

## The Journal of Philosophy & Scripture: A Prologue

*John D. Caputo*

Villanova University

Who or what comes after the God of onto-theology? Among the many answers to that question, which in one way or another has captured the imagination of a whole host of contemporary philosophers working in the continental tradition, one answer certainly is the God of the Scriptures. Having come before metaphysics, or at least in a milieu that was innocent of metaphysics, the Scriptures are in a way older than metaphysics and so they are not faced with the challenge of overcoming onto-theology. By the Scriptures, we mean not simply Christian or Jewish scriptures but all the great Scriptures, from all of the great religious traditions, western and non-western. Levinas once said that the Tanach was a good book—which I think he meant in the sense of a Gadamerian classic, although he did not have Gadamer explicitly in mind—from which everyone, especially the philosophers, had much to learn. The task for thought, he said, was to know how to translate the Tanach into Greek, by which he meant philosophy.

The premise of the journal which our students have launched is that Levinas is right about this, that the Scriptures are a deep and enormous provocation for philosophy, that they call forth philosophical thinking and send philosophy down avenues that philosophy, left to follow its own tendencies, would never explore or discover. Like drama and tragedy, poetry and narratives—which, of course, they also are—the Scriptures provide philosophy with

a bottomless and inexhaustible resource, a salutary shock of alterity, that philosophy requires. Philosophy cannot be itself without exposing itself to its other, to what is not philosophy. Philosophy cannot be itself without delimiting its autonomy, making its own *autos* questionable, and allowing itself to understand—which means to stand under—the coming of something other than philosophy which by the very paradox of dialogue makes philosophy true to itself.

Too often, contemporary continental philosophers take the “other” of philosophy to mean literature, but not religion, which is for them just a little too wholly other, a little beyond their much heralded tolerance of alterity. They retain an antagonism to religious texts inherited straight from the Enlightenment, even though they pride themselves on having made the axioms and dogmas of the Enlightenment questionable. But the truth is that contemporary continental philosophy is marked by the language of the call and the response, of the gift, of hospitality to the other, of the widow, the orphan and the stranger, and by the very idea of the “wholly other,” a discourse that any with the ears to hear knows has a Scriptural provenance and a Scriptural resonance. We invite everyone to join us who shares these views—everyone who wishes to think in dialogue with Scriptures, who want to expose philosophical thinking to the advent of Scriptural imagination, who agree that the Scriptures are abundantly thought-worthy, that they give us more than enough to think. Our wager is that both philosophical thinking and the reading of Scripture will each be enriched.