-transcendence'. These two tendencies represent the two main positions (Wessel Stoker identifies more) within the contemporary debate about transcendence, and for that reason Kearney's concept of transcendence (as it crystallises from his concept of anatheism) should be positioned within that debate. This will help one to understand the uniqueness of Kearney's position on transcendence but also to see how he challenges the dominant tendencies within the debate.

Hypertranscendence is a transcendence that is evermore beyond. It is a still more transcendent transcendence – a hyperbolic transcendence. Jean-Luc Marion is a paradigmatic representative of this tendency. For him, the classical idea of transcendence does not prove to be enough because it 'remains caught up in an ontological idolatry' (Caputo & Scanlon 2007:3). He argues that the word 'being' is an 'idol' because it is a mirror in which we see ourselves and not God. We should therefore seek to think of God 'without being'. Transcendence (which referred to being) must therefore give way to a certain 'ultratranscendence or more radical or hyperbolic transcendence beyond being' (Caputo & Scanlon 2007:3). Marion ultimately makes a sharp distinction between transcendence and immanence. In doing so, he shares an interesting commonality with Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth who stress the difference between God and human beings (Stoker 2015:516, 518). Stoker typifies this transcendence as 'radical transcendence' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:13), and it implies that the absolute is the wholly other and is clearly distinct from mundane reality.

Some of the problems with hypertranscendence (apart from the critique of metaphysics that is often not overcome in this position) are that it creates a 'too distant/removed' (unknowable, unreachable and eventually irrelevant) transcendence it creates a nihilistic world because it is 'the other/outside' world that has true meaning; it devalues the immanent on a bodily level – only the spiritual becomes important as it connects with the transcendent; and it locates the transcendent in brief moments of experiences (with the rest of our lives doomed to be less important) (Verhoef 2016:2).

Post-transcendence tries to avoid these problems by attempting to leave behind classical transcendence. Post-transcendence emphasises the 'notion that we should put transcendence behind us and be content with our mundane immanent world' (Verhoef 2016:2). In post-transcendence, the concept of transcendence is redundant. It has lost its power and meaning, and it has virtually disappeared into immanence. Stoker describes this position of post-transcendence as 'radical immanence' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:15). In radical immanence, the absolute or transcendent is no longer sought outside mundane reality because both realities converge. The problems associated with post-transcendence are listed above as reasons why there is still an interest in and a search for transcendence in our post-metaphysical age.

Hypertranscendence and post-transcendence, as the main tendencies of post-metaphysical thought on transcendence, indicate that it is difficult to move beyond the dichotomy of transcendence and immanence. In a way this is what Kearney attempts through his concept of anatheism. This needs to be explained before we come back to the broader contemporary debate on transcendence – one in which Stoker presents more options to locate Kearney's transcendence.

■ Anatheism and transcendence

Kearney's philosophy has explored the concept of transcendence throughout his career, sometimes implicitly and sometimes more directly in terms of the concept of God. In this regard, his work has been hugely influential as evidenced by the book *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy* (edited by John Manoussakis 2006a). Kearney returns to the main themes of his work as discussed in *After God* in his book *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (2010). Kearney's earlier works, *On Stories* (2002), *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (2001) and *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* (2003), to a large extent, form the platform on which *Anatheism* is written. In my analysis of transcendence in Kearney's work, I will therefore

mainly focus on his concept of anatheism. However, I will take care in this analysis to keep in mind that it is the fate of every philosophical system to be dismembered and have its fragments bandied about in ongoing debate. While it would be a great pity if anatheism were not understood in terms of the rest of Kearney's work, there is great gain to be had from ongoing debate about his thought-provoking conceptualisation of anatheism.

Anatheism should, of course, not be understood as a system. Although Kearney does not present it as such, anatheism proposes a 'third way beyond the extremes of dogmatic theism and militant atheism' (Kearney 2010:3). Anatheism is 'not an end but a way' (Kearney 2010:166); it is a 'movement – not a state – that refuses all absolute talk about the absolute' (Kearney 2010:16); it is not some new religion or 'Master narrative' (Kearney 2010:6) but 'attention to the divine in the stranger who stands before us in the midst of the world' (Kearney 2010:166). Anatheism is not a new belief but simply the invitation to 'see what has always been there *a second time around – ana*' (Kearney 2010:167, [*emphasis in original*]). Important for Kearney is that anatheism is not atheism or theism, not anti-atheism or antitheism, but it is a 'form of post-theism' (Kearney 2010:57); '*amor mundi*, love of the life-world as embodiment of infinity in the finite, of transcendence in immanence, of eschatology in the now' (2010:166). This 'transcendence in immanence' of anatheism, as Kearney describes it, provides the first clue of how to understand anatheism's transcendence, but it needs further explanation.

Transcendence in anatheism is consistently described by Kearney as an immanent transcendence (Kearney 2010:80, 99, 166). Transcendence is the '*surplus* of meaning' (Kearney 2010:xiv, [*emphasis in original*]) to be found in this world; it is about the 'encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to call God' (Kearney 2010:7); it is *transcendence* 'inscribed in everyday immanence' (Kearney 2010:102). Furthermore, the transcendent is described as a 'source beyond and beneath oneself, a superfluity one does not possess or manipulate' (Kearney 2010:179), as an 'untranslatable kernel'

(Kearney 2010:180), an 'irreducible enigma' (Kearney 2010:180), 'a deep mystical appreciation of something Other than our finite human being' (Kearney 2010:180), but it *is found in the immanent* – a 'retrieving of the sacred in the secular' (Kearney 2010:130). Again, it is a transcendence in immanence. Kearney formulates and qualifies it as a 'transcendence in and through immanence which, far from diminishing humanity, amplifies it' (Kearney 2010:182). It is in the alien, the Other, the stranger that we may meet this transcendence – this 'ultimacy that surpasses the limits of humanism and naturalism' (Kearney 2010:184). Kearney (2010) says that:

> [*R*]ecognising something 'more' in the stranger than the human is a way of acknowledging a dimension of transcendence in the other that – in part, at least – exceeds the finite presence of the person before me. (p. 182)

The transcendence Kearney presents through the concept of anatheism, as *transcendence in immanence*, is clearly not a return or rehabilitation of classic transcendence. It is a transcendent (God or divinity) that is – in following his thoughts from *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters* – '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' (Manoussakis 2006a:xvi). Transcendence as *immanent transcendence* (as in anatheism) is an acknowledgement that transcendence can be experienced in our immanent reality. This type of transcendence is identified by Stoker as a possible in-between position, between the sharp dichotomy of transcendence and immanence. Stoker describes immanent transcendence as a form of transcendence where 'both realities are viewed as closely involved with each other – the absolute is experienced in and through mundane reality' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:11). The starting point of immanent transcendence is the experience people have of the Ultimate in this world. This can happen, for example, by seeing the face of the Other (Levinas and Kearney), by meeting the stranger or by giving attention to the epiphanies of the ordinary universe (what Kearney calls a micro-eschatology) or in the surplus of a given

phenomenon. In *Anatheism*, Kearney gives various possibilities in and through which such experiences of the ultimate, the transcendent, can take place.

Kearney's description of the concept of immanent transcendence is meaningful in terms of the broader contemporary post-metaphysical debate about transcendence. It is clear from the outset that Kearney does not opt for a *post-transcendence*. He does not accept a radical immanence where there is no transcendence left, where the absolute is no longer sought outside mundane reality. The transcendent and immanent do not converge or conflate into the immanent in his thought. However, Kearney also does not opt (at least so it seems at first sight) for *hypertranscendence* – where the transcendent is always more beyond – or a 'radical transcendence', where the transcendent is 'wholly other' and 'sharply distinguished' (to the extent that it is unconnected) from mundane reality. Kearney consistently describes transcendence as being connected with the immanent, as 'inscribed in everyday immanence', as the 'sacred in the secular'. With his emphasis on the inevitable connectedness between transcendence and immanence he persistently tries to articulate a middle way (a *via tertia*) between the two extremes of this post-metaphysical debate on transcendence.

However, the fact that Kearney insists that the sacred remains 'distinct' and that it is 'never the same thing' as the secular (Kearney 2010:166) begs the question: Is it possible to keep the balance between, to stay in the middle of, transcendence and immanence with the notion of *immanent transcendence*? Does Kearney's concept of anatheism allow him to succeed in this endeavour?

Transcendence as *immanent transcendence* is not by default a successful middle position. In other words, just by opting for *immanent transcendence* does not ensure that one is in the middle of transcendence and immanence. This middle position is rather fragile and tends to go either in the direction of immanence or transcendence. To position oneself thus in this middle position

of immanent transcendence is a very difficult balancing act, something that might even be impossible, as Merold Westphal (2012:151) argues. This difficulty will be illustrated by discussing the theologian Paul Tillich and the philosophers Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas' respective concepts of transcendence. They all try to avoid the extremes of transcendence and immanence, but all fail to some extent. The similarities of their position will be compared with Kearney's understanding of immanent transcendence to see where and how Kearney struggles with the same problems and develops some new possible ways of resolving them. Firstly, more clarification of Kearney's position is needed.

As stated above, Kearney clearly tries to avoid a move back to radical immanence and post-transcendence. He explicitly says that anatheism is not pantheism (Kearney 2010:166). He says anatheism does not collapse the secular and the sacred into one but retains the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent, although they are integrally connected. He says anatheism (Kearney 2010):

> [D]oes not say the sacred *is* the secular; it says it is *in* the secular, *through* the secular, *towards* the secular. I would even go so far to say the sacred is inseparable from the secular, while remaining distinct. Anatheism speaks of 'interanimation' between the sacred and the secular but not of fusion or confusion. They are inextricably interconnected but never the *same* thing. (p. 166; [*emphasis in original*])

This connectedness and at the same time the distinction between the sacred and the secular, which Kearney makes, moves anatheism past pantheism in the direction of panentheism. For example, in his chapter on sacramental imagination (SI), Kearney shows an affinity with what he calls the Franciscan 'mystical panentheism' (Kearney 2010:100). Panentheism takes the view, as Kearney does, that the sacred is not only the secular but that there is something more to the secular. The 'ultimacy' of transcendence 'surpasses the limits of humanism and naturalism' (Kearney 2010:184). Or, to rephrase him, the sacred is something

distinct; it is not the same thing as the secular, but at the same time it is inseparable and inextricably interconnected to the secular.

The balancing act between immanence and transcendence becomes risky at this point. On the one hand, radical immanence is rejected, but, on the other hand, the option remains open for an experience of the more, the surplus of meaning, the diacritical hermeneutics of the microeschatologies, the epiphanies of the everyday, God in the presence, transcendence in a more radical way – a possible move towards hypertranscendence as something distinct. Kearney does not see being distinct (not the same) as being disconnected. This might look like a contradiction if one understood this transcendence in a panentheistic way, and it thus needs more clarification. It is at this point where the types of immanent transcendence of Paul Tillich and alterity of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas need to be discussed.

■ The problem of anatheism as immanent transcendence (and alterity)

■ Paul Tillich

Variants of immanent transcendence can be found in Schleiermacher, Hegel and Tillich. Tillich attempts to examine transcendence and immanence together, because he was opposed to an 'isolated transcendence of God as a perfect being far away and highly exalted in heaven' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:11). His starting point is the experience people have of the Ultimate, the power of being, of Being-itself. This Being is transcendent because 'Being-itself is beyond finitude and infinity, otherwise it would be conditioned by something other than itself [...]' but also immanent, because '[...] everything finite participates in being-itself and in its infinity. Otherwise it would not have the power of being. It would be swallowed by non-being [...]' (Tillich 1953:263). Tillich speaks in this vein of the 'depth of existence' (Tillich 1948:52) and he identifies the 'deepest ground

of our being and of all being', the depth of life itself, with God. He says (Tillich 1948):

> The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is *God*. That depth is what the word *God* means. And if that word has not much meaning for you, translate it, and speak of the depths of your life, of the source of being, of your ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation. (p. 57)

For Tillich, the initial point for the concept of religion is the experience of the ultimate, the holy or God, which gets translated to one's 'ultimate concern'. Tillich defines religion famously as the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern (Tillich 1951:12–14). This means that God's transcendence only makes sense when accompanied by immanence and vice versa. In this model of 'immanent transcendence', the term *immanence* is privileged; God (the transcendent) becomes nothing more than the ultimate concern, the depth of our being, what is found in this immanent world.[74] Transcendence as 'Being-itself [that] is beyond finitude and infinity' (Tillich 1953:263) is determined, and it seems therefore restricted, by the immanent. For Tillich, God is 'an utterly impersonal concept, such as energy, and not a being, and, *a fortioti*, not a supremely personal being' (Westphal 2012:155). The primacy is here of pantheistic immanence over theistic transcendence, a naturalism over a theism, an immanence over transcendence.

The immanent transcendence of anatheism relates in an ambiguous way to that of Tillich. Firstly (in disagreement), it maintains a stronger emphasis on transcendence. Anatheism pleads consistently for more than the immanent, for transcendence as the '*surplus* of meaning' (Tillich 2010:xiv); the 'encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to call God' (Tillich 2010:7); a 'source beyond and beneath oneself, a superfluity one does not possess or manipulate' (Tillich 2010:179);

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74. Kearney, in 'Sacramental Imagination and Eschatology' (Kearney 2009:55–68), recasts eschatology in terms of our everyday experiences rather than as a grand narrative of the end-times utopia. He focuses on the 'flesh' in its multiple phenomenological layers in order to show 'that the mundane world is infused with divine depth' (DeRoo & Manoussakis 2009:9).

as an 'untranslatable kernel' (Tillich 2010:180), an 'irreducible enigma' (2010:180) and 'a deep mystical appreciation of something Other than our finite human being' (Tillich 2010:180). In this sense, Kearney emphasises the transcendent and maintains a 'middle' position between transcendence and immanence. Kearney puts a stronger emphasis on transcendence through his concept of anatheism than Tillich does in his 'ultimate concern'.

Secondly (in agreement with Tillich's 'ultimate concern'), anatheism is not so clearly a 'theism' but rather a 'form of post-theism' (Tillich 2010:57). It is not a state but a movement that 'refuses all absolute talk about the absolute' (Tillich 2010:16). The transcendent is not a personal God, a necessary theistic creator or Absolute, but an embodiment of infinity in the finite as '*amor mundi,* love of the life-world' (Tillich 2010:166). This transcendence can be described (as indicated previously) as panentheism – and the 'ultimacy' of transcendence surpasses the limits of naturalism. The primacy here – in the immanent transcendence of Kearney's anatheism – is of panentheistic immanence over theistic transcendence, a supernaturalism over an absolute theism. If this is true, the concept of anatheism may create a misunderstanding here, because it implies a return to *God* after *God*. Why ana-*theism* if Kearney moves away from theism to 'post-theism'? Why is *panentheism* the privileged term and not *supernaturalism*? We will return to this question after the discussion on Derrida and transcendence.

■ Jacques Derrida

Stoker (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:5–26) identifies four types of transcendence, of which the first three have been discussed so far, namely, radical transcendence (hypertranscendence), radical immanence (post-transcendence) and immanent transcendence. The fourth type is transcendence as alterity, and here the relationship between transcendence and immanence is no longer viewed as an opposition. It is to think 'beyond opposition, whereby the wholly other can appear in

every other' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:18). This type of transcendence can be found according to Stoker in Levinas, Derrida, Irigaray and De Dijn. Kearney's anatheism refers typically to the 'encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to call God' (Kearney 2010:7). Kearney (2010) says furthermore that:

> [*R*]ecognising something 'more' in the stranger than the human is a way of acknowledging a dimension of transcendence in the other that – in part, at least – exceeds the finite presence of the person before me. (p. 182)

The close affinity here of Kearney to Levinas and Derrida is immediately visible, and therefore *transcendence as alterity* (as Stoker typifies Derrida and Levinas's transcendence) should be explicated.

According to Verhoef (2014), transcendence:

> [*A*]s alterity can be described in terms of Derrida's search for the intangible wholly other. Derrida intends the wholly other, of course, to encompass a much broader meaning than simply indicating the biblical God. (p. 264)

But he develops his position by viewing the biblical God, who sees what is secret (Mt 6:4), as absolute alterity, 'as alterity in myself, an alterity that is more internal to me than I myself' (Stoker & Van der Merwe 2012a:20). Derrida says, 'God is the name of the possibility I have of keeping a secret that is visible from the interior but not from the exterior' (Derrida 1992:108). My existence is in other words determined by an appeal that makes itself known in the conscience. It is in the relationship humans have with 'an absolute alterity' from which 'a call goes out'. This absolute alterity is not a supernatural being but experienced in every other who is wholly other. Transcendence concerns thus not only God as the wholly other, but every other is the wholly other (*tout autre est tout autre*). Derrida (1992) says:

> It implies that God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. [...] Every other (in the sense of each other) is every bit other (absolutely other). (p. 78)

With this view, the absolute responsibility to the transcendent or God is generalised to an absolute responsibility that everyone has to others. Derrida makes thus a shift from faith to ethics, because he generalises the wholly other. He argues, in other words, that 'God' is like all others – completely transcendent and completely other. Therefore, he can say that the infinite alterity of the wholly other belongs to every other, to every man and every woman, to every living human being (Derrida 1992:83f., 87). God is everywhere that the wholly other is. In short, transcendence as absolute alterity does not necessarily imply a transcendent God but rather a 'God' or a transcendence who is everywhere where the wholly other is, especially in the ethical situation (Verhoef 2014:264).

This type of transcendence is a correction of radical transcendence, which emphasises the wholly other in mundane reality too little. It is also a correction of radical immanence, which accepts the world as it is through denying the wholly other. The transcendent is no longer found in a 'vertical' relation to God but in a 'horizontal' relation to others as the Other. This alterity of transcendence found in the wholly otherness of the other can be described as a 'horizontal transcendence'. One finds a strong link here with Levinas's understanding of transcendence, whose ideas Kearney developed further in his concept of anatheism. Before this is analysed, some problems with transcendence as alterity must be mentioned, because (again) it questions the balance-seeking position between transcendence and immanence of *immanent transcendence*.

■ Emmanuel Levinas

Westphal argues that in the case of Derrida it is not so much a matter of deconstructing the opposition between immanence and transcendence but rather its relocation. He says Derrida 'challenged the ideal of the autonomous, self-sufficient self, the self-grounding self', but it is in the 'Levinasian turn in the mid-nineties of the last century that the theme of transcendence as

alterity comes to fullest expression' (Westphal 2012:158). Levinas is concerned with 'an intentionality of a whole different type' (Levinas 1969:23), namely, an inverted intentionality in which the same (the self) is addressed by the other, and he thereby takes a linguistic turn. The other that is 'wholly other and cannot be enclosed within my projects, or even within my language' (Westphal 2012:158) is 'the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself, and the relation between same and the other […] is language' (Levinas 1969:39). The other is defined by Levinas in terms of the human face and not as the object of intentional acts. Levinas (1969) says:

> To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object […] the difference between objectivity and transcendence will serve as a general guideline for all the analyses of this work. (p. 49)

This is because in the face to face relation, '[t]he face speaks. The manifestation of the face is already discourse' (Levinas 1969:67).

Levinas emphasises the inverted intentionality as being addressed, as well as language. In his linguistic version of inverted intentionality, the self is commanded, or 'called upon', by the other. What calls me to unconditional and infinite responsibility is not what is said by the other but 'the mere fact that I am addressed by the other' (Westphal 2012:158). Derrida, like Levinas, also defines transcendence in terms of inverted intentionality – my world and I are defined not by my gaze (or discourse) but by that of others. Transcendence is transferred in this process to finite subjects, a 'horizontal transcendence', as mentioned. It is not a move away from transcendence but located in the 'wholly otherness of the other'. This can be interpreted as a move in the direction of hypertranscendence, because (for Derrida and Levinas) immanence is the futile project – 'of incorporating the other's gaze and voice within my conceptual and volitional horizons, immunising the self from any heteronomous interruption, and putting the other in my service' (Westphal 2012:159). Transcendence is in this case the real and full immanence illusory. This is why Westphal, for example,

categorises Derrida and Levinas's alterity as 'radical transcendence'. He says that what Levinas and Derrida do is to transfer divine predicates, including transcendence, from God to the human other. The question is now to what extent Kearney's anatheism develops the same type of transcendence.

■ Transcendence as part of the wager of anatheism

There is an agreement and difference between Kearney and Derrida and Levinas on transcendence. The agreement is in the understanding of transcendence as the alterity of inverted intentionality, of being seen and being addressed by the other. The other is the wholly other that cannot be enclosed within my projects, or even my language, and in that sense it remains the transcendent. Kearney says, for example, that 'recognising something "more" in the stranger than the human is a way of acknowledging a dimension of transcendence in the other' (Kearney 2010:182). In the last paragraph of the book *Anatheism*, Kearney (2010) emphasises this notion again:

> [*A*]natheism is a matter of hope, love, and wonder. Hope that the stranger is more than we expect. Love of the stranger as infinitely other. And wonder at the very strangeness of it all. (p. 185)

This 'wonder' must lead to the 'ethical act of transfiguring our world by caring for the stranger' (Kearney 2010:185). The 'wholly otherness' of the other – the location of transcendence here in the immanent – and the ethical call in the 'face of the other' are clearly in agreement with the Levinasian line of thought.

The difference between Kearney, Levinas and Derrida on transcendence is that Kearney does not want to deconstruct the opposition between immanence and transcendence but rather to opt for a transcendence in immanence. Anatheism 'speaks of "interanimation" between the sacred and the secular but not of fusion or confusion. They are inextricably interconnected but never the *same* thing' (Kearney 2010:166). This nuanced position

of Kearney allows him to keep the concept of transcendence – albeit qualified – distinct and open, rather than attempting to move beyond or past it. It is with this 'openness' of transcendence where Kearney's 'wager' in *Anatheism* comes into play. It is within this open transcendence where he wants to find a post-metaphysical and post-transcendental notion of transcendence that allows a 'hypertranscendence' that is more hopeful than just the 'other as the wholly other' or a 'radical (dogmatic) absolute'. Again, it is in this 'open space' where the wager comes into play, as will be explained.

As mentioned, the Otherness (transcendence) of the 'other as wholly other' remains for Derrida and Levinas a transcendence on a horizontal level. This transcendence as alterity has an atheistic slant (Westphal 2012:161), while anatheism wants to move beyond theism and atheism – it is 'not anti-atheism or anti-theism' (Kearney 2010:57). Anatheism is not a new belief but simply the invitation to 'see what has always been there *a second time around – ana*' (Kearney 2010:167, [*emphasis in original*]). This 'what has always been there' might be called God, and therefore anatheism is about a return to God after God. It is not the same God – oppressive, absolute – as before, but still a 'God' that implies more than the immanent. It is a transcendence in immanence or, to turn it around, an immanence that is open to transcendence on a horizontal and vertical level. Horizontality and verticality should not be understood here in the literal or spatial sense but rather the transcendence can always imply more. It can imply more than the horizontal transcendence of Derrida and Levinas's Otherness as the 'wholly other of every other'. Kearney argues that it should entail more because there is the risk that deconstructive faith can become 'so empty that it loses faith in the here and now altogether' (Kearney 2010:65). Kearney (2010) says that:

> In the name of a universal openness to any other at all (*tout autre est tout autre*), Derrida's 'religion without religion' seems to have no visage to speak of, no embodied presence in space and time. (p. 64)

Anatheism describes a transcendence that is more than the inverted intentionality of Levinas and Derrida, but an opening, a

return to a possible 'radical transcendent' – beyond, below and above us. It is a 'source beyond and beneath oneself, a superfluity one does not possess or manipulate' (Kearney 2010:179). Such a notion of transcendence opens up Kearney's concept of anatheism to the critique of hypertranscendence, metaphysics and ontotheology. There is a risk in considering such a transcendence. This is why in the preceding quote there is immediately a qualification added. This is the reason why most of his book on anatheism explains why anatheism is a wager. Indeed, it is a high risk and an impossibility to return to God after God if God is still the same absolute, dogmatic and oppressive god, but it is a wager to 'see a second time around', to have a look to see if something has perhaps changed. Kearney argues for this wager, because if we do not take the wager, we might lose too much. This needs further explication because it forms an integral part of the motivation and development of anatheism and its transcendence in immanence.

Why does Kearney not opt for 'horizontal' transcendence, alterity, like Levinas and Derrida did, and thereby avoid the critique on radical transcendence? Why the need for ana-*theism*? Why the need for *religion* and a return to *God* after God? Why should one take the *anatheistic* wager? Of course, Kearney qualifies and justifies this wager very extensively in his book and makes a huge effort to move away from 'absolute talk about the absolute' (Kearney 2010:16), but it remains a wager. There are some important reasons why Kearney wants to take this wager, and why the word *theism* remains part of his post-theistic anatheism.

A first reason is that he thinks too much will be lost if spiritual traditions such as religions are lost. The specificities of each spiritual tradition are important for him, because there is 'at the root of each religion, a silent, speechless openness to a Word that surpasses us' (Kearney 2010:176). Each confession, he says, has its own hidden foundation where a drive towards hospitality and healing can be discovered. Derrida, for example, saves the 'Name' but this 'Name does not entail a return to the Named'

(Kearney 2010:65). Kearney does not want to lose 'the Name' and its particularities: '[…] universality is only guaranteed, it seems, at the cost of particularity; it forfeits the flesh and blood singularity of everyday epiphanies […]', so that '[…] faith becomes an empty waiting' (Kearney 2010:64). Therefore, Kearney asks that 'any faith must be prepared to purge itself of the inherent temptation to violently impose its own version of the Absolute on others' (Kearney 2010:175). This is where the wager comes in, because religion too often wants to master, and it is too often 'rendered into dogmatic formulae and ideological manifestos' (Kearney 2010:179). The good of religion, so to speak, should not be lost because of the bad, and one should rather seek to appreciate the uniquely 'powerful' good offered by and found in the particularities of religion.

The second reason is that the alternative to this anatheistic wager is presumably worse for Kearney. He says, 'I have no wish to endorse an empty secularism that merely aestheticises religion by removing its faith content' (Kearney 2010:130). Empty secularism cannot 'purify our desires and free us from idols' (Kearney 2010:171); it cannot accommodate or comprehend 'the feelings, acts and experiences' people have 'in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine' (Kearney 2010:171). Secularity, he says, 'should be humble enough […] to acknowledge the possibility of a certain untranslatable remainder, a surplus of meaning that surpasses the limits of normative rationality' (Kearney 2010:173).

In contrast to this empty secularism (or post-transcendence), anatheism does not want to evacuate 'the sacred from the secular' but wants to retrieve the sacred in the secular (Kearney 2010:130). The sacred, the divine, the godly – the openness to vertical transcendence – is something Kearney does not want to let go, because 'deconstructive faith' is too empty; it loses faith in the here and now altogether (Kearney 2010:65). In other words, the post-metaphysical 'religion without religion' of Derrida and Caputo offers too little for Kearney, who sees it as empty

secularism: too little content, too little inspiration, too little certainty, too little hope. Anatheism wants to suggest therefore the 'possibility of retrieving a rich grammar, vocabulary, and imaginary of radical hospitality from traditions not readily available in an exclusively secular discourse' (Kearney 2010:184). The problem is that 'religion without religion', post-transcendence or deconstructive faith, only elevates, according to Kearney, alterity to the status of undecidable sublimity – signalling the paradox of the undecidable mystery of God as an 'infinite questionability', which is at the same time 'endlessly questionable' (Manoussakis 2006a:xvii).

It is in this light that Kearney wants to retrieve and reappropriate God as presence and therefore he moves away from the radical hermeneutics of Derrida (Caputo) to a more Romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher through his own diacritical hermeneutics. This entails reinterpreting, for example, rituals, liturgies and traditions. This is all part of the anatheistic wager, of the return to God after God, of the purging of faith from the illusions of power, expiation and escape (Kearney 2010:171). To find an openness for transcendence in immanence is part of the anatheistic wager. It is a delicate balancing act between transcendence and immanence with real risks if one leans to either side. The tension in Kearney's work is clear on this point. On the one hand, there is the need to have something more than 'religion without religion', more than faith without content, more than empty secularism. The need is for religion with its specificities, with its own foundation and spiritual depth, with its Word, rituals, liturgies and traditions, or as formulated earlier: a notion of theism in anatheism, radical or 'vertical' transcendence. But on the other hand there is the continuous move away from dogmatic formula, a refusal of all absolute talk about the absolute and especially an opposition to religions that violently impose their own view of the Absolute on others. Religion should thus have content (it cannot be empty secularism), but on the other hand it should not be taken too seriously, too dogmatically. The question, of course, is whether this is possible.

Can one have religion with only a 'little bit of religion'? When is the particularity, the content of the religion too much?

The tension is something Kearney is of course aware of and it is nearly impossible to avoid or to solve. Even just to say the 'absolute requires pluralism to avoid absolutism' (Kearney 2010:xiv) is already referring to the absolute. This yes and no for religion, for God and for transcendence, of anatheism, links to my second question.

While it is true that some sources beyond and beneath ourselves for hospitality and love can be found in religion, without understanding one's religion as the exclusive access to the Absolute, the question, my second question, remains: Can we not perhaps find in secularism the same fulfilment, inspiration, hospitality and meaning such as that which religions offer, and thereby avoid the risk of hypertranscendence and Absolutism? Is it not better to speak of 'religion without religion', to move so to speak away from the specificities of religion altogether and to avoid the risky wager of anatheism, to embrace a more horizontal transcendence? Is this risk of the anatheistic wager necessary or worth taking? Perhaps, there are ways in which the notion of transcendence can be kept 'open' so that it can fulfil many of the same roles ascribed to it in the book *Anatheism,* for example, Jean-Luc Nancy's transimmanence (Verhoef 2016:12–13) and Ludwig Binswanger's phenomenology of love (Schrijvers 2016:223–244).

With these questions I am not promoting an antitheistic stance. Rather, I want to know if the wager is necessary. Is secularism, or at least horizontal transcendence, really that empty? Is there not another way in which we can respect the unfathomable, the mysterious, the poetic, the surplus of meaning that we find in this life (Kearney 2010:174)?

■ Conclusion

The renewed interest in transcendence in the post-metaphysical era is ironic. This ironic recurring appearance of transcendence

can be described – using Kearney's concept of anatheism – as *Anatranscandere*: returning to the *beyond* after the *beyond*. In a way this is what Kearney attempts with his book *Anatheism*, but here 'theism' is the 'beyond', the transcendent. However, it is not that simple. Kearney is not arguing for a theistic position. He is not arguing for a traditional concept of transcendence either. What he wants to do is find 'a third way beyond the extremes of dogmatic theism and militant atheism', and a middle way between transcendence and immanence. The type of transcendence presented by his concept of anatheism entails an 'immanent transcendence', a delicate middle position.

Kearney formulates this transcendence of anatheism very carefully so that it steers clear of the dangers of hypertranscendence and post-transcendence – the two main tendencies in the contemporary debate on transcendence. Although Kearney's position has a very strong affinity with panentheism, it would not do justice to his work to reduce anatheism's immanent transcendence to panentheism or to mere supernaturalism. There is more to the transcendence, more particularity and specificities, apart from the theism of anatheism. It is also somewhat different from the immanent transcendence of Paul Tillich, which might be read as an inclination towards immanence. Neither is it a 'pure' form of radical transcendence, because it remains connected to the immanent mundane world.

The book *Anatheism* (2011) by Kearney draws on Levinas and Derrida to a large extent, as well as on biblical materials in order to make 'hospitality to the stranger a central theistic virtue' (Westphal 2012:fn.12, 130). One may then ask to what extent Kearney uses Levinas and Derrida's concept of transcendence, or rather alterity, as inverted intentionality. It is here that Kearney makes an interesting and risky move: he makes provision in his concept of immanent transcendence for more of the 'horizontal' than Levinas and Derrida do. His transcendence is open to a more radical, 'vertical', theistic transcendence, but in a

qualified way. It is here where the wager of anatheism crucially comes into play. Kearney is aware of the risks associated with this wager, but he gives good reasons why he still opts for this more open, vertical transcendence.

Although I have raised some critical questions related to this 'vertical' transcendence of Kearney, his attempt to find space for the particular of religions, without moving back to traditional (dogmatic) views of God and religion, must be appreciated. The philosopher William Desmond's thoughts in his *God and the Between* (2008) stand very much in the same trajectory and it creates fruitful space for discussion between philosophy and theology (Verhoef 2012:425–426).[75]

Anatheism is not an attempt at Christian apologetics. Kearney makes this very clear when he says anatheism opposes triumphal theism (and militant antitheism). It is also not little more than an attempt to move away from the concept of theism. In this regard, the implied transcendence of anatheism is also not a defence or rehabilitation of traditional transcendence. Neither is it a post-transcendence. As anatheism is a nuanced way of saying 'returning to God after God', its implied transcendence is also a very nuanced way of saying 'returning to the *beyond* after the *beyond*' – *Anatranscandere*. For both a wager is involved, but in both cases more might be gained than lost.

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75. The influence of Kearney's *Anatheism* on the relation between philosophy and theology is tremendous if one just looks at all the publications that have resulted. In this edited volume, the theologian Rian Venter writes for example about 'A Trinitarian theologian in conversation with Richard Kearney' (Venter 2018).

Response to Richard Kearney's *Anatheism:* Anatheism and holy folly

Johann-Albrecht Meylahn ⓘ
Department of Practical Theology
Faculty of Theology and Religion
University of Pretoria
South Africa

■ Introduction

In this chapter, which is based on a paper delivered in response to Richard Kearney's book *Anatheism*, at a conference in conversation with Kearney, I will specifically focus on *Anatheism*, which I have read numerous times, and each time its poetics draws me into its wager and imagination. It challenges, while inspiring me. It has given me words and provided me with a language with which to think my own faith in a post-metaphysical figuration.

■ The possibility of the book *Anatheism*

From my own struggle for language (configuration) to express my faith or my unfaith, my primary question is about the possibility of such a book. A book, a written text, interpreted as an attempt to capture (configure) that which is believed to be beyond capture: the Other, the beyond figuration, the non-figurable (the transcendent, perhaps). However, this other, even if it is believed to be absolutely other, is only present (even in its absence), is only spoken of, which is only possible in and through figuration. In other words, even that which is believed to be beyond figuration is and can only be thought or contemplated in figuration. This leaves one with nothing but figurations (Derrida 1997:158) and perhaps the non-figurable, but any mention or thought or contemplation of the non-figurable is still a figuration. A book (figuration) is a response, a response to an imagined call, a response to a pathos as Waldenfels (2006) might argue. In that sense, the book, as any figuration, stands in and with the *here I am*. The *here I am* of *Dasein*, of being present, interpreted as the response to the call and the responsibility taken or given for the call. *Dasein* (here I am) in responsibility to the call that is imagined or believed is to be calling one. The book, writing, con-figuration is an imaginative response to the call in which the *imagined* caller is given a specific *embodiment* and in relation to that embodiment the author (implied or narrator), as well as the reader (implied or refigured), is offered the space for individuation (to become subject): to be embodied so as to be able to respond with the words: *Here I am*.

In response, in responsibility to this pathos or call, the world is populated with bodies and thus the world is carried out as embodied, and all this in response and/or in responsibility to an imagined call (other).

■ Saving the name 'God'

The call is first identified (in the mode of imagination), as Kearney argues, 'it reminds us that religions are imaginary works, even if what they witness may be transcendent and true' (Kearney 2010:14). It is in this fictive mode that God is saved from the literal; as Kearney argues, the figural saves God from the literal (Kearney 2010:14). The call is identified, given a name – interpreted (imagined) as a stranger, for example, but all this happens in the response and *as* the response (fiction) in the figuration. Kearney seems to argue something similar in reference to Jacques Derrida when he says, 'unpredictable Other par excellence who calls the text forth and is called forth by the text' (Kearney 2010:106). Yet, Kearney (2010) specifically argues that *Anatheism* is not a fiction:

> I do not mean to equate the anatheist wager with fiction. If poetics invites a 'willing suspension' of first belief and disbelief, it neither includes nor excludes a leap of second faith. (p. 15)

The main reason why it is not a fiction for him is that such a fiction would not include nor exclude the leap of a second faith (Kearney 2010):

> The fictive *as if* is not the same as the anatheist *as* (where I see the stranger as divine); though the poetical may, as noted, serve as a powerful prelude to the creedal for those who so choose. In fact, I would go further and say that without some poetic release into a free variation of possibles, the return to God beyond God is virtually impossible. (p. 15)

Kearney contrasts a creedal *as* to the fictive *as if*, maybe a way to save the name *God*; I am specifically referring to Derrida's (1995: 35–85) essay, 'Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)', where he unpacks the saving of the name, and specifically the name 'God', where the name 'God' is saved as well as God is saved from idolatry.

It is this move beyond the fictive *as if* towards the *as* that I would like to question, that is, the possibility of the non-fictive *as*.

Why not embrace the fictive *as if* wholeheartedly? A love for literature and love (desire *for* the other *in* the desire *of* the other) as literature. In the three modern novels Kearney refers to, he leaves the creedal *as* to the possible re-figuration in the reader (implied or actual) rather than pre-*scrib*ing (pre-writing) it in the pre-figuration (in the implied author or narrator) or in the configuration of a novel,[76] and yet it seems that in his own book (*Anatheism*) he inscribes it. What would be the difference between a creedal *as* and the dogmatic it *has-to-be-thus*?

In relation to the three novels, Kearney leaves the possibility for creedal *as* to the reader.[77] My question, should it not be left there – the text or even texts in general, remaining sacramentally open, as Kearney refers to the texts of Proust, Joyce and Woolf as sacramental texts[78] – texts remaining Messianically expectant to the *to come*?

■ The impossibility of the book *Anatheism*

Kearney argues that *Anatheism* is not a fiction. What is it then? Is it then a philosophical–theological book as it is not a novel, a creedal book as it is not a fiction?

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76. Ricoeur goes so far as to construe the double surrender of (1) the author to the implied author (or narrator) and of (2) the implied author to the reader, as an act of kenotic service to the other that ultimately amounts to a transubstantiation of the author into reader: 'Whereas the real author effaces himself in the implied author, the implied reader takes on substance in the real reader'. In short, the author agrees to die so that the reader may be born (Kearney 2010:106).

77. This triadic model of epiphany – celebrated in the sacrament of word-made-flesh – always implies rebirth. It constitutes an event of semantic reinvention where the *impossible* is transfigured into the new *possible* (Kearney 2010:109).

78. Kearney reflecting and Marcel Proust's text, *In Search of Lost Time*, 'The ultimate definition, perhaps, of an open text. Or what we might call – taking our cue from Merleau-Ponty's model of Eucharistic reversibility – a sacramental text' (Kearney 2010:117).

I would like to talk about the impossibility of such a non-fictive book. A book, a theological–philosophical book about being hospitable to the stranger, cannot itself be hospitable to the stranger and therefore the book's possibility denies the book's message.

A book, like a *civitas*, or like the *polis*, is created through establishing limits on hospitality and denying hospitality to some. The beauty of the three novels Kearney mentioned is their sacramental character, where the writing (configuration) remains consciously fictive and thereby remains an invitation to respond theistically as faithful subjects or atheistically as faithful subjects. The wager is not closed but left open. My argument, in full appreciation of the book, is that the book failed in its intention and necessarily so, as it could not but fail. In a book, things are configured, inscribed, entombed and cursed to their death. In this specific book, the Other, who is every Other – see Derrida (1995:76), who argues that 'every other is wholly other (*tout autre est tout autre*)' – has been entombed in the Stranger, with very good reasons given, good arguments offered to substantiate the Other as Stranger. But thereby the Other, who is every other, is entombed, is configured as Stranger. In the book *Anatheism*, the Other as Stranger is systematically developed and argued from an interfaith perspective, hermeneutically drawn from the sacred texts of the three great monotheisms, traversed with the texts of great fathers of suspicion and the holy texts of atheism, so as to *present* to the reader a postmodern configuration of faith, which is a faith, if I might add, that is politically correct for the times we are living in. Would anatheism not be the perfect state-religion of the liberal–intellectual centre of the European Union, as it brings together the best (politically acceptable) of the three monotheisms with the ethics and criticisms of the fathers of suspicion and thereby bringing together what has shaped and formed contemporary Western European thought?

◼ The anatheist wager

Kearney develops his anatheist wager in five movements: imagination, humour, commitment (truth), discernment and hospitality (Kearney 2010:40ff.). In my interpretation, the wager is developed in the first two, but I believe the wager is destroyed in the next two movements. The last movement creates a possibility for a return to the wager. I will not unpack all five movements but will only focus on the two movements where I believe the wager is lost.

◼ Commitment

In the third movement, Kearney turns to commitment (truth); I place 'truth' in brackets, as it is a commitment, a betrothal to truth, in a sense perhaps like Badiou's subjects of truth: the faithful subject (Badiou 2009:53f.). That through commitment, betrothal, truth is revealed as *facere veritatem*, where one does not know the truth but lives the truth (Kearney 2010:44). It is exactly this identifiable truth in action, through the subject of truth that makes a book possible, that commits the book to a certain *as* (configuration), no longer the *as if* of a fiction. Through commitment the *as if* of fiction is transformed into the *as* of a book, holy book, the *as* that binds a community together (*religare*), the *as* that makes the *polis*, or a congregation of the faithful, a possibility. My concern is with the victims of such subjects of truth, the victims created through the committed faithful subjects, namely, those labelled as the uncommitted. Or let me rather say those committed (labelled) by the committed (faithful subjects) to being uncommitted. Those who are committed by the subjects of truth to the realm or the non-realm of the uncommitted through the actions of truth of the faithful subjects, thereby truth is saved in action, while the uncommitted are lost and doomed.

◼ Discernment

Discernment is the opposite of a leap of faith and rather a wise choice (Kearney 2010):

> We do not, as Ignatius knew, consent to just any kind of Other simply because they are other. And this is where we take issue not only with Kierkegaard and the fideists but also with Derrida and the deconstructionists for whom 'every other is every other' (*tout autre est tout autre*). Not every stranger is divine. (p. 44)

I would argue that every other is every other and only becomes divine or evil in the imaginative response of the '*here I am*'.

In Woolf's text, every other is not the stranger but the 'Real', and the Real is interpreted as divine. Of the three modern novelists, Joyce, Proust and Woolf, all three turn towards a certain sanctification of the Real, sacramentalisation of the Real – materialism as divine, the given as divine, the gift as sacred. In that sense, they are all three true modern novels. Schleiermacher (2001:44) in his understanding of religion argues that religion should not be understood as metaphysics or ethics but in and as the affect that *das Universum* has on humans, in the experience of infinitude. Religion as the affect the Real, *das Universum*, has on people.

◼ Commitment into community and thereby exclusion of the non-committed

Indeed, how can one not be at home and break bread with Joyce, Proust and Woolf? Are we not all children of modernity, seeking a non-religious religion that can bind us (*religare*) into the home where we break bread and drink wine, Eucharistically celebrate the 'Real Presence', the transubstantiation of the immanent into a transcendent sacred, or the transcendent into a sacred immanent? In a sense, anatheism is the religion of our late modern

existence that speaks to our prefiguration and offers us a configuration in which to refigure ourselves, post-metaphysically and beautifully done. Its language is truly the Eucharist of re-figuration, of re-birth offered and given for us, thereby binding (*religare*) me into a new community, a new *polis*. A *polis* of all those of uncertain faith, the subjects of a material or immanent transcendental truth, a community (or maybe even a church) of the anatheists – the liberal and intellectual centre of Europe.

Is that not the danger with any move towards commitment? Should one not rather remain with imagination and humour, as a certain love of literature? A community of literati, lovers of literature and literature as love (desire for the other in the desire of the other). My suggestion is a more radical turn to literature *as if* literature (fiction) is all there is.

■ Discernment with the knowledge of good and evil, death and life

How to *discern* the difference between the other who kills and the other who brings life? How to know if the other who kills is not the one who brings life? This knowledge that enables discernment between the good other and the bad other – is that not a return to the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, when Eve and Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Is such discerning knowledge not the root cause of all evil: sin?

Does it change anything to call the moment of discernment (Kearney 2010):

> [*A*] matter of prereflective carnal response to the advent of the Other before it becomes a matter of reflective cognitive evaluation? The body already 'ponders' in dia-logue with the stranger. (p. 45)

The body is none other than the embodiment into primary, secondary, tertiary retentions and protentions (cf. Stiegler 2014:87) that predetermine or prereflect judgement. This is similar to Kearney's argument, '[w]hich is why cognition of the

stranger is always a matter of re-cognition' (Kearney 2010:45). If I can discern a friend from a fiend how different am I from the tax collectors who love their friends and families and hate their enemies (Mt 5:46)? Is the wager of faith and grace not destroyed through this discernment, as the choice is no longer a choice, but a logical outworking of my pre-figuration of my pre-cognition and a survival instinct?

■ Is the wager, the wager between friend and foe?

It is the embodied pre-figuration that judges, that sees the stranger as enemy come to destroy the city, the home, the configuration. There is no wager, because the pre-figuration, or embodied judgement, is knowledge and therefore there is no choice but the logical outworking of a judgement (pre-reflective judgement). Is the wager not perhaps the wager of death, the wager of destruction, the wager of the crucifixion? The wager that *knows* the enemy will destroy, the guest invited will become host and thereby be the enemy that takes my home and yet still inviting the enemy as guest in the full knowledge that all will be destroyed. The wager is in not knowing what that destruction means, the impossibility of knowing if the death (absolute not-knowing), the crucifixion, is nihilism or liberation and the possibility of resurrection? A wager, a choice, a decision can only be made in absolute non-knowledge, that is in death. The moment there is knowledge, discernment, there is no longer a choice or a wager, but logic.

A friendly stranger who brings joy is a friend, but the challenge is to love enemies. It is a love of death that is our only true friend, but as enemy. The wager: this can end in death and destruction or liberation and new life, but that is beyond our knowledge. It is in death, in the death of knowledge, that there is a wager. Death is the only wager of truly non-knowing. Is death my enemy or is death my only true friend? In this sense is

death not the ultimate other? Although even with death there is pre-figuration or re-cognition, which will determine if death is seen as friend or foe. Thus, death can easily be identified as friend or as foe. Yet, the radical discipleship is to love the enemy. Love the foe, love the destruction of death; the wager has then shifted not from friend or foe, but the embracing of death as enemy, yet in love and the unknown consequences thereof. That is for me where the wager lies. Is death the final nihilism or is death the crucifixion and the hope of resurrection?

But here I have myself moved beyond the *perhaps*, transfigured a fiction into creedal knowledge whereby to clearly identify death as my gambling friend–enemy.

■ Hospitality

The problem with *con*-figuration is that the subject and the other are both *conned*. Thus, I remain with imagination and irony: the tragic-comedy of being conned. Respond in laughter like Sarah and call our configurations Isaac (laughter), but who in turn called his son (configuration) Jacob, who after conning his father and his brother, meets darkness and, struggling with an unknown darkness (shadow), is reconfigured as Israel (the one who struggles with God-shadow).

A fool and a joker am I, who has fallen, has been conned, by none other than my own imagination: my response to an imagined call. In the end, only fools remain, and perhaps some holy fools, who wager not God or truth but themselves and their sanity and/or vanity and thereby protect or save the name 'God' and save all but the name (the fiction) God. God *as* fiction (literature), yet embodied in the immanence of *Dasein*'s figuration, or rather God *as if* fiction. Embodied in the immanence of *Dasein*'s response to the imagined call: embodied together with and in the *here I am*, and in this year of 500 years after the Reformation, give it a Lutheran twist – *Here I stand, and can do no other*!

Chapter 6

Kearney between poles: Is too much lost in the middle?

Yolande Steenkamp ⓘ
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

■ Introduction

To what degree may we hold it possible that one may be, existentially and simultaneously, 'both/and'? Isn't such a wager somewhat grandiose, when our lived realities repeatedly confront us with one of two scenarios: either that of polar opposites continually forcing each other into ever more extreme versions of themselves, or with the passifying, even stifling middle ground of compromise, where the strange uniqueness of both realities are sacrificed for the sake of apparent commonality?

Richard Kearney, in his work, and I would venture in his person as well, is someone who habitually strives to bring opposites into dialogue. Or, one could say, build a house with many rooms, where the strangeness of polar opposites may be hosted as guests in a space for dialogue. As such, he has been referred to as a 'philosopher of middle ways' (cf. Gregor 2008:148).

It is this space in between polar opposites that we will explore in this paper – or rather, 'third space' – as it has taken form in virtually every aspect of Kearney's philosophy. Dialogue between opposing ends, views or persons is a fundamental point of departure that has informed everything from his phenomenology and hermeneutics to his philosophy of religion. I hope to show that this third space, as envisioned and carved out by Kearney, is not a point located at equal distances between opposing viewpoints. It is in fact not a static point at all but may be better understood as a way, for it traverses and creates the possibility of alternative living spaces. It continually visits opposing viewpoints, remains informed by them and seeks to narrate new worlds where the otherly strange may become strangely at home.

■ Meeting Richard Kearney

Before we venture into this task, let us pause to consider where our guest, living philosopher in the flesh, 'speaks from'. In his fairly recent *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, Kearney sets his interest in the God debate in a context of politics, religious background and philosophy (2011:xi–xvii). Having grown up in Ireland during the 30-year period of religious violence, Kearney was witness not only to the most arrogant forms of religious triumphalism on the one hand but also to religiously motivated ecumenical dialogues and peace efforts on the other. In this context, Glenstal Abbey, where he studied for five years, proved a lasting influence with its Benedictine commitment to uncompromising hospitality to the stranger. Kearney's very first exposure to otherness was in his childhood home, however. Concerning his spiritual heritage, he speaks of a 'dual belonging' (Kearney 2011:xiv). His upbringing in a

devout but liberal Catholic Irish family, fostering a deep sense of sacramental spirituality, was supplemented by the more critical consciousness of his Protestant maternal family (Kearney 2011:xiv). This same sense of double belonging was reinforced by Catholic and Protestant artists from Northern Ireland who reimagined their stories from the 'other side', how 'Catholics and Protestants got into each others' minds, swapped stories, and began to feel what the "enemy" felt' (Kearney 2011:xiv). This sort of interreligious hospitality only expanded through Kearney's dialogues with Jewish thinkers (e.g. Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida), the Islamic tradition and finally beyond the three Abrahamic faiths through his encounters with Buddhist and Hindu thinkers (e.g. Choqui Nyma and Swami Tyagananda) (Kearney 2011:xiv–xv). Religiously, spiritually and artistically, then, Kearney has traversed many boundaries and extended many confessional circles.[79]

In some ways, Kearney is himself a stranger. An Irish thinker, yet now resident in the USA, he teaches philosophy at Boston College. The author of radical hospitality has thus become a witnessing voice in a land that elects leaders whose most imaginative approach to the stranger in our midst is to build a wall to keep them out. We have come a full circle, and the growing boy who found that life may be lived in dialogue with what others find irreconcilably strange now embodies the strange other, in the form of his philosophy, to the land who hosts him as guest. As such, he speaks from both sides of various spaces as much as from both sides of the North-Atlantic: a prolific author whose work traverses boundaries and covers interests ranging from philosophy, theology and religious studies to politics, literary theory, aesthetics, even including works of poetry and fiction (Gregor 2008:147; cf. Ward 2005:369).

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79. Kearney's philosophical endeavours are likewise characterised by a commitment to dialogue between diverse approaches. In this, he follows in the example of Paul Ricoeur, his supervisor for his doctoral studies, who published more than 30 major works during his lifetime that ranged from 'existentialism and phenomenology to psychoanalysis, politics, religion, and the theory of language' (Kearney 2005b:4).

■ Between polar opposites: An overview of some of Kearney's 'third ways'

For the sake of those less familiar with Kearney's work, I will attempt to provide everyone a chance to dip their toes into just what is meant by these middle ways I keep referring to. Because it impacts on all his work, I will provide a brief overview of Kearney's hermeneutical 'third way'. We will then move on to an unfairly brief treatment of Kearney's third way between apophatic and cataphatic theology and how this relates to his third way between onto-theology and eschatology, namely, the God Who May Be, or the God of *posse*. We will remain within the larger framework of Kearney's hermeneutics of religion for our final section, which will be a slightly more in-depth treatment of how Kearney's phenomenology of the Other informs his reimagination of God as an ethical response, and specifically in such a way that it maps out a third way between transcendence and immanence.

■ Between romantic and critical interpretation: Diacritical hermeneutics[80]

Kearney navigates between *romantic* and *radical* hermeneutics – an approach that he terms 'diacritical hermeneutics' (Kearney 2003:17). By *romantic hermeneutics*, Kearney (2003) means:

> [*T*]he view – endorsed by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer – that the purpose of philosophical interpretation is to unite the consciousness of one subject with that of the other. This process is called 'appropriation' which in the German, *Aneignung*, means *becoming one with*. (p. 17)

Radical hermeneutics, on the other hand, refers for Kearney to Caputo's rejection of the 'model of appropriation, insisting on the

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80. This section has been reworked from a previous overview of Kearney's thought in the author's master of theology dissertation (Steenkamp 2012), later published by Scholarium (Steenkamp 2014:105–106).

unmediatable and ultimately "sublime" nature of alterity' – an approach inspired by the deconstructive turn of Derrida, Blanchot and Lyotard (Kearney 2003):

> To this end Caputo promotes the 'hyperbolic hypothesis' of Levinas and Derrida, defined as an 'unphenomenological model' in which 'an invisible infinity comes over me and demands everything of me, the food out of my mouth' – a new model 'for the friend and for politics, which have always been understood in *egalitarian* terms'. In this light, radical hermeneutics invokes an irreducible dissymmetry of self and other. (p. 17)

In his proposed diacritical hermeneutics, as a third way to traverse these polar opposites, Kearney follows in the direction chartered by Ricoeur, whom he compliments as having developed his own brand of philosophical hermeneutics through his much-noted ability to negotiate between competing schools of thought (Kearney 2005a):

> Determined to find a path between a) the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Gadamer and b) the more radical hermeneutics of the deconstruction (Derrida, Caputo) and critical theory (Habermas), Ricoeur endeavoured to chart a middle way that combined both the empathy and conviction of the former and the suspicion and detachment of the latter. He himself never gave a name to this third path (he was wary of founding a new ideology or -ism). But I think we would not be far wrong in naming it dialogical or diacritical hermeneutics. There were not many major figures in contemporary thought – Husserl, Freud, Rawls, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Austen, Arendt, Jaspers, Marcel, Habermas, Levinas, Derrida – with whom he did not engage in robust debate. (p. 4)

Kearney's approach to hermeneutics therefore provides us with a first glimpse of how his attempted middle ways traverse polar opposites and also provides us with a basis on which to consider the way he applies his mediating approach to philosophy of religion.[81]

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81. As Nichols has remarked on Kearney's approach to hermeneutics, and specifically how he has applied it to his proposal of God as *posse*, '[…] this new dialectic has raised the bar for hermeneutic discourse one new level, both forbidding and demanding a resolution at

Between apophatic and cataphatic theology: Hermeneutics of religion[82]

Let us now explore how diacritical hermeneutics, and specifically Kearney's appreciation for religious metaphor, enables a third way for a hermeneutics of religion between that of apophatic and cataphatic theology. In this regard, he borrows, in his own words, 'liberally' from Ricoeur's notion of 'semantic augmentation': the 'surplus of meaning' that may result from inventive hermeneutic readings of religious texts, giving rise to a 'rich play of metaphoricity' (Kearney 2001:7).[83] Contrary to the narrowly platonising use of allegory, where meaning is transferred only vertically from the sensible to the intelligible, and from the human to the divine, Ricoeur's new model of religious hermeneutics regains some of the original etymological charge of metaphor as *meta-phora* [to transfer, transit, carry across], so that the production of metaphorical meaning becomes a two-way movement – 'like Jacob's ladder with angels passing up and down' (Kearney 2001:7). Greater awareness of the fertile metaphorical interplay at work in religious texts enables the

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(footnote 81 continues...)

the same time' (Nichols 2006:115). He remarks that the sheer weight of the task Kearney has laid on himself would make it understandable if his weight shifts to one or other side, at times. Indeed, what Kearney attempts in terms of a hermeneutics of religion *is* the impossible possible, so that Nichols suggests, later on (Nichols 2006:125): 'to those who enter the orbit of Kearney's discourse that his diacritical hermeneutics, despite the attempt to remain "in between" romantic and radical hermeneutics, must necessarily lean more closely to the romantic side if it is to retain the possibility of having a *real* God-who-may-be. One could even say that diacritical hermeneutics *is* a version of romantic hermeneutics, but one that strives with incessant vigilance to remember its own potential for violent domination.'

82. This section has been reworked from a previous overview of Kearney's thought in the author's master of theology dissertation (Steenkamp 2012), later published by Scholarium (Steenkamp 2014:103–105, 108–111).

83. To illustrate, Kearney refers to Ricoeur's discussion of hermeneutic interpretations of the Song of Songs. Here Ricoeur makes the point that, because no single writing or reading could ever capture the meaning of divine desire referred to in this textual tradition, it is by interanimating this text with other texts from both scripture and the later traditions of interpretation 'that we can begin to approximate to some notion of divine desire with live metaphors that conjoin heterogeneous semantic fields' (Kearney 2001:7).

hermeneutic retrieval of certain lost meanings 'within and between (*metaxy*) the texts themselves' (Kearney 2001:8).[84]

For Kearney the theological value of this 'metaphorising role of hermeneutic mediation' lies in the fact that it steers a middle way through the apophatic[85] and cataphatic[86] approaches to God. Traversing this frontier zone where the human imagination uses stories, parables and images to think the unthinkable and to say something about the unsayable, Kearney attempts to navigate a third way between the poles of negative and onto-theology. Here, God is not approached as being or as non-being but as the possibility-to-be, and where the intersecting of metaphors disclose latent and new meaning (Kearney 2001:8).[87]

Kearney's phenomenologico-hermeneutical exploration of the topic of the God-who-may-be is best understood as an

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84. Kearney illustrates by quoting Ricoeur's example of the two lovers in the Song of Songs at length, 'The idea of an intersecting metaphor invites us to consider the different and original regions of love, each with its symbolic play. On the one side, the divine love is invested in the Covenant with Israel and later in the Christic bond, along with its absolutely original nuptial metaphorics; on the other, there is human love invested in the erotic bond and its equally original metaphorics, which transforms the body into something like a landscape'. The double 'seeing as' of intersecting metaphors then finds itself as the source of the 'saying otherwise' (Ricoeur 1998:302–303 in Kearney 2001:7–8). Ricoeur concludes from this that it is the mark of the, 'power of love to be able to move in both senses along the ascending and descending spiral of metaphor, allowing in this way for every level of the emotional investment of love to signify, to intersignify every other level' (Ricoeur 1998:302–303 in Kearney 2001:8). The sheer diversity of ways for metaphorising the desire of God points to the fact that none can claim superiority to the other, and that it is precisely from 'the productive friction of the "intersignification" that some transfer (*metaphora*) of meaning is eventually, if always tentatively, achieved' (Kearney 2001:8).

85. The apophatic tradition, with its negative theologians like Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius, Levinas, Derrida and Marion, 'stresses the impossibility of saying anything meaningful about God', so that God is placed too far beyond being (Kearney 2001:8).

86. The cataphatic tradition risks embracing overly positive or foundationalist propositions when talking about God, so that God is sometimes reduced to being – 'either as the most general or highest being: *ontos on – theion*' (Kearney 2001:8).

87. In terms of the desire of God that Kearney has been exploring as illustration in the Song of Songs, we here 'encounter the nuptial nexus where divine and human desires overlap. The still point of the turning world where the timeless crosses time' (Kearney 2001:8).

attempt to poetically say the unsayable and thus engage the radical schools of thought that emphasise the otherness of alterity to the point where it becomes irredeemably strange. Kearney engages hermeneutically the textual treasure chest of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as works of literature, with the freedom that his philosophical point of departure lends him. His aim in this venture is not to suggest a final or even authoritative interpretation, but rather to engage poetically in an act of reinterpretation or, more aptly, reimagination – an act that can be described as applying Ricoeur's 'semantic innovation' and 'surplus of meaning' in the field of Philosophy of Religion.

Ricoeur advances a hermeneutic dialectic that 'passes through the detour of the text in the name of something beyond it – what he calls the "matter of the text"', and that brings us to the ontological potential of a text: 'the ontological horizon of world-meaning opened up by the textual workings of language' (Kearney 2004):

> This ultimate reference – to a world not merely represented by the text but disclosed by the text – brings us beyond epistemology to ontology. Thus the ultimate horizon of Ricoeur's work remains, from beginning to end, the horizon of being which signals to us obliquely and incompletely: a promised land but never an occupied one. We encounter here a truncated ontology – provisional, tentative, exploratory. And this limitation on the pretensions of speculative reason signals for Ricoeur a renunciation of Hegel and all other versions of systematic closure. The interpretation of being is always something begun, but never completed. (p. 4)

This detour into the hermeneutic philosophy of Kearney's mentor, as explained by Kearney, helps us to gain a better understanding of what Kearney attempts – and does not attempt – through his hermeneutics of religion. Ricoeur has namely led us beyond both Husserl's understanding of meaning as some essence to be intuited and Kant's idea that it is a transcendental condition of possibility to be reflected upon, and he has in effect freed the text from the circuit of internal reflection, opening it to 'intersubjective horizons of language and history', which 'involves

a "long" intersubjective detour through the sedimented horizons of history and tradition' (Kearney 2004:4). Kearney's attention to the 'second-order reference' that hermeneutics produces *in front of the text* – and he speaks about God to a postmodern world – precludes the idealist claim of occupying an absolute or total standpoint, and yet still involves *someone saying something to someone about something* (Kearney 2004:4–5). Entering into his poetical exploration of biblical narratives, Kearney rereads these ancient symbols in a way that produces new worlds of possibility.

■ Between transcendence and immanence: Kearney's quasi-phenomenology of Otherness and ethics as integrating force of Kearney's hermeneutics[88]

We come now to Kearney's middle way between transcendence and immanence. We will treat this attempt at dialectics in far greater detail than the two examples above, and as such this attempt at creating a philosophical third space will serve as our most extensive illustration of how middle ways function in Kearney's philosophy.

Kearney portrays the way in which the '[O]ther' and the 'same', God and humankind, transcendence and immanence can be related together, in ethical terms, denying the deconstructionist notion that human consciousness has no access to the radically 'Other' (Masterson 2008:258). Furthermore, rejecting onto-theology in favour of eschatology (Masterson 2008):

> Kearney envisages the divine as an ethically enabling possibility. This possibility, he claims, enables us to achieve, beyond our

88. This section has been reworked from a previous overview of Kearney's thought in the author's master of divinity dissertation (Steenkamp 2011:50–57) and her master of theology dissertation (Steenkamp 2012), later published by Scholarium (Steenkamp 2014:131–133).

> own intrinsic resources, an ethical order of justice and love through which the kingdom of God – the God Who May Be – is accomplished. There is a co-relativity between the divine as enabling possibility and humanity which accomplishes this possibility. (p. 247)

For Kearney, God is present as transfiguring, desiring, poeticising and possibilising, where transfiguring is something that God does to us even as we do it to God through our creations of art, justice and love. Kearney pictures God as the possibility enabling humans to respond ethically to an eschatological call (Masterson 2008:249). This transcendent deity is perceived by human consciousness, though, as a beckoning possibility of ethical existence rather than some supreme Being (Masterson 2008:256), so that any encounter with the true God must of necessity invite humans to sensitivity and care of their neighbours (Bloechl 2005:733).[89] From his phenomenological perspective, avoiding questions of ontology, the point of speaking of God as 'possible and possibilising *eschaton* or finality of human aspiration, who is affirmed precisely as the not yet accomplished fulfilment of ethico-religious desire', becomes clear. God encounters humans as the 'impossible-possible,' 'transcending yet transfiguring human capacity by enabling it to achieve a kingdom of justice and love beyond its intrinsic own resources' (Masterson 2008:259). Eschatology flows back into ethics, for the God that arrives as transformative possibility from the eschatological future turns the attention to the other persons in the world (Bloechl 2005:733). I will now briefly attempt to provide an overview – as briefly as possible – of how Kearney's phenomenology of Otherness functions in this larger hermeneutics of religion.

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89. Reprinted in Manoussakis (2006a:127–138, 408).

■ The Other

The problematic of the Other is the question of how to (Manoussakis 2006b):

> [*T*]hink 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. (p. xviii)

Kearney's approach to this dilemma is to seek a middle way between the unmediated, uncritical rapport with the Other (Levinas' infinity, Derrida's *différance* and Caputo's *khora*) and the rigid, outdated onto-theological and metaphysical conceptions (Manoussakis 2006b:xix).[90] We will examine Kearney's approach to this conundrum by turning to his exploration in *The God Who May Be* of the theme of transfiguration in terms of a phenomenology of the persona – an approach in which he 'draws liberally from post-Heideggerian accounts of the self-other relation' (Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Kristeva, Ricoeur, Derrida) (Kearney 2001:9).

□ Persona: Figure of the Other

While, for Kearney, 'person' refers to others in terms of what is the same or similar (empirically, biologically, psychologically, etc.), he uses 'persona' to denote the otherness of the Other. Each person embodies a persona, which he understands as (Kearney 2001):

> [*T*]hat eschatological aura of 'possibility' which eludes but informs a person's actual presence here and now […]. At a purely phenomenological level, *persona* is all that in others exceeds my

90. As an illustration, we may consider Derrida's remark to Kearney in a 2001 dialogue between them: 'Now on a more, radical kind of reconciliation, beyond the political – the political is just a layer – I would not suspend every relation with the other for the sake of hope, salvation, or resurrection (I have been reading your admirable book these days on this subject). This is perhaps a difference between us: this indeterminacy of the messianic leaves you unsatisfied. To speak roughly, you, Richard, would not give up the hope of redemption, resurrection, and so forth; and I would not either. But I would argue that when one is not ready to suspend the determination of hope then our relation with the other becomes again economical […]' (Manoussakis 2004:5).

searching gaze, safeguarding their inimitable and unique singularity. It is what escapes me towards another past that I cannot recover and another future I cannot predict. It resides, if it resides anywhere, beyond my intentional horizons of re-tention and pro-tention. The *persona* of the other outstrips both the presenting consciousness of my *perception* here and now and the presentifying consciousness of my *imagination* (with its attempts to see, in the mode of *as-if*, that which resists perceptual intuition). The *persona* of the other even defies the names and categories of *signifying* consciousness. It is beyond consciousness *tout court*. Though this 'beyondness' is, curiously, what spurs language to speak figuratively about it, deploying imagination and interpretation to overreach their normal limits in efforts to grasp it – especially in the guise of metaphor and narrative. (p. 10)

The self cannot encounter another without configuring them in some way, and to configure another as a persona implies the paradox of configuration: 'to grasp him/her as present in absence, as both incarnate in flesh and transcendent in time' (Kearney 2001:10). This paradox must be accepted, for to refuse it is to regard another as pure presence (thing), or pure absence (nothing), and thus to disfigure the Other (Kearney 2001:10). The Other can be held in disregard not only by overlooking his or her transcendence but also by ignoring his or her 'flesh-and-blood thereness': 'There is a thin line [...] between seeking to capture the other as divine (qua idol) and receiving the divine through the other (qua icon)', and as such the matter calls for hermeneutic caution (Kearney 2001:11).

☐ Persona as eschaton

In contrast to the fictitious totalities whereby we often respond to the enigma of persona as presence–absence (Kearney 2001:11), the eschatological notion of persona allows the irreducible finality of the Other as eschaton,[91] reminding us that we have no

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91. *Eschaton* should here not be confused with *telos* '(i.e. a fulfilable, predictable, foreseeable goal)' (Kearney 2001:12). Instead, Kearney understands *eschaton* here 'precisely in the sense of an end without end – an end that escapes and surprises us, like a thief in the night – rather than some immanent teleological closure' (Kearney 2001:12).

power over him or her (Kearney 2001:12). Once we confront this primary disablement in front of another, it is the Other who re-enables us (Kearney 2001:12). With the eschaton as persona, Kearney refers to the future possibilities of the Other, which I am unable to realise, grasp or possess: the 'vertical "may-be" of the other' that 'is irreducible to *my* set of possibilities or powers: my "can-be"' (Kearney 2001:12). Appropriating the Other's persona would rob the Other of his or her otherness, temporality, futurity and alterity (Kearney 2001:12). For the absence of the Other refers to a temporal absence – the sense in which 'we might say that my persona is both younger and older than my person – pre-existing and post-existing the seizure of myself as presence (qua sum of totalisable properties)'. The persona is (Kearney 2001):

> [*A*]lways already there and always still to come […] there where there is no one, and takes the place of the no-place without itself taking place […]. Yet it does *give place* to the person and without it the person could not take its place. It is the non-presence that allows presence to happen in the here and now *as* a human person appearing to me in flesh and blood. It is, in short, the quasi-condition of the other remaining other to me even as s/he stands before me in this moment. But however non-present it is, *persona* is not to be understood as some impersonal anonymous presence (i.e., a Monarchian *deus absconditus*). Nor is it to be taken as a merely formal condition of possibility (Kant); nor indeed as some archaic and formless receptacle (Plato's and Derrida's *khora*). *Persona* is always inseparable from *this* person of flesh and blood, here and now. (pp. 12–13)

While it always reminds us that there is always 'something more to flesh and blood than flesh and blood', it is not some disembodied soul but 'gives itself in and through the incarnate body', even as it absolves and withholds itself (Kearney 2001:14).

☐ Beyond fusion

The persona refuses to be turned into an alter ego – into some version of me by which I can quench my desire to grasp it or to fuse with it (Kearney 2001:13–14). And against the fusionary

sameness of the onto-theological relation of 'one-for-one' or 'the one-for-itself-in-itself', Kearney proposes the 'eschatological universality of the Other' (2001:15). Insofar as this notion of the universal envisions a possible coexistence of unique personas where their transcendence is secured, it is more ethical. And insofar as such an ethical universal remains an eschatological possibility that calls at us from the future, it resists contentment with the accomplished and instead creates 'a sense of urgency and exigency, inviting each person to strive for its instantiation, however partial and particular, in each given situation' (Kearney 2001:15).

In the same way that the *eschaton* is a promise (not an acquisition), a possibility of a new future (but impossible in the present where 'the allure of total presence risks reigning supreme'), the eschatological *persona* also defies my power and transfigures me before I can configure it. By acknowledging the asymmetrical priority to the other, that particular persona transfigures me and empowers me to transfigure in turn, to 'figure the other in their otherness' (Kearney 2001):

> The asymmetrical priority of the Other's *persona* over my person (qua ego-cogito) finds expression in the fact that the other comes to me not as some fulfillment of my intentional consciousness; but as a figure-face which eludes and shatters my intentional horizons. The face of the persona discountenances me before I countenance it. Which is another way of saying that the *persona* never actually appears at all, as such, in that it has *already come and gone,* leaving only its trace; or is *still to come,* outstripping every figuration on my part. The *persona* hails and haunts me before I even begin to represent it as if it were present before me. (p. 16)

These temporal idioms signal a specifically ethical time that expresses itself in the (Kearney 2001):

> [*T*]emporal ek-stasis of the self, surpassing itself towards the other who surpasses it, responding to the call of the *persona* issued from a time which exceeds my beginning and my end. (p. 16)

The *achronic* persona therefore 'disrupts me before and after every *as-if* synchronism' that I would impose upon it.

□ Persona as chiasm

With the persona superseding all presentations and re-presentations that seek to capture it as intuitive adequation, the persona can be said to surpass phenomenology that is 'understood in the sense of an "eidetics of intentional consciousness," and strives towards a "rigorous science of transcendental immanence"'. For this reason, the phenomenon of the persona calls for a new or quasi-phenomenology, which, Kearney suggests, is mobilised more by ethics than by eidetics (Kearney 2001:16). As a quasi-figure that appears *as if* it was an appearance, the persona of the Other 'announces a difference which differentiates itself ad infinitum' (Kearney 2001):

> *Persona* is infinitely premature and invariably overdue, always missed and already deferred. *Persona* comes to us as a chiasmus or crossover with person […] That is precisely its eschatological stature – the messianic achronicity which breaks open the continuous moment-by-moment time of everyday chronology. […] It marks a time that is always *more*, remaindered, excessive, sabbatical, surplus. And yet this extra-time reveals itself in time, in what Walter Benjamin called the *Jetzzeit* – the incursion of the eternal in the moment. (p. 17)

The time of the eschaton is therefore best explained as anti-clockwise, or even post-clockwise, in that the persona remains forever anterior and posterior to its manifestations, so baffling all cognitive attempts at understanding it (Kearney 2001:17). It is for this reason (the persona never being there on time, or never adequately there at all) that Kearney suggests that persona is literally *personne (*Kearney 2001):

> It is *no*-one, if *some*-one means a person who is phenomenally symmetrical to me. But it is *this* one and no one but *this* one, if my neighbour appears to me eschatologically, defying the *as-if* figurations by means of which I try to tell its story. For the *persona* is always other than the other-for-me here and now. It is the figure which transfigures by absenting itself as *personne* in the very moment that it hails and holds me. (p. 17)

This calls for us to view the Other as an icon for 'the passage of the infinite, but without construing the infinite as another being of some kind hiding behind the Other. For persona is the in-finite other in the finite person before me' (Kearney 2001:17). It is not the idolatry of seeing the other person as divine, but it is about the divine (as trace, icon, visage and passage) in and through that person (Kearney 2001:18).

☐ Persona as prosopon

Kearney uses the term *prosopopoeic substitution* in a phenomenological and ethical sense to refer to (Kearney 2001):

> [*T*]he otherness of the other in and through the flesh-and-blood person here before me. Trans-cendence in and through, but not reducible to, immanence. *Prosopon* is the face of the other who urgently solicits me, bidding me answer in each concrete situation, 'here I am'. (p. 18)

It is telling that, in the original Greek usage, where *prosopon* refers to the face of a person facing another, revealing itself from within itself, the term appears almost always as a plural noun, suggesting that the '*prosopon–persona* can never really exist on its own (*atomon*), but emerges in ethical relation to others', so that it can be said to be 'radically intersubjective, invariably bound up in some ethical *vis-à-vis* or face-to-face' (Kearney 2001):

> Reinterpreted hermeneutically from a post-Levinasian perspective, one can see just how appropriately this Greek–Latin pair of *prosopon–persona* may serve to translate the Judeo-Christian primacy of ethics. It perfectly captures the double sense of someone as both proximate to me in the immediacy of connection and yet somehow ineluctably distant, at once incarnate and otherwise, inscribing the trace of an irreducible alterity in and through the face before me. (p. 18)

Kearney calls this paradoxical phenomenon – an Other 'inscribing the trace of an irreducible alterity in and through the face before me' – *prosopon-transfiguration*, which we allow, finally, to transfigure us (Kearney 2001:18). It is for this reason that he proposes that we prefer icons over idols, for the counter-tradition

of eschatology challenges the priority granted to being over the good by the tradition of onto-theology (Kearney 2001):

> Against Heidegger I say: it is not our being that cares for itself, as being-towards-death, but the good of the *persona* that cares for being, as promise of endless rebirth. Natality transfigures mortality. Openness to the *persona* of the neighbour in each instant is, as Matthew 25 reminds us, the ultimate in eschatological awareness. And so we find ourselves, on foot of the above analysis, at the threshold of a phenomenology of religion. (p. 19)

□ A hermeneutics of Otherness

But Kearney's description of persona and person is only one side of the coin, and an analysis of his phenomenology of otherness would be incomplete without considering his hermeneutical and phenomenological consideration of otherness in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (Kearney 2003). Here, Kearney reflects on various modalities of otherness that influence our viewpoint of both the world and ourselves (Masterson 2008:252). He considers those experiences of alterity that so transgress the familiar and so expose our existential insecurity that they manifest themselves as strangers, gods and monsters – the threatening unfamiliar that we often ostracise in fear and trembling, sometimes even envisaging them as '*both* monster *and* god, fascinating yet terrifying' (Masterson 2008:252). Hederman (2006)[92] suggests:

> Beyond the reach of the omnidirectional human spotlight, whatever lurks in exterior darkness is the irrevocably other. This is unidentifiable alterity that remains uncategorisable and therefore is as likely to be an alien as an ally, a monster as a messenger, a stranger as a neighbour. Kearney is still confident that within the orbit of human interpretation and narrative imagination we can detect and discern the benevolence of such presence when it emanates from the divine. (p. 275)

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92. Republished in Manoussakis (2006a:270-278, 421).

Masterson points out how Kearney argues that the 'challenge of the Other appearing as the Alien' calls for a critical hermeneutical engagement of self-and-Other, which in turn 'calls for a form of narrative interpretation capable of tracing interconnections between the poles of sameness and strangeness' (Masterson 2008:252). This requires an account of the Other that steers clear of the extremes of radical transcendence and radical immanence – the first extreme rendering the Other 'utterly unthinkable, anonymous and terrifying', and the second extreme rendering the Other as 'indistinguishable from a self-projection' (Masterson 2008:252). It is Kearney's position that we can mediate between absolute transcendence and absolute immanence by means of narrative imagination 'which envisages the other as an ethical appeal which, precisely as other, is constitutive of my conscious self and not merely derived from or projected by it' (Masterson 2008:254). Kearney implies, in other words, that such a practical ethical approach to the Other overcomes, at least to some extent, the antimonies that a purely cognitive perspective presents.

■ Is too much lost in the middle?[93]

At this point, we are ready to consider one argument that Kearney's third ways – at least in the case of transcendence and immanence, sacrifices too much. For this we turn to Patrick Masterson, emeritus professor of philosophy of religion at UCD. While for Kearney absolute transcendence or absolute immanence must both be surpassed and hermeneutically negotiated, for Masterson, 'this multi-dimensional intimation of Otherness via unfamiliar, frightening images of strangers, gods and monsters' begs the question of whether the Other is ultimately accessible to human consciousness (Masterson 2008:253).

93. This section has been reworked from a previous overview of Kearney's thought in the author's master of theology dissertation (2012), later published by Scholarium (Steenkamp 2014:132–142).

Postmodern and deconstructionist philosophers are not so easily convinced by Kearney's approach to the Other via a hermeneutics of ethical discernment and do not find this 'practico-ethical resolution of the tension between immanence and transcendence, between the same and the other', satisfactory (Masterson 2008:254). Conceding that this approach to the Other may be helpful in addressing the difficulty of the same and the Other in interpersonal human encounters, deconstructionists argue that, through its anodyne view of the Other (which makes it ultimately agreeable to human ethical categories), it finds itself still in the traditional perspective of according 'priority and ultimacy to a unified context of goodness, reason and sameness' (Masterson 2008:254).

It is here that the deconstructionists pose the question of God or *khora*. An emphasis on the uncontainable character of radical otherness brings us, beyond the limits of all particular experience, to the matter of primordial origin or foundation – that which 'we encounter in fear and trembling when faced with the bottomless void of our existence' (Masterson 2008:255). And it is here, at the 'foundational otherness' that underlies our existence and that can be imagined as either (or both) and sublime deity and/or monstrous evil, that deconstructionists such as Derrida and Caputo pose their question of God and *khora* and indeed appear to '*opt* for the *khora* alternative of meaningless indeterminate chaos as the more likely face of radical otherness' (Masterson 2008:255).

Kearney's philosophy of religion, while it engages in the contemporary 'pre-occupation' with otherness, profoundly disagrees with the deconstructionist interpretation that, ultimately, the face of otherness is entirely inaccessible to human consciousness – a claim that, in his view, leads to both intellectual and ethical paralysis (Masterson 2008:256). He would supplement the deconstructionist approach with a hermeneutics of practical wisdom that would enable us to discriminate between justice and injustice, monster and loving God (Masterson 2008):

> Prompted by a sensitive phenomenology of the self–other dyad, this hermeneutics involving narrative imagination and judgement suggests that the other is never absolutely transcendent nor absolutely immanent but somehow between the two. Others are intimately bound up with selves in various ways which constitute real ethical relationships between them. In this perspective there is no otherness so absolute as to be utterly inaccessible to consciousness. (p. 256)

This would mean – if applied to the biblical God – that the divine is '*in some way* present or quasi-present in its absence, and hence able to disclose itself' (Masterson 2008:256).[94] But what does this 'in some way' mean, exactly? How precisely is a transcendent deity accessible to human consciousness? Kearney works out his unique answer to this question from a hermeneutical–phenomenological perspective in *The God Who May Be*, characteristically according the possible priority over speculative reason through his re-imagination of a 'vertically' transcendent actual supreme being as 'a "horizontally" beckoning possibility' of ethical existence (Masterson 2008:256). But the relationship that the God of *posse* has with the world is not that of teleology or latent purpose but rather of eschatology and ethical invocation, for as a transfiguring possibility God enables acts of justice and love beyond the intrinsic possibilities of the historically evolving world (Masterson 2008:257). Furthermore, just as the God of *posse* has a bearing on human history, Kearney controversially claims that human history has a comparable bearing upon God as well and must 'help' God to become God by remaining open to the 'loving possible' and making the impossible more and more possible through our actions in each concrete

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94. As Kearney (2003:107) remarks in *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*: 'I believe such indistinction between God and horror poses a real problem for ethical judgement. For how can we tell the difference between (1) a God of justice, memory and promise and (2) the sheer indifference of the *il y a*, unless the divine is *in some way* present or quasi-present in its absence, and so able to disclose itself *as* a God of justice, memory and promise? In short, can a deity be narratively recorded and remembered in scriptures, parables and psalms if it is not *somehow* capable of being *seen* (e.g. as a burning bush), *heard* (e.g. as a call to freedom) and *believed* (e.g. as a promise of the kingdom)?'

moment (Masterson 2008:257). Kearney gives content to the 'in some way' in which the Other and the Same, God and humankind, and transcendence and immanence can be related by integrating them by means of his ethical concerns, which also lie at the heart of his resistance against the deconstructionist emphasis on radical alterity (Masterson 2008:258).

Masterson is critical of Kearney's ethico-eschatological enthusiasm and doubts whether it is satisfactory to provide a legitimation for an experiential affirmation of divine transcendence within a phenomenological frame of reference. He is not convinced that divine transcendence can be at once unbounded by, but yet situated within, experience – a doubt that brings him to his argument that, however compatible with religious sentiment, Kearney's type of thinking should be 'philosophically repositioned by more metaphysical considerations' (Masterson 2008:260). Masterson approves of the phenomenological approach but claims that one can go further than talking about God 'as though what is meant by "God" involves necessarily and irreducibly his relationship to us as the "possible" or not yet achieved goal of our ethical and religious desire'. For such a God 'appears inextricably, in however privileged transcendent or eschatological terms, as God for humanity – a co-relative component with human subjectivity, of human experience' (Masterson 2008:260). Should Kearney's discourse not be qualified by metaphysical considerations, Masterson sees a dilemma resulting that will involve either idolatry or atheism (Masterson 2008):

> For a God inextricably inscribed in human experience is inextricably a human god, and a God not so inscribed must ultimately not even be a possibility from a strictly phenomenological viewpoint. On the one hand, the relative dependence of God, described in phenomenological terms as a possibility co-relative to human desire (rather than in terms of his independently possessed actual existence – his *esse*) appears to compromise his alleged radical transcendence. On the other hand, insistence on the radical alterity of his transcendence calls in question the claim that he is most appropriately spoken of as 'possibility' or 'the God Who May Be', which refers inextricably to his reality for mankind. (p. 260)

Masterson's proposal for avoiding this impasse involves appreciating the fact that 'the transcendence which is apprehended or given in experience cannot be phenomenologically legitimated as an experience, however indistinct or eschatological, of divine transcendence' (2008:260–261). For this reason, admitting that phenomenology represents a necessary and appropriate approach to the 'pre-philosophical lived experience of divine transcendence', Masterson argues that it cannot be sufficient because transcendence that is phenomenologically given is by its very nature a transcendence that is accessible to 'my disclosing capacity for experience' and as such is a transcendence that is relativised as 'transcendence-for-humans' (2008:261). It is because of this claim that an experientially inscribed transcendence can never be phenomenologically legitimated as an experience of divine transcendence that Masterson argues for a different approach to such experienced transcendence that will consider the experience as significant, even if it cannot be phenomenologically legitimated (Masterson 2008):

> It will ask questions not just of meaning, but of existence and truth. It will ask for the conditions of the possibility of this experience of transcendence – an experience which appears to orientate our thought beyond the limits of experience. It will ask whether beyond the intrinsic conditions of the experience anything exists independently which somehow corresponds to what is intimated, however inadequately, by the phenomenologically describable experience. It will address the question 'Might God be the source of our experience of transcendence?' – a question which, we have argued, cannot itself be answered phenomenologically. For God, as such, is not a phenomenological 'given' – neither psychologically, socially, culturally or otherwise. (p. 261)

The question whether God is the source of our experiences of transcendence can for Masterson be addressed either theologically or philosophically, and he proceeds with a brief outline of what each approach might entail.[95] While he is positive

95. Briefly, a *theological* approach would be 'based upon faith in a divine revelation accepted as such', for while faith in the Judeo-Christian God of salvation history does not affirm divine transcendence phenomenologically, it legitimises the experienced salvation history for the

about Kearney's attempt to 'rescue discourse about ultimate transcendence or "Otherness" from the nihilistic implications of deconstructionist insistence on its terrifying and radical unknowability', he cautions that Kearney (Masterson 2008):

> [S]eeks to hermeneutically navigate a conscious reconciliation of transcendence and immanence, of God and man, by way of a phenomenological account of ethical openness in interpersonal relationships to a divine transfiguring possibility. However, these ciphers of divine transcendence, disclosed in ethical endeavour, are not an indistinct awareness or 'presence through absence' of divine transcendence. Here it seems to me, the deconstructionists are right. Radical 'Otherness', or the utterly transcendent God, is not accessible phenomenologically and if this is the only access to divine transcendence then it is indeed unknowable. My suggestion is that the ethical ciphers of transcendence so engagingly delineated by Kearney can be deciphered by metaphysical argument which enables a non-experiential but informative affirmation of a radically transcendent God. (p. 263)

Masterson's suggestions, then, involve the sort of metaphysical arguments that Kearney resists (cf. footnote 18). But Masterson's view of phenomenology is a narrow one that seems hurdled by commitments to epistemology and ontology. Yet, the question that preoccupies phenomenology today is less:

> [T]he question of the *that* or the *what* than the *how*' […]. Being never merely is; there are always modes in which it is being intended. By performing reductions from diverse angles, we pass from being to the phenomenon, the self-showing of something, and, having been enabled to reflect on the movements of our consciousness, we can pay heed to the precise manner in which the phenomenon is actually given to us: its phenomenality. How the phenomenon is disclosed will depend on the intentional horizons in which it is concretely embedded, and that will turn on the sort of phenomenon it is. (p. 714)

(footnote 95 continues…)

believer as 'a genuinely revealing trace of what exceeds this-worldly human experience' (Masterson 2008:261). On the other hand, a *philosophical* approach should, in Masterson's view, 'proceed by way of indirect metaphysical analysis of the implications of this experience to arrive finally at a non-experiential affirmation of God as its ultimate real foundation' (Masterson 2008:262).

Like Husserl, Masterson would put divine transcendence beyond the reach of phenomenological investigation. Hart questions this sort of prioritising of phenomenology as the preferred method for doing philosophy of religion, while denying that there is any theology involved. He suggests that it may be helpful to think of phenomenology as a means of exploring 'revelation as well as manifestation, the style of attention we call prayer, especially contemplative prayer, as well as the attention we call the converted gaze' (Hart 2009:715). In his opinion, when properly understood, phenomenology is strictly neutral to all academic disciplines, so that it would be (Hart 2009):

> [O]f as much help in thinking theologically as it is in thinking philosophically. If we must bracket God as Creator and Judge, so too we must bracket the existence of many other things about which philosophy talks. We are in need of a critical examination of what 'theology' means for those philosophers who endorse phenomenology as working within the limits of philosophy alone and whether it is at all justified. My suspicion is that it will usually be a caricature at best. (p. 715)

Following in the footpaths of Heidegger, Levinas, Scheler and Bergson, phenomenology today has broadened its playfield to include affective and axiological concerns along with epistemological ones, and to address counter-intentionality just as carefully as intentionality (Hart 2009:716). Phenomenology has also come to acknowledge:

> [T]he priority of intuition with respect to intentionality in a wide range of phenomena, and to asterisk the truth that phenomenality has no formal conditions to satisfy. Horizons of intentionality are breached more often than we have thought, and we need to acknowledge that phenomenality has the power to surprise us, and indeed that surprise is a not uncommon response to phenomenality. (p. 716)

Most importantly, with respect to Masterson's criticism of Kearney's phenomenology of religion, Hart points out that phenomenology, by detailing the diverse ways in which phenomena become present to us – ways 'that exceed the familiar triad of epistemic, ontic, and ontological presence' – has moved

beyond the epistemological prejudice that the 'phenomenon must give itself to us by way of representation' (Hart 2009:717). And because divine transcendence means that God is not constrained by any mode of self-revelation or structure of intentionality, it follows that God can reveal Godself in anticipation and imagination as much as in perception (Hart 2009:722). Phenomenology has now become wider in its scope and application, so that the spiritual life need no longer be restricted to the same protocols and requirements of evidence required of physical and intellectual objects (Hart 2009:724).

Kevin Hart's arguments in his review essay of 2009, briefly sketched above, offers one suggestion as to how one may navigate these stormy phenomenological waters. If anything, our slightly more thorough treatment of one of Kearney's third ways in this section has illustrated the sort of challenges that one may encounter when attempting to take opposing viewpoints seriously, while avoiding falling prey to polarities. It has also, however, illustrated the potential benefits of such an approach, enabling dialectical philosophy, in between poles, to say *more*, not *less*.

■ Conclusion

In Kearney we encounter both a person, and consequently a philosophy, in dialogue. Kearney's work could be rightly termed 'dialogical', for not only does he dialogue with various philosophers, but his philosophy also dialogues with different schools of thought and opposing vantage points. The description of Kearney as a philosopher of 'middle ways' is perhaps best illustrated by his own description of his work from the perspective of his mentors and fellow philosophers. As such he states that, for Ricoeur, he was at times too deconstructive (but for Derrida too hermeneutic) and that Levinas found him overly aesthetic and 'inordinately susceptible to the lures of imagination' (while Stanislas Breton thought him too ethical) (Kearney 2007:xi).

Kearney's willingness to re-engage the figures, images, poetic gestures and voices of his inherited Christian tradition so imaginatively from a philosophical perspective has made him an excellent and engaging dialogue partner for theology as well, so that also in this regard, he has come to occupy a middle space, enabling dialogue and resisting polarising tendencies in a time when this is urgently needed.

Strangers, Gods and Africa: In dialogue with Richard Kearney on Otherness

Schalk H. Gerber ⓘ
Department of Philosophy
Stellenbosch University
South Africa

■ Introduction

The problem concerning the interpretation of Otherness or the experience of strangeness has a long history not only in South Africa but in the rest of the world. One way of understanding the challenge of interpreting otherness[96] is in terms of the

96. The analyses of the problem of Otherness as outlined in the introduction and first section of this paper is also discussed in Gerber (2018).

classic philosophical question concerning the relationship between the particular and the universal. 'In short, problems arise when either the universal or the particular is overemphasised and dictates the meaning for its counterpart' (Gerber 2018:2). The question is also to be found in the debate concerning the quest for self-identity in the so-called African philosophical tradition between the ethnophilosophies[97] that focus on the particularity of African cultures to the point of cultural relativism and the anti-ethnophilosophies that try to make room for cultural universalism.[98] More specifically, the question concerning the interpretation of Otherness is framed by, and explicitly contextualised within, a South African history that includes eras of colonisation (an overemphasis of the universal character of Western identity), apartheid (an overemphasis on particular differences) and democracy (the attempt to rethink the relationship between the universal and particular), among other significant events.

What is thus important is the way in which these events shaped the relationship between the so-called Western subject and the African other. On the one hand, they shaped this relationship in ways that may be described as the domination by the so-called all *enclosing* Western world view, that is, a universalist perspective that became incarnated in various oppressive political, economic, social and intellectual practices and institutions. On the other hand, the term *decolonisation*, which is currently a buzzword especially around the various tertiary campuses across South Africa after the student protests of 2015–2016, is advocated as an alternative to the 'Western world view' with an appeal to the particularity of African cultures.

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97. Scholars that form part of this group according to Fayemi (2011:260; Gerber 2018) include Abraham (1966), Mbiti (1969), Sodipo (1973), Anyanwu (1983), Tempels (1959) and Senghor (1963).

98. Philosophers that are included in this classification according to Fayemi (2011:260) are Bodunrin (1985), Hountondji (1983), Appiah (1992), Towa (1991) and Wiredu (1980). Mbembe could also be placed among these thinkers.

The discourse of decolonisation, although not new to postcolonial Africa, is becoming more imperative in the young and fragile democracy of South Africa.

But what is meant by the term *decolonisation* within the South African discourse is by no means clear or generally accepted. One of the most common meanings thereof in these discussions seems to rest on a variation of the ideology[99] advocated as Afrocentrism or Pan-Africanism (the overemphasis of particularities), which has dominated African philosophy in recent decades[100] and is represented by the thinkers referred to earlier under the term ethnophilosophy. This stream of thought may be understood as encompassing responses of the aim to liberate Africa and African personhood from Western epistemic oppression (Appiah 1992; Eze 2015; Mudimbe 1988; Mbembe 2001a, 2001b). The main problem, however, with this line of thought, as delineated by Achille Mbembe (2001a) in *African Modes of Self-Writing*, is that it does not escape the problematic *logic of the coloniser* it seeks to overcome.

Richard Kearney, in turn, holds that the experience and interpretation of otherness, or the discernment between others and aliens,[101] which is also a task that concerns our own identity, is not predetermined but rather we have two choices in this regard '(1) to try to understand and accommodate our experience of strangeness, or (2) to repudiate it by projecting it exclusively onto outsiders' (Kearney 2003:4). The second choice leads to

99. Ideology may be understood here according to Hutchens' (2005:40) definition as 'thought that does not critique or think through its own provenance and its relation to reality'.

100. For a brief outline of the history of the African intellectual development and some of its important figures, see Eze (2015:408), Ramose (2005:1–9) and Wiredu (2004:1–28).

101. Kearney (2003:67) distinguishes between the terms 'other' and 'alien' as follows: I take the term 'other' here, as frequently invoked by contemporary Continental theory, to refer to an alterity worthy of reverence and hospitality. I take the term 'alien', by contrast, to refer to that experience of strangers associated with (1) discrimination (as in certain immigration policies or acts of separating natives from foreigners) (2) suspicion (as in UFOs, extraterrestrials or other unwelcome invaders), and (3) scapegoating (as in xenophobic, racist or anti-Semitic practices). Others hence may become aliens, gods or monsters.

transforming these strangers into either monsters, gods or a hybrid of both. Where the first option follows a diacritical hermeneutics, the latter option may also be described by either a romanticised hermeneutics (overemphasising the universal) or that of a radical hermeneutics (overemphasising the particular), to which we return further. Hence, with these choices in mind, I propose that if we want to constructively engage with a sense of what decolonisation might be as a countermeasure to the subjugating logic of the coloniser, then we may enter into a dialogue with the thought of Richard Kearney to explore possible alternative paths.

■ Western gods and African monsters: The critique of the logic of the coloniser

Mbembe (2001b) poses the problem of interpreting Otherness within the Western philosophical tradition[102] clearly when he writes the following:

> We should first remind ourselves that, as a general rule, the experience of the Other, or the *problem of the 'I' of others and of human beings we perceive as foreign to us*, has almost always posed virtually insurmountable difficulties to the Western philosophical and political tradition. Whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this tradition long denied the existence of any 'self' but its own. (p. 2)

To make sense of the logic that underlines the problem of the Western philosophical tradition of dealing with Otherness that is the logic of the coloniser for our purposes, we may briefly consider

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102. See also Kearney (2003:66), where he summarises the critique of Western thought as follows: 'Most ideas of identity, in short, have been constructed in relation to some notion of alterity. Contemporary thinkers like Levinas and Derrida have made much of the fact that the Western metaphysical heritage, grounded in Greco-Roman thought, has generally discriminated against the Other in favour of the Same, variously understood as Logos, Being, Substance, Reason or Ego. This prejudice is called the 'ontology of Sameness' by Levinas, and 'logocentrism' by Derrida.'

the critique of Western metaphysics. Martin Heidegger (2006:64) outlines that Western metaphysics[103] is constituted by onto-theology,[104] a logic that grounds the meaning and unity of things, that is, the *onto-* of *onto-theology*, by reference to a highest principle, that is, the *theo-* of *onto-theology*. The space of the grounding and highest principle have been filled with various 'figurations like God, History, the Subject and more recently Nationalistic Identities' (Gerber 2018:4). Restated, the figure, also understood as substance or essence, acts as the double ground that provides meaning to beings and the system they fit into as a whole. In Jacques Derrida's (2005) terms, the figure, which in relation to colonisation is the Western identity, serves as the *archai* point of reference at the centre of the structure. Or following Emmanuel Levinas's critique of Western metaphysics – the other is synthesised into the Same, that is, the knowing subject *par excellence* (*le Moi connaissant*) (Levinas 1996:89). Once more, the colonised other is synthesised into the categories of the Western subject, which served as the highest and grounding reference point within the colony.[105] Thus, the African subject received its identity in relation to that of the Western subject – as its negative opposite.

In turn, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe (1997) also explicate that (cited in Gerber 2018):

> The figuration of the identity of the 'social body' operates in the same fashion as the metaphysical identity of the subject, i.e. all other areas of reference are excluded, and the world is [*synthesised*] into

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103. A draft version of this section on the critique of Western metaphysics was presented at the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa conference in 2017 under the title 'On the Critique of Western Metaphysics: A Dialogue between Nancy and Mbembe'. See also Gerber and Van der Merwe (2017).

104. For a discussion on onto-theology, see Gerber and Van der Merwe (2017) and Sands (2017). For a discussion on how Kearney manages the relationship between philosophy and theology, see Sands (2016), who argues that he keeps the two methodologically separate; and Boeve (2005:310), who argues that Kearney seems to 'mix up philosophy and theology'.

105. For an overview of how the South African philosophical tradition was influenced by colonialism, where 'thinking starts to migrate from the centre (in this case London/Oxford/Cambridge) to the colony (in this case South Africa)', see Duvenhage (2017:3).

the figuration of the 'social body', with the renewed telos and utopia of a homogenous society. (p. 128)

The totality is totalised into a closed structure, or *enclosure*, with nothing that may arise that is not already determined by the totalised structure, to echo Hannah Arendt's (1966:437–459) analysis of totalitarianism. Conversely, the totalitarian tendency of identitarian thinking may also be understood according to Claude Lefort's (1988:17) definition of democracy, which refers to 'the empty space of power'. Democracy is, thereby, the keeping empty, or in tension, the space previously held by an onto-theological figuration in a totalitarian fashion. The empty space in Derrida's terms refers to *khora*,[106] taken from Plato, 'the groundless ground of the play of differences or the trace, of spacing-and-timing' (Caputo 2011:60).

More importantly, the main consequence of such an onto-theological figuration of the subject or the social body is the inevitability of exclusion (Nancy 2000:24) – that is, the exclusion of everything that does not fit into the identity of the subject or social body, or in a reversal of terms, included as excluded. By the latter phrase is meant that the exclusion proceeds ultimately in the denial of alterity, of difference, that is, the existence of the other, where the other is physically expelled, excluded or exterminated so as to be included into and make sense according to the perspective of the Same. Kearney (2003) refers to these excluding practices that reinforce identity in terms of the strategy of sacrificial scapegoats[107]:

This sacrificial strategy furnishes communities with a binding identity, that is, with the basic sense of who is included (us) and who is excluded (them). So the price to be paid for the construction of the

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106. See Derrida (2002), Kaufman (2014) and also Kearney (2003), Chapter 9 – '*Khora* or God', where he discusses Plato's explanation of *khora* as a: 'space which is eternal and indestructible, which provides a position for everything that comes to be, and which is apprehended without the senses by a sort of spurious reasoning and so is hard to believe in – we look at it indeed in a kind of dream […]' (Timaeus 52)' And the various postmodern interpretations of the notion.

107. See Kearney (2003), Chapter 1, 'Strangers and Scapegoats'.

happy tribe is often the ostracising of some outsider: the immolation of the 'other' on the altar of the 'alien'. (p. 4)

Whence, the creation of Western gods and African monsters[108]. In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe (2001b:178) also discusses the critique of Western metaphysics and the effects of scapegoating, alienating and constructing the African subjectivity as monstrous. Firstly, the effects of colonisation may be described as the experience of the excluded other in a state of totalitarianism (Mbembe 2001b:178) – 'colonial discourse ends up producing a closed, solitary totality that it elevates to the rank of a generality. And so reality becomes enclosed within a pre-ordained madness'. The colonised other becomes excluded in the denial of their subjectivity.

Accordingly, the African subject forms a negative binary opposite as the other to the Western metaphysical subject. Two examples from Mbembe may be considered. Firstly, the African subject became alienated and scapegoated as an animal (or 'the beast'), which stands in opposition to the rational human found in, for instance, the text of Hegel, dealing with Africa in his *Reason in History* (Mbembe 2001b:173).

Secondly, the African subject is constructed as a monster. If what it means to exist as a rational, self-conscious human being is constituted by the Western metaphysical identity, or in Heidegger's words, *Dasein*, then the African subject who is excluded and denied is regarded as less than a non-being, an empty figure, as nothing (Mbembe 2001b:173). Mbembe further suggests:

In the colonial principle of rationality, however, there is a clear difference between being and existing. Only the human exists, since the human alone can represent the self as existent, and have a consciousness of what is so represented. From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonised does not truly exist, as person or as subject. (p. 187)

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108. Gods and Monsters are written here in capital letters to emphasise that their creation is a product of an ontotheological thought structure as discussed above.

This denial of the existence of the African other as fully human is what defines the violence *par excellence* of colonisation (Mbembe 2001b:182). Moreover, it is the role that language plays in constructing the African other as monstrous through a process of continuous repetition that enables the coloniser to deny the existence and subjectivity of the colonised (Mbembe 2001b:181).

To recapitulate: In unpacking the critique of Western metaphysics, the way in which the logic of the coloniser functions becomes clear in the repeated efforts of constructing essentialising onto-theological figurations, which serve as the ultimate reference point to understand the world, fill the 'space of power' and structure the *khora* around its centre. The consequence of constructing the figuration of the Western identity as a God in colonialisation is the exclusion and scapegoating of the African other, which is transformed into an African monster. Accordingly, *injustice* is understood as the denial of the other's existence as fully human.

■ African gods and Western monsters? What a sense of decolonisation might not be

If the logic of the coloniser constructed Western gods and African monsters, that is, a logic that leads to violent exclusion and ultimate denial of the existence of the other as fully human, then a sense of decolonisation would not aim to reinforce the same logic. In other words, a sense of decolonisation would not aim to refigure an African worldview or identity as the highest reference point, that is, an African god with an accompanying master narrative that would, in turn, exclude the Western monster in a totalitarian fashion. Or, to rephrase Kearney (2003):

> The attempt to build hermeneutic bridges [*decolonisation*] between us and 'others' (human, divine or whatever) should not, [...] be denounced as [*fall back into*] ontology, onto-theology or logocentrism – that is to say, as some form of totalising reduction bordering on violence.

For such denunciation [*falling back*] ultimately denies any form of dialogical interbeing between self and other. (p. 9).

The centre would be fixed again, in Derridean terms, which would not allow for play within the structure or difference in the *khora.* Plainly put, a sense of decolonisation thought along these lines would paradoxically not be more just than that which it aims to replace. The cycle of injustice would be perpetuated.

Hence, in undertaking the task of decolonisation, one should be mindful of the temptation to construct a new onto-theological figuration. Moreover, even if the Western identity is replaced by its African counterpart as the highest and grounding reference point (as a new God), then, to follow Mbembe, the aim of decolonisation has still not been met, that is, addressing the question of what it means to be an African, the question that seeks to make sense of the everyday lived experience in Africa. Rather, such a practice of decolonisation falls back into what Mbembe (2001a) calls the metaphysics of difference, which is another way of formulating the logic of coloniser, by an overemphasis on alterity to the point of inaccessibility. Also, the cycle of violence sprouting from this logic of subjugation is not broken, but rather reappropriated in the postcolonial regimes after independence. This falling back is evident in the 'attempts of Africanism, Afrocentrism and most prevalently Pan-Africanism that seem to fall prey to the temptation of onto-theological re-figuration' (Gerber 2018:7). Patrice Nganang[109] (2007:45) echoes this sentiment when he writes on the Rwandan genocide, indicating that this kind of essentialist or 'identitarian thinking' grounded the rationale and motivation of the mass killing.

To reiterate the point on Afrocentrism, Mbembe holds that this position often manifests as the logic that it seeks to overcome and thereby it merely reverses or redirects the logic of the colony

109. See also Syrotinski (2012, 2014) for a discussion of the relationship between Nganang literature and Mbembe's philosophy.

earlier described. 'The tables are simply turned; everything African is seen as positive and Western as negative, which leads to a sense of decolonisation as destruction' (Gerber 2018:2). The *de-* refers to an emptying out or exclusion of anything Western. Furthermore, no critique against this line of thought is considered; hence one is left with cultural relativism (Wiredu 2004:12). Thus, although terms like the 'post-colony', 'post-apartheid' or for that matter the 'end of Western metaphysics' have been proclaimed, it is no way evident that whatever is designated by these terms can represent a clean break with or end to these practices, both colonial and anticolonial, sharing the same logic.

Attempts, however, at thinking an alternative sense of decolonisation[110] to that of destruction are to be found most notably by Kwasi Wiredu. These attempts seek to critique the negative aspects of the colonial heritage and at the same time try to engage with aspects of the colonial past and the rest of the world that may be beneficial to humankind. Wiredu (1998) hence defines 'decolonisation' as follows:

> By decolonisation, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is 'undue'. Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of a colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of enquiry spearheaded by our erstwhile colonisers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. Are we called upon to reject or ignore it? That would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason. (p. 17)

For Wiredu (1998:17), the 'emptying out' lies especially with the conceptual heritage of the colonial past with its binary categories, which are promoted by language, for instance, English. But there is also an element of self-critique. Or as Ramón Grosfoguel (2011:3) formulates it, the aim of decolonisation is not only an

110. Other forms and themes within the decolonisation and broader African discourse include not only the conceptual decolonisation but also religion, politics, literature and gender. For an overview of the different themes, see Wiredu (2004). For a discussion of the link between decolonisation and feminism in South Africa, see Jennifer Wilkinson's text 'South African women and the ties that bind' in *The African Philosophy Reader* (2005).

essentialist and fundamentalist anti-European critique, but 'it is a perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism and nationalism' (Gerber 2018:3). The current chapter aims in a similar line of thought, to ask what decolonisation may be by engaging with an alternative in exploring Kearney's notion of diacritical hermeneutics for the South African context. The challenge now, to quote Kearney (2013:9), 'is to acknowledge a difference between self and other without separating them so schismatically that *no* relation at all is possible'.

■ Diacritical hermeneutics

Keeping with the schema from the introduction, that is, the attempt to avoid the overemphasising of the universal or that of the particular where no relation is possible, we may look at how Kearney defines diacritic hermeneutics. In the book *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, Kearney (2003:9) contrasts the *diacritical* hermeneutics approach to that of the 'dialectical conflations – or deconstructive inversions' positions to interpret the other, as a third way.[111] But, as Jack Caputo[112] rightfully notes, Kearney implements the approach in the book more than theoretically developing it. Accordingly, partly in

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111. Kearney (2003:18) describes diacritical hermeneutics in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* in the following manner, '[t]he *diacritical* hermeneutics I propose, by contrast, is committed to a third way beyond these romantic and radical options. It is my contention that this middle way (*metaxu*) is in fact more radical and challenging than either. Obviating both the congenial communion of fused horizons and the apocalyptic rupture of non-communion, I will endeavour to explore possibilities of intercommunion between distinct but not incomparable selves. The diacritical approach holds that friendship begins by welcoming difference (*dia-legein*). It champions the practice of dialogue between self and other, while refusing to submit to the reductionist dialectics of egology governed by the logos of the Same. Between the logos of the One and the anti-logos of the Other, falls the *dia-logos* of oneself-as-another. The basic aim of diacritical hermeneutics is, I suggest, to make us more hospitable to strangers, gods and monsters without succumbing to mystique or madness'.

112. See Kearney (2011a:78).

response to Jack Caputo's charge, Kearney develops what is meant by diacritical hermeneutics further in additional publications[113] by defining each term separately.

Hence, hermeneutics for Kearney (2011b:2) means the 'art of deciphering multiple meanings', or more accurately 'it refers to the practice of discerning indirect, tacit or allusive meanings, of sensing another sense beyond or beneath apparent sense'. Sequentially, this special human activity, Kearney holds, may be translated into a second order reflective interpretation with the aim of disclosing concealed messages. The process of disclosement may take place in two ways:

> a) [*U*]nmasking covered-up meaning (hermeneutics of suspicion) or b) by disclosing surplus meaning (hermeneutics of affirmation). In short, I understand hermeneutics as the task of interpreting (*hermeneuein*) plural meaning in response to the polysemy of language and life. (p. 2)

What is important here for our purposes, keeping in mind the argument on what a sense of decolonisation might not be, is that for Kearney hermeneutics has an ethico-political element. Kearney shares this element with Derrida and deconstruction and accordingly identifies it in the hermeneutical tradition only after Paul Ricoeur, who coined the earlier-quoted notion of the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', and Vattimo's 'hermeneutics of subversion'. It is this double vigilance or critique in interpretation that will be important for a sense of diacritical decolonisation, to which we return below.

Therefore, the hermeneutical tradition from Dilthey, Heidegger to Gadamer[114] is regarded by Kearney as 'romantic hermeneutics' with an emphasis on the fusion of horizons or, as Schmiedel (2017:2) writes, the other and self become converged so that there is no distinction, which may be understood as an

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113. See Kearney (2011a, 2011b) on 'Eros, diacritical hermeneutics, and the maybe' and also 'What is diacritical hermeneutics?' See also Dooley (2003).

114. See Gregor (2005), who holds that placing Gadamer in this category is contestable.

overemphasis on the universal. Kearney as mentioned previously also contrasts his approach to that of 'radical hermeneutics' as formulated by Caputo via his reading of Derrida and originating with Levinas. Here, the problem for Kearney concerns the other becoming the absolute transcending Other (Levinas),[115] meaning that the other is so radically different that no understanding of him or her may be accomplished that leads to undecidability in the call for absolute hospitality (Derrida).[116] We find here an overemphasis of the particular.

Returning to the terminology explanation, Kearney defines *diacritical* in a fourfold manner. Firstly, the critical of diacritical links up again with the ethico-politico imperative in the definition of hermeneutics as (1) an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of meaning, and (2) a critical exposure of 'masked' power in the name of liberation and justice. Secondly, in terms of a criteriological discernment between opposing or competing claims to meaning with a hermeneutical and narrative retrieval of future and past testimonies. Kearney, following Aristotle, has in mind here stories with persons who embody the virtue you aim to communicate, like Achilles for courage, Penelope for constancy, Tiresius for wisdom and so forth. These narratives provide practical judgement as '*phronesis*[117] with exemplary paradigms by which to measure, judge, and act' (Kearney 2011b:2). Thirdly, in a more technical or *grammatological*[118] sense where 'diacritics denotes a way of reading differentially, across gaps and oppositions' and in this regard 'diacritics is all about micro-reading' (Kearney 2011b:2). Finally, diacritical also refers back to an older *diagnostic* meaning of reading the body.[119]

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115. For further elaborations on the critique of Levinas's position; see Gerber and Van der Merwe (2017), Schrijvers (2011), and Sands (2017).

116. For the discussion on Derrida and hospitality, see Kearney (2003:68–72).

117. On a discussion of *phronesis*, see Kearney (2003:111–113). See also Caputo (2002:93).

118. See Kearney (2011b:2).

119. Kearney (2011b:3) shows how 'diacritics' is taken from the Greek terms *dia-krinein* and *dia-krisis*, which '[R]eferred to the medical or therapeutic practice of diagnosing symptoms of

Thus, diacritic hermeneutics aims not to fall into the trap of constructing an onto-theological figuration of the self, same or subject – nor of the other. For if you make the identity of the self as the ultimate reference point, the other gets excluded. But, if you make the identity of the other as the middle of the structure, the self gets excluded by the inability to make sense of the world. Rather, Kearney suggests a way of critically engaging one with an other. Engaging the other that again aims to avoid both extreme positions. Or as Kearney (2003) writes:

> [*W*]e need to be able to critically discriminate between different kinds of otherness while remaining alert to the deconstructive resistance to black and white judgements of Us versus Them. We need, at crucial moments, to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other. (p. 67)

Apart from the critique that Kearney underdevelops the notion of diacritical hermeneutics, at least in the book *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (2003), Caputo also replies to Kearney's critique of radical hermeneutics. Caputo (2002:58) argues that Kearney misconstrues undecidability with indecision.[120] Instead, undecidability is the possibility for a decision, and the opposite of undecidability is not the decision of decisiveness but programmability, that is, a step-for-step method on deciding what to do in any situation. Undecidability, here, refers to the openness in the encounter with the other and

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(footnote 119 continues…)

bodily fevers, colorations, and secretions. In this sense, the word designated the hermeneutic art of discriminating between health and dis-ease'. Accordingly, Kearney (2011b:3) develops from his notion of diacritical hermeneutics the notion of carnal hermeneutics: 'Here we are concerned with a hermeneutics that goes all the way down. It covers diacritical readings of different kinds of Others – human, animal or divine'. See also Pretorius (2016) on 'Reading "blackface": A (narrative) introduction to Richard Kearney's notion of carnal hermeneutics' for another interpretation of Kearney in the South African context, Manoussakis (2015), as well as Kearney (2015) on 'The wager of carnal hermeneutics'.

120. For Caputo's response to Kearney, see 'Richard Kearney's enthusiasm: A philosophical exploration on the *God Who May Be*' and 'God, perhaps: The diacritical hermeneutics of God in the work of Richard Kearney', as well as Kosky (2003).

there is no guarantee that things will work out. Anything can happen:

> We rely upon promises in the face of a threat even as a threat can be posed only if something is promised, and 'perhaps' means there is no guarantee about how things will turn out. (p. 58)

In other words, you will not know whether the other is a friend or foe if you do not give them a chance. There is an element of risk. Moreover, this leads Caputo (2002:93) to suggest that Kearney wants to overcome or 'extinguish' the *khora*, or the open space that was previously filled with an onto-theological figuration, with constructing an onto-theological figuration in search of an 'original oneness' himself.

Although I tend to agree with Caputo on his outline of the difference between undecidability and indecision, I do not think that Caputo's accusation against Kearney in terms of onto-theology holds water. Kearney's response and reformulation[121] of his position on *khora* is evident of this. The debate, however, is significant for our purposes because the theme of keeping the space, or *khora*, open is exactly what is at stake in the question of decolonisation. That is, how not to fill the space with another onto-theological figuration, not even an African Other or African god and links up with Lefort's notion of 'the empty space of power', as described.

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121. See Kearney (2011a: 78–83) for the full reply summarised as follows: 'The God who-may-be is not, as Jack critically suspects, a God who will 'be' as full self-identical presence at the eschaton. It is an ana-God who, *after* the last God, would continue forever in the mode of may-being, resisting always the lure of sovereign self-presence. Hence the fertile resonances of *perichōrsis*: *peri-chōra* meaning a movement around, a circling about a centre which, as *chōra*, remains empty, a centreless centre, a free space for the three persons to move in and out, back and forth, up and down. In this spaceless space of 'ana' – as a movement 'back, up, again, in time or space' – each divine person remains in part a stranger to the other, re-fusing to collide, conflate or collapse into a fusion of totalizing identity.

■ Towards a sense of diacritical decolonisation

What then might a sense of decolonisation as diacritical decolonisation be? In what follows, I would like to make four suggestions:

Firstly, the schema of how to interpret Otherness presented by Kearney helps to address the problematic set out in the question for African identity. The challenge of rethinking what it means to exist in Africa is to rethink the relation between the so-called Western identity and the African identity. And, if our analysis holds, this would not entail a re-figuration of African gods and Western monsters. Instead, the aim would be to break the cycle of the logic of the coloniser, with its violent practices of exclusion and the denial of the other's existence as fully human. Kearney, therefore, suggests an important way of making this task of breaking the cycle. For if the relation of the Western and African is rethought to only focus on the universal aspects, or how their respective horizons may fuse as in a multicultural melting pot, then what is at risk is the denial of difference that does not fall in the new synthesised identity. Then again, if the African identity is so construed that anyone not 'African' may not be able to understand it, that it becomes inaccessible and separated from the rest of the world in its focus on absolute particularity, then it undergoes the same risk of the denial of the other. Restated, in the claim to particularity that exists in a kind of vacuum, the lived experience of existing in the world with others is suppressed. The existence of other identities within your lived experience has to be denied in order to construct such an absolute particular concept of identity. Furthermore, two unexpected scenarios occur when the particularity of the other is so radically different that it cannot be grasped:

1. One can argue that the ungraspable other should be kept apart, and not interfered with. This line of thought starts to resemble the ideology of apartheid.

2. This way of reasoning may be used to avoid responsibility. That is, you cannot hold me responsible because you cannot grasp my actions. I am so other that you cannot hold me accountable.

In sum, the overemphasis of the universal and the particular form two sides of the same coin that denies the existence of Otherness in some fashion. Hence, Kearney's suggestion of a middle way may help to break the cycle and take seriously the responsibility to think the relation between the self and the other, that is to discern in our relation to others who may rightfully be judged as the other and the alien, that is (Kearney 2003):

> [*B*]etween (a) those aliens and strangers that need our care and hospitality, no matter how monstrous they might first appear, and (b) those others that really do seek to destroy and exterminate. (p. 10)

Kearney advocates that the universal and the particular, the self and the other, Western and African be thought in relation to each other. And he advocates that the tension between the two be kept and not sublated in a Hegelian way, even though this is one of the charges that Caputo raises against Kearney's thought.[122] Or as Kearney (2013) formulates it:

> This is less a question of Hegelian synthesis than of multiple traversals between seeming incompatibles. It does not signal recourse to

122. For Caputo's critique of Kearney, see Caputo (2011). In terms of the Hegelian charge, Caputo (2011:16) holds that he still worries that Hegel is in the closet of Kearney's diacritical logic of the third: 'I do not mean a strong Hegelianism, with the ab-solute Spirit and the *Begriff* and the teleology, but a certain Hegelian 'structure', which is why in *Radical Hermeneutics*, speaking of Gadamer, I spoke of a 'closet' Hegelianism. By 'Hegelian' I mean that everything culminates in a moment of the 'third', of a 'between' (*metaxy*) or a 'middle', of a reconciliation, of a deeper, richer, more mature concretion of two moments that, taken by themselves, are one-sided and abstract.' Kearney (2011a:81), in turn, outlines how he avoids a total resolution and concludes: 'So, far from collapsing horizons, ana-theism keeps them open and overlapping. Far from resolving conflicting interpretations, ana-theism preserves the hermeneutic circles in motion. It renounces the romantic nostalgia for some original oneness (of being, meaning, intention, authorship), declining to end the story, happy or unhappy. And it does this out of fidelity to an endless interplay between

some speculative metaphysical system that would wrap opposites into some happy ending. Nor does it summon us to the call of a 'Last God', as Heidegger might have us believe. Nor, finally, need such translation revert to a model of scholastic compromise, setting out middle-range rules and then settling for the median mark. It is more a matter of gracious affinities. Constellations. Interlacings of alterities. (p. 12)

Furthermore, the last sentence of the quotation formulates alterities in the plural, which means the moment of diacritical discernment is an endless task that takes place at each (of the plural) encounters between one and an other. Hence, the call is not for an overcoming of differences in one act of interpretation. Rather, the call is a continuous dialogue with others and hence for decolonisation to become a practice of constant diacritical interpretation over against a single sweep of destruction.

Secondly, in order to try and avoid these two extreme positions in rethinking identity by way of engaging and encountering the other in dialogue, I would like to emphasise the double critique Kearney formulates in his approach of diacritical for the task of decolonisation. In short, it is a double critique of namely the self and that of the other. Or in Kearney's (2013) words:

Not all 'selves' are evil and not all 'others' are angelic. That is why, I suggest, it is wise to supplement the critique of the *self* with an equally indispensable critique of the *other*. Without such a double critique – which exposes illusory categories of ego *and* alien – we can no longer speak of any real relation between humans, or indeed between humans and non-humans (animal or divine). (pp. 10–11)

The critique of the Western self, therefore, is to be supplemented by the critique of the African other. And the critique of the African self is to be supplemented by the critique of the Western other, which importantly will entail a critique of all the variations of identities that escape these formulations.

(footnote 122 continues…)
transcendence and immanence. As such, ana-theism holds that two is better than one – and that three (or four) is better still.'

The double critique thus aims to address the challenge of keeping the tension between others and thereby avoid falling into one of two extreme positions (Kearney 2013):

> This double critique requires a delicate balance. On one hand, if others become *too transcendent*, they disappear off our radar screen and we lose all contact. We then not only stop seeing them directly but even stop seeing them indirectly *as* this or that other. The possibility of imagining, narrating or interpreting alterity becomes impossible; and in the field of philosophy, we witness the demise of phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry. […] On the other hand, if others become too *immanent*, they become equally exempt from ethical relation. In this instance, they become indistinguishable from our own totalising selves (conscious or unconscious). The trick is therefore, I suggest, not to let the foreign become *too* foreign or the familiar *too* familiar. (p. 11)

It is this double critique that aims to ensure the engagement of one with an other and thereby overcomes the violent logic that denies the existence of the other as fully human.

Thirdly, the importance of keeping the tension between the extreme poles is of course found in the deconstructive impulse that underlines the tension. That is, firstly, to be aware of the ethico-politico implication when one of these poles becomes essentialised and totalised selves, as the previous quote phrases the problem, that is, when one of them is taken as an onto-theological figuration. The tension is nothing but the 'empty space of power', or *khora*, that needs to be kept open. The cycle of the logic of the coloniser needs to be broken, decolonised in a diacritical manner. Moreover, the double critique implies that both the self and the other take part in conversation through mutual recognition of the existence of the other as fully human (Kearney 2003):

> [*O*]ne of the best ways to *de-alienate* the other is to recognise (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as (in part) another self. For if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity of the other person, it equally requires me to recognise the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities, that is, as someone

capable of recognising me in turn as a self capable of recognition and esteem (p. 80).

Hence, from within the space of diacritical decolonisation, others may encounter each other, one an other, and in taking up the responsibility of critical dialogue or struggle start to co-create a sense of what it may mean to live in the postcolonial and post-apartheid world.

Fourthly, from the space of struggle and contestation of diacritical decolonisation, the question of meaning and identity may be taken up anew through narration. Kearney (2013:101), following Paul Ricoeur, describes the process in three parts. Firstly, the critical and practical judgement of *phronesis* through narratives as discussed earlier. Regarding evil, this critical judgement, although not absolute but always intermediate, would enable us to act against evil, that is, to act against new onto-theological figurations that want to reinstate the violent logic of the coloniser. Elaborating on the narrative account, the second part entails a working through:

> If practical understanding addresses the *action* response to evil, it sometimes neglects the *suffering* response. Evil is not just something we *struggle against*. It is also (as noted above) something we *undergo*. Something that 'befalls' us. To ignore this passivity of evil endured is to ignore the extent to which evil strikes us as shockingly strange and disempowering. (p.103)

As Kearney (2003) points out, acknowledging the traumatising effects of enduring evil and working through them is one of the wisest responses one can give. Hence, the importance of narrative testimonies that may lead to narrative catharsis:

> What the catharsis of mourning narrative allows is the [*realisation*] that new actions are still possible *in spite of evil suffered*. Narrative catharsis detaches us from the [*obsessional*] repetitions of the past and frees us for a less repressed future. [*And moreover*] mourning is not a way of instituting a new sacrificial dialectic of us-versus-them. On the contrary, it is a way of learning to live with the monsters in our midst so that by revisiting and renaming them we might outlive them. (p. 104)

Thus, a narrative working-through helps us to start breaking the cycle of the logic of the coloniser, of creating new gods and monsters, of enduring and inflicting evil, in order to open up new possible futures.

Sequentially, the third part of narrating identity, which follows the working-through and allows for the cycle to be broken, Kearney suggests is pardon. Although it may seem impossible or unpredictable, Kearney argues that in pardon *phronetic* understanding joins forces with the practice of patient working-through. Their joint aim, as Kearney (2003) describes, is:

> [*T*]o ensure that past evils might be prevented from recurring. Such prevention often requires pardon as well as protest so that the cycles of repetition and revenge give way to future possibilities of non-evil. (p. 104)

Here, one must note that the issue of forgiveness is difficult but at the same time not completely idealistic as South Africa's own history reflects:

> For narrative testimony can sometimes give us such a deep empathic connection with the suffering of others that not only is their past honoured in the present but our own present is enlarged by this past. This exchange of testimonial memories – between past and present, Jew and non-Jew, native and alien, us and them – holds out possibilities of reconciliation. And recent experiences of truth tribunals in South Africa and Northern Ireland suggest that such possibilities are not entirely utopian. (p.104)

Coming back to the question of identity, in breaking the cycle of reinstituting the logic of the coloniser, the Us versus Them conception of essentialised identities allows for an understanding of the self in relation to the other in dialogue. Thus, identity is created through the diacritical and narrative interpretation(s) of the lived experience in our relation to multiple others, instead of a substantialised isolated and non-accessible notion of the self or the other. In the words of Kearney (2003):

> Resisting this option of self-ruin, a complex phenomenology of the self–other dyad prompts us to espouse a hermeneutic pluralism

of otherness, a sort of 'polysemy of alterity' – ranging from our experiences of conscience and the body to those of other persons, living or dead (our ancestors), or to a divine Other, living or absent. (p. 81)

One may here bring Mbembe back into the conversation. With a similar aim of overcoming the logic of the coloniser, Mbembe (2001b) speaks of alternative identity as in his notion of the *emerging subject*:

[*T*]he *subject* emerging, acting effectively, withdrawing, or being removed in the act and context of *displacement* refers to two things: first, to the forms of 'living in the concrete world', then to the subjective forms that make possible any validation of its contents – that objectify it. In Africa today, the subject who *accomplishes the age* and validates it, who lives and espouses his/her contemporaneousness – that is, what is 'distinctive' or 'particular' to his/her present real world – is first a subject who has an *experience* of 'living in the concrete world'. She/he is a subject of experience and a validating subject, not only in the sense that she/he is a conscious existence or has a perceptive conscious-ness of things, but to the extent that his/her 'living in the concrete world' involves, and is evaluated by, his/her eyes, ears, mouth – in short, his/her flesh, his/her body.[123] (p. 17)

One finds here Mbembe resonating the call for a diacritical decolonisation, of validating or critically interpreting the world including others around him or her. Moreover, this continuous critical interpretation of the world in order to understand yourself in relation to the other in dialogue re-emphasises the break with essentialised notions of identity. Identity is not to be rediscovered by looking to the past and removing the elements that obscure the purity of that identity so that it may be uplifted in all its glory to the highest reference point. Instead, identity is constantly

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123. The question of embodiment, introduced by Mbembe, cannot regretfully be addressed here. For an overview of the question of embodiment and its various interpretations in the contemporary phenomenological tradition, see Ramona, Jasper and Salazar-Ferrer (2014). See also Kearney (2015), Manoussakis (2015), Pretorius (2017) and Verhoef (2016:7).

co-created in the interpretation of the lived world. Mbembe (2001b) reverberates this point when he writes:

> There is no African identity that could be designated by a single term, or that could be named by a single word; or that could be subsumed under a single category [...]. Neither the forms of this identity nor its idioms are always self-identical. And these forms and idioms are mobile, reversible, and unstable. Given this, they cannot be reduced to a purely biological order based on blood, race, or geography. Nor can they be reduced to custom, to the extent that the latter is constantly being reinvented. (p. 33)

The task of diacritical decolonisation, then, is not to rediscover a lost past by way of destruction but to make sense of the lived experience and co-create possible new futures by way of critical engagement.

■ What is to be done?

As a final word: We may consider the South African context as the experience of a kind of crisis after the deconstruction of the onto-theological figuration and master narrative of apartheid. We are in the midst of experiencing the crisis of democracy, with its 'empty space of power'. This crisis, on the one side, has brought about and re-enforced fear, anger and disappointment towards our various monstrous others as well as the urge to replace the space of power with another figuration of an African god and the creation of a Western monster. On the other side, Kearney reminds us that the empty space opened up by the deconstruction is not one of silence resulting from inaccessibility to alterity or in this instance 'African alterity', or the inability to act against the perceived persistence of 'Western domination'. The space opened up by the crisis of democracy is rather a space of contestation and struggle between conflicting interpretations (or one might say voices, translations, languages, etc.). And a space where the past may be worked through, pardoned and made sense of anew towards possible new futures and

understandings of the self and other. It calls for the negotiation and co-creation of meaning within this space between co-existing, co-original others, one with an other. In other words, this is where Kearney's diacritical hermeneutics enters as a possible guiding sense of what decolonisation might be, that is, a diacritical decolonisation. We need to start having more conversations, testimonies and critical dialogues where we may discern or 'judge' the interpretations and the agendas of the other(s) who proclaim them, which is different from denying these interpretations from the start. For to love and hate presupposes a form of recognition. Thus, what happens on an ontological level in our understanding of ourselves in relation to others – which is the mutual recognition that *Dasein* is always *Mitsein* [being-in-the-world with others] or *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ['a person is a person through other people', as the Zulu saying on *ubuntu* goes] – opens and keeps open the space of contestation and thereby enables the diacritical hermeneutical event of decolonisation to take place.

Approaching the threshold: Hospitality as a pedagogical wager in the work of Richard Kearney

Helgard Pretorius [124]
Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology
Stellenbosch University
South Africa

◼ Approaching the threshold

How does one learn of the other? Is it possible to become better at responding to the experience of strangeness? If the presence

124. Doctoral candidate in a joint degree programme at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

of the stranger calls for hospitality, is that something one could cultivate in oneself or in others?

It is in grappling with these types of questions that I wish to set forth my conversation with Richard Kearney. Certainly, the question of the other would count as one of the most prevalent themes of our time. It has also been a persistent question at the heart of Kearney's work over many years. I believe this publication also attests to the fact that many South African scholars, from different disciplines, have learnt a great deal from Richard Kearney about Otherness and what hospitality to the stranger might entail. Who knows, perhaps one could even say that many people, touched by Richard Kearney's person, his writings, lectures and public initiatives, have grown in hospitality or that they have learnt something about creating more hospitable communities and institutions – perhaps.

But if that is so, *what* did they learn? And *how* did they learn it? Might they also become teachers of Otherness or help cultivate an ethos of hospitality? And if so, how?

In his most important work on alterity to date, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (2003), Richard Kearney refers to Julia Kristeva's suggestion that there are three main ways of responding to our fundamental experience of estrangement: *art*, *religion* and *psychoanalysis* (Kearney 2003:6). Kearney draws resources from each of these in his own attempt to respond to the question of the other, but he also suggests that these approaches may be supplemented by a fourth way – *philosophy (*Kearney 2003):

> For if art offers therapy in terms of images, religion in terms of faith, and psychoanalysis in terms of a 'talking cure', philosophy has something extra (though not necessarily better) to offer. And that something extra, which may usefully supplement the other three, is a certain kind of *understanding.* (pp. 6–7)

Before exploring what such understanding might entail, I would like to draw attention to the fact that each of these approaches

is carried and sustained by a certain *pedagogy* or *paideia*. In art, religion, psychoanalysis and philosophy, at least a minimal form of learning or instruction, training or formation, apprenticeship or initiation are important, mediated by institutions involving curricula, habits, practices, teachers and the like. My premise is that without some type of formative process, these modes of responding to the other would hardly be conceivable.

As an example of what I have in mind, let us briefly consider the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology in which Kearney primarily situates himself. Would it have been possible for this tradition to emerge as a response to the other, as Kearney suggests that it did, were it not for its roots in the humanistic heritage of viewing education as something more than the accumulation of knowledge (*epistemē*) and the acquiring of certain technical skills (*technē*) but also as the cultivation of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), the open-ended *formation* of values, virtues and habits of mind?

Hans-Georg Gadamer recognised the indebtedness of hermeneutics to this particular kind of formation when he gave a central place to the notion of *Bildung* in his influential work *Truth and Method*. Gadamer argues that *Verstehen* [understanding], philosophical or otherwise, is intimately related to a type of formation that cannot be reduced to a methodological procedure or technical result. To be sure, notions like *Bildung* have an ambivalent relationship to the other, something that Gadamer was well aware of when he distinguished *Bildung* from *Kultur* as the development of one's own capacities and talents. Instead, for Gadamer, *Bildung* and the hermeneutic endeavour are both provoked by a common desire, which also determines its course, namely, 'learning how to be open to *the other*, to come to respect *the other* on its own terms' (Thiselton 2007:82) or, in Gadamer's words, 'learning to affirm what is different from oneself', which may include the acknowledgement that 'some things are against me' (2004:14, 361).

Recognising the important connection between alterity, formation and understanding calls up a whole new set of questions. If understanding involves some type of formation or training, this might imply that something can be done to prepare for the other 'as other'. Would that not, however, be implying too much? Can one really be prepared for what is absolutely 'other'? Is it possible to be educated, trained or formed (*Bildung*) for an encounter or event that – by its very nature 'as other' – should transcend or disrupt the figures or images (*Bilder*) that make up the prevailing horizons of an educated person (*Gebildete*)? Or do notions like *Bildung* denote something that is too culturally familiar to do justice to what is radically other? Doesn't *Bildung*, in the final instance, lead to a *configuring* of the stranger into our own image (*Bild*), thereby running the risk of *disfiguring* Otherness by imposing our own values, concerns, desires and fears onto the other?

It is here, at the intersection between formation, imagination and the other – with due respect to the complexities presented by each of these terms – that I believe Richard Kearney's philosophical project has made an important pedagogical contribution. What I have found in Kearney's work is a daring attempt to thoroughly engage the question of the other, yet without abandoning a commitment to a (broadly defined) humanist tradition of learning, oriented towards the cultivation of 'practical wisdom which deliberates about actions and ends in a context where human selves discover an ethos binding them to others in a community, tradition, or *polis*' (Kearney 1995:xii). Against this background, I ask how Kearney's approach to alterity could be read as a *pedagogical wager* that risks preparing a place for the other by allowing the other to prepare a place for the self.

As we will see, such a wager harbours layers of complexity, with many risks to be negotiated and new pathways to be sought between what seems to be incontestable dichotomies. What is at stake is an adequate response to the many crosswinds currently

facing educational institutions, globally and in South Africa. In a culturally polyvalent South Africa struggling to work through persistent histories of violent forms of othering, there is a need for a 'decolonised pedagogy' and also confusion and misunderstanding about what that might mean. At the same time, as institutions of learning are put under increasing pressure to commercialise and instrumentalise their pedagogical offerings, spaces where the question of the other could even be posed with any integrity are rapidly shrinking.

Against this background, I will attempt to retrace Kearney's hermeneutic phenomenology of 'the stranger' as it emerges from his dialogue with other phenomenological, deconstructive and psychoanalytical approaches. In each case, I will try to draw some preliminary pedagogical insights from Kearney's engagement with various heterologies. The point is not to present prepackaged pedagogical solutions. The aim of this essay is simply to reach for new pedagogical vistas or starting points by uncovering language and imagery that could potentially evoke greater attentiveness to Otherness in a variety of pedagogical contexts, from the university classroom to a local congregation's pulpit or communion table. In conclusion, I will suggest that Kearney's description of the 'anatheist wager' as a fivefold movement of *imagination*, *humour*, *commitment*, *discernment* and *hospitality* could be seen as possible orientating markers of a pedagogy of hospitality (Kearney 2010:40–56).

◾ Introducing the stranger

Who is the stranger? Where and how does the stranger appear?

Firstly, a few words on terminology. In the introduction to *Phenomenologies of the Stranger* (2011), a collection of essays co-edited by Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, the editors make a distinction between the English terms 'stranger', 'other' and 'foreigner' (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:6). While often similar and always interrelated, the three terms, for them,

are not the same. Their study focuses primarily on the figure of the stranger, which in relation to the other and the foreigner occupies a type of middle ground:

> The Stranger occupies the threshold between the Other and the Foreigner [...]. Foreigner and Other are two faces of the Stranger, one turned towards us, the other turned away: the Foreigner is the Stranger we see; the Other is the Stranger we do not see. [...] Insofar as it comes towards us, the Stranger reveals its face as 'Foreigner', someone with a name and identity, someone with papers and fingerprints, an accent and place of origin, however far away [...]. By contrast, what we term the Other as such, is precisely that which cannot appear according to any of our factical categories, political, psychological, or social. (p. 6)

By choosing to focus on the stranger as a threshold figure between the foreigner and the other, Kearney and Semonovitch intentionally draw our attention to the profound ambiguity or doubling nature of the phenomenon in question. The stranger, like a shape shifter, slips from being a transcendent other – without name or face – to a foreigner – who can be 'tracked, classified and computed' – and back again (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:6). It is for this reason that the distinction between 'foreigner', 'stranger' and 'other' is helpful: not to indicate three different beings, but to touch on the ambiguities that arise when the same being presents itself in different guises (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:6).[125]

There is, in other words, no stranger 'as such' but only different modes of strangeness, manifesting in different types of strangers and different types of threshold experiences. As Bernard Waldenfels (2007:8) says, 'otherness has an occasional character' and is always imbedded within particular socio-political and symbolic realities. 'A placeless "alien in general" would resemble a "left side in general" – a monstrous idea', says Waldenfels (2007:8). It is important to stress that in Kearney's use of the

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125. In the rest of this chapter, I will attempt, as far as possible, to stick with Kearney's use of these terms, using inverted commas to indicate their more technical use.

stranger, there is no 'monstrous' or 'sublime' or 'noumenal' omni-stranger lurking *behind* phenomena. Instead, by presenting the stranger as a liminal figure between the poles of the 'foreigner-for-me' and the 'other as other' Kearney directs our attention to the *threshold* as 'the *mi-lieu* between the *non-lieu* of the nameless and the *lieu* of the named' (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:5).

In making our way towards a *pedagogy of hospitality*, the following section will try to situate Kearney's so-called diacritical hermeneutic of the stranger within his many dialogical detours with other thinkers.[126] Although the question of alterity recalls a story with ancient beginnings,[127] we will restrict our discussion to Kearney's reception of this question via the phenomenological tradition inaugurated by Edmund Husserl at the start of the 20th century. Kearney's hermeneutic philosophy of the other emerges from a critical dialogue with diverse thinkers from this tradition, starting with Husserl's students, Heidegger, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty, before being received and extended in different ways by the phenomenological hermeneutics of Ricoeur, the deconstruction of Derrida and the psychoanalytic philosophy of Kristeva.

■ The absolute Other: Levinas and Derrida

It is to the credit of the phenomenological tradition that it helped to effect an important shift in the question of alterity from a *relative* kind of Otherness to the possibility of more *radical* types of otherness. For centuries before, in Western thought, there was only room for a stranger that could be derived from the same; only an other *for us*, but not an other *in itself* or an other *as other*. Such a relative Otherness (comparable to Kearney's notion of the foreigner) depended on constellations of thought and

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126. For 'diacritical hermeneutics' as an important term for Kearney's self-understanding, see Kearney (2012).

127. For a more comprehensive account of alterity in Western history and culture, see Part 1 of Kearney's (2003) work *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, as well as Kristeva (1991).

practice that associated the *own* and *familiar* with what is *rational* or *reasonable*, while designating the *irrational* or *incomprehensible* as *alien* or *strange*. It was only in recent times, as the Modern ideals of universal Reason and the autonomous Subject became undermined, that notions of *radical* Otherness were able to emerge from the cracks – in other words, types of Otherness that reach to the core of the self without a foundation in some *a priori* order or subjectivity.

Husserl's phenomenological work played an important role in facilitating this shift, for by revealing the *intentional* character of all phenomena (i.e. that things always appear to me *as* 'this' or 'that') he helped to unveil the processes by which the other enters into the subject's local standpoint and perspective. This is what enabled the 'occasional character' of Otherness to be conceived, implying that the other 'as such' always remains beyond the reach of the subject's interpretive gaze. At best, the stranger 'as other' is apprehended as an '*immanent* transcendency', a 'becoming conscious' of an Otherness that transcends my consciousness (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:8).[128] The stranger that becomes present to consciousness does so only as *my* experience of 'an other' that can at best be called 'an other I' or *alter ego*. Husserl ultimately remained bound to the strictures of transcendental idealism in his attempt to establish a foundation for a science of the human that could compete with the natural sciences. Nevertheless, by defining the limits of the subject's capabilities, Husserl helped to prepare the way for the radical other to make itself felt from beyond the subject's appropriating gaze.

The radical implications of Husserl's discovery would however only become apparent in the work of his student Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas agreed with his teacher that the stranger eludes our attempts to mediate its otherness. However, unlike Husserl, whose concerns were strictly epistemological, Levinas did not

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128. '[T]he verifiable accessibility of what is originally inaccessible' (Hua I, 144, Eng. 114, cited in Waldenfels 2007:8).

consider the incapacity of the subject to be a failure. Instead, for Levinas, the stranger's irreducible transcendence was seen as something laudable (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:10). Levinas reimagined the self's incapacity before the other as 'an invitation to allow the Stranger to remain strange' (2011:10). He thereby exchanged a relative Otherness that reduces the strange to the familiar for a *radical* Otherness that is not derived from a prior self or predetermined logos.

For Levinas, the epistemological inadequacy of my attempts to apprehend the other (by sign, image or analogy) clears the way for an even prior *ethical* responsibility for the irreducible *face* of the stranger to be recognised.[129] In my experience of the stranger 'as other', I feel myself seen *before* I see him or her. Therefore, the face of the other demands that ethics is prior to epistemology. Kearney and Semonovitch (2011) summarise their discussion of Levinas's epoch-changing shift as follows:

> At the limit of my powers, I am compelled to confront a Stranger whose 'face' refuses to be reduced to what is 'similar' to me, to likeness or resemblance. In short, in Levinas's hands phenomenology implodes to reveal an alter beyond all alter egos. This turning towards the face of the Other who looks at me before I look at it, contests all phenomenologies of subjectivity which prevailed from Hegel and Husserl to Heidegger and Sartre. It opens the possibility of radical welcome. (p. 11)

It was this ethical philosophy of radical welcome that inspired Jacques Derrida to direct his deconstructive energies towards various modes of resistance to the stranger 'as other', most notably through mechanisms of appropriation tied up with the Western metaphysical tradition. However (Kearney 1995):

> While Derrida agrees with Levinas's ethical language of radical responsibility to 'the other', he insists that the language of ethics cannot be so easily divorced from the language of 'being'. (p. 151)

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129. For a careful deliberation on 'Levinas and the Ethics of Imagining', see Chapter 8 of Kearney's *Poetics of Modernity: Towards a Hermeneutic Imagination* (1995), New York: Humanity Books, 108–117.

What is required – in service of the ethical horizon of 'the other' – is a re-evaluation of fundamental Western ethical categories (such as 'the self', 'the other' and 'the good'). From this follows Derrida's critique of various '-centrisms', such as *egocentrism* (which reduces the other to the *own*) and *logocentrism* (which reduces the other to the *common*). By decentring the transcendental subject and disrupting conventional orders such as 'pure reason' or 'moral dualism', deconstruction sets out to do justice to the *singularity* of each event, the *irreducibility* of every other and the *undecidability* of every decision (1995:154–158).

Kearney's distinction between the stranger 'as other' and the stranger 'as foreigner' gains particular significance in the light of Derrida's celebrated work on hospitality (see Derrida 2000, 2001). Absolute hospitality, as presented by Levinas's hyperbolic language, says Derrida, is impossible. Because of the conditional nature of hospitality in practice (within the orders of 'family', 'society' and 'state'), the stranger 'as other' can only ever be *awaited*. Like the messiah, however, *it never actually arrives*. Instead of 'the other', the face that appears is always only 'the foreigner' (Kearney 2003:68–9). Because – in practice – hospitality is always conditioned by *nomos* (laws and conventions) and *le nom* (the demand for the stranger's name), the stranger is not allowed to remain strange, but may only exist as a 'foreigner-for-me' (2011:12).

In light of conventions of hospitality based on egocentric and logocentric regimes of thought and practice, Kearney views the radical other of Levinas and Derrida as a vital interruption and disruption in service of an ethics of justice (Kearney 2003):

> The most important lesson, I believe, that we can draw from Derrida's analysis is that the exclusivist binary oppositions of 'us' (sameness) and 'them' (otherness) need to be challenged so that the 'Foreigner Question' becomes not only 'Who is this foreigner?' but 'Who am I for this foreigner?' And by extension 'Whose home is this anyway?' (p. 243)

To return to our pedagogical question, two important shifts stand out as important. Firstly, there is the shift from *relative* to

radical otherness. Levinas especially asks us to consider a pedagogy that takes 'the other', rather than 'the subject' as its starting point. Unlike conventional pedagogical models aimed at overcoming, appropriating or containing strangeness, this would involve the recognition that the stranger 'as other' is not only a puzzle I have *not yet* solved but also someone who maintains their mystery and strangeness even as they enter my home.

Secondly, there is the shift from an *epistemological* to an *ethical* point of departure. As educational philosopher Sharon Todd (2001:67) has argued, this means that the operative question shifts from '[w]hat do we need to know in order to live well together?' to '[w]hat relation with 'the other' is necessary in order for knowledge to be possible?' (Ben-Ari & Strier 2010). In other words, a pedagogy that takes the ethical relation to the other as its starting point would be oriented more towards the *formation* of a type of disposition than the passing on of *information*.

With these two shifts in mind, it might be helpful to reimagine formation, not as a process becoming more informed *about* those who have been othered (although this certainly has its place) but as a type of *initiation process* into a different ethical relation to the other, namely, of becoming *susceptible* to otherness. To prepare for the stranger is to be 'initiated' into an ethos – understood in the original Greek sense of 'dwelling' or 'habitation'. This means that learning and teaching spring forth, not from subjectivity, but from an even prior disposition of *passivity*. After all, the dwelling, as Levinas reminds us, is always the first to show hospitality, for it offers its proprietor a primordial welcome.[130] Does the same not also apply to our 'houses of learning'? Are we not, as teachers and students, first of all strangers who have been and continue to be welcomed as guests?

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130. The home that founds possession is not a possession in the same sense as the movable goods it can collect and keep. It is possessed because it already and henceforth is hospitable for its proprietor (Levinas 1969:157).

Derrida also sees hospitality as the absolute ethical horizon within which our encounter with the stranger takes place. In a remarkable passage from *On Cosmopolitanism*, Derrida (2001) might even be challenging us to think of hospitality as *Bildung* itself:

> 'To cultivate an ethic of hospitality' – is such an expression not tautologous? Despite all the tensions or contradictions which distinguish it, and despite all the perversions that can befall it, one cannot speak of cultivating an ethic of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic among others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, ethics is hospitality; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality. (pp. 16–17)

This passage affirms an ethos of hospitality to the extent that it also calls into question the very quest for a pedagogy that aims at cultivating such an ethic. What, may we ask, remains to be done?

Because 'there is a history of hospitality, an always possible perversion of the law of hospitality', there is also a call for the deconstruction of 'different modalities of violence' by which 'one seeks to appropriate, control and master' the stranger 'as foreigner' (Derrida 2001:17). Therefore, Derrida could be nudging us, initiands of the ethos of hospitality, towards a process of *decentring* and *unlearning* – of deconstructing the house built on *egocentrism* (which reduces the other to the own) and *logocentrism* (which reduces the other to common goals and rules). Importantly, because one never stops awaiting 'the other' – even after 'the foreigner' has arrived – the initiation process is endless. One never graduates. Yet – and this may be Derrida's point – as long as hospitality remains the ultimate horizon, the hope remains of being ever readmitted as an initiand, a disciple awaiting the other's arrival.

In South Africa, hospitality also has 'a history'. It is, in part, a history of colonial violence, of apartheid instituted by 'passes' and

'homelands', of mob violence against scapegoated *makwerekwere*. From this (ongoing) history leaps forth a call to decentre various 'ethnocentrisms' (egocentrism on a social scale) that revolve around one's own group, tribe, culture and nation. More specifically, there is an urgency to *decolonise* pedagogies built on a very particular form of ethnocentrism called *Eurocentrism*: not one culture among others, but the elevation of a particular cultural and ethnic matrix that Bernard Waldenfels has defined as a 'mixture between ego and logocentrism', quietly assumed to be 'the incarnation and vanguard of mankind' (Waldenfels 2007:14–15). However, if a pedagogy that decolonises the foreigner and fosters openness to 'the other' is required, is it sufficient?

■ Strangers to ourselves: Kristeva and Waldenfels

While the influence of Levinas and Derrida on Kearney's understanding of the stranger is undisputed, this is only one part of the story.[131] According to Kearney, one should also explore the actual ways that strangers register in our individual and social psyches. In other words, how are strangers imagined *as* this or that type of 'foreigner' – as guest, neighbour, alien or enemy? How do we account for the age-old tendency within Western discourses to predicate claims to identity 'upon some unconscious projection of an Other who is not "us"' (Kearney 2003:72–73)?[132]

To help account for these processes of projection, Kearney draws on Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach to alterity in her

131. For the sake of brevity, I have not dwelled here at any length on Kearney's important critiques of Levinas and Derrida with regard to alterity. See Kearney's critical discussions in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003:65–72, 102–108).

132. Kearney provides countless examples and incisive readings of ethnic, cultural and national groups identifying themselves in opposition to the stranger. See Part 1 of *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (Kearney 2003:23–139) and Part 3 of *On Stories* (2002:77–122), where Kearney's critical philosophical analyses are enriched with textured examples from anthropology, political history, literature and cinema.

Strangers to Ourselves (1991). Kristeva (cited in Kearney 2003) relates this recurring xenophobic drive:

[*T*]o a basic unconscious process whereby we externalise that which is 'strange' within us unto an external 'stranger'. The result is a denial of the fact that we are strangers to ourselves, a denial which takes the form of negating aliens. To the extent that we exclude the outsider we deceive ourselves into thinking that we have exempted ourselves from estrangement. (p. 73)

Her analysis of this recurring phenomenon rests upon Freud's notion of 'the uncanny' (*das Unheimliche*) (2003:73). Freud ironically pointed out that the *Unheimliche* 'is that phenomenon of strangeness which curiously re-evokes what is "known of old and familiar"' (2003:73). In other words, the uncanny is situated not outside oneself, but in the unconscious of 'the self', 'the own', 'the known' and 'the same':

[*D*]as Unheimliche is the obverse of *das Heimlich*, arising when the latter becomes so privy or surreptitious that it disappears from consciousness altogether, slipping beneath the bar of the unconscious. The intimate becomes *so* intimate that it becomes strange. The 'uncanny' comes to mean, then, something 'secret or untrustworthy', finding its equivalents in the Latin *occultus* or *mysticus*. (p. 73)

As a hidden part of ourselves, the 'alien' or 'uncanny' is experienced as something unexpected, fearful and unspeakable, provoking us to find a means of externalising it – often, by projecting it onto strangers. In such cases, says Kearney (2003), the:

[*M*]ore foreign someone is the more eligible to carry the shadow cast by our unconscious. Strangers become perfect foils since we can act out on them the hostility we feel towards our own strangers within. (p. 74)

What the psychoanalytic hermeneutic discloses is that the scapegoated strangers, however threatening and terrifying they may appear, are sometimes 'nothing other than our own estranged self coming back to ghost us' (2003:74). Kearney (2003) concludes his discussion of Freud's *Unheimliche* thus:

The prefix *un-* in *Unheimlich* is, in short, to be understood less as a logical opposition than as a dialectical reversal. The adversary I love

to hate is often nothing less than myself in disguise. Taking our cue from Freud we might conclude, accordingly, that dreaded aliens are most dreaded not because they are other than us but because they are *more like us than our own selves*. (p. 74)

Kristeva continues to develop this Freudian insight politically, viewing the *realisation* that we are 'strangers to ourselves' as the 'very basis' upon which 'we can try to exist with others' (Kristeva cited in 2003:75).[133] Aware of the strangeness within, a 'tolerant moral cosmopolitanism' becomes 'the secular equivalent', says Kearney (2003:74) 'of the old religious vision […] so vigorously promoted by the Prophets and Saint Paul, of a community of peoples and tongues'. Kearney (2003:74) sees Kristeva's psychoanalytic exposé of the uncanny as 'the stranger within' as a 'useful means of *depathologising* the alien'. Because a 'gap is now located within the presumed homogeneity of human consciousness', the other is 'at long last being admitted as an integral inhabitant of the self' (2003:74). Or as Kristeva puts it: 'the stranger is neither a race nor a nation […] we are our own strangers – we are divided selves' (cited in Kearney 2003:75).[134]

While Kearney endorses Kristeva's therapeutic response to pathological forms of alienisation, he is inclined to ask, in light of the radical alterity of Levinas and Derrida, whether Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach is not perhaps 'too quick in its tendency to reduce alterity to a dialectic of the unconscious psyche?'. Kearney (2003) suggests:

To put it in another way, if deconstruction too rapidly subordinates the Same to the Other, psychoanalysis may too rapidly subordinate the Other to the Same. And so doing, it risks subsuming the exteriority of transcendence into the language games of psychic immanence. (p. 77)

While psychoanalysis sheds light on an aspect of the experience of alterity that is lost from view when Otherness is only situated

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133. Original quote from Kristeva (1988) (Kearney's translation).

134. Original quote from Kristeva (1988:268) (Kearney's translation).

outside of the self, Kearney's critique is that Kristeva 'does not sufficiently emphasise how there are also strangers who are *not* ourselves – and never will be' (2011:21).

At this point, it may be helpful to introduce Bernard Waldenfels to the discussion.[135] Waldenfels has also argued (from a phenomenological perspective) that the other does not merely reside outside of ourselves, in strangers, but sometimes also emerges *from within*, as an 'intra-subjective and intra-cultural otherness' (2007:9–11). According to Waldenfels, for whom the experience of 'the other' is a 'lived and incarnate absence' [*leibhaftige Abwesenheit*], Otherness 'originates in ourselves; it comes upon us at home' (2007:10). Like the event of my own birth – the incarnate absence *per excellence* – even the genesis of my self is hardly my own; I have my beginning outside myself and I am never entirely at home in myself.

The same applies to the cultural realm. According to Waldenfels (2007:18) there always remains a 'wild region' (Merleau-Ponty) of ourselves that is not invested in our own culture. Furthermore, it is this alien region within ourselves, more than anything else, that makes intercourse with the stranger 'as other' a possibility:

> If we were completely at home in our own culture, the other would remain completely outside of it; there would not be any threshold between our own world and the alien world. A threshold, that is, as a place of passage or transition that we cross but do not surpass in a definitive way. (p. 18)

Kearney and Waldenfels both emphasise more strongly than Kristeva that the 'other within' could be no less other than the stranger who is *outside* of the self. In other words, recognising the other within does not make it any less radical. Rather, it

135. Bernhard Waldenfels is someone who rarely features in Kearney's own discourse but nevertheless shares some important characteristics with Kearney's hermeneutic phenomenology of the stranger. I am grateful to Professor Thomas Wabel from Universität Bamberg for recommending his work to me.

acknowledges that 'strangeness is not something added to selfhood from without but inhabits the very tenor of its lived experience' (2011:17). As Waldenfels (2007) says:

> We have never been and will never be completely at home in the world, and this applies in clear opposition to traditional concentric orders, widening from the narrowness of a home-world to a world home [*for*] e.g. from the *oikos* through the *polis* to a sort of *cosmopolis* […] the life-world itself splits into *home-world* and *alien world* (*Heimwelt / Fremdwelt*). Such a splitting is not fatal. On the contrary it asks for *hospitality* and allows it, preparing the ground for an ethics of dwelling with others in the world. (p. 126)

In spite of their important differences, Waldenfels and Kristeva share the view that such an acknowledgement is the opening of a *threshold* towards a hospitable ethics and politics in a globalised world. So does Kearney (2003):

> It may well be that we find more of ourselves than we lose in befriending those monsters that are ultimately neither *fremd* nor foe, embracing the strangers in ourselves and others. For such mindfulness brings peace and transfigures fear. (p. 232)

How might a pedagogy of hospitality help to cultivate such 'mindfulness'? For a start, we might simply recognise that it may not be enough to imagine Otherness as that which is 'still to come'. The other needs to be welcomed into the heart of the pedagogical process itself by exploring ways of becoming more attuned to the alien that resides within what we presume to be 'our own' family, tribe, culture, language and tradition.

Thinking with Waldenfels, this might mean that the 'astonishment and wonder' evoked by an experience of the alien (and we could add other 'moods' such as attraction, repulsion, anxiety, nostalgia etc.) is 'not merely […] the first step towards wisdom and knowledge, but […] the initiation into "another state" […] that we will never leave behind' (Waldenfels 2007:6). The other, in this light, is not only the source and goal of a pedagogy of hospitality but also (like Socrates' *daemon*) its constant companion and even 'the way', 'The alienness in the midst of

myself opens paths to the alienness of the other' (Waldenfels 2007:81). This stands in sharp contrast to conventional pedagogies based on appropriating, domesticating and colonising otherness. We find ourselves, not only *before* the other, as a territory to be exploited, but *beside* the other, as if learning means something akin to cooking with strangers.[136]

Kristeva, on the other hand, would add that our pedagogies should include a *therapeutic aspect* that aspires towards healing and wholeness. We need to be equipped with the diagnostic skills of identifying various ways in which the stranger is 'alienised'.[137] To be sure, this should not be misunderstood as a way of expelling the alien from our lives as if Otherness were a pathology to be cured. On the contrary, the aim is *to depathologise the stranger* by way of a painful process of *healing wounds that may never be cured* – for unattended wounds create new victims. Part of the pedagogical task might therefore include ways of working through painful memories, of loosening bonds of resistance, of exposing strategies of mystification and of raising the lid on repressive distractions.

To assist in these tasks, Kearney has often insisted on the need to cultivate what he has called a 'diacritical hermeneutic' of the self capable of discerning – case for case – between damaging alienating mechanisms (of discrimination, suspicion and scapegoating) and experiences of Otherness that can become a threshold to a deeper intimacy with others and ourselves.[138] With this in mind, we turn to Kearney's engagement with Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty.

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136. One is reminded of Roland Barthes' definition (recipe?) of *Sapientia*: 'no power, a bit of knowledge, a bit of wisdom, and the most of savor possible [...]' (cited in Alves 1990:19).

137. Here 'alienised' refers to harmful forms of alienation and othering by which the stranger is discriminated against, paternalised, ostracised, scapegoated etc.

138. On what such healing might entail in a South African context, see Gobodo-Madikizela (2008).

■ At the threshold: Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty

While openness to the absolute Otherness of the stranger is pivotal, the danger of Levinas's hyperbolic passivity and Derrida's deconstructive self-critique is that we could become paralysed before absolute otherness. On the other hand, as we have noted with regard to Kristeva's analysis, reducing Otherness to the immanent play of the unconscious endangers the transcendence, contingency and particularities of our multifaceted identities.

Against this background, Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty, in their respective ways, have tried to shift the focus of the conversation towards 'the gap between' self and other, familiar and strange, and immanence and transcendence. Embodied existence in time and space, in which every day social, moral and political forces need to be negotiated in the name of justice, not only to 'otherness' or 'the uncanny' but also to flesh and blood 'strangers' who 'as others' are also 'selves', requires ways of traversing the 'gap between' without collapsing it. As the opening discussion may already have made clear, this is mostly where Kearney situates his own approach to alterity. I will first discuss Ricoeur's contribution with reference to the notion of 'translation' and then turn to Merleau-Ponty's 'intercorporeal' perspective, before drawing further pedagogical implications from their ideas.

As I have just suggested, Paul Ricoeur's approach to alterity seeks to shift the focus of the conversation to the hyphens between 'self' and 'self', between 'self' and 'stranger' and between 'foreigner' and 'other'. He does this by replacing the hyperbolic paradigm of Levinas and Derrida with the paradigmatic event of *translation* (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:13–16). However, this does not imply the return to relative otherness, for the very notion of translation is dependent on the other; it presupposes a multiplicity of languages, in contrast to the 'platonic ideal of one language'. In spite of the allure of a universal language that 'would try to fill the interlinguistic space of communication',

Ricoeur sees the post-Babel human condition as a happy opportunity for *linguistic hospitality* (Ricoeur 2006:9–10). Accordingly, the *inter*-linguistic event of translation between different natural languages becomes a symbol for the *intra*-linguistic 'capacity to communicate between distinct human beings' (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:14). The latter is what Ricoeur calls the 'ontological paradigm' of translation (Kearney 2006:xii). Echoing Waldenfels above, this symbol teaches us that even the most intimate and familiar relationships, such as those shared by friends or lovers, include elements of the strange. Translation, therefore, is *always* required, even *within* the mother tongue (2011:14).

A good translation requires an openness to the other and a willingness 'to forfeit our native language's claim to self-sufficiency […] in order to "host" […] the "foreign"' (Kearney 2006:xvi). Ricoeur calls this condition of openness *linguistic hospitality*. While translation celebrates the possibility of communication between self and other, 'linguistic hospitality calls us to forego the lure of omnipotence: the illusion of a total translation which would provide a perfect replica of the original' (2006:xvii). Or, as Ricoeur (cited in Kearney 2006) says, linguistic hospitality:

> [/]s the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling. (p. xvi)

This makes translation 'a wager, easier said than done and occasionally impossible to take up' (Ricoeur 2006:3), a difficult task in which the translator, who serves 'two masters' (an author and a reader, a self and another), fulfils the vow of fidelity while always being suspected of betrayal (Ricoeur 2006:4). Thus, the translator has a double fidelity: 'the first to the possibility of receiving the Foreigner into one's home, the second to the impossibility of ever doing so completely' (Kearney 2006:xvi). As with any translation, something is always lost in an encounter with the other, making the good host like the good translator:

someone who respects the 'untranslatable kernel' and gives up the ideal of the perfect translation, 'the temptation of a final account, the mirage of a total language' (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:13).

The threshold that enables communication between 'self' and 'other', therefore, is not a given but an *invitation* and *task* that always remains to be taken up. It is important to note that the 'self' spoken of here is no longer the self-founding, self-knowing 'I', but a *narrative self* that 'takes on board the postmodern assaults on the sovereign cogito' (Kearney 2003:189).[139] As a narrative identity, it is also not a *fait accompli* but an open-ended *task* of imagination, of being 'woven from its own histories and those of others' (2003:188). Thus, Kearney reads Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach of 'oneself-as-another' as an attempt 'to acknowledge a difference between self and other without separating them so schismatically that *no* relation at all is possible' – or, stated differently, 'to discover the other in our self and our self in the other – without abjuring either' (Kearney 2003:9, 10). This recovery of a nuanced and complex notion of the self has important implications for our search for a type of ethical pedagogy. As Kearney has often argued, a 'minimal quotient of self-esteem' is required to remain true to the ethical relationship between 'selves as others' and 'others as selves', capable of making and keeping promises, acting for the sake of

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139. In his introduction to *The Owl of Minerva* (2004), Kearney poignantly summarises Ricoeur's notion of the self: Ricoeur explodes the pretensions of the *cogito* to be self-founding and self-knowing. He insists that the shortest route from self to self is through the other. Or to put it in Ricoeur's felicitous formula: 'to say self is not to say I'. Why? Because the hermeneutic self is much more than an autonomous subject. Challenging the reign of the transcendental ego, Ricoeur proposes the notion of *self-as-another* – a *soi* that passes beyond the illusory confines of the *moi* and discovers its meaning in and through the linguistic mediations of signs and symbols, stories and ideologies, metaphors and myths. In the most positive hermeneutic scenario, the self returns to itself after numerous hermeneutic detours through the language of others, to find itself enlarged and enriched by the journey. The Cartesian model of the *cogito* as 'master and possessor' of meaning is henceforth radically subverted (Kearney 2004:2).

love and justice, listening to the legitimate claims and rights of strangers, and bearing testimony to past crimes.[140]

If Ricoeur emphasises the interlinguistic character of human existence to reimagine the gap between self and other, Merleau-Ponty's contribution consists primarily in a shift from an inter-subjective to an *inter-corporeal* paradigm. The implications of this alteration should not be underestimated, for it wholly transforms the threshold itself. As Waldenfels says, 'the exchange of the leading figure [from "subject" to "body"] changes the *inter* of the inter-change and inter-course which takes place between us' (2007:82).[141] With regard to our question of the stranger, two important consequences are worth mentioning here.

Firstly, it means that my experience of the stranger in the flesh precedes my grasp of the other as an active subject, for it 'first opens me to a radical passivity and passion' (Kearney 2015:27). Before the stranger even appears on my radar, my existence as flesh is already a 'naked exposition to the other-than-me, receptive to whomever and whatever exceeds and calls and gives itself to me' (Kearney 2015:27). According to Waldenfels, this means that 'we are touched by others before being able to ask who they are and what their behaviour or their utterances mean' (Waldenfels 2007:82). In the flesh, one's creative capacity of *making sense* is dependent on a prior *reception* of sense *from the other* as an 'incarnate absence'. In other words, 'one's agency (the capacity to touch) and one's passivity (the possibility of being touched), one's action and one's passion, are radically intertwined' (Kearney 2015:27–28). 'Here our sense of *touch*, not sight, is the operative sense [and] the [paradigm] of all other senses' (Kearney 2015:27–28).

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140. For a helpful discussion on the complexities involved in historical testimony and rememoration, see Chapter 5 of *On Stories*, entitled 'The Paradox of Testimony' (Kearney 2002).

141. Kearney works out the implications of this shift with his notion of *carnal hermeneutics*.

Secondly, the stranger 'as other' is not only experienced as someone *different* from me, but – crucially – as my living 'similar' (*mon semblable*). Thus, quoting an example of Merleau-Ponty, Kearney and Semonovitch (2011) say:

> The very fact that we are oriented to display for others affirms the otherness of others. When I am talking with someone else, 'should the voice alter, should the unwonted appear in the score of the dialogue' – in short, if the person with whom I am speaking does anything that shows her to be alive and not a robot – then, 'suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived'. (p. 16)

Importantly, this is 'an identification not of identical beings, but of *similar* beings despite an infinite multiplicity of variation in corporeal form and of conduct across time' (Kearney & Semonovitch 2011:16). By showing that self and other share the condition of 'being seen' before 'seeing', Merleau-Ponty enables a shift from the extremes of radical alterity and psychic immanence to *a similarity in plurality and otherness*.

Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty together help Kearney to shift the focus of the conversation to the hyphen between the extremes of hyperbolic transcendence and psychic immanence to situate our pedagogical wager of the stranger within the symbolic and embodied world of social and political realities. Both show that justice towards the stranger 'as other' is not possible unless one is able to recognise the other, not only as different but also as one that is *similar*. Similar but not the same, the stranger is the one who 'is recognisable enough to appear but who nonetheless retains a distance' (Kearney 2003:17). Even at the threshold between self and other, an untranslatable kernel always remains, making any pedagogical wager, like translation, a trial and a drama, a fragile task always to be taken up anew.

As Kearney says of his own diacritical hermeneutic approach, such a pedagogy of the threshold 'does not propose speculative fly-overs or viaducts but tentative foot-bridges and rope-ladders reaching across the chasms separating old ontologies and new heterologies' (Kearney 2003:17). This implies that the delicate

gap between 'oneself as another' and 'the other as another self' should be safeguarded as a playful and tentative space of learning where 'a variety of crossings between same and other' can be tried out (Kearney 2010:40). Classrooms should be allowed to become more like thresholds of encounter and transgression, while thresholds encountered at the margins of life (for e.g. death, [re]birth) should be recognised as spaces of learning and (trans)formation. Teachers, in a paradigm of linguistic hospitality, may be seen as boundary dwellers who, like interpreters, mediate crossings by allowing initiands to try out, in playful ways, different personas (guest, host, foreigner, friend [...]) and different ways of responding to threshold experiences.

With such a pedagogy in mind, Ricoeur might also emphasise dialogue and the mutual exchange of narratives (fictional and testimonial), as well as the importance of just institutions capable of transcending the fleeting present moment to amplify the voices of strangers we may never see or encounter face-to-face. In addition, in an age of excarnation and online distance learning, a carnal hermeneutics informed by Merleau-Ponty might require that established pedagogies based on 'seeing' and 'hearing' be embedded in paradigm of 'touch' to ensure the cultivation of that tactile wisdom necessary for a hospitable response to the stranger as my living similar.

■ Training for contact: Kearney's fivefold wager

When Kearney speaks of the stranger in *Anatheism*, he speaks of an *encounter* that solicits an existential and ethical, and I would add, *pedagogical* wager, involving both risk and promise. Drawing on founding narratives from the three Abrahamic faiths, Kearney argues that the encounter with the stranger is one of the 'primary scenes of religion', something shared by various religious traditions. He suggests that there is (potentially) something sacred at the heart of such encounters, that these

traditions mediate an understanding of a God who meets us in *strange* guises and also in the guise of the *stranger* (Kearney 2010:17–39). In Chapter 2 of *Anatheism*, Kearney explicates his use of the term 'wager' by speaking of five components (also 'movements' or 'moments') that together make up the anatheist wager: imagination, humour, commitment, discernment and hospitality.

Thus far, I have tried to show how Kearney searches for a nuanced way of speaking of the stranger, suggesting that the encounter with the stranger, while remaining a wager, is more than a blind leap in the dark but a call to cultivate openness and responsibility, mindfulness and attentiveness, thoughtful discernment and tactile sensitivity. Even if 'wagers occur in an instant, all at once', Kearney reminds us that 'they are complex, shrouded in a halo of multi-layered motions. And there is much […] that precedes and follows them' (Kearney 2010:40). I have suggested that it is in this 'halo of multi-layered motions' that a space can be found for a type of formation that, without nullifying the risks involved in the wager, nevertheless makes all the difference when it comes to the wager itself.

In a similar context, Anthony Thiselton recalls 'the Duke of Wellington's remark that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'. According to Thiselton, 'Wellington's point was that Eton had provided the *character formation, training, and habits of thought and action* that proved decisive for the later moment of decision and action in battle'.[142] Wagers are indeed open to a time before and after, and while each wager is a new instance, calling for improvisation and openness to the

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142. In his seminal work on *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (2007), Anthony Thiselton helpfully shows how the hermeneutic tradition is fundamentally interested in the educational, formative and transformative role played by the hermeneutic experience generally (coming to understand another) and, more specifically, by the hermeneutic encounter with the shared communal practices, customs, norms, doctrines and institutions of Christian faith traditions. In this regard, see Chapter 5 ('Formation, Education and Training in Hermeneutics and Doctrine') and Chapter 6 ('Formation through a Hermeneutic of Alterity and Provocation').

not-yet, without the *cantus firmus* offered by traditions, institutions and practices, what will prevent the polyphony of life from collapsing into a cacophony under the tyranny of the present moment?

By way of conclusion, therefore, I want to suggest that the five components or movements of Kearney's wager could be further explored as five tenets or guideposts for a pedagogy that aims at cultivating hospitality to the stranger, understood in the multilayered richness explored by our discussion. While the five moments – imagination, humour, commitment, discernment, hospitality – do not necessarily follow a chronological or logical order, one could nevertheless say that the first and the last – imagination and hospitality – are what invigorates and orientates the pedagogical process.

It is impossible to do justice here to Kearney's immense contribution to our understanding of *imagination*, which he problematised, deepened and enriched, not only through his many writings dedicated to the topic but also by displaying, throughout his many philosophical and literary writings, his own poetic sensibilities and his acute sensitivity to the imagination's (often hidden and elusive) workings. Kearney's work on imagination will remain an indispensable resource for anyone interested in exploring the role of imagination in the formation and transformation of persons and society (cf. Kearney 1988, 1995, 1998).

The first step to being initiated into an ethos of hospitality is stimulating the imagination, which plays two crucial roles in the encounter with the stranger. *Firstly*, the imagination serves as a condition for the very possibility of a wager in as far as it provides one with 'the freedom to choose' (Kearney 2010:40). The possibility of choice, Kearney (2010:40) reminds us, 'presupposes our ability to imagine different possibilities in the same person, to see the Other before us as a stranger to be welcomed or rejected'. Before any decision is made, our very perception of the other 'is already a hermeneutic seeing as' (Kearney 2010:40).

Secondly, imagination makes empathy 'between self and other' possible. The only way for the self to become host to the stranger is by 'imagining the other as other' (Kearney 2010:41). Because the other always remains foreign and transcendent, imagination cannot ever eradicate the gap between self and other. Yet, it is within this gap that imagination operates, 'imagining the Other "as" Other (*metaphorically*) or "*as if*" the Other were like me (*fictively*)' (Kearney 2010:42).

One of Kearney's most significant contributions has been to illustrate the ineluctable relationship between poetics and ethics, between the free play of the imagination's creative capacities and the ethics of imagination that recognises its limits before the irreducible face of the other. To recall a passage from the conclusion of *The Wake of Imagination* (1988):

> Otherness is as essential to the life of *poiesis* as it is to that of *ethos*. In both cases it signals a call to abandon the priority of egological existence for the sake of alternative modes of experience hitherto repressed or simply unimagined. Indeed without the poetical openness to the pluri-dimensionality of meaning, the ethical imagination might well shrink into a cheerless moralising, and authoritarian and fearful censorship. And, likewise, a poetical imagination entirely lacking in ethical sensibility all too easily slides into an irresponsible [...] attitude where anything goes and everything is everything else because it is, in the final analysis, nothing at all. (p. 369)

Cultivating the relation between ethos and poiesis is a crucial prerequisite for the institution of each of the 'pedagogical lessons' gleaned from Kearney's multiple conversation partners above: from passively assuming the stranger's summons and sufferings 'as if' they were my own (Levinas) to decentring and unlearning for the sake of a strange hospitality still to come (Derrida); from healing incurable wounds through cathartic participation in narrative (Kristeva) to embracing the experience of the alien as a passage to intimacy, wisdom and rebirth (Waldenfels); from inhabiting the words of the strangers and welcoming the other into one's home (Ricoeur) to being touched by the other (Merleau-Ponty) – each of these pedagogical exchanges depends on the delicate balance between 'the ethical

demand to imagine *otherwise*' and the poetic playfulness that dares to 'transgress the security fences of self-centredness' (Kearney 1988:364, 369).

This brings us to the second movement, *humour*, which, as 'the ability to encounter and compose opposites', is also a faculty of the imagination. Humour is often considered to be unteachable and certainly would not be a commonplace in the average university curriculum. However, when Kearney uses humour in Bergson's sense, 'as a creative response to enigma, contradiction, and paradox' (Kearney 2010:42), we might be inclined to ask if anything is more urgently needed in our curricula. Could it be that we have simply stopped trying to teach creative responses to enigma, contradiction and paradox – not because that is impossible per se – but because it is impossible to quantify such results in annual evaluation reports?

Perhaps it is a related folly that believes humour to be a matter beyond critique. Ola Sigurdson's recent work on humour reminds us that laughter may also happen *at the expense of the other*, as when it is used as a tool of power 'to establish one's superiority over the person one is laughing at' (Sigurdson 2015:147). It is important, therefore, that Kearney situates humour within what Sigurdson identifies as an 'incarnational comedy' when he recognises the intimate link between humour and *humility* (Kearney 2010):

> As the Latin root *humus* reminds us, humour, humility, and humanity share a common source. [...] Humour reminds us that we are deeply and invariably creatures of the earth (*humus*). Finite, mortal, natal. We laugh, like Sarah, when we see God because we are temporal beings facing divine surplus. (pp. 42–43)

A pedagogy of hospitality might therefore wager on cultivating humour not only as an ethos of humble solidarity with the other and with the earth but also as a critique of power that takes 'flight from the embodied, material and finite conditions of human existence' (Sigurdson 2015:152).

The playfulness of humour, therefore, proceeds from a fundamental *commitment* to the other, the third component of the anatheist wager. As the initiation into an ethos of hospitality as the ultimate cultural horizon, the goal of paideia goes beyond 'understanding the other' to *responding* to actual strangers with hospitality. The Latin *spondere* means 'to make a solemn pledge or promise', and it is in this sense that every encounter with the stranger is a moment of truth (Kearney 2010):

> We are speaking here, in sum, of a moment of truth – as *troth* – where we do not *know* the truth but *do* the truth. *Facere veritatem*, as Augustine put it. Orthopraxis precedes orthodoxy. Trust precedes theory. Action precedes abstraction. Commitment, in this sense of betrothal, is the movement of the wager that makes truth primarily, though not exclusively, a matter of existential transformation (*metanoia*). (p. 44)

As our discussion of Derrida's absolute hospitality suggested, commitment to the stranger 'as other' is not the same as commitment to the stranger 'as foreigner' – that is, the stranger as we have become determined to frame him or her. Commitment in the former sense might mean that we betray our prior 'commitments' to the stranger 'as foreigner'. Seen in the light of the ever-increasing professionalisation of learning, a pedagogy of the stranger is not a success story. As *metanoia*, the desired result might even be seen as a failure, such as setting out for Damascus, but – by the grace of God – never make it there.

If the anatheist wager involves a sacred commitment to the stranger, it also acknowledges that not every stranger is sacred. Therefore, welcoming the stranger always includes the need for *discernment*. Responding to the stranger is a 'multilayered hermeneutic drama – extending from embodied prereflection to critical reflection' (Kearney 2010:47). While discernment already begins 'in the moment', starting 'at the most basic carnal level' where 'the body already 'ponders' in dia-logue with the stranger', it is not isolated in the fleeting present moment but is always

accompanied by the movements of imagination, commitment and humility. Therefore, discernment is open-ended and 'includes the wisdom to learn from initial mistakes and misreadings' (Kearney 2010:47).

Therefore, a pedagogy of hospitality aims at cultivating *phronesis* that finds practical understanding and ethical orientation in the retrieval of 'memories and testimonies as well as future oriented projects – utopian, messianic, eschatological' (Kearney 2012:178). Rather than abstract criteria applied indiscriminately across contexts, *phronesis* employs the powers of *narrative* (fictional and testimonial), *dialogue* and the tactile sense of *touch*. Also spiritual and academic disciplines that cultivate vigilance and attentiveness as habits of mind have an important role to play in upholding 'Jesus's admonition to Peter to be "watchful and prayerful": where watchfulness means being "vigilant and alert," and "prayer is attention to otherness"' (Kearney 2010:45).

Finally, the last word goes to *hospitality*, which as we have said, is not the conclusion 'after all facts are in, but "there from the beginning and coterminous with the other four [movements]"' (2010:47). 'At best', says Kearney (2010:47), 'love of the stranger is a form of faith seeking knowledge', knowing that absolute knowledge of the other is impossible and that we always run the risk of getting it wrong. Hospitality that precedes and 'exceeds discernment implies, furthermore, that the "ability to serve as gracious host is not [...] only a matter of discerning between strangers; it is also a matter of discerning between selves"' (2010:48). In a sense, Derrida may have been right to question the possibility of cultivating hospitality. It is rather hospitality that cultivates human beings by extending a strange welcome in which we may be *transfigured* by the stranger.

God-talk, the biblical prophets and Richard Kearney

Daniël P. Veldsman ⓘ
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
Faculty of Theology
University of Pretoria
South Africa

'How could one authentically choose theism if one was not familiar with the alternative of atheism?' (Richard Kearney)

■ Introduction

To say YHWH (יהוה), to say Elohim (אלהים), to say Ehyeh (אהיה [I Am]), to say Adonai [Lord, master] in prayer or Hashem (השם [the Name]) in conversation, to say Theos (Θεός) or Kurios (Κύριος) is to

create space.[143] It is to verbally create space here and now for (religious) stories. Stories from there, from other peoples' contextual experiences of transcendence, intersect re-figuratively with my and our stories as contextual witnesses to transcendence. Put differently, concrete embodied existence before transcendence is given narrative content and mythological identity (as sense making) from specific historical contexts, provided that content from specific socio-psychological understandings is embedded within deep-seated life and world views, presenting itself here and now as archaeologically layered humaneness. Humaneness lived and witnessed before transcendence and captured in narrative identities. Or in short: It is to make (theological) sense of (existential) life in the space that has been created by religious stories.

Much traditional Western-orientated dogmatic reflection over the last two centuries, specifically in reference to the doctrine of God, has mostly been stripped off the lived experiences of the group or the individual from their particular contextual embeddedness. God-talk, stripped from its experiential marks, is then often reduced to a systematic list of static, lifeless, relationless descriptions and/or characteristics. However, for various good reasons, this has changed dramatically over the last 40 to 50 years.[144] Theological reflection on God has been seriously urged to move – with exciting and lively sense-making and hermeneutical results – beyond detached objectivity![145]

143. To 'create space' follows implicitly from the 'possible' etymological background of the Indo-Germanic word 'God' from a 5th-century Sanskrit text. Given the morphological unknown history but the suggested possibilities, I work with the etymological suggestions of the root form of 'to call upon', to call 'in' to make light, to make sense. I interpretatively work with these possibilities.

144. These good reasons are indeed multivarious, ranging from theological movements (such as liberation theologies) to exciting new hermeneutical endeavours (such as the role of the reader and contexts) to philosophical–anthropological insights (such as embodied personhood) to social–cognitive developments.

145. In my unpublished inaugural lecture at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, in August 2014, I called it: post-dogmatic dogmatical reflection, that is, systematic reflection that has moved far beyond the confines of dogmatistic reflection.

In most contemporary discourses, the contextual embeddedness is hermeneutically acknowledged, emphasising that we are all 'speaking from' very particular contexts and from very specific perspectives. And combined or integrated with this God-talk, we find increasingly experiential and narrative elements, bringing the God-talk of humans as people of flesh and blood to life! Our God-talk and God-stories are now being reconceptualised and rewritten in a lively manner, depicting and exploring the dynamics, complexities, diversities, multidimensionality, the unexpected, the not-so-normal, the cracks, the deep and unsayable in a new life-breathing and relational embodied manner.

In this chapter, I would like firstly to give a very general and broad overview of snippets of the prophets' God-stories (as lively products of various historical research endeavours) in which so much are presented as spaces for stories of God. I engage very strongly with the interesting and lively approach to prophetic literature by Stulman and Kim (2010), which values prophetic literature as disaster and survival literature, that is, in sweeping terms, an approach that understands written prophecy as attempts to find meaning in radical suffering and quests for meaning and hope (cf. Stulman & Kim 2010:2ff.). In their own explanatory words on the nature of prophetic literature as disaster and survival literature (Stulman & Kim 2010):

> It functions simultaneously as a disturbing cultural expression of lament and as a complex theological response to massive human wreckage. It pulsates with the pain of war while it fosters hope for survival in those living crisis – often during or after the collapse of long-standing symbolic, cultural and geopolitical structures. The cumulative result is a thick meaning-making map – a tapestry of hope – for exiles living on the edge of time. (p. 8)

From this approach to prophetic literature, I secondly would like to read the prophetic God-talk together with the contemporary philosophical–theological contribution on God-talk by Richard Kearney in his *The God Who May Be* (2001) and *Anatheism* (2010). What I employ as creative interpretative connection is Kearney's (2010:85) indication of the three basic elements to his

approach that he labels with the descriptive term 'anatheism'. The three basic elements of anatheism are protest, prophecy and sacrament in 'telling a philosophical story of the God question' (Kearney 2010:xvii). Finally, possible connections between prophetic and Kearney's God-talk are pursued in an intuitive and artistic interpretative manner.

■ The prophets' God-stories

The God-talk of the prophets[146] – as YHWH partners, as community advocates, as ambassadors, as social reformers or moral teachers (cf. Stulman & Kim 2010:2), or as the messengers of Yahweh who brought a word relevant to a particular hour in history, deeply embedded in their specific historical-sociological contexts – represents a definite break with the preceding earlier ideas held within Jahwism (cf. Von Rad 1965:3). The 'definite break' is formulated poignantly and given content by Stulman and Kim (2010) in saying:

> Biblical prophets map out paths that lead to survival and healing for war-torn and colonised communities, as well for those of us living in a world on the brink of extinction. These meaning-making figures and their enduring literary legacy helps us entertain the possibility of hope in the face of a ruptured and chaotic world. (p. 4)

The mapped paths find expression in a plurality of theologies and multiple voices of written prophecy.[147] At the very same time,

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146. I am aware that there are a host of historical problems attached to my uncritical use of the words 'God-stories' as well as with the phenomenon 'prophets'. However, for the sake of the argument in this context, I will be sensitive to the problematic history of different kind of prophets and different kinds of prophecy but will not discuss the background and nature thereof in any conclusive manner. Stulman and Kim (2010:15) make the point very clear, stating, '[p]rophets are emissaries, poets, cynic, performers, intercessors, social reformers, covenant mediators, harbingers of violence, harbingers of hope – to name only but a few of their roles and functions'.

147. I accept the very important distinction and understanding of prophecy as oral phenomenon and our access to this oral phenomenon only through written sources. Stulman and Kim (2010:9ff.) discuss in a very insightful and convincing manner the importance of this observation and state: 'Contemporary studies of language have made us well aware that

they are also present in the rich array of divine images, as Stulman and Kim (2010:9, 10, 15) insightfully explain, 'YHWH is warrior and peacemaker, judge and saviour, inscrutable and accessible, confident and deceiver, hidden and present, approachable and elusive, healer and destroyer.'

We can start our mapped paths of God-stories of the biblical prophets of disaster and survival with the 9th-century figure from Gilead, namely Elijah. We hear a strong emphasis on 'belonging to Yahweh and to Him alone' and also a very new, scary emphasis on a God who is to rise against them because of the apostasy of his people. From another socio-economic context came the contemporary voice of the miracle worker and political figure of Elisha, who confirmed God's presence with his people, but especially a message that carried the strong emphasis that their help lay not in chariots and horses, but solely in Yahweh. For the 8th-century visionary prophet Amos in the Northern Kingdom, there was a crack in society. Israel had to deal directly with (an unknown) Yahweh that would no longer forgive his people. The Day of the Lord was imminent because wrongdoing in the society – seen from the perspective of the Mosaic covenant – was rife. To say 'God' was to say that he was God of all the nations but that he had an eye for what you were doing. His contemporary Hosea looked through his writings into the heart of God. It was a God who had turned against them. For Hosea to say 'God' was an invitation to love him again. An invitation that he passionately and with great feeling proclaimed metaphorically. For the 8th century prophet in the Southern

(footnote 147 continues...)
the transition from spoken to written prophecy involves more than mimetic transposition. Writing does not preserve meaning with externalized precision: rather, it reconstructs and reconfigures thought.'

In the discussion that follows, many important characteristics of the distinctions between oral prophecy and written prophecy are identified and elaborated on. One of the most descriptive formulations for me that captures their discussion reads: '[...] Prophetic texts can do what prophets cannot; and they can go where prophets are forbidden' (Stulman & Kim 2010:10). Written prophecy – and I take their point – that takes shape after frightful events engages in artful reinterpretation and re-enactment.

Kingdom, the townsman Isaiah's[148] disappointment was the order of the day. To say 'God' was to say that he was the Holy One of Israel. To say 'God' was to say destruction was to hear the unsympathetic judgement that their prayers would go unanswered. Would go unanswered because of their hardened hearts, because of their lack of obedience to divine law. At the same time, God was present with them and invited them to clear the waters with him. For Isaiah's contemporary Micah, to say 'God' was to say that he was the Lord of the world and of all nations. To say 'God' was to say that Yahweh was once more taking up his Messianic work from the beginning. But it was a new beginning that was bound up with the total obliteration of Jerusalem from the pages of history.

For the minor prophets from 701 BCE to 586 BCE, to say 'God' was to bring a loud and strong message of punishment. But at the same time, to mutter God was to proclaim grace. To paradoxically proclaim God's amazing grace. For Nahum, to say 'God' was to name and to put your trust in the One who was more powerful than any world force! To say 'God' was to be aware of the hour of feasting before him. Yahweh manifested himself in the world as the avenger of wrong. For Habakkuk, to say 'God' was to complain that everything was going terribly wrong and what was even more disconcerting was that God did not intervene. However, those who held fast to Yahweh – the King – would be saved. For Zephaniah, saying 'God' meant very much the same as for Habakkuk but with the stronger emphasis on the resulting judgement of Jerusalem, the advent of the Day of the Lord and threats against those who were complacent in the face of injustice and apostasy.

The pervasive collapse of ideological, institutional, political and religious structures during the time of the prophets provided the context in which their lament and protest sounded forth. During this period (neo-Babylonian and early Persian), three prophets arose, sharing and struggling in their own specific ways with the deep question of whether Yahweh was still in control.

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148. Von Rad (1965:147) describes Isaiah's preaching as the theological high-water mark of the whole Old Testament.

With Jeremiah, a completely new dispensation and personal style of prophecy took shape.[149] To say 'God' was to say Creator. Creator of the world and its nations. To continue to say 'God' was for Jeremiah to launch forth long complaints, was also to engage in individual laments. It was to drive home the reality of a dismantled world and the end of a culture. In the words of Stulman and Kim (2010:7): 'The wounded prophet reads the abyss as chaos and cosmic crumbling'. Yahweh became a God who at once stood 'far off' but at the same time yearned for his lost people. They had forsaken him. Their apostasy was incomprehensible. Not only his own nation but also some other nations would endure Yahweh's wrath as he directed history. But God's whole way with Israel threatened to end in some kind of metaphysical abyss. A darkness. Only much later in Jeremiah's prophetic message does a tone of eschatological hope break through for the future when he soberly proclaims that Yahweh will give his people a heart to know him.[150] A call to return to God. How different, however, the temperament and style of (sacral) thinking, speaking and writing of Jeremiah's contemporary, the intellectual prophet but also theologian Ezekiel. To say 'God' for Ezekiel was to say 'Otherness'. Otherness with regard to holiness and cosmic powers. He was addressing a colonised community in jeopardy of losing its core identity, and according to Stulman and Kim (2010:7), he reads as prisoner of war 'the abyss as absence and alienation'. To say 'God' in exile in Babylon was to say that he as prophet was on God's side, on God's side for the honour of his name among the nations. Israel's history with Yahweh was characterised by a constant failure to comply with his divine will. For Ezekiel as watcher for the house of Israel to now say 'God' was to deliver a message of doom, namely that Yahweh's manifestation was to leave the temple, and

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149. Von Rad (1965:196) remarks, '[i]n Jeremiah we are cautious of a prophet's feeling of solidarity with his people in their danger, and even with the land itself in hers, such as we shall never meet with again.'

150. Stulman and Kim (2010:7) formulate it as follows: 'Jeremiah proclaims that God will sculpt new beginnings out of the wreckage of a war-torn community.'

also – almost contradictory – to deliver a pastoral message of giving Israel and the individual a chance to turn. To rebuild their temple and lives. To take out the heart of stone and to give them a heart of flesh. To be God's people and Yahweh to be their God.[151]

But over against the 're-builders' stood another group of 'theological innovators'. For the unknown prophet completely hidden behind the very emotional message, namely Deutero-Isaiah, to say 'God' was to call him Israel's creator, the One who called this people in its whole physical existence into being. He chose Israel and redeemed her. He was the Lord of history because he – and he alone – could allow the future to be told in advance. His advent was imminent. A final theophany for the whole world and not only for Israel: He was to reveal his glory in the eyes of all the nations. Israel as sign ('witness') to the nations that Yahweh was undertaking a new task, a new exodus, so marvellous it would completely eclipse his previous ones! A prophetic psalm of trust (Von Rad 1965).

The prophets of the later Persian period brought their respective messages after the return to their homeland. A period that was neither great nor clear in saying 'God'! For Trito-Isaiah to say 'God' to people with little faith, and who felt that fulfilment of the divine promise was long overdue, was to say, I do not need the temple. I live in heaven and have a new vision for my people. In stark contrast, for Haggai and Zechariah to say 'God' was to stutteringly say 'rebuild – rebuild' – in spite of economic hardships – the temple as sacral centre. Otherwise, Yahweh would not be with them, speak with them nor forgive their sins. The day of Yahweh and the coming of an anointed one was imminent. Now was the time of salvation. Now? That was not the message of the anonymous prophet Malachi after the temple was rebuilt. For him to say 'God' in a community that on the one hand wanted to know where the promised salvation was but was at the same

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151. In a very gripping formulation, Stulman and Kim (2010: 7–8) write in this regard, 'Ezekiel envisions God's own exile from the temple in Jerusalem, which ironically leads to solidarity with the banished people of 'God and the re-creation of the world. When God becomes an outcast, God takes up residence in the borderlands with other displaced persons'.

time a community in which abuses were the order of the day, to say 'God' was to say that Yahweh would come unexpectedly and would bring judgement upon the godless. However, for those who feared God, the 'sun of salvation' would shine forth.

Perhaps the last words as God-talk of the prophets as messengers were not from the prophets themselves. It was God-talk from the group of pseudepigraphical apocalypses from Daniel to IV Ezra that represent a complete break in the understanding of history, namely from a view of the unity of world history. This view – in which growing evil was a result of the nature of humanity and the empires founded by them – was pessimistic in the extreme. God-talk in this context was semantically clothed in esoteric and gnostic terms and characterised in an a-confessional manner by eschatological dualism and sheer transcendentalism. To say 'God' was to take on the responsibility of interpretation and actualisation of earlier cosmological schemata found in myth. It was also to accept that loyalty to Yahweh would lead to suffering (martyrdom). But the suffering was not a sign that there was an end to their fellowship with God.

From these apocalyptic last words on God and history, I now turn to contemporary philosophical discourses on God-talk and specifically to the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney. I take Kearney as an influential representative of current philosophical God-talk.

◼ Kearney's God-story[152]

What does 'to say "God"' entail for Kearney? The basic question as vantage point that the Irish philosopher addresses in telling a philosophical story of the God question is, how do I return to

152. Richard Kearney is currently the Charles Seelig Professor in Philosophy at Boston College, USA. He studied at Glenstal Abbey under the Benedictines until 1972. He completed an MA at McGill University with Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and a PhD with Paul Ricoeur at the University of Paris, Nanterre. His work focuses on the philosophy of the narrative imagination, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Among his best-known written works are *The Wake of the Imagination*, *On Stories*, *Poetics of Imagining* and *Debates in Continental Philosophy* (globalcenterforadvancedstudies.org).

God, having 'lost God'? How and where do I today find the acoustic space to hear anew God's call and to decide for God?

Kearney's answer 'to say "God"' finds expression in his formulation of a third way. A third way from a hermeneutical narrative approach with its interpretative focus on Otherness and the welcoming of the (S)tranger. A third way in which he explores the deep probing interpretative possibilities of a 'return' to God and to reimagine God after the death of God as reaction to the polar opposites of certainty 'that have maimed so many minds and souls in our history' (Kearney 2010:2). A third way between contemporary dogmatic theism and militant atheism. A way between naïve faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion. It is a possibility he calls anatheism that contains a moment of atheism as well as theism within itself. A possibility as hermeneutical wager[153] in a double sense: philosophically and existentially.[154] However, before I turn to his exposition of anatheism as the third way, it is necessary to ask how Kearney explains his understanding of God in his *The God Who May Be* (2001).

■ The God who may be

For Kearney,[155] the divine is in some way present in its absence and able to disclose itself. All expressions of otherness, including that which envisages a transcendent deity, must be somehow accessible to human consciousness. It immediately raises the question of what this might somehow mean. When it is associated with the claim that in a 'post-metaphysical age there are no longer clear maps as to who or what lies beyond the reaches of human finitude' (Kearney) and with insistence upon 'the

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153. Wager simply in the sense that it can go all wrong! It is a dangerous drama that can go either way.

154. It is a philosophical wager regarding the interpretation of diverse voices, texts and theories about the sacred in our times. Furthermore, for Kearney an existential wager is central to everyday movements of belief and unbelief, of uncertainty and wonder (cf. Kearney 2010:xvii).

155. For the following exposition of Kearney's book, I have made use of Masterson's (2008) excellent short summary.

indispensable role of a post-metaphysical self in our post-modern culture' (Kearney), the stage is set for this *somehow* to be played out post-metaphysically in his *The God Who May Be*.

Written from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, Kearney 'seeks to delineate the *somehow* whereby a transcendent deity is accessible to human consciousness'. To do so, it invokes the priority of the possible over the actual and the correlative priority of the imagination over speculative reason. The possibility that he explores is that of a deity envisaged not as a 'vertically' transcendent actual supreme being but as a 'horizontally' beckoning possibility of ethical achievement.

He (Kearney 2001) writes:

> God neither is nor is not but may be [...] What I mean by this is that God, who is traditionally thought of as act or actuality, might be better rethought as possibility. To this end I am proposing here a new hermeneutics of religion which explores and evaluates two rival ways of interpreting the divine – the eschatological and the onto-theological. The former, which I endorse, privileges a God who possibilises our world from out of the future, from the hoped-for eschaton which several religious traditions have promised will one day come [...] Instead of seeing possibility as some want or lack to be eradicated from the divine so that it can be recognised as the perfectly fulfilled act it supposedly is, I proffer the alternative view that it is divinity's very potentiality-to-be that is the most divine thing about it [...] God can be God only if we enable this to happen. (pp. 1–2)

This commitment in considering God in terms of possibility rather than actuality is motivated in part by a rejection of a metaphysical conception of God – a rejection of what has been called 'onto-theology', that is, the tendency 'to reify God by reducing Him to a being – albeit the highest, first and most indeterminate of all beings' (Kearney 2001:24). In his *The God Who May Be*, Kearney devotes much of the book to subtle and illuminating interpretations of key biblical events[156] in terms of a post-metaphysical view of God as divine transforming possibility. One significant feature of this view is the insistence that God conceived as possibility is not

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156. Events such as the burning bush, the Shulamite women and the transfiguration of Christ.

to be understood simply as an intrinsic possibility of the historically evolving world. God has indeed a relationship to the historical world, but as a transfiguring possibility beyond its own intrinsic possibilities. Here we are in the domain of eschatology, not teleology, of ethical invocation, not latent purpose. We are '[…] where the infinite eschaton intersects with the finite order of being' (Kearney 2001:8).

Or (Kearney 2001) again:

> [F]rom an eschatological perspective, divinity is reconceived as that *posse* or *possest* which calls and invites us to actualise its proffered possibilities by our poetical and ethical actions. (p. 105)

A striking feature of this conception of God as possibility is the claim that although God has a bearing on human history, human history has a comparable bearing upon God. Kearney (2001) provocatively claims:

> God will be God at the eschaton. That is what is promised […] the promise remains powerless until and unless we respond to it […] God depends on us to be. (p. 4)

Henceforth, God may be recognised as someone who becomes with us, someone as dependent on us as we are on him. Is such a thing possible? Not for us alone. But it is not impossible to God – if we help God to become God. How? By opening ourselves to the 'loving possibility' by acting each moment to make the impossible that bit more possible.

This is for Kearney how the somehow can be unravelled whereby the other and the same, God and humankind, transcendence and immanence can be related together in ethical terms. But how are we then to reimagine the possibility of God in our everyday lives? How are we to experience God after the death of God? Through sacramental imagination (SI).[157] To come to such an SI, we have to take the third way.

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157. Kearney uses two concepts with similar meaning in this regard, namely, 'sacramental imagination' or 'sacred imagination'.

■ Anatheism as third way

If the word was in the beginning, so was hermeneutics is the first and foremost remark by Kearney (2010:xi) on his *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* which raises the importance of the question: 'Where do I speak from?' As a philosopher who grew up in Ireland, he sees himself intellectually as a Protestant and emotionally as a Catholic.

We live today – according to Kearney – in a context in which the God question is returning with a new sense of urgency. What, however, do we mean when we speak of God? It is a question of religious, political and philosophical importance. Kearney believes it is 'an increasingly pressing inquiry for our "postmodern" age where the adversarial dogmas of secularism and absolutism threaten the option of considered dialogue' (Kearney 2010:xiii).

His 'pressing inquiry' is formulated in the following ways: How do we speak of the sacred after the disappearance of God? What comes after God ('ana')? What follows in the wake of our letting go of God? What emerges out of the night of not-knowing, that moment of abandoning and abandonment?[158] Especially for those who – after ridding themselves of 'God' – still seek God (Kearney 2010:3)? All these questions are bound together in the coined word 'anatheism'. Anatheism is for him 'an invitation to revisit' what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the 'encounter with [a] radical Stranger [whom] we choose, or don't choose, to call God' (Kearney 2010:7). Three elements characterise the Anatheistic Project, namely protest, prophecy and sacrament.

For Kearney, the starting point of the element of protest is firstly to concede: I know nothing of God because then 'one can begin to recover the presence of holiness in the flesh of ordinary

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158. Kearney (2010:235) qualifies and explains the experience that he calls the 'dark night of the soul' as follows: 'This private moment – the first "a" – is an indispensable to anatheism. But in "a-n-a" we have two A's. And if the first "a" is the "a" of atheism, the second "a" is the "not" of the "not". The negation of the negation. The double A-A of anatheism. A reopening to something new. After all.'

existence' (Kearney 2010:86). It is not an elite question but a question for anyone that has experienced instants of deep disorientation, doubt and dread.[159] Kearney turns in his hermeneutic narrative to the three confessional responses to biblical revelation, namely Judaism (Abraham, Gn 18), Christianity (Mary and Gabriel) and Islam (Muhammad), to give content to his Anatheistic Project.[160] In these responses, he specifically focuses on the possible reactions of either hostility or hospitality. Why? For him religion is capable of the best and worst (the great stories of Israel are testaments to the paradoxical origins of religion in both violent conflict and peaceful embrace). You either welcome or refuse the stranger. Monotheism is the history of this wager (Kearney 2010:22). God is revealed *après-coup*, in the wake of the encounter in the trace of his passing ('afterwardsness'). If divinity moves

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159. Elsewhere he states: 'The shortest route from wonder to wonder is loss' (Kearney 2010:13).

160. For Kearney, the anatheist wager has five main components, namely imagination, humour, commitment, discernment and hospitality. In brief, a few comments on these components (Kearney 2010:40ff.): (1) *Imagination*. One cannot wager unless one has freedom to choose. Such choice presupposes our ability to imagine different possibilities in the same person, to see the other before us as a stranger to be welcomed or rejected. Our perception is already a hermeneutic 'seeing' as. For Kearney, the act of faith is the belief in the possibility of the impossible, of a possibility beyond the impossible. And it all starts with a divine call and human response. In short: Revelation begins with imagination. (2) *Humour*. The ability to encounter and compose opposites: what I see as impossible and possible at one and the same time. It is the creative response to enigma, contradiction and paradox. Kearney points us towards the Latin root: *humus*. *Humus* reminds us: humour, humility and humanity share a common source (e.g. Jesus asking his disciples: Who do you think I am?). Humour as deep humility before the excess of meaning the divine stranger carries. (3) *Commitment*. Our response to the stranger is already a decision. Commitment – in the sense of betrothal – is the movement of the wager that makes truth primarily a matter of existential transformation (cf. Kearney 2010:44). (4) *Discernment*. Simultaneous with other aspects. Occurs at the most basic affective and preconceptual levels. Distinguishes between a blind leap of faith and wise one (cf. Kearney 2010:44). Not irrational. Seeing as – a reading of the stranger as this or that. Receive him or her with our eyes wide open. Discernment is a matter of prereflective carnal response to the advent of the other before it becomes a matter of reflective cognitive evaluation (cf. Kearney 2010:46). (5) *Hospitality*. Is there from the beginning and coterminous with the other four. For Kearney, love of the stranger is a form of faith seeking understanding. We always run the risk of being mistaken, of getting it wrong. Love – as compassion and justice – is the watermark. Kearney (2010:47) gives a simple but clear explanation: 'There is a discernible difference between one that gives water to the thirsty and one who does not.'

towards us cataphatically in the face of the foreigner, it also absolves itself apophatically from the immediate group.

The afterwardsness is the afterwardsness that springs from the notion of incarnation as *kenosis*, of the self-emptying of the omnipotent God. In this context, to say 'God' is for Kearney (2010) the question to ask what the more is:

> Something beyond childish superstition and fetishism? Something that gestures towards a divinity that may be in flesh and blood, here and now, if we allow it, responding to the name that calls by creating a place where the one who comes can arrive in our midst? (p. 57)

Answering this question leads from the sovereign to the servant, to the power of the powerless. In this sense: anatheism is a form of post-theism that allows us to revisit the sacred in the midst of the secular. It is a revisitation that confirms specific no's. The no's of Omni-God of celestial might; the no's of the idea that God orchestrates good and evil alike. If anything is dead, it is the traditional thought of God, that is, a God as *deus ex machina* in times of need. Also – if anything is dead – it is the modern individualist conception of private salvation.

It is 'after the death of this God', speaking God without religion (Bonhoeffer), that is, after the protest and the prophecy (in short: the challenge to the God of otherworldly omnipotence), that we can 'return', find, discover, disclose an SI. For Kearney, the SI entails the sacramental return to the holiness of the everyday. Kearney is adamant that Christianity professes both a pilgrim (quest: a kingdom to come) and sacramental vocation (the kingdom has already come). It is the hosting of the transcendent in the immanence of the presence. Anatheism draws from these two vocations, seeking to combine the pilgrim commitment to protest and prophecy with a sacramental return to epiphanies of the everyday. Sacramental return is a retrieval of the extraordinary in the ordinary. Stronger – more positively formulated: the sacramental invokes the power of *yes* in the wake of *no*:

• Marks an opening towards a God whose descent into flesh depends on our response to the sacred summons of

the moment. (This calls for a special attentiveness to infinity embodying itself in daily acts of Eucharistic love and sharing; it is a retrieval of the sacramental in sensible.)

- The ghost of metaphysical idealism is laid to rest. We return to the body in its unfathomable thisness.
- We have to move beyond religious forms disfigured by otherworldly metaphysics to a faith in the divine potential inherent in the everyday life of action and suffering, of attention and service to others (Kearney 2010:93–94).
- Preparatory moment for sacramental vision: Cloud of unknowing (*docta ignorantia*) experiences that pave the way for the deepest wisdom of reality (Kearney 2010:96).

But how is the power of the *yes* to be realised? What are we to do? Differently put: How are we to move from sacred imagination to sacred praxis, to translate epiphanies of transcendence into the immanence of everyday action?

Negatively, what we are not to do is to use religion to dominate politics (religious wars, crusades or inquisitions – fuelled by pathological religious passions). Positively, what we are to do is the sacralising of the secular, and secularising of the sacred![161] This is the third moment of the Anatheistic Project in concretely answering the questions if formulated in terms of the other or in

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161. Kearney (2010:139ff.) gives a very insightful discussion of his understanding of the relationship of the secular and the sacral. In this regard, he argues that it is from the task of the re-envision of the relationship between the holy and profane as such that we can pass from theophany to praxis while avoiding the traps of theocracy and theodicy (Kearney 2010:139). The former, namely secular, is seen as the dominant scientific worldview that is driven by an attitude of disenchantment! A disenchantment that is religion-unfriendly! Religion – as institutionalised wishwill thinking – is seen as a primitive rest of earlier civilisations. All we have left after the sacral has left us is exclusive humanism. Kearney (2010:140ff.) strongly rejects this understanding and explores a privative and affirmative perspective on secularism from the Latin term *saeculum* [of what turns towards the world], as indication of a specific period of time, that is, to direct our attention to a particular time. A secular attitude as such does not exclude the possibility of faith that is attentive for the realm of action and suffering, thus for lived experience. It is indeed directed toward a faith that is detached, apart from lived experience, and finds expression in private interiority or otherworldly abstractions. The secular can help the sacral not to ignore life itself; the sacral can help the secular not to become banal.

terms of the stranger. How is the stranger something more; how is the everyday something more?

The third moment of SI complements a prophecy of promise with concrete attention to embodied divinity. It combines a messianicity of waiting with an engagement with the incarnate stranger before us. In short: kenotic hospitality in which we open ourselves to receiving our own God back again, a gift from the other. It finds expression among others of the transformation of injustice into justice, in the passion to serve others in need.

■ God-talk: The prophets and Kearney

Are there comparative elements of continuity and of discontinuity between the prophets and Kearney's God-talk? Given the sheer quantity and very diverse socio-historical background of prophetic writings, any remarks here must necessarily be of a cursory and preliminary nature. Studies that focus more on specific lines of prophetic tradition[162] will be able to fill these with much greater content than the constraints of this chapter allow. The following paragraphs are therefore to be understood as nodes of meaning that I tentatively formulate to invite further and deeper reflection on their respective contextual meaning-making mapping.

Firstly, the very different historical-sociological contexts of the God-talk of both the prophets (understood as written prophetic literature) and Kearney can most surely be best described in terms – on the one experiential hand – of pain, trauma, disillusionment and disorientation, violence and cruelties.[163] On the other relational hand, they represent historical

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162. George Fisher in his Theologien des Alten Testaments that was published in 2012.

163. Stulman and Kim (2010:4–5) refer to an earlier remark by the Dutch Catholic priest Henri Nouwen in which he captures the contemporary contextual experience of many, whether in Europe, Asia, America or Africa, when he writes: 'History is filled with violence, cruelties and atrocities committed by people against people [...]. But never before has it been possible for humanity to commit collective suicide, to destroy the whole planet and put an end to all

periods of deep transcendental loss, fractured hope, brokenness, darkness and displacement. Both find themselves in places (as interpretative communities) – Stulman and Kim (2010:12) describe them as 'communities that are living with an acute sense of liminality' – where they in their meaning-making mapping have to create space for re-newed or re-vised, re-orientated or re-established religious stories, that is, for attending, coming to terms, coping, looking after their severed experiences and witnesses to transcendence.

Secondly, both want to find, capture and express a relevant 'message' or discourse for their respective contexts and times in their God-talk – messages in which God is in multivarious manners the focus; at the same time, it is messages in which our faith relationships are intensely scrutinised as life before and with God. It is God-talk in which very specific historical circumstances are addressed and are addressed critically (e.g. to expose communal acts of injustice). Both are relentlessly honest about the experienced deep ruptures of life (to name but two examples: the atrocities of the European Holocaust and the Irish revolution and freedom battles). It is God-talk in which specific unacceptable convictions, attitudes and perspectives are called to be left behind and 'new' hearts (convictions, obedience and perspectives) to be pursued and realised – all for the sake of the holy God who is confessed and worshipped. Both radically refuse in facing life to be silenced by their respective eventual, spiritual and political adversaries!

Thirdly, in over-generalised terms, specific differences can also be noted. The prophets in saying 'God' – with all their specific

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(footnote 163 continues...)

history.' On his remark, they elaborate as follows Stulman and Kim (2010:4–5): 'The potential for global devastation has shattered conventional renderings of hope, beauty, and meaning. It has violated our sense of self and morality, and it has created a chasm deep enough to engulf political and civic discourse, as well as art, literature and music. But what is perhaps even more disturbing is that the surplus of violence exceeds our capacity to imagine. It shuts down our ability to feel, exacerbates our loss of control, and it results in debilitating fear – fear that we are less human than intended.'

variances – direct their words from a deep awareness of the holiness of their creator God, the God of history and of all nations, towards the people's apostasy, wrongdoing (thus: hamartiological focus) and subsequent consequential destruction. The destruction is proclaimed paradoxically – God cannot endure Israel's (covenantal) disobedience any longer, and at the same time, God cannot stop loving his people! SI finds its deepest expression in obedience before God. Kearney in saying 'God' from a perspective of a God who may possibly be directs his words from a deep awareness of God's holy Otherness that strangely finds concrete expressions as the kenotic love of God in our embodied, that is, in the welcoming of the Other, in the hospitality towards the stranger, the sacral in the secular, in the SI of the everyday (thus: existentially). The latter expressions are highly critical of traditional thought of God, of an Omni-God of celestial might, of a God as *deus ex machine* in times of neediness. Are also deeply critical of 'sayings about our relations to God' in which faith is reduced to interiority, to a modern individualistic conception of private salvation. For Kearney, SI finds its deepest expression in welcoming otherness. The strong hamartiological focus for the sake of God's holiness is re-directed to an existential focus of God's kenotic presence in the everyday in taking care of God's creation and creatures.

To conclude, both Kearney and the prophets represent powerful meaning-making mapping discourses for their specific historical contexts of embodied personhood before and with God. Both open up spaces for new, re-established, revised God-stories that refuse to be silenced in spite of brokenness, disorientation, trauma, radical suffering in their quest for meaning and hope. Both explore in their own respective manners the creative poetic possibilities of the moments where ordinary and everyday aesthetics expressions have been ruptured by moments of unspeakable pain. Whereas the prophets are deeply engaging in their interpretative communities with the question of a templeless faith and the possibilities of welcoming their God in a strange land, Kearney is asking in his own characteristic manner

about faith in God after having lost one's faith in God. Both are after all about a return to (or off) God. Only the former sometimes couples the land question to the return. Otherwise, it seeks to return to God in a new land. The latter explores a return to God in the acoustic space (as a third way between militant atheism and dogmatistic onto-theology) where God's call to faith can be heard anew in the discovery of an SI, that is, finding and welcoming the sacred in the ordinary there wherever one is. Formulated in a pastoral manner as last word: Both discourses are deep engagements with interpretative communities to empower them to take back their lives and carve out a future when none seems possible (cf. Stulman & Kim 2010:17).

A 'strange' theology: Engaging with Richard Kearney

Wessel Bentley ⓘ
Research Institute for Theology and Religion
University of South Africa
South Africa

■ Introduction[164]

The year 2017 celebrates the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation. In its time and context, the Reformation aimed to redress a God-talk that tended to show favour to those who adhered to the theology of the then Roman Catholic Church. At times, the church's doctrine was characterised by exclusivism and was determined in distinguishing between those who belonged to the faith and those who did not. The church was not

164. This chapter was first presented as a paper at the 2017 conference of the Theological Society of South Africa, hosted by Stellenbosch University.

always a welcoming place to be, and Christianity was seldom a religion that allowed for a diversity of opinions. Then again, this may be a criticism levelled against the church and the Christian religion irrespective of time and space. Considering the modern context, it appears as if Christianity is once again faced with a very particular narrative of exclusion and self-isolation. This time it is not a self-isolation borne out of a need to protect the Christian religion or the church. Instead, it is a self-isolation that focuses on the perpetuation of particular social and political identities, worldviews and belief systems (not necessarily religious).

Let me illustrate: It can be safely assumed that the September 11 (2001) attacks in the USA changed the course of history (Du Toit & Lubbe 2002). These events impacted on the traditional West's notions of diversity, inclusivity and hospitality. For decades, the idea of 'the American dream' espoused images of the West being a haven for diversity – that everyone was welcome. Such hospitality hinged on the premise that everyone who took advantage of this invitation could make a contribution towards the well-being of American society (and its democracy).

Following the attacks of 2001, the USA (and other Western countries) questioned their own levels of 'hospitality'. What followed was an increase in security, growing caution and scrutiny of those who entered these countries and a cycle of retributive acts of violence. The persistent to-and-fro of this violence between the West and groups like Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) must have had a psychological impact on all sides; it escalated social suspicion of the 'other', expressed apprehension when the 'different' were encountered and increased a sense of having to create a safe space for their respective socio-ideological 'in-groups'.

If the recent political history of the West is anything to go by, the rise of the Trump administration and Brexit are indicative of societies that have become critical of the levels of hospitality once proclaimed by their liberal worldviews. Instead, these momentous events speak of social fear, anxiety, self-isolation and effectively a political redelineation of the conditions of their hospitality.

Fear, anxiety and self-isolation are ingredients for the building of walls, whether these walls are literal or metaphorical. The higher and stronger the 'walls', the more effectively society is able to differentiate between the self and the other, distinguishing between the in-group and the out-group, and the easier it is to fall into the trap of adhering to social generalisations.

It is then no wonder that events take place like the attacks on Muslim worshippers at Finsbury Park, clearly motivated by social generalisations and prejudice stemming from maladaptive schemas and fuelled by fear, anxiety, anger and isolation. Before Darren Osborne drove a van into a crowd of worshippers, he is quoted as having shouted 'I want to kill all Muslims' (Booth, Cobain & Morris 2017). This utterance carries all the traits of a self-isolating, maladaptive worldview. Of course, it would be unfair to typify Osborne's approach as the general view held by society. On the contrary, his acts are viewed as extremist and carried widespread condemnation. Nonetheless, his radical views must be noted, and subsequently, one should take heed that the rise of radical religious orientations is leading to increased incidences of violence and subsequently also isolating nationalisms, patriotisms and overall intolerance. The voices of integration, social cohesion of diverse population groups and multidimensional civil society are being challenged by voices that call for the reestablishment of primary identities of origin, culture, language and, perhaps subliminally, religion.

The world has changed; this is beyond dispute. Further, the world is changing, and hence, theologians have to ask what we are to make of God-talk in this changing global landscape. Is there a theological approach that can inform a Christian response to the overt polarisation of people, religions and worldviews?

It is my view that the contribution made by Richard Kearney, an Irish philosopher who has ventured into the discussion on religion and social cohesion, is a promising approach. Advocating non-violence, Kearney argues for a God-talk that takes the risk of making the self vulnerable to the other, with the hope of not only finding in the 'stranger' a friend but also finding God.

■ The status quo in encountering the Other

As a student of Ricoeur, it is only fitting for Kearney to begin his wandering into a 'strange' God-talk by asking the question: 'Where do I speak from?' (Kearney 2010:i). He answers this question by describing his journey as one where his life was shaped by different forms of conflict, conflict that ultimately aimed to polarise people, whether American and Middle-Eastern, Catholic and Protestant in Ireland or black and white in South Africa. He speaks as a person who was raised in Western religion, politics and worldviews. This does not make him apologetic with regard to Western thoughts and actions. On the contrary, Kearney engages critically with his own world, his own beliefs and his own understanding of God.

Off the bat, Kearney offers his first critique of Western thinking, namely that in the West, notions of self-identity are measured as the good while the other is dealt with from the perspective of suspicion (Kearney 2002:7–8). I do not think that this hermeneutic of suspicion is necessarily a Western-specific notion. Our biological make-up informs us that the threat comes from the 'outside', and any perceived threat engages our primal defence–attack mechanisms (LeDoux 1998:138–178). Nonetheless, Western worldviews with their individual-centred approaches seem to emphasise suspicious and cautious engaging with the other. Describing this (almost) natural form of prejudice, Kearney falls back on Levinas's notion of 'ontology of sameness' and Derrida's 'logocentrism' (Kearney 2002:9) as philosophical foundations for dealing with this suspicious way of life.

In Levinas's 'ontology of sameness', the other is first encountered as an entity outside the self. The other is primarily perceived as a threat who enters into an unspoken dialogue with the self (Cohen 1986):

> The unspoken message which appears in the face of the other is: do not kill me; or, since the message has no ontological force, but is the

very force of morality: you *ought* not kill me; or, since the alterity of the other's face is alterity itself: thou shalt not kill. (p. 7)

When self encounters the other, the self and the other's self are moved to ethical and moral reflections, determining what unfolds in the meeting event (Levinas & Kearney 1986). The 'ontology of sameness' then suggests that this move to personalised ethical responses, where the focus is on *my* response and on the other's *my* response – the identification of the self in the other and the other in self – creates the option to forego defence mechanisms and to 'become incarnate selves in the face of incarnate others' (Kearney 2010:160).

Derrida's 'logocentrism', according to Kearney, follows similar lines. The unspoken word of law, rights, justice, contracts, duties and pacts set the conditions for hospitality in any given context (Kearney 2002:11). It is up to the host to choose an approach of radical hospitality, as the host has no way to guarantee that the guest will naturally comply with the expectations set out by the unspoken word. In both Levinas's and Derrida's approaches, the hermeneutic of suspicion is acknowledged, but the move towards a positive encounter between the self and the other rests squarely on the decision of the self to risk hospitality.

Perhaps this hermeneutic of suspicion, the over-cautious response of considering the other as a threat (and acting on the premise that the other is a threat) lies at the heart of the perpetuating cycles of violence and self-isolation that we witness in the world today. Kearney then responds with a call to actively and deliberately take the risk of making oneself vulnerable to the other by offering the gift of hospitality. This requires a shift in thinking, a move that Kearney calls the transition from optocentrism (emphasis on sight) to carnal hermeneutics (emphasis on touch). As beings who are embodied in the context of a particular time and space, reality is mediated through the senses (Kearney & Treanor 2015:2). The reason we are able to perceive threat is as a result of information passing through the senses, informing the self that something or someone exists beyond the parameters of the self.

Our first encounter with the other is usually visual – we see the other. The optocentric response prefers to keep a distance between the self and the other, where the other is viewed as an object and distinct from the self (Kearney 2015:30). To see a person allows the subject (self) to operate with the knowledge that safety is found in the distance between the self and the other. Carnal hermeneutics, on the other hand, engages the other senses, of which touch is the most profound. Whether it be in the shaking of hands, the sharing of a meal or ultimately in intimate contact, the distance between the self and the other is removed, leaving the self in a place of vulnerability, taking a chance that hospitality shown will result in a life-giving experience and not unfold in the most negative imaginings that suspicion can conjure up (Kearney 2015:89–98, 199–215).

Kearney develops these ideas in his book *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, emphasising the point that not only does hospitality facilitate community and reconciliation between people but also the mystery of God is encountered in the process.

◼ A 'strange' response

Kearney's thesis in *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* is that God meets people (us) through the stranger (them). He deduces this point by citing all three Abrahamic religions, identifying the common theme of how the religious pundits miss the revelation of God, while those on the margins, who have nothing to lose by displaying hospitality, are able to meet God. Whether it be Abraham under the Mamre tree (Kearney 2010:3–20), Jesus feasting with sinners and tax collectors (Kearney 2010:136) or the Prophet meeting God in the cave (Kearney 2010:30–46), these God-encounters break the rigid framework of religious fundamentalisms, as if God refuses to be defined by them. It is in the God-talk of a well-defined god that theists build a wall between the self and the other, where the in-group hold fast to the basic fundamentals of the faith, while those who form part of the out-group are often marginalised and labelled. They are then

encouraged to relinquish these labels before they can be welcomed back into the 'community of faith'.

By the same token, atheism, which may serve as a disillusioned response to theism, builds a wall between those who seek freedom outside the strict fundamentals of religion and those who continue to subscribe to a theistic god. Both theism and atheism have very distinct forms of God-talk. It may seem to be a contradiction to describe atheism as having a God-talk, but without a God-talk, atheism has little or nothing to protest against. Richard Dawkins is a prime example of an atheist with a very particular kind of God-talk. The God-talk he employs in *The God Delusion*, for instance, is one that protests against the very God-talk propagated by the theists, who remain unmoved when it comes to critiquing their faith claims (Dawkins 2006). So, here we have two polarised groups, all because of God-talk, and the wall between them consists of the rigid adherence to their respective beliefs … and in the end neither has much to show in terms of a providing a life-giving God-encounter.

It is here that Kearney introduces a third way, a way he calls 'anatheism'. The prefix 'ana-' does not mean 'another', as if another theism would solve the problem of polarisation, or as if another theism would be the *real* theism – the *real* encounter with God. If it were, then such a new form of theism would do nothing more but add another wall, one between the old theism and the new. No, 'ana-' is used as a process of stepping-back and returning to God after the god of theism became the irrelevant god of atheism. He (Kearney 2014) describes it as follows:

> But in a-n-a we have two A's. And if the first 'a' is the 'a' of a-theism, the second 'a' is the 'not' of the 'not'. The negation of the negation. The double A-A of anatheism. A reopening to something new. After all. (p. 235)

The re-meeting with God, a fresh divine revelation in an authentic life experience, is what Kearney refers to when he notes that '[…] certain deep experiences can undergo disenchantment after which we may return again to them again in a new light, *over and over*' (Kearney 2014:234).

In anatheism, God is not encountered as *God*, or at first recognised as *God*, for the defined god is nothing but the domesticated image of our understanding – God created in our own image. God meets Abraham *through* the wandering strangers who seek food, drink and shelter; the shepherds meet God *through* the stranded strangers in the stable; Muhammad meets God *through* the strange presence in the cave; the theme repeats itself in the Abrahamic religions over and over again. The key to the encounter is not through God forcing a divine meeting with the self, but through and when the self ventures to show the gift of hospitality instead of the act of hostility towards the other (Kearney 2014:238). The repetitive nature of this form of God-encounter makes the Divine dynamic and, in a Levinasian manner, requires of us to recognise the dynamism of our own self in the Being of God. Anatheism therefore is not only a fresh way in which we encounter God but a dynamically refreshing way in which we encounter the other and discover new life in the self – returning in a fresh way in order to move forward (Kearney 2014:234).

To open oneself to this form of encounter entails risk. Kearney recognises this risk and proposes that with every act of meeting with the other, the self has to make a wager. The self needs to discern whether the other acts as a guest or as an enemy (Kearney 2015:17). Interestingly, the Latin word that forms the basis of English words like 'hospitality' and 'hostility' is the word *hostis*, which can be translated as either 'guest' or 'enemy' (Kearney 2010:38). Irrespective of whether the other acts as guest or enemy, the self in the gift of hospitality will also encounter God; whether it be God joining us in new life or God meeting us in our suffering in the event that our hospitality has been abused.

■ Some reflections

Now, what are we to make of anatheism? Of course, questions are posed of Kearney's approach. Sands, for instance, argues that Kearney merely reinterprets God alongside others who

already have had a God-experience but does so from the limitations of his own biases and suspicion which is in fact the writing of a new dogmatic line in theology (Sands 2016:10). A further question would be: What are we to do with religious tradition? Is it merely to be appreciated as the story of the development of our response to God through the means of religion? Or what about the more detailed aspects of religious traditions such as the sacraments – are we, by being suspicious of traditions in religion, to throw out the baby with the bathwater in order to reinvent a religion that is aesthetically more palatable for today's context? Are we creating God in our own image, our own hopes, our own projected eschatons, especially if we want these eschatons to build bridges and destroy the dividing walls? Is this truly a new kind of God-encounter, an anatheism, or is it a kind of theism that we want and are thus subsequently inventing?

As valid as these questions are, two points need to be noted. Firstly, the hermeneutic of anatheism is nothing new in the Abrahamic religions; Kearney merely identified the recurring theme and named it. Along with it, there are some truths to be learnt, one of which is that we should guard against religious Empire building, for even when we have an authentic God-experience and ask whether we should 'build huts' to commemorate this experience, God will surprise again by manifesting in a different stranger. Secondly, Kearney does not demonise religious tradition or describe it as a lesser-preferred option. No, anatheism recognises the dynamic movement of sacred encounters, which sometimes manifest significantly through religious traditions and rituals, while at other times meet the self in a religious spaces. The point is that the culmination of encounter, wager and hospitality is the creation of sacred spaces and sacred moments. Hostility achieves the exact opposite. The sacred is not confined to religion and neither does spirituality have a monopoly on the sacred. Kearney (2014) suggests:

> The 'sacred' is somewhere between the 'spiritual' and the 'religious' […]. The spiritual involves a seeking that does not necessarily involve religion; if by religion we understand a specific set of creedal truth claims, shared ritual traditions and institutional behavioural codes. (pp. 244–245)

The sacred is what unfolds when the unifying presence of God enables the self and the other to transcend the boundaries that keep them apart, the walls that are determined to convince them that the other is always an enemy.

■ A 'strange' communion

'Where do I speak from?' I speak as a white, male, South African Methodist. Like Kearney, my life too has been shaped by historically based wall-building. Using Kearney's understanding of anatheism as a backdrop, I can identify the bridge-building nature of sacred moments, especially in events such as the sacrament of Holy Communion. I have already in other papers reflected on Holy Communion as unifying sacrament (Bentley 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017), but I wish to return anew to the mystery of the sacrament and God's ability to use this space as a practical instrument of reconciliation.

Indulge me for a moment as I imagine the unfolding of events during Holy Communion: Here, in front of me is a congregation, a group of people from different backgrounds, different cultures, speaking a variety of languages. If we were to take the time to speak to each one of them, we would find that they hold divergent political beliefs, identify across the spectrum of sexuality and carry with them a myriad of complex histories, successes and problems. Each one is present as a self, standing in the midst of the other. The self is already vulnerable, for the self looks at the other and admires some, is intimidated by others, perhaps even feels either superior to them or inadequate compared to them. Optocentrism dictates this space. One thing is certain: the self can definitely identify those with whom they would rather not share this space. This is exacerbated when the presiding minister asks the congregants to look around and to take note of who is present in this moment. Now the congregation is asked to take note of who is absent from this space. Do those absent not feel welcome? Is there any reason why they would consider it better to be absent than to be part of this moment? Has the church neglected its gift of hospitality? Has it instead been hostile towards the stranger?

The minister shares the peace and asks the congregation to share the peace among each other. People turn towards each other, shaking hands or giving a hug, blessing each other with 'The peace of the Lord be with you', responding with 'And also with you' (Methodist Conference Office 1975:B10). Some engage heartily, while the apprehension is tangible in others. It is obvious that some handshakes and hugs are forced, reluctantly making the self vulnerable to transcend the space of optocentrism so as to dare to touch.

It does not end there. Now everyone is invited to a common Table. It is not the church's Table, neither is it the minister's Table. It is the Lord's Table and everybody is invited. As the elements are consecrated, the congregation sings Charles Wesley's hymn (Wesley n.d.):

> 1. Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;
> let every soul be Jesus' guest.
> Ye need not one be left behind,
> for God hath bid all humankind.
>
> 2. Sent by my Lord, on you I call;
> the invitation is to all.
> Come, all the world! Come, sinner, thou!
> All things in Christ are ready now.
>
> 3. Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,
> ye restless wanderers after rest;
> ye poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind,
> in Christ a hearty welcome find.
>
> 4. My message as from God receive;
> ye all may come to Christ and live.
> O let his love your hearts constrain,
> nor suffer him to die in vain.
>
> 5. This is the time, no more delay!
> This is the Lord's accepted day.
> Come thou, this moment, at his call,
> and live for him who died for all. (n.p.)

The congregation makes their way to the Communion rail. As they kneel, they gather as a diverse community, a people who

would not usually spend time around each other's tables. Here they are: black, white, rich, poor, the healthy, those who suffer ill-health, the disenfranchised, those who benefit from others' hard labour ... they are all here.

As they receive the Bread, they hear, '[t]his is the Body of Christ, take and eat'. The Body of the Divine touches my hand in the same way as it touches the hand of the other. The self becomes vulnerable to being touched (cf. Kearney 2015:27). I taste and eat. 'The Blood of Christ shed for you. Take and drink.' I taste and drink (cf. Kearney 2015:18). There is something sacred in this vulnerable moment where I am welcomed by the hospitality of the Table. Those who I considered as the other a moment ago become fellow sojourners as they too experience this sacred hospitality.

We leave the Table with the blessing (Methodist Conference Office 1975):

> The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen. Go in peace in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God's praise and glory. Thanks be to God. (p. B17)

This means that I am now required to extend the hospitality shown to me in turn to those whom I may encounter during the course of the week.

And so, the sacred moment moves beyond the religious into the secular, an open invitation to take the risk of encountering 'the other'.

■ Conclusion

Not everyone will share my view or experience of the Lord's Table. Neither should they. This is where I experienced a sacred moment. It is not a moment to be prescribed or duplicated for others. To do so would be to 'build huts', to construct a theism through which we believe God should and must encounter all people. For me, this was one of Kearney's anatheistic moments,

a returning to God after God, experiencing the transforming potential held concentrated in the gift of hospitality. Here, God, who for all means and purposes should see me as the other, took the wager of showing hospitality. In turn, as I become the guest, one request was made: 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you' (Jn 13:15 NIV).

The Christian response to the increasing polarising of people in our communities is that the gospel was never intended to perpetuate the divisive action of building walls between people. There should therefore not be a Christian rationale for turning away the stranger, whether the stranger be a bearded Middle-Eastern man wishing to travel to the West or refugees fleeing the atrocities in their home countries in order to find refuge elsewhere. The building of walls to keep out 'the vulnerable' could perhaps just be the most inhumane response we could offer.

Instead, religion by its own rich history of learning that there is something sacred in opening the door for the other must act in both faith and hope. It should act in faith as it reflects on its past, knowing the value that emerges from the gift of hospitality. Furthermore, it should act in the hope that the world its hospitality is contributing to is one that experiences healing through the sharing of this gift. In the present, the gift of hospitality is manifest in the gift of love … and perhaps right here the formulation of sacred hospitality is to be found in: 'Love the Lord your God with your entire being, and love your neighbour as you love yourself'.[165]

Kearney's anatheism calls for a re-encounter, a fresh God-experience that unfolds in the existential expression of hospitality.

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165. My own paraphrase of the twofold law of love.

Trinitarian theology and Richard Kearney's anatheism: An engagement

Rian Venter
Department of Historical and Constructive Theology
University of the Free State
South Africa

■ Appreciation and introduction

Looking at the books by Richard Kearney on my desk, I can still recall how they have touched me in various ways. Years ago *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* helped me to navigate the labyrinth of philosophy while writing a doctoral thesis, and *The Wake of Imagination* assisted me when thinking about doing Systematic Theology in South Africa (Venter 2004). More recently, *The God Who May Be* and *Anatheism* found their way into my whispering of the notion of a theo-episteme

(Venter 2012). And some, apart from their fascinating ideas, like *Reimagining the Sacred*, I love to feel and look at. I cannot but be deeply appreciative of these books by Richard Kearney.

But the touch reaches deeper: a world is constructed in these texts that are intellectually unsettling, challenging and undeniably enchanting. It is a world of poetics, a world of imagination, of stories and of conversation. It is a world where the sacred and the body count, a world of God and of dogs. The grammar employed in this world is one of reimagination, of possibility, of small things, a world of micro- and onto-eschatology. But it is also a world where hospitality is valued, of humans, of Otherness and of responsibility. And it is a world of discernment, where navigation is required. To switch metaphors, this house is beautiful – the design and the textures. Do I want to inhabit this carefully manicured house? Maybe, but.

I am a systematic theologian, more dilettante than conductor,[166] who thinks of dogmatics as constructive theology. I caught only seven fish, had three dogs and remain intrigued by the return of God in theology, and the Trinitarian Renaissance.[167] And I am committed to the epistemological transformation of theology in a (post)apartheid condition. My academic questions centre on the possibility of an interdisciplinary discourse on God and the social possibilities of a re-envisioned Trinitarian theology. Hence, I am interested in the conversation between systematic theology and philosophy of religion[168] and whether one could do anatheistic Trinitarian theology.[169]

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166. See the Dutch scholar Miskotte's famous reference to the dogmatician as 'dilettante' and 'conductor' (1990).

167. Says Kearney (2016a:241), 'I speak as a man from Cork, in his middle ages, who loves fishing, philosophy, dogs, and God […]'.

168. Kearney (2007:62) refers to 'a fruitful dialogue' between hermeneutical poetics and theological dogma, speculative metaphysics and empirical physics. See also the explicit reference to an 'interdisciplinary approach' (2016a:245).

169. Kearney is clearly informed about Trinitarian theology; see his suggestive comments (2016a:251f.) on 'the God of multiplicities and pluralities', on perichoresis, kenosis and the Trinity.

■ Background

A number of brief remarks may be necessary to situate the conversation. One should at least refer to Janicaud and to Heidegger. In a report on the status of contemporary French philosophy Janicaud voiced his concern that phenomenology had been hijacked by theology. The culprits he identified were Lévinas, Marion and Henry. 'Theological turn' became a short-hand description of a vibrant discourse in philosophy. Janicaud himself was of the opinion that phenomenology should be radically atheistic (for the debate, cf. Janicaud et al. 2001). In other contexts, like for example the USA, the same sentiment was to be found. According to Caputo (2012:11), there was a certain inevitability to Continental Philosophy of Religion taking a 'theological turn'. The subdiscipline of Philosophy of Religion started to display a marked mutation from the conventional approach to this field of study. Increasingly the focus became the overcoming of metaphysics and the critique of onto-theology.

The looming figure behind all of this is obviously Heidegger. In his discussion of Western metaphysics, starting already with Aristotle, he sees an intimate link between ontology and theology. God functions as the highest being, the *causa prima*, the ground of all causality. He raises the question of a 'post-metaphysical God', a god outside this great chain of being, a more divine god to whom one can pray.[170] The critique of onto-theology implies the attractive imperatives of unmasking idols in our construction of the divine and of rethinking transcendence beyond human mastering (see Schrijvers 2006:303, 313). Various thinkers accepted this challenge of radically construing the human god-talk beyond being. Some of the most prominent are Marion, Caputo and Kearney (for an excellent treatment, see Gschwandtner 2013).

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170. For a detailed discussion of Heidegger's philosophy of religion, cf. Vedder (2007).

The question that concerns me here is the relationship between contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion and Systematic Theology. My impression is that, apart from a few exceptions,[171] the various attempts to overcome onto-theology and think post-metaphysically about God have not been taken seriously by systematic theologians. The relationship and conversation between Philosophy of Religion and Systematic Theology should be reconceived, beyond what Gunton (1996) called 'indispensable opposition'. Conversation has multilayered dynamics. It is obviously non-colonising; it informs, it challenges, it stimulates, it entertains, and it encourages self-reflection and possible self-transformation.

■ Anatheistic imagination

The questions Kearney raises help to focus the direction of his own creative reimagining. He is interested in 'what kind of divinity comes after metaphysics' (Kearney 2001a:2), 'what kind of God comes again after the death of the Alpha God' (2016a:256), 'what do we mean when we speak of God' (Kearney 2010:xi) and 'how one (might) speak of the sacred after the disappearance of God' (Kearney 2010:xvi). His notions of 'anatheism', 'theopoetics' and the 'possible' are crucial to understand how he thinks these questions may be addressed.

Anatheism conveys a double sense: abandonment and retrieval. Kearney emphatically wants to move beyond a specific understanding of God in the Christian tradition, one trapped in metaphysics and in theodicy thinking, one which prioritises onto-theological categories of omnipotence, sovereignty and all causality. His shorthand designation is the 'Omni-God', the

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171. One can mention here Grenz (2005). Sadly, his engagement with thinkers like Marion, Caputo and Kearney is cursory. In a recent article, Benjamins (2015), also discussing Kearney, views the potential contribution of post-secular thought as opening new perspectives on transcendence for Systematic Theology, which weakens the opposition between the religious and the secular.

'Alpha God' (cf. Kearney 2001b:161, 2009:167-174, 2016b:17, 2016a:249). What this refers to is clear (Kearney 2006:11), '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.'

His rejection is, however, twofold; he distances himself at the same time from postmodern extremes where the alterity is so 'other' that it is indistinguishable from monstrosity (Kearney 2001b:164, 167). In a magnificent discussion of *khora,* he articulates his unease when deconstruction makes a preferential option for *khora*, which is more 'archi-ultimate than God' (Kearney 2003:203, 205). Kearney is looking for a third option between *khora* and hyperousia (Kearney 2003:208).

The grammar of 'ana' in *anatheism* speaks of *before* and *after*, but is not a dialectical third term that supersedes atheism and theism. This 'returning to God after God' opens a space for the questioning of God where theists and atheists may converse (Kearney 2010:xvii, 2017:35), and it emphatically resists absolutists' positions *against* or *for* the divine (Kearney 2010:16). For Kearney, this entails 'an act of reimagining' (Kearney 2016b:10); it is a disposition *vis-à-vis* different positions (Kearney 2016a:246).

His constructive and creative contribution is to be found in a new category of the 'possible'. This as third option moves beyond being and non-being, and beyond the traditional opposition between the possible and the impossible (Kearney 2007:54). Referring to Nicholas of Cusa and his construct of *possest* (*esse* revealed as *posse*), Kearney proposes a notion of God 'that neither is nor is not but may be' (Kearney 2001b:170). What emerges here are connotations of promise, becoming and futurity (2009:180), says Kearney (2009:182): 'God' becomes 'another name for the "more," the "surplus," the "surprise" that humans seek'. For Kearney (2016a:241), God is not a thing out there that can be described in an essentialist manner. This 'enabling God' is

Kearney's proposal for a post-God, a God thought onto-eschatologically; it is a re-imagining 'in terms of *both* ontological being *and* eschatological becoming' (2016a:249).

Crucial for Kearney is the switch from macro- to micro-eschatology, to revisit the sacred in the midst of the secular, to turn to the 'least of these' (Mt 25:40), to imagine a 'God of small things' (Kearney 2007:52f., 2017:35), the 'possibilising power'. His reimagination is clear: 'We are talking here of a radically fragile, vulnerable, humble, appealing, loving divinity' (Kearney 2016a:256). After three previous reductions – Hussel's transcendental, Heidegger's ontological and Marion's donological – Kearney submits a fourth, an eschatological reduction (2006:5). His focus is on the '*possibilising* of essence, being, and gift' (Kearney 2006:8).

Anatheism needs *theopoetics*, according to Kearney. This seemingly simple notion becomes quite multilayered and complex in his philosophy. Basically, it refers to the mutual recreation between the human and the divine, the relation between divine *poiesis* and human *praxis* (Kearney 2017:32, 34). This synergy, however, has much more radical implication for Kearney and involves a crucial 'if': 'God can only be God if we enable this to happen' (Kearney 2001a:2); '*we* […] must help God to be God' (Kearney 2007:55, [*author's added emphasis*]); 'God is up to us, in the end' (Kearney 2016a:250). Theopoetics involves more than ethics: it is hermeneutical, it is multidisciplinary and requires the arts. In this way it differs drastically from dogmatic theology. The fourth reduction 'signals a return to poetry' (Kearney 2006:12). Kearney's constructive reimagining of God in terms of the possible cannot be mapped without these dynamics of imagination, interpretation and openness to various religious traditions and to artistic expressions. The superabundance of meaning requires a certain liberty that could be wrought only in this manner.

Kearney discusses the icon of Andrei Rublev of the Trinity as an example of hospitality, and this conveys also his conviction

that images are stronger than ideas and that art goes deeper than any theoretical theology. What is invited is nothing but carnal hermeneutics. The visit of the three strangers to Abraham was for Rublev a perfect icon for the three divine persons of the Christian deity. The relationship between the three is described by Kearney as an open-ended dance by equal partners, expressed by the Patristic term 'perichoresis'. What is, however, central in Kearney's interpretation is the chalice in the icon. This open space signifies *chora*, a fourth person, and ultimately 'a space of endless possibility', 'a divine possibility [*dunamis*] beyond the impossible [*adunaton*] of the human possible' (Kearney 2017:39, 41). The chalice is the gap 'where the radically Other may arrive' (Kearney 2010:25). Rublev's icon finally 'exemplifies the Trinity as a drama of lived hospitality' (Kearney 2017:39).

■ Trinitarian imagination

Some brief clarifying remarks on Trinitarian theology may assist a conversation. What is at stake here and how does this allow for a possible dialogue with contemporary Philosophy of Religion and with Richard Kearney? The following comments are fragmentary, brief and aim at the present conversation.

The Trinitarian confession is the specific *Christian identification* of the divine. Often, Christianity is uncritically associated with a generic divine being, the so-called classical theism, or the omni-monster. This is a far cry from liturgical practice with its identification of God as Father, Son and Spirit and from all major Christian thinkers throughout history who uphold a Trinitarian understanding of the divine. Claiming this does not imply that the church and theologians maintain stable or similar interpretations, but a fundamental conviction of the simultaneous unity and differentiation of the divine character functions as centripetal force in this religion. The differences between churches of the East and the West should not be minimised, but still they share the same basic conviction.

This confession and eventual conceptual articulation with the available intellectual tools *emerged* as the *culmination* of experiences (i.e. the resurrection and Pentecost),[172] of scriptural interpretation and of interaction with empire.[173] The experience of the dawn of the eschaton, of something drastically new prompted the early followers of Jesus of Galilee to start rethinking their inherited monotheistic Jewish faith.

The expression of a Trinitarian confession did not come easily, and the intense intellectual debate should be carefully taken note of. Seldom do the notions of imagination, courage and novelty receive their due in historical reconstructions. The *revolutionary quality* of patristic reconstructions should be understood. The *homo-ousios* ascription (i.e. Jesus having the same nature as the Father) of the Council of Nicea was a rejection of the conservatism of Arius, who could not imagine complexity and differentiation in the eternal 'substance' of the divine.[174] At the same time, this formulation constituted a challenge to the Roman Empire, which valued order and not difference in the life of the divine (Rieger 2007:91–100). The Cappadocians re-envisioned being and relations; the 'essence' of God is relational. Personhood and relationship are co-fundamental with being, nature and essence.[175] The classical thesis of Von Harnack that dogma amounted to the Hellenisation of Christianity is widely questioned today (cf. Markschies 2012). The early fathers used the available conceptual tools from their environment but drastically redefined

172. Few studies have explored the Trinitarian confession from a phenomenological perspective; for one recent work, cf. Hart (2012). Coakley (2013:100–151) raised the question: Can the Trinity be experienced?

173. Cf. Rieger (2007:69–117) for an excellent discussion of Nicea and Chalcedon in the context of empire.

174. For a thorough discussion of homoousios, see Wiles (1965), and for one on the logic of Arianism and the problems their specific metaphysics caused for reconstruction of God in light of the Jesus event, cf. Williams (1983).

175. Zizioulas' interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers has become well known in this regard (Zizioulas 2008:47–69).

them; Schwöbel (2009) is of the opinion that Greek metaphysics was used to express the universal significance of the Christian gospel. Their metaphysics was revolutionary: it brought change within the divine, established relation as a key category and subtly disrupted colonial power.

What is seldom fully grasped is that the early church with the councils and their confessional articulation, by implication, contracts a great *variety of traditions* of both the Old and New Testament. The patristic rhetoric was thoroughly informed by scriptural testimonies and exegesis. A complex deity emerged, a deity who could not, for example, be sanitised from the 'texts of terror' or of a 'dark side'. The unity of the Old and New Testaments was consistently maintained by orthodox theologians. Any attempt at selectivity or truncation was rejected.

The *attribute* tradition in Christian dogmatics, especially under the influence of the Reformed Scholastics, inhibited the crystallisation of this theo-revolution and kept the Christian God subservient to Greek metaphysics. Often, the metaphysical reconstruction of Thomas Aquinas is discredited for the captivity of the Christian divinity, and the influential role of post-Reformational thinking is ignored. Only in the 20th century were serious attempts made to redress this: to rethink God's character Trinitarianly (cf. Gunton 2002). In theological discourse, this is arguably one of the most productive developments of the 20th century. For example, this opened possibilities to associate God with suffering, with space, with beauty and with justice. Kearney's suggestion (2001b:161) that 'the orthodox onto-theological categories of omnipotence, omniscience and self-causality [...] could do with a radical rethink *sub specie historiae*' has been taken up in Christian Systematic Theology.

The so-called Trinitarian Renaissance of the 20th century, with roots going far back, arguably to the German Idealists and Romantics, is an attempt to embrace the full implications and potential of this confession, to 're-baptise God', the 'God after God' (R Jenson), to 'let the symbol sing again' (E Johnson).

In distinction from earlier theology, which focused on the unity of God, this development has taken divine *relationality* with utmost seriousness. A deliberate attempt was made to move beyond thinking in terms of 'being'. The major Protestant theologian of the 20th century, K. Barth, is an excellent proponent of this. He is explicitly resistant to an absorption of the doctrine of God into a doctrine of being and states clearly his alternative (Barth 1957:260, 263): 'To its very deepest depths God's Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event'. The intimate link between Trinity, life, act and event is the focus in Barth's understanding of God. Jenson (1997:221) puts it succinctly: 'God is what happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit'.[176] Trinitarian theology can hardly be labelled *onto-theology* and should not be equated with *classical theism* (cf. Vanhoozer 2010:82–105). The social doctrine of the Trinity of the German theologian Moltmann is a typical example of a post-metaphysical approach to an understanding of the triune mystery (cf. Rossi-Keen 2008).

I want to suggest that this development of Trinitarian rediscovery, which has been mentioned briefly, may amount to an *anatheistic* move, albeit not with adequate 'negative capability'. There is a deliberate attempt to think in a new register, a relational one, and to take seriously LaCugna's (1973:1) comment that '[t]he doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine with radical consequences'. Earlier insights, especially those of the Cappadocians, have been retrieved and reimagined. Kearney's (2003:207) gracious comment, 'Not every notion of the Trinitarian God […] is a fetish of presence or hyperessence', is especially applicable here. This is true of a large number of relational Trinitarian theologies developed in our time. A vision of God and a way of life have been integrated. For a significant spectrum of theologians, the Trinity has become 'our social programme', motivating specific Christian speaking about politics, economics, aesthetics, evolution, disability and an alternative praxis.

176. The entirety of Chapter 13 in Jenson's *Systematic Theology* is exceptionally important. In an attempt to rethink 'being' trinitarianly, he states (1997:218): 'The life of God is constituted in a structure of relations, whose own referents are narrative'.

The critical contribution has been to rethink *divine action and agency* in a post-theistic, richly pluralistic and nuanced manner. Motifs like the silence and the hiddenness[177] of YHWH, kenosis of Jesus Christ, and – this is crucial – the freedom of the Spirit and newness, beauty and even chaos[178] – all come into play, but with an explicit *extra nos* character.

In short, a *Trinitarian imagination* allows for a conversation with most of the postmodern concerns. The Trinitarian identification of the divine, in contemporary Systematic Theology, is a far cry from a typical theistic, metaphysical, theodicean monarch. An entire constellation of factors in the historical emergence of Trinitarian theology opens the potential for *subversion* of a typical metaphysical distortion of the divine. If the following dynamics are taken serious in a theo-reimagining – the redefinition of monotheism, the contribution of the Cappadocian fathers, the subtle challenge to Roman empire, the crucifixion of the man of Galilee, the Spirit as hypostatised love, the turn to relationality and the 'practical significance' – a 'new space' (cf. Verhoef 2017:182f.) could be opened for Trinitarian theology to contribute to the post-metaphysical conversation. The life of the Triune God is an event traditionised as a narrative of a divine who gives Godself with gracious hospitality, a God who is free in love, who can never be domesticated as idol in any manner.[179]

■ Anxieties

I am sensitive not to give the impression that theopoetics must be refashioned in the image of Trinitarian theology. Too much

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177. This does not necessarily amount to what Kearney (2009:169) calls 'subtle apologetics for apophatic theology'.

178. Cf. the Dutch scholar Van de Beek (1987:210–214) on the 'Chaotiserende Gees' based on the provocative work by his compatriot Van Ruler on 'God and chaos'.

179. Cf. a discussion by Schüssler Fiorenza (2001) on the three idols of being, subjectivity and otherness.

could be learned from this stranger to enrich the identity of the confession. Despite a genuine appreciation of the Kearney construct, I have a Trinitarian anxiety about a number of features of his poetic profile which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, too much of the multilayered traditions underlying Christianity seems to me *truncated*, or dismissed or ignored as representing the omni-God of metaphysics. Kearney's reference to and use of scripture, which is impressive and admirable, is in the final instance, quite understandably, eclectic. Theopoetics operates selectively and creates an image that has been sanitised of offensive features. One often gets the impression that Kearney associates theology with a certain 'inhibitedness' and that philosophy enjoys a far greater freedom (see, e.g., 2007:62 – 'strictures'). A certain irony could be at play here. Kearney (2010:xvii) refers to philosophy as opening 'a space for the questioning of God'. Theology is indebted to a *scope of traditions* that cannot be easily dismissed, and it does not have this eclectic freedom. Recent systematic projects, for example, by Coakley [*théologie totale*] and Kärkkäinen (*Constructive Theology for a Pluralistic World*) evidence the multidimensional and radical open nature of theology. The particular difficulty for Systematic Theology is to argue for coherence amidst divergent traditions and to integrate also the 'texts of terror' (Trible) into its representation of the divine profile.

Secondly, the 'if' is problematic in 'God's kingdom can only come if […]' (see the emphatic statements in Kearney 2011:222, 227). This 'if' could render the two theo-imaginings – the enabling God of Kearney and the Trinitarian God – ultimately incompatible. Does the 'if' hide a pervasive disillusionment in God's faithfulness? Does '[t]he God of little things' come after '[n]ight', after the '[w]aiting for Godot'? The genealogy of the primacy of the ethical can be traced, and the deep disillusionment in any theodicy is understandable, but should the belief in divine agency be abandoned? Among contemporary theologians, there is considerable reflection on the silence of God (cf. *The Silent God* by Korpel & De Moor 2011) and on the nature of divine action in

dialogue with science. But dependence becomes immensely problematic. The Kearney interplay between divine venture and human adventure is potentially frightening for those who suffer, who are weak and who yearn for justice. The Trinitarian dialectic between cross and resurrection via the interval of dark Saturday may open possibilities to reconceive divine impotence and divine initiative.

Thirdly, the central question in an engagement with Kearney and the anxieties a Trinitarian theologian experiences contract in the neglect of the notion of *S/spirit* in the theopoetics. For the Christian religion, sociologically speaking, the 20th century has been the century of the Spirit with the unexpected growth of Charismatic churches in the most unexpected places.[180] Trinitarian theology has sensitised theologians not only to the prominence of the Spirit but also to the surplus of meaning of 'ruach' or 'pneuma' in the various biblical traditions. Christian theologians, or at least some of them, have started to imagine the separation between the Father and Son at the cross, the beauty of the tabernacle, the *novum* of the resurrection, the unity between Jew and Gentile, the emergence of cosmic emergence and even cosmic chaos pneumatologically. Many of the central motifs in Kearney's theopoetics – like imagination, discernment, art, the little ones, possibility – belong in a Trinitarian theology to the domain of the Spirit. The ontological implications of the Pauline notions of the Spirit as *arrabōn* [guarantee, first instalment] or as *aparchē* [first fruits] for an eschatology are immense. The Spirit is the eschatological gift, whom we can grieve and even quench. The Spirit is the possibilising person in the Christian tradition. It is a question whether *perichoresis* allows, in a fairly strict Christian theological sense, for a fourth dimension: 'the triadic model of epiphany implies a fourth dimension – the vacant space of advent for the new [...]' (Kearney 2010:109; also 2006:10). Is there a fourth feminine space, or is the

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180. Kearney (2007:57) makes this suggestive aside, 'The pneumatological call to speak in tongues commits itself here to a poetics of the poor and unremembered'.

Spirit the very (personal) relation of love between Father and Son? This was the particular contribution of St Augustine to Trinitarian and pneumatological reflection to conceive of the Spirit as the bond of love (cf. Kotsko 2011). The Spirit is the space of possibility and of hospitality. This space is not a *khora* but is a Person.

Fourthly, what has happened to *salvation*? Are the small instantiations of justice *salvation*?[181] Is this being addressed by the fourth (micro-)eschatological reduction? What more does Kearney's God offer than – '[e]schatology is realised in the presence of the alien in our midst' (2010:29)? The notion of 'eschatology' in Kearney's project warrants a study on its own, which cannot be done here. Religions have ultimately to do with salvation, and this is why they also persist (cf. Riesebrodt 2010). The Christian faith has a rich legacy of soteriological traditions, which is being explored in ever new historical contexts by theologians. The challenge is to rethink, after so many 'turns', what *salvus* may imply pluralistically. There is clearly an antenna for antimetaphysical, holistic, social and ecological approaches to human and planetary flourishing. A Trinitarian imagination is looking for a clearer referent to what is *possible*.

■ Promise

Kearney is emphatic about a gap 'between the philosopher's endless exploration of new beginnings and the practitioner's proclamation of a return to the word of God' (2010:75; cf. 2009:177, 179). The gap between Philosophy of Religion and Systematic Theology will and should remain, but the conversation between Trinitarian theology and Kearney's theopoetics could, arguably, be most fruitful. Trinitarian theology could be enriched by a greater attention to imagination, possibility, everyday life,

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181. One wonders whether Kearney supports Ricoeur, who 'abandons the notion of personal salvation in favour of service to others' (Kearney 2011:223).

alterity, human agency and space. The Kearney reimagining of the divine remains deeply touching, intellectually challenging and theologically disturbing. The task for a post-metaphysical Trinitarian theology would be to explore its considerable intellectual resources, already started in the 20th century with the so-called relational turn, to express clearer sentiments articulated by philosophy of religion, and specifically by Kearney, and articulate more coherently its own distinctive integrity. This could renew speaking the divine and contribute to human flourishing. This is the promise of an engagement.

After God but behind the Cross: The procession as a way to re-encounter God in a culture beyond classical liturgy

Mirella Klomp
Practical Theology
Protestant Theological University
Holland

Daniël P. Veldsman ⓘ
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
Faculty of Theology
University of Pretoria
South Africa

▪ Introduction

Since the year 2011, a television production company and two broadcasting companies in the Netherlands have annually organised *The Passion*, a popular musical representation of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ.[182] The ritual has grown into a large, open-air media event that takes place once a year on a square in one of the country's larger cities: Gouda (2011), Rotterdam (2012), Den Haag (2013), Groningen (2014), Enschede (2015) and Amersfoort (2016). *The Passion* airs live on Dutch national television on Maundy Thursday, draws a large audience on the square, scores very high television viewing figures and gets a lot of attention in the national media. It was created and is organised by the TV production company Eye2EyeMedia, who initiated and further developed the event with the Evangelical Broadcasting Company EO and the broadcasting company KRO-NCRV (which has Roman Catholic and Protestant origins), in cooperation with several other parties, such as the municipalities of the cities where it takes place. *The Passion* has become increasingly popular over the last six years: the fifth edition in the city of Enschede culminated in a TV-viewing share of 45.7%, with over 20 000 people attending the event on the square.[183] The format of the show heavily leans on covers of well-known Dutch hit songs: secular songs are performed within the framework of a passion narrative based on the gospels. As a result of clever press strategies and marketing techniques, *The Passion* has

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182. The broadcasts of all editions so far are available online via http://www.npo.nl/the-passion/POMS_S_EO_113985, viewed 30 June 2016.

183. Absolute viewing figures and share of viewing (percentage of the total viewing audience watching over a given period of time) per year, respectively, were 1.0 million and 17.6% (2011); 1.9 million and 25.9% (2012); 2.5 million and 32.4% (2013); 3.6 million and 44.9% (2014); 3.8 million and 45.7% (2015); 3.4 million and 44.2% (2016). N.B.: The Netherlands has a population of some 17 million people. *Source*: PDF document created by Petra Moonen, market researcher at broadcasting company KRO-NCRV (obtained by the first author on 30 May 2016). The decrease in 2016 may be explained by a competing intercalary broadcast on the other national channel on the same evening, because of the death of world-famous Dutch soccer player Johan Cruijff earlier that day.

popped up as a vibrant large performance that uses pop music, social and other media, and celebrities to tell the story of *The Passion* and Easter. The performers are mainly famous Dutch actors and singers who not seldom emphatically define themselves as non-believers. Part of the 90-min show is a procession with a cross that over the years has come to take on three different but interrelated shapes: a physical, offline shape, and two online, virtual shapes. Because we will particularly focus on the procession in this article, these shapes are described more elaborately below.

Annual performances of *The Passion* narrative and processions with a cross are of course nothing new, certainly not in the week before Easter. What is new in this case is the secularised context in which *The Passion* is being performed: The Netherlands is often said to be among the most secularised countries in the world. Christianity permeated the culture for centuries, yet traditional Christian belief in the 1960s started to rapidly disappear from Dutch society (Bernts & Berghuijs 2016). To the majority of people today in the Netherlands, Christian liturgy, or even the God of the Christian tradition, does not appear to be (any longer) a topic of interest. The paradox – that watching a TV show on the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and walking along in a procession with a cross is highly popular, whereas the country has shown an ongoing decrease in church attendance as well as a significant shrinking of institutional churches – is as remarkable as it is fascinating, particularly because *The Passion*'s popularity by no means indicates a massive return to Christianity. On the contrary, the decennial quantitative study 'God in Nederland', first executed in 1966, showed in 2016 that 60% of the respondents appreciated *The Passion*, while 34% found it kitschy, 30% said that it did not at all strengthen their faith and 58% indicated that it did not or not at all make them more curious about the Christian faith (Bernts & Berghuijs 2016:219). So, *The Passion* cannot simply be defined as a (Christian) *religious* ritual. To consequently define *The Passion* as a *secular* show would do no justice to the phenomenon either, even though a number

of its success factors invite such a definition.[184] Longitudinal empirical research has shown that many people attribute meaning to various elements of *The Passion*.[185] The ritual appears to open a space that may be described as a nursery for religious experiences: a space where people's hermeneutic ability to deal with the sacred is being activated (Klomp & Van der Meulen 2017). Although many people do not or no longer have the language that we recognise as referring to God, this does not mean that God is absent in this passion ritual.

As theologians, we identify the issue at stake as the sacramental quality of the procession: the encounter with God through, with and in the ritual. This directly leads us to the central question in this article: in a 21st-century secularised society, how do participants in the processional shapes of *The Passion* encounter God? With this chapter, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of public liturgical ritual after the demolishing impact of secularisation on religious institutions in contemporary late modern Western Europe. We also hope to add to the further development of 'theology after the death of God' (the latter referring to the experience that Christian religion had become unbelievable) in a 21st-century Western European society where scholars have come to turn down secularisation theories, stating that modernity has not led to less religion, but rather to a shift in religion.[186]

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184. Brief summary of *The Passion*'s success factors, (1) the meaning of the event is *open* (i.e. it does not contain dogmatic proclamations that steer the meaning of the narrative: what people make of it is up to them), (2) it has a strong *format* consisting of famous Dutch hit songs inserted into the framework of the narrative, (3) *performers* are actors and singers who are famous in popular culture (role models) (4) the event is *accessible* (no entrance fee, open air, people can come and go, but also watch the show on TV or the Internet) and (5) it is a high-*quality* show (in terms of sound, light effects and spectacular images).

185. This research was conducted by the first author, who engaged in ethnographic fieldwork on *The Passion* between 2011 and 2016.

186. Numerous incidents within the last decade have raised questions regarding the validity of Europe's assumed secularisation. The rise of the frequently used concept 'post-secular', however not unproblematic, points to the contested nature of both religion and secularity in Europe. For a discussion of the alleged secularity of Europe, see, for example, Lori Beaman (2013:141–157) and Jean-Paul Willaime (2009:23–35).

We will first describe the three processional shapes of *The Passion* and briefly elaborate on the Dutch context in which this procession practice takes place. We then explain the concept of 'anatheism' as developed by Richard Kearney and elaborate why his theory seems promising for the interpretation of liturgical ritual in late modern society. Leaning on Kearney and the possibility of a sacramental encounter with God in this contemporary procession, we will then offer an interpretation of the ritual and *conclude the article by answering the fundamental research question*.

■ The procession

■ The procession in *The Passion*

We understand a procession as 'a communal ritualised act, a social action that can – mainly but not exclusively – be identified as religious' (Gerhards 1997:593). This ritualised act in *The Passion* takes on three shapes: a physical procession with a cross through the city, a virtual procession behind the cross enabled by a second screen application and a virtual Twitter procession.

Since the first edition of *The Passion* in 2011, every year some 1000 people[187] have followed a large neon-lit cross that is carried through the streets by 16 so-called crossbearers. The procession always heads to the square where the main stage is set up in order to arrive there at that point in the narrative where Jesus, after his condemnation, is taken away by soldiers. During the live performance of the show on the city square, where a narrator on stage hosts the performance, cameras switch over occasionally to the procession. At these moments, a TV personality in the role of a journalist interviews several participants (coming from various religious and non-religious backgrounds) of the procession, who openly share with the millions their personal motives for following the cross.

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187. The organisation set the limit at 1000 participants in order to be able to ensure their safety.

By 2014, this physical procession had become so popular that the online registration for participation, which opened 6 months before the event, filled up in a couple of hours. The organisers, therefore, initiated an additional virtual procession by launching a second screen application, which enabled people to follow the procession online and to share their personal motivation to do so.[188] This virtual procession became so popular, as well, that subsequent iterations of *The Passion* all had this second screen application (2015 showed a fivefold increase in participants). During the broadcast of *The Passion*, people were encouraged to join the virtual procession: the text live.thepassion.nl appeared as a subtitle on the screen. This website showed a pop-up screen with an 'I walk along' button along with an optional textbox where people could write in their motivation. Once enrolled in this virtual procession, participants saw the cross and crossbearers in front of them and could follow the procession through the streets of the city just by scrolling their mouse or swiping the touchscreen of their devices. Each participant could virtually walk the procession at their own pace upon arrival at the main square.[189]

In addition to the physical and virtual processions, people could also join the online Twitter procession by using #ikloopmee [#iwalkalong], a hashtag created and promoted by the broadcasting companies. They meant to relate this to the second screen application[190], but the hashtag was also used more independently, as a way to relate to *The Passion* in general.

188. Definition of 'second screen': 'a mobile device used while watching television, especially to access supplementary content or applications'. It is used to enhance the TV viewing experience and often generates online conversations around the content. From http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/second-screen, viewed 30 August 2016.

189. Participants actually followed the procession rehearsal, which was recorded the evening before the event, which is why they could reach the main stage before the procession did so in real time.

190. So that people could not only share their motivations for following the cross by using the open textbox, but also share them on Twitter.

■ Historical background and cultural context

Processions with the cross, from which the processional shapes in *The Passion* are directly derived, have an age-old history and have been the object of many liturgical studies.[191] Here, we will especially and briefly focus on the history of outdoor processions in the Dutch context. After the Reformation got a foothold in what is now called the Netherlands, public expression of Roman Catholic faith within the territory of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1561–1795) was prohibited.[192] Although freedom of religion was legally established in 1795, processions were again officially banned by Dutch law in 1848 because the revival of processions and communal pilgrimages had stirred up too much turmoil in the predominantly Protestant country. This law prohibited processions in those parts of the country where they had not been a common phenomenon until 1848 (effectively this meant the predominantly Protestant part north of the rivers Rhine, Meuse and Walloon, which makes up two-thirds of the Dutch land area). The ban on processions was finally dispensed with in 1983. So, in general, liturgical procession in the Netherlands had long been a phenomenon that was tolerated and not practised by the majority of the Dutch inhabitants.

Since the 1990s, another ritual has arisen and developed in Dutch culture: the (compassionate or) silent procession.[193] Today, such processions occur in various forms on various occasions: after disasters, after fatalities arising from what is termed 'senseless violence' (e.g. street violence), after sudden deaths of prominent persons, in the context of national remembrance of

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191. For historical overviews and extensive lists of bibliographic references, see Jan Christian Gertz (1997:591–593). Regarding the relation between indoor and outdoor liturgy, particularly relevant is Paul Post et al. (1998:281–320).

192. An elaborate study of Dutch processional culture, on which this paragraph relies, can be found in Peter Jan Margry (2000).

193. For an overview of the development of this kind of procession, see Paul Post (2003: 156–186).

the dead of Second World War and all sorts of memorial and protest ritual (Post 2003:166–172). Where liturgical processions are rather absent, silent processions like these are a prominent public ritual in the Netherlands.

The procession that we focus on in this article illustrates the broader trend of Christian forms and ritual repertoires moving to 'outer-ecclesial' domains. In his exploration of outdoor ritual, Paul Post in 1998 typified rituals similar to the procession in *The Passion* as 'folklorised liturgy'. Acknowledging that the term is somewhat problematic, Post rightly pointed to 'a fundamental change in the context of ritual and the way it is experienced' (Post 2003:294–295). He signalled a change in liturgical shape, context and meaning: it moves to the public realm, where the ritual becomes a performance for an audience and becomes a spectacle with rehearsals, scripts and sponsors. All this is applicable to *The Passion*.

■ Changes in the religious landscape

In Dutch culture, over the last century, religious language and religious practices have increasingly left the enclosed domain of the institutional churches and have migrated to other realms, such as the wider public domain – a shift that can be typified as a transfer and a transformation of religion and/or the sacred.[194] This transfer and transformation occur(red) in a society where institutional Christianity is marked by reduction and concentration.[195] Yet, the Dutch have not become

194. On the transfer and transformation of religion and the sacred, see Joep de Hart (2014); Erik Sengers (2005); Paul Post (2010); Erik Borgman (2006); Wim van de Donk et al. (2006); and Willem Frijhoff (1998).

195. Church attendance in the Netherlands decreased by 40% in the last 10 years (42% for the Roman Catholic Church; an estimated 25% for the Protestant Church). Unaffiliated and Other faiths continue to grow. See http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

completely irreligious: it is not that they all became atheists, but, as historian Peter van Rooden (2004:547ff.) stated in 2004, Christianity simply became irrelevant because of the rise of the expressive and reflexive self. What remains are apparently a 'basal sacral' attitude and behaviour (cf. Juchtmans 2008:306–316), whereas a new group of unaffiliated 'floating believers' (seekers) arose (De Hart 2015:53–79). Christianity 'collapsed' in the Netherlands (Van Rooden 2004:524). Religion, even Christian religion, remained, yet it took an entirely different shape: ecclesial ritual practices were transformed into less specific religious practices with Christian elements and roots. Religion has become fluid. Dutch society in general has become a society beyond the church.

The processional practices in *The Passion* are an example of this transfer and transformation of religion. The procession turned into a public ritual event that is broadcast live and has acquired additional digitalised shapes that are strongly connected with technological developments (cf. Klomp & Van der Meulen 2017). This is striking, considering that the majority of the Dutch have a relative unfamiliarity with the procession phenomenon: most people had never heard of or participated in this practice. Since the increase of media attention *The Passion* has got over the years, the word 'procession' in the public sphere (e.g. in newspapers and TV and radio talk shows) is now used as if it has always been a customary phenomenon.

Considering the complexity of the historical background and the context of the religious landscape of this procession practice, how does the encounter between God and the participants in the procession ritual take place? In working towards an answer to the question, the philosophical–theological reflection of the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney (now from Boston College, USA) on a return to God after having lost God may point us towards a creative hermeneutic of the opened space 'where people's hermeneutic ability to deal with the sacred is being activated'. We turn to Kearney's proposal of an SI that entails the sacramental return to the holiness of the everyday.

■ Theory: Kearney's anatheism

In the Western late modern context of today, the God question according to Kearney is returning with a new sense of urgency. He believes it is 'an increasingly pressing inquiry for our "postmodern" age where the adversarial dogmas of secularism and absolutism threaten the option of considered dialogue' (Kearney 2010:xiii). In his book *Anatheism* (Kearney 2010), he poses the deep penetrating question of how we can speak of God after having 'left God behind':

> What comes after God? What follows in the wake of our letting go of God? What emerges out of the night of not-knowing, that moment of abandoning and abandonment? Especially for those who – after ridding themselves of 'God' – still seek God? (p. 3)

Kearney's answer finds expression in his formulation of a way between contemporary dogmatic theism and militant atheism, which offers a hermeneutical narrative approach with its interpretative focus on 'otherness' and the welcoming of the S/stranger. Anatheism is 'an invitation to revisit what might be termed a primary scene of religion: the encounter with a radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to call God' (Kearney 2010:7). It is a third way in which Kearney explores the exciting interpretative possibilities of a 'return' to God and a reimagining of God after the death of God as a reaction to the polar opposites of certainty 'that have maimed so many minds and souls in our history' (Kearney 2010:2). Crucial to this third way is that it contains a moment of both *atheism* and *theism*: it is a return to God after the disappearance of God (*ana-theos*), a way between naïve faith and the hermeneutic of suspicion. *Ana-theism* is 'another word for another way of seeking and sounding the things we consider sacred but can never fully fathom or prove' (Kearney 2010:3). For Kearney, anatheism is not a state but rather a wager of faith beyond faith that occurs again and again; a wager that 'marks a reopening of that space where we are free to choose between faith or nonfaith' (Kearney 2010:7); a wager moment of creative 'not-knowing' that signifies a break with

former sureties and invites people to forge new meanings; a movement that refuses all absolute talk about the absolute. Such moments by no means occur only to intellectuals: the anatheist moment can come to anyone who experiences anxiety, doubt or disorientation in life. These instants are 'experienced in our bones – moods, affects, senses, emotions – before they are theoretically interrogated by our minds. And they are […] as familiar to believers as to non-believers' (Kearney 2010:5).

An important element of Kearney's theory is SI. For him, this entails the sacramental return to the holiness of the everyday. This sacramental return is taken as a retrieval of the extraordinary in the ordinary: 'It marks and opening towards a God whose descent into flesh depends on our response to the sacred summons of the moment' (Kearney 2010:86–7). In this sense, anatheism is a form of post-theism that allows us to revisit the sacred in the midst of the secular. A revisitation that confirms specific noes: the noes of the Omni-God of celestial might; the noes of the idea that God orchestrates good and evil alike. If anything is dead, it is the traditional thought of God, that is, a God as deus ex machina in times of neediness. Also, if anything is dead, it is the modern individualist conception of private salvation. The sacramental return 'is the possibility of a God after God (*ana-theos*) that signals the return of the sacred after its setting aside (*ana-thema*)' (Kearney 2010:86).

In our opinion, Kearney's theory can be extremely fruitful for the interpretation of the procession ritual in *The Passion* in particular as well as the wider interpretation of contemporary (Christian) ritual as such.[196] By analogy with his 'return to God after God', the procession in *The Passion* may be described as 'a return to liturgy after the liturgy'. In any one of the three shapes, the procession in *The Passion* is an *ana-liturgical ritual*. To many

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196. Strikingly, despite many opportunities in his philosophy that allow for an anatheistic interpretation of ritual, Kearney mainly focuses on texts, sacred stories and narratives, poetry and art.

inhabitants of the Netherlands, a procession with a cross is like a complete stranger. In a society where Christianity in the 20th century was increasingly met with hostility but today has become mostly irrelevant to many people, this procession – still unequivocally related to the cross of Jesus Christ – is somehow embraced (we will later demonstrate how this works). Wherever the procession goes around, people are in the wager. The result of this anatheistic wager is by no means fixed or final: they either choose to follow the cross or they do not. If and when they actually follow the cross, they receive the stranger as a guest. It is their response to the sacred summon of the moment.

This does not mean that all those engaging in the offline and online procession consciously experience anatheistic moments or that they are aware of being in 'a middle section' where they can either choose belief or disbelief. Kearney approaches the anatheistic wager as a rather individual and rational affair, yet we claim some more space for communality and unintentionality. Although Kearney writes that the wager of discernment may occur at the most basic affective and preconceptual levels, the wager of response in his view is not irrational: '[…] every seeing is a *seeing as*, a reading of the Stranger *as* this or that other, as love or hate, life or death' (Kearney 2010:44–45). The difficulty here is that in the end, what comes out of the wager for Kearney often seems very much linked to a verbal act (cf. Kearney 2010:7, where he writes: 'the radical Stranger who we choose, or don't choose, to *call* God').[197] His theory therefore runs the risk of being limited to the mind, to convictions, thoughts and ideas. We emphasise, however, particularly in a 21st-century emotion and experience culture, that a return to God may also occur in the acting itself. Even without words, it is possible to welcome the stranger: in the ritual – a ritual that is often performed together with other people. No matter how small the act of clicking a virtual button, irrespective of the ambivalence that some participants feel, who

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197. Kearney seems to be 'in the word' rather than 'in the flesh', to refer to the title of his chapter on sacramentality and the body.

physically follow the cross through the streets of the city, regardless of the impermanence of their engagement: they act and by acting welcome the stranger at their gates. Experiencing rituals as unfolding meaning within the inviting opened spaces does not necessarily have intellectual consent or theoretical interrogation as prerequisite. The procession of *The Passion* is a stranger walking up to contemporary Dutch people. They turn on the television and the web link to the virtual procession pops up – the stranger is knocking at their doors, and they engage or do not engage in this collective procession ritual.

In embracing *The Passion*, part of Dutch society embraces the procession with the cross anew. Protestants who would never engage in 'such a Roman-Catholic thing', 'nones' (the religiously unaffiliated) and atheists to whom following a cross is something new, Roman Catholics attracted by the virtuality of this ritual of old – people from different backgrounds engage in these processional shapes. They allow the stranger to come closer. It might bring them something new.

◼ Encountering God in the ana-liturgical ritual

If indeed in the ana-liturgical ritual, people encounter the radical stranger – whom they may or may not call God – then how exactly does this work? We discuss three examples of participants in the procession in 2014 and 2015. From a large set of empirical data collected between 2011 and 2016, we chose these examples because they show diverse ways of how the procession is an ana-liturgical ritual.

◼ Empowering powerlessness: Firemen in the physical procession

In 2015, *The Passion* in Enschede took place shortly before the 15th remembrance day of a catastrophic fireworks explosion that

had destroyed the residential area Roombeek. In 2000, the storehouse of a trader in fireworks went up in flames, 23 people (four of whom were firemen) died, around 950 persons were injured and 200 houses were destroyed. The calamity had a great impact on the community. Six days after the accident, a silent procession was organised, in which over 100 000 people participated.[198] In *The Passion* in 2015, the physical procession with the cross started in the heart of the (rebuilt) residential area of Roombeek and from there headed to the city centre. At the request of the local fire brigade, several firemen were crossbearers in this procession. In a preparatory interview that the organising team held with the firemen, they appeared to have concrete motivations to join the procession. One man made clear that by walking along he meant to honour the colleagues who had died in the accident:

> At that time, I had only just begun to work at the fire brigade and was only on the sidelines […], but after 15 years I notice that the accident still greatly influences the work of the fire department.[199]

Another fireman in that pre-interview had been involved more directly:

> I was on one of the first five fire trucks that rode out and ended up in the middle of the explosions. I lost consciousness on site, but I continued working in the days after the fire. It was much later that I got health problems. I had a serious whiplash and got disqualified for work for 60%. The catastrophe literally and figuratively left its scars.[200] (n.p.)

These men did not speak about God; they were living their lives in their social circles, and in that context on a particular evening would join a ritual with a cross: they acted (as we said: a ritual is not always that verbal, and they may not even have experienced God). As theologians, we do interpret their ritual acting as an

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198. http://www.regiocanons.nl/overijssel/twente/enschede-in-de-klas/vuurwerkramp- (viewed 04 August 2016).

199. *Source*: Line-up of *The Passion* 2015, acquired via KRO-NCRV.

200. *Source*: Line-up of *The Passion* 2015, acquired via KRO-NCRV.

encounter with the divine. In that very moment and place and setting where they picked up the cross, God became present just like that. Theologically speaking, by picking up the cross they connected their human suffering – of the fire department, of them as individuals, of the broader community of the inhabitants of Enschede – to the suffering of Jesus, who carried the cross to which he would later be nailed and on which he would die. They may have participated in the silent march in 2000, but this time during the procession they were carrying a cross, which has very explicit theological connotations. They walked with the suffering Christ, and the suffering Christ walked with them, almost like a re-enactment of the Emmaus journey. Participation in the ritual creates a space where the encounter of the firemen, the commemorating community and the weak God can happen. The anatheist moment involves 'a hope in spite of hopelessness that the estranged God may return in its empowering powerlessness', Kearney (2010:68) states (in line with Bonhoeffer). When commemorating *in situ*, the hope that comes with rebuilt houses, streets, parks and playgrounds stands next to the hopeless, utter darkness of the catastrophe and its scars still visible. In this ritual, the God of the past, who is the God still to come, descends. In the ordinary residential area, in a procession with a Plexiglas cross carried around, the divine enters with weakness and vulnerability to meet his suffering people. The procession in the Roombeek area is a sacramental return of the holiness of the everyday: a space where the extraordinary is retrieved in the ordinary. In this procession, the crossbearers return to 'a liturgical ritual after the liturgy' and meet a stranger who suffers and dies, who empowers with powerlessness and who is weak and vulnerable. One whom they may or may not call God.

◼ Letting go of God: A lamenting mother on the second screen

I want to learn to understand why my son was taken away this early, in the prime of his life. I think we need him more than God

or Jesus [*does*], if they do at all exist. My faith had not been very strong, but it was completely taken away from me after the death of my 19-year-old son. How to explain this 'in the love of Jesus'? To my mind that is not possible. Still, I walk along, virtually, maybe I will get an answer sometime. But frankly I expect nothing.[201] (n.p.)

On 17 April 2014, a mother entered this text in the text box on the second screen, by way of motivation to join the virtual procession in Groningen. The text strongly reflects an anatheistic wager: is it not cruel that my son died, and should I not let go of an omnipotent God that takes people like this? It is the existential question of a mother, disoriented in life, not knowing where to go or how to believe. She leaps upon the anatheistic wager, knowing of death and suffering, bewildered by the meaning of existence, departing from the image of an omnipotent God, struggling with a God of love, because the death of her son was so unjust. Her writing exudes the *atheist* 'no' that may initiate the anatheist turn. And by clinging to the virtual procession, she makes this turn: 'Still, I walk along, virtually'. Clearly not expecting to get one, virtually following the cross through the streets of Groningen City, she is hoping for an answer, for the return of God after his disappearance. In the existential darkness of her being as the mother of a deceased child, the cross comes to her in a virtual but no less real way, and she throws herself into the arms of this radical strange cross. In her 'holy insecurity', she keeps the possibility open for the divinity to come all the way back to her, in an instant. Her narrative is one big 'no'; her walking along in the procession is a 'yes'. Kearney writes that our response to the stranger is already a decision: a choice to commit. That is what this mother does, in a moment of truth, where she may not *know* the truth but *does* the truth. Indeed, '[o]rthopraxis precedes orthodoxy. Trust precedes theory. Action precedes abstraction' (Kearney 2010:44). In the moment of her surrender to this virtual procession shape, of simply clicking the button 'I walk along' on

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201. *Source*: Excel sheet with motivations, acquired via EO. Translation from Dutch to English language by the first author.

the screen, the highest deity kenotically becomes 'the very least of these'. The word that pitched its tent with the people empties out of transcendence into the heart of her suffering, again becomes everyday flesh, transubstantiates to join this grieving mother. This example shows that the anatheistic space is about humans who in dark times have to let go: both of their children and of their images of God. God may be encountered right there.

■ An epiphanic tweet: A grandmother joining the Twitter hashtag procession

On the same day, a female user on Twitter posted the text: '#iwalkalong special #thepassion I walk along for my grandson [name] who struggles on the IC of UMCG Groningen'[202] (Female, 17 April, Twitter).

The tweets that followed (replies by others and the woman's response to those replies) showed that her grandson was very ill. The boy had been born after 25 weeks of pregnancy and had many health problems.[203] By using the hashtag, and also by repeating the words, she virtually clasped the procession, joining other people in following the cross that was carried through the city. Although sending such a tweet is more volatile than virtually and physically following a cross through the streets of a city, the anatheistic wager is basically the same: in her days filled with anxiety about her hospitalised grandchild fighting for his life, the online procession suddenly appears. In this moment, she clutches to the cross, dedicating her own processional act to her grandson, connecting the cross of the suffering Jesus to the grandchild's and her own suffering. Virtually behind the cross, she watches

202. Tweet sent on 17 April at 17:17. For privacy reasons, the name of the Twitter account is not mentioned here. For verification of data, it is available upon request.

203. The mother of the boy keeps a blog on the Internet where she frequently posts medical updates about him. This section partly relies on information from that blog. For privacy reasons, the web link is not mentioned here. For verification of data, it is available upon request.

with her grandson – unintentionally responsive to Jesus' appeal to 'watch with me for one hour' (Mt 26:40) – and therefore with Christ. A sacramental inversion is taking place, a change of perspectives: by welcoming the cross, the God who is welcomed welcomes the grandmother with her grandchild.[204] She had posted several tweets about him in the past; he had also been hospitalised several times in the past. This time, the processional tweet through, in and by which she links her grandson to the cross 'somehow transubstantiates the empirical *thisness* [of her tweets] [...] into something sacred and eschatological', to use Kearney's (2010:105) words. An ordinary practice becomes a processional ritual that converts the ordinary into a sacred practice. It becomes a sacramental vehicle that enables an encounter with the divine: the procession tweet acquires an epiphanic character (i.e. it becomes an embodiment of the sacred), giving future to past tweets.

■ Conclusion

In their reflections on the sacramentality of worship, Barnard, Cilliers and Wepener (2014:330) rightly claim that God's presence cannot be manipulated. 'God cannot be captured with or within our liturgical ritual acting. His "real" presence – *presentia realis* – is an answer to human faith, but never in a causal sense'. We do by no means intend to claim that the ana-liturgical ritual causes God's presence. It is rather a matter of *fides quaerens figuras*: faith (and non-faith) searches for opened spaces and shapes in which to encounter the divine. Having said that, we return to our research question: in a 21st-century secularised society, how do participants in the processional shapes of *The Passion* encounter God? In Dutch late modern society where classical liturgy and Christian tradition for that matter are irrelevant in the eyes of many people, the media have reinvented the procession ritual.

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204. An adequate elaboration of this sacramental inversion is found in Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener (2014:323–354).

They have managed to turn a large number of people with very diverse backgrounds into processioners. Apparently, the idea of the irrelevance of the Christian tradition (and in its slipstream: of God) makes religious practices no longer simply 'not done'. This irrelevance thus seems to be the breeding ground for what Kearney calls anatheism. *The Passion* is announced and organised, people see a strange cross approaching – a procession that obtains new, diverse and multilayered meaning. Part of this society welcomes the cross, either in the physical procession or in the virtual shapes on the second screen or on Twitter. By engaging in this procession ritual, participants very often turn out to actively connect themes related to the procession (e.g. suffering, pain, cross, sacrifice and death) to events they (have) experience(d) in their personal lives, like in the examples that we discussed. In doing so, they may encounter the divine in a new way.

Our examples showed that in the moment and action of connecting their ordinary life, sorrow, grief, pain, health, loved ones and all darkness to the cross, a space is created in which God – who was never really gone – can return to people and meet them. A space in which they are (again) presented with the freedom to choose, to imagine different possibilities. This leads to the conclusions that Dutch society is not simply a society beyond God and that to its members the reinvention of liturgical ritual is of the utmost importance.

Touch gives rise to thought: Paul Ricoeur and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela on mutual recognition and carnal hermeneutics

Robert Vosloo Ⓓ
Faculty of Theology
Systematic Theology
Stellenbosch University
South Africa

■ Introduction

In the epilogue of his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur places his reflections on 'difficult forgiveness' (and specifically on 'gift and forgiveness') in conversation with the

work of the South African TRC. Ricoeur rightly points to the fact that the work of the Commission was not driven by a punitive logic (as the criminal trials of Nuremberg or Tokyo were): '"Understanding, not revenge" was the motto here' (Ricoeur 2004:483). Although Ricoeur was well aware of the fact (at the time he wrote these words) that it was too early to assess the success of the TRC's attempt at achieving reparative or restorative justice, he did feel that some provisional remarks pertaining to the limits and challenges inherent in such an undertaking were justified. In the epilogue, Ricoeur then reflects on the TRC project (with its focus on reconciliation rather than on punitive justice) from the perspective of both the victims and the perpetrators. If one considers the work of the Commission from the side of the victims, the benefits are for Ricoeur undeniable on a therapeutic, moral and political level. Since families and victims were able to express their pain and vent their anger in the presence of offenders and other witnesses, 'the hearings truly permitted the public exercise of the work of memory and mourning, guided by an appropriate process of cross-examination' (Ricoeur 2004:483–484).

Yet Ricoeur is also aware that the amnesty granted by the Commission did not necessarily represent genuine forgiveness on the part of the victims. If viewed from the side of the offenders, the verdict on the work of the TRC is even more mixed and equivocal. Hence, Ricoeur's question: 'Was not public confession more often a stratagem in view of obtaining amnesty, freeing the individual from judicial proceedings or criminal conviction?' (Ricoeur 2004:484).

In these remarks by Ricoeur, one senses a tension that is also reflected in the ongoing discourse around the legacy of the TRC, namely the tension between reconciliation and justice, or in the language of Ricoeur the tension between the logic of superabundance and the logic of equivalence, or between love and justice (Ricoeur 1995:315–329). Ricoeur also draws on this creative tension between love (or agape) and justice

in his reflections on mutual recognition in his book *The Course of Recognition*. Ricoeur is sensitive to the difference between justice and agape (also with regard to the way in which this enters language, because agape is akin to the discourse of praise and declares itself, while justice makes arguments). Yet Ricoeur's primal concern is the interconnectedness of justice and agape. Hence, his question: 'Can we build a bridge between the poetics of agape and the prose of justice, between the hymn and the formal rule?' (Ricoeur 2005:224).

In this essay, I want to engage – also against the backdrop of Ricoeur's articulation of the tension between love and justice – with the work of the South African clinical psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. Gobodo-Madikizela, who currently holds the chair for Historical Trauma and Transformation at Stellenbosch University, served as a member of the Human Rights Violations Committee of the TRC, and this experience has been formative of her extended reflections and publications over more than two decades on notions such as trauma, memory, forgiveness, remorse, empathy and restitution. As she (Gobodo-Madikizela 2008a) writes:

> My experience on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been the most profound moment in my life [...] At the end of those many hours and days spent with the TRC, I came out with this one lesson, that there can be no adequate reparation for the horrors we have witnessed on the public stage of the TRC. (p. 170)

Gobodo-Madikizela is acutely aware of the controversy and critique around the fact that the TRC granted amnesty to perpetrators of human rights violations, and especially the argument that the TRC sacrificed justice for reconciliation (Gobodo-Madikizela 1997:271). Yet her work is also marked by an attempt to find a way beyond the logic that frames the notion of justice only in terms of punitive justice, especially in societies marked by traumatic conflict and historical injustices. In her engaged and extended struggle with notions such as remorse, forgiveness and empathy, she indicates how these notions (which can be associated with Ricoeur's 'poetics of agape') can play a role in the complex processes of dealing with the trauma of

the past in a way that has the potential to rehumanise victims and perpetrators.

■ Remorse, recognition and rehumanisation

In her acclaimed book *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*, Gobodo-Madikizela recounts her experiences of visiting and interviewing one of the most notorious of the apartheid assassins, Eugene de Kock. For many people in South Africa, he is the embodiment of evil, hence his nickname 'Prime Evil'. As Gobodo-Madikizela rightly observes: 'De Kock had not just given apartheid's murderous evil a name. He had *become* that evil' (2003:6). A specific event during the TRC hearings provided the impetus for Gobodo-Madikizela's decision to interview De Kock in prison. De Kock testified for the first time before the TRC in September 1997, admitting his role in the killing of three black policemen who died when a bomb blew up the car in which they were driving. They were attached to the Motherwell police station in Port Elizabeth and the incident became known as the Motherwell bombing. These policemen had threatened to expose the involvement of white colleagues in the death of four young black anti-apartheid activists (known as the Cradock Four).

At the end of his testimony, De Kock requested a meeting with the widows of the victims killed in the bombing operation, and a meeting with two of the widows indeed took place. Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) writes:

> A few days later I met with Mrs Mgoduka and Mrs Faku during a weekend of debriefing. 'I was profoundly touched by him,' Mrs Faku said of her encounter with de Kock. Both women felt that De Kock had communicated to them something he felt deeply and had acknowledged their pain. 'I couldn't control my tears. I could hear him, but I was overwhelmed by emotion, and I was just nodding, as a way of saying yes, I forgive you. I hope that when he sees our tears, he knows that they are not only tears for our husbands, but tears for

him as well […] I would like to hold him by the hand, and show him that there is a future, and that he can still change. (pp. 14–15)

Gobodo-Madikizela interpreted this gesture of the widow reaching out to her husband's murderer as an extraordinary act of empathy, because she not only shed tears for her own loss but also for the loss of De Kock's moral humanity. This left her with questions such as: 'Was de Kock deserving of the forgiveness shown to him […] Was evil intrinsic to de Kock, and forgiveness wasted on him?' (2003:15). Or to put this in the language of Ricoeur's question in the epilogue on forgiveness in *Memory, History, Forgetting*: Is the unbinding of the agent and the act possible? (Ricoeur 2004:489–493).

In her 2002 article 'Remorse, forgiveness, and rehumanisation: Stories from South Africa', Gobodo-Madikizela also refers to the encounter between De Kock and the widows, and here she makes her claim explicit that 'a remorseful apology can contribute to the vocabulary of forgiveness in the context of evil'. She is aware of the asymmetrical relationship between the admission of guilt and the word of forgiveness and that the request for forgiveness can have an empty ring to it, adding insult to injury. However, the power and significance of an apology lies in its ability 'to *perform* and to transcend the apologetic words' (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002:13). The performance of empathy is powerful because:

Empathy is what enables us to recognise another's pain, even in the midst of tragedy, because pain cannot be evil. Empathy deepens our humanity […] When perpetrators apologise and experience the pain of remorse, showing contrition, they are *acting as human beings*. (p. 20)[205]

This recognition of the humanity of the perpetrator, moreover, can be unsettling. In *A Human Being Died That Night,* Gobodo-Madikizela recounts a memorable incident that happened when she asked De Kock about his meeting with Pearl Faku and Doreen

205. Elsewhere Gobodo-Madikizela writes in a similar vein, '[I]t seems to me that when a perpetrator shows remorse, this has "moved" some victims or family members of victims to expressing empathy for the perpetrator, and sometimes even forgiveness.' (2008b:342)

Mgoduka, the widows of two men murdered as a result of his actions. During this conversation, Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) notes, De Kock became visibly distressed, saying with tears in his eyes:

> I wish I could do much more than [*say*] I'm sorry. I wish there was a way of bringing their bodies back alive. I wish I could say, 'Here are your husbands.' He said, stretching out his arms as if bearing an invisible body, his hands trembling, his mouth quivering, 'but unfortunately [...] I have to live with it.' (p. 32)

To her own surprise, Gobodo-Madikizela responded to these words by touching his shaking hand, only to feel that his hands were clenched, cold and rigid. Reflecting on her gesture, Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) notes:

> This made me recoil for a moment and to recast my act of reaching out as something incompatible with the circumstances of an encounter with a person who not too long ago used these same hands, this same voice, to authorise and initiate unspeakable acts of malice against people very much like myself. (p. 32)

This unsettling encounter with De Kock left Gobodo-Madikizela (2003:33) with a sense of feeling guilty for having expressed some empathy, and this made her wonder if she had not 'crossed the moral line from compassion, which allows some measure of distance, to actually identifying with De Kock'.

The encounter also had an impact on De Kock, and in one of their later meetings, he said: 'You know, Pumla, that was my trigger hand you touched' (2003:39). This remark, in turn, left Gobodo-Madikizela with a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, she felt vulnerable, angry and invaded, and on the other hand, she realised that De Kock's statement might also carry another underlying subtext:

> My action may well have been the first time a black person touched him out of compassion. He had previously met black people only as enemies, across the barrel of a gun or, for those who were on his side of the firing line, as comrades in murder. Perhaps de Kock *recognised my touch as a kind of threshold crossing*, a new experience for him. (p. 42; [*authors' added emphasis*])

In her reflections on the 'trigger hand' episode, Gobodo-Madikizela seems well aware of the complexities and inherent contradictions of their encounter; yet, she seems to be able to recognise amidst these aspects De Kock's humanity.[206] As she writes (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003):

> His world was a cold world, where eyes of death stared accusingly at him, a world littered with corpses and graves [...] But for all the horrific singularity of his acts, De Kock was a desperate soul seeking to affirm to himself that he was still part of the human universe. (p. 39)

I will return to this 'trigger hand' episode as recounted by Gobodo-Madikizela, but for the moment it is important to note that for her it was the experience of De Kock's expression of remorse that humanised him for her, albeit that one can also say that much depended on her ability to recognise his humanity.[207] Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) describes the act of remorse as a performative event:

> A genuine apology focuses on the feelings of the other rather than on how the one who is apologising is going to benefit in the end. It seeks to acknowledge full responsibility for the act, and does not use self-serving language to justify the behaviour of the person asking forgiveness. It must communicate, convey, and *perform* as a

206. About five months after the 'trigger hand' incident, Gobodo-Madikizela presented for the first time a psychoanalytical interpretation of her interviews with De Kock at an international conference in Cape Town. At this occasion, a colleague asked her if she had considered the fact that De Kock was 'manipulating' her. She had expected this question and was well prepared for it. But before she could respond, she saw in the audience Albie Sachs, a judge from the South African Constitutional Court. Sachs raised his arm, an arm that had been deformed by a bomb intended to kill him, and she deflected the question to him. He then spoke about 'how much our hope as South Africans depended on reaching out to such glimpses of humanity in a spirit of compassion rather than revenge' (cf. Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:45).

207. Gobodo-Madikizela contrasts her experience of De Kock's remorseful admission with the attitude of Eichmann that Peter Malkin describes in his book *Eichmann in My Hands*. Malkin, who captured Eichmann in Buenos Aires, mentions that, in an attempt to find some humanness in the hours he spent guarding him, he spoke about his sister's son who was killed in Auschwitz, to which Eichmann responded, looking genuinely perplexed, 'But he was Jewish, wasn't he?' (cf. Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:67–68).

'speech act' that expresses a desire to right the relationship damaged through the action of the apologiser. (pp. 98–99)

This performative event of emphatic witness, which one can also describe as embodied performativity, enables – and is enabled by – mutual recognition of one's shared humanity. In Gobodo-Madikizela's (2008a) words:

When remorse is triggered in the moment of witnessing, however, the perpetrator recognises the other as a fellow human being. At the same time, the victim, too, recognises the face of the perpetrator not as that of a 'monster' who committed terrible deeds, but as the face with enough humanity to feel remorse. (pp. 176–177)

Although Gobodo-Madikizela (2014) becomes increasingly weary of the use of the notion of 'forgiveness' in her work, she nevertheless states:

The spirit of forgiveness lies in the search – not for the things that separate us – but for something common among us fellow human beings, the compassion and empathy that bind our human identity. (p. 1)

■ Mutual recognition and a hermeneutic of bodily performativity

Ricoeur often emphasises the importance of gestures (such as Willy Brandt kneeling at the Jewish memorial in Poland, or the handshake between Rabin and Arafat, following that between Sadat and Begin) in his reflections on themes such as forgiveness, gift exchanges and mutual recognition. In *The Course of Recognition* Ricoeur writes, for instance, that although such gestures 'cannot become an institution, yet by bringing to light the limits of justice of equivalence, and opening space for hope [...] they unleash an irradiating and irrigating peace' (Ricoeur 2005:245; cf. Wolff 2014). Gobodo-Madikizela's account of her experiences when touching De Kock's trigger hand – with 'touch giving rise to thought' – reminds me of Ricoeur's emphasis on how gestures can serve as an embodiment of the poetics of

agape (which can be placed within a broader phenomenology and hermeneutics of the flesh). This points, I would like to argue, to the fundamental emphasis that a responsible engagement with the past – especially in contexts marked by traumatic memory and historical injustices – requires a *performative* historical hermeneutic. Such an embodied and performative historical hermeneutic is akin to what Richard Kearney calls 'carnal hermeneutics' (Kearney & Treanor 2015:1). Carnal hermeneutics, that is, 'the surplus of meaning arising from carnal embodiment', engages with some important questions such as 'How do we make sense of bodies with our bodies?' and 'How do we read between the lines of flesh and skin?' (Kearney & Treanor 2015:1). Some South African theologians have recently noted the promise of carnal hermeneutics for narrative therapy (Meiring 2016:1–11),[208] as well as for engaging with questions pertaining to racial stereotyping and racial tensions on university campuses in South Africa (Pretorius 2016:1–9). Carnal hermeneutics, or so this essay also claims, indeed provides important perspectives in the search for an adequate performative hermeneutic for dealing with painful but interwoven memories and histories.

In some of his more recent work on Paul Ricoeur, Richard Kearney has engaged with the notion of flesh in Ricoeur's work, indicating some of Ricoeur's important insights on 'carnal signification' in his earlier phenomenological works (especially in *Freedom and Nature* 2007 [1950]). Yet in spite of his promising early work on the body and carnal diagnostics, Kearney notes, Ricoeur abandoned this trajectory in favour of a focus on the

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208. Meiring aligns himself with the corporal-linguistic turn in the 21st century and explores the idea of 'body mapping' within the contexts of narrative therapy. Body mapping is a process developed by Jonathan Morgan and Jane Solomon that emerged in 2002 as part of 'memory work' with people living with HIV and AIDS in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The body mapping process 'entails that [the] client or [researcher] draw a full-scale map of their body, using [colours], symbols and metaphors to recount the stories [they have] written on [or "inside"] their bodies' (Meiring 2016:8). It thus functions as a type of carnal hermeneutics that seeks to decipher flesh.

hermeneutics of texts, the so-called textual turn in the 1960s (cf. Kearney in Davidson and Vallée 2016:31–40). However, Kearney continues, this is not Ricoeur's last word on the matter. In *Oneself as Another* (in the section on 'One's own body, or the flesh' in the final chapter) Ricoeur defines *flesh* as 'the mediator between the self and a world which is taken with its various degrees of foreignness' (Kearney & Treanor 2015:50–51). Hence, it becomes a key concern for Ricoeur to mediate between the immanence of Husserl's *Leib* and the transcendence of Levinas's *Visage*. Without going into the details of Kearney's reading of Ricoeur's hermeneutic of the flesh, one can note the implications that Kearney draws for the relationships between self and other (Kearney & Treanor 2015):

> [*T*]he other who is stranger is also my 'semblance,' a counterpart who, like me, can say 'I' […] and at the same time it reveals the inverse movement of 'she thinks and feels in a way that I can never think or feel. (p. 54)

For Kearney, drawing on Ricoeur, it is the task of carnal hermeneutics to find the right and just balance between the movement of same towards other and other towards same (in a way that is aligned with his own diacritical hermeneutics). Such a task, moreover, raises further questions and invites new dialogues. It is Kearney's conclusion that the simplest phenomenon of touch thus leads to the most complex of philosophies and that Ricoeur's way of addressing these questions 'opens a door where phenomenology and hermeneutics may cross in the swing door of the flesh' (Kearney & Treanor 2015:55).

In her work Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) often emphasises how an emphatic connection (through, for example, expressing remorse as an embodied performative act) is linked to the recognition of the humanity of the other. She expresses this conviction well when she writes:

> The power of human connectedness, of identification with the other as 'bone of my bone' through the sheer fact of being human, draws us to 'rescue' others in pain […] We are induced to empathy because there is something in the other that is felt to be part of

the self, and something in the self that is felt to belong to the other. (p. 127)[209]

One notes in this quotation a view that resonates well with a Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the flesh (as interpreted by Kearney as carnal hermeneutics).[210] In Gobodo-Madikizela's work we find several discussions of testimonies of the encounters between family members and a perpetrator that conveys the power of words and gestures. In an article entitled 'Intersubjectivity and embodiment: Exploring the role of the maternal in the language of forgiveness and reconciliation', she writes that such encounters and dialogues 'allow victims and survivors to revisit the sites of trauma, humanises victims, and confronts perpetrators with their inhumanity' (2001:543). Gobodo-Madikizela further notes that in her interviews with mothers who reached out to perpetrators, she focused more and more not merely on what they experienced as a turning point that opened up space for forgiveness, but also on what they felt in their bodies as a sign that enabled such a response. She noticed how the mothers used 'the Xhosa word *inimba* to describe the bodily signs of empathy and located its source in the womb' (2001:546–547; Gobodo-Madikizela 2011:548). *Inimba* can be interpreted to mean the feeling of motherhood and can be translated as 'umbilical cord'. Linking *inimba* to the African concept of *ubuntu* (the idea of

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209. A few pages later Gobodo-Madikizela writes: 'When perpetrators feel remorse, they are recognizing something they failed to see when they violated the victim, which is that victims feel and bleed just like others with whom they, the perpetrators, identify. Remorse therefore transforms the image of victim as object to victim as human' (see Gobodo-Madikizela 2003:130; cf. 2008a:178).

210. Being a theologian, I also cannot but notice some interesting resonances (amidst possible differences) between Ricoeur's and Gobodo-Madikizela's views on mutual recognition and some statements by the 16th-century Protestant Reformer John Calvin. See, for instance, Calvin's remark in Book 3 of his *Institutes*: 'Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, "He is a stranger"; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you by virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh [Isa. 58:7]. Say, "he is contemptible and worthless"; but the Lord shows him to be one whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image' (Calvin 1960:696; cf. Vosloo 2016:39–52).

interconnected wholeness that a human being is a human being through other human beings), she writes (2001; Gobodo-Madikizela 2011):

> As with Levinasian ethics, the guiding principles of *Ubuntu* are based on a morality that is Other-directed, concerned with promoting an ethical vision of compassion and care for others. Therefore, inimba, as an expression in which one extends oneself to reach out to the Other, signifies the expression of *Ubuntu* through the body [...] Thus the body, be it paternal or maternal, points us towards understanding the body as a site of ethical engagement, a site for forging human links across time and space with the Other – even the Other responsible for irreparable loss. (p. 550)

■ Conclusion

Gobodo-Madikizela's work, with its focus on dealing with the traumatic memory of the past in contexts of historical injustices and its emphasis on humanisation and rehumanisation, is permeated by a view – to use Ricoeurian language – that places mutual recognition of a common humanity within the unsettling but creative space between the prose of justice and the poetics of agape. In the process a productive hermeneutic of the flesh (or carnal hermeneutics) comes to the fore that points towards a hermeneutic of embodied performativity in dealing with the trauma of the past.

Gobodo-Madikizela shares with Ricoeur the commitment to theorise within the space of 'the in-between', and she believes, with reference to the title of a book by Martha Minow, that it is possible to conceive an 'in-between place' – a place between vengeance and forgiveness (Gobodo-Madikizela 2008b:347; Gobodo-Madikizela & Van der Mewe 2009:157–159; cf. Minow 1998). In Gobodo-Madikizela's body of work there is a growing hesitancy to use the word 'forgiveness' and she seems to prefer the term 'empathy' or 'empathetic repair'.[211] She also warns

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211. In her essay, 'Interrupting Cycles of Repetition: Creating Spaces for Dialogue, Facing and Mourning the Past', Gobodo-Madikizela (2016:126–127) writes: 'The word forgiveness,

against vengeance. As she puts it in an essay in her book *Dare We Hope? Facing our Past to Find a New Future* (2014):

> South Africans face the challenge of how to embrace the past without being swallowed by the tide of vengeful thinking [...] If memory is kept alive to cultivate old hatreds and resentments, it is likely to culminate in vengeance, and in repetition of violence. But if memory is kept alive in order to transcend hateful emotions, then remembering can be healing. (p. 103)

Yet there is also a growing awareness in Gobodo-Madikizela's work that the 'poetics of agape' cannot be separated from the structural and often slow violence of historical injustices. In a column entitled 'Apologies aren't enough', first published in *The Boston Globe* in September 2013, she writes:

> The lesson of the TRC is that one shouldn't settle for utterances of apology and symbolic gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead, this transformative moment should be used to address strategies for real change [...] if the greater challenge of economic transformation is not met, what has already achieved in South Africa could be lost [...]. The next revolution might not necessarily be a racial one, but one in which the masses rise against the new breed of beneficiaries of privilege. (p. 59)

One can indeed say, with Ricoeur, that pardon (and other expressions of 'the economy of the gift' or 'the poetics of agape') gives memory a future (cf. Ricoeur 2000:144). Yet we should also note that histories of painful injustices give memory a past. And without dealing with the embodied memory of *this* past, remembering with the future in mind will be robbed of its healing and transformative power.

(footnote 211 continues...)

I argue further, is the wrong word for describing what unfolds in these victim-perpetrator encounters. Forgiveness seems to suggest a fixed position, or a coming to an end – 'I offer forgiveness so that I can move on'. There is a subtext here that seems to signify an act of leaving something behind, moving on without looking back.'

It can be argued, though, that this description of forgiveness as something fixed and ahistorical represents a reductive account of forgiveness (cf. Vosloo 2001:25–40).

Towards hospitality between enemies

Wilhelm Verwoerd[1,2]
[1]Senior Researcher, Historical Trauma and Transformation
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa

[2]Teaching associate, Irish School of Ecumenics
Trinity College
Republic of Ireland

◼ Introduction

I am fascinated and profoundly challenged by this question: what does it *really* mean to extend genuine hospitality to the stranger, especially when the stranger turns out to be a sworn enemy? I am encouraged by Richard Kearney's commitment to also grapple with this kind of question, in theory *and* in practice. With his Guestbook Project and his Irish roots mind, I want to engage

with him primarily from my experience as a reflective peace practitioner, with a deep appreciation of the counter-intuitive, counter-cultural, conflictual nature of genuine hospitality to the stranger-as-enemy.[212] Given Kearney's anatheistic faith commitment (2011), I also feel it is appropriate to draw on my abiding interest in the connections between (contemplative) spirituality and cross-border compassion. I want to focus here on two huge subthemes, namely the dynamics of hospitality across bloody conflict divides and the spirituality of radically inclusive hospitality.

■ Hospitality between (former) enemies?

In view of Kearney's philosophical appreciation of the embodied, poetic imagination within this messy world, I think it is appropriate to start with these lines from an Irish peace worker colleague and poet based in Northern Ireland, Pádraig Ó Tuama (2013:68–69):

> Flags
> […]
> it's only colours, coloured fabric, a construction, not an end
> it's only colours, coloured fabric, a construction, not an end
> it's only colours, coloured fabric, a construction, not an end
>
> but it's beautiful and it's broad and it's our blood and it's our home
> but it's beautiful and it's broad and it's our blood and it's our home
> but it's beautiful and it's broad and it's our blood and it's our home
>
> and they're our colours, our histories, our boys who'll not return
> and they're our colours, our histories, our boys who'll not return
> and they're our colours, our histories, our boys who'll not return
>
> oh beckon us beyond the borders of our belonging
> oh beckon us beyond the borders of our belonging
> oh beckon us beyond the borders of our belonging

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212. From 2001 to 2012, I worked as a behind-the-scenes storytelling and dialogue facilitator with ex-combatants and survivors of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland (see http://www.beyondwalls.co.uk and http://www.beyondwallsfilm.com).

Left, left, left right left
Left, left, left right left
Left, left, left right left (n.p.)

■ Heartfelt hospitality and the dynamics of betrayal

How can someone steeped in the intergenerational, militarised, loyal patrolling of these 'borders of our belonging' genuinely heed the beckoning call of hospitality? What does hospitality really look and feel like when one dares to open a window in these borders and unlock a tightly bolted front door to some of Them – especially those with the blood of 'our boys' on their hands?

In the spirit of embodiment, take the rather uphill struggle of Gerard Foster. He is a former political prisoner from an Irish republican background. As a teenager from a tough Belfast, working-class and Catholic neighbourhood, he became a member of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) – 'because they were the most active in fighting the British Army in our area'. During about five years in prison, his political commitment to a 'socialist, united Ireland' and the use of violence to help achieve this goal was deepened. Upon release, he was faced with ceasefires from mainstream loyalist (Protestant) and republican paramilitary organisations and growing acceptance of the need for political negotiations (mid-1990s). He therefore withdrew in disgust from community-based political activism, believing at that time that 'we lost the war […] we should have *increased* violence!' Through a grassroots organisation focusing on the needs of (Republican Socialist) political prisoners and a fledgling radical political party (the Irish Republican Socialist Party), he re-engaged as a political activist from the late 1990s onwards. This included being delegated to represent his 'movement' at a series of behind the scenes political dialogues with (former) enemies.

Thus, Gerard became a participant – a very reluctant participant – in the Glencree Survivors and Former

Combatants Programme.[213] In the process, he slowly and pragmatically moved away from the current use of political violence while remaining passionate about the (exclusive) 'rightness' of his political beliefs – until a heartfelt engagement with elderly family members of British soldiers who were killed by Irish republicans. Gerard (n.d.) recalls:

> For me the biggest thing was that weekend at Glencree […] seeing […] for me, and I've said this before, genuinely seeing the hurt and pain of the enemy. Some of these people have lost their family members 30 years ago. It was really frightening. My dad is buried near the INLA plot in Belfast, so you can't go to one without the other. It was after that week end at Glencree that I really felt the strong sense of betrayal. I was up at my dad's grave and they're feet apart, the INLA plot is near enough next to it. I was looking down at the names on INLA graves, most of the names I knew. I was thinking by myself 'What would they think of me now; what would they be thinking of what I'm doing?' I felt 'I let youse down, lads.' That was a part that was really strong within me, that I am not only letting them'uns down. I am letting myself down. A real struggle, but I couldn't get past what I'd seen – it kept coming back to me what I'd seen that week end at Glencree.[214] (n.p.)

Gerard's story is, unfortunately, not unique. In my personal and professional experience – working closely with Alistair Little (Little & Scott 2009), a former loyalist, Protestant ex-prisoner – many politically motivated former combatants beginning to reach out to (former) enemies are faced with this profound challenge: if I shake those hands, am I *betraying* 'our boys who will not return?' Am I being *disloyal* to the 'flag' under which they 'sacrificed' their lives (Lawther 2017; Verwoerd & Little 2018; Govier & Verwoerd 2004)?

213. For more detail, see www.glencree.ie.

214. Quotation from a transcript of the Ireland–Northern Ireland workshop within the international Beyond Dehumanisation research project, which I coordinated and co-facilitated with Alistair Little and Brandon Hamber. Between 2012 and 2014, this project facilitated reflective, region-specific workshops with former enemies–peace practitioners in Ireland and Northern Ireland, South Africa, Israel and Palestine and the USA. The main purpose was to gather the practical wisdom of their personal and professional journeys from violence to peacemaking.

In the haunting words of Alistair at a recent reflective workshop:[215]

> And this notion of betraying all of that, betraying all of what you've been conditioned to believe is the right thing to do. And if you speak out against that [*conditioning*], you're accused: 'you're supporting the enemy!' or 'you're agreeing with the enemy. And therefore the blood of those who died [...] your friends, your community [...] are also on your hands, 'cause you're supporting them!' (n.p.)

At the same workshop, our colleague Brandon Hamber formulated the depth of this challenge in a way that strongly resonated with those present:

> [*T*]he issue of betrayal is so difficult because of the sacred nature of our engagements in conflict issues. So if you lose a loved one, for example, normally what happens in that process is that we engage in a set of sacred bonds with that person: 'whatever happens, the truth will come out; one day justice will be done; somebody will pay for this' [...] those bonds are really sacred. They're not just about loyalty. They're beyond loyalty. In the same way as we feel about our ideologies, whatever that might be. There's a sort of sacredness about the way we make those connections – 'Ireland will be freed!' or 'the Union will be protected'. And the problem with that is that one can't ever properly break those bonds yourself because if you're making the bond with some comrade who has died, they can never release you from that bond [...]. And that, I think, is linked to issues of betrayal of a community, of yourself'. (n.p.)

■ Facilitated, vulnerable hospitality

Despite the profound nature of this dynamics of betrayal, there are grounds for cautious, humble hope that these 'sacred bonds' can indeed be transcended. Over the last 10 years or so, I have been privileged to witness, for example, how initial hostility between Gerard and Alistair at the early former combatant dialogue workshops at Glencree was transformed. In zigzag, very cautious fashion and without resolution of ongoing political

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215. As part of the international Beyond Dehumanisation project he and I co-facilitated.

differences this animosity and mistrust started to shift. Hostility between two political enemies (who would have been prepared to kill each other a few years earlier) reluctantly began to give way to curiosity, to friendliness, to joint visits to pubs in 'enemy territory' and, eventually, to – in some sense the act of ultimate trust – the literal, reciprocal showing of hospitality in each other's homes.[216]

I doubt whether this remarkable, courageous journey of mutual rehumanisation would have been possible without initial, facilitated hospitality being shown in a 'third space' such as the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. This physical space – away from the intensity of (past) conflict in Belfast – itself symbolises the uphill journey from hostility to hospitality: it is a refurbished military barracks, built in the early 1800s in the Wicklow hills south of Dublin, to facilitate more effective suppression of rumblings beyond the United Irish Rebellion of 1798. In the early 1970s, this became a residential centre for behind the scenes, inclusive, overnight political dialogue.

The main facilitation task was to help create a relatively safe, risk-accommodating, non-judgemental environment in which each person was given an equal opportunity to participate. Provision of joint meals and a pub facility – late into the night – became very important, informal aspects of the process. These dialogue sessions took place over at least two days and were repeated a number of times, guided by participants' commitment – usually with support from their respective organisations – to help create a sustainable peace that would make it possible for their children not to go through another cycle of bloody violence.

Over time, this facilitated hospitality process developed, in close partnership with Alistair Little, to a point where we required a carefully selected, diverse group of only 15 participants to commit to a 12-month 'journey through conflict', including four

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216. Their respective homes are in neighbourhoods that remain highly segregated between British Protestants and Irish Catholics.

to five multiday residential events. The introductory weekend typically took place in a place like Glencree; the next step was to do a two-day 'storytelling' life histories workshop, again in a remote venue with access to relatively unspoilt nature (Hamber, Little & Verwoerd 2017). This was followed by deep dialogue, which focused on discussing the proverbial elephants in the room. Where possible the deep dialogue strand became an extended five-day process in the Scottish Highlands with the highlight being a further two-week visit to South Africa, including a five-day wilderness trail in Imfolozi, KwaZulu-Natal. The final session had an evaluative and forward-planning emphasis, and ideally took place closer to home (Little & Verwoerd 2013).

The following interaction between a few participants at the evaluative stage of their group's process illustrates the importance of having homely spaces that encouraged unforced, cross-border humanisation through literal, mutual hospitality (Halperin & Weinstein 2004; Kröndorfer 2015):[217]

> **Irish republican ex-prisoner:** 'Where we were had a lot of character […] and we developed the character there as well. That house was ours, this hotel isn't, it is clinical. We are using this, there we were building and building something. This room doesn't have the same character: there's no fire, we're not sitting around in arm chairs, getting a coffee, or making dinner, washing up […] we're not sharing the physical experiences of everyday life.'

> **Protestant security force family member:** 'That whole working together in a social context of making the meals, lighting the fire and collecting the wood or whatever, that played a major part in what was actually going on in the living room whenever were in formal session time. Just being able to be in the kitchen […] because you are not just there for yourself, you are there to feed everybody. If it's peeling the potatoes or chopping the vegetables, we were all mucking in and helping each other. That played a big part in the equal respect that everybody gave each other, so that when you entered that living room and sat in the circle you were going to be open and honest with each other.'

217. This conversation took place in a hotel near (London) Derry and the references are to a remote hunting lodge in the Glen of Tilt, about two hours north of Edinburgh.

British loyalist: 'It is one of those things that look insignificant or small, but actually the fact that people who were enemies, people whose families and themselves have been hurt by people in the organisations that they represented and who were there as well [...] that they were actually cooking meals for each other, cleaning up after each other, making cups of tea for each other. That's a big thing! Because if you were to tell people at home, 'here is someone whose family was devastated by people who were in paramilitaries and someone from that background was present, and they were making tea for each other and helping with food', those people would find it almost impossible to believe. And yet we were doing that [...].'

Irish republican: '[...] without thinking about it [...].'

Loyalist: '[...] without thinking about it.' (n.p.)

This kind of process or 'journey' towards more inclusive hospitality was certainly neither linear, nor a quick fix. Given our experiences as facilitators in the Scottish Highlands and especially in the Imfolozi wilderness, our favourite metaphor for this process has become that of going on a wilderness trail. Humanising the enemy, transcending those 'sacred bonds' is like the vulnerable, risky, unpredictable, unchartered, up and down nature of a wilderness trail. This journey is too risky without experienced guides. Furthermore, adequate preparation and equipment are required, before moving into a 'liminal space' away from familiar territory. And the most difficult stage is returning home.[218] Like the prisoner who escaped from Plato's cave (Little & Verwoerd 2016).

Upon reflection, it also became clear that we adhered more or less to some of the key 'contact conditions', which a large and growing body of social psychology research has confirmed as prerequisites for transformative encounters between conflicted parties. These conditions include equalising power during contact, encouraging cooperative action and cultivating a shared vision of the future.[219] I cannot see how hospitality between

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218. This process can also be interpreted in terms of the classic stages of 'rites of passage' – separation, unsettling liminal space, returning home (see Turner 1969; Bigger 2009).

219. See the large body of research on the 'contact hypothesis', or social contact theory, drawing on the work of Gordon Allport in the 1950s, for example, Pettigrew (1998).

(former) enemies can fulfil its highly desirable, humanising potential without careful, facilitated attention to these formidable conditions.

■ Embodied hospitality without borders – *inimba*

Closer to home and with my own position as a white, Afrikaner South African in mind, I was given an opportunity recently to engage in person with Kearney, after his public lecture on 'Hospitality to the Stranger'.[220] Returning to O'Tuama's (2013) poem I asked: How does someone like me show hospitality to someone, or allow myself to be welcomed by someone, if 'their' blood is on my *and* my group's hands? How does one deal with the deep-seated tendency to close the door on risky, vulnerable hospitality and focus rather on our 'flag' and loyalty to 'our boys', rather than truly face 'our' shared, compassionate responsibility for 'their' suffering? Especially when this blood on our hands – transmitted across generations – is not the result of direct, explicit, interpersonal, physical violence but the consequence of the systemic, structural violence of apartheid?

Faced with these existential questions I received unexpected, undeserved encouragement from the co-respondent on the night of Kearney's lecture in Stellenbosch, Prof. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. I got to know her commitment to inclusive reconciliation when we both worked within the South African TRC (1995–1998). Rather than giving a conventional academic response, she (Gobodo-Madikizela 2008) chose to make this 'public space intimate': she told a story of her recent visit with me to Orania – a whites-only, Afrikaner nationalist town, including a museum dedicated to the memory of Dr H.F. Verwoerd, former

220. The lecture, on 17 May 2017, took place in the historic building of the Theology Faculty – closely linked to the white Dutch Reformed Church, which was highly influential politically pre-1994 in providing theological and institutional support to the Afrikaner Nationalist Apartheid government.

Prime Minister (1958–1966), widely known as 'the Architect of Apartheid'. I am also his grandson. It was humbling to listen again to her retelling of what I experienced as a particularly striking embodiment of the extraordinary generosity of spirit that I have encountered among many black South Africans, despite what my skin and family blood represents.

Because she is not in a position to flesh out her response for this publication I have her permission to include that story here, as well as an extract from a highly relevant follow-up conversation.

A few years ago, on a cold winter's afternoon, Prof. Gobodo-Madikizela and I were standing in front of a display cupboard in the Verwoerd Museum in Orania. We paused in front of the blood-stained clothes Dr Verwoerd wore on 06 September 1966, the day of his dramatic assassination in parliament. I told her what my mother only recently disclosed to me: how the police brought the blood-soaked clothes to my parents' home and how my mother ended up having to wash these clothes in baths of cold water, again and again, over a period of three to four days. When I finished she said softly, despite everything that Verwoerd represents for her and other black South Africans, 'I feel for your mother […]'.

Later I had an opportunity to reflect with her on that experience:

Wilhelm Verwoerd: Can you tell me a bit more about what you were thinking and feeling when we stood there in front of that suit?

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: I remember thinking about what this moment means, you know, being a black South African and the story of this person who owned this suit, Verwoerd. There was a kind of initial strangeness. Here I was standing in front of this story – because for me it wasn't so much a suit, it was a story of this person […] I thought about the historical tragedy, the origins of this story. But I also managed to be in the moment with you. And with the story you told me about your mother having to wash the blood-drenched clothes. I was *deeply* affected by the story of your mother […] even now in fact I am holding back tears […] what she had to go through.

What struck me the most was the repetition – the clothes had to be washed, again and again. The blood of the dead person, the dead father-in-law, was in her hands [...] it is almost like it is written all over her hands, the pain is written right inside her. She is washing the clothes, but she is also washing off the pain, in a way. I have a headache now from just thinking about this thing.

Wilhelm Verwoerd: I am aware that we are talking about Verwoerd's daughter-in-law. Was it easier for you to relate to her experience because she was a woman?

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: I felt close to her as a woman, yes. But there was also just the sense of loss. Remember you and I went for a walk the morning after? What occupied me overnight was just this question of 'how can I not connect to this pain?' This is a fundamental question in my work: how do we respond to the pain of the Other? What are our philosophical frameworks, our reference points to give meaning to these deeply emotional experiences like that day in front of the suit with your mother's story in mind? It is not enough to draw lines and say, 'this suit belonged to the architect of apartheid'. Those lines do not help us to connect with who we are [...] I realise someone might say to me, 'you are a sell-out!' when I describe my whole experience. But does that criticism really capture what is going on? It doesn't. In fact it glosses over some of the most profound aspects of what it is to be human one to another.

Wilhelm Verwoerd: In my experience of you and the work we have done there is no question of you trying to excuse or to deny the pain that he represents in terms of the system, given what your family, your whole community experienced [...]

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: [...] No! No! [...]

Wilhelm Verwoerd: [...] there is no denial, but somehow you are able to have that sense of the pain Verwoerd represents and at the same time be open, at a human level, not at a political level?

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: How do we build knowledge around these kinds of experiences? The canons of knowledge about how to respond is typically about disconnection. And yet here are experiences – through the South African Truth [and Reconciliation] Commission, and what happened to us that day in Orania – that tell us different. How do we take these experiences and produce something fresh and new for our age that will answer the question: who are we in relation to the Other?

Wilhelm Verwoerd: As I understand it you are advocating a post-critical *ubuntu*, a 'second naïvete' (Ricoeur), around this profound connectedness between us as humans, no matter what someone has done? And you cannot get to this *ubuntu* by romanticising about South Africa as a 'rainbow nation'. This superficial, commercialised '*ubuntu*' has to be challenged, but if the critical spirit loses the truth about our fundamental connectedness, then the baby is thrown out with the bloody bathwater […]

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: Exactly, exactly! Because then it becomes criticism for criticism's sake; it doesn't go beyond to the depths of where this connectedness takes us […]

Wilhelm Verwoerd: My sense with people like Archbishop Tutu, with you and other black colleagues I am working with is that there is a depth of spirit that is beyond 'apartheid', beyond human separateness, without denying the pain and the unfinished business caused by apartheid.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela: Yes, this is the ambivalence – how do we hold that space, where it is not simply about judging, or 'selling out' or all these terms that do not really open up the space for a richer conversation? In this regard I am now exploring further the knowledge of the body and particularly *inimba*, the isiXhosa word for 'womb'. Because the womb is almost like the beginning of life, we need to locate the ethics of our relating to one another inside the womb – both the metaphoric womb and the actual womb. As a man you don't have a womb, but metaphorically you locate it in the depths of your being. You go deep down to the start of life in the womb – that is where you feel when you want to connect as human beings, because that is from where we come into the world. We connect in our nakedness as we were in the womb.[221]

■ Apophatic hospitality and the transformation of 'sacred' bonds?

My understanding is that someone like Archbishop Tutu's womblike *ubuntu* is strongly rooted in a (Christian) spirituality of

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221. See Gobodo-Madikizela (2011); also her book *A Human Being Died That Night* on her humanising engagement with apartheid-era hit-squad commander Eugene de Kock (nicknamed 'Prime Evil').

radical inclusivity. As a peace practitioner, I am increasingly interested in the potential contribution of *this* universalist kind of spirituality to the cultivation of resilient, inclusive hospitality between enemies.[222] I am particularly drawn to the promising connection between cross-border compassion[223] and 'contemplation' understood as an apophatic (beyond words) spiritual discipline in the footsteps of the 14th-century Christian classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2009).[224]

Let me explain the reason for this angle very briefly. The anonymous author (most likely a Carthusian English monk) carefully instructs his 24-year-old apprentice in the deceptively simple 'work of contemplation'. 'All' that is needed is a wholehearted 'naked intent' to love Godself. During regular periods of silent, 'learned ignorance' (Augustine), one accepts that the Ultimate Reality we clumsily call 'God' is beyond the reach of any concept. Given the limits of intellectual understanding when it comes to the Infinite one humbly approaches a dark 'cloud of unknowing'. And *all* interfering thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations are kenotically, patiently let go of. In the language of *The Cloud*: these ceaseless, seductive beckonings of

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222. I am, of course, not suggesting that this promise is restricted to (Western) Christian traditions, but a more inclusive interfaith and interspiritual exploration is a future task (cf. Knitter 2009).

223. Borg, drawing on the work of Phyllis Tryble in her book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), drew my attention to the fact that in the Hebrew Bible (as well as in Aramaic) the 'word usually translated as "compassion" is the plural of a noun that in its singular form means "womb"'. He also stresses that in the Hebrew Bible compassion is both a visceral 'feeling with' and 'a way of being that flows out of that feeling' (usually of the suffering of someone else) (Borg 1994:47, 62 notes 2–4). He notes that in one text, Genesis 43:30, there is even a reference to a *man*'s 'womb' being moved (62, note 5).

224. This apophatic emphasis (in which the scholastic 'faculties' of reason, imagination, memory and emotion are temporarily suspended [Bourgeault 2016]) is relatively neglected within the mostly 'cataphatic', word-centred spirituality of (Western) Christianity. This neglect applies even more in the scripture-focused Reformed tradition that I come from. On the (dis)connections between Protestant piety and just peace, see De Gruchy (1986) and Boesak (2012).

the mind are forcefully covered under a 'thick cloud of forgetting' – again, and again, and again.[225]

And then the anonymous author makes these very strong claims regarding the fruits of contemplation:

While engaged in this work [*of contemplation*], the mature contemplative has no special relationships with anyone in particular, whether family or stranger, friend or enemy, because everyone is family and no one is a stranger, and everyone is friend and no one is an enemy. (Ch. 24)

To do this work perfectly, you must neglect everything that is not God. [*T*]here's no time for analysing people into the categories of friend or enemy, relative or stranger. Yes, of course you'll continue to feel closer to some than to others. It's only natural, and there's nothing wrong with that. […] what I'm saying is that during the work of contemplation, you should feel the same intimate love for everyone, because your only reason to love is God. [*This discipline*] will make you so kind and dynamic in loving that when you stop doing it and mingle with the world again […] you'll discover that you love your slanderer as much as your friend, and that you love any stranger as much as a relative. (Ch. 25)[226]

With the battle-hardened faces of many former combatants before me, it is very tempting to dismiss these claims as the pious rambling of an otherworldly monk. There is indeed a big difference between an enemy as a 'slanderer' and an enemy as a killer of those you, naturally and culturally, feel closer to. But then I am reminded that the author's 14th-century context was indeed rather bloody – the Hundred Years' War between England and France was raging, and in the summer of 1381, the Peasants' Revolt began; it was also an age of pandemic, with the bubonic plague wiping out roughly half of England's population.[227]

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225. See *The Cloud*, Chapters 3–7, pp. 11–25 in Butcher translation; Finley (2005).

226. From the recent modern translation by Butcher (2009).

227. Butcher, Introduction (xiii–xiv).

And I remember that Rowan Williams – a widely respected, politically aware faith leader – recently made similar claims about the 'revolutionary' potential of 'contemplative humanity':

> To be contemplative as Christ is contemplative is to be open to all the fullness that the Father wishes to pour into our hearts. With our minds made still and ready to receive, with our self-generated fantasies about God and ourselves reduced to silence, we are at last at the point where we may begin to grow. [*W*]e seek this not because we are in search of some private 'religious experience' that will make us feel secure or holy. We seek it because in this self-forgetting gazing towards the light of God in Christ we learn how to look at one another and at the whole of God's creation. [*A*]s this process unfolds, I become more free – to borrow a phrase of St Augustine (Confessions IV.7) – to 'love human beings in a human way', to love them not for what they may promise me […] but as fragile fellow-creatures held in the love of God. I discover how to see other persons and things for what they are in relation to God, not to me. And it is here that true justice as well as true love has its roots.[228] (n.p.)

Williams does not refer explicitly to the profound challenge of loving *enemies* 'in a human way'. Scripture commentaries on Jesus' radical command to 'love thy enemies' also do not fully address – as far as I can gather – what I have witnessed as a peace practitioner working with politicised former combatants: the intense dynamics of betrayal often involved in becoming compassionate towards the demonised Other. But I still resonate deeply with the thrust of Williams' basic agreement with *The Cloud*'s author regarding the fruits of (mature) contemplation. Both stress the (re)humanising potential of discovering even the furthest Other 'in relation to God, not to me' – as 'fragile fellow-creatures held in the love of God'. Actualising this humanising potential is, in my experience, typically a hesitant, labyrinthine, incomplete process. But I have also been privileged to witness and experience this 'contemplative humanity' convincingly embodied in someone like Archbishop Tutu, among a number of other black South Africans.

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228. From Archbishop of Canterbury's Address to the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 2012.

Tutu's (2009:74–75) *ubuntu* theology and spirituality commits him to the belief that *no* perpetrator is a 'monster', for perpetrators, 'despite the awfulness of their deeds, remain children of God with the capacity […] to change'. Alan Boesak, a prominent anti-apartheid, black, Reformed church leader, challenges white South Africans' self-interested 'domestication' of Tutu's 'subversive piety'; Boesak (2012) reminds us how radical Tutu's inclusivity and resulting, prophetic truth-telling is:

> [*Tutu's faith*] has no borders, knows loyalties beyond skin colour and culture […] [*f*]or that reason [*Tutu*] struggle[*s*] for justice for black people but also for Palestinians, women, gays […] and oppressed groups the world over. (p. 142)

I am acutely aware that many of the people I have worked with in highly divided contexts such as Northern Ireland–Ireland, Israel–Palestine and South Africa will be put off by explicit religious references to 'Christ' and 'loving God' and 'children of God'. But any source that might contribute to the cultivation of 'loyalties beyond skin colour and culture' is surely worth considering? And because we are faced with '*sacred* bonds', it might be particularly relevant to draw on faith traditions and practices that respect the depth of these blood ties.

My colleague Brandon Hamber used the language of 'sacred bonds' in a secular sense to point to the strength and depth of relationships between the living and those who 'sacrificed' their lives 'for us' during a bloody political conflict. But the roots of this language of blood bonds are clearly religious and closely linked to ancient blood sacrifice rituals. Take, for example, this commentary by Schreiter (1988) on Exodus 24:6–8 in the Hebrew Bible:

> The blood ritual in the Exodus story was about covenant. The blood traced a line around the motley band of slaves and made of them something special. And that blood became for the Hebrews more than the blood of young livestock; it became the blood that made of them a family, that gave them a shared substance of life and purpose – a shared substance that did not begin or end with any individual, but was part of a great stream carrying them from one

generation to the next. It made them important to one another and to God. (p. 17)

In the South African context, the (white) Afrikaner, Dutch Reformed group that I am from clearly applied this reading in a highly exclusive way to cultivate a sense of sacralised, covenantal ethnic belonging. And unquestioning loyalty to those of 'us' who were killed – such as the women and children in the concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War and a Dr H.F. Verwoerd.[229] My experience on the troubled island of Ireland suggests that this highly problematic, ethno-political use of biblical blood ritual language (explicitly or implicitly) is a more widespread phenomenon.

The key *facilitative* question I am interested in for now is this: are there spiritual practices that can get to the roots of these 'sacred bonds' and help to transcend them? More specifically, what is the potential of a committed practice of meditation and especially 'apophatic contemplation' to help cultivate a deeply rooted stance of hospitality that is able to reach *through* bloodied boundaries of belonging?[230]

At this stage, I can only mention, in very broad strokes, a few promising avenues for further exploration:

• Linguistic, epistemic humility: An important strand in transcending bloodied divides between Us and Them is, I believe, the subtle softening of hardened *conceptual* boundaries; the thawing of frozen categories of 'friend' and 'enemy'. My sense is that the cultivation of this strand is part of the potential contribution of an apophatic practice. A foundational fruit of this practice is a humble stance towards the inexhaustible, ungraspable mystery of (Ultimate) reality.

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229. I am exploring this particular angle in more depth in a semi-autobiographical book, *Bloedbande: 'n Donker Tuiskoms* (Verwoerd 2018).

230. For more on (long-term) benefits of meditation as confirmed by (contemplative) neuroscience; cf. Goleman and Davidson (2017).

This humility is expressed in a healthy appreciation of the limits of language. Applied to enemy talk, this humility may encourage an openness to the possibility that the person before me is more than the dehumanising conflict labels so firmly, so blindingly attached to him or her.

- Liberating 'forgetting': I am also intrigued by the positive potential of a practice of regular periods of conscious 'forgetting' in helping to loosen the stranglehold of conflict-related memories and emotions. Increasing evidence of the mental health benefits of mindfulness and so on, including for war veterans and trauma survivors, is instructive in this regard (Goleman & Davidson 2017; Van der Kolk 2014).

- Fruits of 'self-compassion': The underlying *attitude* of meditative practice is to maintain non-judgemental compassion towards yourself as you discover very quickly your inability to meditate or contemplate, that is, to stay present and awake, without clinging to or rejecting the inevitable distractions of thoughts, memories, feelings and bodily sensations (Finley 2005). A potential fruit of this inner attitude is that it tends to spill over into daily life; specifically, one's ability to extend non-judgemental compassion to others can be increased.[231] This would be a non-religious route to make sense of the strong claims regarding compassion for friend and enemy made by *The Cloud*'s author.

- 'Post-apartheid' consciousness: A more fundamental possibility for future exploration has to do with the potential connection between apophatic practice and the transformation of apartheid *consciousness*. In the above-quoted conversation with Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, she and I also talked about how deeply rooted the legacy of the systemic, dehumanising racism of apartheid is. We agreed that while the outer legacy of racialised inequality is glaringly obvious in post-apartheid

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231. For promising social psychological research in this regard (focussing on the positive potential of self-compassion on wrongdoer's empathy towards those they have wronged), cf. Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis and Schumann (2018).

South Africa, there is also an inner legacy of racial division and disconnectedness that continues to haunt us.

This contextualised inner 'separateness' might be understood as an extreme manifestation of what in interfaith 'wisdom' literature is called 'dualistic consciousness', with the seemingly unbridgeable divide between the categories 'friend' and 'enemy' another such manifestation. Now, an apophatic practice is fundamentally about the cultivation of 'unitive', 'non-dual' consciousness.[232] I am therefore also very keen to explore its particular potential to contribute to the 'reformation' of Protestant-inspired apartheid consciousness. And, more broadly, to a non-dual, womblike spirit of hospitality that can begin to transcend *all* bloodied 'borders of belonging'.

■ Hospitable language

I am grateful to Kearney for highlighting the deep cultural and religious roots of the language of hospitality, especially towards 'the stranger' (Kearney & Taylor 2011). I have completely neglected this language in my work as a researcher within the South African TRC, with a heavy involvement in helping to draft the chapters 'Concepts and Principles' (Vol. 1) and 'Reconciliation' (Vol. 5).[233] I've also failed to pursue 'hospitality', especially towards the stranger-as-enemy, in subsequent philosophical writing (Govier & Verwoerd 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Verwoerd 2007).

As a peace practitioner, I have seen in action the power of (facilitated, wise) hospitality beyond the borders of 'blood'. I have also experienced how inhospitable the language of forgiveness and apology can be to people such as Gerard, Alistair

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232. Cf. Bourgeault (2016). Also cf. Merton (1997:248–259), especially on the radical inclusivity of a Christian spirituality of non-violence.

233. Cf. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report (1998).

and many politically motivated ex-combatants faced with the dynamics of betrayal (Little & Verwoerd 2016; Verwoerd & Little 2018).

For me Kearney has now opened up the possibility that the language of (realistic, radical) hospitality towards the demonised Other can enrich the family of related concepts, such as compassion, acknowledgement and understanding. 'Hospitality' can thus contribute – especially at early stages of processes of humanisation – to making the discourse of reconciliation more invitational. And so the practice of peace may become more welcoming, more lasting. Even between enemies with the blood of each Other on their hands.

Across oceans: A conversation on otherness, hospitality and welcoming a strange God

Richard Kearney[a,b]
[a]Charles Seelig Chair of Philosophy, Boston College
United States of America
[b]Research Associate
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

Daniël P. Veldsman [iD]
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

Yolande Steenkamp [iD]
Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics
University of Pretoria
South Africa

This chapter is a transcription[234] of a dialogue that took place between the authors on 16 April 2018. The purpose of the conversation was to create an opportunity for Richard Kearney to engage with some of the questions posed by authors in the preceding chapters of the book.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Richard, it is a great privilege to have this conversation with you. We value your response to the perspectives from which the various contributors to the book have engaged with you. We are excited to present this publication to the world, as a first engagement of this nature between African thought and a philosopher representing some of the most current thought in Continental philosophy.

Richard Kearney: Not at all, this is a pleasure for me too. I have to say, going through the conference papers that you've sent me, as well as the questions from the authors, the collection appears to be a very substantial body of work and I feel greatly honoured.

Yolande Steenkamp: I also wanted to say how much appreciation I had for the way you wrote your intellectual biography, for sharing so much of yourself. It was such a pleasure to read.

Richard Kearney: Thank you.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Let's get on with the discussion then. It is a great privilege to debate Otherness with you from a number of South African perspectives. We're going to start with the more philosophical questions, first by Justin Sands from North-West University, and then from Pieter Duvenage, a philosopher from the University of the Free State. Justin Sands says that he has always noticed a concern for the political throughout your thinking, both in your early philosophy of imagination and narrative and your later philosophy of religion and the stranger. He finds this especially so in your works that discuss Ireland and

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234. We express our sincere gratitude to Bernice Serfontein for the many hours she spent transcribing and editing this dialogue.

its political situation and also in texts such as *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003) and *Anatheism* (2011). He calls to mind a response to Merold Westphal where you considered a certain metaphysical, theistic concept of God as a 'recipe for war'. Could you please elaborate on your concern for the political factors in the philosophical projects you choose to undertake, and how this concern for the political becomes integrated into your hermeneutical–phenomenological method? Or, rephrased slightly more simply: How does your ethical concern for violence and your desire for hospitality to the stranger inform your decision to take philosophy to its limit?

Richard Kearney: I would say that my thoughts regarding politics were informed by my growing up in a country like Ireland, bitterly divided by political and religious ideologies. I experienced the damaging influence of two kinds of theocracy in both parts of the island. North of the border one had the ideology of a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people, while south of the border, in the Republic of Ireland, we had for many decades after independence from Britain a more or less Catholic parliament for a Catholic people. In the 1937 Constitution of the Irish Republic, there was a special privileged role assigned to the Catholic Church. So I grew up with a strong feeling that it was not good to have 'national' religions – Irish or British. Even looking at Europe, there were still several national religions: the sovereign Monarch of the UK was also the head of the Church of England, and Lutheranism was the national religion of some Nordic countries. This nationalising of religion was originally in reaction to the imperial legacy of the Holy Roman Empire (as was, in a more radical sense, the secular atheism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution). But it still made for a certain confusion between Protestant church and state.

So I grew up in the sixties and seventies in Ireland with the view that one should separate church and state. The idea of any sort of authoritarian ideology, be it political or religious – or worse the two together – was something I felt needed to be

unmasked and debunked with what my Paris mentor, Paul Ricoeur, called a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. I agreed with Ricoeur's call to set the 'three masters of suspicion' – Freud, Marx and Nietzsche – loose on all ideologies of power and dissimulation. It was necessary to smash the idols of power in order to let the symbols of genuine spirit speak. I embraced the idea that one needed to practise a radical critique of religion before opening up new possibilities for a 'hermeneutics of affirmation' (hope, love, justice, hospitality to the stranger). Already as a young student what I liked about phenomenology was that it began with the epoché: you bracket out all ideological presuppositions and prejudices in order to return to the 'things themselves' – the lived phenomena of experience as if you didn't know the answer. One suspended all answers inherited from Party, Church or State.

So in a sense my initial philosophical position towards religion was antinomian and anti-authoritarian – beginning from not knowing as a way of opening paths for genuine faith. The methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics, as I understood them, prevented philosophy from becoming an ideology, an instrument of a hegemonic institution, religion or state. By recognising the finite limits of human reason, hermeneutic phenomenology still leaves space aside for a genuine experience of the infinite, whether you call it Ultimate Reality or any of the names for God found in the great wisdom traditions – or the absolute Other along with Levinas and Derrida, an infinitely demanding sense of justice that is always still to come. What I would later call 'diacritical hermeneutics', starting with *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (2003), invigilates the limits between finite and infinite experience, preventing one from fetishising or fixating any one of our ultimate concepts as Cause, Substance, Idea or Being – lest we succumb to what Jean-Luc Marion calls 'conceptual idolatry'.

Daniël P. Veldsman: This actually ties in well with the second question: is your critical concern for the abuse of the political a reason why you are careful not to completely conflate philosophy and theology? Your texts pertaining to the philosophy of religion

are explicit about their scope, and in *Anatheism*, you directly state that you are not proposing a new theology of any sort. Does your concern for the political inform this resistance or is it more a professional preference of some sort?

Richard Kearney: It does, and in a way I think I've answered the second part of the question first, because my response was very much a critique of the theologising of politics, about which I have deep reservations. There are two main reasons for this: First of all, I'm not a theologian, and as such I am not competent. I haven't been trained in theology, and I learned from Ricoeur and Derrida during my research with them in Paris that philosophy and theology are different disciplines. Theology presupposes Revelation, or at least this is what Husserl and Heidegger thought. If you answer the question of philosophy, namely 'why is there something rather that nothing?' with a theological answer – 'On the first day God created the world' – then you've got your answer before you begin. So I tried to practise what I would call a methodological agnosticism, which never meant I ceased to be a Christian or a believer, but that I never began by invoking the answers of divine Revelation to respond to the questions of philosophy.

So that's one reason. The second is the autobiographical one that I mentioned above. I grew up in an Irish–British context where politics – often a violent, exclusivist and repressive politics – had been identified with the Protestant or Catholic religion, which I thought was a total betrayal of the authentic goodness of both Protestantism and Catholicism. In Kierkegaard's terms I saw it as 'Christendom betraying Christianity'. So I wanted to leave Christianity free for faith, and in a way free for genuine theology and a certain kind of Christian way of life – both as action and contemplation. I was aware of the limits of philosophy: it can go so far, and no further. You can of course raise the God question in a hermeneutic phenomenology of religion, but you can't answer it. Responses, if they exist, belong not to philosophy as such but to the realms of prayer, liturgy and spiritual practice – and, at an intellectual level, theology proper.

Daniël P. Veldsman: The next question, from Pieter Duvenage, research associate at Free State University, ties in very closely with the question of the role of religion. He is curious whether there is anything specifically Irish that set you on a path of becoming a very important interlocutor in the broad post-phenomenological debate globally? To the point, he asks what there may be specifically in Irish Catholicism that finds an alliance with philosophical movements in the 20th century? Who were your Irish influences and mentors that set you on your way to do your postgraduate work under the Catholic-influenced Charles Taylor in Canada and the Protestant-influenced Paul Ricoeur in France?

Richard Kearney: Apart from the negative and repressive side of my Irish Catholic formation mentioned above I would also readily admit there was a positive side. First I would cite a deep sense of the sacramentality of everyday things. A sense of sacred times and places and saints and events deeply linked to the liturgical seasons. A sense that there was actually real presence of the holy in the life of ordinary incarnate things, of simple epiphanies. That's what I learned from the Benedictine monks of Glenstal Abbey, where I attended boarding school, and from Patrick Masterson and Denys Turner, my professors of philosophy at UCD – the idea that there is a 'mystery deep down things', as Catholic authors like Gerard Manly Hopkins, Gabriel Marcel and Bernard Lonergan wrote.

Phenomenology also resonated, in a certain way, with this Catholic sense of the depth of ordinary things. I remember reading Sartre saying phenomenology empowered us to philosophise not just about first causes and supreme beings but about ashtrays and lamplights – there was nothing ineligible for phenomenological investigation. And this insight into the profundity of the everyday, of our being-there-in-the-world, was also shared by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and feminists like Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, whose thought greatly influenced me during my studies in Paris and Montreal. The sentiment that

visible reality is an invisible gift. *Es Gibt*. This lineage also includes more recent colleagues like Jean-Luc Marion, with his phenomenology of the 'saturated phenomenon' as a pure givenness of the gift – a notion informed by a certain mystical Catholic spirituality going back to Patristic mystics like Dionysius the Areopogite and Gregory of Nyssa. When I worked with Charles Taylor in Montreal for my master's degree in 1976–1977, I witnessed somebody who could be both a practising Catholic and a serious independent philosopher. Not that he did 'Catholic philosophy' as such, but his thinking displayed a very careful attention to 'epiphanies' of transcendence within immanence, as would later be powerfully expressed in the final section of *A Secular Age*[235]. Regardless of whether you interpret these sacred manifestations of word and deed as revealed signs of Christ, Buddha, Krishna or Yahweh – that is a matter for different theologians and believers to decide. You make that decision when you exit the phenomenological brackets, the epoché, and return to questions of religious faith and practice.

Two other Catholic intellectuals who informed my hermeneutics of religion during my time in France were Stanislas Breton and Jean Vanier. Breton was a priest of the Passionist Order who taught at the Institut Catholique de Paris and served on the examining committee of my doctoral dissertation, *Poétique du Possible*[236], along with Ricoeur and Levinas. Breton was very conversant with atheist postmodernists like Foucault, Althusser and Derrida, while remaining deeply committed to the mystical tradition of Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avilla. Perhaps, this early exposure to the vibrant Paris dialogues between theists and atheists was already sowing seeds for my later formulation of anatheism. Lastly, and also in France, I met and worked with Jean Vanier, who had been a professor of philosophy in Canada and then devoted his life to setting up

235. Taylor (2007).

236. Kearney (1984).

homes for young people to live and work with the disabled. Here I found an extraordinary witness to the 'thisness' of each person, a *haecceitas* that is utterly precious and invaluable – a Scotist notion with a certain Catholic valence.

That said, however, let me add that from Paul Ricoeur and others I learned the very important Protestant gesture of critical distance and questioning, the value of limits and of critiques and not being taken over by mystery in a way that might lead to mystification, as can sometimes happen with people like Heidegger and the German idealists. This is all to say that I grew up in between Catholic and Protestant traditions of thought, in Ireland and later again in Canada and France. Not to mention the vital importance for me of Jewish thinkers like Levinas and Buber – and of Hinduism and Buddhism during my journeys to the East (India, Nepal, Japan) between 2009 and 2014.

Yolande Steenkamp: Thank you, Richard. Our next question comes from Anné Verhoef from North-West University in Potchefstroom. He sees a specific tension in your work. On the one hand, there is the need to have something more than 'religion without religion', more than faith without content, more than empty secularism. The need is for religion with its specificities, with its own foundation and spiritual depth, with its word, rituals, liturgies and traditions, or as formulated earlier: a notion of theism within ana-theism, of radical or 'vertical' transcendence within immanence. On the other hand, however, he detects the continuous move away from dogmatic formulae, a refusal of all absolute talk about the absolute and especially an opposition to religions that violently impose their own view of the Absolute on others. Religion should thus have content (it cannot be empty secularism), but on the other hand it should not be taken too dogmatically. His question then is whether this is possible. Can one have religion with only a 'little bit religion'? When is the particularity, the content of the religion too much?

Richard Kearney: I see this as basically a call for a 'discernment of spirits', as Ignatius of Loyola said. Rather than swallow any

religion whole, without question or challenge, I think it is crucial to discern, discriminate and differentiate between the good and bad 'bits', before making a second more mature 'anatheist' recommitment. Regardless of our religion, are we not all obliged at some point to make distinctions between the 'bits of religion' that breed bigotry, scapegoating, hatred, exclusivism and the better, truer, more authentic and life-affirming 'bits of religion' that foster love, justice, good living and openness to the widow, the orphan or the stranger? I deem it responsible for us to jettison and deconstruct the perversions of religion (all too common in all traditions alas – is there any tradition exempt from abuse?) in order to retrieve the uniquely liberating and enriching gifts of religion. Philosophical critique is part of this work.

So I do not see anatheism as an empty secularism void of content but rather as a purgative emancipation and transformation of tradition – rediscovering a second theism or post-theism after (ana) having rejected naïve dogmatic infantile theism. In this sense, anatheism is a catharsis of faith. 'Smashing the idol to let the symbol speak', as Ricoeur puts it. I reckon there is always the need for a certain discernment of spirits, a wager and choice for the bits that give life and the bits that don't. Further, I wouldn't say that the bit 'that brings life and brings it more abundantly' (as Christ says) is just a 'little bit'. On the contrary, I would see it actually as the 'big bit' and the 'most important bit', although it comes through the 'little things' of nature or 'the little people' as Vanier calls the disabled and disinherited – the widows, orphans and strangers. The Samaritans and Syro-Phoenican women singled out by Jesus in the gospels. They may seem small but so does the mustard seed. The little children as portal to the kingdom of heaven (childlike faith is not the same as childish – infantile, blind – faith). The 'big bits' are often in the 'little bits'. The first as the last and least of these. When Christ comes back, he doesn't come back as a grand emperor or master of the universe. He comes back as a fisherman, he comes back as a cook – a maker of breakfast on the shore of Galilee – or as a gardener to Mary Magdalene. Once again the fullness is in the emptiness.

The resurrection (*anastasis*) presupposes the emptying and letting go (*kenosis*), the arriving presupposes the departing and decreasing – in order to rise again, to be born again, to begin all over again (*ana*).

I remember once talking to Chokyi Nyima, the great Buddhist Lama of the White Monastery in Kathmandu, about the Heart Sutra of Buddhism – 'emptiness is form and form is emptiness'. He replied that there is nothing fuller than emptiness. In that sense, I would see the emptiness that comes from the atheistic voiding of dogmatic, theocratic, violent theism as a salutary kenotic emptying that precedes a new fullness. Like the phenomenological bracketing which empties us of our illusions, prejudices and attachments in order to get 'back to the things themselves' (*zu den sachen selbst*), so that we can rediscover the fundamental ontological meaning of being (*Sein*), a meaning normally covered over in our 'natural attitude' of ostensible fullness. When we are 'full of ourselves', cocksure, arrogant, self-sufficient and supposedly sovereign in our ego world, we cannot hearken to the stranger in others and ourselves. Only after a spiritual voiding can we retrieve the secret mystery of things, to which we are habitually blind and inattentive.

It is like the AA 12-step movement where the admission of our 'helplessness' before our addictions and attachments is the necessary prelude for embracing the 'higher power' at work in our everyday lives – in community with others (there is no 'cure' in AA except in the community of fellow or former addicts). And the healing is always one day at a time, never once and for all. There is no big road to Damascus – or rather every moment is a potential road to Damascus, in the ordinary moments, the quotidian surrenders and responses to the call of reality and other people (our neighbours and strangers). In the Christian story, this cycle of emptying and rebirth is also at work, not only in the Pauline vision of *kenosis* as the father emptying himself to take on the form of the incarnate human son (Phlp 2) but also when that same son, Jesus Christ, descends kenotically into the void of hell during and after the Crucifixion, for three days, before

rising again (*anastasis*). So in my opinion, the Christian *kenosis* – the evacuating of power in order to embrace what Paul calls 'the weakness of God' – is actually the promise of a new surplus, a new fulfilling.

It is interesting that Anné talks about a horizontal transcendence as opposed to a vertical transcendence, but I actually do believe in vertical transcendence – what Levinas calls 'Height', what Paul Ricoeur calls 'the Surplus', what William James calls 'the More', what Derrida calls 'the Other', what I call 'the Posse' always to be realised. There is always this 'extra' that we only fully appreciate when we've gone through the emptiness, but it's a greater fullness. That allows for the notion of the Divine as excess, as the Stranger still to come, *à-venir*. So I acknowledge both kinds of transcendence – horizontal and vertical – and actually see anatheism as potentially richer, more life-fulfilling and more full of substance and content than most old conventional formulations of theism. Of course, it's the same set of stories, it's the same metaphors, the same teaching, the same memory, the same events, the same truths, but revived in another way – ana-theistically.

Yolande Steenkamp: So if the Absolute, which you said we can think of in terms of love and justice, if the 'big bit' that is left of religion or theism in Anatheism, if that can give us access to the Absolute, then Anné's second question is whether secularism can give us similar access to the Absolute, let's say in the form of love or kindness to the widow, the stranger and the orphan. Put differently: While it is true that some sources beyond and beneath ourselves for hospitality and love can be found in religion, without understanding one's religion as the exclusive access to the Absolute, his second question remains: can secularism offer us the same fulfilment, inspiration, hospitality and meaning as that which religions offer, with us thereby avoiding the risk of hyper-transcendence and Absolutism? Is it not better to speak of 'religion without religion', and to move away, so to speak, from the specificities of religion altogether, avoiding the risky wager of anatheism, to embrace a more horizontal transcendence?

He wonders whether this risk of the anatheistic wager is necessary or worth taking?

Richard Kearney: The Stranger, the Other is in every person, including secular people, in all relationships – in my relationship to a secular person and a secular person's relationship to me. I had this exact conversation with James Wood in a dialogue published as 'Theism, Atheism, Anatheism' in *Richard Kearney's Wager: Philosophy, Theology, Politics*[237] – a book which is very much a companion piece to this volume. He basically said, and I paraphrase, 'Look, I'm a secular humanist. I believe in doing good, I believe in breaking bread, I believe in welcoming the Syro-Phoenician woman and in sharing water with the Samaritan woman. But what I don't get is, what has God to do with it?' And my response to James Wood – and to Anné – is this: God is a word or notion used by billions of people since time immemorial to designate the miraculous exchange of radical hospitality and love – and all such exchanges take place in the profane world because the sacred doesn't come from elsewhere, it's in and through the profane, it's the infinite in the finite, the transcendent in and through the immanent. This opens up a dimension which I call the *Posse* – or the divine possible beyond the impossible. In the realm of one's human secular powers and possibilities, conventions and presuppositions, something else emerges and surges up. Religion, and in my case the Abrahamic religion, provides me with names for that – Yahweh, Elohim, Abba, Father, Christ; the Greeks call it *theos* in its various forms and guises. If there is one divinity, there are many names for it. The Buddhists have their words for sacred persons and phenomena – nirvana, sunyata, Bodhisattva, Guanyin, etc. – and the Hindus have hundreds of words.

As Stanislas Breton says, the unnameability of God is the omni-nameability of God. Religions offer a set of parables, liturgies, narratives, memories, testaments, promises and missions that articulate that sense of the possible beyond the

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237. Kearney and Wood (2018:40–68).

impossible, where hostility converts into hospitality, where hate converts into love, where the profane becomes sacred. We say about certain things and people in our ordinary language: 'Oh, this place is sacred to me, this day is sacred to me, this person or thing is sacred to me'. It is in the ordinary and everyday that 'the more' surges up – the sacred is in and through the profane. It seems to me that religion provides us with a language and a liturgy for articulating this enigma, which the secular humanist has to do without. Even though it's in many respects the same experience, religion provides us with a hermeneutic – not just any abstract or facile language but a special language of liturgy, a way of performing it, where I'm not alone in discovering the mystery. There are traditions. It's been discovered before by communities, holy peoples and saints, by Jesus and Mary, by Jacob and Abraham, when they opened the door to the stranger, shared food with the alien, welcomed Gabriel so that a child could be born or broke bread on the road to Emmaus. Why go without these stories?

Yolande Steenkamp: A cloud of witnesses […]

Richard Kearney: Yes.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Or from another angle, someone calls it a double vision […] it opens up a double vision.

Richard Kearney: This doesn't mean that the religious person is better than the secular humanist. It simply means that the former may choose to make an anatheist wager, whether it's conscious or unconscious, and that by reinscribing themselves anatheistically in the narratives of their sacred tradition (whatever that may be) they rediscover a 'cloud of witnesses' as you say, a community of saints, holy ones or wise ancestors, a scripture of ongoing testimony regarding the act of hosting the stranger – where one is not alone. Religion simply means I'm on a road with other people who have walked this way and taken this wager before me. One cannot invent wisdom traditions out of nothing. Now James Joyce, one might say, invented *Finnegan's Wake*, a new language from his imagination, because he was a total genius – and because it was fiction. But even

Joyce, inventing an entirely new creative language to express the wonder of the universe, resorted to dozens of other pre-existing tongues, which he mixed and blended in the writing of his text. He was not working *ex nihilo*. He was not some omnipotent God creating from nothing but a human author recreating a new literary imaginary from a whole inherited thesaurus of linguistic possibilities, a rich archival memory bank of multiple languages and witnesses. If this is true of literary scripture, how much more true of sacred scripture? No man is an island when it comes to fiction or to faith. Although they are not the same thing. The later makes a truth claim to the divine; they latter does not.

Yolande Steenkamp: Moving on to Johann Meylahn's first question, which he asked in the first section of his chapter, concerning the possibility of a book such as *Anatheism*. Is the fictional *as if* not the impossible possibility of configuring that which is beyond figuration? He points out that this question is not meant as a critique but as an attempt to understand his own role as an author in an age of literature (cinders there are), specifically when you argue that anatheism is not a fictional *as if* but a creedal *as*.

Richard Kearney: That's a great question. Derrida implies that all we have are figurations; there is nothing outside of the text. In my first book, *Poétique du possible* (1984), I explored a hermeneutics of figuration – prefiguration, refiguration, transfiguration, configuration – in terms of our human attempts to come to terms with the big questions of Being and God. All seeing is a seeing-as, as both Heidegger and Wittgenstein agreed. All experience is interpretative, that is, figurative in some form or other (from the dreams of our unconscious to the parables of the Gods). Hermes goes all the way down and all the way up. But I see figuration not just as a finite limitation to what can be thought and said but also as a positive occasion – when it comes to sacred matters – for theopoetics. Figuration is good. It is better that God be translated into figures for us than that we would ever assume to have a literal and immediate possession of divine

mystery or alterity. That would be to ignore our finitude. It would be to presume that we possess God, that we can comprehend God, that we can be Hegel: the idealist presumption that human consciousness can actually identify with absolute consciousness. That's the big temptation. So we are saved by figuration. We are saved by the figurative 'as'.

Now the figurative 'as', when it comes to God, is in my opinion a way that works dually, like the 'double vision' Danie mentioned earlier. Theopoetics is divinity making itself accessible and available to us through figurations – through performances, rituals, liturgies, narratives, icons, cathedrals, synagogues, mosques and many other forms of religious art and architecture. We can access God through what Sufis like Ibn al-Arabi called the 'imaginal'. This is an experience of the divine Other as a 'figure'. After the resurrection, we see Jesus *as* a gardener, *as* a fisherman, *as* a shepherd, *as* a breaker of bread, *as* a healer, *as* a wanderer on the road to Emmaus. The sacred stranger always manifests figuratively *as* this or that. And we finite humans respond with an act of interpretation, which is often a wager of faith in the call and promise of this Other *as* divine. It is faith rather than knowledge, as one can never *know* for certain; one can never be sure whether the figure is a figuration of something beyond us or a mere figment of our imagination, a pure supreme fiction projected by our minds. I have faith in you *as* gardener, giver of bread, cooker of fish or saviour. It is, however, a saviour *as* a particular figuration.

Anthropoetics responds to theopoetics. God reveals divinity through figures, and we respond with an anthropoetics, which can go two ways. It can figure God faithfully *as* this or that, or fictionally *as if* God was this or that. For instance, the gospel narrative of Jesus crucified and resurrected is different from D.H. Lawrence's fictional account of Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene and having children or Kazantzakis' novelistic take on the crucifixion in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. It is wrong to confuse the two – the *as* and the *as if* – and to censor or condemn fiction writers for blasphemy when their fictional configurations

are not making any truth or faith claims as such. This is also true of the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. It is a category mistake to confuse the different modalities of figuration. Literature is not religion. Though religion is often literature. That said, the two modes of figuration – creedal transfiguration and fictional configuration – can often supplement each other. Acts of hospitality represented in great works of literature – Homer, Joyce, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Karen Blixen's *Babette's Feast* – offer deep insights into the act of sharing with strangers. Here the fictional *as if* opens our imagination to all kinds of possibilities, irrespective of whether we are theists or atheists, Christians, Jews or Hindus.

Now, the creedal *as* comes about when my response to the stranger who comes takes the form of transfiguring (faith) rather than configuring (fiction). The creedal *as* takes another step, a second step, a step from imagination to prayer. And this involves a hermeneutic wager. Not that the two are incompatible. In fact, I would say that literature is often a powerful portal for genuine faith. In faith, the 'willing suspension of disbelief' (Coleridge's definition of poetic imagination) is accompanied by a second anatheist belief beyond disbelief (and of course beyond the first naïve 'literalist' belief that God is some kind of object, fetish or possession). It is this second belief beyond disbelief which involves a spiritual or creedal transfiguring – I have faith in you *as* a sacred Giver of life as well as experiencing you as a human person in a profane finite world. That second step of believing-*as* is different from the imagining-*as-if*. They are distinct figural moments. For example, when Thomas is first told about Jesus returning he believes it is a ghost – a mere *as if* figment of the disciples' configuring imagination – but when he encounters Jesus himself and declares '[m]y Lord and my God', he is claiming it is true and thereby moving from configuration to transfiguration. When he has faith in Jesus *as* the Giver of life who is born again he has moved from the *as if* of the phantom to the commitment of *fides* and *confidens* – faith and trust that this is true. That's the difference between literature and religion. They're both acts

of imagination but the latter is a trusting in the truth of the statement.

Now that truth must never be, in my view, inflated to the point of dogmatism, in the sense of a smug authoritarian certainty. We should have humility about saying that we have confidence, we have trust, we have faith. Faith is a question of humour and humility, as I suggest in *Anatheism.* It is not 'believing that' but having 'faith in'. Faith is having confidence in this person *as* a divine bringer of bread and life. But we must always remind ourselves that this cycle of figuring–configuring–transfiguring never ends, never escapes from the hermeneutic circle of *as* and *as if.* To pretend to be able to escape from hermeneutics, even as I am carnally touching the body of my saviour (like Thomas), is the radical temptation of turning stone into bread, which is precisely what Satan tempted Jesus with in the desert. It is the temptation of Dostoyevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*, namely to forget figuration. The flesh and blood of my saviour is a body transfigured by faith – flesh is always already figuration. Flesh is word and word is flesh. Or as Aristotle put it in the *De Anima*, 'flesh is a medium (*metaxu*) not (just) an organ'. That is for me the importance of carnal hermeneutics. Creedal hermeneutics involves both carnal hermeneutics and poetic hermeneutics. Faith needs both flesh and imagination. The three are indispensable, I think, for any genuine understanding of the anatheist wager.

Yolande Steenkamp: So Johann's second question, which is also from his chapter, is whether anatheism would not be the perfect state-religion of the liberal–intellectual centre of the European Union, at least for all those with slight leanings towards the left? As a South African he finds himself sensitive to any creedal *as*, and therefore he is more inclined towards a fictional *as if*. The reason is that the *as if* for him remains hospitable to all those who might find themselves welcomed by an *as if*, while an *as* always already excludes those who are not in that specific configuration of the *as*.

Richard Kearney: I think I have already touched on this. For me, faith is a creedal *as* that is always in dialogue with the fictional *as if* – which it made into a wager. The fictional *as if* doesn't make a wager or leap of faith as such but opens an imaginary space – what Danie calls an 'acoustic space' – for new possibilities of epiphany and annunciation, of hospitality and caritas. I repeat: these possibilities can be read in either of two ways, (1) either purely fictionally – which is what I call configuration (after Ricoeur's reading of Aristotle's poetics of *mythos-mimesis* as fictional emplotment in *Time and Narrative*[238], Vol. I) or (2) creedally in the form of an anatheist wager which triggers a transfiguring of our prefigurations (our everyday dreams and interpretations) and configurations (our texts and readings). And that's where the divine becomes human and the human divine, theopoetics and anthropoetics entering into mutual play. That's when the fictional *as if* is transformed into a creedal *as*. One may read the gospels in either of these ways: as pure literature or as sacred scripture. Or as both together. When I read Hindu myths or the Upanishads, for example, I read them not in terms of a creedal *as* – because I don't actually believe in Rama, Vishnu or Krishna – but I marvel at the power of the literary *as if*. Likewise with Greek literature: I love reading Homer but I don't believe in his gods. Let me repeat: I think all people who make a commitment to a creedal *as* need to remember that it never escapes figuration. It is always figural, never literal (or you get fundamentalism and positivism). In creedal figuration, in order to remain tolerant, you should constantly be able to take a step back every so often and remember that this is also a language of metaphor, myth, symbol and trope. We must have modesty about this, because it is always at some basic level an act of human imagination responding to a divine call. To forget this is to succumb to the danger of theistic dogmatism.

So I believe that Johann is misreading what I mean by anatheism. I often refer to Keats' definition of 'negative

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238. Ricoeur (1984).

capability' – being in a state of 'mystery, uncertainty, and doubt, without the irritable reaching after fact and reason' – to keep faith decent, open and tolerant. As such, negative capability may serve as a portal either to good poetry or to good faith. It's potentially a portal to both, but you make your choice. For instance, I'm going to read Homer today as literature and Luke's Gospel as faith because I happen to be Christian and am committed to the truth claims in the text (in terms of both a hermeneutics of affirmation and suspicion). However, if you go to the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, many papers discuss the Bible, the Koran or whatever religious text they're working with, in terms of the fictional *as if*. That's perfectly legitimate, as all these texts are works of religious *language*.

Anatheism implies a second step, as I have been trying to explain, which is optional and which needs to be taken again and again. It's not like something I do once and for all and I'm forever redeemed. We are never done with negative capability. Rather like Kierkegaard's three phases – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. It's not a necessary one-way dialectic, where you begin as an adolescent in the 'aesthetic' with your passion for the possible and your fantasies, then you become serious, get disillusioned and become 'ethical' (make your commitments, get married, have children, pay your taxes, get a job) and then finally you make your Abrahamic leap of faith at the end. No, these are 'stages on life's way' that are lived every day, in different measures and mixes, not as some preordained script with different sequential chapters. It's not that when we make the leap of faith we're saved forever. Abraham wasn't. He made a leap of faith on Mount Moriah, but he was a bad bastard who did all kinds of terrible things. After he performed the inaugural act of sacred hospitality by welcoming the three strangers at Mamre, he cast his wife Hagar and son, Ishmael, into the desert. A leap of faith is never a done deal, once and for all.

Furthermore, it's very important to remember that in a creedal *as* there is already a gap – the 'qua' which separates self and

stranger, word and action, imagination and reality. One must never forget that when one says, 'I have faith in God', that one believes in God *as* this or that experience; one is not saying, 'I *am* God', or, 'I *know* God absolutely'. There is no absolute way to the Absolute; it's always a figural path and we are always figuring it out. We are saved by the *as*: God is saved from us and we are saved from God. That *difference*, that little *as* which Stanislas Breton called the 'little servant of the Lord', saves us from the presumption of over-identification with the Divine. The *as* is prophylactic against fusion and confusion. There is deep modesty in the *as*, as well as an invitation to respond to the call. Anatheism is not a non-committal kind of European liberalism. It is deeply engaged, but not uncritically so.

Yolande Steenkamp: We return to your professor of philosophy in Dublin, Patrick Masterson, when it comes to my question about steering a third way between transcendence and immanence. I'm curious how you would respond to the conundrum outlined by Masterson in this regard. At the same time, could you take this puzzle as a case in point to illustrate how a 'third space' operates in dialectical philosophy, so that, in between poles, you attempt to say *more*, not *less*?

Richard Kearney: Sure. I see the 'between' as a *more* rather than a *less*. Again, maybe it's something I learned from Paul Ricoeur, that the way of mediation, the middle way, is a wiser way, because it's a both/and rather than an either/or. I don't see immanence and transcendence as an either/or. I think some philosophies go too far in the direction of transcendence and end up with nothing. This is the danger of Derrida, in my opinion: he so stresses the undecidability and asymmetry of alterity that he ultimately evacuates the other of any lived content and carnality. It is all text without context in the end. Other philosophies go too far in the other direction and get too caught up metaphysically in a great linked chain of Being which drags God down like an iron anchor of immanence: we basically reduce the Other to our anthropomorphic fixes of metaphysical presence (or what Heidegger and Derrida called 'onto-theology').

Therefore, when I talk in *The God Who May Be* of an 'onto-eschatology', what I want to say is this: There's a truth in the ontology of immanence, and there's a truth in the eschatology of transcendence, and we need to hyphenate them rather than oppose them. We need to travel the middle path of both/and/neither/nor. The truth is neither radical transcendence, nor mere immanence, but both one and the other. My friend William Desmond has coined the term 'metaxology' – a philosophy of the between (*metaxu*) – which he traces all the way back to Plato. But you find it in Aristotle too. In *Carnal Hermeneutics*[239] I took the idea from Aristotle (1968, Book 2 of *De Anima*) that flesh is a medium, not just an organ of immanence to be opposed to a spirit of disembodied transcendence: flesh (*sarx*) is at all times a mediation which discriminates between differences. The body discerns. The senses make sense. The Buddha also preached a middle way; and I see Jesus as performing a mediational journey as *both* human *and* divine. In my opinion one finds versions of the middle way in most philosophical and wisdom traditions, where the between operates not as a function of *less* – as some lukewarm mediocrity to be spat out – but as a wiser and fuller way, a way beyond binary dualities, a double vision of the *more*.

Yolande Steenkamp: Thank you.

Daniël P. Veldsman: We are going to move now to the understanding of strangeness and otherness. Schalk Gerber poses the following question: How, from a diacritical hermeneutical perspective, would one address the question of tradition? For example, are we completely predetermined by tradition, or should we abandon it in light of critique?

Richard Kearney: I see anatheism as a critical retrieval of tradition. I recall Ricoeur once trying to mediate between Habermas and Gadamer, with Habermas arguing for emancipation and Gadamer arguing for tradition. Ricoeur responded that liberation is itself a tradition; it wasn't invented in the French

239. Kearney and Treanor (2015).

Revolution by chopping people's heads off. Liberation was already being witnessed by the stories of Moses and exodus, of Christ and Resurrection, of Spartacus and Socrates. In other words, we have traditions inherited through narrative memories, and what I call 'diacritical' hermeneutics (in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*) is always a reinterpretation of the old in light of the new, and vice versa. Here I take the term 'ana' very seriously: The diacritical is the *between*, but it's also the *after*. The 'ana' goes back over sacred history and turns it into story. It takes the facts of the past and turns them into fiction or faith – a retrospective transfiguring of tradition in the name of the 'messianic' always still to come. Anatheism is not at all about getting rid of tradition but about reliving history as sacred story.

Daniël P. Veldsman: Secondly, Gerber would like to know your thoughts on interpreting Otherness in terms of the universal and the particular?

Richard Kearney: Again, I would say that the 'dia' in diacritical hermeneutics is the 'between' that interprets the other in terms of a radical thisness of particularity, of singular *haecceitas*, while never abandoning the horizon of the universal. In the case of Jesus Christ, I would say that *Jesus* is the particular, singular, embodied *haecceitas*, whom Thomas touched with his finger, and who offered bread and wine, food and fish after the resurrection to his disciples; while *Christ* is the universal figure of redeemed humanity who Paul hails as neither man nor woman, neither Greek nor Jew, but who recurs again and again in each individual person. It's the universal Christ figure, the cosmic Christ, the transindividual, transnational, transhistorical Christ who comes back again in each unique individual person. As the poet, Gerard Manly Hopkins powerfully puts it, 'Christ plays in ten thousand faces, lovely in eyes and lovely in limbs not his, to the Father through the features of men's faces'. That's the universal in the particular, the cosmic in the embodied. The 'dia' is the hyphen between them. Perhaps it would be more accurate to talk here of a diacritical hermeneutics of the quasi-universal and the quasi-particular.

Daniël P. Veldsman: We come to Helgard Pretorius from the University of Stellenbosch. He asks of you: What, in your experience, are some of the biggest contemporary challenges (ideological, material, political) facing those institutions that we rely on for cultivating/formative tasks? What, for instance, threatens the cultivation of hospitality (and other virtues for that matter) in our institutions of learning?

Richard Kearney: Helgard talks brilliantly about induction and initiation rituals and the liminal space. There's so much to be said about these important things; I wish we had the space and time to cover everything. I think there is a huge need for rituals of initiation. I had a wonderful experience with my brother, Michael, at a sweat lodge with Native American Indians in Santa Barbara in 2015. People of different religions came and we all went down into a hollow cave scooped out of the earth together, inhaling the steam from water poured over red-hot volcanic rocks. It was a very powerful initiation rite and I believe people have a real need for such liminal journeys and crossings – of body and mind – and sometimes, if disillusioned with their own religion, look to ancient or so-called New Age rites for it. Yoga, for example, can serve this need, where you meet different searchers from different faiths (or none) and pursue something that is spiritual. I very much believe that the Christian Eucharist could also serve as an interconfessional rite where people are received, initiated and welcomed while respecting their different spiritualities. I strongly advocate for the right to have dual or multiple belonging in religion. When I was in India I met several people who were both Catholic and Hindu (dual religious belonging); and I think that rituals and practices of liminal crossing are very meaningful here. It's no accident in my view that the Song of Songs is an Egyptian love song that becomes the centre of Jewish and Abrahamic spirituality. There is a sort of mystical *fiancialles* going on there, a 'nuptial metaphoricity', as Ricoeur says, which serves as a chiasmic initiation of Egyptians into Judaism and Jews into Egyptianism – and of course, the Egyptians were the enemy, as we know from the biblical tradition.

It is therefore very important to rethink our religious rituals in this way. On that note, I think that sport and rock music festivals – think of Woodstock in 1969 – can also at times operate as secular rituals that serve the important function of bringing different kinds of people together, across divisions of class, creed or colour. I saw the movie *Invictus* recently about Mandela's meeting the South African rugby team, the Springboks. Given that rugby was traditionally such a 'white' sport it was a hugely symbolic gesture of reconciliation. Similarly in Ireland, the fact that Northern and Southern Irish play in the same Rugby team, regardless of whether they are Protestant or Catholic, is an example of an initiation rite bringing people together symbolically. I'm not saying that sport is the same as religion – as Nietzsche would – but I recognise that secular forms of initiation are important also.

With regard to Helgard's discussion of institutions of learning, I think that we've become very exclusivist in our models of competition, rivalry and rankings. Everything has become quantitative, using performance units in order to justify more grants and funding. Numbers rule. Our institutions of learning are becoming paradigms of corporate power – pyramids rather than playrooms. The university should be a *Spielraum* – a place of free scholarly experimentation, of spiritual and intellectual immunity, as it was when it was first set up in the early Middle Ages in Bologna and Paris. This links up with your article, Danie, written with Mirella Klomp, about the Christian passion play being re-enacted as a contemporary street process and interactive Internet event. The play element is so important, without voiding the passion element. Universities have become *artes surviles*, as opposed to *artes liberales*, to use Cardinal Henry Newman's famous distinction in his *Idea of the University*. We're losing the idea of the university as a place of creation and recreation. Creation is recreation – hanging out together, dreaming out loud with one another without the pressures of fixed production outcomes and placements. When I was doing my BA in Dublin, we had no exams for the first three years; there

were only last year finals. So one was able to go to different lectures, to listen, learn and read without any formal assessment for years. You were free. Now every week students have tests and quizzes where everything is quantified and computed. A far cry from the celebration of play – '*Imagination au pouvoir*!' – in the university revolutions of 1968 in Paris, Prague and Berkeley. Or to put it in the religious terms of the mystic Angelus Silesius, we need 'God-play' for gifts and graces to happen, for accidents and inventions to surprise us. I know it's a bit utopian and people do have to do exams, but I'm a great believer that God is play. Education too!

Yolande Steenkamp: I think changing that might be a case of the impossible-possible.

Richard Kearney: Absolutely!

Daniël P. Veldsman: Let's turn to Wessel Bentley from the University of South Africa, who makes things very concrete. It seems to him that there is a resurgence of the drive for determining identity as a basis for exclusion/inclusion in the recent phenomena of American nationalism/patriotism, Brexit and the dilemma of receiving refugees in Europe. Why, in your opinion, is this exclusivism growing instead of calls for diversity and inclusion?

Richard Kearney: I would say that, first, it is an anxiety about belonging, an identity crisis of nationalism and tribalism driven by fear. It's a desperate need to belong which fears the stranger or immigrant and projects these fears onto the other as enemy and scapegoat. One clings to one's identity by disparaging the other. This was a main theme of my *Strangers, Gods and Monster*s and I have two things to say about this. The European Union, if it is to work, will have to operate on three levels. It has to be transnational, which entails opening the borders to other nations as the *Single European Act* (1992) decreed – and pooling sovereignty (which by definition, going back to Bodin, Hobbes and Rousseau, was defined as 'one and indivisible'). The notion of national popular sovereignty has often been a recipe for war. The EU has been pretty good at sharing sovereignty and there

are still many who wish to move towards a kind of more confederal or federal Europe. At a second level, one has to respect nation states with their differences: they are not yet ready to disappear completely (as the Brexit backlash shows). And thirdly, finally, the EU requires a greater degree of regionalisation, where one recognises people in their local, municipal and regional identity. This is the problem of the Basques, the Catalans, the Bretons, and many other regional groups and dialects in Italy and the Balkans, for instance. If these three levels of federation–nation–region are not equally respected, citizens will reject the open crossing of borders, retreating back into nationalisms and micronationalisms. We need to understand the need to belong. If we do not, people will withdraw into themselves and fixate on one particular identity, as is happening now in Hungary, Poland and with Brexit, and of course in the growing nationalist popularism, protectionism and isolationism of Trump's 'Make America Great Again' movement.

This is a danger for every nation. To overcome such fear and xenophobia we need to work towards an ethos of intercommunal hospitality. And I think genuine religion and spirituality has an important potential here for offering liturgies and languages of sharing, whether it's around ritual, or the Eucharist, or the reciting of Psalms and the Scriptures. At an AA meeting, for instance, people come with their pain, their anxiety, their addiction and trauma, sharing narratives together. It is, as Thomas Merton said, one of the most important spiritual movements of the 20th century. Something needs to be done to supplement the political with the spiritual. Politics alone will not solve the problem. When he was helping to found Europe, Claude Monnet famously remarked that 'Europe will be cultural, or it will not be'. In my opinion – and I am deeply committed to a more federalist-regionalist model – Europe has not paid enough attention to a cultural–spiritual exchange of stories, a mutual and multilateral sharing of our historic narratives of wounds and of promises. Ricoeur has a beautiful piece called 'Reflections on a new ethos for Europe' (1995), where he talks about the need for interlinguistic,

interconfessional and intercultural translation between the different nations. I think this has been lacking; and it might even be true of America, too. The stories of the US Civil War need to be retold between north and south. The stories between black and white need to be told, as well as the stories between the Mexicans and Americans regarding their past wars. All these wounds and traumas need to be revisited with the help of a vigorous ethic of translation – a cultural and spiritual task which supplements the political.

When Habermas says we need a 'constitutional patriotism' for Europe, he is right; but law is not enough to deal with the question of identity. Nobody lives or dies for abstract laws and constitutions. People need narratives, traditions, stories of belonging, because if you don't *feel* in your heart that you belong, you cannot share your identity with others. If you don't feel like you're a host in your own home, you can't open the door to the guest. For the guest to be welcomed there has to be somebody home! There has to be a host language to translate a guest language, to turn hostility into hospitality. The impossible can only work in terms of such a spiritual wager, a leap of imagination and faith. Politics cannot legislate for that.

Yolande Steenkamp: Moving on to Rian Venter from the University of the Free State, who considers the notion of (micro)-eschatology to play a prominent role in your theopoetics – how does this relate to conventional Christian understandings of salvation, or soteriology?

Richard Kearney: Again, they are not incompatible for me. Micro-eschatology believes in salvation as an everyday salvaging. My new novel is called *Salvage*, but my next philosophy work could also be called *Salvage*. Maybe even *Anatheism* could be called *Salvage*, because it's about salvaging the remainder – what's left of God after the omni-God has crumbled or flown, in other words salvaging the little things, the little ones, the least of these (*elachistos*) as the gospel calls them. Abandoning the illusion of God as Mighty Magician, Grand Master of our servitude,

Superintendent of the world. That all needs to be debunked. The 'anti-Godsquad' have a point, you know. Dawkins, Hitchens and so on are cranks, but what they are attacking is often the Alpha God of power and manipulation that the 'three masters of suspicion' (Freud, Marx and Nietzsche) rightly unmasked. So I would say salvation rightly understood is salvaging with humility, with 'faith in' rather than 'belief that'. I don't believe *that* there is a saviour, I have faith *in* a saviour as somebody or something that is left in the least of things, in the stranger of Matthew 25, after the omni-God has gone. So first and foremost, micro-eschatology attends to the little stories, the little people and simple epiphanies in which we find the Divine. It is not an evacuation of the divine. If anything, it is the reinvention of the divine in all things, a kind of panentheism.

Yolande Steenkamp: Rian then refers to an interesting comment in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, that '[...] not every notion of the Trinitarian God [...] is a fetish of presence or hyperessence' (2002:207), and wonders what you would consider a post-metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity?

Richard Kearney: I am very interested in a theopoetics of the Trinity – the idea that God is an art, a play of sacred imagination between divinity and humanity. Hence the title of my recent edited book, *The Art of Anatheism* (2018). It is a post-metaphysical view which goes beyond the old 'onto-theological' model of a Trinitarian God as three male substances looking at each other, sufficient unto themselves. Breaking up that fetishised and frozen notion of God brings in movement again, the dynamism of divinity as ever new possibility (*dunamis*), as a dance around the core (*khora*), which of course is the feminine principle at the heart of the Trinity. *Perichoresis*, the Greek Fathers called it. At a more colloquial level, I would also see the Irish shamrock as a post-metaphysical figure, to return to a more popular figuration. There is the story of how Saint Patrick came to Ireland and explained the Christian Trinity to the native king by showing that the three leaves of the shamrock shared a single stalk. The Trinity

is already in nature, in the flora and fruits of the earth, everywhere – one does not need to go looking for it in some otherworldly Platonic heaven of Ideas, which is actually a form of 'conceptual idolatry', as Jean-Luc Marion rightly says. Of course, metaphysics never leaves us, and once you realise that metaphysics is metaphor, figuration and imagination, then metaphysics comes back to life, and we are able to see Aquinas, Scotus and Bonaventure as brilliant artists of the Divine. Also, it's very important in a post-metaphysical interpretation of the Trinity to be open to signs and cyphers of the Trinity in *other* religions. In a way, St Patrick showing the shamrock to the king of Ireland is saying to a native pagan that the three-in-one is already to be found in his own nature-religion. And we should not forget that the Trinity is not just an idea of Western Christian metaphysics; it is also to be found in the Judaic story of the three strangers appearing to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre or the *Trimurti* in Hinduism. Interreligious dialogue is indispensable in this respect, helping us all to loosen up the Christian notion of God as a monotheistic metaphysical substance and to see it also as a movement, reintroducing the dynamism of post-metaphysical stories and tropes. Likewise, with 'Salvation', if you remove the upper-case 'S', saving becomes visible in everyday acts of salving (healing) and salvaging the sacred in the profane. This is my reading of soteriology as micro-eschatology.

Yolande Steenkamp: Danie and Mirella Klomp wrote a fascinating chapter on *The Passion* – also published in your book, *The Art of Anatheism* – which is an annually organised popular musical representation in the Netherlands of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. This has now grown into a large, open-air media event, and Mirella describes the event as a 'ritual' that 'appears to open a space that may be described as a nursery for religious experiences: a space where people's hermeneutic ability to deal with the sacred is being activated'. Their question to you is whether *The Passion* in this sense is a concrete contextual example of your philosophical commitment to third ways to

create an acoustic space for hearing the 'call of God' anew and again.

Richard Kearney: I addressed this briefly earlier, but I am happy to return to it. The short answer is yes. It is a perfect example of a third way and I think that there should be far more such examples of poetic and aesthetic retrievals of the liturgies in our contemporary digital culture. Back in the Middle Ages Passion Plays were acted out on the streets and in the fields. When it became locked into churches, and only certain people could enter, it lost its sense of a theopoetics – which as I say calls for an anthropoetics, which is an anapoetics, a constant interplay and replay. I like the charged term of a passion *play*, because it allows for the passion to be relived and retrieved – rather like Freud's famous example of the play of *fort-da* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a poetic–therapeutic way to deal with the trauma of loss. Because the passion is trauma. It is only when it is replayed poetically, aesthetically, liturgically – where you've got the fictional *as if* coming together with the creedal *as* – that it becomes a creative recreation. Recreation in English can be a place of recreational play. The art of play does not mean artifice as merely made up. 'Making' is not 'making up' in the sense of pure fantasy. The work of religious imagination is very much alive in the passion play, and using contemporary technology to have it televised and viewable on the Internet in order to make the street procession more publicly available is a powerful way of bringing the sacred back into the profane, and vice versa. I am all for that. To return to Andrei Rublev's famous icon of the Trinity as a play of *perichoresis* between the three divine persons, what we witness is a recreation of three persons in movement, which is constantly open to an endless hermeneutic, to repeatable viewings, representations, interpretations. That is the greatness of classic religious art. There is nothing more true than poetic play. Which is what Aristotle says in *The Poetics*: art as *poeisis* gives us access to an essential truth that history will never get to. Whereas history is a mere chronicle of facts – one thing *after* another – poetics as *mythos-mimesis* is a creative redescription

of lived action and suffering in a way that shows one thing *because of* another. It introduces 'meaning'. This is what solicits the religious imagination of viewers to see Rublev's icon or the Dutch passion play either as a fictional *as if*, or as a creedal *as*. If the former, then one happily enjoys the art of a good performance. If the latter, one sees these plays and paintings as epiphanies of the Christian mystery. Like Mardi Gras, you can enjoy it simply as a festival of fun or as a crucial preparation for Easter. Or both. Very often these events can be viewed at both levels at once: poetically *and* confessionally.

Yolande Steenkamp: Robert Vosloo from the University of Stellenbosch takes on the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (who wrote the preface to our volume) and your focus on carnal hermeneutics. In her work, the notion of 'empathy' (or 'emphatic repair') plays a central role. The question Vosloo subsequently poses is: How do you think 'carnal hermeneutics' can be valuable in engaging with bodily signs of empathy, also in contexts marked by historical injustices and misrecognition? Also, in memory studies one often finds reference to 'performativity' or 'performing memory', where remembering is more than mere repetition. What perspectives can we glean from carnal hermeneutics in thinking about the embodied and performative aspects of memory? In a way, I think Robert's question ties in nicely with the notion of 'playing' after the fact that you have been discussing.

Richard Kearney: Very much so. I would say two things, and because I address much of this in my intellectual biography in this volume, I will be brief. To begin with, I think the point of moving from retributive justice to restorative justice is very important, and as Ricoeur says, justice as restorative implies some 'extra' dimension of mercy or love. Love goes beyond justice (without dispensing with it) introducing what exceeds law, rules and moral judgement – the surplus of empathy, *le petit miracle* of pardon, the grace of super abundance, as Ricoeur says in his epilogue to *Memory, History and Forgetting* (2006). But leaving aside Ricoeur – I know he is a very important influence,

not only for me, but for Pumla and Robert as well – let us return to the idea of carnal performance. The therapeutic working-through of suffering and trauma often involves a carnal performance which goes beyond the purely verbal – even the *fort-da* of Freud is not just verbal. The two words – 'here-gone' – comprise an embodied act of little Ernst, playing with something material (a spool of cotton), casting it away and pulling it back in a way which mimes the loss and retrieval of the love-object. We have here an act of healing through the double verbal–physical act of play, which in fact is a symbolic replay of actual loss and possible recovery (.e.g. the comings and goings of Ernst's mother). The therapeutic detour of symbolic performance. The carnal gesture is just as important, if not more so, as the two words – *fort-da* – repeated again and again. But this embodied gesture of play is almost always overlooked by Freudian commentators. So I would see Pumla's act of touching the hand of the killer De Kock as a 'little miracle' of impossible contact – with all the ambiguity involved. What prompted her? What made that impossible gesture possible? Just as we might ask, to move from South Africa to Northern Ireland: what made it possible for Ian Paisley to shake the hand of his arch-enemy Martin McGuinness, who was fighting Protestants while Paisley was fighting Catholics? And we might cite here other historic handshakes like those of Mandela and De Klerk or Sadat and Begin? It's the carnal gesture of 'chancing your arm', which in each of these instances brought about an end to war and violence. There is something about the hand-to-hand that is more important than just giving our word. When Lord Fitzgerald put his bare hand through the door of Dublin Cathedral in 1492 and shook the hand of his enemy Lord Butler, it was more than just saying, 'I promise if you come out, I won't kill you'. It was actually laying his body on the line. Words into action. And we could go all the way back to Homer in the *Iliad* when Glaucus and Diomedes put down their swords and shake hands; or to Jacob and Esau physically embracing after Jacob had wrestled with the dark angel in the night. In all these instances, there is something

absolutely fundamental about the carnal gesture of exchange which supplements and surpasses the exchange of narratives and words. Both are necessary. Before and after words, the handshake.

Yolande Steenkamp: We come to our last set of questions, which is from Wilhelm Verwoerd, senior researcher at Historical Trauma and Transformation at the University of Stellenbosch. He would welcome any further insights regarding the dynamics of betrayal when hospitality is shown to a (former) enemy. You referred to this in your intellectual biography, Richard, in saying how Pumla felt guilty for having felt compassion for De Kock. So how do you understand the accusation of betrayal when hospitality is given to someone with the blood of 'our community' on their hands? Any suggestions, firstly, regarding how to transform this dynamic? And secondly, Wilhelm is curious about your thoughts on the potential role of a contemplative, apophatic spirituality in the cultivation of hospitality towards the enemy.

Richard Kearney: This is why I endorse a hard-core, impossible hospitality, rather than some cheap mantra of 'let's be nice to each other'. When forgiving the enemy you may be accused of betraying your own. It's hard. Betraying here has a double sense as both travesty and manifestation (as in 'betraying your emotions or thoughts'). There can be a sense that you're letting your own people down by siding with those who have been killing your people. The other sense of betrayal, however, is to show your inner secret instinct for ostensibly impossible pardon – translating it from inner spirit into external words and actions. So there's always a huge risk and wager in hospitality, of taking something inside you – the desire to do the impossible, to make a leap of faith, love and empathy to the enemy – and translating it into an embodied act of forgiveness. In one sense, of course, this is the very core of Christianity – 'forgive your enemies' – and of Abrahamic hospitality (welcoming foreign desert strangers into one's tent). But to actually *do* it (not just say or preach it) is very hard, almost impossibly hard, and we have

to recognise the hardness. That is what I really appreciate about Wilhelm's question. Hospitality is not easy. If it is, it is not true. You are exiting your familiar comfort zone, your closed secure domestic space, exposing yourself to the incoming other with all the dangers that may imply. You are fragile, vulnerable, attentive, all eyes and ears and open hands. Like St Francis, when, at the height of the bloody Crusades, he went to meet the Islamic leader, Sultan al-Kamil: he went barefoot and unarmed and stayed with him for weeks in a tent. They shared words and prayers and bread together and Sultan al-Kamil recognised a saint in spite of their religious differences. Unfortunately, nobody listened to Francis when he returned back to the Christian camp, and the war continued. It was too hard for the other Christians to forgive and make peace. In his supping with the enemy Francis in a way betrayed his own, sitting down with Sultan al-Kamil for the time that he did. He chanced his arm. It was a Franciscan–Sufi moment of impossible hospitality made possible – for a moment. A moment at once mystical and carnal, where they prayed and ate together for three days and three nights – which alas could not be translated back into a more collective political settlement between the Christian and Islamic armies. Like Christianity itself – it was a failed experiment; but it leaves us a testimony of the 'impossible possibility' of hospitality and pardon, which always remains a promissory note, an endless call which never goes away.

Regarding Wihelm's second question, whether there is a connection between contemplative spirituality and cross-border compassion? I think the answer is yes. This is certainly something I am committed to as founder-director of the Guestbook Project, not that I am a peacemaker to the degree that Pumla and Wilhelm are. In a small way I can speak from the perspective of Guestbook, however, and I would say that those working in Guestbook are inspired by the example of people like John Hume in Northern Ireland, Gandhi in India, Ernesto Cardinal in Nicaragua, Thich Nhat Hahn in Vietnam, Mandela in South Africa and so on, all figures who in their unique ways combined spiritual depth with

political peace-making. To repeat Ricoeur, in the impossible act of pardoning the enemy there is a 'little miracle' of superabundance at work that has more to do with love than justice. Now the ideal is to have love and justice together; but sometimes, with restorative justice, you need to go beyond retribution and the claims of wrongs and rights to something else. That doesn't mean that it should be a travesty of justice, or a refusal of law – as Ricoeur says 'there should be no amnesty without amnesia' – but it recognises that justice has limits.

In my own small way meditation and prayer have played a role in my modest efforts with Guestbook, spiritually guided by a contemplative neo-monastic movement inspired by Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating and Cynthia Bourgeault, where it is about getting beyond the 'false self' based on borders, boundaries, fears – me versus you, us versus them – in other words, transcending the binary adversarial oppositions which characterise our normal social prejudices. Not that we all don't need egos and borders, boundaries, and identities – up to a point – but you get to a level where that is less and less important. We need again a double vision – recognising questions of identity, belonging, borders and law as necessary realities, but also being able to cross those borders in a leap of impossible compassion. It is only impossible until it happens! The impossible occurs and then we realise for a moment that everything is possible! But when the impossible becomes possible one is rarely on one's own. Or not for long. It is just too hard and too lonely to do the impossible on your own. That's why in AA, the people who get beyond their addictions never do it alone. It's always a group – a community sharing narratives, pains, traumas and recoveries. That's what makes the impossible-possible: moving from the avowal that one is 'helpless' before one's addiction, that one is incapable of overcoming them, until one surrenders to what AA calls a spiritual 'higher power' (however you define it). To surrender to a higher power – which makes the impossible-possible – always invokes or convokes other witnesses. Testimonial contagion. I think that's very important. Subsequently,

then, the person who recovers becomes a sponsor for others, in an ongoing interplay of healing through testimony and compassion.

Daniël P. Veldsman: On that wonderful note, I'm going to say a trinitarian thank you, that is, a playful way to say I do not have any words of deeper appreciation for the wonderful conversation we have had across the oceans on a strange kenotic God, on Otherness and on hospitality. Richard, you have left us with much to ponder in our South African situation on God-talk that is crying out for many impossibilities to be realised in a deeply scarred society. May many little and exciting things follow in the wake of our conversation. Thank you, it has been a privilege.

Richard Kearney: Well, likewise from me.

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Index

This collected work is presented as a dialogue between various scholars (mostly South African) and the work of the Irish religious thinker Richard Kearney. Its encyclopaedic setting is primarily philosophy of religion, although Kearney's background in late French Continental philosophy and the turn to theology therein (especially in the thinking of Levinas, Derrida and Ricoeur) allows it to span several interdisciplinary contexts where questions of the meaning and relation between varieties of (a)theism and ethics are of interest. Both male and female, Western and African views are present. These are viewed against the backdrop of Kearney's work on anatheism in general and his reception of Levinas and Derrida's configurations of words like 'hospitality', the 'stranger' and/or the 'other', in particular.

Prof. Dr Jacobus Gericke, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

In their unity of theme and variety of expression and context, the contributions in this book reflect the heart and soul of Richard Kearney's lifetime of scholarly work. They engage with the highly theoretical, hermeneutical and theological side of who he is and what he does; they get involved with the hands-on, messy, real-life struggle of what it means to be human in relation to 'the stranger' – be it a divine stranger, a human other, or a bitter enemy. With Kearney, they explore a 'third space' between polar opposites and return to God after God.

Prof. Dr Yolanda Dreyer, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa