Because I am quite familiar with the Kearney-Caputo exchange over the question of post-meta-physical divinity and was counting on Richard and Jack continuing that today in this Scholar’s Session, I have decided to take a different path in discussing Richard’s work, namely, the trail that leads principally through literary works that he himself has written or those that factor in his writings as well as through other essays he has recently authored.

* * * *

On the cover of Richard Kearney’s first novel, *Sam’s Fall*, Sam’s face is engulfed in shadow while that of Jack, his twin, is only shadowed partially. The theme of the shadow is central to much of the narrative in both *Sam’s Fall* and his second novel *Walking at Sea Level*, not in a light way such as the reference to “shadows from the rhododendrum bushes” (although this recalls other rhododendrums at the close of *Ulysses* . . . to be discussed later) or “a shadow crossed Jack’s heart,” but in a constitutive way, as in the taking-up of the Gnostic claim regarding God’s shadow. These novels are about twins, about doubles: Jack and Sam, Raphaelle and Hannah, Carpocrates and his “secret sister”—for the Carpocratian Gnostics even God has his double, “the formless matter . . . the nether part, the shadow of his being.” Even Christ has his double: “Christ became a lie the day they buried his double, the day they hid his shadow in the empty tomb.” And Raphaelle writes, “If God is double, then we are shadow selves. So argue the Gnostics against the God of the Jews, the God of Augustine.”

Without claiming that Richard is a Gnostic (a problem I will take up later), I would like to get at what Richard is trying to get at in all of this by asking: what is the shadow in the empty tomb? Raphaelle provides the answer. In discussing monasticism with Sam, the novice monk, she asks:

why such a quest for perfection meant treating women as temptresses, or seeing desire as a way of tempting men away from God. From Eve in Eden to the erotic apparitions of the Desert Fathers. She just couldn’t comprehend, Raphaelle said, why this world had to be seen as a derivation from God, rather than the route itself. Why women, throughout the history of religious art, were represented as imaginary fantasies rather than real beings.

As I read it, the shadow in the empty tomb is the other who has been suppressed, marginalized, dominated, objectified, depersonalized, and dehumanized, namely, each woman in her female embodiment and her female transcendence. Like the face of Sam on the cover of the novel, a woman’s face is left in shadow, revealing that something is hidden, “a shadow veiled Raphaelle’s countenance as if she were carrying precious things inside of her.” Each woman is the ultimate stranger, desired to be sure, but to whom hospitality has not been offered historically. On the back of a photo that she later sends to Sam, Raphaelle writes, in a truly panentheistic fashion: “We do not renounce the world to reach God: we rediscover the world in God. Deep calling upon deep.” For Raphaelle, and for Richard, the search for the absolute is not incompatible with living one’s own desire, which is never an obstacle to transcendence but rather the path. We reach God through the stranger and “she embodies something else, something more, something other than what the self can contain or grasp,” “a surplus of meaning,” of value. This

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surplus is heard in the “yes” of Molly Bloom and the Shulammit woman, the “yes” of female transcendence, of female embodiment which is, as I will argue, the “yes” of promiscuity properly understood by Richard as a sacramental “yes.”

What Raphaelle has articulated in her responses to Sam is the central message of a new book by Richard Kearney, Anatheism, that takes its place along with his other works at the very center of the contemporary philosophical discourse on religion, responding to the problem of the estrangement of the Stranger, who historically has passed beyond the horizon of reflective understanding into the invisible, unspeakable, unthinkable darkness of radical undecidability, into the darkness of the empty tomb. When phenomenology took the “turn” toward the theological, toward the question of the nature of post-metaphysical divinity, the question of the stranger became one of the pivotal questions in continental thought. It is a question to which Richard Kearney has devoted his major research since Poétique du possible: Phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration which he published in 1984. Richard has contributed significantly to the contemporary discourse on the stranger by arguing for a diacritical hermeneutics of alterity beyond the romantic hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the radical hermeneutics of John Caputo. His trilogy entitled Philosophy at the Limit is completed by Strangers, Gods, and Monsters, which book explores the main debates on the enigma of the Other ranging from religious anthropology (Eliade/Girard/Levi-Strauss) and psychoanalysis (Freud/Lacan/Kristeva) to deconstruction (Derrida/Lytard/Caputo), phenomenology (Husserl/Heidegger/Levinas) and hermeneutics (Gadamer/Greisch/Ricoeur). Kearney seeks through the ensemble of these voices multiple traversals between seeming incompossibles, always a middle path of what he calls gracious affinities and interlacings of alterity, making us more hospitable to strangers, gods, and monsters but without succumbing to mystique or madness. In Anatheism, Kearney argues a middle path between theism and atheism, between belief and non-belief, between the sacred and the secular. This takes the form of a preferential option for a hospitality that remains open existentially to the divinity that might show itself as the stranger, the god of little things that comes and goes, like the thin small voice, like the burning bush, like the voice crying on the street, like the “yes” of Molly Bloom or the Shulammite woman. Through the narrative imagination and its companion diacritical hermeneutic, it would seem that Kearney wants to name the unnamable, say the unsayable, imagine the unimaginable, tell the untellable, making the foreign more familiar and the familiar more foreign, to acknowledge oneself as another, and to retrieve one’s selfhood through the odyssey of hospitality and otherness. All of this gets played out in Anatheism through a series of chapters titled in the moment, in the wager, in the name, in the flesh, in the text, in the world, in the act.

There are two women, mentioned above, who are at the center of Kearney’s scholarly life and, for that matter, in his own personal odyssey of hospitality and otherness: Molly in Joyce’s Ulysses and the Shulammite woman in the Song of Songs from the Hebrew bible. Let us first take up the figure of Molly Bloom whose “yes” is, according to Kearney, a “eucharistic” event, an epiphany, a mutual transfiguring instance of the holy in the ordinary and vice versa. Permit me to cite the text itself

the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky.

Richard claims that Molly’s “yes” “epitomizes the anatheistic move,” neither theistic nor atheistic. The “yes” becomes “yes” through the
kiss remembered, the kiss within which Molly inserts the seedcake into Leopold’s mouth. The kiss as the primordial site of the sacrament, as the giving and receiving of the sacrament, as the transubstantiation of breath into flesh, as the most intimate encounter of the incarnate spirit. The “yes” of her kiss grows like a wave, from her inner pushes and desires and memories and feelings, through a stream flowing from her unconscious into a crescendo of affirmation:

And then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.

It is fascinating to see how Richard roots his analysis of the Eucharistic sacramental character of the kiss in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the “chiasmic crossing of ostensible contraries.” In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty draws a parallel between the real presence of God in the transubstantiation of bread and wine into body and blood and the relation of the sensible to the sentient. He writes that “sensation is literally a form of communion” by which seer and seen are transfigured one into the other. Merleau-Ponty privileges the handshake in his unveiling of the meaning of chiasm: my touching hand is touched by the hand of the other which I am touching, each both touching and touched, both subject and object, in an intertwining within which their roles are perpetually reversed. But, to exemplify chiasm and the primordial sociality which it institutes, it would be more fruitful to take the kiss between Molly and Leopold, the kiss which by its very nature is much more intimate than the handshake, and clearly more promiscuous involving as it does the mix of all the senses, the kiss in both its erotic and ontological sense in which Molly and Bloom not only touch each other with lips and tongue and nose and cheeks, but also hear and smell and taste each other, where her breath is in his breath and his in hers, yes in each other in a moment of such voluptuous abandon that action and passion, subject and object, become almost indiscernible in an intercorporeity more fundamental than either.

What had been regarded traditionally as incompossibilities in systems where the “ism” was a term of exclusion and not of emphasis (e.g., materialism, spiritualism, etc., where the visible and the invisible, self and other, freedom and determinism, concept and word, idea and image, mind and body, spirit and matter mutually cancelled each other out), now become through the anatheistic notion of chiasm each the other side of the other, each infolded into the other, as a fold of the other. As a result of this process of invagination, this doubling up or folding over within Being and of the negativity thereby engendered through which Being breaks open in the kiss as openness upon its other, as a primordial “yes” to the other, and through which the visible (for instance this red, the red of a dancer’s dress, the red “of the eternal feminine,” the red Molly wants to wear or the rose in her hair) becomes for Merleau-Ponty “a sort of straits between exterior and interior horizons ever gaping open.” These horizons are the two leaves or “lips” of what Merleau-Ponty will name “flesh,” and he proposes that by studying these two leaves or lips “we ought to find the structure of being.”

In fact he describes the prototype of Being as carnal being, as flesh, “as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant.”

Because the constitutive paradox of the body is that of every visible, Merleau-Ponty can speak of the “flesh of the world” and describe the relation between the body and the world as a form of copulation, “the insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body, the insertion of my body between the two leaves of each thing and of the world.” This place of copulation, of engulfment and insertion, of one in the other is the place of promiscuity, the wild region under the ravishing rhododendrons, where all the dimensions of wild flowering Being are in the tension of the chiasm, intertwined, each the reverse of the other. Molly is Bloom’s mountain flower (the rhododendron was classified...
originally as “the alpine rose”) “yes so we are flowers all a woman’s body yes.”21 The rhododendrum, the alpine rose, pronounces itself across space and time, and gathers within itself all the echoes it arouses and echoes them back in a perpetual utterance of “Yes.” Because it has this flesh, the factual rose that Molly would wear in her hair or the metaphorical rose that she says is the woman is also the dimensional rose rising as a relief within Being and executing a distinct style of cohesion and coherence upon the spatio-temporal field, thus enunciating a promiscuity and a promiscuity with the roses of the past and the roses of the future and with all that the rose has ever meant in the myriad cultures where it bloomed. The Yes of Molly, of the rose, is the yes of promiscuity, rooted in the primordial unconscious. Merleau-Ponty describes it as “the initial ‘yes,’ the indivision of feeling,”22 the “indivision of my body and of other bodies: of its cavities, reliefs, and those of other bodies, and of these between them . . . the encroachment of corporeal schema on each other . . . body-images, intercourse—their distance, their reconciliation, as at the circus where the parts of the body are intermingled, an investment in the promiscuity of powers, of powers and of others, and of others among them.”23 Like the problem of the relation between the visible and the invisible of which it is a variation, the self/other problem can also be resolved through the anatheistic and chiasmic notion of copulation where, as with Molly and Bloom, “two intentions have one sole Erfüllung.”24 Let us listen again to this lovely passage from Merleau-Ponty that in turn echoes the love making of Molly and Bloom:

For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying itself to it carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with it hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.”25

In his journal, Sam admits at the end that Raphaëlle had been the other voice in him, the voice that said the desires of the flesh were not to be banished but in seeking to be fulfilled were paths to divinity. It would appear that here we have echoes of Klaus’s Carpocratianism which the early Church father Ireneeus condemned for its libertinage, its excess of sexual expression outside any context of law. In Anatheism Kearney references the desires of the Shulammite woman from the Song of Songs and develops this theme extensively in an earlier essay as if it were the very script plot to Anatheism, an essay entitled “The Shulammite’s Song: Divine Eros Ascending and Descending.”26 Here he pits the theistic medieval Christian allegorical readings of Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory of Nyssa against contemporary atheistic psychological readings by Lacan and Bataille, arguing always for a third way in which the desires of the Shulammite are an affirming “yes” to the summons of a superabundant God “who seeks the beloved before she seeks him.”27 The Shulammite says “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” and Kearney puts in the Shulammite’s mouth Molly’s words to Bloom: “Yes, I say, yes I will. Yes.” It is a yes to God’s desire for us and ours for him. And because it is in the first person pronoun, Kearney writes, “it is a woman’s song from first to last and it keeps the heroine at center stage” not as the passive and reified woman left in the empty tomb of Christ.28 In his anatheistic manner, Kearney reads the Song of Songs as a double crossing, of the ontological understanding of desire as lack and the eschatological understanding as a movement to fullness. Put in another way, Kearney writes: “The lover’s discourse in the Song of Songs testifies . . . to the double traversing of sensuality by transcendence and of transcendence by sensuality.”29 Thus an amorous eschatology persists in the text, in its dips, folds, and invaginations as Kearney writes, revealing “that desire ascending is a response to desire descending—an eros that precedes the upward movement of the soul and comes to meet it halfway.
down, indeed all the way down, in the kiss of perpetual incarnation.”30 In *Sam’s Fall*, a French girl named Violaine “became more desirable the more she was desired. It seemed part of her magic, that desire of desire.”31 The Shulammite’s desire for her beloved’s desire renders him more desirable as does his for her. Such are the “fluid reversals of erotic roles” being played-out in this text, not simply between the Shulammite and Solomon but between her and God, theoerotics with human erotics.32

Through this chiasmic interweaving of desires expressed through the narrative imaginary, we find traces of the God of love actively engaged in the world, and this may save Kearney from any charge of Gnosticism. In *Walking at Sea Level*, Klaus, the ex-novice monk, tells Jack that no one escapes the dark double, that we are all Gnostics, all part of God’s shadow. Kearney’s response to this is that “the sacred is *in* the secular, but it is not *of* the secular per se” as certain monistic Gnostics might have it. (But can Kearney maintain this principal consistently?) Kearney affirms enthusiastically Raimon Panikkar’s reference to a “deep temporality in which the divine dwells as a seed of possibility calling to be made ever more incarnate in the human and natural world.”33 Panikkar describes this faith commitment as *cosmotheandrism*, which connotes “the creative cohabiting of the human and divine in the lived ecological world.” Kearney sees Panikkar aligned intimately with anatheism in its seeking to rediscover the God of life at the heart of our incarnate temporal existence. In his discussion of Saint Francis, Kearney refers to Francis’s “mythical panentheism—the view that God is in all beings.”34 He sees Merleau-Ponty and Kristeva in their vision of sacramental and sensible incarnation as deeply Franciscan. I find Kearney as one with them, also deeply Franciscan, but we have to ask whether it is really a panentheism that is at work in Kearney’s thought by looking at his recuperation of Merleau-Ponty, whom he nonetheless describes as a methodological agnostic. Panikkar’s “deep temporality” resonates well with Kearney’s reference to the “nascent logos” described by Merleau-Ponty, that force of transcendence within the immanence of nature.

In his “Working Notes” to the *Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes a “vertical past” that adheres to the present independent of consciousness, a past existentially sedimented in the present, entailing a displacing of latent intentionality from the lived body to the world, yielding a kind of “intentionality within Being.”35 The intentionality, which encompasses the vertical past, can be explicated as a kind of carnal temporality or duration, somewhat in the manner of Henri Bergson and, for that matter, Panikkar, as an ongoing process whereby the present, in its novelty, both incorporates the past and opens to an ever-emergent future, a duration inherent to material events and processes and not simply to consciousness. This latent intentionality or duration is an active process of self-differentiation. It unfolds in a succession of heterogeneous phases and constitutes a qualitative multiplicity of interrelatedness as an ever-emergent creative novelty. The sheer advance of the present over the past involves the ascription of some minimal novel agency internal to the present event and the adherence of the past to the present, its survival in the present, internalized at the moment of being transcended. This intentionality operative within being is the primordial desire or longing, the original creativity, which is another name for *logos endiathetos*, for wild Being.

But can this logos be identified with God? Richard does not claim such identity, although he alludes to it in phrases such as “by relocating transcendence within the immanence of nature, Merleau-Ponty is restoring logos to the flesh of the world. *Deus sive natura*.”36 In response let us note that in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings two terms are almost used interchangeably, namely *logos endiathetos* and *esprit sauvage*. Merleau-Ponty’s use of *esprit* refers to prerreflective consciousness, with its attendant passions and drives, it implies both mind and spirit. It is called *sauvage* when it is being taken in its most rudimentary ontological sense as that which is untamed by cultural acquisitions, that which is the being-ground for the cultivated mind, that is, as a spirit whose roots are anchored in the deepest recesses of nature, as the invisible of nature, as its organizing, energizing and directing principle.
Although Merleau-Ponty’s use of esprit does not bear any explicit reference to the divine principle, there are some phrases, although elliptical, which indicate that his usage may not be wholly antithetical to this. In a note dated October 1959 Merleau-Ponty seems to align “the unmotivated upsurge of brute Being” with “the hidden god.” In “Eye and Mind” he speaks of the “depth of the existing world and that of the fathomless God,” tying this into phrases such as “abyssal being” or “the being of God for us is an abyss.” Despite these references and related nuances in his use of “esprit,” there is not sufficient textual warrant to equate the divine being with Logos Endiathetos. In fact, if Merleau-Ponty is a panentheist as Kearney claims, we must note that the Logos Endiathetos is not only in the world but is of the world. The analogy operative here is that of the relation of the soul to the body, which according to Merleau-Ponty, is to be understood as the relation of the concave to the convex: “the soul is the hollow of the body, the body is the distention of the soul.” The mind as one of the structures or powers of the soul is the reverse side of the body, the mind of the body; it is not some secondary level of positivity, cluttered and clamored with concepts, judgments, etc., it is “quiet as water in the fissure of Being.” It is of the invisible and is to be conceived as a movement of transcendence within the openness that is generative of the visible and tangible body. The soul and mind are thus defined by and are expressions of an originary negativity, a primordial openness, which comes to the world through the doubling up of Being upon itself, whereby each is of the other. Kearney writes “of Eucharistic embodiment as recovery of the divine within the flesh, a kenotic emptying out of transcendence into the heart of the world’s body, becoming a God beneath us rather than a God beyond us” and citing Merleau-Ponty’s citing of Claudel, Kearney affirms that God “dwell in and authenticates our darkness.”

Which preposition is Kearney privileging, the in or the of? Richard is very clear about this: Anatheism is not a pantheism (ancient or New Age) that collapses the secular and the sacred into one, denying any distinction between the transcendent and the immanent. Anatheism does not say the sacred is the secular, it says it is in the secular, through the secular, toward the secular. I would even go so far as to say the sacred is inseparable from the secular, while remaining distinct. Anatheism speaks of interanimation between the sacred and secular but not of fusion or confusion. They are inextricably interconnected but never the same thing. That is why Anatheism should never be confounded with Hegelian dialectics.

On the face of it then, Richard clearly rejects the Carpocratian Gnosticism of Klaus, who claims “God is all things—good and evil.” But does his recuperation of Merleau-Ponty bring him dangerously near to this, Merleau-Ponty with his emphasis on sacramental copulation with all the others who are in and of the world?

But to address this question we must ask: who is the God that is in the world? Kearney asks: what do we mean when we speak of God, especially after declarations by Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud of the death of the God of the philosophers, who was said to be perfect in power, goodness, and knowledge. Can we still speak of the beneficent Lord of History in the wake of the Holocaust, and by extension Hiroshima, the Gulags, the killing fields of Cambodia, Rwanda, and other atrocities of the twentieth century? Kearney wonders whether the only God worthy of belief is a vulnerable and powerless one who suffers with us, who comes to us not as a mighty monarch but a solicitous stranger, whose voice is heard as James Joyce suggests “in the cries in the street?”

In taking-up this latter question, Kearney discusses two major thinkers who suffered the Nazi persecution, namely, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in April 1945, just a few weeks before Hitler committed suicide, and Paul Ricoeur, who lived five years in a Nazi prisoner of war camp but survived. Richard aligns his anatheism with both of them, first with the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose secular reading of the divine “affirms the life of the world in its darkest moments” even if we “are related to God only by
his silence and absence." In his *Letters and Papers from Prison* Bonhoeffer writes of a "religionless faith" in which Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, who helps us not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by his weakness and suffering. For Bonhoeffer, God is weak and powerless in the world and that is precisely the way, the only way, he is with us. Only the suffering God can help, the god who accepts the cross in order to reveal clearly who he is. God abandons us just in order to establish a real and personal relation with each one of us. For Bonhoeffer and Kearney, to accept to live without God—that is to live without any abstract or a priori religious guarantee—is the necessary condition for living before God and with God as men and women, in our whole worldliness. For Christians in a secular world come of age the only response is to “watch with Christ in Gethsemane” by keeping deep human and personal company with the afflicted, the homeless, the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the stranger, by participating in the sufferings of God in the secular world.

Kearney finds strong support of his anatheism also in the postwar essays of Paul Ricoeur, who argues for a post-religious faith, one that entails an “atheistic purging of the life-denying components of religion, of taboo and escapism and with these also the God of ontotheology whose power rested therein. Ricoeur’s atheistic postreligious faith “allows us to restore our originary affirmation of life, our primordial desire to be.” Ricoeur aligns himself with Bonhoeffer when he describes his postreligious faith as “a faith that moves forward through the shadows, in a new ‘night of the soul’ . . . 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.”

In relation to this I am reminded of a story told by St. Bonaventure of St. Francis of Assisi, who as a young man was horrified by poverty and by all forms of suffering, but nothing was more disgusting to him than leprosy. His charity toward lepers was condescending and not without moral disapproval. But when he discovered the crucified Christ, who according to the text of the prophet was despised as a leper, he began to render human service to the lepers with deep personal concern and devoted compassion, even to the point of kissing their hands and their mouths.

In his chapter entitled “In the Act,” Richard discusses the work of Dorothy Day and Jean Vanier, their active service to the rejected of society with whom they found Christ in solidarity. Attending to her publications “The Long Loneliness” and “The Catholic Worker,” Richard writes that Day’s politics was a praxis of the flesh, turned toward a public ministry of the afflicted. It pertains to everyday acts of love and justice in the secular world, transfiguring misery into care, hostility into hospitality. Like St. Francis, she welcomed the poor and afflicted as guests in her house that was always opened. She understood through this praxis that Christ was both host (emptying himself out of love for the least of human beings) and guest (the recipient of hospitality by a good Samaritan).

Another model of sacramental service is that manifest in the work of Jean Vanier, who founded the L’Arche project, “an open door ark for the estranged and rejected” establishing over 130 communities in thirty-three countries and six continents, whose servant-hosts live with disabled people such as persons with Downs Syndrome, the wounded of the earth. Vanier discovered that his service to these discarded people enlarged his spiritual vision, that his love for Christ increased in direct relation to this involvement, that these persons constituted a concrete opportunity to learn to know and love Christ, that these persons were his teachers. Service had become sacramental hospitality where host and guest were in chiasm with each other, or as Merleau-Ponty says, in one another, each transformed by the other.

Another example of sacramental hospitality is to be found in the Guestbook Project directed by Richard Kearney that seeks to bring divided communities together, that enables their respective community leaders, students, artists, and refugees to encounter each other across political, reli-

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gious, and cultural divides. It involves a process of exchanging narratives from both sides of the conflict, and requires a compassionate listening and empathic imagining as a way of hosting the Other. Its sacramentality is expressed in a process of transubstantiation that moves in reciprocal directions, from word to flesh, from flesh to word. Children from opposing sides, for instance, agree to speak to one another in the bodily presence of face to face in a moment of enormous vulnerability. Levinas writes that trust precedes truth, and clearly here, the movement from face to face of the flesh requires the trust that each will listen compassionately to the other’s truth. In listening to the other’s words, a new flesh can be born, the flesh of hospitality, of peace and welcome. Here we see Richard Kearney putting into practice his own philosophy of hospitality, moving from word to flesh.

While affirming Kearney’s recuperation of Bonhoeffer and Ricoeur, we are compelled to ask whether their God, whom Kearney endorses, lets him avoid the charge of pantheism. Let me clarify. If anatheism wants to steer a course between atheism and theism by claiming the transcendent is in the immanent and vice versa, we have to ask what are the qualities or attributes of the transcendent that justify the claim that God is in but not of the world. Would these not be the qualities already articulated by philosophers for centuries, namely that God is eternal and infinite in power, goodness, and knowledge? For many theologians it is standard fare that God is in the world in the persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, but he is not of the world, given that he is omnipresent, omniscient, etc. In other words, how can panentheism not embrace, although in a highly qualified manner, the God who transcends finitude and death?

Perhaps Schelling’s speculation about the dark ground of God may be for Richard another way of coming to terms with this question. For Schelling the Urgrund, the groundless abyss of indifference somehow differentiates into the ground of god’s existence and his actual existence, into a two-fold will, the obscure will of the ground and the clear will of love. But given that God is in a process of self-revelation, given that there is strife and opposition in his very being, it would seem the khorà is an intrinsic principle of his development. And so I am wondering if Derrida may be on track in pointing to a certain undecidability that disturbs and haunts our world from within and calls for a religious response, a movement of faith, that the God to whom we pray, the God of love, is still struggling with the obscurity of his own ground.

But perhaps the above question is the wrong question to put to Richard. Perhaps he is not a panentheist at all. Kearney responds with the anatheistic paradox, namely, that we can only return to God after we have abandoned “God.” But isn’t the “God” that we abandon the dead God of the philosophers or else the God of the Baptist preachers, the God of death and fear, while the God to whom we return is the God of life? But is this a strong paradox? When I commented some years ago at SPEP on Richard’s book The God Who May Be, I pointed out that the God of Onto-theology was the postmodern God described and rejected by Heidegger, who was educated in the dreary German scholasticism of the Suarezian type, namely, metaphysical essentialism, and not the God of Thomas Aquinas, who desires the perfection of all creatures, who freely and contingently loved all created things. For Thomas, God desires that all persons be saved on the condition that, through a responsible exercise of their freedom, they keep his commandments, cooperate with his grace, etc. The Kingdom of God, the kingdom of love and justice, was indeed at hand but we humans had to achieve it, freely choose it, and work fervently toward it; our profound dignity as persons rested upon the fact that we were able to do this. Thus Thomas could say that God depended upon us, albeit contingently, to realize the kingdom. Yes, we are related to God, as Bonhoeffer claims, only by his silence and absence, but for Thomas, God’s silence and absence are his providential love of our freedom. Without the existential reading of Thomas by Etienne Gilson, I find the anatheistic paradox perhaps too facile.

Conclusion: Rather than trying to outdo Polonius, let me conclude as I did in an earlier commentary on The God Who May Be by noting
that perhaps we have not listened closely to Richard’s words. Perhaps we have not understood that Richard is effecting a nuptial chiasm between ontology and eschatology, with an emphasis on the latter. The eschatological focus is principally on the ethical, not the ontological, on the God who is responsible for having made promises to us and we who are responsible for fulfilling the promise made to God to trust his promise. The promise of God transforms God into the promised God, a very different sort of God of the Gaps, in this case meaning that there is a gap in the divine, a free space gaping at the very core of divinity, the space of the possible. This is not to deny esse of God in the way in which Thomas understood esse but to defer God’s full esse to the promised future. God takes leave of his full being in order to make us partners in achieving the kingdom; thus he is not all powerful, because he takes from himself and confers upon us the power to freely bring forth his being as the reign of love and justice.

Let me also conclude by thanking Richard for revealing the richness and depth of the Other in shadows, i.e., for bringing into the discourse on the God after metaphysics the female imaginary in the person of Raphaelle, of Molly Bloom, of the Shulammite woman, of Dorothy Day and many others who have been traditionally hidden and buried in the empty tomb, and for bringing Christ back to the streets after his long sojourn at the right hand of the Father.

NOTES

1. Richard Kearney, _Sam’s Fall_ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).
3. _Sam’s Fall_, 190.
4. _Walking at Sea Level_, 62.
5. Ibid., 105.
6. Ibid., 198.
7. Ibid., 211.
8. _Sam’s Fall_, 127.
9. _Sam’s Fall_, 168.
10. _Sam’s Fall_, 134.
15. Ibid., 732.
18. Ibid., 264.
19. Ibid., 136.
25. Ibid., 144.
27. Ibid., 307.
28. Ibid., 309.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 322.
31. Kearney, _Sam’s Fall_, 70.
33. Kearney, _Anatheism_ 141.
34. Ibid., 100.
35. Merleau-Ponty, _The Visible and the Invisible_, 244.

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40. Ibid., 271.
41. Ibid., 235.
42. Ibid., 248.
43. *Anatheism*, 91.
44. Ibid., 166.
45. *Walking at Sea Level*, 197.
46. *Anatheism*, 68.
47. Ibid., 75.
48. Ibid., 76.
49. Ibid., 159.

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