Hermeneutic Rationality
La rationalité herméneutique

edited by
Maria Luísa Portocarrero
Luis António Umbelino
Andrzej Wierciński
offers his most sustained treatment of *phronesis*, Heidegger refers to character only to emphasize its critical function, that is, only to acknowledge that without a stable character one’s passions would get the upper hand, which would result in the distortion of one’s moral vision and inhibit *phronesis*. For Heidegger too, then, character is a necessary counterpart to *phronesis*, but not a positive condition for discernment. Character or moral sense is not the guide to moral action, as it is for both Gadamer and Aristotle, but a purely critical element, which is therefore inessential. Dasein could do without character in principle, if not in fact. This insight allows us to formulate our primary objection to the Heidegger of *Being and Time*: unlike Gadamer’s hermeneutic self, Dasein has no character. 

Finally, we can also indicate that the hermeneutic self is able to overcome the solipsism that continued to beset both Heidegger and Levinas. While for Heidegger, authentic sociality is grounded in authentic solitude, for Gadamer, the other is the source or ground by which the self comes to understand itself. Alternatively, while for Levinas the self is given to itself in the approach of an other too transcendent to recognize, for Gadamer the other serves as the occasion for an understanding that would otherwise be impossible. That is, the understanding enacted in the hermeneutic encounter is grounded in the being of the other, and not in the prior cognitive activity of the subject. Gadamer’s hermeneutic subject, as opposed to Dasein or the one-for-the-other of substitution, operates neither from out of the resolutions of its will, nor from a passive sensibility entirely beyond appropriation, but from a cultivated sensitivity to the particularity of the other.

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100 “If one of these [pleasure or pain] dominates the man the result is that it does not show itself from itself. The true no longer shows itself; it is thus concealed and must be uncovered through logos. In this way, therefore, *phronesis* as soon as it is achieved, is involved in a constant struggle against a tendency to cover over reading at the heart of Dasein.” Martin Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 37.

101 This is especially clear insofar as Heidegger refers to pleasure and pain only as impediments to *phronesis*, and not as positive conditions for *phronesis*. See note 93. For Aristotle, on the other hand, the appropriate distribution of pleasures is the defining mark of a good man. “For besides the reasons given already, someone who does not enjoy the fine actions is not good, for no one would call a person just, for instance, if he did not enjoy doing just actions, or generous if he did not enjoy generous actions, and similarly for the other virtues.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a18.

Gadamer voiced this same concern when, after reading over Heidegger’s lecture years later, was surprised that Heidegger had neglected the role of character: “What struck me most on the whole is the preponderance of the ontological interest which is apparent also in the entire phenomenon analysis, so that the concept of *ethos* is hardly mentioned at all in the programmatic text. Ethos, however, is precisely that which is not enlightenment (Erhellung) but habituation. Heidegger had certainly recognized habituation in his analysis of the facticity of life as constitutive, but characterized it as the inclination of life to decline/deteriorate (verfallen). It appears therefore not so much in the enlightening of Dasein but rather in its distortion and obscuring, against which the exertion of thinking must direct itself in order to become transparent to itself.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Freiheit* (*Freiheit*). *Diethe Jahrbuch*, 1989, trans. Michael Eldred, 233.

7. DIACRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

Richard Kearney

For X-

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert

What is diacritical hermeneutics? First a word on what I mean by hermeneutics generally, then several words on the qualifier, diacritical.

I understand hermeneutics as an art of deciphering multiple meanings. In its most basic sense this relates to the human capacity to have ‘two thinks at a time,’ as James Joyce said. More precisely, it refers to the practice of discerning indirect, tacit or allusive meanings, of sensing another sense beyond or beneath apparent sense. This special human activity may in turn call for a method of second-order, reflective interpretation involving a process of disclosing concealed messages, either by a) unmasking covered-up meaning (hermeneutics of suspicion) or b) by disclosing surplus meaning (hermeneutics of affirmation). In short, I understand hermeneutics to be the task of interpreting (hermeneuein) plural meaning in response to the polysemousness of language and life. 2

Hermeneutics, thus viewed, is an activity carried out in the name of its founding spirit, Hermes: Messenger of gods, guardian of thresholds, and carrier of cryptic codes. The three original disciplines of hermeneutics, formulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the 19th century, were theology, law, and philology. Why these? Because each solicited an interpretation of dual meanings: a) divine and human (theology), b) prosecutorial and defensive (law), c) ancient and actual (philology). All three disciplines called for a method of discriminating between different and often conflicting readings. Wilhelm Dilthey would add ‘history’ to the list as a universal human science devoted to reading between past and present; a science, which he saw as a model for a general hermeneutics of life as it interprets itself. Whence the birth of philosophical hermeneutics.

Later, Heidegger broadened the definition further in speaking of an ontological hermeneutic committed to understanding the fundamental difference between Being and beings—a task based on a re-understanding of our everyday existence as being-toward-death. The famous hermeneutic circle. And more recently, thinkers like Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Caputo have augmented the


2 This outline of a general philosophical hermeneutics is particularly indebted to Paul Ricoeur, in the wake of the prior formulations of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Heidegger.
one tell the difference between just and unjust actions? These differences require careful criteriological discriminations. And there are obviously other significant criteria apart from the narrative one mentioned (e.g., rational evaluation, virtue ethics, pragmatist judgment, phenomenological intuition of values, feminist and ideology critiques, wisdom traditions and so on). In short, pace deconstruction, I endorse the use of criteria as long as they involve vigilant discernments and distinctions.

3) Third, in keeping with the more precise dictionary definition of ‘dia-critical,’ I refer to a grammatical aspect of inflections of linguistic marks. In this technical sense, dia-critics provides rules for differentiating between narrative units of language (signifiers, graphemes, accents). Think, for example, of the difference which the following accents-grave, acute, circumflex, and diaeresis—make on the same letter in the French language: è é ê. Or think of how ‘ou’ with an accent (meaning ‘where’) differs from ‘où’ without accent (meaning ‘or’). These silent, discreet signs distinguish between values of the same character. Small graphic demarcations thus serve to avoid confusion between otherwise identical letters, helping us differentiate between distinct meanings. In this sense, diacritics is about micro-reading. And here, I think, I share common ground with John Caputo’s radical hermeneutics and Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction.

4) In addition to this technical usage in linguistic and semiotic practice, dia-critics also has the older meaning of reading the body. The Greek terms, dia-krinein and dia-krasis, referred to the medical or therapeutic practice of diagnosing symptoms of bodily fevers, colorations, and secretions. In this respect, the word designated the hermeneutic art of telling the difference between health and disease. Such a skill to read between the lines of skin and flesh—in order to sound the movements of the soul (homeopathic or allopathic)—was often a matter of life and death. Needless to say, this model of micrological reading of somatic and psycho-somatic symptoms has deep implications for the practice of philosophical reading in its own right. I agree with Wittgenstein that philosophy is therapy. In sum, diacritical hermeneutics should do you good!

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4 I am particularly indebted to John Caputo and Jacques Derrida on this question of micrological reading and the attendant notion of our textured experience as a basic form of écriture, which, for me, received its interestingly old medieval idee of the liber mundi (‘semiological ontology’) and the earlier Greek idea of the logos of nature as a primary tacit language (logos endiathetos) calling out for a more articulate verbal language (logos proorhishos). Heraclitus and the stoichi were obvious proponents of this notion of logos-in-phusis which, of course, was later retrieved in the Christian notion of essentia, the Stone doctrine of logos spermatikos and the Kabbalistic notion of the world as traced by the secret letters of Creation (Sefer Yetsirah). In his late work, The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty offers an interesting hermeneutic retrieval of the logos endiathetos/proorhishos distinction from the point of view of what I am calling a carnal-diaccritical phenomenology. See our discussion of Merleau-Ponty below.
5) These four characteristics—critical, criteriological, linguistic, and diagnostic—comprise the basis of what I call, finally and most primally, '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. Such carnal hermeneutics has a crucial bearing, to take just one example, on how we 'sense' subtle distinctions between hostile and hospitable strangers (the same term, hostis can refer to guest or enemy). And pursuing this example I would say that diacritical hermeneutics has two patron saints—the god Hermes and the dog Argus. For if Hermes discloses hermetic messages from above, Argos brings animal savviness from below. The former guides our deciphering of cryptic messages and masks (Hermes disguised as a beggar). The latter, Argos, imparts a canine flair for recognizing the friend or enemy in the visitor (e.g., Odysseus returned to Ithaca to oust the false suitors). 

Diacritical hermeneutics may thus be defined as both sacred and terrestrial in so far as it ranges up and down—in ascending and descending spirals—from the highest heights of the absolute to the lowest crevices of the abyss. While hands reach up, feet reach down. But no matter how high or low hermetic 'sense' goes, it never leaves us totally in the dark. It is not blind but half-seeing and half-believing. It is a sort of uncertain phrenesia which sounds, probes, scents, and filters. Something akin to Wittgenstein's seeing-as in our most ordinary perceptions or Heidegger's understanding-as in our most basic moods (see his analysis of Verstehen-Befindlichkeit). This fundamental form of existential sensitivity and sensitivity is further radicalized in Merleau-Ponty's more embodied notion of 'dia-critical perception' to which I shall see below. 

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2 The name of the true dog, Argos, who recognizes Odysseus in Bk 17 of the Odyssey is derived from the Greek word argos meaning 'glimmering, shining' (from which the Latin term for silver, argentum, is derived). The word arguros is used by Homer in Bk 16 to mark the 'shining' of the goddess Athena which transforms Odysseus from a beggar-stranger back into himself. But unlike the dog Argus, his own son, Telemaeus, does not at first recognize his father, mistaking him instead for a god. It is telling, I think, that this connection between argos/arguros and diacritical hermeneutics occurs in one of the oldest texts in Western literature: a lesson in how to discern between mortal and immortal strangers through our carnal senses; indeed a lesson which, Homer suggests, dogs may well have to teach men! With hermeneutics, it all comes down to smell and the smell of the in the beginning. As The smell of the book, Canine feces. I am grateful to Richard Capobianco for bringing to my attention in Martin Heidegger, 'On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,' trans. Richard Capobianco and Marie Golbert, Époché 14:2 (Spring 2010): 213-23.

3 It is telling that the first thing father and son do in the moment of mutual disclosure is to eat a meal, the two 'strangers' (hospites) becoming host (hospes) and guest (hospitum) to each other. One finds the same polysemy at work in the Greek term xenon. Diacritical hermeneutics as hospitality (xenizoen). See our discussion of these terminological and etymological variations in Anthropos, 27-28, 43-49.

4 We could also include here Max Scheler's account of embodied ethical feeling in The Nature of Sympathy, Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic reading of semiotic unconscious experience in Desire in Language and later work; and Emmanuel Levinas' ethico-phenomenological analysis of the 'pre-sensibility' in Otherwise Than Being. See, for example, how Levinas describes the relation of subjectivity as one of 'sensibility' and 'vulnerability' to pleasure and pain (ibid., ch. 3)—a form of radical carnal 'contact,' 'proximity,' and 'experience' prior to intentionality or consciousness. "The exposure to another is," he writes, "proximity, obsession by the neighbor, an obsession despite oneself, that is, a pain." (Ibid., p. 53) Levinas does not deny this is already a form of language: but it is a language in its most primordial expression.

6 For earlier sketches of the carnal hermeneutics of discernment see Strangers, Gods and Monsters, chs 3-5 and 7, and Anthropos (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), chs 1-2, 5.

At this stage, and by way of addressing one of the most recent discussions of hermeneutics, we might ask how our fivefold model of dia-critical hermeneutics compares with John Caputo's method of 'radical hermeneutics' inspired by Derrida's deconstruction. While the diacritical and radical approaches share a common commitment to micro-logical reading, there are also significant differences. In contrast to deconstructive sans-savoir, dia-critical hermeneutics practices a certain savoir, which goes beyond and beneath Derrida's maxim of 'reading in the dark.' Diacritical savoir should, I suggest, be understood in its original etymological sense of tasting: savourer, sapere, sapientia. It is not knowledge, in the purely cognitive or theoretical attitude (here I agree with deconstruction); but it is some kind of sense nonetheless. Sense as primal interpretation, reading between the lines of skin and flesh. A sensing which makes sense in the three connotations of the French sens: sensation, direction, meaning. I am concerned here, in short, with a multilayered sense which goes all the way up and down—like Jacob's ladder—from thought to touch and back again. Meaning ascending and descending in open-ended spirals.

And let me add this: The dia of dia-critical is crucial. It's sensing is fundamentally dia-logical. It sounds and resounds across differences between self and other (human, animal or divine). Dia-legein—a reading between, through, across (dia), an inter-signifying in relation, a welcoming of alterity.

By way of elaborating further on the different inflections between diacritical hermeneutics and deconstruction let me explore for a moment the implications of what I call 'diacritical sensation.' I refer here to the way the body reads. Or more precisely, the way we read bodies and bodies read us. In a trivial, obvious way we are familiar with phrases like 'I don't know how to read you?' or 'your face betrays your feelings' or the proverbial 'the eyes are the mirrors of the soul.' Lady Macbeth puts it well to her husband, 'your face is like a book, my Thane, where men may read strange matters.'

Mostly such phrases are used in relation to facial expressions—glancing or shading of eyes, widening of pupils, raising of eyebrows, altering of complexion, stiffening or loosening of lips, smiling or grimacing of mouth. But facial vision, as bearer of inner moods, deep feelings and moral emotions, is not the only (if in the West privileged) medium of expression. In addition to our ability to see, we also have the ability to hear, touch, smell and taste. Each sense has its own special

obsession: An ethical 'saying' before the 'said' of thematization and representation, a language where the self does not give signs but is itself a sign of saying. (Ibid., 47) This is what Levinas means when he says that sensing is 'saying' (le dire) or pre-ethical 'signifying' (signifiant, signification or signification). I am indebted here to James Taylor's essay, "Aft the Modern Subject: Between Activity and Passivity in Heidegger, Levinas, and Gadamer" in the present volume. See also the recent work of Kelly Oliver, Karen McKendrick, and Catherine Keller for interesting contributions to a hermeneutics of the flesh.
the offering and eating of food. Treat your guests like gods' (1.11.2) when giving food, we are told, for ‘that (food) is Brahma.’ (3.1) The true self of mind and vital breath was considered to dwell within food, considered as an interconnection between the cosmic elements of air and earth. (3.9) The task of the host is to discern this culinary 'correspondence' and thereby recognize the god within the guest. Offering hospitality to the guest is a sacred act in that it reminds us of the integrity of body and soul illustrated by the equation: Food—true happiness—Brahman. 

The Upanishad concludes with a resounding paean to the transfiguring power of food. The self becomes sacred in a sacramental identification with eating: 'I am food! I eat him who eats the food! I have conquered the whole universe! I am like the light in the firmament.' (3.10.6) This ancient belief found classic expression in the formula: 'Anna (food) is the manifestation of Brahma'; and it later became the basis for a long Vedantic tradition of hospitality where saintly figures offer themselves as food and reveal themselves in the act of eating and being eaten. The unexpected guest (a-thiti) who asks to be fed is a god waiting to become manifest. In feeding the guest we greet the divine and taste its food. A primal act of carnal hermeneutics.

We find clear echoes here of similar acts of sacred hospitality in biblical literature. Recall again Abraham and Sarah feeding the three strangers at Mamre (Gen 18); or Christ offering his body as Eucharistic bread at the Last Supper and at Emmaus, or returning as the stranger (hesper) who asks and receives food from passersby (Matt 25). I have treated such inaugural scenes of sacred transformation between hosts and guests elsewhere, so I will not dwell further on them here. Suffice it to note that the sacred sharing of food is not confined to Hindu or biblical traditions but is also found in other cultural myths of gods appearing as guests at the table of hospitality. On studying such recurring motifs one might be tempted to infer the existence of some trans-cultural, or quasi-universal, practice of gustatory hospitality. And one might be right. But such comparative theologies of the tongue themselves involve a work of diacritical hermeneutics—a second-order methodological interpretation of first-order interpretations of carnal communication between hosts and guests. All such primal scenes of eating, across diverse cultural and religious examples of gustatory hospitality see also the recent essays of Kalpana Seshadri, Andy Rotman, Joseph Lombard, and Marianne Moayyed in Kearney and Taylor, ed., Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions (New York: Continuum, 2010), 139-146.


11 See Francis Clooney, “Food, the Guest, and the Tattirriva Upanishad: Hospitality in the Hindu Traditions,” in Richard Kearney and James Taylor, ed., Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions (New York: Continuum, 2010), 139-146.

12 See chapters 1, 4 and 5 of Anathem.
have carnal congress with guests-as-gods. In such founding narratives, touch, smell, sight and sound are often synaesthesized with taste in the meetings of gods and mortals. From the beginning, Word is Flesh in multiple ways. The polysynym of such primal enfleshment is, I submit, a key task of diacritical hermeneutics.

We do not, however, have to look to the ancient narratives of great civilizations to find evidence for the diacritical connoisseurship of the senses. We already find examples of such carnal hermeneutics in our everyday sensations. Here we might take special heed of the pioneering phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, and in particular his notion of "diacritical perception." This idea was first developed in his Collège France Lecture courses, *La Conscience et l'acquisition du langage* (1950) and *Le Monde sensible et le monde de l'expression* (1953, henceforth MSME). Borrowing liberally from Sausure's notion that words only signify by virtue of their differences with other words, Merleau-Ponty argues that meanings are never given as isolated terms or objects but always as parts of a mobile interaction of signs involving intervals, absences, folds and gaps (écarts). This is not just a function of language, however, but the very structure of perception itself. In so far as perception is thus structured like language in its nascent state it is dia-critical.

Here is how Merleau-Ponty puts it in an important Note from his 1953 lectures:

Diacritical notion of the perceptual sign. This is the idea that we can perceive differences without terms, gaps with regard to a level (of meaning) which is not itself an object—the only way to give perception a consciousness worthy of itself and which does not alter the perceived into an object, to the signification of an indifferent or reflexive attitude. (MSME, 203-204)

In a subsequent note entitled 'Diacritical perception'—no longer merely a 'notion' but now a quality of perception itself—Merleau-Ponty adds this intriguing example of reading a face. To see another's visage is to interpret it carnally 'as' this or that form of expression:

To perceive a physiognomy, an expression, is always to deploy diacritical signs, in the same manner as one realizes an expressive gesteuralization with one's body. Here each (perceptual) sign has the unique virtue of differentiating from others, and these differences which appear for the onlooker or are used by the speaking subject are not defined by the terms between which they occur, but rather define these in the first place. (MSME, 211)

This logic of diacritical perception is alien to the classical approach of difference presupposing identity. Here the identity of terms emerges in the tension of their

Minerva, and the cornelian cherries of autumn, preserved in wine lees; radishes and endives; a lump of cheese; and lightly roasted eggs, untouched by the hot ashes; all in clay dishes. After this she set out a carved mixing bowl for wine, just as coolly, with cups made of beech wood, hollowed out, and lined with yellow bees' wax. There was little delay, before the fire provided its hot food, and the wine, of no great age, circulated, and then, removed again, made a little room for the second course. There were nuts, and a mix of dried figs and wrinkled dates; plums, and sweet-smelling apples in open wicker baskets, and grapes gathered from the purple vines.

In the center was a gleaming honeycomb. Above all, there was the additional presence of well-meaning faces, and no unwillingness, or poverty of spirit. Meanwhile the old couple noticed that, as soon as the mixing bowl was empty, it retorted itself, unsaid, and the wine appeared of its own accord. They were fearful at this strange and astonishing sight, timidly Baucis and Philemon murmured a prayer, their palms upwards, and begged the gods' forgiveness for the meal, and their unpreparedness. They had a goose, the guard for their tiny cottage; as hosts they prepared to sacrify it for their divine guests. But, quick-winged, it wore the old people out and, for a long time, escaped them, at last appearing to take refuge with the gods themselves. Then the heaven-borne ones told them not to kill it. "We are gods," they said. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk VIII: "Philomen and Baucis," trans. Anthony S. Kline (University of Virginia, 2000).

In "Departures: Hospitality as Meditation," Kalpana Seshadi offers a hermeneutic commentary on an analogous story in the Bhagavata Purana (Bk 10, cantos 80-81). It relates how a poor man Kuchela offers a meager bowl of pulped rice to his friend Krishna who gleefully eats the mere nothing and returns the gift of a nothing that is the ultimate fullness. This emptiness in fullness recalls the empty-filling/wine bowl of Philomen and Baucis, as well as the Buddhist notion that 'emptiness' is the highest form of fullness. Seshadi offers this commentary. The poor scholar (Kuchela) gathereth together, in a piece of clean san torn from his wife's shoulder, a heap of pulped rice, itself borrowed from a kindly neighbor—emptiness itself, rice with kernels removed, with nothing inside. And him sets out to give to the friend, who had the great capacity to receive. The friend sinks his palm in the heap of rice and opening his mouth he eats a littleful with sheer delight, of the emptiness and the nothing, and reaches for more, and yet more...and the friend emplis the emptiness within the pulped rice, the scholar feels himself filling up. His satisfaction is immeasurable. Incalculable happiness and fortune accrue to him, the more he gives of what he does not have, the more he feels himself receiving what he could not imagine. Can something come out of nothing? Is it possible to give, eat and be full of the nothing? Is this the meaning of grace? And is this also the time of hospitality?... Later Kuchela recalls that he had asked nothing, indeed he needed nothing... He is again blessed. Kalpana Seshadi, "Departures: Hospitality as Meditation," in Kearney and Taylor, ed., *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*, 52-53. It might also be interesting to do a comparative analysis on the role of the goose as a sacred bird in other cultural-religious myths, for example, the "Pramahamsa" in both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures, referring to the divinely enlightened sage. For Kabir, the Shik-Nahi-Hindu poet, the Hamas or Himalayan Goose was considered to be a wandering migrant soul who bore secret messages and we also find the Goose-Swan playing a key role in the *Big Ved* story of Puru Raivas and his wife Urvashi. The goose that flies over Mount Kailash, and bathes in the lake of Manasarova (the lake of the mind, Manas) remained a recurring poetic theme. The goose-swan also plays a key role of transformation in the popular story of Nala and Damayanti from the *Mahabharata* as well as in Celtic and Greek mythologies and popular folktales like Grimm's *Goose Girl*. I am indebted to my colleagues, Francis Clooney, Iyotchi Sahi, and Kalpana Seshadri for this information.
differences, their contours arise from the *encroachment* (*empiècement*) of things on things. We always read between (*dia*) the lines.

Merleau-Ponty departs from the Aristotelian perspective which tended to define something new in terms of a preexisting genre or foundation. Diacritical perception across gaps reveals the illusory character of the traditional one-to-one correlation between consciousness and object; for this derived correspondence arises only in retrospect and ignores the fact that there never was an object in the first place but only several 'things'—and at the very minimum a reversible interplay between figure and ground (*fond*). This plurality of 'infra-things' is irreducible to the dualist framework of an isolated mind faced with an isolated object. Diacritical perception is, Merleau-Ponty insists, the sensing of meaning as it expresses itself in the intervals between such infra-things. It involves our sense of identity through differentiation rather than differentiation through identity. \(^{13}\)

Our most basic carnal sensations may thus be said to be structured diacritically in so far as they are structured like the phonetic differentiations of language. “To have a body capable of expressive articulation or action and to have a phonetic system capable of constructing signs, is the same thing.” (MSME, 204) Our body schemas, Merleau-Ponty claims, operate like phonetic systems which function according to principles of which they are not conscious (e.g., *parole* is not conscious of *langue*). But to compare carnal perception to linguistic structure in this way is not to reduce the latter to the former (naturalism), nor to reduce the former to the latter (structuralism). Nature does not make the body any more than it makes phonetic systems. And it would be a mistake to construe the perceptual capacity to play with principles of which it is not immediately aware as some kind of “unconscious.” Perception of figure is not simultaneously perception of ground—but rather ‘imperception’. The sensing of the invisible in and through the visible, *sentir en profondeur*, by negations, absences, gaps (écart). Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in Gestalt language: *Consciousness of the figure is consciousness without knowledge of the ground (fond).* (MSME, 204)

We may say, therefore, with Merleau-Ponty that diacritical perception witnesses the birth of expression as a form of awakening or reawakening of meaning. Against an unformed background emerges a meaning which begins and re-begins, an expression which takes the form of a figure that is prefugured and refigured again and again, now here, now there, now here, now there. \(^{14}\) Hence the importance of Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of modulation: “Consider sensation itself, the act of sensing (*le sentir*), as the intervening of a figure on a *fond*. Modulation as a sound modulates silence. As a color modulates an open space by varying it. Every sign is diacritical.” (MSME, 206) And Merleau-Ponty adds significantly, “This is Valéry’s idea,” thereby indicating that his use of the term ‘diacritical’ is as indebted to literary poetics as it is to structural linguistics. Either way, this birth of meaning occurs not in the manner of a foundational cause (as in the old metaphysics) but as a diacritical play of visible and invisible, an embodied vigilance capable of signaling and resuscitating full being (*l’être total*) on the basis of a fragment. (MSME, 204-5) This diacritical interplay between figure and ground represents an endless reversibility—for what is one perceiver’s figure is another’s ground and vice versa. The diacritical art of perception, enacted in the advent of sensing, ultimately amounts to the displacement of nature (cause) by culture (expression).

In the 1953 lecture Notes, Merleau-Ponty offers one further telling illustration of the diacritical isomorphism of perception and language. He compares the perception of movement to the comprehension of a sentence. We only understand the beginning of a sentence from its end, he says, just as we only perceive movement in light of its goal. Perception does not follow something as it displaces itself from one fixed place to another, as if one solid object succeeded another; it proceeds rather as a wave which stretches back and forth across distances in the same manner as a sentence correlates through a whole linguistic field. Carnal sensation is a fold (*pli*) in the moving flesh of the world; there is no world without it and it cannot be without a world. “Like signs in language,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “the points traversed in movement have only a diacritical value; they do not function in themselves as places but rather as passages in the same way as words of a sentence are traces of an intention which (invisibly) transposes them.” (MSME, 205) Or to put it another way, perception operates like language in that it does not confront an ob-ject head on, but senses things which speak to it laterally, on the side, provoking one’s ‘complicity’ in the manner of an ‘obsession.’ Less objective than obsessionnal, then, the thing perceived ‘sollicits’ us (Valéry). Like an epiphany that calls for remembrance (Proust), or a poetic word which invites *co-naisance* (Claudel); or a pregnancy that years for birth and rebirth (Bachelard); or a frosted branch whose every crystal signals a whole order of emergent meanings (Stendhal). In all these examples, mostly drawn from literature, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting that each perception of the world constructs itself on the basis of an emerging part which solicits our co-creation of this world; just as language constructs itself in terms of a circular movement between a present part and absent whole. (Merleau-Ponty also uses the analogy of film montage where each frame functions in the movements between gaps across an invisible background).

\(^{13}\) I am very indebted to Emmanuel de Saint Aubert for bringing these passages to my attention, and especially those in his edited edition of Merleau-Ponty’s *College de France Lecture Notes of 1953* (*Le monde sensible et le monde de l’expression*), edited and introduced by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, 2011. In his “Introduction,” 19 f., de Saint Aubert offers a very illuminating commentary on this important notion of ‘diacritical perception’ in the later work of Merleau-Ponty. I would also like to express deep gratitude to my close colleague and friend, Kaisha Semenovitch, who first introduced me to the later Course Notes of Merleau-Ponty, especially those on ‘Nature.’

But it is important to remind ourselves here that the diacritical model of carnal interpretation is not a matter of voluntarist invention (à la Sartre). It is not a question of reading into something but of reading from something. We are solicited by the flesh of the world before we read ourselves back into it. Carnal reading and listening is as much reception as creation. And this is why I think Merleau-Ponty insists that the solicitation of our body schema functions symbolically, laterally, indirectly, like a sexual or ontological 'surprise.' Diacritical sensation, across distances and intervals, comes not just from us but from another person or thing that meets us ‘like a stranger in the dark.’ Merleau-Ponty cites Paul Valéry to make his point: "A man is nothing so long as nothing draws from him effects and productions which surprise him." (MSME, 205) But to be surprised one must be ready to receive, open to solicitation, prepared to partake of the thing sensed and symbolized. Every sense, as Merleau-Ponty concludes, has its own symbolique. Every carnal act and organ inscribes its own imaginaire. From sexual expression down to the act of eating itself. Nature is already culture as soon as we sense it as this or that. Sensation is expression and expression sensation. Flesh is word and word flesh. Hence the significance of Merleau-Ponty's description of perception in terms of a diacritical Eucharistic communion:

Just as the sacrament not only symbolizes, in sensible species, an operation of Grace, but is also the real presence of God, which it causes to occupy a fragment of space and communicates to those who eat of the consecrated bread, provided that they are inwardly prepared, in the same way the sensible has not only a motor and vital significance, but is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world suggested to us from some point in space, and seized and acted upon by our body, provided that it is capable of doing so, so that sensation is literally a form of communion.

What we have here is a basic analogy of proper proportionality: A is to B what C is to D. Namely, the sacrament of Eucharist is to the responsive communicant what the sensible is to the capable perceiver. Merleau-Ponty goes on to delineate this quasi-eucharistic power of the sensible as follows:

I am brought into relation with an external being, whether it be in order to open myself to it or to shut myself off from it. If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now a sacramental value, this is because the sentient

In other words, each sensory encounter with the strangeness of the world is an invitation to a 'natal pact' where, through what we might call diacritical sympathy, the human self and the strange world give birth to one another. Sacramental sensation is a reversible rapport between myself and others, wherein the sensible gives birth to itself through me.

What finer example of a carnal hermeneutics. Everyday perception as sacred food of the world.

Diacritical Readings of God after God

In the second part of this essay, I wish to address some key differences between Caputo's deconstructive reading of the 'Weak God' and my own diacritical reading of 'God after God.' The similarities are multiple and well rehearsed elsewhere, so here I confine my remarks to some variations of emphasis and inflection which demarcate our hermeneutic positions.

In our Montreal dialogue (SPEP 2011), Caputo asks about the relationship of our respective approaches to a 'poetics of the im-possible' —deconstructive and diacritical. We clearly agree that the notion of possibility which interests us transcends the binary opposition between the actual and the possible: an opposition which, in traditional metaphysics and modal logic, placed the former above the latter. Both of us endeavor to go beyond these conventional models of possibility as potentia (Aristotle and scholasticism) and possibilitas (Leibniz and the rationalists) following Heidegger's claim that 'in phenomenology possibility stands higher than actuality.' We concur on this and gesture toward a notion of 'possibility beyond the impossible' (as Angelus Silesius put it). So we are really aiming at the same phenomenon.

But where Caputo emphasizes the im-possible, I emphasize the hyper-possible. The hyper-possible, which is also a micro-possible, is something I have been seeking to explore from La Poétique du Possible (1984) to The God who May Be (2001). It is 'poetic' in proposing an imaginative crossover between an ontology of the 'loving possible' (after Heidegger's das mögende Vermögen) and an eschatology of the Perhaps (after Cusanus' Posses). Such 'onto-eschatology,' as I put it in The God who May Be, seeks to overcome the rigid metaphysics of presence twice (both as 'being-as-presence' and 'God-as-presence'). In terms of the second move, I propose a hermeneutic retrieval of the 'possible beyond the impossible' in keeping with Silesius and Cusanus. The latter's term Posses combines both posse and esse in a manner which opens both to a 'surplus of


16 Ibid.
meaning. So understood, Posses has nothing to do with the Omni-God of absolute and immutable sovereignty—the *Ipsum esse subsistens* or *ens causa sui*. It is a far cry from the Scholastic *actus purus non habens aliquid de potentialitate*—for it is so superabundant in possibility (beyond the impossible) that it calls for an endless posiblizing of what is in the light of what is to come: the God who may be. This Perhaps (Peut-être) is the powerless power which capacitates all living things, enabling what is not to become. The Maybe is this not-yet which promises to become flesh if we respond to its call. It calls like ‘the cry of a child in the street’ (Cusanus). For divine Posses is, paradoxically, a powerlessness which empowers us to become what we could not otherwise be. In short, it makes the impossible possible. When Joyce describes God as a ‘cry in the street’ (*Ulysses*), I believe he has something similar in mind.17

Let me offer some illustrations. Think of an AA meeting where the addict invokes a ‘higher power’ to enable him/her to overcome addiction—in other words, to make the impossible possible. The higher power (‘however one wishes to understand it’ as AA says) operates as a sacred non-sovereignty which enables a person, enslaved to habit, to surmount the disease and say yes to a healing power. But this healing cannot happen if one does not consent to its ostensibly impossible possibility. The first step of AA recovery, in sum, is the recognition of one’s ‘helplessness’ which in turn opens the possibility of receiving a promise of healing from someone or something ‘other’ than oneself, and equally important, is the twelfth step: Namely, the recognition—witnessed by a community of AA members—that this posibilizing of what is impossible does not stop with the recovered person but opens onto an endless healing process for others. Having been healed one becomes a sponsor of other addicts. Not surprisingly, Thomas Merton describes AA as one of most important spiritual movements of the 20th century.

This powerless power of Posses finds important testinomies in the great wisdom traditions of Western culture (our limited scope here alas) from ancient to modern times. Recall again the primal biblical scenes where Sarah under the Mamré tree and Mary in Nazareth are approached by strangers who announce that the impossible act of conceiving a child is possible. Each welcomes a higher power which makes the impossible possible: they give birth. (‘For what is impossible to man is possible to God’ as Luke says). This sacred Maybe is another name for ‘God After God,’ the ana-God who is always coming after the God who has already come, the sacred stranger who is forever still to arrive. *Deus adventurus*. But this phenomenon is by no means confined to biblical traditions. Similar scenes can be found in Greek culture, to wit, the famous exchange between Glaucon and Diomedes in the *Iliad* where they lay down their arms in the name of the sacred promise of hospitality. (*Xenia* is the highest virtue of Hellenic culture and the greatest god is Zeus *Xenias*). Here as elsewhere, the handshake is the inaugural gesture of civilization where enemies become guests and hostility converts to hospitality. A gesture repeated throughout the ages down to the famous handshakes of recent history where, in bold moments, impossible peace becomes possible—Gandhi, Mandela, Sadat, Havel, Hume.

But what, Caputo asks, distinguishes this divine posibilizing from Hegelian becoming? Why is the dia-critical poetics of the possible not just one more dialectical system? Why does not the double departure of God—the double AA of ‘ana’ signaling the death of the death of God— not fold back into an Hegelian synthesis? How does this differ from the negation of negation reaffirming itself as Absolute Concept? The *Aufhebung* of Spirit as new Self-identity?

First, unlike Hegel’s system, the Perhaps is about little things. It expresses itself in what I call a ‘micro-eschatology’ of theMaybe where infinity incarnates in infinitesimal thinness (*haecceitas*). Witness the poets: Hopkins’ celebration of the divine in the smallest ‘dappled things,’ Proust’s ‘petits miracles’ of sacramental surprise, Joyce’s epiphanies of unexpected advents like ‘a cry in the street.’ All of these escape the totalizing ‘Ruse of Reason.’ Where Hegel’s dialectic reduces the stranger to the Same, dialectical hermeneutics unfolds as a carnal hospitality to the stranger as Other; it embraces the alien or outcast who escapes the System.

The Perhaps contests the Dialectic’s claim to full adequation. It resists the lure of Total Resolution. Far from being some ‘immutable rock of ages’ or ‘unshakeable warrantor of a promise’ (as Caputo suspects), we find here the fragile risk of May-Be, the possibility to be that cannot be unless we incarnate it. As such *Posses* is an invitation rather than an invasion of human freedom. (And here, if there were more time, I would express some reservations about the violent terms associated with the Divine not only in Hegel but also in some of the later writings of Levinas and Derrida). For if the Perhaps contrives an *eschaton* it is as micro as the cry of a street child. The *micro-eschaton* is the opposite of the *Macro-Telos*. It refuses the speculative synthesis of a God-in-itself-for-itself. Understood diacritically, the *Posses* is not some dialectical conflation of the human and the divine: a temptation, we might note, not just for Hegel and the Idealists but also for any Process theology which construes God as an immanent becoming culminating in some Final Being.

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 transcendence and immanence. As such, ana-theism is diacritical in holding that two is better than one and that three (or four) is better still.

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Let me conclude with a last illustration of a diacritical poetics of the possible. Where might theo-poetics find a figure to describe the play of ‘ana’? Where locate an image to depict the double A-A of release and return, of leaving and arriving, receding and advancing, withdrawing and inviting, ceding and receiving? What might this double move look like? Here I propose to hermeneutically retrieve the metaphor of periherosis.

The God who may-be is not, as Caputo 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 periherosis: Perichora meaning a movement around, a circling about a center which, as chora, remains empty, a centerless center, 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’ (OED)—each divine person remains in part a stranger to the other, refusing to conflate or collapse into a fusion of totalizing identity. The trinitarian figures of Father, Son, and Spirit themselves refugue the earlier trinity of strangers who appear to Abraham and Sarah under the Mannre tree. And this primal scene of hosting the three strangers (hostes) marks the inaugural moment of Abrahamic hospitality: A moment which prefigures Andrei Rublev’s famous icon of the three divine persons seated as guests around the bowl/chora/womb/chalice. Thus we witness a mutual, chiasmic mirroring between New and Old testaments of the God-who-may-be and the humanity which enables this Word of promise to become flesh (in Sarah and Mary). The circular dance around the chora-center is guaranteed by the free space between each of the dancers. They move toward and away from each other each ceding place to the other so that each may sit down as guest at the table.

The Latin translation captures this ingeniously by offering a double graphic rendering of the phonetically identical terms—circum-in-cessus and circum-in-sessio. The swing-door of inward and outward hangs on the diacritical hinge of this c/s exchange. In the first option, the verb cedo conveys a gesture of surrendering one’s place to the incoming other, offering a free space in an act of self-emptying and self-giving. In the second option, the alternative spelling sedo/sessio describes a complementary gesture of moving inward, taking a seat as one moves towards the other’s place and receives the gift.14

Here we find diacritical hermeneutics at work in the naming of the eschaton in motion. A name which is at once dia-krinein (reading through) and ana-phorein (repeating again).

In this diacritical metaphor of Greek Eastern mysticism, we find a powerful rendering of the double play of immanence and transcendence, of position and disposition, of appropriation and disappropriation: The delicate and fecond tension between belonging and letting go. Inngelik and Gelassenheit. If this perichoretic tension is broken one risks lapsing back into the polar extremes of dogmatic theism (pure presence) or dogmatic atheism (pure absence). Perichoresis serves as a theopoetic image of the interplay between being and non-being, resisting both the ontological temptation of ‘total being’ as much as the ontological temptation of ‘no being at all.’ The chora at the heart of periherosis is that chiasmus of empty fullness and full emptiness so powerfully attested by the mystics of the great wisdom traditions, and famously captured in the Buddhist Heart Sutra—‘emptiness is form, form emptiness.’ Chora thus becomes the sacred ‘container of the uncontrollable’ (chora achoraton), celebrated in Greek murals of the Madonna’s womb as carrier of a child-to-come.15 And the mention of Greek here is also a reminder of how the chora of Plato’s Timaeus finds its place in Jerusalem. When it comes to chora we follow James Joyce’s formula: ‘Greek is Jewgreek. Extreme mete.’

The feminine womb at the core of the three-personed dance represents the perpetuation of human flesh, space and time at the heart of divinity. It signifies an eschatological May-be forever dedicated to amor mundi—love of the world. This inexhaustible space in the eschaton is what Gregory of Nyssa called epektasis: A cleft in the body of God which ensures that the promised Kingdom is a place of perpetual desire, of dunamis rather than stasis, of endless giving and receiving. And it is precisely this cleft which enables hosts to become guests and guests hosts in circles of endless motion. At the eschaton, at any moment, the more desire is answered the more it is reborn as desire: A desire beyond desire which foments desire. What is imagined here is open-ended eros. Excess breeding ceaseless natality, re-turning to life again and again, to God after God after God. But such an eschaton, I repeat, may be only if we allow it to take flesh. If we say yes. Like the Shulamite, like Sarah, like Molly Bloom. That is the wager of ana-theism. The risk of eros.

14 For further discussions of periherosis see The God Who May Be, 109-11; Strangers Gods and Monsters, 207 and Debates in Contemporary Philosophy, 26 and 288-290. By a felicitous double play, the letters of AA may be related to ana-theism as a two-step departure from the Omn-i-God of metaphysics—the first departure of a-theism from theism, and the second departure from this a-theism by way of a turn to ana-theism. The a-dieu which bids farewell to God is followed by a second a-dieu (in sense of ad-deum) which returns ‘toward’ a God after God. God here simply serves as a name for ‘what we hope for’ (Augustine), a name with many names (as the multiplicity of religions testify), names which seek to express the transformative promise of the Perhaps.


16 On Nyssa’s notion of epektasis, see my debate with Jean-Luc Marion, “Hermeneutics of Revelation,” in Debates in Contemporary Philosophy, 24, John Manoussakis, God after Metaphysics (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007), chs 5-6; and Tamsyn Jones, A Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2011), 31-32, 43, 49.
Let me respond finally, in summary fashion, to Caputo's main questions.

1) Caputo claims that the ana-God of diacritical hermeneutics is 'untouchable.' It is anything but. It begins with touch and taste (sapere)—the primary sensings of the infinite in the infinitesimal. Diacritical hermeneutics goes all the way down. It is carnal in its ascent and descent between gods and dogs.

2) Far from interpreting history as guaranteed by 'divine warranty,' ana-theism interprets every moment of human history as radical responsibility. The Ana-God is the opposite of the Alpha-God in that it promises a kingdom which cannot come unless we risk everything. Nothing is given in advance. Posses needs us for its esse. It is up to us. Hence the irreducibility of anatheism as hermeneutic wager.

3) Caputo contrasts my ana-theist reading of Perhaps with Derrida's deconstructive version. He claims the latter may be a 'promise or a threat'; and this, he says, constitutes the 'may-not' of undecidability inscribed within the May-be. For me, the may-not is, by contrast, a matter for us to decide on, not something intrinsic to the Maybe itself. The promise of Posses is, I hold, trustworthy in entrusting us with the task of enshrinement. Unconditional in its call but conditional on our response. The God-who-may-be is not itself a 'threat,' a 'monster,' a power of 'terror' or 'destruction'; not even in part or in potentia as in some Gnostic-Jungian-Schellingian notion of dark deity. What threatens destruction is uniquely 'our' free decision to refuse the promise of justice and goodness. The threat, if it comes, comes from us alone by not heeding the call of justice-to-come or by replacing it with our own construct of a sacrificial Omni-God. Posses invites reception and risks rejection—by us. Posses says 'let me become.' But we are the ones who say yes or no. In this respect, diacritical hermeneutics remains not just phenomenological—in its fidelity to lived experience—but profoundly existentialist in its commitment to human agency and freedom (often subverted, I find, in thinkers like Levinas and Derrida whose notion of the Other-in-me triumphs human initiative and choice).

4) As noted above, Caputo suspects that ana-theism is ultimately a crypto-Hegelianism. Before ending, I need to respond more precisely to this serious challenge. The 'ana' is, on Caputo's reading, about a third moment which comes to dialectically reconcile the opposed positions of theism and atheism. He thus reads the 'return' of ana-theism as a restoration of theism, albeit a second more mature version. Instead of such a 'sublated' God, Caputo proposes a deconstructive chora 'before' God.

But my position has always been that 'ana' refers to both a God before and after God—that is, a God of possibility who calls us prior to our wager of response, prior to becoming flesh in our lives. Anatheism is not Hegelian 'recomposition,' as Caputo claims. It is a radical dis-position which both precedes and follows the opposed positions of theism and atheism. As such it can lead, again and again, to new re-positionings (ana-theist theism or ana-theist atheism); but it never represents a Terminal Solution. If there is a choice of faith after atheism and atheism, it is not a restoration of some propositional belief in divine being but rather a fides that expresses itself as fides. Or better still as confessus in the sense of entrusting oneself to the promise, having confidence in the possibility of its impossible arrival, confiding in the word becoming flesh. And if one wishes to extend anatheist faith to the question of truth, I would say it is a matter of trust as 'by my troth' and betrothal (fiancailles). God as confidant and fiancé! As in the nuptial theo-erotics of the Song of Songs. So, re-turning to God after God should be read not as Hegelian re-collection (Erinnerung), but as perpetual turning anew in ever extending circles. This is what defines the re-turning (the 're'-understood as 'ana') as a perpetual desiring and seeking 'after' God. Not only ab-deo but ad-deum, in the double 'à-dieu' of a-dieu (a crucial dia-critical accent). Hence a God of 'hope against hope'—as Caputo rightly claims.

5) So let me return, finally, to the question of the 'third.' Caputo writes: "By 'Hegelian' I mean that everything culminates in a moment of the 'third'. . . . of a more mature correction of two moments that, taken by themselves are one sided and... letting their momentum unfold into a third, higher, concrete unity." I have answered the charge of abstraction (under 1) above. Now let me address the question of the 'third.' Ana is not about three but four. It opens from and onto the fourth dimension of chora which alone keeps the three persons free and mobile.


23 We might think of an analogy here with the role of a fourth dimension in physics where it is only in an extra dimension that three-dimensional partial spatial views can be brought together to give an entire view. Since one sees only slices at any given time (e.g., slices of different proportions), is it in the extra fourth dimension that they are brought together to constitute a full perspective. In the four-dimensional analogy, solid three-dimensional objects change shape as we view three-dimensional slices of their full four-dimensional shapes. I am grateful to my friend and physicist from Harvard University, Leon Golub, for this suggestion.

Notions of a pivotal Fourth dimension or 'Fourthfold' (das Geviert) are also to be found in depth psychology (Jung) and fundamental ontology (Hedegger). I am grateful to Amy Bently Lamborn for bringing the Jungian notion of the Fourth to my attention, in relation to our own hermeneutic proposal of a Fourth Reduction (in addition to the phenomenological reductions of Husserl, Heidegger and Marion), see Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward
Without the chora of Sarah’s womb (represented in Rublev’s iconic bowl offered to the three strangers under the Mamre tree) there would have been no Isaac, Jacob or prophets. Without the chora of Mary’s womb there would have been no Christ. And, by extension, without the chora within each one of us—open to receive strangers every moment of our lives—there would be no landing site for the advent of the Maybe. The Fourth dimension is what keeps the door ajar. And it is telling, I think, that the highest level of meaning in classic hermeneutics is analogy, a fourth mystical-ecstatic meaning which surpasses and subsumes the other three (literal, moral, and allegorical).

So when I say ana is the figure of four, not three, might I be coming close to what Caputo calls the ‘innumerable’? Where we differ, I suspect, is on the question of ‘decomposition.” In radical hermeneutics,” says Caputo, “one seeks not a higher composition but a decomposition, a deconstruction of each one (of the three) in its place.” Diacritical hermeneutics tries to avoid both alternatives—composition and decomposition—in the name of a dis-position that comes before and after these ‘positions’: A disposing toward the Maybe that never stops coming as the Fourth which promises, knocks, calls and—if we open the door—becomes the stranger at our table. “You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat. So I did sit and eat.” (George Herbert). The Fourth is the time-space where host and guest exchange places, without end. Four is the cardinal number of perichoresis.

6) And kenosis? I fully share Caputo’s critique of classical kenosis as the act of an Omni-God only willing to give up absolute Power so as to get it back with interest. Here kenosis is no more than divine investment in a rigged market. The ana-theist understanding of kenosis, by contrast, fully accepts a Maybe exposed to ‘fragility, contingency and provisionality.’ For while the Maybe is unconditional in its loving it is utterly conditional upon us for embodying and realizing this love. God is impotent without us. The God-who-may-be calls. The rest is up to us.

Micro-Eschatology,” and John P Manoussakis, “The Fourth Reduction: Toward a Fourth Reduction,” in John Manoussakis, ed., After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). The Fourth Reduction leads us back before/beneath/beyond the first three reductions (Essence, Being and Gift) to the sacred-prolane Flesh. Here we find the source of sacred hermeneutics in the ‘least of these’ (elachiston): “The highest in the lowest, the first in the last, the infinite in the infinitesimal. One might mention here, finally, the Fourth as the ultimate level of meaning in traditional hermeneutic readings, namely, the ‘anagogical’ or mystical/spiritual meaning of a word or passage beyond the three standard meanings, literal, moral and allegorical. Anagogy comes from the Greek terms ana (up) and eisodos, to lead.

22 See my discussion with Derins on our respective (hermeneutic and deconstructive) readings of resurrection and reconciliation in “Terror, Religion, and the New Politics,” in Debates in Contemporary Philosophy, 5-14.

23 See my frequent discussions of kenosis in Anatheism, 52-53, 133-137, 159-160. The exaltation opens kenotically onto the innumerable, constantly amplifying the inter-personal circles as it safeguards the inescapable chora, woman, emptiness at its centerless center. It thus expresses the gap of distance and difference—the cut and clef of kenosis—between each of its persons in a dance without end.

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