

TODAY'S TRULY PHILOSOPHICAL PHILOSOPHER OF RELIGION

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Abstract. What does it mean to be a truly philosophical philosopher of religion today? The paper proposes that the thinker of faith should pursue the following passions: (1) a passion for wonder and epistemic openness; (2) the desire for a rationality that exceeds narrow-minded hyper-rationalism; (3) an ecological pathos i.e. loving the Earth; (4) a passion for self-development; and (5) thinking and participating in ethical political-economic transformation, a revolutionary passion. And so, today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion would pursue a cognitively rigorous, engaged, and experientially adventurous venture in thinking.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TRULY PHILOSOPHICAL PHILOSOPHER OF RELIGION TODAY?

The following offering is an introductory unfolding of this dense and daunting question. To consider each of these terms – “today,” “truly,” “philosophical/philosopher,” “religion” – separately would probably present no formidable challenge, but to begin tracing their composite meanings is indeed challenging. A challenge, and, as I hope to show, an opening, an opening-up of possibilities, risks, and opportunities when it comes to being a truly philosophical philosopher of religion today.

To begin with, “religion” in its broadest sense has to do with beliefs and practices associated with divinities. But what does it mean to be *a philosopher* of religion, *to philosophize* about religion? In order to broach this preliminary question, we must first consider the meaning of philosophy. What, then, is philosophy? Let us begin etymologically: *filo-sofia* is a friend/love(r) of wisdom. Before immediately asking the critical question “What is wisdom?” we note from the etymological description that

philosophy and wisdom are not strictly identical: wisdom is what philosophy *seeks*; wisdom is philosophy's *object of desire*. What is the nature of this difference? Perhaps we can propose that philosophy is reflective and theoretical, while "wisdom" intimates more involvement and interactivity, more immersion in life, perhaps even a thoughtful praxis, a philosophy that is practiced, a practical philosophy. But we should not over-state the difference: if/when philosophy is a *love(r)* of wisdom, this might also imply that philosophy is wisdom's *love(r)*, so we are warranted to assume some kind of overlap or intertwining (like lovers do).

Perhaps, then, the perplexing relation between wisdom and its lover may be figured in terms of *passion*: maybe philosophy becomes truer (to itself, to the world) when it draws nearer to the passionate thinking that is wisdom; maybe the more passionately we philosophize, the wiser our philosophizing may be. But why the term "passion"? As I hope to show as I proceed, it is eminently suitable as a driving concept when unpacking the meanings of "philosophy" and "philosophy of religion," considering the attraction and affection that characterize the relation between wisdom and its lover, as well as reflecting the related notion that a philosophy drawing nearer to wisdom is one which is engaged and involved. Next, one can perceive a certain correspondence between "passionate" and one of our pivotal words, "truly," for the latter's basic resonance here is affective/emotive – akin to its signification in the wonderful movie title, *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990). Furthermore, I propose that truly philosophical thinking is passionate about the following things (though not *just* the following things): wondering and cognitive openness; ever-evolving rationality; bodiliness and the Earth; self-development and ethical politics; and otherness *and* relation. Let us consider this series of inter-penetrating passions in relation to philosophy and the philosopher of religion, thus allowing us to glean what it means to be one who loves to truly think belief in divinity today.

A PASSION FOR OPENNESS

We have begun unfolding what philosophy is, but we should also consider philosophy's beginnings in order to better understand it and assess it today. How, then, does philosophy arise? With wonder. Wonder is a response – an evocation, a provocation – to Creation's breathtaking expanse, awesome power, and innumerable abysses. We are surprised and awed by a spectacular universe even in the face of an ostensibly tedious and challenging everydayness that routinely consumes and even bores us (after all, immersion

in the mundane often obscures its extraordinariness). In turn, bewilderment provokes thinking. The Greeks recognized the pivotal place of wonder when it comes to thinking philosophically: Plato's Socrates proclaimed: "wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else" and Aristotle remarked that "owing to wonder" we "first began to philosophize."¹ Now, marveling is not "just" the beginning of thinking, for amazement calls *and recalls* us to philosophical attunement; hence, we supplement the Greeks' remarks by construing wonder not "just" as philosophy's origin but also as an abiding partner – something which Heidegger was acutely aware of when he declared that "Astonishment carries and pervades philosophy."² Perhaps it would only be slightly hyperbolic to suggest that when one stops wondering, one stops thinking philosophically.

Passionate wondering and a love of wisdom are thus intertwined (like lovers). Their inextricable coupling is exemplified by that wonderful proto-philosophical question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" (first expressed that way by Leibniz), a question that can never grow old or tiresome for the passionate thinker. Such an abyssal question is provoked by Existence which excites, eludes, and exceeds human thought and scientific mastery, arousing epistemic humility and open-mindedness. How so? A question like "Why is there something?" continues to baffle us: science itself (whose scientific guise is like a religion for many) cannot authoritatively answer it, as witnessed by the fact that there are competing scientific theories ("Big Bang" versus "Steady-State") – and even if the "Big Bang" remains the "dominant" scientific hypothesis, it only exacerbates our perplexity, for it impels us to ask what (if anything) "caused" the Big Bang.

In the midst of such bewilderment, the passionate thinker is right to consider additional and alternative causal possibilities, including divine involvement in the eventuation of what-is. Since wonder-fueled philosophy faces Big Questions that both summon and exceed thinking, stimulating and overwhelming our minds, we should remain humble and open to various possible answers – scientific and otherwise. For passionate thinking must not be confused with fundamentalistic fervor of any persuasion, religious or irreligious. Epistemic humility and cognitive openness thus open up a space for considering the divine as perhaps somehow being involved in Creation – the "perhaps" signaling that today's truly philosophical phi-

¹ Plato, *Theatetus* in *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 173; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1554.

² Martin Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics* (New Haven: College & University Press, 1955), 6.

philosopher of religion never forgets that divinity remains a possibility until such time – *if any* – of a self-evident divine self-disclosure. And yes: “possibility” should here be understood in a “strong” sense – not to the extent where it may be raised *above* actuality (*à la* Aristotle and Heidegger) but certainly where it is *not* inferior to it (i.e. the possible construed as the strictly hypothetical): possibility is instead considered actuality’s counterpart; furthermore, some possibilities are actualities that have not been or cannot be verified as such (for the time being) – such as divinity, perhaps.

Of course, it is anticipated that the figuration of the divine *as a possibility* will offend a number of thinkers of religion – and certainly many believers. However, when considered carefully, the depiction of divinity as a possibility actually opens up the space for faith: by definition, belief is *faith in X*, not *knowledge of X*. If there is deity, then only deity (and perhaps other celestial beings, if there are any) *knows* it; as for us – one can only believe, or not believe, or maybe agnostically suspend belief. A recognition of divine possibility and the knowledge that faith is not knowledge is – should be – therefore a defining trait of today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion. Such an open-minded philosopher of religion recognizes that faith – true, courageous faith – arises in the midst of an ineradicable undecidability.³ A passionate embrace of a critical openness and the resulting recognition of uncertainty thus assists today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion in resisting the lure of certainty.

And the same goes for today’s atheistic philosopher of religion, for atheism is also a faith. Today’s passionate thinking thereby vehemently rejects excessively empiricistic logics that arrogantly assert the human as the “The Measure of All Things” – “All Things” being construed by the narrow-minded as only those things that are observable, excluding elusive but valid possibilities that arise out of Creation’s multiple abysses (such as deity, if there is any).⁴ And so, the various dogmatisms that plague the Earth today – religious and otherwise – should have no place in passionate thinking today; they should have no place in the truly philosophical, for

³ Refer to, e.g. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1999), Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), Mark Manolopoulos, “When Marion’s Theology Seeks Certainty,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 4.1 (2002): www.jcrt.org/archives/04.1/manolopoulos.shtml.

⁴ Hubristic hyper-rationalism rears its ugly head most vividly in the form of scientism, whose most recent proponents are the “New Atheists” (Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, etc.) – who are almost/just as narrow-minded as religious fundamentalists, who merely exhibit a reverse dogmatism, and are therefore not truly philosophical, no lovers of wisdom, and nothing truly “new.”

the truly philosophical is passionately anti-dogmatic and radically open. If, today, there needs to be any methodology to philosophy of religion, any Heideggerian “methodological atheism” is replaced by a “methodological agnosticism” – more accurately: open-mindedness. For when it comes to divine non-/existence, we just don’t know. (For the time being.)

A PASSION FOR REASON

But does an affirmation of epistemic humility and philosophical openness entail stances such as an inflated Socratic ignorance and a hyper-postmodernistic anti-knowing (“All I know is that I do not know,” “there is no Truth/truths,” etc.), leading to the purported rejection of ethics (“anything goes”)? As we further explore the meaning of cognitive openness and other passions of thinking, the question of a truly philosophical ethics will be disclosed. But we can begin by quickly dismissing any link between the openness espoused here and an *indiscriminate* openness to *any* opinions and actions: philosophical openness does *not* mean being open-minded to *every* notion and praxis – hence, my strategy of usually qualifying the openness described here with predicates like “philosophical,” “cognitive,” “radical,” “thoughtful,” etc., to distinguish it from an indiscriminate openness. After all, even though the affective/emotive resonance of the word “passionate” is pivotal in the present aim of disclosing the meanings of today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion, such a word should by no means be automatically reduced to “recklessness,” “selfishness,” and so on. On the contrary (and as I hope this introductory exploration will indicate), philosophical passion is restrained, discerning, discriminating, rigorous.

But how does passionate thinking discern what is reasonably possible in contrast to nonsensical opinions? Passionate thinking critically draws on the discoveries, breakthroughs, and refinements of thousands of years of thinking, including Hellenic thought, the Enlightenment, contemporary philosophy, scientific endeavor, etc. A survey of the contributions of these various movements (a mammoth task in itself) will not be undertaken in this preliminary study, but what must be emphasized here is that various critical philosophical moments and currents (especially modern and contemporary movements) have led to greater understanding and discernment.⁵ The continual generation of insightful philosophical breakthroughs,

⁵ Some of the pivotal thinkers in this regard include (in alphabetical order): Simone de Beauvoir (refer to, e.g., *The Second Sex* [New York: Vintage Books, 1989]); Jacques Derri-

movements, and counter-movements thus allows critical conditioning by each of them on each other, allowing the passionately “eclectic” thinker to continually and discerningly retrieve, refine, and develop each school’s truths while rejecting their errors and exaggerations.

Furthermore, this accumulating, evolving, expanding, and universalizable knowledge is – or should be – also shaped by thoughtful and progressive elements in ostensibly “non-philosophical” or “other-than-philosophical” traditions, including science, religion, art, literature, poetry, and so on. For instance, with respect to philosophy of religion, the passionate biblical insistence on the inclusion – and even the priority of – the marginalized (consider the recurring biblical motif of “orphans and widows” [Deuteronomy 14.29, Psalms 109.9, Isaiah 1.17, etc.]) offers a crucial supplement and corrective to philosophy’s forgetting and disavowal of outsiders and outcasts – typified by destructive “centrisms,” such as androcentrism (sexism/patriarchy) and anthropocentrism (the human as Creation’s apex-center).

The process of critical appropriation of whatever is truly philosophical in philosophical and other-than-philosophical movements thereby expands and sharpens our thinking, opening us up to more and more truths, simultaneously causing us to abandon our prejudices (which is confronting, given our drive for certainty). How so? What are the implications of a passion for ever-evolving and ever-expanding Reason for philosophy of religion? In other words, how does the passionate thinking that has been developing over millennia affect the way today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion think belief in deity?

da (e.g. *Of Grammatology* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976]) [henceforth Derrida, *Of Grammatology*]; Ralph Waldo Emerson (e.g. *Essays and Lectures* [New York: Library of America, 1983]); Sigmund Freud (e.g. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* [London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974]); Germaine Greer (e.g. *The Female Eunuch* [London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970]); Martin Heidegger (e.g. *Being and Time* [New York: Harper & Row, 1962]); Edmund Husserl (e.g. *Logical Investigations* [London: Routledge, 1973]); Immanuel Kant (e.g. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 992-2003]); Søren Kierkegaard (e.g. *Either/Or* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987]); Aldo Leopold (e.g. *A Sand County Almanac* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1949]); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (e.g. *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975-2005); Maurice Merleau-Ponty (e.g. *Phenomenology of Perception* [New York: Humanities Press, 1962]); Friedrich Nietzsche (e.g. *The Portable Nietzsche* [New York: Penguin, 1976]); Blaise Pascal (e.g. *Pensées* [New York: Penguin, 1995]); Jean-Paul Sartre (e.g. *Being and Nothingness* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1956]); Richard Rorty (e.g. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]); Edward Said (e.g. *Orientalism* [New York: Pantheon Books, 1978]); etc.

I have already noted how a passion for openness means that today's passionate thinker of faith does not dogmatically insist on divine existence but proceeds along the path of its possibility, an openness which is the very thing that makes faith *faith*. Now, if there is a necessary tentativeness when it comes to divine existence, then this necessary tentativeness is amplified when it comes to the question of any possible divine "nature" or "attributes" – a provisional thinking until such time, *if any*, of empirically-incontestable divine self-revelation. And so, today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion approaches this question provisionally, tentatively, discerningly retaining whatever is reasonable in classic theological configurations, supplementing them with critical reconfigurations and radicalizations, and rejecting whatever offends a truly thoughtful rationality.

Before I begin sketching some of the key divine "characteristics" postulated by a truly philosophical philosophy of religion today, I must first respond to an inevitable objection: am I not merely "projecting"? Am I not imposing upon the mystery of divinity my own image of it, perhaps even of my own inflated self-image? There is always this risk when thinking faith. But as I hope to show, my "projection" – if it is one – is resolutely informed by thinking, by a passionate thoughtfulness, by a love of wisdom.

Divine Reason

A first divine trait, then, would be thinking itself: today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion offers for thinking a divinity that thinks, that is open-minded, a free-thinker. (As I hope to show, this divine aspect is related to other traits, so the elaboration of these other traits will disclose more on divine rationality.) For philosophers of religion affiliated in some way or degree with biblical traditions, this trait is scripturally sanctioned, for there are numerous biblical references to divine wisdom and its imparting to humans.⁶ Therefore, philosophically and scripturally, we should be thinking divinity (if there is any) as a thinking entity. This means that we philosophers of religion should eschew figuring the divine as an insanely bloodlusting fanatic (which is unfortunately a prominent feature of the biblical deity), a configuration that only fuels religious militancy and atheistic disdain (which is understandable). But what if the divine *is* a vi-

⁶ For example: 1 Kings 4.29: the divine gives Solomon wisdom; Jeremiah 51.15: the world is "established" by divine wisdom; Romans 11.33, 1 Corinthians 1.24, Ephesians 3.10, etc, all refer to wisdom as a divine trait; there is John's (in)famous correspondence between Jesus and the divine Word/*logos* (John 1.1). . . .

cious lunatic? Richard Kearney nicely sums up the stance that thoughtful thinkers should take when it comes to the question of believing in such an abominable deity: “the God [*sic*] of love and justice is the only God I’m interested in. I’m not interested in the God of evil, torture, and sadism.”⁷ I’m not interested in such a divinity either: Reason demands that a just and loving deity is the only deity the reasonable person should believe in. *If* the divine (if there is any) is evil or good and evil, the reasonable-ethical thinker would not adore such a deity. Which is reasonable.

Furthermore, the proposed trait of divine rationality does not automatically mean that today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion should construe deity as a hyper-rationalistic automaton without loves or passions – in other words, a kind of divine version of Dr. Spock, strictly rationalistic, coldly calculating. No: today’s thinker of religion should propose and advance that the divine might possess – might be possessed by – a variety of loves and passions, some of which are discussed as I proceed.

A PASSION FOR CREATION

Speaking of loves and passions, passionate thinking loves and thinks corporeality. Unlike the prudishness and frigidity of neoplatonic logics which persist today, who continue to privilege the “soul” and “heaven” over against bodies and the Earth, philosophy now returns to questions of bodiliness, sensuality, sexuality, ecology. Philosophical dedication to materiality contrasts with logics in which the “immaterial” has been traditionally privileged above the material (the divine over the corporeal, the mind/soul over the body/flesh, and so on). Such neoplatonic logics fixated by the other-worldly – dominant for so long in conventional philosophy and theology – have thankfully been increasingly undermined by a variety of radical thinkers (a number of which were mentioned in note 5 above). Of course, what today’s truly philosophical thinker should not be tempted to do is simply reverse such hierarchical dualism – i.e. privileging the material above the immaterial – though we lovers of justice are somewhat sympathetic towards “strategic reversals,” especially as they unsettle

⁷ Richard Kearney, “Faith in Hermeneutics,” in *With Gifted Thinkers: Conversations with Caputo, Hart, Horner, Kearney, Keller, Rigby, Taylor, Wallace, Westphal*, ed. Mark Manolopoulos (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 140. The inserted qualifier “[*sic*]” signals the recognition of the problematic – nay, offensive – nature of the word “God” with its heavily masculinized-patriarchal resonance; refer below.

and undermine hegemonic dualism.⁸ To be sure, we open-minded ones certainly do not refuse outright the possibility of the immaterial – though we should certainly be wary of immaterialist logics' errors and excesses. What today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion must do, then, is contribute to the destabilization of hierarchical dualism without giving up dualism altogether – after all, it is valid and useful to tentatively maintain various distinctions (such as “male” and “female”) but they must be deployed rigorously non-hierarchically.

Philosophical currents that exemplify the re-inclusion, re-thinking, and re-affirmation of corporeality include ecological criticism and ecofeminism, ever-growing movements characterized by a most rigorous and passionate thinking.⁹ Ecofeminism is particularly passionate and passionately thoughtful: it has been identifying the way traditional philosophy has overwhelmingly privileged the (European) male and its attendant logics which degrade the coupling female/ (“Mother”) Earth. Ecocriticism identifies and explores the ways in which hierarchical dualism has been a key constituent and driver in a matrix of forces that include phenomena such as puritanical, patriarchal religions, intrusive, manipulative scientism, greedy, hyper-industrializing capitalism, over-population, etc. As an elementary force in this diabolical matrix, hegemonic dualism is involved in the accelerating ecological crisis: orthodox philosophy's disavowal and exclusion of things like the body, the female, Nature, sexuality, only facilitates their disfiguration and destruction. The passionate thinker must therefore contribute to

⁸ On “hierarchical dualism,” refer to, e.g. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) [henceforth Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*]; on “strategic reversal,” refer to, e.g., Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

⁹ Refer to, e.g. (in alphabetical order), Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Books, 1985); Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995); Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Freya Mathews, “Letting the World Grow Old: An Ethos of Countermodernity,” *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 3.2 (1999): 119-137; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement,” *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95-100; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*; Richard Routley and Val Routley, “Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism,” in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century*, ed. K. Goodpaster and K. Sayre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979), 36-59; Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Charlene Spretnak, *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997); Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207; etc.

the abolition of hierarchical dualism and to the promotion of a truly ecological *skepsis* and *praxis*.

Thankfully, the task and pleasure of thinking divinity is increasingly drawing on ecological thought, thus sharpening its rigor and further arousing its passion.¹⁰ This is a crucial step forward: as Lynn White pointed out but somewhat over-emphasized, religion has been one of the anti-ecological culprits, so ecophilosophy of religion may contribute to a greening of faith and its thinking that counters anti-ecological religion.¹¹ Passionate about matter, today's truly philosophical theologian and philosopher of religion refuses a hierarchy of beings – which, to re-emphasize, does *not* mean the abandonment of distinctions. Today's passionate thinkers (theological and otherwise, theistic and otherwise) must join a growing throng who are for the Earth – which does not mean a wholehearted consumption of *all* ecological discourse, for even ecological thinkers err; once again, critical openness is necessary here.

God-dess

In keeping with the drive for radical openness as well as confronting the hierarchical dualization of “male” “vs.” “female,” today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion must also broach the question of divine

¹⁰ Refer to, e.g. (in alphabetical order), Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003) [henceforth Keller, *Face of the Deep*]; Jay McDaniel, *Earth, Sky, Gods and Mortals: Developing an Ecological Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 1990); Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985); H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* 1992); Joseph Sittler, “The Sittler Speeches,” in *Center for the Study of Campus Ministry Yearbook 1977-1978*, ed. P. Schroeder (Valparaiso: Valparaiso University Press, 1977-1978), 8-61; Mark I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996); etc.

¹¹ Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207. For religious thinkers who might dispute theology's role in anti-ecological thinking, consider this classic statement from Ignatius of Loyola, which exemplifies mainstream theology's stance towards Creation: “Man [*sic*] is created to praise, reverence, and serve God [*sic*] our Lord. . . . And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man. . . . From this it follows that man is to use them . . . and ought to rid himself of them insofar as they hinder him. For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things.” Ignatius of Loyola, “First Week: Principle and Foundation,” in *The Spiritual Exercises*, on *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* <http://www.ccel.org/i/ignatius/exercises/cache/exercises.pdf>.

“gender.” In other words, how should the passionate thinker conceive the divine “person” – *if*, of course, the divine is some kind of personal force? To begin with, the word “God” is heavily masculinist and therefore reinforces the oppression of females, for the notion that the divine is *strictly* male has been legitimizing sexism for millennia. “God” and its correlates (“He,” “Him,” “His,” etc.) denote and reinforce the construal of the divine as an “Old Man in the Sky,” a towering, moralizing patriarch – a configuration that should be abandoned by today’s passionate thinker. Today’s thinker of faith should therefore deploy alternative terms (“deity,” “divinity,” “divine”). Of course, it should be noted that our radical openness directs us to being open to the possibility that the divine may turn out to be an “Old Man in the Sky” – what then? Today’s truly philosophical philosopher of religion should not subscribe to such a violent deity; such a deity is not worthy of belief by the thoughtful believer. Only a deity that is truly divine – a divinity that is just and loving and rational – warrants the thoughtful thinker’s belief.

Now, philosophical passion should not be misconstrued as a fervor blind to what may be saved or redeemed from this word, for not only does “God” remain a powerful name (it has a history and a charge and a dynamism) but it is also more personal than the alternative terms – which is important if the truly philosophical philosopher of religion desires to think the possibility of such a deity. Therefore, this word’s potency and personal resonance should – and can – be retained and transformed by modifying it: one such possible alteration involves adding “-dess” to produce the neologistic “God-dess.” Why such a modification? First of all, simply replacing “God” with “Goddess” might work as a temporary strategic reversal (especially the positive and powerful carnal-ecological resonances of “Goddess”) but it is unsatisfactory as a permanent measure: it would merely substitute an exclusively masculinized name with an exclusively feminized one. What is required today is that both “God” and “Goddess” are disfigured and transfigured – hence, “God-dess.” The intervention and insertion of the hyphen unsettles, troubles, and “contaminates” any pure and simple genderization of divinity: not only is “God-dess” gender-inclusive but, perhaps more importantly, the hyphen signals the possibility that deity is maybe, somehow, both genders and/or in-between them and/or gendered otherwise and/or otherwise than gendered and/or beyond gender. “God-dess”: s/he-it-other-wise. A hyphenated name therefore not only breaks up any reifying dualization but also opens up other possibilities when attempting to think the possibility of a personal deity.

A PASSION FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

One of the perennial passions of philosophy has been self-examination and self-knowing: Plato's Socrates declared (perhaps with some classic Hellenic hyperbole) that the unexamined life is not worth living.¹² I would add that passionate thinking not only calls for examination and knowing (inasmuch as the abyssal human being *can* examine and know oneself) but also for self-development – becoming more open to life, a better person, engaging in and with the world. One wonders (and deplores) to what extent philosophers and theologians have contributed to the ethical betterment of individuals; one could even suggest that these industries have substantially failed, a failure demonstrated by the success of the phenomenal self-help movement (including the “popular philosophy” heralded by the likes of Alain de Botton) which has been attempting to satisfy seekers' desire for self-betterment. Now, the self-help movement certainly warrants quite a bit of criticism, particularly with its naïve exaggerations of self-creation (i.e. its substantial blindness to crucial developmental-environmental forces [genes, upbringing, etc.], as well as its general ignorance of the complexity and multiplicity of the self) and its radically apolitical character (the socio-economic-political being another fundamental developmental factor that is usually ignored by self-helpers). Nevertheless, this movement's popularity indicates the failure of philosophy and theology in this regard. Furthermore, it must be stressed that today's thinkers should not consider self-help their sworn enemy (as some snobbish academicians do), for Nietzsche – a passionate thinker if ever there was one – was somewhat of a self-help pioneer himself, having declared: “Help yourself, then everyone will help you.”¹³ And so, one of the passions of philosophy today should be the thought of self-development and its dissemination to the multitudes who should have ready access to growing wisdom, be exposed to it, be schooled in it (or even have it rammed down their throats).

How, then, should the passionate thinker think “self-development” today? The whole breadth of such thinking lies beyond the scope of this introductory work, but it would certainly involve the thematics of wonder, openness, fidelity to a universalizable Reason, and so on. Of course, a rigorous philosophy of self-development is also ineradicably intertwined with the question of ethics and politics. After all, what is self-improvement if

¹² Plato, *The Apology*, in *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo* (London: Penguin, 1993), 63.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 467.

not a developing-towards what is good and true, individually and corporately? How, then, should the passionate thinker think the ethical?

Millennia of thinking have produced a variety of ethical schemata, with their various insights and drawbacks, but I would like to outline a kind of ethics that is intrinsically informed by a number of the philosophical movements cited above (and may be figured as an “ethical ontology/ontological ethics”). Materialist, ecological, and phenomenological philosophical currents provide a context: their fundamental concern is with “the given.”¹⁴ This emphasis provides an opening for a truly radical and rigorous ethics: a driving feature of the ethical is the human allowance for all entities – human, other-than-human, and, *yes*, “even” humanly-manufactured things – to arise and to flourish. With such an ethos, we accept only a minimal, unavoidable human amount of interference – unavoidable due to our ineradicable material relationality to other beings produces a certain minimal amount of violation (e.g. when we humans wash or walk, we inadvertently annihilate countless micro-organisms). In other words, what is being presented here is a radical egalitarianism: *all* things should be allowed to be – and who knows, even respected, even loved. Likewise, we should recall old and unfashionable words like “wrong” and “evil” to describe human notions and actions that unnecessarily disfigure and annihilate the flourishing of the Earth and its creatures.

Allowing, Delighting

This emphasis on letting-flourish and a correlated radical egalitarianism has biblical resonances. Reading afresh and anew the opening verses of Genesis, we find that the divine both allows things to be (“Let there be . . .”) and considers all created things “good.” Rather than interpreting “Let there be” as some kind of authoritarian command-demand, today’s passionate thinker may figure it as a divine invitation. Likewise, the words of the deity who considers creativity and Creation as “good” may be rethought not “just” as “approval” but as *delight*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Refer to, e.g. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁵ These insights are divulged in Keller’s *Face of the Deep*, an exemplary case of passionate theological thinking.

A PASSION FOR AN ETHICAL POLITICAL-ECONOMIC SYSTEM

A radically egalitarian ethos opens up the kind of ethical politics that the passionate thinker should envisage today. What kind of political system would facilitate such a thoroughgoing democratism? Existing systems have failed dismally – not only is the ecological crisis proof of this failure; consider, also, the plagues of poverty, racism, sexism, dubious wars, etc. As much as the passionate thinker might adore the idea of “democracy,” its historical expressions have been failings us, substantially shaped by unenlightened leaders and multitudes. Hence, the political order must change – and change drastically – and we thinkers are called to contribute to radical political transformation; for as the passionate Marx pointed out: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”¹⁶ Today’s passionate thinker must therefore re-consider the possibility of revolution. More than that: we thinkers must think the revolution itself. This may sound scandalous to some/many, but it nevertheless remains true. It is also nothing new: note that Plato’s *Republic* does precisely the same thing, advancing the rule of philosopher-rulers – who would perhaps do no worse than our present leaders, and would possibly do a whole lot better.¹⁷

As part of a radical re-thinking of the ethico-political, today’s passionate thinker must also re-think economics and determine what is the most rational-ethical economic system – for politics and economics are intertwined, exemplified today by the collusion between capitalism and existing “democracy” to exponentially exacerbate a thoroughly unjust world with its extremes of obscene wealth and dire poverty. What, then, is the

¹⁶ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” on *Marx/Engels Internet Archive* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). Due to the limits of this introductory paper, I cannot espouse details of what truly philosophical political philosophy of religion could contribute in this regard. However, as ridiculous as it may appear to our “liberal-democratic” minds, Plato’s *Republic* provides a possible starting-point: what if government was driven by a “democratic oligarchy of the wise”? A benevolent corporate dictatorship, whereby the world’s most thoughtful thinkers would debate the issues and democratically decide whenever issues cannot decide unanimously (which would not be too often, for Reason is universalizable). But wouldn’t such a system become obsolete “once” the multitude becomes enlightened? Not necessarily: as the masses learn to truly think and act truly ethically, there may be no need for democracy, for the minds and hearts of the governing body and the public would be substantially “at one” – for the minds and hearts of both would be fundamentally driven by universal Reason.

most ethical economic system? As with the need for a revolutionary politics, what is required is a thinking of a revolutionary economics. With a qualified, critical recuperation of passionate and compassionate Marxism – a neo-Marxism, a neo-socialism, a neo-communism – all citizens would be ecological producers and consumers, aware of the Earth's material conditions and limitations. And, yes, today's passionate philosopher of religion must contribute to the thinking and re-thinking of this neo-Marxism/-socialism/-communism.

Red God-dess

As with other passions of philosophy and their relations to thinking divinity raised in the present work, we can find biblical indications/confirmations of socialism. The Book of Acts is pivotal in this regard: at 2.44-45, we find that: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" and, again, at Acts 4.32, we are told that: "Now the whole group of those who believed were one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common."¹⁸ This biblical link between biblical religion and radical emancipatory politics has also been historically expressed: theologically, by the likes of Thomas More, and as praxis by the likes of revolutionaries such as Joachim de Fiore, Thomas Müntzer, Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, Camillo Torres, and so on.¹⁹

¹⁸ It should be noted, of course, that Christian proto-commun(al)ism does not go far enough, for what is required is that the means of production are also "held in common," for how could a community survive once all of its "possessions and goods" are sold? True commun(al)ism, in other words, must permeate throughout society – indeed, throughout the whole world.

¹⁹ Roland Boer is an expert on the relations between Christianity and communism; refer to, e.g., *Criticism of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Lest one remains unconvinced that today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion should affirm and advance some kind of neo-communist revolution, we can also find philosophical confirmation in what only *appears* to be a most unlikely source: philosophical confirmation is found in the work of that incredibly passionate Christian-atheist, Slavoj Žižek. In *Living in the End Times*, he devotes quite a bit of time and space (some 20 pages) to a vigorous and rigorous elaboration of the link between Christianity and radical politics: "Perhaps, we should take love as our starting-point – not intimate-erotic love, but that political love whose Christian name is *agape*. . . . *Agape* as political love means that an unconditional egalitarian love for the Neighbor *can* serve as the foundation for a new Order. The form of appearance of this love is so-called apocalyptic millenarianism, or the Idea of Communism: the urge to realize an egalitarian

Omnipotence or a Certain Impotence?

But shouldn't the rational believer rely on deity when it comes to changing the world for the better? Shouldn't the believer "wait" for God-*dess*? We open-minded ones should certainly not disclose the possibility of a messianic deity that rescues us from ourselves. However, we should *also* be open to the controversial counter-possibility: perhaps the divine (if there is any) is not as powerful as traditional theology construes; perhaps the divine is not powerful at all, or empowered otherwise, powerful-enough to inspire *us*, empower *us*. These counter-possibilities are reasonable, given that, thus far, there has been no divine saving from the countless, unceasing horrors that humanity has been continually inflicting upon itself and the planet.²⁰ Today, then, the notion of a weak/*er* deity has (re-)emerged.²¹ Of course, for many believers, faith in a somewhat powerless deity is blasphemous and embarrassing, but the thoughtful thinker of religion should not be swayed by entrenched notions of the divine, for today's truly philosophical philosopher of faith must be substantially determined by the various possibilities offered by Reason.

If we therefore remain open to the possibility of a powerless God-*dess* or a deity empowered otherwise, then we should not wait on the divine, for

social order of solidarity. . . . Indeed, Dostoevsky was right when he wrote: 'The socialist who is a Christian is more to be dreaded than a socialist who is an atheist' – yes, dreaded by the enemy." (*Living in the End Times* [London: Verso, 2010], 98, 117). The fact that the atheist Žižek finds a commonality between his passionate communism and Christianity's radical ethico-political core should not be surprising: both currents are essentially rational in their desire for liberation, justice, sharing. Hence, passionate thinking can today unite atheistic and theistic thinkers in solidarity to transform the Earth. This kind of solidarity is crucial: not only would it provide the rigorous theoretical framework for effective emancipatory political praxis, but the greater our number, the more likely our success. Today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion *must* unite with other thinking persons – religious and otherwise – to overcome the oppressions inflicted by militant anti-rationalists and anti-religionists.

²⁰ Millennia later, the multitude is still asking the question originally posed by a powerless carpenter-Messiah: "Why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27.46; Mark 15.34). A reasonable question.

²¹ For instance, John D. Caputo, a passionately deconstructive "hybrid philosopher/theologian" (his self-description), develops this point in *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), whereby the divine calls rather than orders. Like a number of his other works, that particular text indicates a truly philosophical move for today's philosopher of religion: recalling Vattimo's "weak thought" (refer to Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, "'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo," *Common Knowledge* 8.3 (2002): 452-463), Caputo passionately thinks the possibility of a weak/*er* deity.

the divine (if there is any) may never save us, may never *be able to save* us. Instead of waiting for God-dess – or *whilst* waiting for God-dess – we should theorize, plan, and participate in a thoughtful revolution that will save the Earth and its inhabitants. *Now. Today.* After all, the ultimate act of passionate thinking is revolution.²²

CONCLUSION: A PASSIONATE OPENING

The aim of the present work was to begin broaching the daunting and necessary task of unpacking the meaning of today's truly philosophical philosopher of religion. This meant returning to some of the original ambitions of philosophy and theology as well as announcing what thinking is now (and always) called to do. Today's truly philosophical thinker of religion therefore has much to do – as daunting and dangerous as such thinking may be. I, for one, hope to pursue such a venture and adventure in thinking.

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²² Of course, truly philosophical passion differs radically from fundamentalistic fervor (be it Christian, Muslim, New Atheist, etc.) because truly philosophical passion is driven by thinking (openness, rationality, discernment, critique, etc.).

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