

# SECULARISATION AND VIOLENCE

## Opening the World

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**Abstract:** This study starts out as a search for a connection, not between religion and violence, as is often superficially claimed, but between secularisation and violence. If secularisation is synonymous with nonviolence and with peace, then, obviously, secularisation holds an ethical appeal and should be radicalised, as it might well be the secular translation of charity itself. This is clearly the position of Gianni Vattimo. If, however, secularisation is a modern option that carries no historical or theological imperative whatsoever, then secularisation is open to evaluation and should, if desirable, at least be suspended. This is the position of René Girard.

**Keywords:** Desacralisation, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-Luc Nancy, René Girard, Secularisation, Violence

### 1. Introduction

Gianni Vattimo is well known by his weak thought, whereas René Girard is well known by his scapegoat mechanism. I shall treat both these insights as hermeneutic grounds, not as scientific facts or superhistorical essences. They are profound cultural experiences, like Friedrich Nietzsche's death of God, which cannot be read as theoretical descriptions of a matter of fact or a state of affairs. This implies that one cannot prove the others wrong. A hermeneutic ground just opens a perspective; the perspectives opened by 'their' respective hermeneutic grounds are not related or connectable through a traditional logic: they overlap, disagree, and look the other way.

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In the case of Vattimo, I will show where radicalisation of secularisation becomes dangerous, in that it betrays its own weak premises. In the case of Girard, I will point out that original mimetic violence might be able to shed light on the phenomenon of senseless violence. Though they share the same premises, their views on violence and charity suddenly diverge. I will 'undo' this divergence and turn it into difference as where to find charity. To accomplish this, I will need hope and faith, not as ingredients of my own personal spiritual set-up, but as genuine figures of thought itself.

## 2. Gianni Vattimo's Weak Thought

In Vattimo's works on secularisation, weakening, charity, nihilism, etc., these all point at the same ontological event: the immersion of the transcendent into the world.<sup>1</sup> It is an experience in the wake of God's death, as diagnosed by Nietzsche, whereby facts turn into interpretations that have no longer any external reference to decide between them. Reality no longer consists of facts and things, but of mutually interacting interpretations. By lack of any transcendent referee, the factual erodes and dissolves, disappears into a perpetual interpretation of interpretations. The world becomes the stage of an endless flux of interpretations, a hermeneutic plasma. His is the event that Vattimo calls 'weakening'. This weakening itself is no more than an interpretation, a hermeneutic ground. But, as Vattimo often repeats, it is the most adequate way to understand actuality. To put it in Heideggerian terms: weakening is the way Being gives itself to current thought. So, weakening spells the 'end' of metaphysics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998 and *After Christianity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>This 'end' is not an end as in daily use. It is not as if suddenly, metaphysics is completely gone, over. The least one can say about this 'end' is that it is, like 'post-', one of the names of the critical phase metaphysics has gone into. Since we do not know the outcome of the

This, Vattimo claims, is an effect of Christian charity.<sup>3</sup> Its ultimate message is the good message that there are only messages and interpretations. Christianity is the event of charity in that its history consists of the disappearance of the sacred from heaven ‘up there’. The ultimate *telos* of Christianity is its God becoming the worldly flux of interpretations instead of transcendent truth. Heidegger would probably have called it ‘epistemo-theo-logy’. God is at the same time all interpretations and their hermeneutic principle. Christianity becomes hermeneutical, which means that God takes leave of His substantial existence – the way Vattimo reads *kenosis*, in a theologically rather unacceptable way – in a true world that directs ours and becomes the ongoing flux of interpretations, according to Vattimo, the ultimate Revelation.

Vattimo starts calling his former weakening ‘secularisation’, to emphasise the parallel in weakening of the philosophical and the theological aspect. The West, the philosophical and theological space-time opened by the mutual contamination of Greek principles and the Jewish-Christian deity, has secularisation as its history. But it is Christianity’s *kenosis* that determines the dissolution of transcendence. Charity, as the core element in Christianity, is the Christian provenance of weakening and of desacralisation – a term Vattimo finds in Girard’s work. The Unmoved Mover and YHWH would, once brought together, be curbed by charity, following the motif of incarnation of *kenosis*.

If, as Vattimo claims, metaphysics and religions of the sacred are synonymous with violence, the violence of arbitrary norms and principles, of rigid logic and eternal truth, then the dissolution of metaphysics, of the metaphysical and sacred transcendence, is synonymous with the world becoming non-violent, with the event of peace. In order for peace to happen undisturbed, unconditioned by entities, institutes or processes that do not belong to weakening, secularisation should itself

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crisis, of this challenge to thought, we can say no more than that metaphysics is endlessly ending.

<sup>3</sup>This is, indeed, the basic contention of both *Belief* and *After Christianity*.

remain exempt from secularisation, since Vattimo seems to ask us rhetorically, who would want to weaken love? This way also, we can consider secularisation or charity uncontaminated by traces of metaphysics.

Leaving aside the question whether the love Vattimo treats of could be Christian charity, there is a more urgent philosophical problem concerning this exemption. If Vattimo exempts secularisation from weakening, that is, from interpretation, it leaves secularisation or the ultimate event of charity without meaning. Therefore, it cannot belong to the flux of interpretations. Only what has no meaning cannot be interpreted – or, what will have its meaning unquestioned. Weakening, secularisation, charity itself hovers outside the world, outside the hermeneutic plasma. This inevitably turns charity into a metaphysical principle that directs secularisation, the event of weakening, the flux of interpretations from without. Translating this into Vattimo's own terms: in weak thought, charity becomes the violent principle of late-modernity.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. René Girard's Sacrificial Logic

René Girard approaches the phenomenon of violence in another way than the identification with metaphysics. In myth, art, religion, literature, etc., he discerns a tendency that he calls 'mimetic desire'. This desire is not focused on an object as such, but on any object that is already desired or possessed by another. Actually, Girard suspects, without law, morals, socio-political structure, in short, without culture as the largest understanding of the organisation of society, humanity would find itself in a struggle of one against all.<sup>5</sup> But how does humanity curb that original violence? In other words, how does humanity persistently succeed in organising societies?

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<sup>4</sup>E. Meganck, "Philosophia Amica Theologiae: Gianni Vattimo's Weak Faith and Theological Difference," *Modern Theology* 31 (2015) 3, 387-398.

<sup>5</sup>René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, London/New York: Continuum, 2003, 141-142.

Internal tension can only be curbed by attributing the cause of this tension on an outsider *within* the group: the innocent victim in society, or the scapegoat. The innocence of the victim is crucial and so is the expulsion. Someone within the society but at the same time perceived as an enemy gets the blame and is condemned. Society has got rid of the cause of violence and peace reigns. But precisely because of that, the innocent victim is not pardoned, but rather recognised as the warrant, the cause of peace this time. This paradoxical dynamics is called ‘sacri-fice’: slaughtered and at the same time ‘made sacred’.<sup>6</sup>

A holy social order, a hierarchy, is installed in the name of the sacrifice. The reference to the sacrifice, to the sacred, makes the hierarchy untouchable at its roots. This is to be understood as derived violence. It is the socio-political violence that is supposed to curb original violence. But as long as the innocence of the sacrifice is suppressed, original violence remains out of sight. Obviously, derived violence or socio-political order seems unable to curb original violence once and for all. The scapegoat mechanism goes to work each time original violence breaks through. One notices this in Nazi-ideology and the racist reactions to immigration. The Jews have to go because they are communists and because they are capitalists. The immigrants have to go because they take all our jobs and use up all unemployment benefits. There is very little logic in this rhetoric, but still it works.

This is why Girard, against Vattimo, doubts the absolute wisdom of the modern ideal of equality as the result of secularisation. Equality means the breaking down of the hierarchy that still serves to curb original violence. Modernity, says Girard, would be well advised to maintain hierarchy as long as people keep using the scapegoat or, in other words, as long as people do not grasp the anthropological message of Christ.<sup>7</sup> There, I think, could hide the meaning of ‘senseless’ violence. Equality has facilitated a violence that we cannot understand with traditional

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<sup>6</sup>René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

<sup>7</sup>René Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and the Weakening Faith*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 23-26.

theoretical reason; that makes no sense to our modern human sciences. It appears senseless because it may well be a manifestation of original violence. Therefore, Girard asks us to be careful with the radicalisation of secularisation, of equality.

This notion of the scapegoat was very well received in France. The French lay intelligentsia has always liked the idea of an inherent connection between culture and religion, on the one hand, and violence, on the other. All the more horrified they reacted to Girard's next step in his cultural analysis. Christianity was to be understood as the break between violence and religion. Christianity, Girard explains, is an anti-religion that rejects and abolishes any salvation economy, any political alliance with the sacred. There is no deal with God. There is, therefore, no violence in the God of Christians. This is the meaning of desecralisation: God has left the sacred, source of violence, behind.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, Christ had an anthropological message for us. 'Love your neighbour like yourself' implies: do not put any blame on an innocent other, recognise the violence in yourself. The anthropological meaning of Christ's Passion reveals the fundamental innocence of the victim, the Lamb of God, as its very crux. In fact, it is Christ himself who shows how the scapegoat system works. He continuously tells his disciples what is going to happen. Indeed, though Christ is fundamentally innocent, the day after the people welcome him as a king, they, the same people, shout for his death. This switch remains unaccounted for.

#### **4. Interface of the Sacred and the Secular: Violence or Peace?**

Christ tells us that the source of violence lies within the world, within humanity. The source of charity, of Love, is divine. The God of Christianity is the God that leaves the sacred, the violence of absolute cosmological and moral control, behind. He does this out of love. But this is not how Vattimo understands it. To him, you will remember, every form of transcendence, be it metaphysical or sacred, is a source of violence. Vattimo considers every external operation on human thought an arbitrary one.

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<sup>8</sup>Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 231ff.

Peace can only reign when and where the world is handed over to humanity, as the only source of charity.

This sounds like two opposite viewpoints. This is all the more remarkable, since Girard and Vattimo share the same premises. They both consider secularisation as an effect of and within Christianity. They both consider social (political, legal, etc.) order a form of violence – Vattimo because every structure is always metaphysically installed and Girard because it is a derived violence that is supposed to curb original violence. They both blame the persistence of violence on the masses – Vattimo because they cling to the certainties that metaphysics supplies and Girard because they don’t appreciate the full meaning of the scapegoat as revealed by Christ. It is the masses that do not understand that ‘God is dead’ and there is no more access to a realm that supplies those certainties or do not understand that violence hides in themselves and cannot be allocated in the ‘other’ within themselves.

Girard calls the history of Christianity desecralisation, God’s taking leave of religious violence and revealing ‘purified’ divine love. To Vattimo, this is exactly the same as secularisation. The question becomes here: is there indeed a difference between desecralisation and secularisation? And if there is, does it have to be a divine substance that dwells in another world than this? If desecralisation is not identical with secularisation, without there being any specific ‘content’ that signifies this difference or without there being a logical relation that explains the non-identity, then we are dealing with difference as evoked in French contemporary philosophy – a difference, by the way, that is not very much appreciated by either Vattimo or Girard.

In order to look into this difference, let us first explore the interface between the sacred and the secular. But what are, in fact, ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’?

Girard distinguishes between sacred and divine. ‘Sacred’ refers to the gods of natural religion, full of arbitrariness, retaliation, lust for power, envy, etc. Violent gods belong to the sacred. Divine refers to the God of Love, purified (or

contaminated?) by *kenosis*.<sup>9</sup> 'Secular' would mean something like 'the result of the process of secularisation', i.e., the world in as far as it is considered independent of the transcendent. Charles Taylor prefers a more mild interpretation: secular is where and when a man has religions amongst many other options of signification.<sup>10</sup> God no longer plays an all-over determining role, but is allowed as a player on the field. What, then, does the interface mean? I will not consider the sacred here in the sense that Girard gives it, I will consider the sacred and the divine as synonymous here: the transcendence of abundant, excessive Love. The interface is where the question is articulated: can a world where religion is an option ever be a world of peace? In other words, can an 'enclosed' world, where God is an option, a product of the world's own laws, warrant peace or can only an 'open' world do so?

### 5. World or Globe?

Nietzsche closed any *Hinterworld* off from philosophical discourse. But both Heidegger and Wittgenstein agreed that the world does not generate its own meaning. What, then, if meaning is not provided by or from another world, keeps our world away from meaninglessness? How are we saved from absurdity? How and where does philosophy see the possibility of redemption from absolute nihilism?

Vattimo preferred to close the world around the hermeneutic plasma. This has to be interpreted as an endless flux, without any meaning 'coming in', without the possibility of an arrival of new meaning. Meaning, or world, is the result of interfering and colliding interpretations. Girard does not close the world. Its redemption, its peace, definitely comes from a divine (or sacred) 'without', as revealed by an anthropological reading of Christ's teaching. But since Nietzsche, philosophy has no longer a natural access to any 'without'. In order to learn from Girard, however, philosophy doesn't need another world to allocate divine love. A

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<sup>9</sup>Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 195.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, 19.



hermeneutic ground is not (necessarily) holy ground. Besides, we can always re-read the divine source philosophically in terms of alterity. The divine belongs to the other-of-the-world rather than to the other(-than-the-)world, as Jean-Luc Nancy would say.<sup>11</sup>

What philosophy needs as its ‘stuff’ is a world that does not completely coincide with itself, that does not carry its own full meaning or explanation and legitimation within itself, where meaning comes in, but not from the world. This would have to be an ‘open’ world. But how can we open a world without it opening upon another world? And how could an open world be a sign of charity, of divine Love?

If opening and meaning refer to each other, mutually imply each other without anything corresponding to it, without there being something out there whereof ‘meaning’ and ‘opening’ would be attributes, then ‘world’ leaves the register of structure and system, of substance and objectivity and enters the order of event, of advent. World *is* meaning and opening, both understood as verbs. Only because world is opening can meaning happen.

In the world of traditional metaphysics (and most of current analytic philosophy), meaning was a function of the relation between thought, on the one hand, and the allegedly objective state of affairs, on the other. This function could be true or false. But, again thanks to Nietzsche, such a function became itself meaningless.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger agrees with Nietzsche insofar as he also dismisses any approach to meaning from an *adaequatio rei et intellectus* or a similar model, but understands meaning rather as the amazing and admirable way things appear to us in a

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<sup>11</sup>Jean-Luc Nancy articulates the impact of Christianity as follows: “Christianity designates nothing other, essentially [...], than the demand to open in the world an alterity or an unconditional alienation. [...] All the weight – the enormous weight – of religious representation cannot change the fact that the ‘other world’ or the ‘other kingdom’ never was a second world, or even a world-behind-the-worlds, but the other of the world [...]” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 10.

<sup>12</sup>“How the real World Finally Became a Fable,” the famous chapter 4 of *The Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*.

meaningful, consistent way.<sup>13</sup> He called this way, among other terms, 'horizon', that keeps us away from what Levinas called 'absurdity'.

This world is no longer Descartes' *res extensa* but needs to be 'received' (instead of 'approached' or 'described') in a more Heideggerian way. The meaning of the world is not a set of significations or an explanation that makes up its inherent representation. Such an explanation only awaits its own discovery, description, decryption with science as the most favoured candidate. Meaning is coming, arriving. Therefore, world cannot be enclosed, world has to be opening. This opening is alterity as, again, event, not as structure or attribute. The opening is therefore rather like Heidegger's horizon, it is itself not accessible by analysis in terms of the meaning that has arrived. In other words, the opening is not the access to meaning that comes. The opening marks the impossibility of such access in the form of extrapolation, prediction, expectation, etc. This impossibility can best be read as John Caputo intends it: not as the opposite of 'possible', but as "beyond what we can imagine as possible."<sup>14</sup> Thought at the opening loses its object and its ground.

Here, I think, thought finds itself at the crossroads: either world - meaning as opening - or globe - enclosure of meaning. Globe is also without object and ground, consists of value and surface: it is the world that is reduced by planning, it is the world that is becoming plan according to a strictly economic logic that cannot be bothered by politics, law, culture, etc. It is a world without hope or faith. Meaning and philosophy disappear.

Planning does not need hope or faith; it trusts only in its own calculations, its own extrapolations. Actually, one could call planning and globalization hyper-religious, since instead of hope and faith being overtly rejected, they find themselves 'inflated' into certainty. Before pushing God out of the picture, early

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<sup>13</sup>I am sure that this is still the very same amazement and admiration that led Plato to the articulation of the Idea.

<sup>14</sup>This notion that Caputo borrows from Derrida appears in almost any of his books. See, for example, John Caputo, *On Religion*, London/New York: Routledge, 2001, 7-16.

modern philosophy still turned to God as to a warrant for certainty – as indeed Descartes did.

But by just pushing God out of the picture, philosophy allows itself to cling to a ‘theist’ structure, but without God at the top.<sup>15</sup> It still deduces reality from a single principle. Hyper-religious theism believes in the existence of ‘true’ epistemological strategies that gain access to the ‘true’ nature, structure of reality. This might get confusing, since what is generally recognised as non-religious atheism, is presented here as hyper-religious theism. Since the question “Which is true, world or globe?” is unhappily phrased in the traditional register, I will need to explore a different approach on a track that I provisionally call ‘preligion’.

## 6. ‘Preligion’ and the ‘Good’ Atheism

One may ‘step away’ from global reduction, from the totalising plan. At that point, thought has become religious, becomes also hope and faith. It has become hope since not having an object, a subject or a reason (or ground) is typical only of hope. At least, it is typical of philosophical hope, of hope as thought. This is not about what hope becomes within a confessional (hope for redemption) or even daily (hope for the graduation of your child) context. Philosophy says: when I have no more reason to expect something, when indeed I do not even know what to expect anymore, then thought becomes hope – or nothing. Whenever thought acquires an object or a reason, it becomes desire, aspiration, expectation, and calculation. Whenever thought becomes technology, it tends towards hopelessness. Technology is about control, not hope. Hope only rises when and where technological hopelessness turns into despair. Technology itself, however, is unable to see the hope in despair. An ‘other’ thought is needed – what I would call religious thought.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 32.

<sup>16</sup>Hope leaves the result ‘open’. When medical technology fails, doctors leave the room and someone stays behind, lighting a candle. To the doctors, the candle is meaningless, because it is a sign of hope. Hope does not echo the medical aspiration: this person shall live.

Thought has become faith because it relies on there never being meaningfulness or closure, without being able to hold anyone or anything responsible for meaning. This is what is behind Heidegger's thinking as thanking and mirrors Plato's *agathon*, a name for the reasonability to be thankful for intelligibility as such. Meaning happens at the opening, which is world. If the world is open instead of enclosed (in a globe that awaits its final full explanation, its Full Meaning), then meaning belongs to 'advent', then meaning is given to thought. Philosophy is then no longer the construction of epistemological strategies to enter the realm of eternal and original truth.

It is certainly not coincidental that, whereas non-confessional religious inspiration used to be regarded as not-done in philosophy, current philosophy welcomes studies that accept the incomprehensibility of philosophical texts when amputated from their religious inspiration.<sup>17</sup> Derrida calls philosophy 'religion without religion' - religious thought that does not confess itself to any denomination or ideology or organisation - and refers to promise as opened up by atheist philosophy.

It may occur to some that 'religious' and 'atheist' cannot work together in philosophy, but they do. For the sake of this argument, I will distinguish between two kinds of theism and atheism. There is the 'religious' theism that deduces the future from original

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Hope only hopes for the best, whatever that is. Lighting the candle means not knowing what is the best, but hoping for that and trusting that any result will be the best. Whereas our affection will hope for the patient to become 'better', philosophy only has faith in the 'best' that could happen. We can never know whether what we psychologically hope for is, in fact, philosophically 'the best'.

<sup>17</sup>A very well-known example is Parmenides. Until now, scholars would gladly reject the importance of the *Proemium* and consider it literary baggage that should be removed from the main corpus as the legitimate object and domain of serious philosophical study. Now, agreement rises that the reference to the Goddess is, though metaphorical, crucial to the understanding of Parmenides. In other words, the traditional approach to Parmenides 'merely' as a logician and metaphysician is now accepted as too narrow.

divine intention and ‘metaphysical’ theism, more or less what Heidegger calls onto-theo-logy, that hides the eventuality of Being or the opening (of the) world behind an eternal basic structure underlying world. World then becomes the partial, temporal, superficial, phenomenal, etc., form of this total, eternal, fundamental, and noumenal structure. ‘Vulgar’ atheism is such a theism where God is replaced by Spirit or Matter or Will or State or any other strong unifying principle. ‘Profound’ atheism, as meant by Derrida (and Nancy, at that) does not just tag an ‘a-’ onto a theism, denoting the replacement of God at the top of the theist structure, but starts from the ‘a-’ as the philosophical pendant of the ‘ex nihilo’. This ‘a-’, as I read it, disturbs, annuls, frustrates, perverts all theisms in the name of God. This ‘breaking up’ of the traditional metaphysical structure of thought is promising, as it leaves meaning open. Critique of metaphysics, thus, appears as philosophy whence God is not removed. It does not decide on the existence of God. It accepts the name of God as pervading culture, persistently, without knowing whether this persistence is warranted by any eternal substance *behind* the name.

One of its ‘faith articles’ that, I think, follows from this, is that the first contact with the name (of) God is not necessarily a philosophical one in the traditional sense of this word. The very first hearing of the name does not necessarily imply or presuppose an already available epistemological tool and ontological model to ‘redraft’ the name according to any hypostatic preference.<sup>18</sup> This, in turn, does not mean that the first hearing is a pure effect of the original word. The first hearing

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<sup>18</sup>Another famous preface in the history of philosophy, Anselm’s *Proslogion*, may illustrate this. Phrases like “Than You, nothing higher can be thought” and “You are greater than what can be thought” are philosophically challenging. The first phrase actually sounds more like a love declaration than a philosophical statement, though such statements, e.g., on the necessary existence of God, can be deduced later on, when reflecting on this declaration. The second phrase points thoughtfully at what lies beyond the limits of thought – as diagnosed by Nancy in his *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, 11-12.

takes place in an element of thought that we could call 'preligion',<sup>19</sup> a space of meaning that theism reduced to a dimensionless point: the origin.

Preligion is not an origin, but a provenance. This mustn't imply that philosophy is 'earlier' than theology or religion or mythology, of course. But philosophy has preligion as its research domain – that it possibly shares with other (human) sciences. Preligion is where philosophy can look for the provenance of God and gods. In preligion, philosophy can think about theology without theology looking over its shoulders. Preligion is also where the relations between philosophy and theology emerge – premodern *ancilla*, modern *dominatrix*, postmodern *amica*. Preligion harbours the 'a-'. It is not a historical period, it is a philosophical realm.

In preligion, theology speaks untheologically. Perhaps I could say that in preligion, only theology without theology can enter. It is where thought can still be religious – trusting, thankful – without becoming religious – confessional, believing... For instance, the preligious Bible is a text, no more. The text is of massive importance, because of its effect on thought and culture in general. Even 'atheist' thinkers recognize this. Belief is left at the entrance of preligion, because, as Heidegger said, belief supplies the answer before the question is raised.<sup>20</sup> Theology appears in preligion as philosophy, in a philosophical grammar, as 'philosopheme'. Preligion is where thought ends up when it has understood Eckhart's prayer to be rid of God, in his famous sermon on *Beati Pauperes Spiritu*. It is where atheism may be 'good', promising.

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<sup>19</sup>I introduced this term to 'solve' the confusion that the expression 'philosophy of religion' entails. Unlike, for example, in 'philosophy of science', philosophy and religion mutually imply each other. Religion can never become a 'pure object' of philosophical reflexion that is by itself radically religious.

<sup>20</sup>Heidegger, "The Ontotheological Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

## 7. Hope and Faith Leading Thought to Charity

Hope and faith both ‘redirect’ thought towards the coming, the promised, the ad-vent. Hope and faith are without expectation and extrapolation. They are two of the theological virtues that Saint Paul isolates. He also put forward a third, charity, which he called the greatest (1 Corinthians 13:13), suggesting a sort of teleology, as if hope and faith ‘served’ charity. Remarkably, those virtues do not figure on Aristotle’s list that only contains what became known as the cardinal virtues, the ones that an enclosed world hinges upon. This means that, at first, hope, faith and charity belonged exclusively to the Christian moral theological vocabulary.<sup>21</sup> But since Nietzsche, these three items no longer belong exclusively to moral or any other theology. In his preface to *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, he sings the praise of those virtues as philosophical attitudes that take thought and life beyond metaphysics.<sup>22</sup> Thought itself can also become hope, faith and charity. In fact, hope and faith lead immanent and transcendent thought out of itself towards charity.

Charity, finding itself ‘at the end’ of hope and faith,<sup>23</sup> cannot be a thing or a concept in which it resembles Plato’s *agathon*. Hope and faith cannot redirect thought towards object and ground and will not reduce world to globe. Charity can only be a name of meaning,<sup>24</sup> a name at the opening that is world – world being the event of opening that is meaning. It cannot control thought or cause thoughts, but philosophy can think in its name – the space

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<sup>21</sup>In his worldwide bestseller *A Small Treatise on the Great Virtues*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001, André Comte-Sponville explicitly leaves out hope and faith on the ground of their being strictly theological virtues.

<sup>22</sup>Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, New York/Toronto: Random House, 1974, 32; 37.

<sup>23</sup>As Saint Augustine says in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 13:13, at the Last Judgement, there will be no hope or faith since charity will be ‘totally realised’ in the eternal presence of the Lord. Charity can, therefore, be considered, ‘in the end’, the eschatological truth.

<sup>24</sup>Of course, charity is never purely theory, but the praxis of a philosopher is to think.

of that name being preligion. In the name of charity, supported by hope and faith, philosophy will question interpretations and question violent thought. As a name, charity promises more than a principle or norm. As a principle or norm, it would command love in a fundamentally non-Christian, pharisaic way. As a name, it can always become the persisting appeal to 'do better', to 'love more'. So, for instance, one can calculate solidarity, according to laws of expectation and extrapolation, or one can question every calculation in the name of charity. Charity is the critique of globalisation, not just in the sense of 'criticising', but also in the transcendental sense of laying bare its limits.

If charity cannot be an appeal, a challenge (to do more) and criticism (it is never enough) at the same time, then it is not charity. If charity is turned into a concept, a principle, a norm, it dies. A philosopher who would say "In the name of charity, open the world!" can never be a charitable philosopher since he is unable to receive the advent of meaning. Such philosophy would only open the world onto yet another enclosed globe.

Perhaps the most philosophical 'implementation' of charity is Derrida's hospitality - though some may prefer Levinas' *Face*. Charity is a paradigmatic term to denote openness towards what comes/arrives in thought. This is what Derrida means when he refers to philosophy as religion without religion, to truth as promise without promise. In preligion, there is no substance that promises or is promised; there is no author of revelation, there are no sacred instances that force commandments upon humanity - nor is there any denial or rejection thereof. The opening implies a radical undecidedness on the question of the divine, whence charity as also a name for impossibility (in Caputo's sense). This is, then, also a name for the interface between the divine and the secular: it is the *locus* of promise as long as it remains impossible.

To conclude, this philosophical argumentation shows an obvious - but, therefore, not necessarily exclusive - Christian provenance. Indeed, we can learn this from Girard, not because of the divinity of Love in the way he meant it, but because of an openness of the world that has to do with the abolishment of the salvation economy that is typical of all religions but Christianity,



even the monotheisms. Girard calls Christianity an anti-religion. Following Luther, Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, Georges Bataille and Nancy, I would also call Christianity an atheism: the experience that God does not belong to the world, though his name persists in the world.

## 8. Conclusion

Inasmuch as the argumentation above is philosophically legitimate, charity cannot be nihilist, as Vattimo suggests. His model of an enclosed hermeneutic plasma or flux of mutually interacting (and thereby weakening) interpretations radicalises easily into a violent metaphysics of charity and secularisation. If *'tertium non datur'*, philosophy would have no option but to turn to the opposite of nihilism, which could be any kind of theism. But there is a third way beyond the metaphysical logic of opposites. Not Vattimo's nihilist plasma but rather world as opening leads thought to charity, to peace. The opening is the interface beyond which philosophy cannot reach.

I would call the differential tension between desecularisation and secularisation or between transcendent and immanent charity: desecularisation. It resists radicalisation of secularisation, as tried by Vattimo. It would leave the outsourcing of charity, as suggested by Girard, in all respectful modesty and friendship, in *pietas*, to theology. Its atheism does not contain any statement on the existence of God, but liberates the name of God from any metaphysical, theist, onto-theo-logical structure – to which the secularisation thesis belongs as soon as it becomes the explanation of the history of Christianity.<sup>25</sup> It doesn't actually reconcile the positions of Vattimo and Girard, nor does it reject them. It offers a philosophical perspective that relies on religious thought, but not nihilist, like Vattimo's, and though primarily and preferentially Christian, perhaps not necessarily and exclusively Christian, like

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<sup>25</sup>Desecularisation cannot be the reverse of secularisation since it would just keep the structure and turn the explanatory content upside down. This is what Peter L. Berger does in a book he edited, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Girard's. This is, of course, because philosophy cannot become totally Christian without turning into theology, which would be a metaphysical or pietistic annexation. This way, however, philosophy can enter a preligious friendship with theology that is not contaminated by dominance, by violence.

The popular contention that religion, the divine, transcendence is a source of violence *per se* is highly debatable. This article starts from the recognition that secularisation models, or indeed immanent theories, often or indeed always resemble traditional metaphysical philosophies in that they 'enclose' the world rather than think world as opening, as the event of meaning. Moreover, modern secular thought is generally called non-religious atheist, but can also be considered hyper-religious theist. In order to see clearly, I took a step back into what I call 'preligion' to see how all this works. There it turns out that thinking the world as opening, following Nancy, is actually religious thinking. Philosophy leaves the absolute primacy of planning and becomes hope, faith and charity. The critique of metaphysics, a tradition that traces Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Nancy, allows philosophy to 're-connect' in a mutually friendly way with theology, with confessional (as different from philosophical) religion. This reconnection suggests 'desecularisation' as a critique of (radical) secularisation. Desecularisation resists the violence of enclosure of the world.