

BEYOND CONTINENTS

ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF WILLIAM JAMES AND RICHARD KEARNEY

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Richard Kearney is a contemporary continental philosopher with interests in the divine beyond the onto-theological.¹ In *The God Who May Be*, Kearney is interested in an eschatological hermeneutic of God rather than a traditional metaphysical interpretation. His justification for such a conceptualization of God is drawn from sacred scriptures of various religious faiths—but in this work, predominantly Christian and Jewish. Echoing Heidegger's claim in the introduction to *Being and Time* that possibility stands higher than actuality,² Kearney's eschatological hermeneutic yields an onto-eschatological position of God as possibility. That is, God neither *is* nor *is not* but *may be*. Kearney asserts that such an understanding of God most appropriately resolves some abrasive points between theistic and ethical notions. For instance, he suggests that an onto-eschatological conception of God satisfies the problem of theodicy more aptly than a traditional metaphysical understanding of God as First Cause, Unmoved Mover, etc.³ The issue of theodicy is alleviated when God is reinterpreted as becoming possible within and through just human acts. Thus, Kearney's somewhat philosophically iconoclastic interpretation of God has sought to reassert a God who has been subverted and muted by traditional metaphysics in favor of one "more attuned to the original biblical context of meaning."⁴

Essentially, Kearney's God of onto-eschatologically is onto-temporal. Such a God's very being is realized as he comes meaningfully alongside his beloved ones in an interplay of anticipation and desire into the future. An onto-eschatological God is not reducible to a static creative and giving act that moved once and finally. Rather, an onto-eschatological God is the surprising and donological God of dynamic and regenerative revelation depicted in sacred scriptures, stories and experiences. Such an interpretation seeks to establish a perpetually receptive mindset toward the infinity

and movement of God that *is* beyond metaphysical prejudgments.

William James, not unlike a legion of philosophers, was interested in examining questions of God, ethics and knowledge. Interestingly, as I hope to show, James' position on such issues is quite similar to the results of Kearney's hermeneutic. This is particularly interesting since these thinkers come from quite different philosophical traditions: Kearney from a European phenomenological/hermeneutical method of thought, and James from an American empirico-pragmatist background. However, as an introductory point of commonality, I believe that attention to the many facts and facets of human experience is responsible for both thinkers bringing out their notions of God and the ethical from the abstracted Absolute or onto-theological. It is their unswerving vigilance to real-time positive effects of the religious in human life on the one hand, and the horrible facts of human atrocity on the other hand, that gives impetus to their conclusion that God's nature exists as possibility.

The particular interest of this essay is to offer a comparison of these philosopher's positions with special interest regarding the nature of the ethical and the divine. Furthermore, by way of this fruitful comparison, I will assert that James' position can serve to philosophically amplify Kearney's interpretation of the divine possible and avoid some problems that Kearney runs up against. Specifically, the amplification flows from what I will call James' eschatological notion of truth (which I will qualify below). I will suggest that given similar approaches to the ethical and the divine between the two thinkers, Kearney can go beyond a long-standing tension between the ontological and eschatological in the contemporary continental tradition. That is, Kearney can supplement his ontological characterization of God as *Possess* by asserting with James an eschatological conception of truth itself and

thereby address the problematic tendency in the contemporary continental context to oppose the ontological with the eschatological.⁵ James' notion of truth takes the bite out of the will-to-power and violent status of ontological commitments and allows such judgments to become more convertible with the eschatological.

Since I am primarily interested in offering a comparative reading, I will look at specific pertinent texts. In general, I will compare Kearney's *The God Who May Be* with a compilation of James' lectures entitled *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (since the latter is a fine overview of James' overall philosophy). Although Kearney approaches the question of the ethical and theistic through hermeneutics, he unapologetically arrives at a positive ontological position. It is Kearney's ontological position that serves as the strongest point of comparison of eschatological dimensions between Kearney's onto-eschatology and William James' pragmatic and metaphysical approach to the ethical and theistic.

James and Kearney: The Ethical

I begin the comparison with the deeply ethical substance of their philosophies. For both philosophers, the ethical aspect stands as an important interpretive key to the whole thrust of their thought. Regarding James, Ruth Putnam asserts that "James' writings in moral philosophy . . . provide the best entrance into his thinking."⁶ In fact, the philosophical maxim that the worth of any concept held for judgment hinges on the practical effect that it will have in action—in its "cash-value"—is inherently ethical and stands as an essential mark of pragmatism itself. In fact, all worthy conceptual judgments are inextricably linked with human action and its value. For James, all worthy philosophical thought connotes the ethical since the worth of both the ethical and the philosophical converges in the assessment of action.

Likewise, Richard Kearney's ethical position is both sympathetic to and motivated by Levinas' ethical theory in which the ethical is given more weight than metaphysics; or rather, the ethical has a vitally basic ontological status in the metaphysics of the human person and re-

ality itself. For example, Levinas states in *Otherwise than Being* that the ethical is "older even than the *a priori*,"⁷ showing that, given the fundamental structure of otherness to *Dasein*, ethical concerns become primary. Similarly, Kearney has an ethical motivation and approach in his consideration of God as *Possesst* and argues that such a conception addresses the problem of theodicy most expressly. In fact, his approach to the onto-eschatological notion of God is identified largely through the ethical notion of *persona* in the first chapter of *The God Who May Be*.

Thus, the intersection of James' and Kearney's thought begins with tracings of a thoroughgoing ethical impetus in each respective philosophy. That these philosophers have such a deeply ethical influence working itself through the whole of their thought is rather a change from a majority of thinkers who deduce or proceed to their ethical systems by a protraction of their metaphysical/ontological positions; e.g., Aquinas, Kant, Heidegger, et al. Often, ethical considerations cohere as residual metaphysical afterthoughts—simultaneously an ethical and an ontological mistake according to Kearney and James. Nevertheless, in order to make appropriate comparisons (regarding their ethical positions) I shall begin with an examination of James' lecture entitled "Pragmatism and Humanism," prefaced by a brief synopsis of his general pragmatic theory. Next, I shall proceed to a discussion of Kearney's first chapter entitled, "Toward a Phenomenology of the *Persona*" which stands as an anti-ethical foundation for the conception of the divine eschaton.

To say the least, William James was well-enamored with philosophical pragmatism; a philosophy which asserts itself most strongly as a theory of truth. Therefore, in order to understand James' notion of the ethical, a brief introduction to the pragmatist theory of truth is required. The method is encapsulated aptly in the following explanation:

Pragmatism . . . signifies the insistence on the usefulness or practical consequences as a test of truth. In its negative phase, it opposes what it styles the formalism or rationalism of Intellectualistic philosophy. That is, it objects to the view that concepts, judgments, and reasoning processes are representative of reality and

the processes of reality. It considers them to be merely symbols, hypotheses and *schemata* devised by man to facilitate or render possible the use, or experience, of reality. This use, or experience, is the true test of real existence. In its positive phase, therefore, Pragmatism sets up as the standard of truth some non-rational test, such as action, satisfaction of needs, realization in conduct, the possibility of being lived, and judges reality by this norm to the exclusion of all others.⁸

According to James' pragmatism, in order for an idea to achieve truth status it must be consistently actionable and livable. In addition, it must cohere usefully with the bulk of one's pre-established conceptions. If it does not cohere with one's other relevant beliefs, the belief in question must be either retested by experience or the bulk of pre-established beliefs that most closely connect to the belief in question must be re-examined. Hence, James envisions truth as more dynamic than static—truth is intricately linked to the process of cogitation upon experience itself. He succinctly comments that "truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events."⁹

Yet, although truth is grounded as a subjective and expedient notion, James saves the objective by considering the expedient in the public sphere of thought. In fact, since the ground of truth is the expedient, the concept or belief determined as expedient is most available to proper objective verification across the range of humanity since it can be verified by experience and the criterion of livability. All true beliefs, although they must cohere with experience, need not only be strictly empirical but also may include beliefs that are ethical, religious, aesthetic, etc. According to pragmatism, all ultimately expedient beliefs are true and many non-empirical beliefs in the aforementioned categories of thought are expedient and pertinent to human life and experience (rather than to purely scientific knowledge).

From a novel notion of truth, James moves seamlessly to the ethical. He extends the pragmatic notion of truth to the ethical realm: "'The true,' to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as 'the right' is only the expedient in the way of our behaving."¹⁰ Thus, he proceeds from an evolutionary notion of truth to an evolutionary no-

tion of the ethical since both are grounded in the expedient.¹¹ Such an understanding of truth in relation to human values involves a radical turning of minds and judgments to the world of experience in order to learn the truth of how ethical positions yield true happiness and overall social expediency. Consequently, human contribution and conditioning become important elements in the depiction of reality. In James' thought, human perspective, reality, experience and truth converge in a nexus. This is quite different from certain rationalist positions (which he is largely criticizing in his lectures) that assert an Absolute Truth picture of reality that is somehow abstracted from human experience and human values.

In answer to his rationalist critics, James maintains that the pragmatic notion of truth and reality—although indefinitely pliable regarding the strong role of human experience—is not a relativism. Rather, he argues that his pragmatic and humanist notion of reality possesses "something *resisting*, yet malleable, which controls our thinking as an energy that must be taken 'account' of incessantly (tho [sic] not necessarily merely copied)."¹² For James, something indeed stands over and above one's conceptions that stand as a real corroboration for one's ideas, but since one must never forsake the striving toward making sense of experience as it unfolds one must never close off from experience by absolutizing concepts. Furthermore, the aforementioned resisting that shapes thought toward objectivity is revealed in the "cash-value" of an idea. The workable application of an idea with experience shows a coupling of the subjective judgment with objective reality. Yet, there is no guarantee that any given workable or livable idea will always be a workable or livable idea regarding future experience or in relation to the flux of important beliefs that one holds at any given time. Thus, James resists the tendency to jettison any notion of transcendence in favor of stressing vigilance to the openness of experience itself and the dangers of blind rationalism. This is a point that is compatible with Kearney's position who wants not to dismiss the possibility of the transcendent.¹³

Thus, there are two pivotal elements in James' ethics. The first is that all concepts need to be positively actionable in some edifying

form. This is especially important since truth relies on an overall consistency and coherence with other beliefs and experiences. Subsequently, this means that scientific truths must be consistent with common sense truths and each of these must be consistent with social truths (ethical truths) and each of these must be consistent with religious truths, etc. Such a holistic notion of truth is grounded in the world of experience insofar as all concepts must enhance one's interaction with overall human experience and value. A second aspect of James' philosophy is that it possesses an eschatological notion of truth, and hence, has an inability to absolutely pre-establish the truth of a judgment given the almost arbitrary flux of human experience and the causal web of personal beliefs. That is, vigilance and open-mindedness is an integral element in James' epistemology and ethics. James comments that whereas "for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity . . . for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future."¹⁴ All realms of reality—the scientific, the common sensical, the ethical, the religious—are always awaiting further determination from the future. This importantly implies that one's present understanding is at the same time significantly indeterminate: all concepts are revisable in light of future experience.

James' eschatological notion of ethics is comparable with Kearney's ethical phenomenology of *persona*. Kearney presents *persona* as radically eschatological insofar as it is neither epistemologically reducible to any other nor is it temporally exhaustible. *Persona* is always both already here but yet still to come. *Persona* is the truly dynamic otherness of one who stands in the face of another—*persona* is the reasoning behind the adage that "no one can ever have another's 'number.'" *Persona* is surprising and startling to those attuned to the infinite *persona* in each human being; for, *persona* involves the visceral presence that is possible only in the "thisness" of the other and cannot be reduced away merely through an adumbration of personal or individual characteristics (no matter how exhaustive). Kearney expands:

Persona is all that in others exceeds my searching gaze, safeguarding their inimitable and

unique singularity. It is what escapes me toward another past that I cannot recover and another future I cannot predict. . . . The *persona* of the other outstrips both the presenting consciousness of my *perception* here and now and the presentifying consciousness of my *imagination*.¹⁵

Persona ultimately transcends any schema or conceptualization that one is always tempted to impose on the other—a way through which one may gain power and manipulative control over another.¹⁶ Rather, *persona* is not something other than the person himself or herself. *Persona* is grounded in the singularity of each person. It reveals and withholds itself in all of the particular characteristics and *haecceity* of a person. Thus, the *persona* is actively present in and through each moment as the very being of the other. Consequently, when we interact ethically with the other—in order to do the most justice to the eschatological nature of the other—we should seek to see the other simultaneously in his or her singularity and diversity, with a cognizance that it is in the singularity of the other through which the eschaton, gift and being of the *persona* comes. The onto-eschatological nature of the other comes precisely through the incomprehensibility of the other.¹⁷ One needs to envision the other in his or her individuality as constantly renewing, surprising and incomprehensible. One must not minimize the other by projecting and labeling pre-established conceptions onto the other. Such a minimization is inherently unethical since it is a reduction of the other to one's sameness and subjectivity merely for the sake of manipulation and exploitation.

Already, with only a brief introduction of Kearney's ethical designation of *persona*, some important points of intersection with the eschatological hints in James' own ethical understanding come to the fore. I shall outline a few salient similarities.

First, as mentioned, the ethical in James is inextricably linked with action and livability. This means that our fantastically abstract ethical notions must not absorb us and render us closed off from the reality staring us in the face. We must never overlook experience and our interplay with it. A good ethical action is one that bears good fruit in the overall experi-

ence of human beings and humanity's interests broadly considered. The Kantian world of the ethical in relation to the principled well-wisher is rejected by James and his pragmatism in favor of a more empirically minded ethic grounded in real-time effects. The synonymous coupling of the ethical with the actionable involves a pragmatic imperative in which "we must be prepared at all times to revise our judgments in response to complaints from those whose demands have gone unmet."¹⁸ Such an open-ended ethical system frees up the process of conceptualization for truly ethical actions by virtue of its inherent revisionary and dynamic structure. This avoids overlooking the world for the sake of a "pure" and elegant ethical world-system in favor of fixing one's attention on the flux of human experience and overarching connectivity of human interests and values.

This is very much like Kearney's ethical conception of *persona* which follows Levinas' emphasis on the overwhelming demands of the other who is neither able to be satisfied or understood but whose ontological otherness is locked in an irreducibly mysterious front-on gaze. However, Kearney differs significantly from Levinas by grounding the ethical in the radically particular as opposed to that something beyond the particular and identified as "otherness." That is, Kearney would criticize Levinas' overemphasis on the transcending nature of otherness of the other to the neglect of the radical particularity of the other as *persona*. Kearney states that the otherness of the other cannot be attended to without attending to the particularity of the *persona* that is both constantly coming through (but never having fully arrived) and already given. Kearney's development of Levinas' ethics is compatible with James' ethical notion in that for both James and Kearney the ethical must always be open to the future revelation of experience that goes beyond all categories previously applied to the other. However, at the same time, the particular characteristics through which one understands the other are also required in the continuing revelation of *persona*. Likewise, there is vigilance and attention to the singularities of the other and not a looking through or past the particular to the *persona* as if it was something behind or other than the *persona* itself.¹⁹ This is like James stressing the details

and facts of experience while maintaining the "beyondedness" of experience itself and the insufficiency of concepts.

Kearney and James: The Theistic and Religious

In his final 1906–07 lecture on pragmatism entitled "Pragmatism and Religion," James broaches the topic of how religion is to be treated by his pragmatic method. It is in this concluding lecture where the greatest similarity occurs between James's pragmatism and Kearney's eschatological notion of God. However, before I present James' view on the theistic, it is appropriate to first offer a glimpse of the metaphysical position that informs his position on the theistic.²⁰ In fact, as illustrated throughout the lectures on pragmatism, his metaphysical position is partially responsible for his affinity with the pragmatic method. Moreover, as is true of many philosophers, his metaphysics serve as a propaedeutic to his position on the theistic.

In short, James' metaphysics is an ontological pluralism sustained and justified by what he deemed "radical empiricism." His ontological pluralism described in his pragmatism lectures is really a counter-metaphysical position to the ontological monism of the rationalists of his day (viz. Bradley, Royce, etc.). James claimed that by maintaining that the world is One, a person must necessarily neglect and stray from experience, since the world as given in experience is found to be variously disconnected, discontinuous and often arbitrary. Thus, when following the lead of experience, one follows causal chains of reasoning that guides one either toward an unforeseen truth or down the blind alley of falsity. Far from asserting that the world is One in the rationalist sense, modern science shows that things merely "hang together" in a chain of causal connections. Rather, for every causal connection there is a myriad of things seemingly disconnected beyond sheer psychological contiguity. It is the lesson of the scientific revolution with its fastidious attention to the reality of experience that shows just how pluralistic our world is. The only way that the world can be understood to be One is as a roughshod network of causal connections that one discovers through the observation of facts

in experience; not as the elegant and abstract edifice of the rationalists. According to James, the pluralistic hypothesis is that “a world imperfectly unified . . . and perhaps always to remain so, must be sincerely entertained. . . . This leaves us with the common-sense world, in which we find things partly joined and partly disjoined.”²¹

It is from this ontological pluralism (which is not necessarily the same as religious pluralism) that James proceeds to delineate his religious notions. Essentially, the implication of a pluralistic universe is that reality itself remains open as the possibility that is inherent in the flow of experience itself and one’s conceptual interplay with it. Truth is determined through our interchange and investment in human experience as it unfolds and is “cashed-out.” Thus, such a universe “suggests an infinitely larger number of the details of future experience to our mind.”²² Continuing on the topic of possibility arising from the status of a pluralistic universe, James states the following:

in our search for truth we leap from one floating cake of ice to another, on an infinite sea, and that by each of our acts we make new truths possible and old ones impossible. . . . That each man [sic.] is responsible for making the universe better, and that if he does not do this it will be in so far left undone.²³

To say the least, such a pluralistic and pragmatist picture of the universe demands a strongly active human role in the journey of the world toward perfection.

Regarding the possibility of the pluralistic universe, James specifically defines it as a middle point between the actual, the necessary and the impossible. The possible is neither actual, necessary, nor impossible but rather has the nature of the “perhaps” or the “will be”: the eschatological. Thus, regarding the ethical, the salvation of the world is possible. Some conditions of world salvation exist but they need to be successively realized in the unfolding of experience by maximizing good and minimizing evil. James explains that “the way of escape from evil on this system is *not* by getting it ‘aufgehoben,’ or preserved in the whole as an element essential but ‘overcome.’ *It is by dropping it out altogether, throwing it overboard*

and getting beyond it, helping to make a universe that shall forget its very place and name.”²⁴

From the ethical, the pragmatic and ontologically pluralistic models open up a way of approaching the nature of the divine. Although James rejects the reality of the “Absolute” (read: the God of rationalistic metaphysics), he nonetheless allows that the “superhuman” may be. The openness of the pluralistic universe allows that which is beyond our immediate experience to be a possibility. The task then, according to the pragmatist, is to put religious beliefs to the test in order to find out if they really are consonant with human life and experience—whether they enlighten and propel one toward the possibility of realizing possible happiness both socially and individually or not.

Richard Kearney follows the manner of thinking that God is beyond actuality in his possibility. God is *Possest*—an ontological term that Kearney borrows from medieval thinker Nicholas Cusanus.²⁵ The term *possest* is a combination of the Latin verb *posse* (meaning “to be able”) and the third person singular form of *esse* (meaning “to be”). Thus, the term literally means “He is to be able.” However, the verb *posse* is also the root of the English verb “to be possible.” Kearney suggests that *Possest* means “that possibility itself exists. . . . Hence, all things are enfolded in this ‘actualized-possibility’ (*possest*) which is none other than the proximate (if never adequate) term for God himself.”²⁶ Thus, in this possibilization of God comes the eschatological. God is in Himself a collection of possibly actualizable avenues that is unfolded temporally. Coupling this ontological designation of God with the ethical priority of *persona* comes the notion that God as *Possest* awaits further disclosure through the actual events and actions of human beings in their everyday ethical interactions with each other. In a dialectic of divine and human desire, human beings bring God about to others from a temporal interplay of the divine and the human *persona*. This gives new meaning to the words of Jesus Christ when he said that when one gives a cup of cold water to the thirsty other one really is giving water to God Himself by virtue of the intimate interplay or *circumincessio* of the divine and human *persona*. The divine *persona* thereby

speaks through individual things in experience in one's openness to God's possibility—the infinitely escaping eschaton revealing Himself to us in the mundane as the mundane but always as something more. Thus, one must be vigilant to find God out of the world by actualizing the justice and mercy that God is in his eschatological *persona*. This means that human beings enable God through active means in compassionate acts to each other. God is made known—yea, his very being (*Possess*) is brought forth—through such acts. The very actualization of God by us in such acts affects the coming of God's kingdom. But, since God depends on us as much as we depend on Him, “the Kingdom is possible but we may decide not to accept the invitation.”²⁷

There are strong similarities between James' theism and Kearney's notion of God in their focus on ontological possibility. Both thinkers have strong elements of futurity, expectation and possibility in their notions of the divine. In addition, both thinkers have a very humanistic notion of God in which human beings actualize the divine through just actions. With James, a person actualizes God through an individual responsibility to eradicate evil in the world. Likewise, Kearney places the burden (or gift) of the coming heavenly kingdom on the activity of individuals towards each other; viz. through compassionate acts and kindness. Both also offer onto-possible and onto-eschatological definitions of God: God neither *is* nor *is not* but *possibly is* or *may be* and God awaits actualization from out of the future through our recognition of the divine through the present.

A Jamesean Amplification of Kearney's Onto-eschatological Designation of God

A comparison of James and Kearney regarding the divine reveals many fruitful similarities. James and Kearney are ensconced in different philosophical traditions and, therefore, deal within different sets of presuppositions. Consequently, James' position can serve to amplify Kearney's position and alleviate a problem that Kearney inherits in the contemporary continental tradition.

The problem facing Kearney's attempt at an ontological designation of God as both possible and eschatological lies in the contempo-

rary ethical critique of the onto-theological or metaphysical by Levinas and Derrida. Kearney clearly makes a move from the impossible God *per se* of deconstruction toward the possible beyond the impossible as designated in the onto-eschatological designation of God as *Possess*. Kearney clearly has in mind the violent and will-to-power critique of metaphysics and the ontological with its smothering and suppressive tendency and so is tentative regarding a metaphysical reduction of God. Yet, his hermeneutic approach yields an ontological characterization of God in his partial embracing of Nicholas Cusanus' “actualized-possibility” designation of God. The result is a tension that dogs his very fruitful attempts at building a connection between the ontological and the eschatological. The question remains regarding how he can resolve the tension in which he seeks to give an ontological characterization and yet retain a radically eschatological notion of God. James offers such an approach to relieving the tension. The contemporary continental ethical critique of truth conflates truth with absolute truth. Whereas absolute truth is critiqued as oppressive (and the most totalitarian of notions being metaphysical concepts since they are the most encompassing), truth as James understands it does not possess this power. Thus, given James' position, one need not shy away from ontological or metaphysical designations.

Furthermore, as seen in an analysis of James' pragmatism, the conceptions which human beings formulate from experience and in turn project back on experience do not necessarily imply a closed system of thought that neglects the particular, but rather enhance one's interplay with experience. The system always remains open insofar as the truth of conceptions become inextricably possibilized by the flow of human cogitation and experience itself. Although the projection of one's conceptions onto the objects of experience are required in order to possibly attend to experience itself, one need not necessarily tumble toward a commitment to Absolute Truth and be blinded to the inherent flux of human experience by the imperious nature of abstract and ontological notions. One's conception of things (and truth itself), although possessing a certain resistance toward shaping reality,

ultimately remains as open as the flow of experience itself.

Similarly, Kearney preserves the tension between the individual *simpliciter* and human conceptualization in his notion of *persona* and would benefit from James' open-ended notion in the relationship between truth and experience. Kearney admonishes that humanity should continue to heed human experience rather than fetishizing vague abstractions. One must always treat the other as an end instead of a mere vehicle for attaining one's own ends. Yet, at the same time, in order to treat a person as an end by being open to the eschatological revelation of one's *persona*, human beings must attend to the person as individual. However, with the individual comes the way through which one understands the individual or the mode that allows us to directly attend to a person in his or her individuality: viz., through their characteristics, peculiarities, mannerisms, outlooks, relationships, etc. It is this re-embracing of the conceptual element as an integral aspect of the eschatological *persona* that James' pragmatism allows to come out in Kearney's philosophy. In fact, the eschatological can only appear through a dynamic revelation of the characteristics of the other as dynamic. Furthermore, when conceptually embracing an individual, we must always remain open to the absent-but-yet-to-come aspect of the *persona* in our present grasping and face-to-face interplay with the other. We must

always hold these two principles of the other in a dialectical tension. The other is unknown beyond the known while simultaneously being the known and this dialectic is perpetually localized in the individual.

The Jamesean amplification of Kearney's notion of the eschatological in the ethical also holds an important implication for his onto-eschatological conception of the divine. It is recognized that the *persona* is not devoid of that through which one conceives the divine but also possesses a combination of the yet-to-be-conceptualized and the complete incomprehensibility of the individuality of the *persona*. Thus, to do justice to the other is to keep these elements in a dialectical tension. Thus, the *persona* is localized as an individual (known as such through human experience) and in the concept-that-is and the conception-yet-to-be (the latter being of course discontinuous from the concept-that-is since it is new and cannot be reduced merely to an extension of the old). Furthermore, God can be justly understood through concepts but one must also recognize that God should not be reduced to one's already known concepts of God. Rather, God is also yet-to-be-known in his essence and is by nature also eschatological and revelational. This allows us to make ontological judgments about God, but judgments that must remain open to the incomprehensible depths of the *persona* as will be revealed in its radicality into the future.

ENDNOTES

1. Special thanks to Richard Kearney and others for discussion and helpful comments on this paper given at the 7th Annual Building Bridges Conference: Faith and Experience at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in Fall 2004.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 63.
3. In a complimentary article to *The God Who May Be* entitled "Eschatology of the Possible God," in John D. Caputo, ed., *The Religious* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), Kearney states the following traditional characterization that he is reversing with his onto-eschatological characterization of God: "The Aristotelian and medieval deity was deemed to be a self-causing, self-thinking Act lacking nothing and so possessing no 'potencies' which might later be realized in time" (175).
4. Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 25.
5. Although this is true of many aspects of "post-modern" philosophy (loosely, if not inadequately designated), this is seen particularly in deconstruction. See Derrida's interpretation of Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics," in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
6. Ruth Anna Putnam (1998), "James, William," in E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge), retrieved May 7, 2004, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/DC043SECT6>.

7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
8. William Turner, "Pragmatism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (K. Knight, online edition, 2003), retrieved May 7, 2004, from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12333b.htm>.
9. William James, *Pragmatism: A New Way for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), 201.
10. *Ibid.*, 222.
11. That pragmatism is grounded in the expedient is not to equate it with utilitarianism—although James was very influenced by J. S. Mill. A main difference, among many, between the two is that pragmatism offers a definite theory of truth which seeks objective certainty whereas utilitarian thought is specifically relativistic, considering those involved in a contingent situation only while disregarding any consideration of truth whatsoever (this relativistic inherent in utilitarianism holds also in "rule utilitarianism").
12. William James, *Pragmatism*, 258.
13. In fact, in a recent interview, Richard Kearney disagrees with the pragmatistic Gianni Vattimo's tendency to dismiss the metaphysical and the transcendent. Kearney disagrees with Vattimo that "we should jettison them [metaphysical questions] along with the question of transcendence." Liam Kavanagh, "An Interview with Richard Kearney 'Facing God,'" *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture* 1 (Spring 2004): 5. James would also disagree with Vattimo since questions of transcendence are also questions that are important to human beings and ground many other positive and valuable beliefs. Furthermore, this is seen in James' own beliefs: he held both theistic and metaphysical positions himself. Essentially, both Kearney and James want to leave open the possibility of the transcendent rather than either absolutely asserting it or dismissing it altogether.
14. William James, *Pragmatism*, 257.
15. Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 10.
16. This is the major theme of Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).
17. This is an interesting twist on a traditional Aristotelian or Thomistic understanding of the individuality of matter as completely incomprehensible and hence of a lesser dignity than the concepts through which particulars are understood. Yet, this ethical interpretation via the *persona* eschaton in fact enlightens the Aristotelian perspective given the Aristotelian notion that the particularity of matter is *required* for human beings to understand anything whatsoever. Thus, far from being less dignified, the particular should be elevated in dignity in virtue of its ethical and humanistic worth (at least when dealing with particular human beings). In addition, certainly this particularity of matter or "thisness" as the nexus of the dynamic *persona* with its eschatological character is rather fitting since matter is the principle of potency or possibility in the Aristotelian system, and as Richard Kearney points out, the eschatological and possible go together quite compatibly.
18. Ruth Anna Putnam, "James, William," in E. Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
19. Furthermore, the individuality of a *persona* is seen in Kearney's notion of *prosopon*. "*Prosopon* is the face of the other who urgently solicits me, bidding me answer in each concrete situation, 'here I am. . . . So to be a *prosopon* is to be-a-face-toward-a-face, to be proximate to the face of the other'" (Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 18).
20. Contrary to the reputation of pragmatism as anti-metaphysical in nature, James takes metaphysics very seriously. James was largely concerned with attacking the particular metaphysical position of the rationalists. He does not do so only negatively but also by offering his own metaphysical position as presented in the collection of lectures that he gave after the lectures on Pragmatism entitled *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). His metaphysical position can be rightly called metaphysical pluralism as it is in contradistinction to the metaphysical monism of the rationalists and is founded on radical empiricism.
21. William James, *Pragmatism*, 161.
22. *Ibid.*, 278.
23. *Ibid.*, 278–279.
24. *Ibid.*, 297.
25. Nicholas Cusanus, *Triologus de Possess*, in Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).
26. Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be*, 103.
27. *Ibid.*, 110.

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