Chapter 2

Ricoeur and Biblical Hermeneutics:
On Post-Religious Faith

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Paul Ricoeur spoke of faith as "the joy of yes in the sadness of no," and once described his own Protestant belief as a "chance converted into destiny by a constant choice." He understood that nothing about God could be taken for granted. Indeed, having lived for five years in German captivity during World War II, Ricoeur knew that there could be no return to faith that did not fully acknowledge the dark traversal of the abyss. He also recognized that the trenchant critiques of religion, delivered by atheists such as Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, had to be taken seriously. In this way he was prepared to ask: What comes after God? What follows in the wake of our letting go of God? What emerges out of that night of not-knowing, that moment of abandoning and abandonment, especially for those who – after ridding themselves of "God" – still seek God?

Implicit in such questions is the desire for a way beyond the extremes of dogmatic theism and militant atheism – a way we might term "anatheism." Ana-theos, God after God. Such a post-religious faith is, I will argue, intimated both in the writings and the spirited integrity of Paul Ricoeur. He understood this need for another way of seeking and sounding the things we consider to be sacred but can never contain. The sacred is another word for getting back what we’ve given up, as if we were encountering it for the first time – just as Abraham received back Isaac as gift after having given him up as patriarchal project. It is another way of returning to a God beyond the God we thought we possessed. And at stake in this movement of return and reception is not a simple “overcoming” of religion, but a reopening of that space where we are free to choose between faith or non-faith – to inhabit the option of retrieved belief. When Ricoeur endeavors to set forth the character and conditions of a post-religious faith, he is concerned to retrieve this option that operates before as well as after the division between theism
and atheism, making both of them possible. Put in the terms of a phenomenological hermeneutic, this amounts to 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. It is a scene that arises according to what Ricoeur, in a similar vein, has called a “tensional” model of metaphor: a fertile encounter between the familiar and the foreign (a scene we will observe in the Song of Songs, e.g.). This, after all, is an option for revisiting the sacred that Gerard Manley Hopkins imagined through various names —“aftering,” “seconding,” “over-and-overing,” or simply “abiding again” by the “bidding” of the everyday. All these verbs are variations on the prefix ana-, defined as “up, in place or time, back, again, anew.” They designate, for my own work and for that of Ricoeur, a process of retrieving the divine in a world ostensibly estranged from God, recovering the sacred in a time of disenchantment (Entzauberung) — what Charles Taylor describes as a secularized universe where God’s existence is no longer taken for granted.

Critical Hermeneutics and the Atheistic Guest

Since Ricoeur is ever a thinker of the text, it is fitting that we make our way into the movement of this post-critical faith by way of his texts and the option they evoke. We begin, appropriately, with his postwar essay, “Religion, Atheism, Faith,” and the manner in which such categories may play both “host” and “stranger” to one another. Ricoeur speaks here of the “religious meaning of atheism,” suggesting that an atheistic purging of the negative and life-denying components of religion needs to be taken on board if a genuine form of faith is to emerge in our secular culture. Assuming the role of a “philosopher” rather than a “preacher,” Ricoeur seeks to indicate certain possibilities of such a post-atheistic faith, rather than fill in the details of what such a faith might mean in a confessional or liturgical context. The discourse of the philosopher is always, he says, that of the perpetual beginner, a “preparatory discourse.” And he adds that this is timely in our period of contemporary confusion, “where the true consequences of the death of religion perhaps still remain concealed,” requiring a “long, slow and indirect preparation.”

Two underlying elements of religion that call for radical critique, on this view, are taboo and refuge. Under the first heading we have the archaic religious feeling of fear, or more particularly, fear of divine punishment and expiation. Under the second, we find the need for protection and
consolation. Ricoeur defines religion, accordingly, as a "primitive structure of life which must always be overcome by faith and which is grounded in the fear of punishment and the desire for protection." In this context, atheism discovers its true justification not only as destructive but also liberating. For as it exposes the dissimulating mechanisms of religious fear and infantile dependency – thereby destroying its destructiveness – it can also emancipate new possibilities of existing. And one of these possibilities, suggests Ricoeur, involves a faith situated beyond the level of accusation and protection. In this manner, atheism may be said to emancipate religion from itself, opening the promise of a living faith tucked within the shell of historical religion. That at any rate seems to be Ricoeur's wager regarding a "post-religious faith."

Under the first category of taboo, Ricoeur invokes the salutary critiques of both Freud and Nietzsche. Unlike other philosophers – for example, British empiricists or Enlightenment positivists who attack religion on scientific grounds as undemonstrable – Freud and Nietzsche developed a new kind of atheistic critique, namely, the critique of religion as a cultural representation of disguised symptoms of fear and need. In this way they did not bother with arguments for proving or disproving the existence of God but concentrated on deconstructing religion to the extent that it is operative in forms of prohibition, accusation, and punishment. They thus advanced a critical "hermeneutics of suspicion" directed toward the illusions of religion and determined to unmask the hidden motivations behind religious piety. This critical hermeneutics took the form of a genealogy resolved to expose religion as the symptom of a conflict of underlying forces. Nietzsche identified the main ulterior motive as a "will to power," and Freud as a perverted expression of libido resulting in "obsessive compulsion" and neurosis. The aim of Nietzsche's genealogical readings was to show that the so-called ideal realm of religion is in fact "nothing": a cover-up for a denial of life, an illusory projection of a supersensible world driven by calumny of this earth. The aim of Freud's psychoanalytic exposé, for its part, was to show that religion operates on the basis of a delusional "phantasm of the primal Father" responding to our infantile dependency. The answer, Freud suggested in his book on Leonardo DaVinci, was a "renunciation" of this Illusory Father, constructed as a double fantasy of fear and protection. Only by means of such a radical mourning of the divine Superego, only by letting-go of this phantasm of absolute authority and refuge, could the origin of values be restored to itself, that is, to Eros in its eternal struggle with Thanatos.

So Nietzsche and Freud, in their respective voices, announce the "death of God." But the question (once again) is: which God? Ricoeur suggests that it
is the God of onto-theology, and that such a God deserves to die. The term “onto-theology” was brought into common parlance by Martin Heidegger to refer to the metaphysical concept of a highest and most general Being abstracted from the lived world.\textsuperscript{9} In Western intellectual history it often coincided with a moralizing deity of accusation and condemnation. Atheistic critique set out to accuse the accusation and condemn the condemnation. It sought to unveil the nihilism at the core of the religious delusion, to reveal the Superego’s lack of power, the Ideal world’s collusion with nay-saying and death. Or as Nietzsche put it, when something is leaning give it a push.\textsuperscript{10} Atheism, in this sense, is a way in which the illusions of religion self-destruct, exposing themselves for what they truly are: nothing. And so dies the omnipotent God of onto-theology understood as Emperor of the World.

So also dies the omniscient God of “self-sufficient knowledge,” which places the “powerful over the good and law over love and humility that are superior to law.”\textsuperscript{11} And along with the omnipotent and omniscient God goes the omnipresent God who condones evil as well as good. So dies, in short, the Omni-God of theodicy, invoked to justify the worst atrocities as part of some Ultimate Design. This is the God rightly dismissed, in our day, by Richard Dawkins when he invites us to imagine a world with:

no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian Partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as “Christ-killers,” no Northern Ireland “troubles,” no “honor killings,” no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money (“God wants you to give till it hurts”). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing some of it.\textsuperscript{12}

After the hermeneutics of suspicion has done its work, it is no longer possible to return, in Ricoeur’s words, “to an order of moral life which would take the form of a simple submission to commandments or to an alien or supreme will, even if this will were represented as divine.” That is why he urges that we acknowledge the positive good of the critique of ethics and religion undertaken by the school of suspicion. From it, he argues, we learn that “the commandment that gives death, not life, is a product and projection of our own weakness.”\textsuperscript{13} If atheism remains simply a negation, however, it runs the risk of being merely re-active rather than active. The rebel falls short of the prophet. The accusation of accusation, while necessary, may fail to return to a pure affirmation of life, that is, to a recognition that all things in our secular universe
are in fact, already and always, sacred at heart. Nietzsche did, to be sure, speak of an "innocence of becoming" and embraced the "eternal recurrence of the same." And it is easy to forget that the "madman" who declared God to be dead began his declaration with the words "I seek God." But by declaring the will to power to be the primary truth of existence, Nietzsche remained confined within a voluntarist universe: a world where even the reaffirmation of life becomes a sort of personal mythology, a willful lyricism of animus and projection, a private fantasy of how things might be, albeit this time on the side of yeasayers rather than naysayers.

Hence the option of anatheism. And I stress that it is an "option" rather than a necessity. Anatheism, as signaled in Ricoeur, offers the possibility of retrieving a post-atheistic faith. It allows for a return to a post-religious theism in the wake of Freud and Nietzsche. For Ricoeur, the philosopher as a responsible thinker remains suspended between atheism and faith, between the secular and the sacred. As such, a critical hermeneutic opens up a space where the "prophetic preacher" may envisage the retrieval of a liberated faith within the great religious traditions. Ricoeur imagines in this context a "radical return to the origins of Jewish and Christian faith," a journey at once "originary and postreligious," which speaks to our time. The philosopher dreams of a prophet who would realize today the liberating message of Exodus that exists prior to the law: "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2). He or she dreams of a faith that speaks of freedom and that proclaims the Cross and Resurrection as invitations to a more creative life, a belief that articulates the contemporary relevance of the Pauline distinction between Spirit and Law and that interprets "sin" less as the breaking of taboo than as the refusal of life. In such a scenario, sin would be exposed as a life lived fearfully "in the infernal cycle of law, transgression and guilt." But the philosopher can only dream of such a faith. It is the business of post-religious believers to actually promote it. The philosopher finds himself in an "intermediate time" between mourning the gods who have died and invigilating the signs of a new return. While looking forward to a "positive hermeneutics," which would be a recreation of the Biblical kerygma – the prophets and the primitive Christian community – the philosopher cannot, says Ricoeur, enter that promised land. For the philosopher's responsibility is to "think," that is, "to dig beneath the surface of the present antimony until he has discovered the level of questioning that makes possible a mediation between religion and faith by way of atheism."

Ricoeur's argument here is deeply anatheistic. It suggests that to think religiously is to think post-religiously. And it acknowledges that the best an
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anatheist philosopher can do is to disclose a site where the freedom of our human will is rooted in listening to a “word” of which one is neither source nor master. This disclosure, this listening, is one step into a moment that may constitute an antidote to dogmatic theism and atheism. With Dostoyevsky, it may be that moment in which true faith “bursts forth from the crucible of doubt.”[^18] But it is also a moment, or movement rather, that refuses all absolute talk about the absolute, negative or positive; for it acknowledges that the absolute can never be understood absolutely by any single person or religion. I believe Ricoeur would here acknowledge the liberating force of critical atheism as an integral part of genuine theism, understood as a second faith beyond faith. And he would likewise respect an agnostic atheism that remains just that – a-gnosis, not-knowing – choosing not to make the second move of faith. Indeed, this attention to a primordial event of the word and meaning is the fitting vocation of an anatheist who, at least when philosophizing, provisionally brackets out metaphysical questions of “God” and “religion.” It is a form of existential hearkening to the coming and going, the being and non-being, of meaning prior to any confessional or institutional identification of the nature of that word. But in attending to this landing site, this disposition to listen and receive (often in silence) from something beyond one’s own mastering will, the anatheist philosopher can prepare the ground for believers who may later wish to release the kerygma of their faith from the prison-house of obligation and trepidation.

Listening philosophically to the word of existence may thus help us to listen theologically to the word of God, without confounding the two. For existential listening, in Ricoeur’s view, allows us to restore our originary affirmation of life, our primordial desire to be: a desire that preexists the many distortions that have made it a stranger to itself. It invites us to start all over again, from the beginning: Repetition, Recapitulation [Anakephalaiaosis]. The word of existence – which affirms the goodness of being in spite of its multiple estrangements – speaks according to the grammar of the prefix ana-. “This affirmation must be recovered and restored,” as Ricoeur says, “because (and here the problem of evil emerges) it has been alienated in many ways. This is why it must be regrasped and reinstated. The task of ethics is thus the reappropriation of our effort to exist. Since our power has been alienated however, this effort remains a desire, the desire to be.”[^19] Without this ana-ethical turning and returning to existence, the option of anatheist faith is not possible. There is, insists Ricoeur, something that precedes the order of will and obligation and this something is nothing else than “our existence in so far as it is capable of being modified
by word.” In sum, anatheism may be said to express both an existential desire and an eschatological faith.

A certain “gap” will always remain between the philosopher’s endless exploration of new beginnings in existence and the practitioner’s proclamation of a return to the word of God. But in spite of this gap, concedes Ricoeur, a certain “correspondence” may appear between a theology that retrieves its own origins and a philosophy that embraces atheism’s critique of religion. Anatheism might be described as an attempt to respond to this correspondence. Ricoeur himself does not use this term, but I believe he prepares the ground for a recovery of God after God in his account of what such a recovery might entail:

It would return to the roots of Judeo-Christian faith while also being a new beginning for our time . . . It would be a faith that moves forward through the shadows, in a new “night of the soul” — to adopt the language of the mystics — before a God who would not have the attributes of “Providence,” a God who would not protect me but would surrender me to the dangers of a life worthy of being called human. Is not this God the Crucified One, the God who, as Bonhoeffer says, only through his weakness is capable of helping me?

He concludes his essay on religion and atheism thus: “The night of the soul means above all the overcoming . . . of fear, the overcoming of nostalgia for the protecting father figure. Beyond the night, and only beyond it, can we recover the true meaning of the God of consolation, the God of Resurrection . . .”

Nothing is lost in anatheism. Or rather what is lost, as possession, can be retrieved as gift, revisited after the salutary night of atheistic critique — just as Job received back all he lost, and Abraham received back Isaac, and Jesus received his life after death. Even the loving “father” of creation may be anathetically retrieved as a symbol of life. For if Biblical religion represented God as a Father and atheism bids us renounce the fetish of the father, anatheism suggests that, once overcome as idol, the image of the Father may be recovered as symbol, a symbol generous in its semantic and gender implications. “This symbol,” suggests Ricoeur, “is a parable of the foundation of love; it is the counterpart, within a theology of love, of the progression that leads from simple resignation to poetic life.” Whence his summary of the religious meaning of atheism: “An idol must die so that a symbol of being may begin to speak.”
Last Testaments and the Eucharistic Hope

Almost forty years after this radical reflection, Ricoeur returns to the question of death and resurrection in his final testament, *Vivant jusqu'à la mort* (2007). Written shortly after the death of his wife, Simone, and revisited as he himself was dying, the author here blurs the distinction between the philosopher and the preacher, and confides to his reader with unprecedented candor. His confidences, in my view, amount to the confessions of an anatheist. Speaking of a certain kind of “grace” accompanying the experience of death, Ricoeur notes that

it is not important for this moment of grace that the dying person identifies with a particular religion or confession. Indeed maybe it is only when faced with death that the religious becomes one with the Essential and that the barrier dividing religions (and non-religions like Buddhism) are transcended. Because dying is trans-cultural it is also trans-confessional and trans-religious.24

Admitting his basic suspicion of “immediacy and fusion,” Ricoeur makes one exception for “the grace of a certain dying.”25 He talks about this grace as a “paradox of immanent transcendence,” of an especially “intimate transcendence of the Essential which rips through the veils of confessional religious codes.”26 To encounter such authentic grace one must, Ricoeur writes, forgo the will for one’s own personal salvation by transferring this hope onto others.

Here again we confront the basic scriptural paradox that “he who clings to his life loses it and he who lets it go gains it.” Or to put it in James Joyce’s terms, “without sundering there is no reconciliation.” In this context, Ricoeur offers a startlingly refreshing reading of the Eucharist as a celebration of blood-as-wine, transubstantiation being taken as a sign of life and sharing rather than a token of sacrificial blood-letting.27 The Eucharistic commemoration of the giving of one’s life – “Do this in memory of me” – thus becomes an affirmation of the gift of life to and for the other rather than an anxiety about personal physical survival after death. In other words, when Christ said “it is finished,” he meant it. He was offering up his own personal life, in a second gesture of kenotic emptying (the first being the descent of divinity into flesh), so as to give life to others, in *both* service (Luke 22: 27) *and* sacrament: the breaking of bread at Emmaus, the cooking of fish for his disciples in the form of the risen servant, and ever after,
down through human history, in the guise of feeding the “least of these.” Ricoeur concludes his terminal testament with this remarkable note:

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. Hence the link between death-rebirth in the other and service as gift of life. Hence also the link between service and feast. The Last Supper conjoins the moment of dying unto oneself and the service of the other in the sharing of food and wine which joins the man of death to the multitude of survivors reunited in community. And this is why it is remarkable that Jesus never theorized about this and never said who he was. Maybe he didn’t know, for he lived the Eucharistic gesture, bridged the gap between the imminence of death and the community beyond. He marked a passage to glory (through suffering and death) without any sacrificial perspective.28

What Ricoeur is rejecting here, it seems to me, is the notion of Christ’s death as a scapegoating ritual of bloodletting to propitiate a divine blood-lust. He is not rejecting Christ’s act of “sacrificing” his life out of love for others. Ricoeur’s intention is, I believe, deeply anatheistic in its return to a post-sacrificial Eucharist of sharing with the stranger, the other, the uninvited guest. Indeed, the fact that Ricoeur calls himself a “Christian who writes philosophically” rather than a “Christian philosopher” seems to me significant here. For in so doing he is acknowledging the importance of a gap that allows us to freely and imaginatively revisit, and at times retrieve, the often forgotten resources of traditional religion.

But there is one last question I wish to ask of Ricoeur: “What exactly does he mean when he speaks of God as a dieu capable, a capable God?” Always one to oppose schismatic oppositions, Ricoeur suggests that the critical encounter between the categories of Greek ontology and biblical theology involved in the translation of Exodus 3:14, opens up new resources for understanding the nature of the divine as being-capable or enabling. (Indeed he might well agree with Derrida that between the “tragic” being of Athens and the “messianic” alterity of Jerusalem, there is “philosophy.”)29 Noting the traditional rendition of the Hebrew ehyeh asher ehyeh as “I am who am,” Ricoeur is more interested in alternative renditions such as “I am who may be” or “I am who will be with you.” The latter acknowledges a certain “divine dynamism” in the Hebrew formulation that in Greek and Latin amplifies the existing range of ontological categories of being and non-being.30 Of particular interest here are the connotations of promise, becoming, and futurity that the Exodic formula contains. Ricoeur is intrigued by the fertile tension emerging from the crossing-over of Greek
ontology and Biblical theology. "It is truly the verb 'to be,' but in none of the senses found in the Greek," he writes, "There is a sort of enlargement of the meaning of being as a being-with, or being-faithful, that is, the being as accompaniment of a people, another dimension of being."31 When Aristotle says there are many meanings of being, he had not, says Ricoeur, imagined the being of Exodus 3:14. Ricoeur endorses a mutual amplification of ontologies in the various translations between Greek and Hebrew.

Here, finally, we encounter what might be called an eschatology of the possible shared by philosophers and theologians alike. Eschatology is, by Ricoeur's own admission, his intellectual and spiritual "secret."32 It usually arises at the end of certain hermeneutic analyses (e.g., Freud and Philosophy) in a relatively allusive fashion. The Greek term "eschaton" serves as a limit-concept for Ricoeur's work in both philosophy and theology, as suggested by his embrace — in Thinking Biblically — of a medial position between "philosophical theology" and "theological philosophy."33 This latter-day acknowledgment of an eschatological posse marks something of a departure from Ricoeur's earlier reservation — what he called his "methodological asceticism" — regarding the intermingling of philosophy and theology.34

In an intriguing essay on the Song of Songs entitled "The Nuptial Metaphor," Ricoeur pushes his eschatological secret to the point of rhapsodic avowal.35 Here we find the eschatological potential of the divine responding to the liturgical power of the human in the form of a theo-erotic crossing. Commenting on verse 8:6 of the Song — where the shortened and unprecedented allusion to God (shalhevetyah) appears as yah — Ricoeur notes that the famous "seal of alliance" inscribed on the human heart is to be understood as both wisdom and desire.

Under the apple tree I awakened you
There where your mother conceived you
Set me as a seal upon your heart . . .
For love is as strong as death . . .
Its flame a flash of sacred fire (shalhevetyah) . . .

(Song of Songs 8:5–7)

Here, suggests Ricoeur, we have a discreet eschaton that respects the incognito of an intimate corps-à-corps where human and divine desires traverse each other. In this nuptial traversal, the "I can" of human being finds its correspondent in the "You can" of sacred love. L'homme capable and le dieu capable respond to each other in an act of daring complicity and co-creation. And it is no accident, I suspect, that Ricoeur chooses the term
"metaphor" to describe this divine-human exchange, for metaphor is, as noted earlier, precisely that "tensive" power of language that comes alive in the crossing of ostensible opposites — immanent-transcendent, sensible-intelligible, finite-infinite. Reading this text, one realizes that for Ricoeur the divine is "capable" precisely because it is eros as well as agape. a dynamic potency (dunamis, conatus, appetitus) that expresses itself as a desire that is less lack than surplus, an eschatological desire to make human beings more capable of new genesis, incarnation, and natality. Desire to be (désir à être) rather than lack of being (manque à être). Desire beyond desire. Anathe-ist desire is a love that answers desire with more desire — and death with more life. And in such a process of mutual traversal, desire surely reveals "God" as another name for the "more," the "surplus," the "surprise" that humans seek.

So what are the implications of such a "capable God" for concrete questions of living and dying? Such an eschatological posse, for Ricoeur, implies a God of enabling service rather than of sacrificial blood-letting, a God who is willing to efface his own being for the sake of giving more being to his beloved creatures. In this sense, we may speak of a God beyond religion (in the sense of confessional absolutism), or at the very least of an inter-religious or trans-religious God. I think Ricoeur comes close at this terminal juncture to his Parisian friend, Stanislas Breton, who espoused a form of mystical kenosis whereby divinity becomes "nothing" in order that humanity can become more fully human.36 The notion of divine posse — of an enabling God who says "You are capable!" — repudiates all forms of theodicy and theocracy by returning power and responsibility to humans. And it is interesting that on this point, Ricoeur specifically invokes the great Rhine mystics who "renounced themselves" for the sake of opening to the Essential, to the point of being, in their contemplative detachment, incredibly active in the creation of new orders, in teaching, traveling, and tending to the forgotten of this world. By being available like this to the Essential they were motivated to "transfer the love of life onto others."37

God thus becomes a God after God, a God who no longer is but who may be again in the form of renewed life. Such a divinity is "capable" of making us "capable" of sacred life, and it does so by emptying divine being into non-being so as to allow for rebirth into more being: life more fully alive. In this option for natality over mortality, the dichotomy between before and after death may be refigured. The space of anatheism opens onto this "may be." But it is a space of free possibility — beyond impossibility — never a fait accompli. Nothing can be taken for granted. Wagers are called for, again and again.
Notes

5 Ibid., 441.
6 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 460.
23 Ibid., 467. See also Ricoeur, “The Critique of Religion,” in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, eds. Charles Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 213f. Ricoeur talks of returning to a second naïveté of authentic faith after the dogmatic prejudices of the first naïveté have been purged. He speaks accordingly of debunking false religious fetishisms so that the symbols of the eschatological sacred may speak again. Anthony Steinbock sketches a similar move in his distinction between a genuine “vertical” experience of the sacred and “idolatrous”


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 47.

27 Ibid., 90.

28 Ibid., 91; emphasis in the original.

29 See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 131. The full quote is: "No philosophy responsible for its language can renounce ipseity in general, and the philosophy or eschatology of separation may do so less than any other. Between original tragedy and messianic triumph there is *philosophy*, in which violence is returned against violence within knowledge, in which original finitude appears, and in which the other is respected within, and by, the same" (emphasis in the original).


34 Ibid.

35 Ricoeur, "The Nuptial Metaphor," in *Thinking Biblically*, 265f. See Ricoeur’s final reference to our notion of divine *Posse* in one of the last “Fragments” of *Vivant jusqu’à la mort* (129–130). This occurs in the context of Ricoeur’s discussion of Marc Philonenko’s reading of the “Our Father.” Remarking that we are concerned in this prayer less with a statement about God’s being (the fact that God is) than an invocation to action and doing, Ricoeur sees here a movement beyond a traditional metaphysics of being to an eschatology of “possibility.” “Une invocation s’adresse à un Dieu qui peut ce qu’il faut” (our italics). Dans les demandes en tu, il est demandé à Dieu de faire qu’il règne . . . Peut-être un Dieu du *posse* (Richard Kearney). La vision eschatologique est celle d’une complétude de l’Agir” (129–130). Returning to his oft-repeated desire for a hermeneutical re-reading of Aristotle’s dialectic of possibility and actuality, Ricoeur notes that Christ’s appeal to the Father takes the form not just of wish but of expectancy, an act of trust in the accomplishment of action (agir). Here Ricoeur sees a “coupling” of capacities, human and divine, seeking to be realized in a “coupling” of actions. “Forgive us as we forgive others,” and so on. “Le comme opère verbalement ce que la symétrie inégale des deux agir opère effectivement” (130). Ricoeur concludes with an eschatological reinterpretation of Aristotle’s ontology of potency and act, involving a new hermeneutic “coupling,” with its


37 Ricoeur, *Vivant jusqu’à la mort*, 76. Other significant contributions to the “God after Metaphysics” debate – which emerged in the wake of the “theological turn” in phenomenology (Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Yves Lacoste, Michel Henry) and in deconstruction (Derrida) – include the recent work of thinkers such as John Caputo, John Manoussakis and Mark Taylor. These thinkers have explored the idea of a messianicity without metaphysics, calling this, paradoxically but tellingly, a “religion without religion.” Caputo’s own notion of the “weakness of God” stems from a reading of Christian kenosis in light of a deconstructionist complicity between mysticism and atheism that, as noted earlier, was already identified by Derrida in *Sauf le Nom*. Manoussakis and Taylor develop somewhat different conclusions to their respective books, both titled *After God*, the former veering in a more theistic direction, the latter in a more atheistic one.