

ERIK MEGANCK

FVG Antwerp

PHILOSOPHY AS LOVE:

UNBLOCKING THE ROAD FROM ATHENS TO JERUSALEM

Philosophy literally means “love of wisdom.”¹ But this can be read in more than one way. There is the well-known objective genitive, proposing that philosophers are thinkers who love wisdom without claiming to own it. But there is also a subjective genitive that shows how love belongs to wisdom. So, when wisdom takes the form of love, it could become philosophy. ‘Philosophy is the wisdom of love at the service of love.’² This entails that such philosophy is not merely a theoretical, analytical matter, providing a definition of love and all its logical implications. ‘Friendship is so closely linked to the definition of philosophy that it could be said that without it philosophy would not be possible.’³ ‘Friendship is like hospitality. But it is a hospitality whose setting is not a house, but the sensation of existing.’⁴ Reading these last two quotes together, I feel justified in replacing ‘existing’ with ‘thinking’, a Heideggerian move, to open the perspective that started the exploration that I retrace in this article. It explores the way philosophy changes when it takes love, charity, hospitality, and openness as its (main) topic.

First, a note on the (in)famous continental-analytic divide. Without expanding this divide, there is a difference between continental or differential thinking on the one hand, and analytic or Anglo-Saxon thought on the other, no matter how analytic thought may dislike the notion of a difference that reaches beyond epistemology. Whereas analytic thought holds on to its traditional Anglo-Saxon aspirations, including objectivity, neutrality, transparency, and rigid logic; continental and/or differential thought embraces all the risk of contamination by what is despised by analytic thinkers, including the unconscious, unintended and marginal

¹ If philosophy is becoming love, it probably does not mean romantic love. This love is where openness, hospitality, desire (*eros*), friendship (*filia*), Christian charity (*agape*) come together. In order to mark this excessive meaning, I have chosen to write Love with a capital letter - without promoting Love to an absolute nonnegotiable principle since then it would not be “lovely” anymore.

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1998, 162.

³ Giorgio Agamben, ‘The Friend’ in *What is an Apparatus?* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 25.

⁴ ‘Friendship and Philosophy: an interview with Giorgio Agamben. A shared sensation. (Leland de la Durantaye). *Cabinet* (2012) 45: cabinetmagazine.org/issues/45/durantaye_agamben.php.

meaning, metaphor, etc. When the latter considers literature, or the unconscious, it *becomes* literary, psychoanalytical – unlike analytic thought that always remains analytical, whatever its topic.⁵ Here, I will propose how philosophy, when continental and reflecting on Love, *becomes itself an act of Love.*

What analytic thought tends to ignore rather emphatically, is that it is also “no more” than a register of thought, which is something in between literary style and language game. You can read Plato’s work as a logically coherent system of transparent philosophical concepts, but also as a literary expression of amazed and grateful adoration. You can read Anselm’s *Proslogion* as a logically coherent system of transparent theological concepts, but also as a prayer and love declaration. In each latter case, “different” meaning appears.⁶ Suddenly, metaphors and paradoxes come into play that reveal sense that lies beyond what lends itself to the metaphysical imperative of logical analysis. Actually, Nietzsche convincingly demonstrated how this imperative always threatened to suffocate thought and culture.

The Late-Modern Condition

The modern world, in Heideggerian sense, is labeled ‘technoscience’. While this world was enthusiastically considered the ultimate one, leaving all that was irrational and primitive – religion included – behind, things have shaped themselves in a way that seems to, at least, question this alleged achievement, and even its underlying ambitions. Words that undeniably refer to a religious provenance appear in philosophy, the very philosophy that was supposed to carry science, the whole science, and nothing but science. Indeed, it seems as if the unachieved modern opposition of ratio and fides, thought and faith, world and church, is fading into ‘difference’, without actually disappearing.⁷

⁵ One might compare this to the way Heidegger’s thinking about the givenness of Being, truth, and thought, actually *becomes* an act of gratitude: thinking *is* thanking.

⁶ Nietzsche pointed out that Plato’s philosophy largely hinges on metaphorical work. Anselm’s contentions that ‘God is the greatest that can be thought’ and ‘God is greater than what can be thought’ cannot be logically reconciled. Differential thought can deal with this. It just notices an excess on the metaphysical notion of Supreme Being. See Erik Meganck, ‘World without end. From hyperreligious theism to religious atheism.’ *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion* 3 (2021) 1, 65 – 89.

⁷ The Church clumsily tried to overcome this opposition by deliberately misunderstanding *Vatican II*. Priests in jeans started handing out the host from a plastic cup and preaching on socio-economic and political issues. Others fell back on the Latin rites introduced after the Council of Trent (16th century), thereby hardening the opposition. Both the immersion in and detachment from the world were not what John XXIII meant by *aggiornamento*. Perhaps our days, half a century later, finally start this movement that may be marked by the publication of *Laudato si’*.

Late- or post⁸-modern condition are tricky terms. It defies Cartesian clarity and allows philosophy to be overtly contaminated by broad cultural shifts, mainly in religious or esthetic experience. The condition is also marked by an unresolvable ambiguity. On the one hand, I assume that the dominating elements of current ‘technoscientific’ thought can be summarized in the word ‘planning’.⁹ Every form of control, organization, measurement, calculation, analysis, induction, extrapolation, and management comes down to planning. No action or thought within the registers of science and technology requires public justification whereas any other does.

Statements like ‘Science proves this!’ and ‘Technology works!’ – Jean-François Lyotard called this legitimization by performativity¹⁰ – usually end all arguments, though they are both highly problematic.¹¹ On the other hand, hitherto unusual terms unexpectedly appear in late-modern philosophical discourse. We read about Martin Heidegger’s gratitude, Emmanuel Levinas’ hostage, Jacques Derrida’s hospitality, René Girard’s peace, John Caputo’s perhaps, Richard Kearney’s may-be, Jean-Luc Marion’s and also Gianni Vattimo’s charity, Badiou’s love, and so on.¹² These terms

⁸ This “post-” is a problematic prefix since it cannot simply mean ‘after’. Postmodernity is still modernity, but at its “end,” yet another problematic term since it cannot be established as such. See Erik Meganck, ‘Ratio est Fides. Contemporary Philosophy as Virtuous Thought.’ *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77 (2016) 3, 154 – 170.

⁹ Planning denotes the world at the “end,” i.e. the summit and transition, of technologically motivated thought since Aristotle. It refers to Heidegger’s *Ge-stell*. “Summit”, in that it has exhausted its potential – according to Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 374 – 377; *Off the Beaten Track*, 157 – and “transition” into what has not yet arrived and cannot be deduced from current culture and thought. For further elaboration, see Erik Meganck, ‘Spem in Aliud ...: What May I Hope For?’ *Ethical Perspectives* 23 (2016) 3, 473 – 498.

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

¹¹ Without any objective reference or legitimacy, the validity of proof and efficiency only holds within the context of a technological-scientific reason, much like the rules of a game. Usually, a Nietzschean approach to science in terms of perspectivism is met with a curt: ‘Perspectives do not put people on the moon.’ Quite so, but the great achievement of thought is precisely the notion of the moon as a place where to shoot people and things at. Thought has been able to shift the perspective of the moon as a divine being to that of an exploitable object. Once this notion, typical of technological mentality, has entered and convinced thought, it all becomes a mere matter of calculation and fabrication. This explains why Plato did not “do” science and why Archimedes had to apologize in public for his inventions, arguing that he still considered the good of society the ultimate focus of existence and thought. They were not too “primitive” or stupid for that; they just were not receptive to the idea of total exploitability of nature. History, or destiny (as Heidegger would have it), is the way thought had to become familiar with its own technological tendency, going from ancient intelligibility to current control and exploitation.

¹² Charity and the like, by the way, are still very different from the way solidarity is formulated by, let’s say, Jürgen Habermas or Richard Rorty. The former stays safely within metaphysics, despite his intentions, and the latter just rejects metaphysics completely as futile. They both remain insensitive to the *Verwindung* of metaphysics as elaborated by Heidegger. Solidarity is always the

used to belong exclusively to (moral or pastoral) theology but now present themselves in mainstream (continental as well as analytic) philosophy without any real headstrong resistance.

Philosophy has not been “reconfessionalized,” nor has philosophy been restored to its previous position as servant of theology. Actually, philosophy and theology (and sociology and historiography) now agree that secularization is itself the name of an event within the history of Christianity. This also means that secularization cannot be understood as an attack on Christianity from “without” – this “without” perhaps being scientific reason. Science and Christianity are not, or at least no longer, considered each other’s “without.”¹³ This yields a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, planning is still the official ‘mindset’ of current western culture. On the other hand, terms and topics that may well be considered as ‘other-than-planning’ are becoming recurrent themes in thought. Perhaps this is typical of our late-modern philosophical constellation where planning is leaving thought and Love is arriving in thought without this being a replacement or an antithesis. Rather, Love seems to chatter the complacency of planning – which is in a way a biblically inspired or motivated aspiration. Therefore, to understand actuality¹⁴ and perhaps even promote these approaching other-than-planning items on the philosophical and cultural agenda, I want to look for a possible connection between planning and Love at the “end” of modernity.¹⁵

Since, and thanks to, Heidegger, much has been written about the “end” of metaphysics, the ‘end’ of modernity, of technology, and of history. He considered this “end” ethically motivated. “End” of metaphysics must of course be understood by thought that takes a ‘step back’ (Heidegger)

result of careful calculation; charity is of the order of the widow’s mite (Mk12: 41 – 44).

¹³ It is said that secularization is the transition of philosophy’s position of *ancilla theologiae* or servant of theology, to its master, keeping religion ‘within the boundaries of reason’ – after the title of one of Kant’s works. This is only one side of the story since philosophy at that time also became the servant of science, as Lyotard famously argued in *The Postmodern Condition*.

¹⁴ Actuality is used here in the sense that Foucault suggested, namely a reflective connection with the present, more concerned with what goes on behind the facts than with the facts themselves. In a more recent jargon, we might say that actuality is the ‘event’ of the present.

¹⁵ Solidarity can be derived from or integrated in planning whereas charity cannot. To put it biblically, solidarity is putting plenty of money into the treasury; charity is the widow’s penny or mite. Its meaning is completely non-economical, even in the salvatory register. Precisely because they seem so totally unrelated, even the label “other-than-planning” does not really do justice to charity as a philosophical figure or style. Every other-than always hides a reduction to the “same.” In other-than-planning, charity may be reduced to a function of planning, even if their mutual deduction is impossible. And even this impossibility does not appear in the same way to them. In planning, impossibility is the result of a survey of all possibilities where no-one “works.” In charity, the impossible can happen, but only beyond all possibilities we discern. This is how Derrida and Caputo present their “impossibility.”

from metaphysics. If this end could be (scientifically) established, it would still belong to metaphysics. And, Derrida wonders, is the arrival of a new understanding of Being, as prophesized by Heidegger, the only way to adequately think away from metaphysics? Why not accept the “end” as an endless ending?

Recent attempts to reconcile the “end” of metaphysics with Love and Christianity are often framed in a philosophy/theology constellation that is still highly determined by precisely the modern schemata these authors want to overcome or leave behind. They either confuse theologians by stretching Christianity too far down (like Vattimo) or they confuse philosophers by turning into theologians (like Marion) – or they radically tear down the walls between them (like Caputo). Still, they do not seem to address the question I want to raise here, to wit: How does the appearance of a theological virtue in philosophy change philosophy and its relation to theology? Furthermore, what is the actual relevance of this (for the moment still alleged) change?

This means I shall have to recognize both of these terms, i.e. Love and planning, within the confines of current thought as well as formulate a new relation between philosophy and theology – a relation that is already there since it cannot be “installed” on human initiative, which is, by the way, one of the reasons to consider thought as religious. By undoing the (modern) opposition between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith, thought and faith are seen to belong to each other. Thought always hinges on a form of faith – tearing down the objectivity system.¹⁶ Faith without a thoughtful footing tends to drift away from the world, and to lose touch with actuality – still Foucault here. I will elaborate on this later.

Love is a theological, perhaps even Christian¹⁷ notion but will be treated here as a word that not only enters current philosophical vocabulary but also transforms philosophy itself. To be more precise: it transforms philosophy into Love.¹⁸ This Love is not to be found in the deeds that justify faith, as in James’ letter. This is about thought becoming itself Love, i.e. openness, hospitality, friendship. Philosophy befriends hope and trust, and thereby recognizes its own religious purport.¹⁹

¹⁶ Even science thrives on a philosophical confession, namely the belief that only what is rational, logical, measurable, etc. can be true. This belief is suppressed by the objectivity thesis, which comes down to the tautological: ‘It is not a matter of belief because it is what it is.’

¹⁷ Marius Reiser, ‘Love of Enemies in the Context of Antiquity.’ *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 4 (2001): 411 – 427.

¹⁸ As e.g. Bruno Latour stresses, religion does not *inform* but *transform*.

¹⁹ If we need to determine a distinction between science and religion, then it could be this: science informs, religion transforms. A philosophy that recognizes

How can thought even be a form of Love? Thought that does not stem from sheer curiosity or “Neugier” – as understood in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* – does not look out for “news.”²⁰ Thought that can become Love is thought that is open to what remained “unthought” and what arrives as a stranger, or as a thief in the night. This unthought is not some content that was somehow “out there” but remained as yet undiscovered or overlooked. This would suggest that there exists a full (propositional?) truth about the world, a truth that we are gradually assembling and accumulating, possibly scientific.²¹ Instead, unthought means what has yet to arrive from nowhere and without ground, *ex nihilo*.²² We cannot even ever have considered its possibility. The unthought then belongs to the future instead of the past, although its sense may be older than metaphysics itself, for ages working its way through thought – unseen and unheard-of. Hospitable thought receives, even welcomes what arrives in thought without asking for epistemological credentials. It is friendly because, though critical, it does not ridicule, censure, or reject ideas of another. It trusts that “bad” thought will eventually peter out by itself. Thus, thinking becomes “ethical” without having to resort to moral theory.

Before I outline my actual argument, I want to draw attention to another fascinating tendency of current thought. Nowadays, it is still popular to recognize the full historical merit of Christianity in its culmination in science, democracy, the current care and education industry, or the human rights discourses. But a new generation of philosophers²³ – almost all

its religious purport is a philosophy that realizes that thinking is never neutral, objective, coldly logical, sterile, etc. Thinking becomes testifying, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery. A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*. New York: SUNY Press, 2020.

²⁰ Nietzsche already warned us for this modern obsession with the ‘novum’ as a reaction to the rejection of the authority of tradition. To be “new” used to become a moral argument. It is new; therefore it has to be better. Anyone who rejects the “new” is reactionary and holds up progress. It has also infected political debate. We are all familiar with the rhetorical exclamation: ‘How is it possible that, in 2022, we still [anything, really].’ You read this also on posters recommending an exposition of a contemporary artist: ‘No-one has ever done this before!’ Then, when I visit that exposition, there always seems to be a very good reason for that.

²¹ Remember the Grand Unified Theory.

²² Dialectics is such a ground. There, thought can only arrive as the momentary result, the necessary outcome of what is already thought.

²³ I could mention Jean-Yves Lacoste, Michel Henry and others, but they are overtly philosophers of Christianity ‘in both genitive senses’: they have Christianity as their research object, but their philosophies also explicitly belong to Christianity. I’m looking here for an unsuspected liaison between philosophy and charity, where Christianity appears as an unsurpassable provenance. American philosophers like John Caputo take an intermediate position. They shift philosophy straight into theology and then refer Christianity back to philosophy. All this goes to show that there is more going on than what 20 years ago, Dominique Janicaud called ‘the theological turn in French phenomenology’. See Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

of them “unbelievers” (like Vattimo, despite his belief that he believes), some of them even militantly anti-Church (like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou) but solidly familiar with theology (like Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben) unlike most scientists (like Richard Dawkins) – highlights the ongoing and irreversible impact of certain Christian notions and eruptions on culture, including philosophy.²⁴ Their research into this impact reaches further than the sociologist tradition from Max Weber to Marcel Gauchet. They do not merely offer a theoretical description, free of triumph and regret, but introduce a motif of involvement into their reports. In their philosophy, they critically testify of this impact.

Philosophy of Christianity needs to be read in the “double genitive,” where in one sense Christianity is the object of philosophical reflection and in another sense philosophy somehow belongs to Christianity as a provenance of thought, of culture.²⁵

This is not mere coincidence, confined to a specific set of philosophers. It can be called typical of current culture. The way in which the encyclical letter *Laudato si'* is received outside the community of faithful Catholics is highly symptomatic. Bruno Latour estimates this letter's impact on the world to be of the same magnitude as the *Communist Manifesto*.²⁶ It is about climate change and socio-economic inequality, and is widely appreciated for its original and revolutionary vision, for its courage and clarity, and even for its scientific accuracy.

This means that a provenance can be recognized, which is what this paper wants to evoke. What some renounced as philosophy's outsourcing to theology – remember the famous theological turn of French phenomenology as diagnosed by Dominique Janicaud – is actually nothing more than thought reaching beyond technology and thinking the “end” of metaphysics to reconnect with its provenance, its source – in short: thought becoming religious. This is what I would call, following Derrida, philosophy being religious without religion. The “end” of metaphysics can only be understood by religious thought since it cannot be planned, controlled, analyzed as historical fact.

Therefore, I think I may be justified in bringing in Christianity as a – not the – recognized provenance of current philosophy. Even its theological virtues are welcome in

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben ‘redefines’ secularization as a signature term, meaning that it does not mean anything in itself, not adds any meaning to any ongoing signification. It just refers (political, egal, economical, etc.) notions to their theological provenance, origin. Ariën Voogt, ‘Agamben on secularization as a signature’. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 2022. DOI: 10.1080/21692327.2022.2068049

²⁵ Of course, the history of Christianity is a “shared” history, heavily influenced by other traditions – especially Jewish and Islamic religion.

²⁶ bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-176-LAUDATO SI.pdf (3/11/2019)

philosophy these days.²⁷ Apparently, these virtues that were not on Aristotle's list still have their moral relevance.²⁸ I will even go one step further here and introduce hope and faith as basic figures of thought itself, not just ethical virtues. I will argue that planning, or indeed modern thought, tends to forget that hope and faith belong to the element of philosophy – and the other way around: philosophy belongs to the element of religion that is marked by hope and faith. Late-modernity, I then contend, is when and where hope and faith inform a philosophy that connects planning with Love. Modernity, however, is when and where planning neglected, even rejected hope and faith, and (thus?) failed to connect with Love.²⁹ Love was sequestered in moral theology and became a matter for saints and bigots in their spare time. Society needs organization and the solidarity this entails is laid bare by calculation, not by faith. This separation urged modernity to decide: who wants to perform charity should turn to faith and who belongs to the community of faith is expected to perform charity; but whoever wants to build society will rely exclusively on reason, preferably scientific, and launch solidarity programs.

Love is not the opposite of planning; openness is not the opposite of enclosedness. Openness is not the new metaphysical principle that deals out signification among all beings. It does not replace God or *Geist* or Will or any other Supreme Being. It 'undoes' these Beings of their supremacy out of Love. It remains impossible to think openness, alterity, hospitality, the way they are meant here, in any enclosed system. There, these terms will be reduced to noncommittal

²⁷ Surprisingly, it is Nietzsche who introduced the theological virtues in philosophy. In the preface to the re-edition of his *The Gay Science*, he testifies of a 'spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure – patiently, severely, coldly, without submitting, but also without hope – and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health, and the intoxication of convalescence.' Faith and belief arrive a little later, where Nietzsche in the same vein and style sings of a 'merry-making after a long privation and powerlessness, the rejoicing of strength that is returning, of a reawakened faith in tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, of a certain sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, of seas that are opened again, of goals that are permitted again, believed again.' Finally, 'The trust in life has gone: life itself has become a problem. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one gloomy. Even love of life is still possible, only one loves differently.'

Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science [Fröhliche Wissenschaft]*. New York: Random House, 1974, 32; 36 – 37. Of course, these three terms do not refer to God here. They announce the "end" of metaphysics. See Meganck, 'Ratio est Fides.'

²⁸ Aristotle's virtues were canonized later on into what are called the cardinal virtues. They are the virtues that the world and its workings 'hinge' upon. As its moral hinges, they belong to the world. Theological virtues do not, they are understood as a divine gift to the world. They do not allow the world to just continue, they turn the world into heaven.

²⁹ Charity cannot be confused with solidarity in that the latter is a form of calculation. Solidarity consists in calculating what I can spend, what the other needs, and then finding a formula. Charity is giving without counting the cost. Solidarity is about what I count, economically speaking; charity is about what counts, theologically speaking. See note 8 on the poor widow and the mite.

concepts, categories, predicates. Metaphysics cannot deal with this openness where meaning comes in and leaks away, as a movement or event of sense. That scenario is, in the words of Leszek Kolakowski, “metaphysical horror.”

Late-modern philosophy can be understood as *intellectus quaerens fidem*. This *quaerens* is a process, an event that carries the connotation of Love. Hope and trust reconnect planning with openness, with receptivity without expectation and without probability calculus. Thought gratefully opens up to its Christian provenance, to its religious source.³⁰ Again, not that there is first a religious source and then philosophy has to reconnect with it. The reconnection with a provenance is religious.³¹ It has nothing to do with reconfessionalization after an allegedly dark period of secularization.

Deseccularization

Secularization, amongst many of its meanings, held the modern promise of redemption, salvation, and emancipation. Instead, it is abused as scientific support for shallow atheism as well as for religious and philosophical indifference. Radicalizing secularization does not remedy this. It is by thinking secularization through the death of God as diagnosed by Nietzsche that the promise of redemption becomes, at least philosophically, acceptable.

Modern metaphysics is motivated by the powerful notion of a Supreme Being and by Leibniz' grand Principle of Ground, modern heir to Aristotle's etiology. The incubation, as Heidegger calls it, of this Principle went on for ages. It declares that everything in the world can be accounted for.³² This intuition lives on in the conviction that science will, one day, explain everything in a Grand Unified Theory. In as far as it allows planning to take a dominant position in thought, modern metaphysics indeed silently aims at full explanation and manipulation of the world without any reference to hope or faith. Indeed, the difference between “theological” virtues that require divine motivation, and “cardinal” virtues upon which the world literally “hinges”, disappears.³³ Whereas medieval Christianity put up the seven virtues over against the seven sins, modernity leaves this moral structure behind. There only remain virtues, and hope and faith do no longer

³⁰ In specifying the Christian context, I certainly do not ignore or reject the historical dialogue with Jewish and Arab theology and philosophy. This context is specified only because of two reasons: the intimacy between Christianity and (Western) metaphysics, and my contingent familiarity with Christian tradition.

³¹ In this, it disobeys the modern imperative to reject any authority of tradition.

³² The Latin version, ‘*Nihil est sine ratione*’, nothing is without reason or ground, can also suggest that what cannot be accounted for, must be considered non-existent, without “sufficient” value or truth.

³³ *Cardo* is Latin for ‘hinge’.

belong to that list. As a consequence, Love is isolated from thought – to the modern mind, it becomes “soft”, irrational, female,³⁴ theological.³⁵

Current thought is, of course, still heavily marked by modernity and metaphysics, by science and technology, and by secularization. This is the dead God’s shadow that Nietzsche pictures in his famous §108 and §125 of *The Gay Science*. I think this shadow aligns with what I call, following Nancy, theism. Theism is any thought configuration that generates a system that is held together by one Supreme Being determining all signification (position, status, function, etc.) of every element in the system without there being a “without.” This recalls the onto-theo-logical structure of thought, but not necessarily with God as Supreme Being. In case God is replaced by any other modern principle, like Reason, Spirit, Matter, History or Will, the shadow takes the shape of a shallow and superficial atheism.³⁶ This atheism is, however, still a theism and therefore fails to think the death of God through. The “a-” that is tagged onto it has got nothing to do with Nietzsche’s nihilism. It refers to the replacement of God by another Supreme Being within exactly the same theist system. There is still a Supreme Being at work to hold the system together according to the grand Principle. This atheism needs to be led through the death of God.

Modern atheism is almost spontaneously linked to secularization. Inasmuch as secularization is the historical disappearance or removal of God from the cultural, socio-political, and intellectual discourses and systems,³⁷ it still belongs to theist thought and can be nothing else than a rational, theoretical, or scientific explanation. Not that there is anything wrong with that, except for its presupposed or implied claim to “objectivity.” But what is worse, if secularization does not liberate thought from its theist structure, then it cannot be the emancipating force or event modernity expected it to be. There is no redemption in just

³⁴ Remember what Nietzsche said in the famous fourth chapter of his *Twilight of the idols* about the idea: ‘it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible – it becomes female, it becomes Christian.’ Recently, Derrida pointed out that Levinas identified the feminine as the “other,” thereby in a way safeguarding the masculinity of the I, of the “same.”

³⁵ On the last page of his *Short Treatise on the Great Virtues*, André Comte-Sponville suggests that love renders virtues redundant; virtues only shine in the absence of love. See André Comte-Sponville, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues. The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*. London: Vintage, 2003.

³⁶ The utmost shallow version of atheism is the contention that ‘God does not exist’, without explaining what can be meant by ‘God’ and ‘existence’.

³⁷ This is not the only interpretation of secularization. To name but one: recently, Hans Joas understands it as rationalization of the sacred. Also, secularization cannot explain the persistence of the name (of) God. See Meganck, ‘World without end.’ The neglect of this persistence leads to two one-sided secularization models: one where God disappears, leaving the world; and another where God immerses in the world.

replacing God with another Absolute Principle, although this was what modernity expected.

Emancipation and redemption refer to the promise of a better world. When and how can one declare a world "better" than another, without resorting to quantification and calculation? It cannot be the world of planning, because there, a better world is a closed system determined by only a couple of established parameters that can be measured over time. Making the world better would then mean: increasing or decreasing the value of certain parameters. This becomes visible in a form of biopolitics – another term launched by Foucault – where the intrinsic meaning of life shifts to a measurable value: the so-called (and paradoxically often quantifiable) "quality" of life.

This quantification rules out the qualification "better" in the sense that I mean here. Measuring export flow, income, job employment, health security access, and educational success rates is not the way to discern the "hoped-for" world. This "better" that is meant here is not a question of knowing, but rather of hoping. One thing therefore sounds reasonably convincing: this latter world will have to be open instead of closed, to make room for the arrival of a "better" world beyond planning. Then how can we imagine ourselves an open world as different from a closed, planned one? We should not understand this opening world as leading thought into another world. As we know, Nietzsche has closed off every philosophical access to another world. Transcendence is no longer a matter of the other *than* the world but rather of the other *of* the world, says Jean-Luc Nancy. This transcendent alterity entails at least the rejection of absolute pure immanence – the latter turning out to be an "unrealistic" philosophical project.³⁸ In this transcendence, *deseccularization* persists.³⁹ It shows where secularization went too far in its radicalization (see below) and at the same time did not go far enough, failing to dissolve theist structures. Desecularization is not the opposite of secularization. If we take the "de-" of deconstruction instead of the "de-" of deduction and tag it onto secularization, then we allow for the erosion of the latter, thereby also undermining the *dominance or primacy* of "planning" instead of rejecting planning itself. Desecularization does not abolish, reverse, or deny secularization but spells its dissolution, its decomposition into

³⁸ I would admit: if a philosophical giant like Gilles Deleuze could not achieve this, no-one will.

³⁹ Erik Meganck, 'Deseccularisation. Thinking secularisation beyond metaphysics' in M. Chabbert; N. Deketelaere (eds.), *The Pulse of Sense. Encounters with Jean-Luc Nancy*. London: Routledge, 2022, 185 – 201. Deseccularization is not a concept that describes an event, on the contrary, it undoes the semantic aspirations of the concept 'secularization' by undoing its signification, its ideological use, its attempts to make a (political) point. Deseccularization turns secularization into a signature, to stay with Agamben.

local and ephemeral processes that do not make up History as a unity, and its endless ending. By this, I mean that secularization will not, someday, result in a completely non-religious world. Desecularization redirects secularization from God and religion to the systems and institutions that consolidate religion as well as its enemies. It leads thought beyond the pointless ‘God exists!’ – ‘No, he does not!’ polarities.⁴⁰ Desecularization drags secularization through the death of God.

Desecularization dissolves the theist frame to which secularization is still indebted. It prevents secularization from becoming the ultimate determination of history, or better: it is the mark of the seeming impossibility of anything becoming the ultimate meaning of history. Since desecularization is not a theist system but rather a “contamination” or “dissolution” thereof, it can never be the successor of secularization. In this sense, desecularization belongs to the post-secular, where it resists theism as well as radicalization of secularization. This may answer John Milbank’s poignant remark that post-modern thought has dismantled every modern ambition except secularism.⁴¹

I will show that a combination of world-as-opening together with desecularization as introduced above is able to understand how the “return of religion” is actually the re-attachment of thought, of philosophy to its element of hope and faith, thereby becoming a specific act of Love. This re-attachment entails decardinalization. Decardinalization declares the Aristotelian list of virtues unable to divulge the full moral motivation of thought and the whole moral spectrum of the world. It also rejects the theological reduction or isolation of the so-called theological virtues. Decardinalization wonders what would happen if thought, or the world, lost hope and faith altogether. It seriously doubts whether hope and faith only belong to a register other than thought, as Enlightenment would have it. It also suggests that hope and faith never really left thought but rather remain under the cultural radar for as long as planning keeps determining thought.

Before going on with the exploration, I first want to show how radicalization of secularization, i.e. the denial or rejection of desecularization, could turn out to be a philosophical *cul-de-sac*. I will take only one, though explicit and famous, example to illustrate how, when reason secularizes radically, this creates more problems than it pretends to solve. Vattimo is a fervent advocate of a radical secularization of thought and

⁴⁰ In Zürich, Heidegger once confessed to students that he would like to compose a theology without the word “being.”

⁴¹ John Milbank, ‘The end of Enlightenment: Post-modern or post-secular?’ in C. Géfré, and J.-P. Jossua eds.), *The Debate on Modernity*. London: SCM Press, 1992, 39 – 48.

faith.⁴² His weak thought explores the dissolution of both metaphysics and the sacred as sources of violence. Thought is left without any transcendent instance that can declare ongoing interpretations right or wrong. Truth becomes a matter of negotiation and this is, according to weak thought, the effect of Christianity, of history as the revelation of charity. But then, Vattimo declares secularization itself exempt from secularization. He declares charity exempt from (weak) interpretation, because, he asks, who would want to weaken love? Leaving aside the question whether his nihilist charity is the ultimate meaning of Christian love, as he contends, Vattimo denies charity any meaning or sense. Since it cannot be interpreted, it finds itself cut off from thought. This implies that Vattimo posits charity beyond being and thinking, beyond a reality that has become hermeneutic plasma or flux of interpretations that never will become facts. In its turn, this means that charity secularizes the world from outside, which is Vattimo's very own definition of metaphysical violence. Secularization becomes a strong metaphysical historical principle at the very core of his weak thought. Clearly Vattimo's attempt to connect his critique of metaphysics with charity has failed. So, in as far as we may extend this conclusion to similar attempts to radicalize secularization, this does not seem a very fertile notion. But radicalization is not a necessary condition, vector, or goal of secular thought.

A much more interesting elaboration on secularization is offered by Agamben.⁴³ Moving as far as possible beyond the still unresolved Löwith-Blumenberg dispute, he "reduces" secularization to a hermeneutic operation. There is no (political, socio-economic, legal, etc.) "substance" (institution, relation, power, activity, etc.) that moves through time from sacred to profane – or not – or has had its theological determination removed so that only a secular one remains – again, or not. Secularization works like a signature. It refers each current signification of the forementioned "substances" back to its original theological context, in order to better understand it. Implied is the contention that science and its modern philosophical backup – the "secular" explanations – are on themselves unable to fully understand actuality, i.e. the current political, socio-economic, legal, etc. constellation. We need the theological references.

Here, I also recognize desecularization at work. A signature is not a concept, nor is it a substance. It has no content and on itself no meaning. It does not by itself add meaning to a specific term, but only refers this meaning back to its theological origin. It does not presuppose, describe, or

⁴² Erik Meganck. 'Philosophia Amica Theologiae: Weak Faith and Theological Difference' *Modern Theology* 31, no. 3 (2015): 377 – 402.

⁴³ Colby Dickinson. *Agamben and Theology*. London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011, 130 – 137.

lean on history, be it as emancipation, desacralization, or anything like that.

Modern atheism and secularization do not seem to be what actually subsists in late-modernity. Perhaps the modern project, viz. total rational explanation and control, became too ambitious after a while – if not from the very start. Planning became too self-confident when it replaced hope and faith by certainty, when thought became method, when world became technoscience. But if superficial atheism and the rejection of hope and faith are proprioceptive errors, what does that tell late-modern thought? Late-modernity, at least in its continental differential form, rejects absolute objectivity, so those errors are not to be read as merely “wrong.” But the modern focus on method and certainty organized thought in such a way that hope and faith, the element of thought, became suspicious. Modernity has ‘enclosed’ thought around the principle of certainty. Certainty does not allow for any openness. This is why modernity is not really areligious but hyperreligious. It has petrified its belief system into an absolutely certain representation of the world.

Hyperreligious Modernity

During a debate with a known supporter of what I call shallow atheism, he exclaimed “I am convinced, I am absolutely certain that God does not exist.” The comma tells the whole story. At that time I realized that modernity is not areligious as it always pretended to be, it is actually hyperreligious. In that case, thought, philosophy has never been areligious.⁴⁴ This yields some interesting consequences. The shift via that comma has to do with another shift, from *parousia* to eschatology. In the experience of an immediate second coming of the Savior, with its promise of full explanation of the meaning of life, every cognitive, political, or moral ambition becomes futile and three core virtues would suffice to make the world worthy of such an event. But this second coming is being delayed indefinitely, leaving us with the challenge of provisional and tentative management of the world. Eschatologically speaking, philosophy finds the world ontologically, epistemologically, and morally undecided, or, in short, *hermeneutically open*.

But modernity has lost or left the eschatological dimension. The Final Judgment that will solve the problem of moral undecidedness, the ultimate judgment of the world that bears no appeal in that the world can no longer be made “better” anymore, is suspended until further notice. This

⁴⁴ Just as Bruno Latour claims that we have never been modern, I claim that we have never been areligious.

judgment will be that the world is “the best”, cannot be “better”, which is what we all hope for, after all (literally). After waiting in vain for the thief in the night for ages, humanity took ontological, epistemological and moral matters into their own hands. The world became the field of makeability, certainty, and utility. Man became himself the author of the Grand Narratives, the creator of plans that would make the world “better” within a manageable timespan. Technology overtly supplied the new parousia, called extrapolation. As said before, thinking became planning, method. The world disenchanted, “flattened.”

Morality here does not refer to what we have to do, but how we need to think.⁴⁵ The moral question here is not: “What good do I have to do?” (Mt19:16; Mc10:17; Lc18:18) but rather: “How can thought connect with hope and faith?” Only from this connection, a “better” world becomes visible beyond what planning considers possible, manageable. But this connection is still far from being realized. In the words of Nietzsche on the death of God: “This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men.” These men are the people on the market place, laughing at the madman. These are the atheists that have not understood the death of God, those who believe in planning and have no need for the hypothesis of God.

This, of course, reminds of Laplace’s (in)famous reply to Napoleon’s query as to why God was not even mentioned in his celestial mechanics. He claimed he did not need that “hypothesis.” What he forgot to mention is that he needed another hypothesis very badly. He needed scientific reason – i.e. the collaboration of the Cartesian imperative of certainty, of method, of measurability, of alleged objectivity, etc. – as Supreme Being instead of (a biblical) God. Natural law became Newtonian instead of Thomistic. And modern philosophy became the servant of modern science. I would contend it is the system of objectivity that in its turn produces and supports the notions of makeability, certainty, and utility – the modern metaphysical configuration of thought. I consider this configuration “hyper”-religious. Modern philosophy is superficially atheist when it keeps a theist structure and removes God from the top (which operation is denoted by the prefix “a-”), only to replace this concept by another, like Spirit or Matter or Will or Society. It is hyper-religious in that it has calibrated secular thought so rigidly that its faith comes so near to certainty as to actually identify with it. This is not the certainty of the mystic but of the scientist. It is quite understandable how the collaboration between algebra and experiment, which makes up modern science, did much to push God from the theist throne. First,

⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy. ‘What is to be done?’ *Diacritics* 42 (2014) 2, 100 – 117.

Descartes turns God into a concept in terms of makeability, certainty, and utility⁴⁶ and then Laplace gets rid of the hypothesis. Indeed, if God guarantees certain truth if-and-only-if you apply the correct procedure, then you need only to focus on the procedure, no longer on God. And so “planning” becomes the name of that configuration.

The “return of religion” is sometimes understood to mean the dramatic reappearance of God and religion on the public stage, full of triumph and retaliation, after having been locked up during modernity. That would be the Hollywood-version. Hope and faith were not strategically or epistemologically removed from thought, they just did not make any sense to planning, the dominant feature of modern thought. There is no real comeback, the de-position of planning as dominant feature has the effect of thought sitting up and taking notice of hope and faith again.

Planning and Religious Thought

Where planning fails, despair grows. Only where despair grows, hope can rise. Where hope rises, thought reconnects with (the philosophical equivalent of) Love, thanks to a “certain” – ambiguity intended – faith and trust. Planning is indeed hopeless. It will not rely on what it cannot itself achieve. Planning is also faithless. The strategic “discovery” of a world-as-it-is relies exclusively on method. Planning needs a reason for everything (remember Leibniz’ Grand Principle) whereas hope only dawns when we have run out of reasons. Only where planning fails, despair grows. But precisely because planning stumbles upon its limits, despair is at the same time hope. Hope can only come from despair, from the experience that we are left without reason. No hope without despair. When the whole therapeutic arsenal is used up and no recovery in sight, the doctors leave the room and someone lights a candle.⁴⁷ The situation shifts from planning to hope through despair. The thought that can see how hope comes out of despair is certainly not itself a variation on planning. Nevertheless, it is actual, real thought; it could be philosophy.

⁴⁶ This is precisely what Marx, Nietzsche and Freud – the masters of suspicion, Ricoeur calls them – noticed. God became a rationally dethroned human invention.

⁴⁷ The medical aim is clear. In the technological battle between the symptom and science, the latter wants to win the battle that is called illness. It wants to heal the patient, effect a cure, not for the latter’s sake but for the triumph. We can suspect this when we see how, in a medical environment a human being is readily identified with his symptom. Nurses do not refer to “mr. Johnson” but to “the kidney stone in room 16.” Doctors often are prepared to fight it out the hard way, which is known as “therapeutic aggression.” The candle is of a different order; it is cleansed through despair. It mustn’t be confused with magic. It only says: ‘We cannot but hope for the best, without knowing what the ‘best’ could be. It trusts that, whatever the outcome, it will be for the best.’

It thinks the limits and the reach of planning. Philosophically, hope can only hope for itself, without any external reference. Such reference would only turn hope into desire or expectation, even calculation or guarantee. Then what could be the sense – and not the use, as modernity's imperative – of hope in the real world? Well, hope defies globalization that is nothing but the world turning into (a financial-industrial or capitalist) plan, only because this ambition itself defies and destroys hope.

Those limits of planning reveal the scope of human action and thought, or at least the fact that there *is* a limited scope. Since hope has neither object nor reason (outside itself), in which case it would become a form of extrapolation, it thinks in the register of accident. Whereas in traditional metaphysics accident meant secondary attribute, in modern metaphysics or technology accident means failure. Where technology breaks down, accidents will happen. When thought becomes hope instead of planning, accident is whatever befalls. It is not negative, as in planning, but rather promising, though there is no guarantee or certainty about what precisely is being promised. Hope can only be “for the best”, without this “best” having any content, object or reason. This “best” only acquires its meaning within hope. Outside hope it becomes a plan where “better” can be measured and often just means “more.”⁴⁸

The register of hope is different from that of planning. The change of register becomes “visible” where the philosophical connotation of “accident” changes from negative to positive – which is just one of many shifts, but it serves as a “good example” here. Planning only recognizes a future that cannot be anything more or else than extrapolation of the present, the present being a constellation that only differs from former ones in that it is supposed to be “better.” The criteria to establish this “better” are provided by planning itself and are therefore other than hope’s “best.” As long as one stays within the epistemological monopoly of planning, the world is becoming better. This is established objectively in the sense of: measured. The present is the time-rod of technology, of planning. Hope shifts this rod to advent or accident, which is the future that is not the product of extrapolation of the present. It is concerned with the impossible. The impossible is not what is clearly not possible on scientific or technical grounds, but what arrives from beyond what we can imagine (i.e. calculate) as possible. This shows how we can have absolute faith in technology and science, though its extrapolations and equations are not

⁴⁸ Not being an economist, I am often amazed by financial bulletins where I read that industrial growth of a company is not enough; its growth itself should grow to be “better.” Is not this, again, a symptom of the “limits” of planning? And where can the long-term vision of exponential growth come in?

guaranteed over time. No law in science can claim that it will still be valid in the world tomorrow.⁴⁹ We have a hyperreligious faith in science. We are absolutely convinced, we are certain that the laws of gravity will still hold tomorrow, though science itself cannot account for this certainty; modern philosophy takes care of that.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, we trust science to account for it through our idea of objectivity. This idea turns faith into certainty and then amputates the former from thought.

Thought in the register of hope and faith, accident and promise, (re-)enters the element of the religious. At this entry, there is no – or in any case: not yet – Church, confession, or systematic dogmatics. There is only philosophical faith. It is the faith where Plato finds *agathon* and where Heidegger thinks thankfully *Seinsgabe*.⁵¹ Thought gratefully enjoys the faith that there will always be meaning and that thought will never dissolve in complete absurdity (in Levinasian sense). The thought that takes leave from the system of objectivity no longer experiences meaning as evidence, as signification, as *adaequation rei et intellectus*.

Faith has always been the element of thought, even when modernity tended to blur this element with objectivity and certainty. Hope has always been the basic moral motivation of thought, even when modernity thought it could replace it by method and planning. Love is not a being, nor is it a concept. It cannot be (the concept, category, predicate, definition, etc. of) a Supreme Being. A philosophy that has become Love cannot be metaphysical in the traditional, i.e. onto-theo-logical sense. Love cannot serve as a *hinterweltlich* or outerworldly principle. The philosophical reliance on or access to any “external” reference was already closed off by Nietzsche, in his famous ‘How the “True World” Finally Became a Fable,’ the fourth chapter of *Twilight of the Idols*. Love cannot be the label of a scientific research project or a theory. It cannot be measured from a distance. Therefore, it also cannot serve as

⁴⁹ The only way for rationalists and the like (positivists, scientists) to suppress this problem, is to translate this hyperreligious, certain faith into the one and only true objective structure of reality.

⁵⁰ Aristotle observed exactly the same processes that are gathered under the term “falling” as we do. Nevertheless, he explained this phenomenon by referring it to the natural positions of things. We, after Newton, refer it to a gravitational force. Why and how is this “better?” Only because it satisfies the modern imperative of measuring and the also modern ban on teleology. But because we still live modernity and thought is still modern – even when we call it post-modern – we cannot but obey this imperative until it will have ‘dissolved’.

⁵¹ There are plenty of examples that hint at the fundamental religious, faithful nature of thought. There is Parmenides, who presented his wisdom as a divine gift. Anselm’s *Proslogion* reminds one of a love declaration, with philosophy coming after, thinking about God’s existence. Descartes’ system hinges on his trust that a perfect God cannot be a *malin génie*. Kant trusts that the phenomenal order has a meaningful report to the noumenal order. Only Hegel is certain that Spirit will never fail a dialectic leap, because in his own philosophy, reality is finally explained as a whole.

“internal” reference. This reference is also losing its status of absolute reliability since it is not at all certain that the legitimization by performativity (Lyotard) will save this reference. Love, hope, and trust are not about that kind of performativity.

Hope opens the reach of planning, takes planning out of itself. It shows that planning does not have the last and ultimate word or explanation. Beyond the limits of planning is not “non-thought”, like poetry or sentiment or absurdity, but a thought that is at the same time less and more than planning. It opens a world at the price of alleged certainty. Faith saves hope from pointlessness. Both are oriented towards advent, to what is coming, promised or promising. But what is coming cannot come from another world since this *Hinterwelt* has been emptied, closed off. That is what we learn from the experience of the death of God, as prophesized by Nietzsche. On the other hand, Heidegger as well as Wittgenstein contend that the world cannot generate or even hold its own (full, definite) meaning. Then, where does this meaning come from, if there is no world but this one, philosophically speaking?

Decardinalization

Hope has been shown to be the moral motivation of thought, opening philosophy to a “better” world without this “better” being measurable, predictable, derivable from what is considered “good” in the technoscientific world. In the same vein, faith can be shown to be the epistemological motivation of thought, the basic trust that we will never be left in total absurdity. Love will be explored here as the ontological, hermeneutical motivation of thought. The moral agenda of current thought does not consist in the construction of a separate, rational, liberal, or communal ethics, but in the extension of philosophy from planning to Love,⁵² from certainty to openness, from *veritas* to *caritas*. Decardinalization is not about amorality or immorality, but about thought itself becoming moral instead of virtuously reflecting on virtues, values, and norms.

The element of the religious is motivated by Love, so Christianity informs us. Here, in this philosophical essay, this motivation refers to a thought that opens up to a truth that is not necessarily the result of calculation, a truth that is not founded on certainty. In this approach, Love is about leaving a world open instead of enclosing it in a theistic structure. The ambition of total explanation, typical of technoscience, is the

⁵² This is itself a movement of Love.

most articulate form of modern ambition.⁵³ A charitable philosophy is one that aims at liberation from all too rigid method without applying any rigid method to this end, at salvation from absolute planning without planning this, and at liberation from a closed globe without promoting Love to Supreme Principle. This philosophy is something else than planning. From the viewpoint of planning, every other thought is nonsense, irrational. But when thought breaks away from the supremacy of planning through hope and faith, it recognizes the reasonableness of Love and the philosophical fertility of an open world, of an opening that *is* meaning. Philosophy that is focused on method will generate systems *more geometrico demonstrata*. No such system can sprout from Love. Philosophy that is focused on Love will never produce such systems.

A “promising” candidate in the running is deconstruction. Deconstruction of archaeology and teleology of philosophy, of alleged absolute foundations and aspirations of metaphysics, has dis-enclosed, has opened world.⁵⁴ A closed world, purely immanent and identical to itself, is closed off from meaning, is philosophically suicidal – and deconstruction appears as palliative care. Such a world will only acknowledge signification, a definite “adequacy to itself.” An open world experiences meaning as an event, as advent. Opening and meaning are synonymous verbs here, denoting the event of world or world as the event of sense. Perhaps late-modern metaphysics, under what is still called deconstruction, finds itself more lenient towards hope and faith, and can therefore be said to be a suitable candidate to re-attach Love to thought. Deconstruction is the name of the event that turns the closed world of traditional metaphysics into an open one. Meaning as opening (“world” as a verb) becomes a matter of “advent,” of to-be-given, of promise instead of originally and eternally given in a fixed system of concepts. Truth becomes a matter of reception rather than of deduction. Meaning happens all the time, not just at the origin (archaeology) or in its culmination (teleology).

This reason is secular in that it refuses to find the reason or the truth of the world in another world. It is also “desecular” in that it allows for meaning to arrive instead of being fabricated by method. Also, the very notion of the arrival of meaning rejects the possibility of a full explanation as aspired by science. It shows modesty and courage to welcome a register and enter an element that thinks the limits

⁵³ Remember that this ambition hinges on the Supreme Being and the Principle of Ground. It seems not easy to determine whether the notions produced the ambition or the other way around. We do know that the notions and the ambition together make up metaphysics.

⁵⁴ This is what Nancy means with dis-enclosure. Jean-Luc Nancy. *Dis-enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

of planning. Hope and faith lead thought into Love, where it experiences the world as a gift, not as a given that fits into an equation, or into a plan. Here, philosophy realizes that planning did not plan itself and that the system of objectivity is not objective itself, without the threat of absurdity.

All this implies that philosophy cannot think Love without becoming Love, without welcoming the event, without opening to the event of meaning. In the form or register of Love, thought leaves the theist structure that lends planning its absolute character. This cannot be accomplished by a superficial atheism like the one described above, where the theist structure is maintained and God is replaced by another principle. Here, only the concept and entity "God" are removed from the world. But it is still theism, with an operator tagged onto it. Philosophy should instead point its "a-" at all theisms, *in the name of God*.⁵⁵ It should destroy theisms in a Heideggerian sense, dissolving onto-theological metaphysics.

Philosophy has to become atheist and religious⁵⁶ in order to allow for a more appropriate configuration of thought, with planning and Love "united" through hope and faith – not through dialectics – as modes of thought. This is what I call desecularization. In all its complexity, it keeps secularization away from radicalization. A desecularizing reason will no longer hold planning to be the most appropriate response to the "turn towards the world" and the matching "expulsion of the holy" that is supposed to be typical of modernity. So, in a way, desecularization saves thought from imminent suicide. Desecularization of philosophy, acknowledging the critique of metaphysics and the purport of Love, moves thought beyond Kant and Hegel. It renounces the immanence of the identity of the whole with truth and with thought, but it also renounces the transcendence of a God that eludes scientific thought and is evoked by another reason as "out there."⁵⁷

A closed and mechanized world, the world that calls out for or comes out of radical secularization, has no use for theological virtues. Or better, it "cardinalizes" those virtues. They seem to have been spread out over or between the cardinal ones. Only the cardinalization of moral thought can explain the appearance of "applied ethics." One may well

⁵⁵ Meganck, 'World without end.'

⁵⁶ It would perhaps be more precise to call this philosophy hypo-religious, not only to contrast it with hyper-religious modernity (the solid certainty of science), but also to keep it away from religious in the confessional or denominational sense (the convinced, faithful belief). Hypo-religious would be the philosophical hope, trust and openness.

⁵⁷ And yet it would be interesting to find out whether it is easier to open up Hegel's immanence by difference than to drag Kant's God into the opening, into the difference between theoretical and practical reason, into the difference within reason.

wonder whereof these ethics are the application, if not of a “broader” religious (not necessarily confessional) ethics. In a Christian world, philosophy could focus on freedom while theology took care of the dignity of the person. Secularization disconnected freedom from dignity. Freedom became a matter of privacy and property, now both threatened by secularization itself as globalization,⁵⁸ i.e. the world turning into the form of a plan. The dignity of the person completely disappeared from the intellectual stage and became a mere matter of sentiment. There is, in a secularized or “disenchanted” culture, no science that can “deduce” or reveal, discover or formulate this dignity of the person. Contemporary philosophers like Nancy and Žižek, as mentioned above, discern the Christian provenance of this dignity that can never become a rational concept but will always be an appeal. This appeal cannot be answered in or by a theory. It presupposes thought to be Love.

Modern thought did not recognize its own appeal. It considered its contents the adequate representation of an objective reality in a conceptual structure. Therefore, it did not see how its philosophy was the answer to an inner appeal to turn reality into a rational and dual system of objectivity. The laying bare of this appeal is the effect of reality becoming deconstructive. Deconstruction is at the same time also decardinalization of ethics. This decardinalization keeps virtue away from the general notion that a better world can only come from adequate management. Decardinalization moves away from the systematization and application of ethics. It re-integrates the ethical into thought as such, turning thought into Love.⁵⁹

Desecularization and decardinalization have reorganized the (moral, therefore still modern) relation between philosophy and theology.⁶⁰ Instead of pre-modern *ancilla* or modern *dominatrix*, philosophy has become *amica theologiae*.⁶¹ Much can be said about this new relation. In connection with desecularization and decardinalization, I would formulate a conclusion as follows. Metaphysics traditionally elaborated ethical systems, late-modern thought itself has become ethical itself. Now that thought has reconnected with hope and faith, not as topics but as its religious element, to think is in itself

⁵⁸ I just need to refer to the way social media invade privacy and to the unworldly arrogance of the financial “world.”

⁵⁹ Critique of metaphysics is in more than one sense ethical. It liberates us from the shackles of “violent” metaphysics, it welcomes an ‘eventual’ new advent, and it points at the thinker’s responsibility for his thoughts since he can no longer outsource this to a “true world,” a system of objectivity.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche famously tried to dismantle the traditional moral connection between philosophy and theology. Instead of disproving any kind of connection, the death of God gives rise to a new moral connection that can be called typical of late-modernity.

⁶¹ Meganck, ‘Philosophia Amica Theologiae.’

“good” and promises “better” worlding – in an eschatological rather than ideological way. Philosophy talked about hospitality, charity, and friendship and has now become Love, welcoming the advent of meaning. Paradoxically, at least from a theological viewpoint, philosophy had to become atheist, not in the shallow sense but in a deeply religious sense.⁶² This religious atheism does not remove God from thought or replaces God with another Supreme Being. It has passed through the experience of the death of God and, in the name of God, dissolves theisms, theist structures, and onto-theologies.

⁶² This “shallow” atheism does not belong to modern thought as such. Great modern or post-modern thinkers were more cautious than that. They did not shout that God does not exist, as so many others did and still do. They were often more concerned with the problems inherent to metaphysics and Christianity than with God and religion itself. See Erik Meganck, *Religious Atheism. Twelve Philosophical Apostles*. New York: SUNY – forthcoming.