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Mark C. Taylor: Coming After (the Death of) God

Postmodern thinking is marked by the difficulty of separating and/or opposing theological and philosophical approaches to thinking through religion, which is a response to coming after a certain “death of God,” both historically and conceptually speaking. For both traditional theological perspectives and for secular or atheistic philosophical perspectives, an important and yet unusual place to find serious approaches that are at once constructive and deconstructive, both religious and critical of religion, is the paradoxical space opened by “the death of God,” a space ingeniously traced by certain de/constructive thinkers following Derrida, such as Mark C. Taylor and John Caputo. I focus on Taylor’s call for a “religion without God” or an “a/theology” as a bold and instructive model for navigating the complicated space between postmodern philosophy of religion and postmodern theology, and between (un)belief and (un)faith. I hope to show that Taylor’s theory of religion can and should be a live option for thinking through religion because it creates a productive and provocative conversation between those who study religion, whether they seek a complex understanding of it that would lead to faith or not, and between those who think or believe theologically, those whose faith seeks understanding and self-critique.

Taylor’s wide-ranging and transdisciplinary theory of religion offers philosophers of religion, and unconventional theologians, a theoretical frame whose sophisticated features make it an important option for the future study of religion. He offers: a general definition of religion as a complex adaptive network that stresses both its constructive, affirmative, and stabilizing functions as well as its deconstructive, critical, and prophetic

functions; a radical critique of the logic of “neo-foundationalist” conceptions of religion; a holistic perspective that integrates religious phenomena with other phenomena in society, such as the sciences (e.g., information and complexity theory) and the arts (such as poetry); the articulation of a life-affirming faith rooted in uncertainty, complexity, and restlessness; and a conception of the divine as an infinite, restless creativity that figures, disfigures, and refigures life from within. I highlight these general features by analyzing the peculiar logic and religious significance of the “death of God” in his thinking.

Before considering Taylor’s recent work *After God*, it might be helpful for those unfamiliar with his work to briefly look at his academic background and theoretical orientation. Taylor’s parents were both teachers and he recalls that “Though we were regular churchgoers, it was clear to me from a very early age that in our family, school was church and books were scripture. [My parents were] more Protestant than they ever realized.... [They taught me] a ‘secular’ religion in which the world appears sacred.”¹ Taylor went on to study religion, and also philosophy, at Wesleyan. There, he came to see the relevance of Hegel and Kierkegaard for understanding the spirit of the culture of the 1960s. His first book compared these two thinkers and his work continues to grapple with them today, oscillating between them as he unravels the history of Christianity and contemporary culture and theory. He went on get advanced degrees in religion and philosophy from Harvard and the University of Copenhagen. He is currently a professor of Religion at Colombia.² In addition to writings in religion and philosophy, he also writes works on literature, art, architecture, media, science, technology, and economics;

¹ *After God*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 245-47.

² For anyone interested in learning more about his life and career, he recently published an autobiography entitled, *Field Notes from Elsewhere: Reflections on Dying and Living*. (Colombia: Colombia University Press, 2009).

he has also had artwork exhibited, introduced new technologies and online education in his own classrooms and globally, and created other types of new media that engage key contemporary issues. His academic background and scholarly activities make his work a well-rounded and exciting live option in the study of religion. If contemporary theory and theology wants to speak to today's youth, they must learn how to speak through the mediums and technology to which the next generation is plugged in. Taylor provides an approach and theory that responds and adapts to this new emerging culture.

Defining and Refiguring Religion

Taylor's *After God* works out a critical reconceptualization of the way that religion(s) work by showing how the forces of religion provide order and forms for life, without which life is impossible, and also how these orders and forms are disrupted and transformed over time by religious forces themselves, as well the other forces with which religions interact. His definition reads:

Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other hand, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure.³

There are two inseparable moments or movements of religion, structuring and de-structuring, which operate in a quasi-dialectical rhythm and complex adaptive process.⁴

He offers his definition in an attempt to fill the "interpretive vacuum" left by "the reluctance to engage in critical reflection on the nature of religion" and to offer a general

³ *After God*, 12, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

definition.⁵ He intends it to be used within as well as across traditions, as the basis for an interpretive framework that enables comparative and critical analysis of religions relevant to historical and contemporary religions, and to contemporary theory and culture. I begin by discussing his engagement with theories of religion, and then move on to his discussion of theology, with the proviso that: “theory is implicitly theological or a/theological, and theology and a/theology are inescapably theoretical.”⁶

For Taylor, the above-mentioned definition meets what he sees as the minimum criteria for an adequate definition of religion:

1) describe and/or explain the complex origin, operational logic, and multiple functions of religion; 2) clarify the dynamics of the emergence, development, and transformation of different religious networks; 3) show how religions relate to and interact with each other as well as the physical, biological, social, political, and economic aspects of life; and 4) include a ‘principle’ of ‘internal’ criticism that leaves the theory open to endless revision.⁷

As these criteria suggest, this is a highly *relational* notion of religion that does not consider it in isolation from or opposition the domains of history, culture, nature, “secular” phenomenon, etc. It does not see religion in static or fixed terms, as it seeks to flexibly explain how the patterns that create order emerge and are refigured over time. It is also “scientific” in that it is radically open to revision and not immune from criticism: it is in principle auto-deconstructive. Indeed, on his reading, the resources of religion

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Ibid., 298. On the opposite page, Fig. 19, he helpfully explains this observation in a concrete way by graphing a “Theological Genealogy of Modernism, Postmodernism, and Complex Adaptive Networks.” The book is full of illustrations, outlines, tables, etc, that simplify and help one to visualize what Taylor is talking about abstractly. The figures represent one way that Taylor speaks to our contemporary culture, dominated as it is by visual media and phenomena.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

itself help to undo or deconstruct fixed essences and binary oppositions; deconstruction makes a profoundly “religious” contribution in this sense. These criteria, along with his general definition of religion, lay the groundwork for what strikes me as one of the most sophisticated, challenging, and comprehensive theories of religion available today.

Unfortunately, he notes, there has been a tendency in many dominant theories to minimize either the structuring or the de-structuring function of religion. The former tendency reduces it to an epiphenomenon of other forces and/or ignores its meaning-making and ordering power. We see this tendency, in different forms, in various theories of religion: the history of religions (which stress historical differences and cultural relativity, asserting there is no such thing as religion as such); social constructivism (which see religion as an epiphenomenon of ideological superstructures); different forms of biologism (which see religion as a product of more basic processes - sociobiological, genetic, neurological, etc.); the hermeneutics of suspicion (which see religion as effects of social, economic, political, or psychological processes); and deconstruction (which call into question *every* system constructed to provide security, certainty, and stability).⁸ Taylor includes deconstruction here because while he holds that its critical function has never been more important, and while it is integral to his definition and understanding of religion, he thinks it is not constructive enough: alternative structures informing creative cultural production and effective sociopolitical transformation are also called for.⁹ While the above theories offer valuable insights into and criticisms of religion, they distort religion by either reducing it or denying that it exists which, though it is rarely

⁸ Ibid., 9-11.

⁹ Ibid., 11. John Caputo criticizes Taylor for underestimating the constructive potential of deconstruction, which he sees rooted in Taylor’s ignorance of Derrida’s later works. See Caputo’s review of *After God*, by Mark C. Taylor, *JAAR* 77 no. 1 (2009): 164.

acknowledged, thereby call into question the legitimacy of studying religion at all and the purpose of independent departments and programs in religion or religious studies.¹⁰

Without a basic definition and understanding of what religion is and how it functions, comparative and critical analysis is impossible.

Taylor's criticism of the hermeneutics of suspicion aims to show the limits of its analysis of religion, not to dismiss its insights, which he values. Though he does make this explicit, I surmise that what he reacts against is, for example, Marx's reduction of religion to an ideology that is at bottom socio-economically motivated, which for Marx thus calls for the most radical criticism: ultimately religion is to be abandoned or become superfluous because it is oppressive. On Taylor's view, Marx stresses its structuring and ordering power but underestimates its capacity to disrupt and destabilize oppressive structures of power, assuming it can function primarily only as an "opiate," and not as a spur to genuine revolution. Hence, Taylor quotes Marx: "the Peasant War, the most radical event in German history, came to grief because of [Luther's] theology."¹¹ While, surprisingly enough, Nietzsche did *not* underestimate the disruptive, revolutionary, and transvaluative power of religion, he reacted against "Judaean-Christian" religion for precisely that reason: it undoes and revalues "noble" values and institutes "slave" values. That said, Nietzsche's insight that in general "the highest values devalue themselves" accords with Taylor's understanding of religion as both stabilizing and de-stabilizing and informs his understanding of the death of God. The point here is that the masters of suspicion present powerful critiques of religion and God, but they only partially grasp the multiple functions and power of religion.

¹⁰ *After God.*, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

If many “post-structuralist” (broadly construed) approaches minimize the structuring function of religion, there has been a contrasting tendency (which Taylor calls “structuralist,” broadly construed) to minimize its de-structuring function, which Taylor thinks fails to explain how religious structures emerge and change over time. This leads to, or issues from, attempts to immunize religion from (self-)critique and underestimations of the capacity of religion for disrupting structures (e.g., hegemonic ones). This structuralist tendency, to which the theories discussed above are a response, expresses itself in theories that understand religion as a “universal” or “essential” structure or experience that is completely *sui generis* and irreducible to anything other than itself. These theories are rooted in versions of the phenomenology of religion as articulated by Eliade, Otto, Durkheim, and others, which go back to Schleiermacher, whose discussions of the definition of religion have been highly influential.¹² According to them, there is one “true” and distinctively “religious” experience or one essential “elementary form” of religion, of which all others are variations, sometimes inadequate or questionable variations. Hence, the essence of religion is found in the binary opposition of the sacred and the profane, religious and non-religious experience. In terms of Taylor’s criteria for a theory of religion, this structuralist understanding can be critiqued as follows: it fails to adequately explain the de-structuring function of religion; it reduces other religious networks to “false” variations of the “true” religious structure; it does not adequately show how religions interact with other realms of life, since it is defined as *sui generis* and as opposed to the “profane”; and it does not leave the theory fully open to revision and criticism, since it has identified the one true structure or

¹² Ibid., 7.

essence of religion. Structuralism is a form of foundationalism that cannot comprehend the complexity and transformativity of religious systems.

Critique of (Neo-)Foundationalism

To privilege either structuring or de-structuring function of religion to the exclusion of the other is to misunderstand the complex logic and history of Western religions and ways of thinking, and it often issues in or issued by ethically and politically questionable policies and ideologies. For Taylor, the major contemporary threat to a balance between the stabilizing and destabilizing forces of religion is what Taylor calls “neofoundationalist” ways of thinking.¹³ For instance, what would become the New Religious Right (people like William Bennet) in the U.S. aims to reverse the moral, religious, and social “decline” that they see having begun in the 1960s by returning to basic values and foundational beliefs.¹⁴ They attempt to secure all kinds of bases and ends, particularly economic and political, by claiming to construct and protect “foundations” and “fundamentals” that cannot be questioned, in order to provide stable order in a chaotic, conflicted, and “fallen” world. In doing so, they tend to deem processes or people that work to destabilize and deconstruct those foundations as “nihilistic,” “godless,” “immoral,” “demonic,” “treacherous,” “treasonous,” etc. They also deny the religious motivations of their opponents. They have even succeeded in making the notion of religious liberalism virtually oxymoronic (a symptom of further

¹³ Typically, they offer some form of foundation designed to re-center a shaken world. Taylor suggests that one can say that (neo)foundationalisms come after the death of God, which marks the loss of an absolute foundation, by reaffirming God as an absolute or unshakeable foundation, and in this sense they represent a distinctively postmodern phenomenon, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

“decline”).¹⁵ Unfortunately, those who vocally oppose (what has come to be) the New Religious Right have less often been religious liberals than self-avowed “secularists” who think that religion is “naïve” and dangerous as such; because they fail to see its capacity to provide genuine meaning and protest against illegitimate power, they deny all religion. Thereby they too contribute to needless conflict and confusion. Like those who defend religion against secularists, those who attack religion in the name of secularism fail to understand that secularity has a *religious or spiritual* underpinning or motivation (rooted in Judeo-Christian, Protestant principles) and that the two sides need not be fatally opposed.¹⁶ This misunderstanding is not new.

For Taylor, since religious (and other) forces that destabilize and disfigure so-called foundations, including religious ones, are integrally part of the creative process whereby life and all its complex networks emerge (political, economic, cultural, biological, ethical, etc), neofoundational strategies are not only misleading but they are dangerous in at least two ways: they justify warring against and dispensing with those myriad undesirable “others” who oppose (neo)foundationalisms; and their promotion of absolute foundations is *self*-defeating since that which precludes the establishment of any foundation comes from life itself and from forces and people with whom the neofoundationalists are actually related and on which their own identity and survival depends.¹⁷ Each term and identity depends for its meaning, power, and survival on its “opposite,” which it (counter)supports, but this vital mutual relation is what

¹⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2. Taylor explains that “religion...in the West has always harbored secularity, and secularity covertly continues a religious agenda. In other words, [they] are coemergent and codependent. It is, therefore, misleading to speak of a “return of” or “return to” religion. Religion does not return because it never goes away...it haunts society, self and culture even – perhaps especially - when it seems to be absent, 132.

¹⁷ Ibid., 255, 346.

(neo)foundationalisms (and militant secularists) deny. Put differently, in promoting religious and ethical values that are deemed absolute, certain, and fundamental, they nihilistically place themselves outside of (they ab-solve) life and interrelations in this world, a world that they (thus can) ultimately seek either to master and control and/or destroy or let die. If the ultimate foundation is not in or of this world, then one's relations to and within this world become questionable, dispensable, and threatening.¹⁸

Coming After (the Death) of God

For Taylor, the so-called “death of God” refers not just to the events linked to Hegel or Nietzsche or to the 1960s, not simply to historical events, but to recurrent logical tendencies in the history of Western theology and philosophy. Historically, God can be said to have died or to re-present death in multiple senses. The thinking of “the death of God” that begins to emerge in Luther and becomes explicit and Hegel and Nietzsche, and then in Altizer and the death of God theologians of the 60s, has been implicit since the beginning of religion in the West. In coming after God, historically, one already comes after a certain death of God: that of Jesus on the cross. The church then effects its own construction of God, which results in a sort of death of the living, biblical God.¹⁹ Thomas Carlson explains that contrary to those who “would first hear (or not hear) the proclamation of God’s death in the cry of Nietzsche’s madman,” the idea of the death of God first appears in a Lutheran hymn and it reaches its first full expression in the Christian onto-theological and philosophical/metaphysical thinking of Hegel, who in turn

¹⁸ Ibid., 355.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Robbins provides a nice summary of such a reading in his introduction to Caputo and Vattimo’s book *After the Death of God*. Ed by Jeffrey W. Robbins. (NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3-7.

traces its origins to Christian theological and Trinitarian thinking.²⁰ The “death of God” that is (re)announced and also deconstructed by deconstruction and thinkers like Taylor, however, is not yet fully heard and is “still on its way” as Nietzsche would say. However, for Taylor, we see its effects in today’s postmodern “secular” culture, wherein the transcendence of the divine has effectively emptied or incarnated itself in various informational networks, artistic creations, popular culture, and (un)certain spiritualities and faiths. While the historical dimensions of thinking through the death of God cannot be separated from the conceptual ones, I want to focus on Taylor’s analysis of the conceptual meanings and implications of thinking the death of God. I will then turn to his notion of the divine and of faith.

Taylor’s status as leading figure in debates about post-modernism and religion was established with his 1984 book entitled “Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology.” However, I focus on his recent work *After God* because it presents a summation of Taylor’s work over the last couple of decades: as John Caputo puts it, it articulates nothing less than a “*summa theologiae Tayloriensis*.”²¹ From that work to his recent work, he has attempted to think through modernity and postmodernity as it grows out of a German Protestant tradition begun by Luther: Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, the Schlegels, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx, etc. Herein lay the seeds of the “secular religion” that comes after “the death of God.” In terms of Taylor’s approach in *After God*, it is quasi-dialectical: it shows how dominant ways of thinking in history of modern thought have alternated or oscillated between stressing the transcendence (dualism) and immanence (monism) of the divine; when either way goes to extremes and attempts to

²⁰ Thomas A. Carlson, *Indiscretion: Finitude and the Naming of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 23.

²¹ Caputo, review of *After God*, 162.

deny the other, paradoxically, they end up collapsing or passing into the other. Both, in effect, end up killing the God of the other. Taylor wants to sketch out a third way of thinking that does not oppose transcendence and immanence but shows the identity of their difference (or the difference in their identity); this way errs *between* transcendence and immanence, operating according to a different logic and reading history in an unusual way. Thus, his approach to both God and the death of God that comes after God articulates neither a straightforward history of philosophy or theology nor a theme or genealogy: “I attempt to graph a complex network of alternating associations and changing relations, tracing lines neither strictly logical nor chronological.”²² His hermeneutics deconstructs, it comes after, the logic and history of transcendence and immanence in order to bring them back before the divine matrix that figures, disfigures, and refigures them both.

Taylor was one of the first thinkers to seriously engage religion and theology as it relates to the thought of post-structuralist thinkers, namely that of Derrida, whose thinking grows especially out of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Hegel and yet is neither Kierkegaardian, Nietzschean, nor Hegelian.²³ His approach is more or less deconstructive (Derridean), though it has a Hegelian inflection.²⁴ In *Erring* he makes the well-known

²² *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xxx.

²³ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: a Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Carl Raschke published the first book in English on Derrida and theology: *The Alchemy of the Word* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), revised and reissued as *The End of Theology* (Denver: Davies Group, 2005).

²⁴ As Caputo reads him, in this work Taylor “makes it clear that is a Hegelian, not Derridean nor a Kierkegaardian, although (in vintage Hegelian mode) these are important “moments” in a larger dialectic. But this is Hegelian against the grain, for the ‘System’ has become a non-totalizing whole, a network of ‘complex adaptive networks,’ unprogrammable and exposed to the future (12),” 163. Though Caputo and Taylor articulate theoretical and theological visions that complement each other, Caputo likes to distance himself from and critique Taylor for, among other things, his Hegelian inflections while stressing Caputo’s own Kierkegaardian and Derridean inflections. They are closer than Caputo sometimes makes them out to be. See Caputo’s review of *After God* (cited above). Also see Caputo’s discussion in *After the Death of God* (NY: Columbia Press, 2007), 67-70.

claim that “*Deconstruction is the ‘hermeneutic’ of the death of God.*”²⁵ What makes deconstruction distinctive is its ability and willingness to confront, to come after - to follow or pursue and to critique or arrest - both God and the death of God:

The failure (or refusal) to come to terms with the radical implications of the death of God has made it impossible for most Western theology to approach postmodernism. This shortcoming results, at least in part, from the lack of a clear recognition that concepts are not isolated entities. Rather, they form intricate networks or complex webs of interrelation and co-implication. As a result of this interconnection, notions mutually condition and reciprocally define each other. Such thoroughgoing correlativity implies that no *single* concept is either absolutely primary or exclusively foundational.²⁶

This basic deconstructive insight is explicated fully and integrated into the larger interpretive framework of religion in *After God*.

To come after God is to live after the loss of a single foundation, in a postmodern world that dwells with the death: the death of God implies death not only for God but for humanity: “Postmodernism opens with the sense of *irrevocable* loss and *incurable* fault. This wound is inflicted by the overwhelming awareness of death – a death that ‘begins’ with the death of God and ‘ends’ with the death of ourselves.”²⁷ In its antithetical relation to God and theology, deconstruction interprets the death of God and lives in God’s wake, but it also comes after or seeks to overcome “the death of God.” The “death of God,” as announced by humanistic atheism, kills or denies God because it experiences God as a threat or even as death. But in its attempt to flee God as death, it tries to become

²⁵ *Erring*, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

sovereign and immortal itself, and thus meets its own limits and ends. Deconstruction comes after the death of God in order to place humanity back before and in relation to the divine and theology, since by itself, without some relation to something divine that is more than human and other than human, without “difference,” humanity ends up killing itself (and others).²⁸

As a concept, the death of God means many things, but it does not mean that God simply does not exist or has never existed. It is a deeply religious event, though many interpreters consistently fail to fully grasp this.²⁹ I will not take time to fully explain this, but the religious implications, for better or worse, should be obvious if one considers carefully a seminal text such as Nietzsche’s aphorism 125 in the *Gay Science*. Several key death of God thinkers hold, in fact, that the death of God clears the way for a rebirth of an authentically biblical faith and, as Vattimo puts it, makes clear that “there are no longer strong, rational reasons for being an atheist.”³⁰ The relation death of God thinking to the divine and to theology is uncertain and insecure, to be sure. Theology, as traditionally or progressively conceived, has to come to an end in order for (an a/theology of) life to go on. For this reason, Taylor speaks from, or rides, the slash in a/theology: his vision is neither atheistic nor theistic, neither purely philosophical nor purely theological, or it is both; he calls for a complex of faith and unbelief, and neither alone. In this sense, he calls for a religious thinking and faith that errs *between* so-called opposites and contradictions, such as God and death, revealing their co-implications.

²⁸ Ibid., 23, 30.

²⁹ For a fascinating discussion of this tendency, see René Girard’s “Dionysus versus the Crucified,” *MLN* 99, .no. 4 French issue (Sept., 1984): 816-35.

³⁰ See Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, 97, 89-90; and *After Christianity*, Trans. Luca D’Isanto (NY: Columbia Press, 2002), 5-8. Also see Robbins introduction to *After the Death of God*, 3-11. Also see René Girard, “Dionysus versus the Crucified,” 828-35.

Why do I place the term “death” in parenthesis in the title of this paper and of this section? Because for Taylor the term “God,” as it has been defined in the West, harbors an intimate and ambiguous relation to death, more intimate and ambiguous than many believers (or even many atheists) would like to think. Being-toward-God is analogous to being-toward-death.³¹ As apophatic and mystical theologians remind us, God is unseeable and unnameable and visions and names of God often cover up the divine behind or beyond God. Thus, Gregory of Nyssa writes that “*You cannot see my face, for man cannot see me and live.*”³² One cannot actually see God and live; God comes after life. Despite being commonly understood as the source and creator of all life and “being” and as the antithesis to, conqueror of, or savior from death, “God” has functioned to close off possibilities of different forms of life and to figure (as) death.

In many (neo)foundationalist discourses, and generally in the history of Western theology and philosophy, God is conceived as “the ground of being that forms the foundation of all beings,” either monistically as the One or dualistically as the transcendent or Wholly Other.³³ Quite radically, Taylor sees theologies grounded in monistic and dualistic (ontotheological) metaphysics, and the simplistic and binary logic they articulate, as deeply problematic and even fatal: as “theologies of death.”³⁴ In a monistic frame, one is concerned with showing the identity and roots of all things in the One, which makes everything ultimately the same and functions to repress otherness and “differance.” If everything and everyone *is* the same, then every and any genuine other is *to be not*. The *both/and* logic of monism tends to subsume the transcendence of God (or

³¹ This is Carlson’s basic thesis in *Indiscretion* (cited above, note 18).

³² *Life of Moses*, Trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), 2:232-33.

³³ *After God*, 345.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

the divine) into pure immanence, just as it subsumes others back into the sameness to which they must definitively return (e.g., in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Altizer). By finitizing the infinite absolutely, monism ends up killing off transcendence and deeming the plurality of others suspect.³⁵ If all is one, there appears to be neither a need nor any opening for a religious force (such as God) that would disrupt or criticize the reigning order or its abuses. If God becomes too immanent, God's divinity, mystery, and otherness die.

In reacting against the excesses of monistic thinking, dualistic thinking promotes an *either/or* logic that posits differences and turns them into oppositions, oppositions that demand strict hierarchies and radical decisions based on them. In this frame, God is not the same as the world but is a wholly Other and transcendent sovereign who founds oppositions such as good vs evil, faith vs unfaith, finite vs infinite, truth vs falsity, etc. This means that one must choose one term or value at the expense of the other, as if they were wholly independent of each other. *Either* one chooses God/good over Satan/evil *or* one deserves (eternal) death. As Barth noted, quoting Luther and echoing Kierkegaard: ““Therefore when God makes alive, He kills; when He justifies, He imposes guilt; when He leads us to heaven, He thrusts us down into hell” (Luther). The Gospel of salvation can only be believed in; it is a matter for faith only....To him who is not sufficiently mature to accept a contradiction and rest in it, it becomes a scandal – to him that is unable to escape the necessity of contradiction it becomes a matter of faith. Faith...is the love of God that is aware of the qualitative distinction between God and man and God and the

³⁵ Ibid., 346.

world.”³⁶ However, as Taylor points out, by affirming one term and the other absolutely, dualistic thinkers also negate the opposition they have created and thereby negate that on which they covertly depend (evil, unfaith, falsity, finitude, etc).³⁷ Thus, dualism leads to self-negation through the negation of others deemed alien and undesirable. Dualistic thinking tends to finitize the infinite, paradoxically, by making God or the Infinite the strict and necessary opposite of the finite world and humanity, which betrays (also in the sense of reveals) its constitutive but hidden ties to finite things. While dualistic thinking preserves an opening for radically disrupting and criticizing reigning orders, it also pushes all order into chaos and conflict by presupposing that the infinite fabric of life is nothing but an infinite set of clashing oppositions. If God becomes too transcendent, God’s existential relevance and basic relationality die.

In both monistic and dualistic theologies and religiosities, God tends to die and to function as a figure of death that closes off possibilities and the future. For this reason, Taylor positions his thinking “after God”: he comes “after” God logically and chronologically as subsequent to God, figuring and yet moving beyond God and the “death of God.” Conceptually, he comes “after” in a way that comes “before” God to allow God to be seen as something finite and as something that comes after and closes off the infinite “originary abyss” of life, and thus as a figure for death.³⁸ This is related to his understanding of the complex logic of “after,” which “is never present as such but is the approaching withdrawal and withdrawing approach that allow presence to be present. Neither here nor there, neither present nor absent, after is the trace of that which gives

³⁶ Quoted in *After God*, 195. Does anybody know where this quote comes from in Barth? I have been unable to locate it and Taylor does not provide a reference.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 346, 312..

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

and takes being.”³⁹ “God” is never present as such, we always come after or trace “God”; the divine is always after and yet to come, a trace of the to come. “God” tends to be seen as totally present or totally absent, in both theisms and atheisms. Coming after God, Taylor deconstructs God as “the figure constructed to hide the originary abyss from which everything emerges and to which all returns.”⁴⁰ Rather than thinking, as is commonplace, that only after life comes death, or that after death comes an after-life, Taylor suggests that only after (the) death (of God) comes (infinite) life.

Put differently, Taylor “comes after” God in the sense of following after and pursuing God, which implies working in the tradition of God-talk but also implies (though he does not put it this way) pursuing God as if God were a disguised criminal or murderer: thus Taylor seeks to disrupt and arrest the (foundational) dis-course of theology in the name of a *a/theology* of life. He comes after God to expose the negation and death that God receives and gives: he shows how God is killed but also how, as Luther put it, “When God makes alive, he kills.” Taylor suggests that God tries, but fails, to master death or the art of death; after God comes the infinite “autopoietic” and “autotelic” art of life.⁴¹ This infinite abyss that God hides is not God and is not nothing, just as in Genesis a formless, chaotic matter that is not nothing exists and is formed into creation. The infinite abyss gives way to the creation of life and it “is always after the God who is after it,” which means that the living abyss always already gives and takes away the (non)foundations of God and of nothingness. If in Neo-orthodox theologies like that of Barth God becomes so absent as to be effectively dead and the world, though promised future redemption, is left to die, in death of God theologies like that of Altizer,

³⁹ Ibid, 346

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 345.

God becomes so present (“totally present”) as to be effectively dead and the world is cut off from the need for redemption: absolute or total presence/absence become indistinguishable and both issue in a death of God.⁴² These Gods have been constructed and embraced in a way that they simply cannot or will not rest in *between* presence and absence, certainty and uncertainty, order and chaos. In their excess they collapse into each other, collapsing difference into sameness or extinguishing themselves in oppositions.

Taylor’s Notion of the Divine: Beta/theology? Better Theology?

In coming after monistic and dualistic notions of God, Taylor calls for an alternative between atheism and theism that moves beyond the death of God and toward a “religion *without* God.”⁴³ That is, he calls for thinking a “radical a/theology” or a “religion without God” that “issues in ethics without absolutes to promote and preserve the creative emergence of life across the globe.”⁴⁴ For him, “after God, the divine is not elsewhere but is the emergent creativity that figures, disfigures, and refigures the infinite fabric of life.”⁴⁵ That is, God does not mark the infinite since all Gods/gods are finite; the infinite is the complex emergence of life from within itself, as opposed to from some One or Other outside of life that would “ground” or “design” or “create” it. The infinite or the divine is life itself, which is never the same as itself because it continually emerges as different from itself. A radical a/theology operates according the logic of an “elusive neither-nor” that oscillates between the dominant poles in Western thinking that tend to

⁴² Ibid., 199, 205

⁴³ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Xvii.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

either structure *or* de-structure ways of feeling, thinking, and acting: Hegel and Kierkegaard; Neo-orthodoxy and the death of God theology; structuralism and post-structuralism (deconstruction). Taylor moves within and between these to an other, religious place of “altarity,” a divine milieu wherein various forms of life are restlessly both structured and de-structured, planted, supplanted, and transplanted.

On this view, the divine can be thought of as the space and the network that creates and re-creates, that figures and dis-figures, life. It is the “network of networks” of life whose import consists in its relationality, rather than in its “substance” as a “supreme” Being or as “Being itself,” or in its eternal attributes and unchanging perfections. One way to illustrate the character of this notion and its distance from both traditional and progressive notions of God, is to place it dialogue with Philip Clayton’s recent discussion of “beta theology” or a “beta faith.”⁴⁶ For Clayton, beta faith, represents not just a product-not-yet-ready-for-consumption, but a way of thinking about and relating to the divine. In particular, a beta theology calls for active interpretation, responses, and questions from humans that change and refigure what is given and created. What is given and created becomes a product of both God and human agents. In this intriguing exploration of the limits of trying to think God in a “beta” way, as a divine figure that creates the emergent space and order for communication and relation with God through various networks, he approaches Taylor’s notion of the divine.⁴⁷ Though, Clayton cannot fully embrace Taylor’s scheme, a considerable and yet creative tension emerges between their positions.

⁴⁶ Philip Clayton, Spencer Burke, and Oozers. *Beta Faith* (MP3 Audiophile/podcast). *Homebrewed Christianity Podcast* 75 (2010) . <http://homebrewedchristianity.com/2010/03/03/beta-faith-with-philip-clayton-spencer-burke-and-oozers/> (accessed 3/18/2010). I also have in mind his recent comments on the theme of the recent conference in Claremont on “Theology After Google.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40 mins.

For Clayton, beta theology is promising because it allows one to think of, and relate to, God in dynamic, emergent, and creative ways. As a “host,” God invites the faithful into a sacred relation with him but does not, Clayton wants to say (though he wavers), finally determine the program of life or its outcome from the beginning, as does the traditional God who operates out of an eternal and unchanging perfection, sovereignty, and wisdom.⁴⁸ The latter God is not “living” or “biblical” enough and is too strong and not incarnational enough for Clayton; Taylor would agree and would call the traditional notion the foundation of a “theology of death.” A beta God calls for human participation and creativity in the ongoing work of ordering the given relations of the cosmos. For Clayton, a beta theology is a progressive, better theology.

Clayton’s main problem with an a/theology like Taylor’s would be that it gets the “beta” part right, but not the “God” part.⁴⁹ He would see Taylor as furnishing a sort of “betatheology” that is too risky and chancy – too much like a bet, too much like a wager on atheism – for his theological liking. Clayton says that “the furthest he can imagine anyone going” in conceiving a beta God, which for him is too far, is Samuel Alexander’s Gifford Lectures in 1918-19 called “Space, Time and Deity.” Clayton either paraphrases or quotes him (I cannot tell which as it is a podcast) as follows: God is the next emergent level in the becoming of the cosmos...God or the divine emerges [through evolution]...not a being, not completed, in process, not transcendent, the next stage in becoming of this universe.⁵⁰ Clayton admits that he cannot endorse such a radically beta God. Clayton seeks an immanence transcendence that reconciles God’s “eternal nature” and traditional attributes with his creative, responsive activity with humans and with the

⁴⁸ Ibid. 29-30 mins.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 31-32 mins.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 31-32 mins.

becoming of the universe.⁵¹ However, he cautions that theologians, in order to not make a mockery of the terms they use, must make room for “real emergence” and newness by having God figure not only a host but also the creator of the space for radically creative emergence. Fair enough. My question is: how can one have “real” or “radical” emergence if one wants, like Clayton, to hold onto some of God’s “eternal” nature and if God remains timeless (though “not overly” so)? As a progressive theologian, perhaps not surprisingly, he does not want to break completely or radically with traditional, enduring notions of God. Taylor’s notion of emergence would strike him as too radical, too rooted in notions that promote the divine’s wild imagination and unprogrammable creativity. If the furthest a radical progressive theologian can go is found in an understanding almost a century old, perhaps he has not looked hard enough at some of the radical options emerging today.⁵²

Taylor’s notion of the divine is similar to that of Alexander, but it is not something that emerges only after or with humans, as a next or later stage of development. Alexander’s divine seems tied to a more or less linear evolutionary scheme. Taylor’s divine *coemerges* with life itself, both existing and relating “from the beginning,” and it is not absent until a later stage. Neither is it “present” in the sense of being eternal and unchanging or of existing before or independently of the emergence of life. The origin of the divine is always inaccessible and unfigurable; “God” has been constructed to cover the originary abyss of all life and knowing. For Taylor, the divine emerges through life and is the infinity of life itself as it emerges out of itself. It traces

⁵¹ Ibid., 32-33 mins.

⁵² I do not mean to be dismissive of Clayton, as he is a former teacher of mine whom I highly respect. He may, or probably, in his books engages new options emerging today. I confess I am not familiar with many of his works. However, it strikes me as strange that he would not refer to more radical understandings that have gone further than Alexander. I am simply being provocative here and trying to spark dialogue.

out this originary abyss. It does not refer to some personal or providential presence that, however immanent, would also transcend life or exist outside of life and that would or could “program” life and personally invite humans to co-create. For Taylor, one cannot get back to the “given” to which Clayton refers, whether Clayton is referring to a faithful relation to God (as promised by Christ) or to what God has created “in the beginning.” One is always already interpreting meanings, which change over time, so that one has no direct access to a foundational act or fact (this is a radical, deconstructive hermeneutics). Clayton suggests that Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection marks a foundational act or classical text or program which only calls for updating and reinterpretation (as in classical hermeneutics).

Clayton’s God refers to something or someone who is always (omni)present and more or less identifiable. It seems that one can access “Him” through the program he has designed, either passively or, better, actively. Taylor’s divine never presents itself as such, since it always withdraws and calls forth, being unnameable and ultimately unidentifiable: it is never self-same and never returns to the same self it was before. Taylor’s divine marks a creative process that comes before life as its emergent creativity. It is “personal” insofar as it emerges through and is transformed by humans (while also transforming humans), but it is also impersonal and more than human: “in humans this creative process becomes aware of itself, but incompletely and must be refigured forever. The infinite process in which human life is enmeshed ‘knows’ things finite beings can never know. There is no mind or Logos at work within this process; these emerge through self-organization of the autopoietic process of life.”⁵³ For Taylor, the only enduring features of God are a divine restlessness and ceaseless relativity that engenders

⁵³ *After God*, 346..

unpredictable creativity. If both thinkers sketch out a sort of “panentheistic” vision of immanent-transcendence, Taylor’s errs toward an *immanent* transcendence while Clayton’s errs toward a *transcendent* immanence. Their beta outlooks are not that far apart, but they differ on the character of the divine, which also leads to different types of relation to the divine and to different faiths. Though Clayton pushes the beta metaphor in a radical direction, and though there are affinities with Taylor’s thought, perhaps Taylor’s thinking of the divine is too radical for the beta metaphor in the first place.

Faith and (Un)certainty

For Taylor, the infinite creative process of life, which is (the) divine, “knows” things that finite beings can never know, but this is not the “knowing” and certain, familiar relation to God of which Clayton speaks. For Clayton, that one is known by God (by “Him”) forms a fundamental part of faith: one is *certain* that one is known and one is secure in that knowledge as the basis of faith. Beta faith, on his account, assumes a given (divine) fact or design, which is tailored to human needs and desires, which calls forth and takes on human responses and activities, in the process continually modifying itself and modifying its notion of the divine.⁵⁴ Faith means a response to and acknowledge reliance on God’s creation and gifts. God gives first, humans receive. He also suggests that “faith needs to say that we knew that it would be God at the end of the game,”⁵⁵ that God knows or assures humans of the “final outcome” or the end of the process of life, which presumably is salvation or life after death. One has to have faith that someone, i.e., God, ultimately “runs the show,” even though He lets one participate in programming it.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8-9 mins.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35 mins.

On Taylor's view, no single thing or person is "running the show," just as no one is running the internet, and this is a good thing. If one knew for certain the one who was running the show, one would have special access to that one divinity and a special, if not ultimate, authority to effect all kinds of programs and (final) solutions (for better or for worse).

What kind of game is theology if it assures one of the outcome before it begins? What kind of decision is faith if the outcome is guaranteed? One might say misguided or even dangerous. This faith seeks to secure a certain faith that immunizes itself from the threat of radical emergence and that shies away from the border of chaos. The problem, for Taylor, would be that one lives and promotes life most fully on the border between order and chaos, which is where creation, and de(con)struction happens; to want nothing to be destroyed is to want nothing more to be created. To have indestructible knowledge of or faith in God may, in fact, lead one to stop desiring God or the divine. To want only security from the dangers of life is to want death, not God, unless God is death. To the extent that Clayton resists any self-deconstructing notion of the divine and seeks to immunize faith from radical insecurity and doubt, he unwittingly seeks a God that is foreign to life and perhaps closer to being indistinguishable from death than he would like to admit. Of course, Clayton is seeking to keep questioning and uncertainty open and seeking to move away from overtly authoritarian and overly rigid notions of the divine, but unfortunately his appeals to faith and God hint at some type of foundationalism that can be seen as problematic from an a/theological perspective.

Taylor's notion of the divine as the network of networks that in-forms life is too complex and (un)figurable to be reduced to any single subject or simple presence/absence

such as “God.” The divine is unknowable and transcendent in a relative sense, since it is constantly figuring, disfiguring and transfiguring itself through schemata that lend life meaning and purpose. For Taylor, one does not absolutely know, and one cannot name with certainty, what one has faith in when one has faith in the divine (as Augustine restlessly heart pondered: What do I love when I love my God?). The line between the divine and anything that would oppose or resist it (the “demonic,” the “secular,” the “pagan,” etc) is not so clear: did Abraham know beforehand that killing his son would be a godly or good thing? What one hopes for is something impossible and unforeseeable, a hope *against hope* in a future to come. This hope is without an ultimate foundation, but it is not nihilistic. Absolute foundations lay the groundwork for nihilism, not a relativism that conceives all life as related and interconnected. If one is certain of the outcome, one has little impetus to create and to effect change. If one is certain of salvation after death, one has little impetus to save life and create new life. (Neo)foundational faiths and moralities are attractive for many people because they offer security, certainty, and stability in an increasingly chaotic, conflicted, and stressful world. However, in attempting to secure these elusive things in an absolute way, in attempting to found structures that cannot be founded, these faiths and moralities end up threatening and/or destroying that very security, certainty, and stability (among other things). By stressing God’s unshakeability and immunity from any threat, they insulate themselves and God from the life of the world, which means in effect that God is dead to the world (or the world is dead to God).

Taylor appeals to a different kind of “faith” that is, paradoxically for those to whom faith is synonymous with certainty, rooted in uncertainty and insecurity, since it

recognizes these as the conditions for the creative emergence of life. This faith, or what some would deem “unfaith”, affirms the possibilities of a future that cannot be grounded in a stable foundation and that knows no end and hopes for none. It does not rest in God because it restlessly desires (the divine in) God. This is a hope against hope in a future yet to come. To hope or pray for end to uncertainty and insecurity is to hope or pray for an end to possibilities, to the future, and to the emergence of life, which is profoundly nihilistic. For Taylor, “To overcome this destructive nihilism, we must cultivate emergent creativity in complex adaptive networks that figure, disfigure, and refigure what once was believed to be the substance of things seen and unseen. Always after God, the endless restlessness of the Infinite is the eternal pulse of life.”⁵⁶

Unconcluding Reflections and Criticisms

Taylor consistently positions himself within the creative tension between contrasting positions and their logics: his logic is somewhere between the either/or that stresses transcendence and most often leads to a theological vision, and the both/and that stresses immanence and most often leads to atheism, but it sides with neither one nor the other. This means that his “religion without God” or his “a/theology” can be pushed or extended in either direction, and can be critiqued from either direction. However, I suggest that ultimately, if Taylor errs to one side, it is toward atheistic immanence and that he can most productively be critiqued from a theological position such as that of John Caputo. I first want to show Taylor’s affinities to the “radical atheism” articulated by Martin Haggliind and then show the tensions and disagreements with Caputo’s “weak theology.” All three positions are closer to each other than they are to either traditional

⁵⁶ Ibid., 312.

theologies or traditional atheisms (to some extent despite themselves), but let us create some tension.

Hagglünd's notion of "radical atheism," rooted in his reading of Derrida, holds that traditional notions of God and immortality are *radically undesirable* for finite humans since they would threaten all human desire and all human life.⁵⁷ "Traditional atheisms," he explains, deny the existence of God but do not question the *desire* for God or for immortality, asserting that it would be desirable or good for God to exist and/or for mortality and finitude to be overcome.⁵⁸ Hagglünd sees deconstruction as fundamentally and unapologetically rooted and engaged in a *radical* atheism, rather than in any religious or metaphysical way of thinking (such as a "negative theology," a "generalized religion," a "messianism," or an "ethical metaphysics"). What religious and metaphysical ways of thinking share is an apparent desire for an ideal space and time characterized by divine and human immortality, and by an absolute immunity from evil and destructibility: they desire absolute peace and godliness and goodness (though they know not what they do).⁵⁹ This means that "God," posited as the example and source of immortality and absolute immunity, is not only nothing in itself and impossible to think without reference to mortality and violation, but that "God" and his kingdom are ultimately and radically *undesirable*. If nothing threatened God or whatever one desires, nobody would desire anything at all.⁶⁰ One desires only that which can be destroyed. If God is defined in terms

⁵⁷ I should note that Hagglünd's view is an explication and amplification of his reading of Derrida, and not necessarily a reflection of his own views. At some level, this discussion between Caputo, Taylor and Hagglünd is an argument over how to read Derrida on religion.

⁵⁸ Martin Hagglünd, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, (Stanford, CA; Stanford UP, 2008), 2-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

of immortality or eternity or as one who saves humanity from death, then *God is death* to mortal life and desire.⁶¹ In fleeing death one unknowingly rushes into death's arms.

As we have seen, Taylor makes similar critiques of "God" as a figure of death and also stresses the radicality of human finitude and mortality. While Haggglünd might argue that he problematically privileges the category of "religion," this is because Haggglünd is reacting against notions of religion that do not share Taylor's deconstructive understanding of it, which allows for uncertainty and does not desire to be (absolutely) immune to disruption and the threat of death. Likewise, Taylor's notion of the divine would not be radically undesirable for Haggglünd; Taylor articulates a notion geared to overcoming the limitations that Haggglünd criticizes in traditional notions of God. Haggglünd would simply suggest that Taylor remove the slash in "a/theology," since his notion of the divine does not conform to what is usually meant by "theology" or "God" and is compatible with a radical atheism.

Caputo says outright that Taylor's work in *After God* is really an atheology (no slash), suggesting that he goes too far in removing the human desire for God by suggesting that God is dead or that God is death.⁶² While Caputo too has serious reservations about most talk of God (for being idolatrous and for leading to abuses of power), he does not want to abandon the vital resources that he thinks are harbored in the concept of God: he wants to preserve that which is "affirm[ed] [in] the event that lives within the name of God."⁶³ Like Taylor (and to some extent Clayton), he calls for the death of the God of metaphysics and onto-theology, the classical God of sovereign

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² *After the Death of God*, 68.

⁶³ Ibid., 67.

power.⁶⁴ However, he sees in Taylor's notion of the death of God a declaration of God's final decisive death, an unwarranted deicide which misguidedly "dissipat[es] the force of the name" and kills one's desire for God, if not one's desire for life.⁶⁵ Caputo wants to overcome deconstruction as the (downbeat) "hermeneutic of the death of God," and to raise it up to the upbeat "hermeneutics of the desire for God."⁶⁶ In the end, Taylor leaves him wondering "if we are not left unclaimed by anything, irresponsible to anything, unsolicited and unprovoked, as if nothing has happened to us, as if there were no events."⁶⁷ Clayton would likely agree.

For Caputo, Taylor does not make enough room for a transcendence and otherness capable of radically critiquing existing worldly orders. Taylor's divine is not "living" and "biblical" enough in that sense: it does not create enough tension between the logics and economics of the world and that of the "kingdom of God."⁶⁸ Indeed, he sees Taylor as more or less affirming and celebrating today's secular culture as the incarnation of God: its overt godlessness is a latent Godliness.⁶⁹ On Taylor's view, Christianity does not need to critique secular culture, since secular culture re-presents its own spirit or triumph.⁷⁰ Caputo fears that this type of death of God thinking affirms a complete diminution of the transcendence of religion. Thus, on Caputo's reading, Taylor ends up committing the pitfalls Taylor identified in his own critique of monism. Caputo

⁶⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁵ Caputo, however, says he is willing to give up the name of God for the event as in the name, *After the Death of God*, 70. But his charge against Taylor for letting the force of the name dissipate is somewhat unfair to Taylor as this is what Taylor's death of God theology tries to do.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁰ *After the Death of God*, 75. Caputo originally makes this critique of Gianni Vattimo's secularizing notion of "weak thought", though it applies to Taylor as well. See Vattimo's discussion in *After the Death of God*.

calls for “the death of the death of God” as an affirmation of human desire for God and the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

One important additional critique that Caputo makes concerns the historical privilege accorded to the Christian West, and specifically to the Reformation, in Taylor’s thought. Taylor’s theory of religion privileges no single religion as a controlling factor. And yet Caputo notes that there is a subtle controlling factor, one that derives from the historical narrative embedded in his death of God narrative. In his narrative, which is too grand for Caputo, as in most secularizing death of God narratives (from Joachim of Fiore, to Hegel, Schelling, Feuerbach, and to Altizer and Vattimo), a Christian pedigree that turns on the Trinity and Incarnation is claimed which sets up an opposition between Christianity and Judaism.⁷¹ For Caputo, these theologies all tell how we go from religion of Father in Judaism, to religion of Son in New Testament, to Spirit in modernity (Altizer) or in postmodernity (Taylor), which is the Final Story.⁷² Judaism plays the role of the alienating, overly transcendent and domineering Father who must be overcome through the loving incarnation of Christ. Unfortunately, supersessionism is not dead and lives in death of God theologies. For Caputo, deconstruction has been sent into the world to break up such accounts, particularly accounts that would present kenosis as a zero-sum game in which the transfer of being is made at the expense of the “religion of the Father” and to the advantage of his local incarnation.⁷³ Though Caputo and Taylor are closer than this discussion makes them out to be, and their differences help clarify what is at stake in thinking through the death of God and the complicated relationship between philosophy and theology.

⁷¹ *After the Death of God*, 79-80.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

At bottom, my discussion of these thinkers calls one to seriously and critically (re)consider the desirability or undesirability of our understandings of, and conclusions regarding, religion and of God, secularism and atheism. The question of God, or the question of what constitutes one's "ultimate concern," is a question of life and death.