

**DRAFT**

## *Chapter Five*

# **Embrace and Differentiation**

*A Phenomenology of Eros*

Emmanuel Falque and Richard Kearney

Richard Kearney (RK): It is a great pleasure to have Emmanuel Falque here this evening as part of this joint seminar to discuss the questions of desire, body, and the flesh.<sup>1</sup> As requested, we will be going back and forth between the philosophies of eros analyzed in our recent volumes—my *Carnal Hermeneutics* (co-edited with Brian Treanor) and Emmanuel’s *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*. I will ask Emmanuel to speak in a moment; then I will respond and we’ll have a conversation. But a few words of introduction first. Emmanuel Falque has done a very brave thing in “crossing the Rubicon” (to quote the title of another of his books). He has dared to mix the waters of phenomenology and theology, which was rather taboo in France and Germany for much of the last century, and on the Continent generally, particularly after Husserl said that we must bracket religious matters when doing phenomenology (not that he always observed that bracketing himself). This position of methodological agnosticism was radicalized by Heidegger in his Tübingen address on philosophy and theology. Never the twain shall meet—that was normative for several generations of phenomenologists. And even Ricœur and Levinas always made a point of saying that their philosophy was not theology; when they did discuss religion it was in separate publications. For example, Levinas had his Talmudic lectures, and Ricœur had his *Thinking Biblically*. But they kept philosophy and religion separate—or rather, they tried to; the separation was never totally watertight in their later writings. Then a new generation of phenomenologists and hermeneuts came along at the end of the century and brought philosophy and religion into dialogue again with the famous “theological turn,” to use Dominique Janicaud’s term. Some of them, like Marion, didn’t say that they were doing this at first, but

they did it anyway; others, like Falque, Lacoste, and Chrétien, did say that this was what they were doing. I think this bold crossing of theology and phenomenology is remarkable, and you will witness an example of it in Emmanuel's presentation here today.

Emmanuel Falque (EF): Thank you, Richard. I will be speaking mainly about the sixth chapter of *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb* (entitled "Embrace and Differentiation"). In this chapter, as in all my books, philosophy and theology are intertwined but also separated. There I take up the question "What does 'This is my body' mean?" And this is not only a theological and liturgical question but is also a philosophical and erotic question, or even an erotic experience. In my opinion, we cannot separate theology and experience: if you are studying theology, you have to link the dogmatic concept to an experience because if you don't do that, the dogmatic concept always remains empty. So in my *Philosophical Triduum* I try to link the question of resurrection (Easter Sunday) to that of birth (in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*), the question of Gethsemane (Good Friday) to that of suffering and death (in *The Guide to Gethsemane*), and the question of the Last Supper (Holy Thursday) to that of body, desire, and the flesh (in *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*).

In that latter book, I aim to show that we have to distinguish the heritage of the Eucharist, its content, its modality, and its aim, and I explain that the heritage of the Eucharist is animality. Although it is not strange to speak of animality in a work of philosophy (Heidegger spoke of it, after all!), it might seem strange to do so in a work of theology, since in theology we do not distinguish between animality and bestiality and therefore reject animality. In fact, however, we must reject not animality but only bestiality, which is one way of living our animality—but certainly not the only one.

RK: Has anyone before you talked about the animality of Christ? At first blush, it seems rather scandalous, even blasphemous, as a statement. But that is, of course, to ignore how the God of the Bible is often compared to an animal—the Lion of Judah, the Dove of peace, the Eagle of wisdom, the Lamb of innocence. Though not as often, or as literally, as in certain Eastern wisdom traditions like Hinduism, where monkeys, elephants, cows, and snakes are, in special ways, treated as sacred or divine. Hence the invocation of powerful animal divinities such as Hanuman (the monkey god) or Ganesh (the elephant god). And in the Western classical tradition, we have many stories of the deities, especially Zeus, appearing as an animal or bird (swan or bull etc.), and certain divinities manifesting as hybrid "humanimals"—for example, Chiron, brother of Zeus, who carried out his sacred healing vocation as a centaur (half horse, half human). But such tales of sacred animality are often rejected as pagan or primitive in the Abrahamic moral tradition—



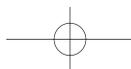
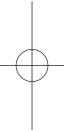
one thinks particularly of the biblical prohibition against Baal's "graven images" of animal gods and golden calves. Can you cite any examples of official biblical teachings that sanctioned or sanctified the idea of divine animality?

EF: That's a good question. The Council in Trullo in 692 C.E. said that we may no longer represent Christ as a lamb, or more generally as an animal, but that decision was in fact not against animality but was because of the significance of lamb imagery in paganism and Judaism. So the Council of Trullo said images of Christ could not depict him as an animal. But in fact John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, for example, spoke of Christ as an animal; we reject this today, but there was a time in the Christian tradition when we could speak that way. This does not mean that Christ was an animal but rather that Christ assumed our part of animality, since if he assumed our humanity he also had to assume our part of animality. That is the heritage of the Eucharist, and it means that the Eucharist is not only a passage from humanity to divinity but also a passage from our animality to humanity. We are humanized by the Eucharist. This does not mean that the aim of Christianity is humanization or that Christianity is humanism; it is a matter of humanization in filiation. So that is the heritage of the Eucharist.

The content of the Eucharist is the body. What are we eating in the Eucharist when we say, "This is my body"? This is important for me because I am coming from the generation of Vatican II, and an important point was that when you celebrate the Eucharist, you are sharing a meal to which you are invited. But then we have to ask what is on the menu. We tend to forget the menu. What are we eating, and what is a body? The question of cannibalism is a real question, as we can see in John 6:56, when the people ask, "Who is this man who gives us his flesh to eat?" So what does it mean to eat the flesh?

The modality of the Eucharist is precisely eros, which is what I will be speaking more about here. Christ says "This is my body, given up for you," and I will be considering today what it means to give a body.

Finally, the aim of the Eucharist is abiding; as Christ said, "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (John 6:53). So the aim is to remain in God, and we have to interrogate the status of *presence*, which in my view is not merely the "thingification of substance." We must distinguish between this "thingification of substance" that Heidegger criticized and "manence," or the act of abiding, as emphasized by Stanislas Breton. Abiding is being or remaining "with," be it a matter of eros or of agape. It is in this sense that all lived fidelity calls us to "abide."



RK: These preliminary remarks are very useful. Could you now give us a more detailed critical account of your treatment of the two kinds of love—eros and agape—in chapter 6 of *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*?

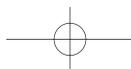
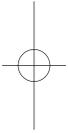
EF: Yes, of course. I acknowledge the distinction between eros and agape. Anders Nygren (in his *Agape and Eros*) takes the view that there is a complete equivocality of eros and agape, while Jean-Luc Marion sees in the Eucharist a pure univocity of eros and agape; in fact, my chapter could be a sort of hidden response to Marion's *Erotic Phenomenon*. I argue that it is not enough to speak about univocity or equivocality; rather, we have to speak about the conversion of eros into agape. The point where I disagree with Marion concerns the status of fidelity. I was very astonished when I read *The Erotic Phenomenon* because Marion states that we all have automatic flesh—which is true, because we are animal—but then his thesis is that in fact fidelity is not in the flesh but in the spoken voice, which means that it is a promise. You are to remain faithful because of your promise. My view, however, is that we have to speak of a fidelity of the flesh and not only of a fidelity of the promise, for there is no ratified marriage without the consummated marriage. Indeed, in the Catholic Church you are married only when the marriage is consummated, not just with the promise. So this is a very important point. We are married when we give the body, and so I maintain that we cannot sustain the thesis of the univocity of eros and agape. Univocity is insufficient because it amounts to lowering God, as it were, to the level of the human being. Only God gave his body completely. We must therefore sustain the thesis of conversion of eros to agape. If you are a Christian believer, and only if you are—and you do not have to be a believer—you can think that the erotic “This is my body” that occurs between a man and a woman can find a sense in the “This is my body” that Christ addresses to the Church in the Eucharist. That is what I mean when I refer to the conversion of eros into agape. And that is my first point.

My second point is that when discussing the link between eros and agape, we must also consider the link between the body and desire. This question is obviously a philosophical one, but it is also a theological one. Discussing the body and desire of course requires us to distinguish between desires and needs. Here I must raise two points, of which the first is theological. It is a fact—and I saw this after writing *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*—that Christ's Passion was not only suffering but also desire, for Christ said to his disciples on Holy Thursday, “I desire with a great desire to eat this Passover with you” (Luke 22:15). Christ as God has the desire to eat the Passover as a man, and because there is a form of desire in Christ, there is an erotic dimension to Holy Thursday. It is exactly what Hegel explains in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, when he addresses the desire for recognition and states that we have to distinguish between desire and needs: need is need of an



object, but desire is desire of the desire of the other. With regard to human sexuality, that means we don't desire only the other but also desire the other's own desire. Hegel even says desire is anthropogenic: you become human when you desire not only the other but the desire of the other. When Christ said, "I desire with a great desire to eat this Passover with you," he was speaking not just about a desire to eat the Passover; he said, "I desire with a great desire" because it was a matter of a desire of desire, of desiring to become or to be recognized as God. If desire is anthropogenic for the human being, it is theogenic for God. As I said before, the heritage of the Eucharist is the passage from animality to humanity, and this is so because God took upon himself our passion and our drives and took them upon himself in the Eucharist in order to inhabit them and change them. Thus when I receive the Eucharist, I become more human in filiation, and God becomes more God if not for himself at least for me. And it is the same with desire between a man and a woman: each becomes more himself or herself, as the erotic experience is absolutely not an experience of fusion.

This brings us to my third point, which concerns love and differentiation. It is not enough to love the other because he or she is different from me—that is good, but it is not enough because the love of difference is difference as love. This means that loving is not only loving that the other is different from me but also loving the act of differentiation. In the erotic experience, in sexuality, the man becomes more a man in the encounter with the woman, and the woman becomes more a woman in the encounter with the man. The man cannot experience what the woman experiences and vice versa because there is a genital difference. You can't feel what the other feels, and this is absolutely true in the experience between man and woman. And if one cannot experience what the other experiences, this means that in the experience of sexuality the other becomes more who he is or who she is. I say this because the other is always strange to me; it is a matter of what I call the gap of the flesh. The gap of the flesh means that there is some failure in the flesh—the experience of flesh is sometimes a failure—yet the failure of the flesh in the erotic experience is actually a success. There is a success in the fact that I cannot feel what the other is feeling; and the success is precisely that if I cannot feel what the other is feeling, then there is a sort of obscurity of the other, who has to become who he or she is and not only who I am. In that sense, it is absolutely the same in eros as in the Eucharist. As in eros the woman is more feminine and the man is more masculine, so too in the Eucharist the human being is more human and God is more God. In short, the act of love is differentiation, and that is why I am completely against the idea of love as fusion. Aristophanes' myth in Plato's *Symposium* is altogether false. The difference between Aristophanes' myth and Genesis is that in the beginning the creation of difference is good, while in Plato it is a sort of punishment.



In Genesis difference is first, and this brings us to my fourth point, which concerns our central discussion here of the body. The meaning of Genesis is not only a matter of speech. In my book *The Loving Struggle*, there is a chapter on the ark of the flesh, which responds to Chrétien's book *The Ark of Speech*. Chrétien's book is very good, but I was astonished to see that he is always considering speech, or the word. But there is the moment when God took Adam's rib to create Eve, and Adam and Eve are not face to face but rib to rib, side by side<sup>2</sup>—exactly as Merleau-Ponty said, in fact. This is the moment of silent experience, and the silent experience is exactly what I and all my generation of phenomenologists are looking for. It is what Husserl discusses in the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, where he says that the silent experience is always first—a muteness wanting to find its own sense. I want to come back to the silent experience, but I am not sure that it is a matter of returning to sense. In my view, there are three failures of phenomenology: the hypertrophy of the lived body (*Leib*) over the animal or material body (*Körper*), the hypertrophy of sense over chaos, and the hypertrophy of passivity over activity.

If what we want is a human body, we cannot think the body independently of the question of love. To say that the body desires is false; the body does not desire anything or anyone. Rather, it is desire that needs a body. This means first that we can think transubstantiation because substance is not “substantification” (as Heidegger claims); on the contrary, substance is an act. Thomas Aquinas, of course, refers to the act of being, and Leibniz and Spinoza say that substance is a force. Force is first. It is not the body that makes love but love that makes a body. We are force, we are strength, and because of this force that is loving, we need a body. Take the theory of evolution as an analogy: it is not that cows eat grass because they were made for eating grass but that their bodies adapted to eat grass. Similarly, in love, we are a force looking for a body. It is absolutely the same for God, and that is the sense of the Eucharist. What does it mean when the priest says that the force of the spirit is coming to change the bread to body and the wine to blood? It means that God is love and therefore always wants to find a body, as we do, but his way of finding a body is not exactly the same as ours because he created the body.

In order to properly think the body, we have to try to find something between the extended body and the lived body. This is very important. In *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, I introduce the idea of the “spread body” (*le corps épandu*). To understand the spread body, consider first that in Descartes there is the extended body, in Husserl there is the lived body, and, surprisingly, there is a sort of swerve of the flesh in French phenomenology.<sup>3</sup> This swerve of the flesh came about because French phenomenologists interpreted *Leib* as flesh (*chair*). In fact the translation of *Leib* as *chair* comes from Ricœur (in his famous paper on reading the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*)

and Merleau-Ponty (who says in his *Phenomenology of Perception* that we have to translate *Leib* as *chair*). In Levinas' 1931 translation of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, however, he always translates *Leib* as *corps organique* (organic body) (in section 44, for example), and indeed, *Leib* had been translated that way in most other philosophical texts. For example, when you translate Nietzsche into French, you always translate *Leib* as *body* (*corps*), never as *flesh* (*chair*). It is good to speak about the flesh, but we must not neglect the organic body. Moreover, this point is also a theological one. Tertullian, arguing against Gnosticism, emphasizes that Christ has a true body because he is not an angel. This means that Christ has a body with real hands, hair, stomach, genital organs, and so on, just as I do—but what has phenomenology said about this? Absolutely nothing, because the biological body has been completely forgotten. In short, the spread body is the biological body seen as a human body (and the spread body is a human body also). The spread body is exactly between Descartes' extended body and Husserl's lived body. It is, for example, the body that is anesthetized or sleeping, or the body of Christ on the cross. I explore this further in "Toward an Ethics of the Spread Body."<sup>4</sup>

My fifth and final point deals with the question of the "limited phenomenon." The limited phenomenon is neither Ricœur's fallibility nor Marion's saturation. Ricœur spoke about fallibility because there is a disproportion between myself and my desire or my force. I do not think we can always speak this way; my thesis is that if I experience desire it is not because of lack or disproportion but because of limit. The other is always a resistance for me. This is true in eros because the erotic experience is absolutely becoming one; if the couple has to become one flesh, they always remain two bodies. There is no pleasure without combat, without difference of bodies. This is important because we are created within the limit, and we have to love our limits. In fact, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said as much in the fantastic course on creation and the fall that he gave in 1932. He said that God gave Eve to Adam to give him a limit and to ask him to love her limit and his own limit. You are a limited phenomenon, but you do not have to ask, "Why did you create me within limitations?" because there is a difference between limit and limitation. Limit is positive. But that difference is not in Ricœur. Finitude does not have any contrary; the finite is always a part of the infinite, and so you presuppose the infinite when you speak of the finite, but that is not so when you speak of finitude. Limit is on the side of finitude. The difference between the saturated phenomenon and the limited phenomenon is the difference between Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure; and whereas Marion first worked on Dionysius, I first worked on Bonaventure. Pseudo-Dionysius writes of glory and offers an apophatic theology; Bonaventure writes of humility and offers a kataphatic one.

To conclude, if I can not only accept but also love the fact that I am limited, it is possible to love that the other is limited. The limit of the other means not only that she (or he) is not like me; it means that I have to love that she is not like me and that I am not like her, and the very fact of loving that is our love. The more different the other is from me, the more we are the same, because we are alike in our difference. That point is very important because it is the condition of the conversion of eros into agape and the conversion of the body into flesh. Here Jean-Paul Sartre offers a surprisingly good analysis: he explains in *Being and Nothingness* that when a man experiences desire for a woman, he becomes himself because his consciousness is incarnated in his body and he is *also* incarnated in his flesh. For me the other is a body and I am a flesh. The act of loving means that the other becomes flesh for me. He becomes flesh because he is not only an object. Of course he is often an object, and sexuality is often need and not desire. But when the other becomes flesh and not only a body, that is because I am in the desire of the desire of the other—and for me, that is exactly the sense of Christ’s life. The sense of Christ’s life is a possible way for the body to become flesh. And what is this flesh? It is the flesh of the Son of God. The Resurrection is the act in which flesh becomes completely the flesh of God. And as Romano Guardini has said, the Ascension is the moment when Christ put the human body in the heart of God.

RK: Thank you, Emmanuel. I will respond relatively briefly. My first point is really one of method. You are a committed phenomenologist. The things themselves, the body, love, eros—all these things matter to you. You are engaged, enthusiastic, and expert in your descriptions; you are also a hermeneut in action, in conversation with such figures as Husserl, Ricœur, Sartre, Marion, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas—a very rich critical conversation with the traditions. And, third, you are a Catholic theologian in name and deed, declaring yourself as such in *Crossing the Rubicon*. My general question—and then I’ll raise a few more specific points—is this: is what you are saying about eros, flesh, desire, and the body a specifically Catholic description of those phenomena, or is it universally eligible for all human beings irrespective of their confessional allegiance? Even independent of their non-Christian or non-Abrahamic identity? It seems to me that much of what you say (and say brilliantly) is very Christocentric; and yet in your descriptions there seems to be the desire, following Husserl, to make this a phenomenological work with universal claims (not to deny that Christianity makes universal claims too at a religious level). Considering this as a work of philosophy, I always have the sense that for you it is philosophy that needs to be completed by theology. I often get the sense that you’re saying, “Okay, this is philosophical up to a point, and now we are going to give the theological interpretation.” I see chapter 6 of *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb* as already

theological, as the liturgical trumping the linguistic, the conjugal trumping the nuptial, agape trumping eros—in short, Christianity trumping humanism. That’s what I’m hoping we’ll tease out here—the phenomenological method on the one hand, the confessional method on the other—and ask how they are compatible or indeed mutually reinforcing (as they may well be). My tone is that of a devil’s advocate because I think we agree on 90 percent of things, and it’s more interesting for our audience if tackle the other 10 percent, addressing our differences in a “loving struggle” (to borrow the title of another of your books).

First, the question of eros. You go to great pains to show that you are critical of Gnosticism and dualism. You say you are going to go down deep and dirty when it comes to the animal, the carnal, and so on; and yet when you describe the drives (eros and thanatos), you speak of eros in terms of a “chaos” of our passions and drives—often synonymous, it seems, with animality, materiality, organicity. For you eros would seem to be a part of the organic body, for which you have great respect, but it is a chaos of passions and drives that needs to be saved and transformed by the Eucharist. But why is eros as drive not holy and meaningful in itself? Why does it need to be redeemed? Why is eros—as the love drive—not Eucharistic from the word go? After all, Pseudo-Dionysius spoke of Christ as eros crucified, not as agape crucified. And following Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, eros has often been spoken of as a life force that signifies and unites, that brings disparate and conflicting things together, that may even need to rise up against the destructive chaos of thanatos—as Freud says at the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and as Herbert Marcuse later elaborates in *Eros and Civilization*. If one wants to go further and actually give that a theological interpretation (which I’m all for), why can’t one say that in light of the Incarnation, the Word *is* the flesh of eros? As Teilhard de Chardin says, there is a cosmic Eucharist. The cosmos itself is Eucharistic as earth coming into the Kingdom—in and through Christ. Moreover, Christological cosmology does not begin with the historical birth of Jesus Christ but is at work from the beginning of creation to the end, from Alpha to Omega. “Before Abraham was, I am.” The call of “I-Am-Who-May-Be” (Exodus 3:14) is at work from the word go. *Fiat*. Let there be light. Let word be made flesh, again and again, from Genesis and Exodus to the Gospels and the Eschaton. Teilhard says very movingly that his first religious insight as a child was that “God is in the rocks.” God is everything from the mineral, vegetal, and animal to the human and beyond. That’s what he celebrates in his famous “Mass for the World” in the Gobi desert with his fellow scientists (many of them secular Chinese atheists).<sup>5</sup> So it’s not as if the rocks, the animals, the cosmos need to be redeemed by the Eucharist—it is always already Eucharistic through and through: a *posse* ceaselessly incarnating as *esse*—forever calling out for the response of *possest*. Yes. Amen. I will. I am. Eros is not some ontological

deficit, some curse or sin that requires to be hallowed by agape, because eros is already holy. The Jews knew that. And Christ's incarnation is a reminder of this basic truth: God is in all things. Iranaeus, Eriugena, Bovaventure, Duns Scotus, Ignatius, and all the great Rhine mystics acknowledged this. Scotus called it *ensarkosis*—divine enfleshing in and through nature (hence the later term pantheism). Many Christian artists and poets throughout the ages have powerfully testified to the presence of God in the most ordinary and carnal of things, right down to the metaphysical ecstasies of John Donne and the poetic epiphanies of Gerard Manley Hopkins—"Glory be to God for dappled things" or "When Kingfishers Catch Fire": "[F]or Christ plays in ten thousand places / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / To the Father through the features of men's faces." Eros is already Eucharistic—the desire for oneness-in-difference, for community in bread and wine—right from the word go. I call this *micro-eschatology*—the end is already there from the beginning, in the "least of these," the kingdom of little things, mustard seeds, the widow's mites, the cups of water.

As a footnote to this first point, I would add: where for you there is a risk of becoming enclosed in the play of the carnal, I would say that the carnal is always already expression and interpretation; the carnal is not something we could be enclosed in, since there is already eucharistic desire at work in it. Or to refer to Aristotle, flesh is not just an organ but already a medium (*metaxu*).<sup>6</sup> Or again, as we see in *De Anima* chapter 2, touch knows differences.<sup>7</sup> In the beginning is hermeneutics. With the first stirring of flesh we are tasting, touching, testing the world, sounding out and responding to others.

Following that is my second question: why do you think the sacrament of marriage is necessary to redeem eros? Throughout your text, there is a contrast between lovers and spouses. I'll just quote one passage: "While lovers may simply be content to be part of humanity—which alone is very significant in their relationship—married spouses search for God, to be incorporated with him and to live their lovemaking in *another* way."<sup>8</sup> You do mention lovers in the text (in connection with Michel Henry and Sartre), but when you talk about eros, it is always matrimonial and conjugal. It is not the *Song of Songs*, which, as Ricœur says, is nuptial, not matrimonial.<sup>9</sup> Why this exclusive privileging of the matrimonial over the nuptial, of the conjugal over the amorous? The Shulamite and the shepherd in the *Song of Songs* are not married, but their love is eros and is holy. So why do we need a matrimonial transformation of eros? Isn't eros enough whether it expresses itself in terms of lovers or in terms of spouses? The cult of the matrimonial smacks to me of a certain ecclesiastical conservatism where the official Catholic Church—which we both hail from—is still so dismally out of touch with the younger generations who frequently experience loving eros in a pre-conjugal fashion and do so with the sensitivity, fidelity, and commitment that you

associate with the conjugal. Why can't it be a both/and—meaningful eros for spouses *and* lovers?

Also, when you mention marriage you do so in relation to the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of the Eucharist. That could make some people say, “I can't go there because I'm not part of your sacraments. I am not baptized in the Catholic faith.” You have, I know, an extremely open and inclusive approach to Catholicism—which I applaud. I realize that you do not think your frequent use of Catholic language might prevent non-believers from feeling admitted to the sacramental fold, integrated into your descriptions. Most of what you say in the *Wedding Feast of the Lamb* is, I think, phenomenologically and hermeneutically available, in a universal sense, to everyone regardless of their traditions. But I see this phenomenological openness to be somewhat in tension with your confessional language as a Catholic thinker. Unless you refer to the sacraments in a metaphorical sense? But I do not think so. You are too much of a realist for that.

The next ancillary point is that your writing on eros seems to me to be overly heterocentric. Heterosexuality seems to be not only normative but mandatory. In fact at one point you say that sexual difference is “constitutive and originary.”<sup>10</sup> Is it heterosexuality that constitutes the modality of sexual difference? Can there not be a sexual difference between same-sex lovers? Does sexual difference have to be biologically gendered and genital? You do say that sexual difference is natural, not cultural—you take on Judith Butler in that regard—but, again, might that not be too exclusive regarding some people? I've just come back from SPEP, and in the conference hotel there were signs saying, “Male, female, and transgender—all welcome.” We're not there yet at our respective institutions, but I have the sense that your presuppositions regarding sexual desire are fundamentally heteronormative. In short, my question is: why can homosexual love not also bear witness to the celebration of Eucharistic difference that is the core of your argument? Are not same-sex partners different persons? Different desires? Different bodies, each with his/her own singular uniqueness and thisness (*haecceitas*)? In sum, I cannot help sensing a certain tacit dualism at work in the text at several levels—making too much of a difference between male and female, between agape and eros, between living flesh and spread body, between spirit and chaos. And this separatism of spirit and matter seems to me almost “gnostic” at times (uncharacteristic of your otherwise very incarnationalist approach) and makes strange allies with a certain literalist overemphasis on natural-genital-biological gender differences at the expense of other kinds of more personal-carnal-haecceital differences (which we all enjoy, irrespective of gender). I'd like you to comment on what I see, perhaps wrongly, as a tension between gnostic and literalist tendencies in your analysis.

The last point—and this brings us back to my first—is that you are operating from a Christocentric hermeneutic. I do not think this is a bad thing as

long as one says, “This is what I am doing; I’m dealing with the Christian, Catholic sacrament of marriage and the Eucharist.” But the language of “conversion,” of eros as something that needs to be transported and transfigured, does seem to reintroduce an element of condescension toward carnality. Granted, you go a long way to acknowledge the “animality” of all bodies, even Christ’s body; but then we discover that this admission is a methodological step on the way to something else, something higher, more transcendent. I’ll just quote one passage: “[D]ivine love (*agape*) [. . .] in espousing human love (*eros*) succeeds in integrating it and transforming it at the heart of the Eucharistic act.”<sup>11</sup> So you seem to be saying that in eros, as lovers, we’re waiting for our filiation in the act of the Eucharist, right? Which again raises questions for those who don’t travel the road to the Eucharist—or marriage—as a Catholic sacrament and yet want to partake of everything else you so powerfully describe in the mystery of the Eucharist. And it is here I think that we need to speak of a cosmic Eucharist, *à la* Delia Illo or Teilhard de Chardin, or a universal baptism like Origen, from which nobody is excluded. Unless they choose to exclude themselves. Everyone is eligible for the Cosmic feast of hospitality. Every host and every guest engaging in the sharing of bread and water (Matthew 25). And insofar as one is prepared to bring Christ and Christianity into phenomenological and hermeneutic investigations of eros—as you do, and why not?—what *kind* of Christ are we talking about when we talk of the body? You mention the importance of the fact that Jesus had genitals and a stomach; and I’d like to acknowledge these biological details, since at another point in your text you say that in heaven resurrected bodies will have no need for organs like genitals or stomachs (you quote Aquinas). But why? Are you really talking about a resurrected Jesus *without* genitals or a stomach? And, I do admit, we don’t have much official Church iconography to show that he *did* have genitals or a stomach (with some notable exceptions). Mary shows her breasts, and Jesus shows his wounds, but we don’t often see Jesus’ penis or testes, do we? Why not? Why the cover-up of his lower half? Even in the Sacré-Cœur replica of the Shroud of Turin (in Paris), which shows his whole body, Jesus is *covering* his genitals as if he had nothing better to do with his hands while he was being buried! As if Jesus was some puritan who wanted to keep the record pure for posterity—I am incarnate but not fully! Didn’t Jesus himself ask, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, You are gods’” (John 10:34)? He surely didn’t mean divine from the waist up, that our being created in the “image and likeness” of God excluded our bodily organs and functions.

So my final question is this: given your Eucharistic embrace of flesh, of body, of desire, which is incredibly generous and inclusive, shouldn’t you allow for celebrating the “thisness” of the resurrected body in *all* its specificity, all its particulars, the Eucharistic body with genitals and intestines? Why cut Jesus off at the waist? A phenomenology of Christ deserves better than



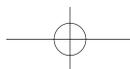
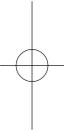
that. For as Merleau-Ponty rightly observes, every organ has its *imaginaire* and its *symbolique*; Bachelard has his poetics of the body; even Freud, who can be overly reductionist and secularist, as Freudian orthodoxy shows, recognizes the symbolic quality of the oral, the anal, and the genital. And mystical poets like Péguy, Hopkins, Claudel, and even James Joyce celebrate a hallowing of the organic body and eros that doesn't have to be separated from flesh or redeemed into agape. For them eros is agape: the carnal *is* the symbolic and vice versa. Symbol and spirit do not need to be superadded to the flesh *après coup*, after the event, to change it into something else, more divine—and therefore “redeem” it from itself.<sup>12</sup> Flesh is already divine.

So, I ask, does your suggestion that theology completes philosophy not carry a certain supercessionism—with conjugal spouses completing amorous lovers, agape completing eros, and Christianity completing other religions and non-religions alike?

EF: Thank you, Richard, for very good and important questions. This is very interesting because at the colloquium in Paris on my work—which has been published as a book of over 700 pages (entitled *Une Analytique du passage*)—nobody said what you said. You are reading my book in a certain context that is absolutely not the French context, so the questions are not the same at all. In France you are either a Catholic or an atheist; there are very few Protestants or members of other religions. As I like to say, Ricœur is the only Protestant in France—and the most well-known philosopher, including in Catholic thought! There is also the question of secularization, but that is not the same. First, you saw this very important point, which is that in my books I try to speak about the phenomena, the “things themselves.” But you cannot speak about the things themselves without speaking with others. That is why I quote a lot—I am never thinking alone. On that point we absolutely agree—we are always in conversation.

Your first question, which is perhaps the most difficult one, is about the universality of my discourse. Now, perhaps I have not finished my work. Perhaps I will die tomorrow, but perhaps I have more time! My current project is to write a book that is only philosophy, and you will see that my “Toward an Ethics of the Spread Body” only mentions God at the end. It is not that I was first a theologian and will become a philosopher—absolutely not. Rather, because of Christ's incarnation, I become more incarnate in myself. This dimension of pure humanity is a sort of consequence of my thesis of the “simply human” [*l'homme tout court*] that I developed in *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*.

My second point is that I never say that it is better to be a Christian believer than not to be a believer. I am against this idea, and if you read chapter 3 of *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* (“Is There a Drama of Atheist Humanism?”), you will see that I say that there is no drama of atheist human-



ism. Merleau-Ponty said in his lecture, “In Praise of Philosophy,” at the Collège de France, in reference to Henri de Lubac (but without quoting him), that he did not know why for believers all non-theism is always a form of atheism or anti-theism. Why, if he was not speaking about God, did believers think he was speaking against God? Merleau-Ponty was never against God (the same was not true of Sartre). I think it is the same today in France. One day, someone in my family told me, “I don’t need your God.” For ten years I wanted to convert him, and then I understood that he had converted me: I have concluded that it is possible to live without God, and indeed, we all have to live without God, even the believer. As Ernst Jünger said in his book *God as the Mystery of the World*, we can live without God, and to live without God is not to be against God, since if I live without God, I have to live only with my own humanity. This is exactly what Levinas was talking about when he said that I have to be separated, created, atheist. For me it is exactly the same.

Next, I didn’t want to say that it is better to be married, as if fidelity was easier because I am married. I am married, and I don’t want to write outside my experience because I think that one is always writing from one’s own experience. I know a lot of people who are absolutely not believers but who are completely faithful to their spouses, and I was thinking of one of them when I wrote that “[t]he union of the flesh is not ‘better’ in sacramental marriage; it is ‘other,’ or rather, differently oriented.”<sup>13</sup> Lovers may simply be content to be part of humanity, which by itself is very significant in their relationship, and they may also believe in the fidelity of the flesh. In my view, you don’t need God to live in the fidelity of the flesh. God just wants to give us a new meaning of fidelity, which is human too but is not only human, in the conversion of Eros into Agape. The Eucharist is God who gives himself first in the act of agape. Then I can live from this act—“this is my body”—but this act is also a Christian one as well.

RK: But in Proverbs we learn that divine wisdom—Sophia—was there from the beginning of time giving herself to the world and to all things in the world. You don’t have to wait for Jesus Christ and the last supper for a Eucharistic presence of God in the world. Isn’t the act of Abraham and Sarah offering food to the strangers at Mamre already a Eucharistic event of hospitality to the Stranger? Could Matthew 25 have hoped for more? Doesn’t Jesus identify the Christ with *any* stranger (*hospes*) being a host or guest of Eucharistic hospitality? Not just those initiated in the Christian or Jewish faith, not just those who cry out “Lord, Lord”? If anything Matt 25 seems to proclaim the message of a natural, universal baptism for everyone—of any religion or none—for anyone who gives or receives a cup of cold water. The Kingdom is wide open for all who wish to enter. Isn’t that what Christ the stranger (*hospes*) announces in Matt 25?

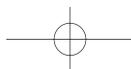


EF: Yes, but Jesus Christ is the topos of transformation.

RK: For people who believe in Jesus, yes, but what about the vast majority of those in the world who do not? Are they excluded from transformation? I don't think Jesus would want that, and I read him as saying as much in Matthew 25: he is every and any stranger. And that includes Buddhists who believe in the compassionate sharing of food with all sentient beings. Or Jews and Muslims who believe in Abraham and Sarah's wager of absolute hospitality and act accordingly. And those who profess no explicit religion or faith but actually *do* love and justice, actually incarnate the call to host the stranger, enact the call of the beloved.

EF: That is the second point—what does it mean to be transformed? First, I say that the Eucharist changes eros into agape. When you go to the Eucharist, the sense of “This is my body” changes from what it is between a man and a woman to what it is between God and humanity. Salvation does not mean that God takes me from my animality—as if I was an animal and now become a human. You are absolutely right: that would be a new form of Gnosticism or dualism. But I think that salvation is a transformation of myself in the form of inhabitation. Salvation absolutely does not mean that now you don't have any drives and you have to be good and so on. It means that you accept that someone else is coming where you are. Salvation is not only transformation of the situation; it is transformation where you are. Salvation is the act of accepting the other. The difference between Lacoste and me is that for Lacoste we are first in finitude, but then we are *coram deo*, and when you are *coram deo* everything changes. But my thesis is that we are *cum deo*, not *coram deo*. (And *cum deo* is my name—Emmanuel!) This means that salvation is first the fact that you are not alone where you are. For example, you are living something in your passion, drive, or sexuality, and you are completely alone—and then salvation is to accept that someone else is coming.

RK: But why should that not be the work of eros? As mentioned, Dionysius the Areopagite calls Christ eros—not some separate paternal agape that is coming to save and transform eros? Christ is both eros and agape at once: “I and the Father are one.” Considering *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I would say that while Freud hardly had a theological bone in his body, he can help us rethink Christian eros psychoanalytically when he says eros is always an opening to otherness, the outside, the strange, the new, the unexpected. It is wonder and surprise (which are the flip side of trauma and operate according to the same temporality of *Nachträglichkeit*). The basic insight of unconscious eros is that self alone is not enough—we always need the Other who



comes. What Levinas calls “exteriority” or “transcendence.” If you are left to yourself, you die—that’s thanatos. Eros is what comes from the other and goes toward the other; and it is both metaphysical and organic as a love drive. Sometimes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud makes it sound purely biological and zoological, but then you turn the page and he’s talking about Schopenhauer, the Upanishads, Kant, and Plato. And then one can see that eros is, deep down, at once a biological *and* ontological drive toward otherness—and, we could add (though Freud never did) a drive toward Eucharistic communion. Eros is not a “chaos” of organic sensation that needs to be saved and transformed by something else. The body is redeemed and redeemable precisely as the call of desire, the cry of the flesh. The body *is* flesh. It doesn’t need to become it. Surely that is the basic phenomenological message of Christian incarnation—the divine word as flesh through and through: *Hic est corpus meum!* The Word (Logos, Christ) is not just acting as flesh, as if it were flesh, pretending to be flesh, it *is* flesh—body and blood. So the body is not an organic mess waiting for God to come along and knock it into shape—and make it human! The body is already flesh: that’s why God has always desired it and wants to become it, again and again. But only if we, as loving human beings, as erotic beings, let word be flesh. The God who may be (Exodus 3:14) can only *be* flesh if we say yes to the call. If human eros answers to divine eros, flesh to flesh, hand to hand, mouth to mouth, *corps-à-corps*.

EF: There are two senses of the question of transformation. First, there is the ontological sense, which means that resurrection is an ontological event, not an ontic one. It is not something that happens in the world but something that changes the structure of the world. And this project stands from the beginning of creation, from before creation. That is Irenaeus’ perspective.

RK: Yes. I agree. And for Irenaeus, Creation is already good—from the word go. When God created eros in the first act of genesis, it was good. And it remains so unless we make it otherwise.

EF: We agree on that. Then the second point is knowing what transformation is for me; and in *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, I am only speaking of transformation for me because the Eucharist is a viaticum—that is, it is my manner of being transformed today. And of course I agree with you when you say that in psychoanalysis I have to welcome what happens in myself and welcome the other.

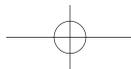
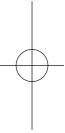
RK: But when I mention Freud, I am not thinking only of the psychoanalytic situation. The other is not only the analyst, or for the analyst. Freud has some interesting things to say about Eros as a life force and a love force, revealing



that desire is not a chaos of organic impulses that need to be converted into something else. I think he's right. And if we combine that insight with the bold mystical teaching from Pseudo-Dionysius on, that God created us with eros and that God *is* eros, then we have the invitation to live that out in relation to others. We don't need marriage or some formal ecclesiastical sacrament of Baptism or the Eucharist—to redeem it. (Though I personally am very committed to both Catholic sacraments, I do not want to prescribe them as normative or paradigmatic for those who do not share such sacramental practices or beliefs.) As Chesterton said, when we meet our Maker, he will not ask us why we were not more like Him but why we were not more like ourselves.

EF: Yes, I agree with you. But the question is why there is not only eros but also thanatos. In fact, God came to redeem us from thanatos. And that is the sense of chaos for me. I saw that if God is present in the Eucharist, he can come where I am in passion, drives, anxiety, so that I am not alone. And I think the Eucharist is why when I am speaking about the lovers there is a matrimonial perspective.

RK: But for you it seems the matrimonial is teleological—erotic love is in search of marriage, fulfilled by marriage, crowned by marriage. Like the earthly Mary being “assumed” into a heavenly Mother. The Song of Songs doesn't stand a chance. Nor the troubadours of *fine amour*. Nor most lovers in our world today (at least in the West). There is still, it seems to me, a privileging of the matrimonial in your analysis. And don't get me wrong—I am all for the matrimonial (I am happily married for forty years with two wonderful daughters!). But I think the matrimonial is not the first or last paradigm of eros. The primary paradigm is the nuptial, meaning a binding of two beings (of whatever sex or gender) in an interplay of togetherness. The poet John Donne speaks here of “commingling” and “interanimation.” And chapter 8 of the Song of Songs speaks of a free play of love (eros) that is stronger than death (thanatos)—a sacred erotic liaison that is prior to duties and responsibilities of marriage contracts, laws and norms relating to child-bearing, property and the economy of a home. “Matrimonial” comes from the words “Mater” and “maternity.” It refers to the life of motherhood (and fatherhood) and carries all the necessary protections and provisions required for parental child-rearing, sharing a house and domestic concerns. By contrast, the shepherd and Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs have no home, don't mention marriage or law—and there isn't a baby in sight! Just fawns and doves and lilies and pomegranates! If one is going to make distinctions between eros and agape I would place eros with the nuptial and agape with the matrimonial. Which is not to deny for one moment that the two can complement and supplement each other—or overlap. Nuptial eros is



sometimes a precursor to matrimonial agape, but not always. And every marriage needs a bit of nuptial play to keep it alive. This is not just a question for the Abrahamic tradition, either: it is also present in the Celtic wisdom literature (Emer and Fand) and in Greek mythology (Aphrodite and Hera). It seems to be a transcultural, almost perennial concern.

EF: Though it seems that way, I am not in fact privileging the matrimonial; it is something else. If you are married only because of tradition, it means nothing, or it is not enough. In the Catholic tradition, it is written that you always have to celebrate the Eucharist when you celebrate a marriage. It is the meaning of the Christian marriage, but no one is obliged to believe in it. For believers, there is no “This is my body” independently of Christ’s “This is my body” to humanity. But it is of course possible for non-believers to read my books. In fact, a lot of people who are not believers read them, even in France, because they are first speaking about the “simply human” and also its meaning in a Christian culture (which is not only a past culture). A believer is not “better” than a non-believer, but he has something else which is simply different.

RK: I fully agree that non-Christians would get a huge amount from your books. You are an excellent phenomenologist! And your Christian philosophy is profoundly anthropological. “Christ as man fully alive,” as the Greek Fathers taught.

EF: Yes. You can say, “I am not a believer but I would like to know what it means to eat a body in Christ.” I tried to find the credibility of Christianity, and I think the aim of Christianity today is not to convert others. Credibility is not only belief but is also the philosophical act of showing that Christianity always has a meaning for today. That is why I said in *Parcours d’embûches* that there is no apologetics in my work—or at least I hope there is not because I don’t want to convert. It is first necessary that religion be credible, and afterward the question of believing in God is raised. Developing a phenomenology of the “simply human” is not immediately imposing the question of divinity. I am a philosopher, but I am also a believer, and if I am a believer I can say that.

RK: And you do. You boldly own up to that. You say, “I am doing Catholic hermeneutics.” Indeed, when you do phenomenological hermeneutics you honestly acknowledge where you are speaking from. I admire that confessional candor and integrity.

EF: Yes. That is why I say in *Crossing the Rubicon* that “[t]he more we theologize, the better we philosophize.”<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

1. This text presents an edited and expanded version of a conversation between Emmanuel Falque and Richard Kearney, held at Boston College on October 26, 2016. It has been transcribed and edited by Sarah Horton.
2. *Côte à côte*, the French expression for “side by side,” translates literally as “rib to rib.”
3. See Emmanuel Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 1–4, “Introduction: The Swerve of the Flesh.”
4. See the following chapter.
5. See Richard Kearney, “Toward an Open Eucharist,” in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions, and Invitations*, ed. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof, 138–55 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) and Richard Kearney, “Two Prophets of Eucharistic Hospitality,” *Japan Mission Journal* 68, no. 1 (2014): 14–25.
6. See Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J.A. Smith (London: Clarendon, 1931), 2, 428.
7. See *ibid.*, 418.
8. Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 170.
9. See Paul Ricœur, “The Nuptial Metaphor,” in André LaCoque and Paul Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, 265–306, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
10. Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 138.
11. *Ibid.*, 134.
12. See Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), chapter 4, “In the Flesh: Sacramental Imagination.”
13. Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 170.
14. Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham, 2013), 25.

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