

Article

Rethinking the Death of God through Kenotic Thought (with Hegel's Help)

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Abstract: This paper explores the death of God narrative through the lens of kenosis, drawing insights from thinkers such as Marcel, Heidegger, Vattimo, and Girard. It investigates the implications of kenotic thought for contemporary religious and philosophical discourse, exploring various interpretations of kenosis, ranging from Altizer and Žižek's apocalyptic views to Vattimo's more hopeful perspective. Through critical engagement with these viewpoints, this paper advocates for a nuanced understanding of kenosis inspired by Hegel, one that bypasses both radical theology and excessive optimism. Methodologically, this study adopts a hermeneutic approach, analyzing key texts and engaging in philosophical dialogue. This paper concludes that rethinking kenotic thought could provide a robust framework for grappling with the death of God in the contemporary context, offering avenues for ethical reflection, social critique, and speculative renewal.

Keywords: death of God; kenosis; kenotic thought; nihilism; mimetic theory; Hegel; Nietzsche; Vattimo; Girard; Žižek

1. Introduction

In Robert Sheckley's satirical novel *Journey of Joenes* [1], the protagonist encounters a deeply religious character named Hans Schmidt¹. Schmidt recounts his religious journey, during which he stumbled upon a cave and encountered the United Church Council of Earth. The Council, representing all religious systems, including beliefs in both good and evil and chaired by Satan, is concerned about a machine that possesses "a point of view" and preaches that the universe is without value and reason, without god and evil, without gods and devils. The Machine's nihilistic message has swayed people away from traditional religious views. Fearing the loss of influence over humanity and unable to seek aid from the gods (the Council's "clients") who, like humanity, prefer "destruction to boredom", the Council seeks advice from Schmidt. The narrator feels inadequate: "For who was I, a mere man, to advise *them*, the essences of divinity which I had always looked to for guidance?".

In many ways, we—you and I, here and now—face a situation similar to Schmidt's. It has been over two centuries since Hegel proclaimed that "God Himself is dead" ([2] p. 190). Eighty years later, Nietzsche sealed the event through his Madman's haunting cry, which still torments Western civilization nearly a century and a half later: "God remains dead! And we have killed him!" ([3] p. 120). Since then, the recurring echo of the message of nothingness—the Machine's message—has been repeated over and over. How can we, mere mortals, oppose that message with anything? And indeed, why should we even attempt to do so?

In the upcoming discussion, I assume the role of the unfortunate character from Sheckley's novel, compelled by circumstance to respond to the Council's inquiry. Initially, I explore how subsequent thinkers—such as Sartre, Heidegger, Marcel, Altizer, Vattimo, and Girard—have elaborated and interpreted the death of God. Following this, I approach the topic from a different angle: that of kenosis. I survey contemporary understandings of kenosis, assessing their respective strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I explore the death of



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God and kenosis in tandem, aiming to unveil insights that may have previously eluded us. The narrative of Sheckley's character does not conclude with the posed question; as he struggles to formulate an answer, an event occurs, prompting a reevaluation of the inquiry. I can anticipate that Sheckley's character will depart the cave in despair. We will see whether there is, for us, an alternative to such hopelessness.

2. "God Is Dead. Oh, Well"

Nietzsche's Madman proclaims the death of God and suggests that we, the killers of God, must "become gods" to "appear worthy of it" ([3] p. 120). The death of God announced by the Madman is neither an "epistemological error" ([4] p. 342) nor a meta-physical statement on the nonexistence of God. Instead, it acknowledges a cultural shift: God is dead, and we are responsible for it. We are left alone, faced with the task of determining our course of action. What do people do in response? Nietzsche offers a clue to this question four years later in *Beyond Good and Evil*, a passage surprisingly (or perhaps not) less renowned and cited than the Madman's proclamation:

[D]uring the moral epoch of humanity, people sacrificed the strongest instincts they had, their "nature", to their god; the joy of *this* particular festival shines in the cruel eyes of the ascetic, that enthusiastic piece of "anti-nature". Finally: what was left to be sacrificed? In the end, didn't people have to sacrifice all comfort and hope, everything holy or healing, any faith in a hidden harmony or a future filled with justice and bliss? Didn't people have to sacrifice God himself and worship rocks, stupidity, gravity, fate, or nothingness out of sheer cruelty to themselves? To sacrifice God for nothingness—that paradoxical mystery of the final cruelty has been reserved for the race that is now approaching: by now we all know something about this. ([5] p. 50)

Were people not expected to become worthy of the death of God? Instead, they turn to worship "rocks, stupidity, gravity, fate, or nothingness". Take note of these words; they will come back later. For now, let us examine how Nietzsche's epigones lived up to the words of their prophet.

Fast forward to 1946. Jean-Paul Sartre arrives at Geneva airport to a swarm of reporters eager to capture his first words after landing. With calm and composure, Sartre declares: "Gentlemen, God is dead. I announce to you, gentlemen, the death of God"². In these few words, we find the entire meaning and undertones of the death of God in Sartre's philosophy. That God is dead, for Sartre, means the acknowledgment of the absence of any inherent meaning or purpose in reality. In a godless universe, there is no predetermined essence or moral framework to govern human existence. This absence of external validation leads to anguish (*angoisse*), yet concurrently grants humans *absolute* freedom.

Few of Sartre's contemporaries grasped that Sartre's declaration is out of tune when compared with Nietzsche's pronouncement. Gabriel Marcel did. He wrote: "How could one fail to see that the existential tone is absolutely different here, precisely because the sacred dread has disappeared, and has been replaced by the satisfaction of a man who claims to establish his doctrine upon the ruins of something in which he never believed?" ([6] p. 32). Marcel observes a stark contrast between Nietzsche's "burning passion for sincerity" ([7] p. 199) and the complacent tone adopted by his followers. Yes, even in anguish there can be self-satisfaction—as if contemplating desolation marked a success and the culmination of humanity's journey. While Nietzsche's faith in the *Übermensch* remains largely unique to him, the affirmation of the death of God has found in an infinity of minds "a definitive resonance" ([6] p. 34). For Nietzsche's followers, the loss of meaning no longer carries its tragic weight but is seen as the only path forward. Marcel views post-Nietzschean nihilism as a dogmatic reversal driven by desire: "I want reality to be of such sort that it gives me no grounds for expecting any salvation or cherishing any hope" ([7], p. 199; see [8] p. 142; [9] p. 408). Against this sort of "perverse joy", we should remember that Nietzsche claimed to *transcend* nihilism, which "can be a point of departure". Someone else grasped this, Marcel claims. He was Heidegger. In his essay, *Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'* [10],

Heidegger “recalls that with the consciousness of the death of God begins that of a radical transvaluation of the values until then considered as the highest” ([6] p. 32). However, Marcel is also critical of Heidegger’s interpretation of the death of God, deeming it overly abstract ([11] p. 14; see [9] p. 400).

Heidegger interprets Nietzsche’s notion of the death of God as marking the “advent of nihilism”, the “flight of the gods”, which opens the possibility for a complete revaluation of values ([12] p. 285). However, as Wrathall points out, in this historical moment, “there is no candidate to step into the position of shared source of meaning and value” ([13] p. 198)³. Heidegger’s later thought on the death of God revolves around the endeavor to envision a “poetic-philosophical religion of the ‘last God’ or the ‘coming Gods’” ([14] p. 196). Heidegger maintains that an experience of the divine is crucial to live a worthwhile life in the post-death-of-God world, because while the demise of the God of metaphysics poses significant risks, it also offers a unique chance to reintroduce values into the world (see [13] pp. 200, 210). Heidegger’s perspective may appear similar to Marcel’s. However, for Heidegger, the death of God ultimately signifies the end of metaphysics, paving the way for a new beginning. The “mere” identification with the end of metaphysics lessens the tragic aspect of the event, which was central in Nietzsche’s declaration, now receding to the background.

Vattimo’s interpretation of the death of God aims to show the fundamental alignment between Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s readings. Vattimo underscores that once the death of God has occurred, it becomes our destiny (*Geschick*), calling us to confront a world devoid of the traditional religious frameworks that once provided meaning and stability ([15] p. 165). On this basis, Vattimo argues that “the Nietzschean and Heideggerian definitions of nihilism coincide” as they both signify the conclusion of metaphysics: “For the one, the death of God and the devaluation of the highest values; for the other, the reduction of Being to value” ([16] p. 23). This convergence allows Vattimo to embrace the constructive aspect of Heidegger’s analysis, aligning it with Nietzsche’s active nihilism as “the chance to begin a different history” ([17] p. 93). In his later reflections, Vattimo emphasizes that the death of God not only does not signify a metaphysical truth, but does not signify the end of religious reflection either. The opportunity to begin a different history involves a transvaluation of Christianity, since God’s disappearance from the world signals the end of God’s absolute transcendence (see [18]).

This is where Girard’s contribution becomes significant for Vattimo. The traditional transcendent God is viewed by Vattimo as also representing “the God of natural religion”, Girard’s violent sacred ([19] p. 38). Girard’s work leads Vattimo to understand the Incarnation as a crucial moment of the “weakening” of metaphysics and secularization as its outcome (see [20]). The problem is that Girard is critical of Heidegger’s interpretation of the death of God. Therefore, exploring Girard’s interpretation and his critique of Heidegger is necessary to assess the feasibility of Vattimo’s proposed combination of Heidegger’s and Girard’s viewpoints.

Girard’s initial insight was that the death of God leads to the deification of humanity. Instead of ushering a peaceful paradise, this shift prompts the worship of “the other”, a “horizontal” transcendence rooted in resentment and violence (see [21] p. 24). The world where humans become “gods for each other” is, in fact, the hell of mimeticism; genuine “vertical” transcendence can only be achieved by turning away from this interpersonal divinization. In his 1984 essay *Dionysus versus the Crucified* [22], Girard underscores the collective human responsibility in the death of God; however, unlike Vattimo, Girard sees this not as the end of God’s (absolute) transcendence but as the dawn of a new religious cycle. Girard writes:

God did not die a natural death; he was collectively killed. And the crime is so great that new festivals of atonement, new sacred games will have to be invented. New rituals will undoubtedly appear. The consequences of God’s murder are religious, therefore, purely religious. The very deed that seems to put an end to

the religious process is really the origin of that process, the sum total of it, really, the religious process par excellence. ([22] p. 831)

Nietzsche's Aphorism 125 functions as an intellectual sacrifice⁴, akin to the collective murder itself. In this light, Heidegger's essay *Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'* [10] assumes the role of a mystifying myth, portraying Nietzsche's message as a "harmless cliché" and concealing the murder "behind the theme of an entirely 'natural' and peaceful death, a radically undramatic death, a death *sans histoire*". Girard's criticism of Heidegger grows more vehement: "Heidegger's essay could only bury the dramatic force of Nietzsche's madman under the crushing weight of its philosophical pedantry. And indeed it does. According to Heidegger the madman's announcement really means: 'the end of the supra-sensible in the platonic sense'" ([22] pp. 831–833)⁵. In 2001, Girard reiterated:

The idea of a "retreat from God" in Heidegger, as I understand it, stands in opposition to the "death of God" in Nietzsche. For Heidegger, the notion of God's death reminds us too much of Christ. He replaced it by what he considered to be the more subtle notion of a withdrawal, a pulling back from God. But Heidegger was also bent on removing the basis for Nietzsche's religious concerns. ([25] p. 119)

The problem lies in the fact that the "first" death of God does not result in the "restoration of the sacred order", but in such a profound and irreversible "decomposition of meaning" that "an abyss opens" beneath our feet. Nietzsche's aphorism gives us the impression that the abyss will finally close with the advent of the *Übermensch* announced by Zarathustra ([26] p. 95). That impression, however, proves illusory, and the abyss remains unclosed. This is because Nietzsche's death of God, even beyond Heidegger's mystification, stems from a "misinterpretation" of the desacralizing process brought about by the Christian revelation: "The gods who are dying are the sacrificial gods", the "sacrificial concept of divinity", not the Christian God, who "has nothing to do with them" ([27] p. 33). The sacred violence inherent in mimetic victimization is waning due to the demystifying influence of the Gospels. However, rather than embracing the God of love, the modern self tries to "take his place"—hence, Nietzsche's error ([28] p. 56; see [23] p. 37). The death of God, therefore, represents the demise of the image of a cruel, violent deity, caused by the self-affirmation of the demystifying spirit. This, Girard argues, heralds the return of the authentic Christian message (see [23] pp. 30–31).

In conclusion, Vattimo, following in Heidegger's footsteps, views the death of God as the end of metaphysics, signaling a positive shift toward human emancipation. However, Girard argues that this interpretation overlooks the void left by God's death: the abyss remains open⁶. As Palaver notes, this insight "sheds light on the present state of religion" and explains why the death of God "has led to an explosion of religious phenomena around the world", indicating a resurgence of the old violent sacred ([21] p. 28). Palaver also observes that Vattimo's transition from Girard's tenet that the natural sacred is violent because "the victim-based mechanism presupposes a divinity thirsty for vengeance" to the tenet that it is violent *also insofar as it attributes to the divinity "the predicates of omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity and 'transcendence' with regard to humanity"* remains "far from Girard's position" ([21] p. 266; Cf. [19] pp. 38–39). This is indeed accurate. However, both Vattimo and Girard maintain that the death of God marks the end of something—the violent sacred for Girard, and the (violent) metaphysics for Vattimo—whose dissolution sets the stage for a resurgence of authentic Christianity. While Vattimo's "optimism" views the death of metaphysics as a path to human emancipation, Girard's "qualified optimism" acknowledges the potential for positive meanings but emphasizes the importance of avoiding the allure of new, even more perilous forms of the violent sacred.

Another interpretation of the death of God is represented by the theothanatology of Altizer and others⁷. Altizer rejects the traditional Christian view of a transcendent God separate from creation, with the incarnation seen as merely an "infiltration" of the human realm by a divine being. Instead, Altizer's conception of the death of God revolves

around the idea that God undergoes a self-negating process of descent into human history. He views the death of God not merely as a philosophical/theological concept but as an existential reality, an actual event that shatters the foundational structures of meaning and purpose. For Altizer, the Incarnation is not just an event of divine self-revelation but a definitive moment where God fully enters the human condition, experiencing suffering, limitation, and death. According to Altizer, this kenotic movement is not a symbolic gesture but represents an absolute and irreversible identification of God with human finitude and mortality, culminating in the radical negation of God's transcendence. This radical kenosis marks the dissolution of God the Father as a distinct transcendent entity, leaving only the immanent presence of the divine within human experience: "God himself has ceased to exist in his original mode as transcendent or disincarnate Spirit" ([30] p. 69). This is a radical rupture in the fabric of reality, indicating the complete withdrawal of the divine presence—a transformative moment in human history that leaves humanity alone to confront the abyss of existence and a world devoid of transcendent meaning. Yet, the obliteration of traditional boundaries between the divine and the human, resulting in a God who is immanent, dynamic, and historically engaged, allows for the manifestation of God's ultimate solidarity with human suffering and finitude.

In this section, we explored some interpretations of the death of God, including (1) Sartre's "satisfied" nihilism; (2) Altizer's tragic reading; (3) Vattimo's optimism; and (4) Girard "qualified" optimism. Girard's viewpoint particularly highlights an acute awareness of the ongoing consequences of the death of God. As early as 1978, he noted, "Until now the absence of divinity was still a substitute for presence, which is now in the process of being effaced" ([31] p. 112). This substitute is now itself eroding, leading to a further breakdown in cultural cohesion. The *absence* of divinity, which once lent a semblance of order and meaning (albeit negatively), is itself becoming increasingly fragmented and ineffective. While some, like Sartre, may find solace in nihilism as a form of contentment, and others, like Altizer, view it through the lens of the tragic, Girard's observation suggests a deeper layer of complexity. His insight implies that the death of God is an ongoing process with unforeseen implications: "At this time we might say that even the death of God has begun to die" ([31] p. 112).

3. Kenosis: Do We Need the "Big Other"?

The notion of kenosis originates from Philippians 2:7, which portrays the Incarnation of Christ, stating that Christ "withdrew" or "emptied himself". Within this context, two discernible moments of kenosis emerge: first, Christ relinquishes divine absoluteness to assume human form; second, through suffering on the cross, Christ bears the sins of humanity. Importantly, this differs from the classical notion of "vicarious atonement" as kenosis focuses on the initial moment of the divine becoming human, which is not regarded as a mere act to facilitate the later sacrifice, but an expression of love in itself, as God enters into a deep relationship with humanity. The key aspect of kenotic sacrifice resides in the voluntary relinquishment of something inherent to one's nature for the benefit of others, without expecting any gain in return. The kenotic conception held a minor, but nonetheless significant, role in medieval and early modern philosophy and theology. Notable figures in this lineage include the medieval philosopher Meister Eckhart, the 17th century German mystic Jacob Böhme, and more recently the 20th century German theologian Jürgen Moltmann⁸. In this section, we pivot our exploration of the death of God towards the lens of kenosis, exploring the strengths and limitations of various interpretations, thereby gaining insight into its implications for the death of God.

According to Ten Kate [33], kenosis is marked by ambiguity, with thinkers employing it differently based on whether they emphasize distance or proximity between God and humanity. Those who emphasize distance, such as Karl Barth, Jean-Luc Marion, Emmanuel Levinas, and Mark C. Taylor, view kenosis as the "emptying" of "any positive relationship between God and the human beings". The second interpretation underscores the proximity between God and humanity, emphasizing the "de-hierarchisation and de-totalisation of

the religious relationship". Thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek, John Milbank, and Gianni Vattimo exemplify this perspective—although it should be added that the prototype of this interpretation traces back to Hegel's philosophy. Ten Kate suggests that emphasizing proximity poses challenges as it defies transcendence. Without transcendence, he argues, there can be no "other", and without "otherness", there is no relationship; in turn, "without relationship, there can be no religion" ([33] pp. 286–287, 291).

Let us briefly consider Žižek's and Vattimo's approaches to kenosis to assess Ten Kate's critique. Both draw on Hegel's conception (although Žižek's connection to Hegel is more explicit than Vattimo's). In Hegel's philosophy, there is a profound interconnection between kenosis as divine self-divestment and the death of God. The death of God, as a representation (*Vorstellung*) of kenotic self-sacrifice, is not final but transitional, from substance to subject; as elucidated by Williams, the outcome is "not that God dies, but that God suffers" ([34] p. 300). This perspective challenges traditional views of an immutable and impassible absolute by asserting that negation and suffering are inherent within God. By acknowledging suffering as an intrinsic aspect of divine experience, Hegel presents a vision of God deeply engaged in a self-realizing process.

Merold Westphal asserts, "Neither in the epistle to the Philippians nor in any of Paul's other writings is there any suggestion that God the Father or God the Holy Spirit has been emptied of their divine authority and their divine power". He argues that "It's only Hegel and, following Hegel, Vattimo and Altizer who interpret the Incarnation as the death of God the Father and the bringing of the deity completely to earth" ([35] p. 231). I am going to argue that while Westphal's assertion holds true for Altizer (and Žižek), it does not fully represent Hegel's nuanced conception of kenosis, nor does it align with Vattimo's interpretation.

Indeed, Hegel emphasizes the self-emptying aspect of the Incarnation, particularly regarding the Son's voluntary relinquishment of divine power. However, this does not imply the complete annihilation of God the Father. Instead, Hegel's framework suggests a dynamic process within the Godhead, wherein the Son's self-sacrifice leads to transformation rather than annihilation. Hegel's notion of kenosis entails a transition from substance to subject, wherein God undergoes suffering and negation but overcomes them. Therefore, Hegel's account does not entail the complete earthly embodiment of deity, but rather a profound reconfiguration of divine presence and agency. The death of God signifies not abandonment or annihilation, but rather a crucial stage in the continuous unfolding of divine consciousness.

Westphal's assertion holds true for Altizer. For Altizer, the death of God is real and ontological, indicating the end of God as a transcendent being and the complete immersion of divinity into the historical and temporal dimensions of human existence. Drawing insights from both Hegel and Nietzsche, Altizer sees them as converging on the notion of God's demise as an inevitable consequence of historical development. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in his view, is "a work that not only revolutionized philosophy, but for the first time created a philosophical realization of the death of God, a realization that is not only the consummation of Western philosophy, but is the recovery of a long hidden or forgotten ultimate ground of Christianity itself". This revolutionary thinking is also "the advent of a purely apocalyptic philosophical thinking, one reflecting the advent of the final Age of the Spirit, and an advent inseparable from the absolute self-negation or self-emptying of Absolute Spirit" ([36] p. 584)⁹. Hegel's conception is understood by Altizer as a dialectical process where God's transcendence is negated to bring about an *Aufhebung* of divine immanence and human consciousness—a simultaneous negation and preservation that allows for the emergence of *Geist* through the historical unfolding of human freedom and divine self-realization. Altizer argues that Hegel uniquely grasped atonement as God's internal struggle—the self-sacrifice of the abstract, transcendent God ("God in-itself") to become the active, embodied God ("God for-itself"). This death is not just about Jesus' crucifixion but a representation of a new, concrete totality and absolute freedom: "Here, crucifixion is resurrection, an identity which is first proclaimed in Paul and

the Fourth Gospel, and thus an identity which is the very center of an original Christianity, but an identity which was not fully realized theologically until Hegel" ([37] pp. 39–40).

However, Hegel's language, in Altizer's view, is not "offensive" enough, at least not in its immediate impact, whereas the language of Nietzsche "is the most purely offensive language which has ever been inscribed" ([38] p. xiii). Thus, Altizer integrates Hegelian dialectics with Nietzsche's reading of the death of God, interpreting the latter as both a historical event and an existential reality, which demands a new understanding of divinity and human agency. Such understanding comes from embracing opposing forces: a radical "Yes" to human existence and an absolute "No" to traditional metaphysical meaning. Altizer remarks that "this is a No which not Hegel but Nietzsche profoundly understands interiorly, which is just why Nietzsche is absolutely necessary to Hegel and only thereby can a purely and totally dialectical thinking actually be meaningful and real to us" ([39] p. 87). This coincidence of "Yes" and "No" creates a never-ending cycle of finding meaning in a world without a divine plan. Such ongoing confrontation with meaninglessness becomes a recurring "apocalypse", prompting a renewed search for meaning through radical acceptance.

In Altizer's view, therefore, the death of God is not merely the demise of a theological construct but a transformative event that redefines the relationship between the divine and the human. This kenotic process is a dynamic unfolding where God's self-negation paves the way for a new manifestation of divinity that is intimately bound to the historical and finite realities of human existence. Altizer's radical theology posits that true divinity is found not in transcendence but in the immanent and communal expressions of love, justice, and creativity within human history. However, Altizer acknowledges the potential for conflict and despair; the complete absence of a transcendent God can be a terrifying prospect, forcing humanity to confront the abyss of existence.

Altizer was a forerunner to Žižek, who, in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, writes under the direct influence of Altizer, although Žižek approaches the death of God from a Lacanian psychoanalytic and materialist perspective, viewing it as a radical ontological event that disrupts the symbolic order. For Žižek too, the death of God unequivocally marks the demise of the metaphysical *and transcendent* God ([40] p. 257). Žižek radicalizes Hegel's kenotic logic, aligning it with Altizer's complete dissolution of God into the world: God actually dies on the cross. Here, Žižek employs the term "God" neither literally nor metaphorically. Not literally, because Žižek is a materialist; for him, "there is no God". Yet, not metaphorically either, as if God were a mere metaphor, "a mystifying expression". Rather, "God" refers to "the inhuman core that sustains being-human", to what exceeds the boundaries of the human condition—the unknown, the unconscious, the Other ([40] p. 240). The "monstrous" forsaking of Jesus on the cross reveals the absence of any overarching entity—as Caputo puts it, it is the realization that "there is no 'Big Other' (God, Man, the Nation, the Party), no 'theological' place of transcendence". This event, however, heralds a potentially positive development, as it brings forth a new subject liberated from specific identities. Kenosis signifies that "we are on our own to establish the kingdom of God, or justice, on earth" ([41] p. 672). On the grounds of this radical reading of kenosis, Žižek "actively fights" against the "theological turn" of thinkers like Vattimo and Caputo, according to whom the secularization and obliteration of the moral-metaphysical God of onto-theology "opens up the space for the new authentic postmetaphysical religion, a Christianity focused on Agape". Their stance, he argues, is still one that does not risk everything, that accepts the death of God just to get God back. Conversely, for Žižek, the death of Christ "is the death of God himself"; therefore, he concludes, "[t]he only way to redeem the subversive core of Christianity" is "to return to death-of-God theology, especially Thomas Altizer", for whom what dies on the Cross "is not just the false (positive, ontic) envelope of Divinity, which was obfuscating its evental core; what dies is God himself, the structuring principle of our entire universe, its life-giving force, the guarantee of its meaning. The death of God thus equals the end of the world, the experience of 'darkness at noon'" ([40] pp. 255–260).

Conversely, Vattimo upholds, as seen above, a more hopeful interpretation of the death of God, as the transition towards immanence and humanization, with both epistemological and ethical implications. Epistemologically, the openness to the viewpoint of the other forms the foundation of genuine hermeneutic experience: kenosis is the “dissolution” or the “weakening of strong structures”—that is, *secularization*, understood as a “fuller realization” of the truth of Christianity, which is “the kenosis, the abasement of God, which undermines the ‘natural’ features of divinity” ([19] pp. 52, 47; see [42] p. 38). Ethically, kenosis involves self-relinquishment for the sake of the other, thereby serving as the model for *caritas*.

While some scholars have compared Vattimo’s view of kenosis to Altizer’s, others have already showed—successfully, in my view—that this is not the case¹⁰. Altizer emphasizes God’s changing nature, whereas Vattimo’s focus is on the death of the metaphysical God as paving the way for a renewed understanding of Christianity based on a personal encounter rather than absolute truths. In order to distinguish Vattimo from Altizer, it is not necessary to emphasize Vattimo’s distance from Hegel. In my research [45], I have striven to show that not only does Hegel not subscribe to a traditional, pre-Kantian ontotheology, but actually, that traditional metaphysical framework is precisely what Hegel wants to overcome. Even if Vattimo’s thought is influenced by Hegel, this does not contradict his anti-metaphysical stance. It is sufficient to point to Hegel’s conception of the transition from substance into subject to realize that this conception, in an admittedly weakened form, is compatible with Vattimo’s speculative framework¹¹.

Ten Kate categorizes both Žižek and Vattimo as “thinkers of proximity” between God and humanity. Yet, their approaches to this proximity differ significantly. For Žižek, God (as the “inhuman”) truly dies, whereas Vattimo views the death of the *metaphysical* God as a gateway to anti-metaphysical Christianity. Ten Kate argues that Vattimo’s rejection of transcendence eliminates the possibility of a relationship with transcendent otherness. However, Vattimo does regard kenosis as rooted in genuine otherness. As he claimed in one of his last published conversations, “For me, the encounter with this [Christian, kenotic] message is a personal encounter. ‘Jesus looked at him and loved him’ (Mk 10:21). This is enough for me. This idea that there is a message of truth that is communicated to me by a *person* fits well with the whole of Christianity, as well as with the whole of weak thought, which is a philosophy that does not believe in the existence of pre-determined structures or in ‘true’ propositions” ([47] p. 341).

Ten Kate introduces a third meaning of kenosis, one that “confronts the constant ‘negotiation’” between the extremes of distance and proximity. In his assessment, Derrida emerges as the most relevant thinker of this “third way”. Ten Kate terms this perspective “econokenosis”, delineating Derrida’s treatment of kenosis within an “economic” framework. In this framework, “the poles do no longer rest”; they engage in a perpetual fluctuation, challenging conventional notions of stability and rigid oppositions. Ten Kate posits that this third meaning of kenosis is not merely the intermingling of the two “traditional” interpretations but something radically new—a place of *différance* opened up by the economy. He cites Derrida’s *Sauf le nom* ([48] pp. 35–85), where kenosis intertwines with the economy and *différance*. This “place” of *différance* introduces a series of double binds, turning kenosis into econokenosis—a negotiation between competing parameters, culminating in the negotiation between humanity and God ([33] pp. 295–304).

I identify two issues with Ten Kate’s proposal. First, Derrida, as early as 1998, expressed reservations about the very notion of kenosis, viewing it as a potential hindrance to philosophical advancements. For Derrida, a God who relinquishes absoluteness in the Incarnation “would not even be able to promise or give himself both because he leaves and impoverishes himself (he says farewell to himself) and because, while leaving himself, he still does not leave himself, he does not abandon himself” ([49] p. xlii). Derrida regarded kenosis as “a toxic gift which does not liberate its recipients but enslaves them” through guilt, subjugating them “not by force, but by moral obligation” ([50] p. 193). Consequently, Derrida advocated for rejecting kenosis entirely: “We should then accomplish one more step”, he concluded, “and say farewell to this farewell of God to God” ([49] p. xlii). Given

these premises, it becomes challenging to envision how Derrida's perspective could form the basis for constructing a "third way" to kenosis.

Second, even if we consider the possibility of a Derrida-inspired account of kenosis, it would rely on the premise that an "economy of kenosis", unlike traditional dialectics aiming for synthesis, disrupts stable oppositions, challenging the logic of presence and identity. This approach would be innovative only if Hegelian *Aufhebung* indeed entailed an irenic synthesis. But it does not. *Aufhebung*, rather than being a peaceful reconciliation in the conventional sense, involves the sublation of the original contradiction while retaining its essential aspects within a higher unity; it is characterized by tension, conflict, and movement, rather than by a static or tranquil synthesis. *Aufhebung* entails a dynamic process of overcoming opposition through internal development, marked by struggle, transformation, and the recognition of difference. On the other hand, "econokenosis"—"choosing and living this double bind of kenosis" ([33] p. 299)—does not, in itself, necessarily do away with conventional reconciliation; as Camus observed about Kierkegaard, "Reconciliation through scandal is still reconciliation" ([51] p. 41).

That being said, I find Ten Kate's insights valuable for refining a viable account of kenosis. He reminds us that "Every relationship essentially needs an *other*" and that "Every relationship is, in a way, violent", while "in Vattimo's idea of kenosis, the ambivalence of violence and peace is unthinkable" ([33] pp. 291, 294). Concerning the former assertion, I could not agree more—that is precisely the reason why it is important not only not to deny the Hegelian influence on kenotic thought (including Vattimo's version of it), but also to revisit it, as its emphasis on *recognition* (*Anerkennung*) constitutes a significant aspect thereof. Regarding the latter claim, I do not believe that the ambivalence of violence and peace is "unthinkable" within Vattimo's framework of kenosis, but it is still largely *unthought*. As Derrida himself showed in one of his seminal works, *Plato's Pharmacy*, the *pharmakon* can be both poison and remedy. Recognizing this duality is important. Nevertheless, giving up on distinguishing them or passively accepting their interchangeable nature can be very dangerous—indeed, fatal.

4. Return to Hegel

We left Schmidt, the character of Sheckley's novel, struggling with how to respond to the question posed by the United Church Council: how to regain influence over humanity amidst the pervasive nihilistic message disseminated by the Machine. While Schmidt is pondering this quandary, the Machine itself enters into the cave and remarks that it is because of the willful abdication of religions that it has been forced "to carry out their work": "Not only you desert mankind, but you also deserted me. You left me victorious by default, the sole spiritual ruler of humanity—and utterly bored". The Machine then reveals its role in the recent proliferation of churches and the preaching of various theological doctrines, and proposes a collaboration with the Council to incite religious disputes and reign over mankind: "Together we will cause greater wars and more terrible cruelty than the world has ever known!". Enthralled by the Machine's vision, the Council eagerly embraces its leadership, electing it as chairman. Schmidt, witnessing these events with horror, confronts the unsettling realization that "even nothingness was simply one more lying trick to persuade men of their importance to the vanished gods".

Schmidt experiences a sort of nihilism to the second power, nihilism even toward nihilism itself. Is this not a poignant and disturbing portrayal of the current state of affairs? As Marcel already noted, invitations of this kind mount from all sides: "Messieurs, je vous annonce que Dieu est liquidé, nous voici!"—an "advertising declaration [*déclaration publicitaire*]", because "it is obviously intended to cause a sensation", a mere marketing gimmick ([52] p. 82; see [9], p. 404). It is not difficult to imagine Sheckley's Machine uttering those words, advocating the worship of nothingness, the nothing as value. It is Nietzsche's prophecy fulfilled: people now venerate a multitude of substitutes, from rocks to stupidity, from gravity to fate—even pure nothingness. The once-clear boundaries between religious beliefs, and even between faith in God and faith in nothingness, blur. In

our era, the temptation arises to see the solution proposed by the Machine as the only one: an *economy of transcendence and nothingness*. As Girard noted, the death of God has sparked a proliferation of religious phenomena. Now, the cave of the United Church Council of Earth bears a striking resemblance with Plato's pharmacy, where poisons and remedies are virtually indistinguishable, and gods can happily emerge from it arm in arm with Satan and with the nihilistic Machine. . . to do what? To catalyze greater conflicts and unprecedented cruelty. In a world saturated with never-true-never-false interpretations, violence becomes the sole means to assert the (always transient and precarious) dominance of one interpretation over another.

But this is not the only possibility. A lucid analysis of the predicament is provided by Moltmann. He suggests that while the modern world may feel engulfed in the abyss of nothingness, there exists an alternative perspective—one that views this crisis as integral to the universal revelation of God through the cross and resurrection: "Then the stringency of the world's god-forsakenness is not in itself enough to ruin it, but its ruination comes only when it abstracts the element of the expending and death of God from the dialectical process of God and fastens on that" ([53] p. 169)¹². The world's ruin stems solely from the *abstraction* of God's death from the dialectical process of God. But is this abstraction not similar to Derrida's proposal? By advocating bidding farewell to the farewell of God to God, Derrida abstracts kenosis from its dialectical context. His rejection of kenosis reflects a tendency to isolate the negative aspect of God's death, divorcing it from its role within the broader narrative of God's revelation. Beneath the veneer of an "economical" interpretation lies the temptation to reject kenosis altogether, reducing it to a transactional concept devoid of its transformative potential to challenge prevailing power systems. By considering kenosis as a means for God to impose moral obligation over humanity, Derrida's interpretation does not relinquish violence, which remains entangled within a framework of transactional exchange. In other words, Derrida's interpretation acknowledges the presence of violence, but does not actively seek to overcome it. Instead, it may (inadvertently) contribute to its normalization within systems of exchange and power dynamics. By refusing kenosis, Derrida remains ensnared in Plato's pharmacy, perhaps foregoing the only escape we are left with—our only way to grapple with God's death.

But which version of kenosis should we embrace? If we combine our analyses from the previous sections, we find ourselves torn between Altizer and Žižek's view, which sees kenosis as the actual death of God, and Vattimo's more hopeful interpretation, which views kenosis as the demise of the abstract and violent God of metaphysics.

Consider the former view. Žižek aligns with Altizer's conception, portraying Christianity's essence as revealed in "rare apocalyptic moments": "The crucified Jesus is the apocalyptic Jesus: it stands for the end of the world as we knew it, the end of time, when God himself dies, empties himself; at this point of apocalypse, opposite coincide, the lone Jesus is Satan himself, his death is the death of Evil, so that crucifixion and resurrection are one event" ([40] p. 261). Žižek, citing Altizer, asserts the "profoundly revolutionary force" of apocalypticism. I sympathize with this assertion, as never before have we been in such dire need of some revolutionary force. However, here, Žižek seems to overlook Hegel's cautionary stance. Despite Hegel's steadfast support for the French Revolution, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, he warns against the consequences of revolutionary zeal and contends that in the midst of Terror, death becomes the sole expression of *absolute freedom*: "the coldest, emptiest death of all, having no more meaning than chopping off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water" ([54] p. 343). Duque has recently argued that Hegel, in this section of *Phenomenology*, is concerned with the attempt to "mitigate" or "evade" the tragic implications of the death of God through the full liberation from Nature and God, that is, through the purported "triumph of absolute freedom" embodied in the Revolution ([55] p. x). However, the Terror vividly demonstrates that abstract freedom and full liberation from God do not offer a viable solution to the subject's inability to master itself as substance. We can argue that Hegel foresaw the aftermath of absolute freedom following the death of God: unbridled violence. In the economy of a world dominated

by absolute abstract freedom, violence becomes the only currency and bargaining tool. Furthermore, apocalypticism inherently risks reverting to what Sartre termed “the practical inert”—as Vattimo put it, all the “objective transformations bring with them the risk of dominion, the risk of a power that re-establishes itself” ([47] p. 344).

On the other hand, Ten Kate’s claim that in Vattimo’s conception of kenosis, the ambivalence of violence and peace is “unthinkable” hits a nerve somehow. In my view, Vattimo’s flaw, if any, lies in excessive optimism. While he posits that the death of God could promote peaceful coexistence among interpretations, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential for the opposite outcome—a battleground of interpretations. The absence of a transcendent anchor may lead to competing narratives and interpretations vying for dominance, potentially igniting ideological conflicts. Is there a third way between Žižek’s apocalypticism and Vattimo’s, perhaps overly hopeful, perspective? I believe so, and it entails a return to Hegel.

It is crucial to emphasize that Hegel’s conception of the death of God must be situated within a different interpretative horizon than Nietzsche’s. As Williams explains, while Nietzsche “identifies the Christian tradition and God entirely with morality and alienation”, for Hegel, Christianity “need not, and must not restrict itself to the moral God” ([34] p. 5). For Hegel, the death of God is “the highest divestment [*Entäußerung*] of the divine idea” ([56] p. 125). The Hegelian notion of kenosis encompasses the “death of God” in two ways. First, God ceases being purely divine and *externalizes* Godself, becoming human (*Entäußerung*). Second, God fully embodies humanity: by experiencing human limitations and ultimately death, God *remembers* the divine nature not just as abstract perfection, but as a being capable of love, sacrifice, and solidarity with creation (*Erinnerung*). Kenosis is regarded by Hegel as expressing the *relation* between divinity and humanity, not a choice between them. The interplay between externalization (*Entäußerung*) and internalization (*Erinnerung*) highlights the dynamic between external manifestation and internal transformation, where truth is not merely an abstract in-itself but a dynamic unity that comes into being through self-awareness. This kenotic process does not entail the complete annihilation of God; rather, it showcases true divinity through self-emptying. Genuine divine love does not distance itself from human frailty but manifests in sacrificial love. The introduction of negativity into God forms the foundation for the unity of the divine and the human ([56] p. 326; see [45] p. 134), as this negation is subsequently negated through the Crucifixion, leading to the emergence of the Holy Spirit and enabling the complete revelation of God (see [57]).

Jaeschke maintains that Hegel’s philosophy of religion aims to serve as a post-death-of-God philosophical theology, and adds, “What is of particular interest to Hegel is that this death needs to be *thought*” ([58] p. 16). But thought *how*? As I proposed in previous works ([45] p. 131), the notion of God, as the pinnacle of normativity¹³, is initially perceived as entirely external (“abstract”), then integrated with the self (through the Incarnation), and ultimately relinquished (with the death on the cross). The human self is then “left alone to create its own world” ([60] p. 95)—to establish its own norms. What perishes in the death of God—Hegel claims that explicitly—is the “representational thought [*Vorstellung*]” containing “the death of the *abstraction of the divine essence* which is not yet posited as a self” ([54] p. 451). This further representational externalization (*Entäußerung*) is crucial for envisioning God’s demise as abstract being and reconceptualizing God in modernity. Indeed, the recognition of the death of the abstract God of traditional metaphysics exposes the human subject to the establishment of normativity independently of the relationship with God. This risk materializes historically in the Enlightenment and, subsequently, in left Hegelianism ([45] p. 145). In fact, Hegel concludes by claiming “That death is the agonized [*schmerzliche*] feeling of the unhappy consciousness that *God himself is dead*” ([54] p. 451). The use of the term *schmerzliche*, meaning “agonized” or (perhaps more aptly) “agonizing”, suggests a critique of prevalent humanist optimism regarding secularization and the loss of normativity. According to Hegel, this process also carries a tragic dimension often disregarded in humanist accounts, which typically endorse subjectivist perspectives.

Hence, Hegel opposes subjectivism, which reduces God to a reflection of the “I” (which alone is regarded as real) and maintains that it is possible to think of the self apart from an idea of normativity of the kind once provided by God. Conversely, for Hegel, the maturity and freedom of the modern self can be fully appreciated only when the self is thought of in relation to the idea of God and God’s death (see [45] pp. 132–135).

The death of God needs to be *thought* and then *known*. The knowledge of the death of God (its conceptualization) is therefore spirit-giving (*Be-geistung*), “as a result of which substance becomes subject” ([54] p. 451), a process wherein the union between God and the self is achieved in a twofold way: God, externalizing Godself (*Entäußerung*), assumes (human) finitude, and the (human) self becomes able to contribute to normative frameworks ([45] p. 132). The balance between God and the “I” in shaping normativity requires reassessment to reflect the relative weight of the ideas of God and the “I” in forging the normative framework of reason’s use: the weakening of the normative role of the idea of God corresponds to the heightened normative role of the “I”. Specifically, the notion of the death of God is the expression of a mutual dependency between the idea of God and the idea of the self; this interdependence lies at the heart of Hegel’s recognition-based idealist metaphysics. The death of God encapsulates a significant historical shift, marking the transition from the notion of the “I” disjoined from the idea of normativity formerly provided by God to a more integrated perspective (see [45] pp. 126, 144).

In the preceding section, we have reaffirmed that Altizer’s belief in the changing nature of God cannot be attributed to Vattimo. But what about Hegel? Is the death of God merely a “metaphor for a change in human experience”, or is it “part of the life of the Absolute itself”? ([61] p. 26)¹⁴. While Žižek addresses this issue by regarding God as the “Inhuman”, my stance is that the question does not make sense within the context of Hegel’s idealist metaphysics, because we cannot transcend our finite perspective to achieve a purely objective understanding of reality. If God is not wholly transcendent, discussions about God’s attributes are inseparable from our conceptualization of them. This is why, as I have argued elsewhere ([45], p. 73), for Hegel, the meaning of religious representations—including the death of God—is to be identified neither solely in their historical nature nor solely in the spiritual meaning that they are intended to convey, but rather in the *figural* relationship between this historical nature and spiritual meaning. Hegel employs this approach because he deems it the most appropriate method to attain what I have termed “mediated objectivity”, namely, an objectivity that reflects the contribution of the self-conscious mind in the establishment of the content of metaphysical objects¹⁵.

If that is indeed the case, then what is the figural meaning of kenosis? It is that God self-actualizes *in* the relation with us. As Williams puts it, “what ‘dies’, i.e., what God renounces and divests, is precisely exclusive *fürsichsein*, relationless identity and substance, devoid of subjectivity, to wit, the impassible divine being”: God suffers because God “cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of God’s other” ([34] p. 243). Thus, as God undergoes death in corporeal form to become Spirit *for* the world, humans attain their true humanity by embracing this divine love, relinquishing selfish will, and fostering mutual love and recognition among themselves to become spirit *in* the world. Truly divine love manifests within a human community grounded in mutual recognition (see [45] p. 144; [63] p. 556).

Pace Žižek, the death of God does not result in the merging of opposites, and Jesus is not Satan. God’s suffering is not “necessary” for Hegel, but rather “gratuitous”—occurring “for the sake of God’s other” ([34] p. 51)¹⁶. From a Hegelian standpoint, the kenosis of God’s death is not the negation of radical otherness, but rather (human) spirit’s encounter with it. This encounter yields two potential outcomes, as Hegel illustrates drawing on Böhme’s works ([64] p. 19; see [65] p. 69). The first outcome involves *fürsichsein*, namely self-centeredness and separation from the other, as epitomized by Lucifer and characterized by a focus solely on oneself. The second outcome, exemplified by Jesus, entails the acceptance of otherness *as otherness* within divine love. Jesus embodies a harmonious coexistence

of difference and unity, wherein self-liberation arises from a generous openness and a willingness to negotiate one's own identity.

Is this a form of *Aufhebung*? For Hegel, undoubtedly so. Although, as previously discussed, *Aufhebung* carries a meaning far removed from the irenic synthesis often associated with his philosophy, it is likely that, from Nietzsche's standpoint, the Hegelian resolution might still be viewed with skepticism. Hegel's approach, integrating the death of God into a dialectical process that ultimately reconstitutes divine presence in a new form, might seem to Nietzsche an attempt to domesticate the radical implications of God's death, thereby undermining the potential for true creative freedom that he envisions. Nietzsche might see Hegel's resurrected God as a mere consolation prize, a feeble attempt to reassert the very structures that the death of God had toppled, blocking the ushering in the era of unfettered creativity and self-overcoming that Nietzsche advocates. Effectively, one might argue that, at the juncture of intellectual history in which we live—vividly portrayed by Sheckley's character Schmidt, standing bewildered and disheartened at the mouth of the cave—any semblance of *Aufhebung*, even as reconstructed above, may appear unattainable.

However, from a Hegelian standpoint, Nietzsche's vision of the death of God fails to recognize the necessary development of human consciousness through historical processes. The death of God, while a necessary stage in the historical unfolding of spirit, necessitates a new form of meaning-making. In response to this predicament, we might conceive of this movement in terms of a Heideggerian *Verwindung*—a transformative “going beyond” that entails both acceptance and deepening, signifying both “healing” and “distorting”. *Verwindung* involves surpassing traditional metaphysical structures and embracing a perspective that integrates the temporal dimension of norms and the inherent finitude even within the very source of norms—God. *Verwindung* does not negate the presence of radical otherness, and not even of violence. However, it does not forfeit the endeavor to sublimate otherness and minimize violence¹⁷.

A post-metaphysical kenotic thought requires not just a symbolic reconfiguration of kenosis—as undertaken by Vattimo—but also a *conceptual* re-appropriation. As previously noted, Vattimo's “optimist” view of the death of God fostering harmony may overlook its potential to incite interpretational conflict. In our contemporary context, confronting the death of God may demand a deeper commitment to relinquishing self-centeredness—a process of de-centering. Only through this can we evade the violence of the “sacred”, which now also encompasses the sacrality of a pseudo-ecumenism that blurs distinctions, passively witnessing gods exiting the cave arm in arm with Satan and the nihilistic Machine. But to take this step forward, we need an openness concretized in creative *caritas*. To put it in the form of the evagelic gnomic wisdom, we should be “cunning as snakes and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). In this notion of *caritas* lies much more than a “trendy being-nice-to-each-other” ([46] p. 379). Vattimo remarks that any ontological listening must be “supplemented by a political listening to the voices of lost generations, those who were muted and masked by the injustices of history, erased in the official version of history—the triumphal account written by the mighty and powerful (empires, kingdoms, churches, victorious states or statesmen)” ([66] p. 146).

As we have seen, for Hegel, kenosis is *Entäußerung*, externalization; yet, *Entäußerung* also needs *Erinnerung*, internalization, which constitutes an integral aspect of kenotic thought. This process involves recollecting and reclaiming memories of past struggles, suffering, and alternatives, thereby generating, owing to their transformative power, an inner redefinition of human subjects. The constructive re-appropriation of memories serves as a conduit to inspire and steer actions in the present, contributing to the ongoing process of societal development and transformation. Memories, too, should be handled in terms of a *Verwindung*, a process of acceptance, deepening, and re-creation, to assimilate past victories, defeats, struggles, and envisioned futures. Only then can they become our own, guiding us in the post-death of God world (see [67] pp. 40–45).

The full acceptance of the event of the death of God allows for, and perhaps even requires, such recollection. Kenotic thought provides the resources for a profound engage-

ment with the memories of past struggles and suffering, offering a way of remembering that listens to the silenced voices of history. By fully embracing the event of the death of God, we unlock the potential for a radical reimagining of existence and relationships, grounded in *caritas* and selflessness. This vision of self-emptying love and humility challenges the prevailing logic of power and domination, thereby advocating for solidarity amidst existential uncertainty. Ultimately, kenosis offers a horizon for fostering a more humane and just society, one that transcends traditional metaphysical structures and responds creatively to the needs of a post-death of God world. More remains to be carried out to think and present kenotic thought in ways more closely in tune with our lived experiences, and in the course of this process, concepts themselves might falter, and words will seem to be lacking. Hopefully, little by little, the words will return.

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Notes

- 1 Robert Sheckley's *The Journey of Joenes* [1] was published in 1962. Interestingly, Sheckley names his pious character after Hans Schmidt, a German Catholic priest, rapist, murderer, and suspected serial killer, executed at Sing Sing Prison in 1916.
- 2 The event is recalled by Marcel [6] p. 32.
- 3 One might argue that a possible solution to this predicament could be found outside the Western tradition and its monotheistic framework, for example in certain Buddhist schools that do not rely on the idea of a supreme being. The issue is too complex to be more than alluded to here; however, it might be worth noting that the question of the "death of God" concerns not only the idea of "the one true god" but, more fundamentally, the idea of an ultimate horizon of meaning—and even non-Western and non-theistic religious frameworks are not immune to this question.
- 4 For an explanation of how intellectual sacrifices function within Girard's mimetic theory, see [23] pp. 12–24.
- 5 In a letter to Schwager, also dated 1984, Girard refers to Heidegger's essay as "very powerfully mistaken [*puissamment faux*]" ([24] p. 136).
- 6 Girard illustrates our existential condition referring to the individual in Luke 11, 24–26, who "is delivered from the demon but fails to use this experience to give his life a more positive meaning. The demon, in turn, profits from this and returns to his old home—but this time accompanied by seven others who are all much worse!" ([29] pp. 105–106).
- 7 Among the proponents of radical theology, alongside Thomas J. J. Altizer, notable figures include Gabriel Vahanian, Paul Van Buren, Dorothee Sölle, William Hamilton, John Robinson, Mark C. Taylor, and John D. Caputo.
- 8 For a fuller introduction to the notion of kenosis, see [32] pp. 2–5.
- 9 The quote in English is from Altizer's original manuscript.
- 10 See [43] p. 8. Harris shows that it is not Vattimo's intention to construe God in terms of an Absolute "weakened in ontic terms". However, I disagree with Harris's argument that Vattimo's thought is not influenced by Hegel. Harris's position responds to Scigliano's claim that Vattimo's thought is fundamentally Hegelian ([44] p. 528). In my view, both Scigliano and Harris rely on a somewhat outdated interpretation of Hegel.
- 11 Vattimo's account of kenosis has encountered criticism on other fronts. Specifically, Meganck [46] criticizes Vattimo's "restricted reading of kenosis". While space limitations prevent a thorough discussion of these critiques here, I believe that Vattimo's perspective, despite its reliance on the symbolic, can be argumentatively defended.
- 12 Moltmann significantly contributed to the development of a kenotic account, extending it to the view of creation as the result of God's withdrawal from Godself. This act of divine self-restriction precedes God's creative activity, suggesting that God's self-humiliation is not merely a consequence of creation but its essential precondition. Moltmann emphasizes that God's creative love is rooted in God's humble, self-emptying nature. This self-limiting love marks the beginning of the self-emptying process described in Philippians 2. Even in the act of creating heaven and earth, God relinquishes omnipotence and adopts the form of a servant. Thus, God's creative and redemptive acts are both grounded in humility and self-emptying love.
- 13 On the idea of God as the "guarantor for the context of all things", see [59] pp. 105ff.

- 14 Elsewhere ([45] p. 136), I referred to the question of whether the death of God occurred solely “for us” or in an “external” reality as the “reality of the death of God problem”.
- 15 One could argue that Vattimo glimpsed the possibility of this kind of figural interpretation in the context of his discussion of Joachim of Fiore’s doctrine of the “spiritual intelligence of Scripture”, i.e., the “capacity to grasp the events narrated in the Bible as ‘figures’ of other historical events” ([62] p. 28).
- 16 Hegel asserts that this “consummation of externality” occurs “in conscious negation” ([56] p. 132); therefore, Žižek’s ideal—the “ethical monster without empathy, doing what is to be done in a weird coincidence of blind spontaneity and reflexive distance, helping others while avoiding their disgusting proximity” ([40] p. 303)—is very far from Hegel’s kenotic ideal, if only because “blind spontaneity” does not align well with Hegel’s emphasis on self-consciousness.
- 17 See Girard’s discussion of the *katēchon* as the “least violence” that is necessary to maintain, because without it “nothing would stand in the way of absolute violence” ([25] p. 98).

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