

JOHN D. CAPUTO  
Syracuse University

IF THERE IS SUCH A THING:  
*POSSE IPSUM, THE IMPOSSIBLE, AND LE PEUT-ÊTRE MÊME*  
READING CATHERINE KELLER'S *CLOUD OF THE*  
*IMPOSSIBLE*

I should warn you that you are coming into the middle of a conversation between Catherine Keller and me. We have been writing (letters) to and about each other for a while and so sometimes links in this epistolary chain may appear in short-hand and in need of explanation.<sup>1</sup> I am not just trying to be clever when I say that our relationship is something of a *coincidentia oppositorum* and apophatic relational entanglement unto itself—Catholic and Protestant, male and female, philosopher and theologian, deconstructor of metaphysics and process theologian, just for starters. There have been wars over such things, blood spilled. As Catherine Keller says, a lot of our differences are explained by our biographies—I come from the Catholic tradition saturated with metaphysics, so when I heard about “overcoming metaphysics” and “deconstructing the metaphysics of presence” that had the lure of liberation for me, of the rogue, the radical, the outsider. Catherine comes from an anti-metaphysical Protestantism which gave metaphysics the lure of the prohibited other, especially if it took the form of a non-scholastic panentheistic process metaphysics, which set the hair on fire of my Thomistic professors in college, from which they tried duly to inoculate me. Over the course of our careers, we have been inching toward a center, finally touching fingertips in a middle we both happily called “theopoetics,” in a piece we coauthored a few years.

*As She Says*

The name of God is the name of an invitation, a solicitation, a lure, an *eros* to which *we* are supposed to be the answer, the response, the realization, the actualization, the materialization, the embodying incarnation, she says, and I say *oui, oui*. “Theology haunts each of us with the gift of our own ability, our responsibility” (112), she says.<sup>2</sup> “It is up to us to do God,” she says.<sup>3</sup> “No more Big Guy in the Sky dolling out Pie (that

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Face of the Deep* (London: Routledge, 2003), Catherine Keller showed us how to link the critique of *creatio ex nihilo* with post-structural theory, of which I made use in my *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Indiana UP, 2007), 56-65, which she reviewed in *CrossCurrents*, 56:4 (Winter, 2007), 133-39. We collaborated on John D. Caputo and Catherine Keller, “Theopoetic/Theopolitic,” *CrossCurrents*, 56:4 (Winter, 2007): 105-11. See also Catherine Keller, “Dear Jack,” in *It Spooks: Living in Response to an Unheard Call*, ed. Erin Schendzielos (Rapid City, S.D., Shelter50 Publishing Collective, 2015), 226-35.

<sup>2</sup> All pagination in parentheses is to Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Keller, “Dear Jack,” 245.

someone else baked),” she says.<sup>4</sup> *Oui, oui*, say I. Formulations upon which I defy anyone to improve. God not as Sovereign Exception but a quiet source of sollicitation, asking for instantiation. Atheism about that Big Guy God is not the end of theology but the beginning.

Possibility is a felicitous nickname, a good word, for God, she says. But since one word leads to another, there being no such thing as one word, she quickly adds, a possibility such that *the impossible* is lodged at the heart’s desire of this possibility. So, in five words, the possibility of *the impossible*, she says. *Oui, oui*, say I. By the impossible we both mean not a logical contradiction but making all things new, the new being (St. Paul says), renewing the face of the earth (Ps. 104:30; 282), as the psalmist says, a horizon-shattering, inbreaking renewal which releases hitherto unimagined, unthought possibilities, possibilities for which we pray and weep and dream. Such is the stuff of what can be called “religion,” if that is a word that means something to you. If it does not, that word is of no consequence. What we call religion, or religion’s God, does not care what you call it or whether you believe it (306) she says. What we call theology is “but a chance to regroup before the impossible,” she says (16). And so, say I. I wish I had thought of saying it that way.

So, I begin by saying I counter-sign everything—the cloud of the impossible, negative theology, and global entanglement. Everything! The jury is thanked for their services and dismissed. Next case, please.

Not so fast. What about “metaphysics?” Are not the two of us well known to disagree about that? Well, after having gone around that corner several times with what she says, I would say *no*, not after it is looked into carefully enough.

*No*, not if the metaphysics we both reject is the Metaphysics of Omnipotence, of guys wearing long robes and carrying big sticks with which to defend the Big Guy in the Sky. Omnipotence is a word that sends Keller, and me right behind her, running for cover.

*No*, not if we double click the “refresh” button and say that what we mean by this word metaphysics is “a series of metaphors mutely appealing for an intuitive leap,” as Whitehead says,<sup>5</sup> a work of creative imagination construing our place in the world and the world’s place in us. As she says, “The new form of theology, or indeed of metaphysics, ‘that comports with science’ must, [Philip] Clayton argues, ‘be hypothetical, pluralistic, fluid in its use of empirical conceptual arguments, continually open to revision’ (130). And so, say I.

*No*, not if by metaphysics we mean following “after,” as in pursuing and heeding, the new physics, which reveals a deep relationality and chiasmic intertwining in all things great and small.

So, again, in a word, we might describe our common ground here not as Mighty Metaphysics of the Almighty, or a Strong Ontology,

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, “Dear Jack,” 243.

<sup>5</sup> Keller, “Dear Jack,” 244.

but as a “hauntology,” a kind of metaphysics without Metaphysics, more like trying to guess the shadows on the wall of the cave, or the shifting shapes of clouds above, a chap with big ears here, a dog there. Then, are there residual differences in our “hauntology?” I am not sure. Let us see what happens.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, then, I will follow as time and my wits permit what she says, taking as my touchstone the possibility of the impossible in *Cloud*, in the course of which I manage to muster up a question or two.

*Laying the Cards of the Cardinal on the Table*

*Cloud of the Impossible* is a complex, multidisciplinary, discursive performance. It moves with agility across multiple disciplines and across thinkers ranging from Christian antiquity to the present. It takes place on several discursive levels at once, an erudite study, a meditation or act of contemplation, and a call for action. Its multiple lines of force, its apophysis and entanglement, cross over and intersect upon a point of maximum concentration, evoked by its magnificent title – the impossible, the possibility of the impossible, the mystery of the possibility of the impossible. The possibility of the impossible has never been far from the name of God, for with God, all things are possible, up to and including the impossible.

But is that not the very *definition* of “omnipotence?” Let’s start with the “possible” *itself*.

If there is such a thing (*s’il y en a*), if it has a *self*.

Ay, there’s the rub. Then the questions come rushing in. Is the possible a being? A higher cause of being? A deeper ground of being? Being itself? Beyond being? Might possibility itself be nothing more than an abstraction, nothing more than a figment of an overactive imagination or an overreaching thought? Might possibility itself be nothing more than that nothing? *The* nothing in Heidegger’s sense, which is in a way responsible for everything? Or just plain nothing at all, the *nihil negativum*?

Very early on in this magisterial book, climaxing an insightful survey of the classical Christian apophatic tradition, Keller comes to the Renaissance philosopher-theologian-

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<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, she has in a spirit of amicable admonition warned me that women, the poor, the excluded do not feel encouraged by the “weakness” in *The Weakness of God* when what they precisely require is strength; see *CrossCurrents*, 56:4 (Winter, 2007), 133-39. For that I am grateful because it gives me the opportunity to clarify what I was saying: that the *counterpart* to the weakness of God is the power of human response, the depth of human responsibility, the force of the other in me. And to further explain that the *counterpart* to the insistence of God is that *we* are responsible for God’s *existence*. I am all for God’s existence, all for –let’s call it – God’s existence. God does not exist; God insists. But ignore the punctuation. That is not a full stop. You have to keep on reading: *Therefore*, the existence of God is up to us; we have to “do God,” as she says, which only slightly paraphrases Kierkegaard, saying that the name of God is the name of a deed, and Derrida paraphrasing Augustine speaking of *facere veritatem*, truth is something to do.

ecclesiastic Nicolas of Cusa, whom I am going to treat as the pivotal figure in her meditation, inasmuch as Cusa provides the pivot from the tradition of Christian Neoplatonism to the modern world.<sup>7</sup> Steeped as he was in medieval mystical and scholastic theology, Cusa can always be seen from the point of view of classical theism. But Keller shows that he is also the author of a speculative cosmology that is dramatically modern, an antecedent, a rival before the fact to Copernicus, and, to boot, an international diplomat concerned with the question—*mirabile dictu*—of Christianity and Islam. In Cusa, Keller finds the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which provides both the organizing feature of the book's architectonic—*complicatio*, *explicatio*, and *implicatio* (from *plico*, *plicare*, to fold). (Even diplomat derives from *di + pli*, carrying a folded document, portfolio.) Cusa's *complicatio* supplies the conceptual link between the inherited apophatic theological tradition and the relational metaphysics of Whitehead, Deleuze, quantum entanglement, and the relationality of interpersonal and planetary-environmental ethics and politics. Hence the "magisterial!"

The *coincidentia oppositorum* in Cusa means that in God what seems to us to be opposed is identical, coincident, one or "simple," all enfolded in God, of which the created world is the unfolding. In Latin, *simplex* also belongs to the same linguistic family, meaning what has been folded (*pli*) together (*syn*, *sym*) into one, meaning *no* folds. In the German *Einfalt*, the Latin *syn* has been replaced with "one," so in addition to meaning folded into one, *Einfalt* can be taken to mean One-fold. That is the rendering used by Heidegger, where the One-Fold means the fold *between* Being and beings, or the ontological *difference* (177). So, one makes two, one fold making for two planes or surfaces out of one, a version Keller finds attractive because it is also a serviceable panentheistic model (113). But in Latin, and in medieval philosophy and theology, *simplex* meant no folds, no differences, absolute self-identity (*ipsum!*).

By describing God's self-identical unity as prior to and hence the unity of opposites—act and potency, essence and existence, even identity and difference—Cusa adopts a daring trope, of the sort found in Meister Eckhart. Daring but not unorthodox. Even as canonical a figure as Thomas Aquinas, who had no taste for such paradoxes, taught that God precontains *eminentiore modo* (in a higher way)—more perfectly and with perfect simplicity—the multiplicity of perfections found in

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<sup>7</sup> Although I do not often call upon John Milbank to come to my aid, I do recommend his presentation of Cusa in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, Creston Davis (ed.), (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-234. As both Catherine Keller and I have been moved to point out—independently, spooky action at a distance—Milbank very rightly says that Cusa is the road not taken in Roman Catholicism, one that would have interested Catholicism in reformation and steered it around its barren counter-Reformation gymnastics, engaged it in the newly emerging sciences instead of going into lockdown against the sciences (120) in a self-destructive opposition to them.

creatures. In the simplicity of God's being, every opposition coincides. Accordingly, although Aquinas would never have put it this way, the *doctor angelicus* also taught a *docta ignorantia*. We know *that* (*quod sit*) God's being is absolutely simple, but it is too difficult for us to understand (*intellectus*) *how* (*quid sit*) (*ignorantia*). Our *ratio* is the weakest form of *intellectus* (*debilitas intellectus*), "weak thought," as Vattimo might have translated it. Thus, a legend has Aquinas say that all this metaphysics is *sicut palea*, like straw, or a very cloudy unknowing.

That being said—and so far, this is all straightforward Catholic-University-of-America-*nihil* *obstat*-Thomistic orthodoxy—we can see that Nicholas of Cusa did not drop from the sky. The proximity of and the difference between Cusa and the classical tradition is found in Cusa's famous neologism, *possest*, a composite of *posse* and *est*, signifying *quod ipsum posse sit*: "that possibility itself can be." By this he meant that God is everything that God (and everything else) *can be* and there are no possibilities outside of God. While that is standard Thomistic stuff, Cusa's emphasis falls on the *possibilities* that bubble up from being—while Thomism sizzles with the buzz of being itself—all of which are curled up in God. The Cusan version anticipates Nietzsche's complaint about God: if there is a God, Nietzsche grumbled, what would be left for me to create? Everything that can be, is—(in) God. So *possest* feels rather more like Leibniz's all-possible-worlds God than Aquinas's *esse subsistens*.

What makes matters still more interesting is that *posse* exhibits a significant undecidability. Does *posse ipsum* mean "possibility itself" or "power itself?" It "doesn't translate neatly," she says (111). *Posse* like *potentia* (coming off its present participle *potens*), can mean either potential or possible, on the one hand, or outright power, on the other hand. *Habere multum posse* refers to people having a lot of power and potentates like that are not to be fooled with. When a possibility goes wrong we say it is lost; when potential goes wrong we say it was wasted; when power of a potent goes wrong, we say it has been abused.

So, when Thomas Aquinas entitles a treatise *De potentia dei*, we rightly translate it as *On the Power of God*, on the "potency" of God, not in the sense of potentiality, of which there is none,<sup>8</sup> but in the sense of sovereign power pure and simple, of which there is an unlimited measure (*omnipotentia*). For Aquinas, to speak of God's *potentia* is to say there is *no potentiality* in God. So, everything in *Cloud* turns on dispelling the cloud of omnipotence, even as it has embraced a standard definition of omnipotence! How then to say the possibility of the impossible and how *not* to say an omnipotent Being who has the power to do *anything*.

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<sup>8</sup> Aquinas did, however, allow a way to speak of a "*potentia*" in God, by distinguishing between a *potentia passiva*, the potential to be acted upon by something else, which he denied, and a *potentia activa*, the capacity to act on something else, which he affirmed. God created the world but could have decided not to or to have created the world differently, and neither of these "possibilities" in God diminishes God's power—rather they exhibit (unfold) it.

Fond as she is of clouds, Keller is not going to crash against the iceberg of omnipotence of a foggy night on the deep. So, she keeps a sharp eye on Cusa's *innovation*, his departure from the classical tradition, which, interestingly enough, is not as clear in his neologism, *possest*, which is consistent with the classical formulation of the coincidence of *potentia* and *actus*, as in Cusa's last book, which he considered the "apex" of his thought, when he speaks of *posse ipsum*, period! No mention of *est* or *esse*. Here the emphasis falls on the *ipsum*, "itself," (*s'il y en a*) the effect of which, I dare to say—as she does not—is to "disentangle" *posse ipsum*, to which nothing can be added, from creatures. In created things, *posse* is found not in and by itself (*ipsum*) but *cum addito*, with an addition—a possibility-*for* this or that. A creature is not possibility *itself* but a *particular* ("contracted") possibility-*for*—(inorganic) existence, life or intelligence (in ascending proximity to God). But in God *posse* is *nothing other than itself*. Nothing need or *can be* added to it. In God, *posse* is found *per se*, in a pure state, and—here is the innovation—possibility is not defined in terms of actuality, as the possibility-*to-be*, but actuality is defined in terms of *it*—as something *added* to it. God is *posse ipsum*, possibility itself, period.

*If there is such a thing.*

[By now, you can see my underlying question: If I *add* this little qualification to *posse ipsum*, and if I say *if there is such a thing*, have I *added* anything and failed to stay within the limits of the *ipsum*? Or have I just repeated the same differently, as if I said, "possibility itself, if possibility itself is itself possible?"]

Cusa himself is arguing in full Neoplatonic mode. These contracted possibilities-*for* this or that are "images" of pure possibility *itself*, which is absolutely prior to them. In God, the sum total of every possible possibility, whether or not it ever gets actualized, is concentrated. Against the Aristotelian and Thomistic view, he says possibility is *higher* than actuality—curiously, that is *verbatim* what Heidegger said in *Being and Time* about Dasein's *Seinkönnen*—as the pure and simple is higher than the *additum* or *compositum*. Pure possibility is God's first or highest name. God is the realm of infinite, uncontracted, unedited, undiluted, uncontainable possibilizing. Other divine names only bring out aspects of God's unfathomable possibilizing. Cusa's final but foremost intuition, his *visio*, is focused on this field of pure possibilizing (*posse*) itself (*ipsum*). That is to strike a new note—one that might not have gotten an *imprimatur* after the Council of Trent—and it opens up several possible impossibles, to which I will return below.

But for the moment I would say that, on either formulation, *possest* or *posse ipsum*, Cusa's own position is a classically *theist* Christian Neoplatonism. Either one elaborates the distinction between God who creates and sustains the world *ex nihilo*, and the creatures who would be nothing (*nihil*) without God, whose entire possibility-cum-actuality depend absolutely upon God. The world is not possible without God, but God is possibility itself, with or without the world.

*Top Down and Bottom Up*

So, the most that Cusa's *complicatio* and *explicatio* can be doing for Catherine Keller is to provide a pivot, a threshold, a bridge, a provocative antecedent of the *post-theistic* apophatic rationalism unfolding in *Cloud*, where *posse* as potency and possibility is what is really at work (*en-ergeia*), which means that *Cloud* is at most a *Wiederholung* (Heidegger) of Cusa's metaphysics, a repetition with a difference (Deleuze).

In one of the most fascinating parts of this dazzling book (146-53), Keller is discussing quantum entanglement, which Einstein called "spooky action at a distance." In classical physics, a causal connection requires contiguity and disappears over distance ("local realism"). But in quantum mechanics, when two particles that are originally joined separate, they continue to act in tandem, no matter how great the distance. As Brian Greene says, they behave like two dice, one being rolled in Las Vegas and the other in Atlantic City, but always coming up the same (148). If one is measured to have a clockwise spin, the other seems to "know" this and at exactly the same time is found to have a counterspin. So instead of trying to see a linear causal link between the two particles, we should view them as the same set of potentialities getting actualized as the same event in two different locations. The two are entangled in their virtual quantum state, and get actualized together. And maybe even that is true of the entire universe, and all things are tangled together in their quantum state. Each thing is entangled with everything else in a common field of potentiality, even a ground of being, a sea of entangled potentiality, a wavy boundlessness, a *tehom*.

Physicist David Bohm proposes a distinction between a virtual order and actual order, which he calls the implicate and the explicate order, where the implicate refers to the underlying virtuality, the quantum flux, and the explicate to the manifest and the multi-plicated actual entities. So, the quantum state can materialize as either a wave or a particle, and which one unfolds and which remains hidden depends upon the way the observer interacts with it. In the West, Bohm thinks, the explicate has hardened over into a Cartesian grid – we might say that the rheomode has been reified! – while the underlying flux has been masked and obstructed (158-59).

In this analysis – which illustrates how Keller, in something of a *tour de force*, is going to link the first creation story in Genesis, Cusa, quantum physics, Whitehead, panentheism, and (in the next chapter) Deleuze – Keller pulls the trigger. In a classical theologian like Aquinas, the power of God "above" precontains everything that is going on "down below" in creation. Let's call this the top-down model because there the higher precontains the lower, *eminentiore modo*, in a higher way, in a higher unity, eternally, perfectly, inexhaustibly, *simpliciter*, while the lower exists in multiple, limited ways. God precontains the created order "virtually," *in virtute*, by God's power, paradigmatically, while actual beings occur as created, finite *images*, imperfect realizations of God's *esse/posse*, in which they

participate. The higher does not need the lower; the lower needs the higher. That is a classical omnipotence model.

This is to be contrasted with the alternate, bottom-up model, let us call this not the omnipotence model but what Keller calls, in an excellent formulation, the *omnipotential* model (112). Here the virtual quantum order, the quantum field of virtuality, precontains the higher in a lower way, *inferiore modo*, or if we prefer a less invidious vocabulary, *profundiore modo*, in a more profound way. Maybe we could even say “in a weak way” (*debilitate modo*) since the virtual cannot strongly *predetermine* the actual (166) lest, to put it in Derrida’s terms – and this is crucial – there would be *no event*, nothing unforeseeable, and hence *no possibility of the impossible*. So now “the possibility of the impossible” does not imply a panoptical omnipotent superbeing but an *omnipotential* ground of beings that renders things more *open-ended* and does not *overpower* the actual order (184-85). That requires that we “darken” the logic of implicit-explicit with a dose of Deleuze (172), as she says. (I would say “weaken.”) Otherwise the power of the implicit will *overpower, precontain* (or *program* in Derrida) the explicit (261); the explicit will have already happened (implicitly) and represent nothing new. In this anti-omnipotence account of an omnipotential *posse*, the possibility of the impossible means that the novelty of the “explicit” can always take the “implicit” by *surprise*. The impossible requires the possibility of unforeseeability, the unexpected, rupture, discontinuity.

[So, here’s another little question: dare we say that the operative figure must *shift* from the *coincident* to the *accident*, the *fors, fortasse* of the fortunate/unfortunate, *bon chance*, in short, the unforeseeable *event*? *God does* play dice or poker late into the night during the six days of creation. The “coincident” is a cosmic trope; the accident a *chaosmic* one, and even “oppositions” are too tidy and binary for a disseminative chaosmic play. Does not the “coincidence of opposites” obey a very *classical* logic? Does it not require exposure to the grammatologic of dissemination?]

Whichever way we formulate the bottom-up omnipotential model, the virtual stands *in need of* actualization by something – either by a human agent/observer or what Latour calls a nonhuman “actant” – so that the actualizations are higher than the virtual ground (143) and take us by surprise. In the classical sense of *posse/esse*, finite actualities are *effects* of omnipotent power; in the second sense, the actualities are the *expression* of the *virtual* omnipotent power. In the first sense, power works in a linear contiguous way; in the second sense, it circulates underground and may emerge in discontinuous times (Deleuze on “repetition”) and noncontiguous places (quantum entanglement). In the first sense, finite actualities are *lower images* of the exemplary power; in the second, they are *higher realizations* of the virtual power.

For Keller, this whole analysis is rich with theological implications. The top-down classical sense is theistic, the bottom-up is panentheistic. The top-down turns on *creatio ex nihilo*; the bottom-up on *creatio de profundis*. The top-down model is providential, the bottom-up is unforeseeably eventive (169). In the

one, God is the first cause of being, in the second a ground of being (164). In the one, God is thought as pure act (*actus*), in the second as action (*actio*), activity or emergent process. In the first sense, God is a paradigm, the exemplary, primordial stuff, the virile cause, of which creatures are images and effects. In the second sense, God belongs to the virtual order as a ground or womb or matrix and thus admits of feminine figures. In the first, *posse* is pure *actus*; in the other, it is a *call for actualization*. The first employs a metaphysics of cause and effect, and a logic of analogical predication; the second employs a metaphysics of expression or actualization and a logic of implicit and explicit, where the names of God are “symbols” (or “nicknames”) of the ground. The first gives rise to a classical concept of transcendence and immanence,<sup>9</sup> the other to a “plane of immanence.” In the first, God is an uncreated creator; in the second God is both creative and creatable. While both are apophatic, in the first, there is an apophasis of excessive light (99), height, eminence, *hyper, supra, über, au delà*; in the second, an apophasis of depths dark and dense, of the face of the deep, of an unfathomable abyss, of the *Ungrund*, the groundless ground of being, or of a cloud obscuring the sun on high.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> There is a counter-part to the plane of immanence in classical metaphysical theology. To use the language which we have adopted in the meantime – in the middle ages these words have a different meaning – God is both transcendent *and immanent*. As pure subsistent being (*esse*) and power (*posse*), God is more interior to any finite being (*ens*) than that being is to itself. For any being to be, there is required the sustaining power (*potentia*) of God, who is present by the divine power to the most hidden interstices of that creature. God sustains every hair on our head. If God withdrew the divine power for even a moment, we would all go instantly bald. Or worse: the created being itself would in that very moment vanish without a trace, *différance* to the contrary notwithstanding. The more absolutely *transcendent* God is as pure being, the more radically *immanent* God is in created beings, the more present to that being by God’s power. God’s immanence is *directly proportionate* to God’s transcendence. The more transcendent, the more immanent. In the relationship between creatures and God, immanence and transcendence coincide, even though from our finite perspective they seem to be opposites.

<sup>10</sup> Allow me to point out that this is my objection to the classical strong sense of metaphysics. The “metaphysics” of *posse ipsum* can be run either way, on either the theistic or the pantheistic register. It is as if the two are entangled, but spinning in opposite directions, the one clockwise, from above, the other counterclockwise, from below. At the very moment in which one metaphysical position begins to spin (say at the Catholic University of America), another metaphysical argument, at some remove in space (say, in Claremont, California) somehow mysteriously “knows” this, and begins spinning in the opposite direction, simultaneously, the communication between the two being *unheimlich*, instantaneous, faster than the speed of light. When this happens in physics, Einstein calls it spooky action at a distance. When it happens in metaphysics, Kant just calls it an antinomy. Anything that that is said in the first register, can be repeated differently in the second register. And conversely. And we have no third metaphysical theory which adjudicates between them, which incorporates both, or verifies one and falsifies the other. Then what? So

*Explicating Entanglement*

Keller proceeds to carry out the *explicatio* of the *complicatio* by showing the way this metaphysical cosmology “unfolds” in poetry, in feminist theory, in political theology, in the ecological crisis, and finally in love. Now love is a much abused and risky word and I think, it is the tell-tale touch which tells us what is *ultimately* going on in *Cloud*. By the time we are finished, we will have come a long way indeed from Aquinas and even from Cusa. We are presented with a tour de force, a dazzling intermingling of different forces, a brilliant theopoetics, indeed a theo-cosmo-geo-gyno-ethico-politico-poetics, whose proper name is Catherine Keller. As Heidegger says, the name of the thinker is the name of a matter to be thought, *die Sache des Denkens*.

In the next chapter, Keller takes up the cosmic quality of the poetry of Walt Whitman, and she shows that his song to himself is not an exercise in egomania— “I am large, I contain multitudes” — that is not Donald Trump but a linking of the self to the whole world. The world reverberates in him and he reverberates with the world. His is an affirmation of creatures great and small, straight and gay, from a leaf of grass to the vault of stars about, of an exuberant egalitarian democracy, a kind of universal sacramentality, motivated by a love of the earth. Next, she highlights an ethics of precarious interdependence in Judith Butler, who has recently been reading Whitehead. The I is widened, undone, by the immensity but not done in. The self is not immune to the loss of the other. (227) Grief reveals the relation that was already there and gives me a chance to vacate the self-sufficient I. (229) We come undone in loss but also in love, which also punctures our independence, and we grieve also over lost species and a damaged environment, which weakens the opposition between nature and culture which Butler earlier kept strong.

In chapter 8 panentheism unfolds as political theology, which is made clear in Cusanus, who warned against the Islamophobia of his day, occasioned by the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (248). But he is the road not taken. He favored conversation over conversion, applauds pluralism, and admits the truth content of other traditions. As God is an unknown God, no one can rule out the truth of other communities, multiple expressions of the divine. Apophaticism point to pluralism. Today’s entanglement is enstrangling. It has been reduced to globalization; we are electronically “connected” but beneath that is market-entangled individualism, not interdependency (255). The relational is not good in itself, but only as mindful relationality (259). Even if we accept Schmitt’s idea of political theology, we don’t have to have Schmitt’s idea of an Omnipotent God. It was just such a God by whom Pope Urban II felt empowered to say that whoever dies in the Crusades against the

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then stop talking like that. Just *weaken* your sense of metaphysics and say we’re talking about how we comport ourselves to the world, we’re looking for felicitous metaphors, nicknames and symbols.

Muslims is granted remission of sins! Political theology is to be organized around God, panentheism's God, which yields a participatory democracy not a decisionistic sovereignty. Whitehead said God is the "exemplification" of process and relation, not a sovereign exception.

Next (chapter 9) the principle of apophatic entanglement unfolds into planetary interdependence. In the Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock), the earth is not a rock but a living ecosystem, of systems within systems, which is to day under assault. We are "de-creating," running Genesis backwards. We who? The Anthropocene, meaning a planet dominated by a single species (279-82). Moltmann has argued for the democratic incorporation of the human species into the wider systems of the earth, which is the broader space of the world religions. The world religions must become earth religions, which will force us to reassess the old "natural religions." We must outgrow our "otherworldly" (unearthly) ambitions and return to the earth, avoid the notion of a transcendent (universalist) He-God over and against an immanent pagan She-body (pagan), and appreciate the ontological incarnation, the inter-carnation. Might we not then be able to link the secular scientists (and others) concerned with climate change with religion? Is not Gaia a divinity? Might the democracy to come be the result of a negotiation between Athena (culture) and Gaia, a democracy spread out to include all the earth?

In the end is love. In the beginning and the middle is love. The entanglement of each with each, of all in each, of each in all, is love. Without it, passion is cut off from compassion, ethics becomes rules, and the world gets stuck (288). Love is both questionable—what do I love when I love my God?—and self-questioning, keeping love in scare quotes, because love is scary; countless rivers of blood have been filled by "love." That allows Jesus, of whom we have heard not too much, his fifteen minutes (292-301), as the incarnation of love, with whom every crucified and lynched body is consolidated, of the God of love, not the Royal Son of the Sovereign Exception.

This will have been theopoetics, in several senses. In the discursive sense: *Cloud* is a theology written with the plastic imagination of a poet, with an apophatic soul, about a God, if we prefer that nickname everywhere emergent and everywhere hidden, everywhere multiplied and everywhere unfolding, unnamable and omni-nameable. In the onto-cosmological sense: a theology of God in the making (*poiesis*), of a God both creative and creatable, God materializing, incarnating, intercarinating.

The ending we want to avoid is the apocalypse, the ecological one. So theopoetics is theopraxis, the explication part of application. As William Connolly says, the idea is to get concerted action on climate change, inequality, and a vibrant pluralist spirituality in our democratic machines (311). Hope is clouded but not cancelled. (313) We are being drawn to a convivial cosmopolis, lured toward a sociality, an entanglement. Not by a Person-God, and not by the merely impersonal, but by something inclusive of all persons, a *complicatio*, enfolding everything, unfolding in

everything. Is this lure calling inside the apocalyptic warning (315-16)? There is no God-guarantee, only a lure, to come out, to come forth (*e-venire*, eventing). All the theisms and atheisms, anatheisms and pantheisms are invited to the *practice* of nonseparable difference. They are all so many amorous nicknames for the entangled life of the universe.

Such is the stunning theopoetics of *Cloud of the Impossible*, whose theopoetic point we feel most acutely at the end, at the point of love and practice, of alarmed and amorous mobilization, of theopoetics as theopraxis—in the face of the violence of wars waged in the name of God and oil, of the injustice unleashed by neoliberal capitalism, and of a catastrophic culpable ignorance of the ecological crisis, all so many “en-strangling” entanglements.

To all of that I can only say, *amen, viens, oui, oui*, yes, I said yes. As she says, so say I.

#### *The (Heat) Death of God*

Allow me now to introduce two alternate hauntologies, two other specters, two other spooky possibilities of the impossible, each of which belongs to a hauntological thought of *posse ipsum*, if there is such a thing, upon which I invite comment as to how they may have a place in the *Cloud*.

The first, which is neither theistic nor pantheistic, we might call *nihilistic*. This would represent another possible apocalypse, one to end all apocalypses, which, to my knowledge, never comes up in *Cloud of the Impossible* or in Cusa. Interestingly enough, it is “implicitly” to be found in Cusa, as one of its implications, not of the Cusa of *De possest* (where *ipsum posse est*) but of the Cusa of *posse ipsum* (no *est* need apply). For the Cusa of *De possest*, God is everything that God can be. But, as Peter Casarella says:<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, since possibility itself must be nothing other than itself, it is not restricted by the requirement to be all that it can be. Because the ascription of self-identity is the only requirement placed on *posse ipsum*, one could also speculate—as Cusanus assuredly does not—that possibility itself actually can be nothing at all.

Once *esse* is treated as an *additum*, one possibility of *posse ipsum* is the possibility of nothing, of no-more-*posse*, rather like the *Sein-zum-Tod* of Dasein, which must square off with the possibility of no more possibility-to-be, *nicht mehr Dasein*. One possibility of *posse* is *posse-cum-esse*, but another is *posse non cum addito*, that is, *non-esse*. At some point, the power of the possible would cease and the lights would go out, not just in the world, but in God. How would this be possible? Because, as *posse ipsum*, God is the sum total of every possibility, which would include the possibility not to be. Existence is an *additum*, superadded to pure possibility, an image of which *posse ipsum* is the exemplar, its exemplarity keeping it *pure* of existence. As Casarella says, “nothing is prior to possibility itself,” which does not preclude that “possibility itself

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Casarella, “Nicolas of Cusa and the Power of the Possible,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 64, 1 (Winter, 1990), 30

might be nothing other than this nothing."<sup>12</sup> This speculative possibility is rather the perfect opposite of Meillassoux's strange speculation on pure contingency (*posse ipsum!*), which speculates that while God may not exist at present, what is to stop God coming to exist in the future?

Now, as it turns out, something similar is found in contemporary physics. I refer to the various scenarios that contemporary physicists entertain about the end of the universe, about what they call the "death" of the universe. To speculate—as Keller assuredly does not—on these scenarios, what lies up ahead is another possibility of the impossible, one of no more *posse* at all and of utter *disentanglement*. Planetary entanglement proves to be a *transient moment* and a *local event* in a larger cosmic disentanglement.

We are told about "heat death" of the universe, that point in the history of universe when it reaches a state of "thermal equilibrium" or "maximum entropy," the way the heat of a cup of hot coffee will gradually cool down and reach equilibrium with the temperature in the room. Now substitute our little star for the Starbucks and, we are told, in a half-billion to a billion years the sun will have expanded to the point of turning Lady Gaia to toast—talk about global warming!—after which it will implode. The universe as a whole, pushed ever outward at increasing rate of acceleration by the unforgiving force of dark energy, will keep expanding (*disentangling*) to the point that all the galaxies of stars, whose heat and light sustain whatever life there is anywhere in the universe—not just ours but however many untold forms of life there may be "out there" about which we know nothing—will all be stone cold dead.<sup>13</sup>

More than dead, since death is a sign of life, a normal function of life, belonging to the cycle of life and death, representing the way that life has found to transmit and renew itself, sometimes being the only way to get CEOs, pastors, politicians, and tenured faculty to retire. So, this will be the "death of death," not the Pauline version when we all get shiny new spiritual bodies, but the death of the whole cycle of life-and-death, living things having long since passed away. There is even a timeline for it, if you want to mark your calendars, to be found on

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<sup>12</sup> Casarella, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Plait, *Death from the Skies: The Science Behind the End of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009) makes an amusing and helpful presentation of this possibility, along with a few others, and this from one of astronomy's most gifted presenters. For a robustly Deleuzian counter-proposal, see Clayton Crockett, "Entropy," in *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*. eds. Clayton Crockett, B. Keith Putt, and Jeffrey W. Robbins (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 272-81. My point is to take into account the very real *possibility* (I think it is at present the leading contender) that dark energy is pushing the universe irreversibly into an expansion that will leave nothing standing, not to defend its plausibility, for which, like the vast majority of philosophers, I lack the competency. That is up to the mathematical physicists to decide, not Deleuze's *Repetition and Difference*, much as I love that book. The prolegomenon to any possible metaphysics is physics.

Wikipedia, which plots the course from the “Big Bang” to “Heat Death.” Our present “stellaferous era” will be followed by the “degenerate” era – talk about running Genesis in reverse (276) – the “black hole” era and finally the “dark era.” This will occur in 10,000,000,000<sup>3</sup> years.<sup>14</sup>

On still another account, it may not take that long. According to what is called the “Higgs Boson Doomsday,” an apocalypse theorized by Stephen Hawking, the “God Particle” – the amazing name that has been given to the Higgs boson particle – could destroy the universe. On this scenario, “a quantum fluctuation creates a vacuum ‘bubble’ that expands through space and wipes out the universe.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, such a bubble might have already formed and is racing toward us as we speak at the speed of light, so we will not even see it coming. Since, according to Derrida, the definition of an “event” is the coming of what we cannot see coming, let us say that this would be the event to end all events.

A spectral thought, is it not? All of us, all of this, everything, all that omnipotence that religion has been relying upon to get its own way for so long, will have turned out to be reeds in the wind?

I am not advocating these theories. I have no competence to evaluate them. I know just enough about contemporary physics to be dangerous. I am only interested in the fact that these and others like them (the “big crunch”) are serious scientific possibilities of the impossible. I have no desire to deny that the science may change and at some time in the future these views could be abandoned in favor of some presently unknown alternative. I am at least as interested as any panentheist in people like Paul Steinhardt who hypothesizes an endless series of universes, of which ours is but one, which I find more congenial. But physics is not a congeniality contest. Everything will depend upon the mathematics and the experimental evidence to come.

All that interests me here is that these are very real possibilities of the impossible, the possibility of no more *posse*. Taking this rather long view, life is a strictly local “negentropic” event and a temporary condition in the universe. The universe as a whole is relentlessly expanding, that is, everything is getting farther and farther away from everything else – each from each, each from all, all from each – faster and faster. If particles are paired, they are paired for simultaneous oblivion. The universe is gradually *disentangling* and is headed for a state of total *disentanglement* and utter oblivion. No more *posse*, period.

Here I have a lot of questions:

What, then, for *theopoetics*? Of what, then, shall we say that “God” is a nickname? For another mortal like us? For a temporary and transient and local process found here on Gaia but destined eventually to disappear?

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<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat\\_death\\_of\\_the\\_universe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_death_of_the_universe) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphical\\_timeline\\_from\\_Big\\_Bang\\_to\\_Heat\\_Death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphical_timeline_from_Big_Bang_to_Heat_Death).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/47737-stephen-hawking-higgs-boson-universe-doomsday.html>

Or a nickname for the *whole story*, from the Big Bang to thermal equilibrium? Then is theopoetics—if the metaphysics follows the physics—a theory of *the heat death of God*? Is God an accomplished enough jazz artist to improvise a way out of that (145)?

What then for *process metaphysics* if the whole process is in the process of burning itself out? How does theopoetics “comport with” (Clayton) the prospect of a cold dead universe?

What then for *global entanglement* if the cosmos is in the process of *cosmic disentanglement*?

What then of *love* if it is destined for loveless death?

Is it necessary not only to *darken* Whitehead with Deleuze, but to *darken Deleuzean vitalism* with the mathematical physics of a kind of a cosmic nihilism?

Is it not necessary to further *weaken* the *logos* of theology with the possibility of the utter death of *logos* and *theos*?

*Perhaps* the universe is an expenditure without return, an *exitus* without *reditus* (*pace* Neoplatonism), an expansion without contraction, unto oblivion, *usque ad mortem*? Why not say that we can say *now* that by *then* it will all have been a good run? Good-bye. Good Friday pure and simple. Period, adieu. *Requiescat in pace*.<sup>16</sup>

Or should we say, *so what*? We have other things to concern us, not what may happen 10,000,000,000<sup>3</sup> years from now. But if *that* is the answer, then are we saying, don’t get so entangled in the meta/physics? If *that* is the answer, then is this theopoetics thing not running on other grounds, *regardless* of where the meta/physics is headed?

Where is the possibility of no more possibility, no more entanglement, no more love in *Cloud*? Is that impossible not possible? Is it not the *limit case* of the possibility of the impossible?

#### *The Hauntology of Perhaps*

I love apophatic theology. It has been a lifelong love. But I am deeply incredulous of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of the timeless One on which it turns.<sup>17</sup> I think the real stuff (*die Sache*

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<sup>16</sup> If indeed the universe is headed for oblivion (*nihil*), then let our cosmic comportment take the form of a nihilism of grace. The long-term prospect of global, solar, cosmic death does not empty life of meaning but gives it meaning, urgency, and intensity. Then the *love*, the amorous entanglement of each with each, of each with all and of all with each with which *Cloud* culminates is intensified by its transiency. In the dark cloud of a cosmic death, our life and the life of other things on this little speck of dust called Gaia are rendered infinitely valuable. Would not all the imperatives of entanglement—poetic, ethical, political, ecological, amorous—described in *Cloud of the Impossible* remain standing—but now reframed within the horizon of cosmic death? We are keeping diaries of life in the flux, writing captains’ logs of our journey through the churning waters of the *tehom*.

<sup>17</sup> In Neoplatonism, the one is prior to the many; in poststructuralism, the one is an *effect* of difference. In Neoplatonism, eternity is prior to time; in poststructuralism, eternity is a *construction* of time. In Neoplatonism, the Origin is primary and the image is derivative; in poststructuralism, origins are non-original effects of substitutes.

*selbst*) in apophatic theology is a magnificent phenomenology of living “without why.”

I love the ground of Being in Tillich but I am deeply incredulous of the German Idealist metaphysics of *Geist* on which it turns. I think the real stuff is the phenomenology of “being-seized by something unconditional.”

I have been reminded by Catherine Keller that I love Nicholas of Cusa. But I greet the (highly scholastic and Neoplatonic) arguments of Cusa’s *De apice theoriae* with an apex of Lyotardian incredulity.<sup>18</sup> I think the real stuff in Cusa is a phenomenology, by which I mean a hauntology, of “possibility” itself, *if there is such a thing*, and it is this little ghost of a phrase whispering in the ear of his eminence, the Lord Cardinal Cusanus, on which I am focused.<sup>19</sup>

I think Peter Casarella, for example, makes a gesture in this phenomenological direction on Cusa’s behalf by following an article by Richard Kearney, which would disentangle Cusa from *Seinsvergessenheit* and hook up *posse ipsum* with Heidegger’s play on *mögen*, *vermögen* (enabling) and *Möglichkeit* in the *Letter on Humanism*. *Mögen* means wanting, wishing, desiring, being inclined or “liking” to do. So, for Heidegger, Being is “*das vermögende Mögen*” – the enabling liking or favoring, or the possibilizing love, or the loving possibility. As such, Being is the

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Neoplatonism is structurally, constitutively essentialistic; poststructuralism is constitutively nominalistic. Of the One, eternity, origin and essence I am deeply incredulous. I do not seek a way for them to *coincide* or *intersect* with the many, time, images and existence. I want to expose them as alienating constructions, deconstruct and “retrieve” (*wiederholen*) them in experiential hauntological terms, of which they are deceptive figurations, misleading symbols, costly tropes.

<sup>18</sup> Taken strictly as a set of arguments, I regard *de apice theoriae* as a vintage example of a Kantian antinomy. *Posse ipsum* implies both the possibility that it is nothing at all *and* that it is not. If *p* implies both *q* and  $\sim q$ , then *p* can prove and disprove anything. That is what an antinomy means. It is not an accident that *posse ipsum* is simultaneously the way Cusa wants to characterize the *posse* of God and (although he hates this) it is the standing definition of unformed (prime) matter. Cusa is saying things in this text that are in varying degrees tautological. If *x* exists, then it is possible for *x* to exist, and that in turn is possible only in virtue of pure possibility itself. We are instructed to take this seriously only because it is then given the status of a pure Platonic form (he chooses not to let it mean unformed matter – but why not?), of which all actual possibilities are “images.” As with any antinomy, one could go on arguing about this forever. What stopped Cusa from going on is that he died four months later, and that has proven to be thus far the only effective way to stop a metaphysical argument like that.

<sup>19</sup> I agree with Wilhelm Dilthey, that the best metaphysical arguments, while failures as arguments, succeed as contributions to what we call nowadays an *imaginary*, as a way of “figuring” the world – which Dilthey himself called its *Geist*. Like good literature, they provide highly creative vocabularies for what is at bottom a deeper hermeneutic, a deeper *encounter* with the world.

essence of the “possible” (*das Mögliche*), wanting-to-be-thought, lovingly enabling *Denken*.<sup>20</sup>

The *Cloud*, too, makes a comparable phenomenological move. After linking up *posse ipsum* with Whitehead, Deleuze, quantum physics, feminism, and climate control, Keller most tellingly, at the end, at the apex of her theory—and rather like Heidegger, I must say—also links *posse* with love. So, if the scholastic arguments supporting *posse ipsum* are exercises in futility, the poetics of *posse ipsum* are exercises in fertility, the proof of which is *Cloud* itself.

Finally, I myself link up the possibility of the impossible with faith—believing not the believable, which is easy, but the unbelievable, like moving mountains; and with hope: hoping against hope when all hope is lost; and with love: loving when it is impossible to love, like loving one’s enemies.<sup>21</sup> I am just jazzing on Derrida, who links it with hospitality to the hostile, forgiving the unforgiveable, and giving the ungiveable gift. All of us are following Don Quixote: dream the impossible dream, which is the opening (missed) note of this wonderful book (1).

Those are all so many *exercises in the underlying hauntology of this trope*. So, it is in this poetico-ghostly spirit, that I raise another possibility of the impossible, repeating with still another difference Casarella’s speculation, as Cusa does not speculate, about the possibility that *posse ipsum* is nothing at all, but this time isolating and adhering more rigorously to the *hauntological* element.

If *posse* itself is nothing other than itself, then one possibility of possibility itself, *if there is such a thing*, is that there is no such *thing*, meaning that it has not ontological but purely *hauntological* status. *Posse ipsum* is not a being. It is not the first cause of beings. It is not the ground of being. *Posse ipsum* does not exist; it insists—and the burden of existence falls on *us*. We say of *posse ipsum* not that it exists but that it *calls*—and we are asked to respond. “Theology haunts each of us with the gift of our own ability, our responsibility” (112), as I have already said she says. The *hauntological* structure of perhaps is best evoked as “unconditional without sovereignty,” as something that lays claim to us unconditionally but without the power of coercion, as a weak force, not a sovereign one, modeled after omnipotence. Not like a being but a ghost, not a spirit but a spook, not *es gibt* but *es spukt*. Were we to give Cusa such a deconstructive twist, we could speak of a *posse sine posse*, or a *potentia sine potentia*, the power of perhaps without the power of the pope, of the police, of any potentate or omnipotentate, in short, the power of a *call*. A call for what? For the impossible, orchestrated with admirable

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<sup>20</sup> Casarella, 32-34; Richard Kearney, “Heidegger and the Possible,” *Philosophical Studies*, 27 (1980): 176-95.

<sup>21</sup> John D. Caputo, “The Axiology of the Impossible,” in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, eds. Kevin Hart and Barbara E. Wall (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 20-41.

ingenuity in *Cloud*, as a theo-cosmo-geo-gyno-ethico-politico-poetic call, let us say, as the call of the world, as the promise of the world, that calls for our response.

But is not this call destined to disappear without a trace, extinguished by a merciless expansion of the universe? Perhaps. But does that not “darken” the prospects, “weaken” the logos of the world, and expose us all to the worst? Perhaps. But we get the best results by facing up to the worst. For then, in that case, we shall *now* rejoice that we have all been privileged to have taken part in one gorgeous and spectacular moment, when life and love and mindful being-in-the-world will have prevailed, like two lovers entangled in each other’s arms all the more tightly through the night, knowing that in the morning they shall part. Even as we shall grieve over all the wasted potentialities, all the lives laid waste by violence and just plain bad luck.

The ultimate *possibility* is the possibility of *the impossible*, and the most fertile possibility of the impossible is *to keep the future open*, come what may, come what might-be, to nurture the possibility of a future we cannot see coming (285-87), even one that may ultimately reduce the universe to oblivion, *usque ad mortem*. This “come” requires the *radical apophasis* of the “come what may,” which is exposed to oblivion, a *radical confession of non-knowing*, the passion of non-knowing. Otherwise the *docta ignorantia* is piety, a form of praise that inscribes a zone of respect around the ineffable and superexalted One (103).

Our address to the impossible is a “pure address, on the edge of silence,” as the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* says (80), meaning, we do not know who or what we address or what addresses us. The call calls, whatever its whence or wither, whatever the metaphysical origin or destiny of the universe may be. The call is issued by something-I-know-not-what that calls for a response, that recalls something that was never present, that calls for the coming of something that is always and structurally to come, that calls upon us here and now and calls for action. Its source is constitutively unknown and unknowable because the moment we say we know its name—God or Nature, Physics or Metaphysics, the Law or the Party—then we abdicate all responsibility. We can always plead that God or the Law or Something made me do it and I was just following orders, making myself commensurate with some deep *mensura*. Just so, its outcome is constitutively unknown, whether its final upshot will be oblivion or universe after universe (one damn cosmos after another). Then the universe will have been an event, of which we will have been a fleeting moment, where our task will have been, as Deleuze would say, to make ourselves worthy of the events that happen to us.

Under the figure of the cloud, Keller has identified a hauntological structure, a deep structure of our experience, of chiasmic intertwining, of our *dwelling in the world* and of the world’s *dwelling in us*, a structure to be disentangled from the metaphysics of *actus* and *potentia* and from the dichotomy of the

epistemological and ontological.<sup>22</sup> This is the experience of the “quiet power of the possible” which is higher than actuality (Heidegger), the experience of the perhaps, *peut-être* (which derives from *potest esse*), *if there is such a thing* (Derrida). What is summoned up is a *hauntological* figure, the specter of what is to come, of what has been all along, of what is calling, what being recalled, of what calls us forward. The world is haunted by the

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<sup>22</sup> I detect a certain tendency in *Cloud* to make things turn on *two* categories – the one *epistemological* and the other *ontological* or cosmological. So, at various points deconstruction and postmodern theory generally are gently chided for being on the linguistic or epistemological side and opposed to their better half, process metaphysics, which is located on the onto-cosmological side (18, 40, 309). But is there not a missing middle term here? Is not the theopoetics of *Cloud* running on a *third* track? One of the things I have learned from Keller’s amazing book is another amazing book, with another felicitous title, upon which Keller draws, which is also the answer to my question: Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For Barad, this is the point in quantum physics where the observer meets the observed, which produces an event, depending on what the observer seeks to observe. This is not simply epistemological uncertainty (Heisenberg) but ontological indeterminism (Bohr), not simply an epistemological perspective (*ens rationis*) but an actualization of the quantum potency (*in re, in rerum natura*). As it happens, that extraordinary encounter in the quantum world is, in fact, not a paradox but a paradigm of our encounter with the world at large. Aristotle describes our mindful meeting of the world as what takes place when the knower-in-potency and the knowable (the known-in-potency) are *actualized in and by the same act*. Phenomenology emblemizes our *experience* of the world, our being-in-the-world (Heidegger), our chiasmic entwining with the world (Merleau-Ponty), our being enfolded by the world (Keller). That is the point where we meet the world and the world meets us, where our being-in-the-world coincides with the world’s being-in-us, where our fall into the world is met with the world’s rising up to meet us. This is the world in which we *participate* while also taking a moment of contemplative pause, a chance to regroup before the impossible (16), in which, as Merleau-Ponty says, the bonds that lace us to the world “slacken” just long enough to allow us to look around for a bit. We have no need of neologisms here. There is a ready name for the discourse (*logos*) on that meeting point, that point of that encounter, which is *phenomenology*, a word that not make the index in *Cloud*, although I think it is to found everywhere in the book under various pseudonyms. Phenomenology tries to do the impossible described by William James, to turn on the light quickly enough to see the dark, a wonderful text cited by Keller (138). That impossibility makes phenomenology possible. Phenomenology is not a transcendental success but a *quasi-transcendental failure*, a *phaenomenologia negativa*. Its very failure is its success. Talk about *apophatic*! We are too entangled with this world to untie it. Talk about apophatic *entanglement*! Phenomenology is the endless failure to reconstitute that point of primordial contact, and that failure is constitutive of what success it enjoys. Has not a hermeneutical-phenomenological-hauntological discourse, neither purely epistemological nor purely cosmological, been running in the background and keeping the whole thing going in *Cloud*?

weak force of perhaps, by the quiet power of a spectral coming, of the possibility of the impossible.

*Ite, missa est*

*Posse ipsum* doesn't translate neatly, she says (111), and so say I. Were I pressed for my own preferred translation, I would proffer perhaps itself, *le peut-être même*, if there is any such thing, *s'il y en a*. This is not my own translation, of course, but one I borrow from a slightly atheistic Jewgreek Augustinian I once knew, where he is also distinguishing *le peut-être même* from perhaps-this-or-that (*ceci ou cela*). This he said, per-happily enough, in a course on love and friendship and their politics, in a voice that is neither theistic nor atheistic – too many dead bodies, she says (26) – nor panentheistic, neither ontological nor ontotheological, but rigorously (*ipsum*) hauntological:<sup>23</sup> What is going to come, *perhaps*, is not only this or that; it is at last the thought of the *perhaps*, the *perhaps* itself (*le peut-être même*) ...the arrivant could also be the *perhaps* itself, the unheard of, totally new experience of the *perhaps*. Unheard-of, totally new, that very experience which no metaphysician might yet have dared to think.

**John D. Caputo**

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London & New York: Verso, 1997), 29; for an extended commentary, see *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).