Vattimo, Kenosis and the Philosophy of the Event

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Contents

Abstract

Having presented as a Marxist atheist for the previous thirty years, in the 1990s the postmodern philosopher Gianni Vattimo returned to religion. This dissertation analyses and evaluates the kind of religion to which Vattimo has returned, looking in particular at how it relates to his wider philosophical style of 'weak thought,' the interpretation of our current situation as one of hermeneutical nihilism in which there are no longer any 'strong foundations' such as metaphysics, value-free facts and metanarratives. In particular I look at whether Vattimo has constructed a 'supersessionist' religious history in which Christianity is 'better' than Judaism, a claim which—if true—would not only be politically incorrect, but also inconsistent with weak thought in that it puts forward a metanarrative of progress away from 'strong' biblical literalism associated with Judaism towards the 'spiritual' interpretation of Scripture found in postmodernity today, via the 'liberating' messages of *kenosis* and *caritas* found in Christianity. I argue Vattimo has constructed a 'weak Hegelian' narrative and one which, due to his increasing reliance on the work of Thomas Kuhn, can be tempered by an appeal to the 'incommensurablity' of paradigms, whereby difference in content is acknowledged although one paradigm (such as Judaism) cannot be regarded as better than another (such as Christianity). To support this interpretation of Vattimo's 'return' to religion I appeal to changes in his view of Christianity since the Millennium in which the 'unilinear' history is downplayed in favour of a Gadamerian focus on the importance of the Bible as the source of textual tradition. Nevertheless, I go on to show that while there are resources within his return to religion to counter its critics, the kind of ontology he takes on board with his appeal to Kuhn highlights the larger problem within his philosophy of an increasingly selective reading of his main influence, Heidegger. The selectivity in his reading of Heidegger pertains in the main to his central concept of Being as event, and I show how this has implications for his return to religion in relation to the ideas of transcendence and *caritas*. Having done this, I construct my own reimagining of Vattimo's return to religion to keep the spirit of what he has done without the conceptual problems generated from his reading of Heidegger, using Vattimo's idea of the defining message of the New

Testament as God's newfound announcement of universal 'friendship' for all peoples to construct the idea that Philosophy and Theology have inexorably weakened one another through the missionary aspect of 'friendship' leading the Apostles to seek out Greeks (philosophers) as well as fellow Jews.

<u>Note</u>

Section 116 of the *Revised Regulations for the Award of the University's Degrees of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy by Supervised Research* states: 'The candidate will be free to publish material in advance of the thesis submission but reference will be made in the thesis to any such work. Copies of published material should either be bound in with the thesis submitted for examination, or placed in an adequately secured pocket at the end of the thesis.' Therefore, I have included a CD at the back of the dissertation with copies of all the works I have published during the course of my research at Staffordshire University. Not all of these works were incorporated into my dissertation but I have included them in light of section 116 of the revised regulations. Furthermore, where I have drawn upon one or more of the articles at length in my dissertation I have supplied a footnote referencing the article of origin for the material concerned.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

An Introduction to Vattimo's Thought

1. **An outline of the research question, purpose and direction of this thesis**

   a) **A brief summary of Vattimo's weak thought and return to religion**

Gianni Vattimo (b. 1936), an Italian philosopher and cultural commentator, was born and studied in Turin, Italy, with Pareyson, then in Heidelberg under Hans-Georg Gadamer. While Vattimo's philosophy very much reflects the proto-postmodernist influences of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, as well as drawing inspiration from the philosopher of science, Kuhn, there is also a more 'concrete' or politically engaged side to Vattimo which has made him visible outside of philosophical circles, including supporting gay rights and being a Member of the European Parliament. Since the early 1980s, Vattimo has become well known for his philosophical style of 'weak thought' (*pensiero debole*), a term and style deriving from a volume of this name edited by Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti and containing the work of a number of other philosophers (Vattimo and Rovatti 1983). 'Weak thought' is an attempt to understand and re-configure traces from the history of thought in ways that accord with the lack of centre and foundations characteristic of the postmodern in order to create an ethic of 'weakness.' Core features of Vattimo's style of weak thought are hermeneutics, nihilism and a negative assessment of metaphysics. The latter is regarded by Vattimo, following Heidegger, as 'violent' in the sense that it reduces thought back to irreducible, fixed first principles. The truth claims pertaining to metaphysics no longer have their purchase, Vattimo believes, because we are living after the 'death of God,' a Nietzschean phrase which Vattimo interprets as meaning that the highest values have devaluated themselves (Vattimo 1988a: 20-21), 'Truth' chief among them. Although we are no longer impressed by 'Truth,' not only the remnants of metaphysics, but also local rationalities, appear to us as linguistic traces which have come to prominence due to the fabling of the world in the development of information and communications technology such as the radio, television and—above all—the internet (Vattimo 1992: Ch. 1). Vattimo saw nihilism as the constitutive feature of thought in

postmodernity, with the latter term referring to the dissolution of the modern idea of 'progress,' again, instituted by the liberation of minority voices and the ending of hope of a better world after the two World Wars of the twentieth century and the end of metanarratives at the end of the Cold War (Vattimo 1992: Ch.1). Hermeneutics, Vattimo believed, was the characteristic form of thought of postmodernity reading the signs of the times after the death of God, and in the 1980s and early 1990s he referred to it as the *koine* (common way of thinking) of thought at the time (Vattimo 1991a: 283). The task of thinking proper to hermeneutics is *Verwindung*, which is a convalescence-alteration-distortion of the traces of metaphysics which are inescapable as, following Gadamer, 'Being, which can be understood, is language' (Gadamer 1989: 474); our horizons as *Dasein* are linguistic and are made up of linguistic messages which one interprets. We cannot wipe the slate clean and start afresh as this would be to repeat modernity and its (metaphysical) value of the new. Therefore 'weakening' traces of metaphysics from the History of Being is all we can do. The History of Being is made up not of solid foundations, but 'events,' which are historical openings. Currently, we are living after the event of the death of God, which Vattimo also understands as synonymous with what Heidegger called the 'end of metaphysics.'

What Vattimo did not say in his initial works on weak thought is how *Verwindung* should take place and how it can be regarded as an ethical imperative. For if there are 'no facts, only interpretations,' why not simply inhabit the interpretation within which one was brought up? This was the quandary facing Vattimo by the time he came to write his book *Beyond Interpretation* (1994; translation 1997a). Vattimo feared hermeneutics would turn into an 'anything goes' form of relativism (or what Nietzsche called a 'reactive nihilism') or, worse, into the metaphysical thesis that there are no facts, only interpretations because there *are* only interpretations in the metaphysical sense. Therefore, the emphasis in *Beyond Interpretation* was to find a grounding for hermeneutics which was simultaneously historical and ethical. Although Vattimo had used terms such as 'secularisation' before (Vattimo 1985), the chapter on religion in *Beyond Interpretation*, following as it did the one on ethics, was Vattimo's first concerted attempt to engage with religion as a functional, clear development

of weak thought. In this chapter he laid the groundwork for what would become known as his 'return to religion,' which was crystallised in his autobiographical book *Belief* (1996; translation 1999) and rounded-off in his Italian Academy Lectures, *After Christianity* (2002a). Subsequent to these three key books there have been numerous other collaborations and essays that have constituted an interesting development on his original 'return' for which, among theologians in particular, he is better known. The view of Christianity for which he is known I will outline now, although I have found that the way in which he developed his understanding of Christianity subsequent to *After Christianity* is interesting and I shall outline this in the course of the dissertation.[1]

Vattimo developed his 'return to religion' out of a handful of core concepts and a number of influences. At the heart of his return are the biblical ideas of *kenosis* and *caritas*, essentially two sides of the same conceptual coin. Vattimo never defines these terms but uses them impressionistically, as referring to intuitions Vattimo has had concerning the place of Christianity in the history of western ideas and also in the role he thinks it has had in weakening philosophical and religious ideas. *Kenosis*, which usually means the self-emptying of God in the incarnation of Christ, indicates an historical process of weakening, clearly dovetailing with Vattimo's Heideggerian-Nietzschean 'weak thought.' Nevertheless, Vattimo already had a term to describe a long historical process of this kind, and that is 'secularisation.' Therefore, *kenosis* had to refer not only to the process of secularisation, but also to the key message which inaugurated this process. The content of this message is God's friendship with his creation, having previously presented as a master (John 15:15). This idea of God presenting himself differently at different times struck a chord with Vattimo, and so another way in which he understands this notion of *kenosis* is that once one realises the historically diverse messages of God in which he appears in various ways, one cannot regard God as a simple, immutable transcendent first principle. As such, Vattimo has emphasised Christological passages such as Hebrews 1:1 more so than the obvious 'kenotic' 'Christ Hymn' of Philippians 2:5-11 (Vattimo 1997a: 46). Furthermore, Vattimo has made an identification between the immutable God the philosophers, metaphysics

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[1] Near the beginning of Part Two.

and the violence of the 'natural sacred' and 'literalism' in religion by aligning René Girard's theological anthropology with Heidegger's thought (Vattimo 1999: 38-39). To add to the historicising, Vattimo brings in the thought of the Medieval theologian Joachim of Fiore to indicate that thought is passing through an historical process from literalism and strength to spiritualisation and weakening. This weakening would then yield an ethic of *caritas* (charity), a biblical virtue reimagined by Vattimo to refer instead to the process of secularisation, the kenotic drift of nihilism as weakening which envelops metaphysical violence in all its forms which has reached its culmination in late-modernity in the death of God and end of metaphysics.

b) The reception and importance of Vattimo's return to religion

In the following subsection I will outline the principal objections which have been made against Vattimo's return to religion (Vattimo is selective in his reading of Scripture to the point of creating a false absolute in *caritas*, is neglectful of transcendence and is supersessionist about Christianity over Judaism), as well as highlighting the smaller number of positives to come out of it (his creative reimagining of secularisation, and its interdisciplinary nature).

A common criticism of Vattimo's return to religion, especially (although not exclusively) from theologians, is that Vattimo is selective in his reading of the Bible and, more particularly, in his understanding of *kenosis*. Numerous critics have expressed their concern that Vattimo is very selective when it comes to his use of Scripture (Vosman 2000: 430; Meganck 2015: 6, n. 8), and similarly so in his reading of Heidegger (Owen 1994: 157), and Nietzsche (Gurciullo 2001: 22). Concerning his understanding of *kenosis*, the philosopher Erik Meganck has said 'Vattimo's very 'selective' reading does not do justice to the theological richness of *kenosis*' (Meganck 2015: 6, n. 8). This is partly related to the problem of being selective in terms of Scripture more generally, for Vattimo reads *kenosis* in isolation from other parts of the New Testament, or picks seemingly unrelated texts from the Bible to interpret the idea of *kenosis*. Normally *kenosis* refers to Philippians 2:5-11 in which St. Paul describes the Son of God descending from heaven in obedience to the Father, divesting his power to become a human, before ascending to heaven after

the resurrection (later in the so-called 'Christ Hymn' of Philippians 2). The text is one of the proto-Trinitarian texts found in the New Testament. Vattimo does not quote the passage but cites it in *Belief* (Vattimo 1999: 39) and mentions it as an aside in a very recent text (Vattimo 2015: 183). Normally Vattimo does not define exactly what he means by the term *kenosis* but, as shall be shown in Part Two, uses it to make a series of impressions, such as it being an announcement (rather than a literal descent) of God to declare that he is no longer our master, but our friend (John 15:15) by him lowering himself to our level. Elsewhere (Vattimo 1997a), Vattimo uses the term *kenosis* to mean the concatenation of openings to which Being pertains, which finds parallel in the many ways in which God has spoken to his people, latterly through his Son (referring to Hebrews 1). For any theologian or biblical exegete, these are extremely unorthodox ways of understanding *kenosis*, not only in relation to exegetical and theological traditions of the church, but also internally within the text. As some commentators have mentioned (Depoortere 2008a: 21), Vattimo ignores the second part of the Christ Hymn in which Christ becomes exalted; if the impressions he built up through friendship, weakness, divesting or power and many voices are meant—collectively, cumulatively—to reflect, and (paradoxically) inaugurate, the horizon in which we are thrown whereby transcendence no longer has any purchase for us, this is why Vattimo ignores the exaltation (Hart 2002: 138), the 'parabola' of Christ in which he ascends back to heaven in glory having already descended. For Vattimo has chosen that there can be no glory as this would be returning to (vertical) transcendence, which he regards as metaphysical *tout court*. From this selective reading of *kenosis*, there have been concerns from theologians such as Guarino (Guarino 2009: 144-145; Depoortere 2008a: 22) and even philosophers such as Meganck (Meganck 2015: 10), that there is no genuine exchange between philosophy and theology; weak thought reduces theology (including the Bible) to its own ends. Even with the way in which Vattimo has qualified *kenosis*, his reading is selective. Meganck points out that Vattimo has ignored the command, the mastery which Jesus states he has over his disciples in John 15:14 before Jesus' announcement of friendship of which Vattimo is so fond in the following verse (Meganck 2014: 420). Vosman also notes that Vattimo is not so keen on John 15:12-13 which

mentions giving one's life for one's friends (Vosman 2000: 418). If Vattimo is perceived as seemingly arbitrary in his use of Scripture, he is also regarded as such by a number of his commentators on his elevation of *caritas* to an untouchable position: 'the limiting of secularisation by the commandment of love is nothing but an arbitrary decision on the part of Vattimo as an individual' (Jonkers 2000: 386). There is some dispute in reception of Vattimo's thought about whether he has created a false absolute (Depoortere 2008a: 20; Klun 2014: 49) or a flawed postmodern categorical imperative (Jonkers 2000: 385). Either way, Vattimo is seen as being inconsistent, either for creating an absolute value when, after the death of God, there really should not be, or because in his view there are only interpretations and messages (and so one should recognise the thrownness of the other, weak thinker). Vattimo comes too close to the metaphysical position of saying that there are only messages (Meganck 2015: 6), which becomes problematic for establishing an ethic. This is because Vattimo's position borders on tautology; a hermeneutical ethic is based on a recognition that hermeneutics is itself an interpretation, so how can *caritas* be untouchable (Carravetta 2010: 91. 94)?

In his emphasis of the *kenosis* ('self-emptying') of God into a history of messages, Vattimo has been accused of neglecting or misconceiving transcendence (Antiseri 1997; Hart 2010; Jonkers 2000; Klun 2014; Meganck 2014; Repolschi 2010; Roldàn 2007; Ten Kate 2002; Zimmerman 2009). Variously, these thinkers have argued that Christianity as a religion is inconceivable without a dimension of transcendence (Roldàn 2007; 92), or that transcendence is needed existentially (Antiseri 1997), ethically (Zimmerman 2009: 316), or for the sake of the internal consistency of Vattimo's position (Meganck 2015). However, some thinkers—even theologians—have been grateful to Vattimo for critiquing absolute otherness, which has allowed Carmelo Dotolo to create a distinction between transcendence 'without a name' and the historicised transcendence of Christianity (Dotolo 2009: 30). It is doubtful, though, that Vattimo would approve of this development as he is against transcendence in all its forms save 'horizontal' transcendence which refers to the linguistic-traditional horizon into which we are thrown. A minority of nonetheless important voices have also seen Vattimo as derivative of the 1960s 'Death of God

Theology' movement, especially seeing similarities between Vattimo's thought and that of Thomas J. J. Altizer, whose Nietzschean-Hegelian death of God involved the divesting of transcendence into immanent nihilism (Sciglitano 2007; Depoortere 2008a). However, I will argue that this understanding of Vattimo's work is overly simple (Harris 2011).

More troublingly, Vattimo has been accused of 'supersessionism' with regards to the value of Christianity over Judaism. Sciglitano has been the most vocal proponent of this accusation (Sciglitano 2007; Sciglitano 2013), although it has been hinted at by other scholars too, notably Caputo (Caputo 2007). This accusation is based on the idea that, at times, Vattimo has allied his notion of *kenosis* too closely to the philosophy of history of thinkers such as Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century abbot with mystical tendencies. Joachim talked about three 'ages' pertaining to the Trinity, whereby the Old Testament corresponded with the 'Age of the Father,' New Testament with the 'Age of the Son,' and the time to come as the 'Age of the Spirit.' Vattimo's critics see him as identifying the Old Testament not only with Jewish beliefs about Yahweh, but also with the 'violent' metaphysics of biblical literalism. By contrast, the 'Age of the Son' is the catalyst of emancipation from literalism, secularising to the point where we are now in the 'Age of the Spirit,' which is also the 'Age of Interpretation.' I will argue that there are resources in Vattimo's thought to get around this problem (Harris 2014a).

Along with the negative assessments of Vattimo's return to religion, there have been positive evaluations, too, especially with regards to Vattimo's originality in the field of the study of secularisation (Rass 2014: 171). As such, Vattimo's return to religion is important beyond Philosophy in that his positive evaluation of secularisation has relevance in both Theological and Religious Studies fields, as well as the interdisciplinary area of study, the 'Philosophy of Religion.' Concerning the latter, Vattimo has begun to have an impact in the study of secularisation, a field dominated by the Löwith-Blumenberg debate of 1962 (Harris 2015a). Whereas Karl Löwith thought that the distinctly modern value of progress was an illegitimate secularisation of the Christian notion of messianism, Hans Blumenberg thought that modernity was the result of a legitimate self-assertion of humanity in the face of beliefs in an absent God. The latter was

the utterly transcendent God of Ockham's nominalism who made it impossible to evaluate the extent to which the world was good or evil, for these concepts could mean anything to this kind of God. Along with another contemporary thinker, Marcel Gauchet, Vattimo's view of secularisation as the essence of the Christian message—and therefore, as neither an illegitimate distortion of Christianity, nor a novelty from modernity—has helped to move the debate about secularisation on, especially as it is a nuanced alternative to concepts such as the 'post-secular' and 'desecularisation' which seem only to see the world in binary terms as either secular or sacred (Meganck 2015: 10). Meganck in particular has commended Vattimo for his positive approach to secularisation in removing obstacles for faith, such as positivism and scientism (Meganck 2015). Andreas Michel (Michel 2015) has compared and contrasted Vattimo and Gauchet, and I have followed on from Michel arguing that Vattimo's approach is the better of the two scholars' approaches to secularisation (Harris 2015a), for Michel withholds judgement. Vattimo's contributions to the Löwith-Blumenberg debate are discussed more in Chapter Five.

Before moving on to the purpose and direction of the dissertation, it is worth pointing out that Vattimo's return to religion has importance beyond the merely theoretical, by which I mean here its relevance to Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. Rather, insights from Vattimo's return to religion have found their way into discussions of gender politics, politics more broadly and discussions about intelligence gathering. An early book concerning Vattimo's return to religion was Marta Frascati-Lochhead's *Kenosis and Feminist Theology*, which used Vattimo's 'weak thought' more generally to generate criteria to critique feminist ideology, using Vattimo's return to religion as a model about how this might transpire (Frascati-Lochhead 1998). With regard to politics more broadly, I have used Vattimo's return to religion as a model by which to assess Islam, whereby I argued that secularisation is required before political reform (Harris 2015b). As for intelligence gathering, in a book chapter in the volume *Ethics and the Future of Spying*, I argue that Vattimo's 'strong/weak' distinction can be applied to discussions pertaining to the ethical rightness and wrongness of spying on extremist groups, especially religious fundamentalists (Harris

2016). In short, Vattimo's return to religion is an innovative and controversial theory with far-reaching implications.

c) The purpose of this thesis

The first reason I have for producing this thesis is to explore Vattimo's return to religion in its entirety, looking closely at the relationship between his statements concerning Christianity and his philosophical style more generally. While there have been book-length treatments of Vattimo's return to religion they have been from a theological perspective (Guarino 2009) or date from before the end of Vattimo's writings on religion ceased (Antiseri 1997; Dotolo 1999). As a result, they have tended to focus on the limitations of Vattimo's view of Christianity for theology or have not gone further to look for resources within Vattimo's work to explain or overcome the problems they have encountered.

I argue that there are simple ways to overcome some of the more common problems highlighted by critics of Vattimo's theory, such as him creating an 'absolute,' being 'heretical' and 'selective' with Scripture. However, from my research I found that two other common objections—of Vattimo's apparent 'supersessionism' and the lack of transcendence in his return to religion—were not only harder to answer, but also were interrelated.[2] Further research and reflection told me that the way in which Vattimo was developing his style of weak thought had implications for his return to religion. Increasingly, Vattimo has been drawing his interpretation of Heidegger closer to a particular reading of Thomas Kuhn (one of which Kuhn would not have approved). While the 'incommensurability' of Kuhn's paradigms would allow Vattimo to get around the supersessionism charge pertaining to the relationship between Old, New and 'Postmodern' Testaments, it involves Vattimo identifying openings of Being with human artefacts—religious texts—too much. Along with a change in Vattimo's style of weak thought, I notice a change in the way he argues for the primacy of the New Testament by downplaying the role of Joachim of Fiore in his thought and taking a more Gadamerian approach to the Bible as the source of all tradition in the West for the language and influence of the

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[2] I wanted to build on answers to both of these questions which I had deal with provisionally in my articles on Vattimo's thought (Harris 2011; Harris 2014a).

Bible have created a linguistic tradition that constitutes the horizons into which we are thrown.

While Vattimo posits transcendence in 'horizontal' terms (of the linguistic horizons defined by the traditions into which we are thrown), the kind of transcendence that, arguably, Vattimo should be more open-minded about is 'vertical' transcendence. Normally this is taken in the sense of postulating an 'above' (metaphorically) or 'beyond,' but I would argue that this should also—due to Vattimo's strongly Heideggerian background— take into account what is 'below,' too. By this I allude to Heidegger's notions of the 'earth,' *physis* and 'concealment.' Through neglecting spatial metaphors (the kind of transcendence beyond language, to do with 'earth,' for instance) in preference for emphasising the importance of history (and therefore, time), Vattimo closes himself off *a priori* to many areas of thought. Once again, it is worth emphasising that this is inconsistent with his own philosophical style of weak thought which is set up against dogmatism. While I show that, especially with subtle adjustments that he has made in his return to religion (which I identify in the first chapters of Part Two), Vattimo has the resources to get around many of the charges levelled against his 'return to religion'—constructing an 'unilinear' history and being 'supersessionist' with regard to Christianity over Judaism being the two main ones—I show that he restricts his notion of *caritas* to other weak thinkers like himself, when actually the practical potential of his theory should be as a way of weakening all strong structures, not just the metaphysical ones inherited by those people who recognise that they are contingent, historical interpreters; weak thought should have resources to engage with strong thinkers, whether they be metaphysicians, fundamentalists or intellectuals who think in ways characteristic of earlier stages in the History of Being, such as Richard Dawkins' thoroughgoing empiricism.

Seeing potential in Vattimo's general approach to religion in relation to hermeneutics, I search for avenues to be charitable to Vattimo, such as grounding his theory in his biography, in order to find ways to reconfigure Vattimo's hermeneutical nihilism to reach out to strong thinkers. Ultimately I cannot defend Vattimo except by modifying his interpretation of Christianity to locate the possibility of generating a hermeneutical ethic in

the missionary basis of Christianity, that is, the so-called 'Great Commission' in Matthew 28:18-20 where Jesus asked his disciples to spread the Good News to 'all the nations.' This injunction to evangelise meant that syncretism took place between Christianity and other forms of thought, including philosophy, as is implicit in The Gospel of John and explicit in the second-century works of Justin Martyr and other Apologists. I go on to show that the mixing of the particularity of theology and the universality of philosophy was fatal to the absolutism of both, which played itself out in history which is another way of conceiving secularisation. Moreover, the Great Commission as a basis for weakening would yield what Vattimo hopes to achieve with *caritas*: a quasi-ethical principle of weakening to guide hermeneutics as it is a way of seeking friendship with the other – even strong thinkers—through imparting a message to them and receiving their interpretation of it. The purpose of the thesis, then, is to show how Vattimo's basic intuitions about Christianity are sound—that there is a message within Christianity which has led to weakening, which can still act as a quasi-ethical criterion today—but that the message of friendship is more practical in the sense that it is about explicitly seeking-out the other no-matter who they are, and that this insight can cohere with Vattimo's philosophy better, without having to rule out 'vertical' transcendence completely in a way inconsistent with weak thought.

d) The direction of this thesis

The Introduction will outline Vattimo's mature philosophy of *il pensiero debole* ('weak thought') taken from his landmark essay, 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought' and explain Vattimo's understanding of key ideas taken from his principal influences: Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer and their development in his key works: *The End of Modernity*, *The Transparent Society* and *Beyond Interpretation*. This is to outline significant ideas in his thought which will become important when analysing and evaluating his return to religion in the latter chapters of Part One and in Part Two.

Part One will explore the reasoning behind Vattimo's 'return to religion,' along with the principal problems connected to it by its many critics. Chapter One will trace the personal, societal and theoretical

influences on Vattimo which brought about his 'return to religion.' Chapter Two explains how Vattimo initially conceptualised his 'return' in *Beyond Interpretation*, outlining key terms such as *kenosis*, *caritas* and secularisation as well as his first engagement with the ideas of thinkers such as Girard. Chapter Three shows how Vattimo's thoughts on Christianity took a more autobiographical turn in *Belief*, his first book-length treatment of religion. This chapter will show how Vattimo made closer links between the thought of Girard and that of Heidegger, as well as outlining more about what Vattimo meant by *kenosis*. Vattimo's collection of Italian Academy Lectures and other essays in *After Christianity* is the topic of Chapter Four, analysing Vattimo's growing use of Nietzsche in his return to religion, as well as his reimagining of secularisation along lines hinted at by Wilhelm Dilthey, that Christianity effected an 'inward turn' which led to increasing subjectivism. Chapters Two—Four constitute an overview of Vattimo's most widely-cited writings on religion and, as such, Chapters Five—Eight cover the most important implications and criticisms of his 'return.' Specifically, Chapter Five situates the 'return' in the wider debate on secularisation, Chapter Six addresses the accusations from Depoortere (2008a) and Sciglitano (2007) that Vattimo has been copying the death of God theology of Altizer. Beyond unoriginality, this accusation is important because there was a strong Hegelian—and therefore, metaphysical—streak running through Altizer's project, and so Vattimo could be regarded as internally inconsistent if found 'guilty' of this accusation. I argue that Vattimo and Altizer have only superficially similar positions, and the differences between them—particularly on the 'Hegelian' debate—are outlined more in Chapter Seven. The significance of the issue at hand—the extent to which Vattimo thought Christianity superseded Judaism—is outlined in Chapter Eight, raising the possibility, observed in Vattimo's work, that using Kuhn's 'paradigm concept' would be useful to show how Judaism and Christianity are 'incommensurable.'

Part Two will outline what I perceive to be a shift in Vattimo's approach to religion after the turn of the millennium, which I use to show how Vattimo has gradually changed the course of his 'return to religion' from emphasising *kenosis* in a seemingly unilinear historical schema, to seeing the Bible as an epochal paradigm; this is the argument in Chapter

Nine. In Chapter Ten I interrogate the solution to the problem of supersessionism offered by this 'turn' in Vattimo's return to religion. I argue that Vattimo's use of Kuhn does not necessarily conflict with his reading of Heidegger, but that the latter is far too particular in his thought, ruling out transcendence. In this chapter I also outline the negative implication of the issues Vattimo has with transcendence to the main point of his return to religion, his attempt to yield an ethic for his hermeneutical nihilism.

I will then conclude by trying to develop a way in which the positive insights Vattimo has with regard to religion can be reconstructed to form a more persuasive approach to the subject. I draw upon Antonello's insight that Christianity was, for Vattimo, a 'Trojan Horse' for religion and that, I argue, Christianity could have been a Trojan Horse for philosophy, too. I take over Vattimo's core insight that Jesus brought a new message of friendship to his creation, but that the 'weakening' effect of Christianity comes from how it had to reach out to other forms of thought to fulfil the 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28: 18-20) to make disciples of 'all the nations.' In order to effect the latter, the disciples had to put the gospel into the conceptual schemas of the people they encountered. Especially important were the Greek philosophers St. Paul encountered in Athens. Gradually, through Christianity, I argue that religion and philosophy cross-contaminated one-another, with the particularity of the Christ-event weakening the universality of philosophy, with philosophy's value of 'Truth' eventually causing the downfall of religion along lines similar to Nietzsche's idea of the 'death of God.' By this I mean that the contingency of religion weakened the absolutist nature of philosophy, whilst philosophy brought into religion the ideal of truth, which eventually undermined religion when it was discovered to be a lie (along lines indicated by Nietzsche).

2. <u>'Dialectics, Difference, Weak thought'</u>
a) *Il pensiero debole*

The purpose of the rest of this Introduction is to outline the core principles of Vattimo's thought in more detail, analysing their philosophical roots along the way. Section Two focuses on Vattimo's initial statement of weak

thought from the volume of that name, 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought.' Key ideas found in this argument will be outlined afterwards, as well as relevant developments in Vattimo's thought from this initial statement of his mature position as and when required. Section Three uses an analysis of his major work, *The End of Modernity*, to examine what Vattimo meant by nihilism, while Section Four gives the backdrop to Vattimo's 'return to religion' by focusing on the purpose of *Beyond Interpretation* in which Vattimo expressed concern that hermeneutics was starting to be taken as meaning 'anything goes.' Along with setting the scene for Vattimo's 'return to religion,' the point of this Introduction is to outline and explain the key terms Vattimo employs and the influences on his thought.

In 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought,' Vattimo sets out his position as follows:

> Weak thought presupposes that, contrary to the heavily metaphysical framework beneath the problem of beginnings (starting from the first principles of Being), and contrary moreover to a historicist metaphysics (in Hegel's sense, in which Being has no first principles but is rather a providential process: to think means to be up on the times), a third way may be possible (Vattimo 2012a: 39).

Before I explain what Vattimo means by 'Being' or 'historicist metaphysics,' it is important to note what Vattimo says about the third way. The third way is based on 'experience' which is 'largely that of the everyday, which is also and always historically qualified and culturally dense' (Vattimo 2012a: 40). Vattimo is talking here of Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* as a 'thrown project,' which in Vattimo's eyes is one's 'hermeneutical foundation,' that is, one of interpretation based on thrownness into the world. This notion of *Dasein* will be explained momentarily. Hermeneutics (interpretation) works like literary and art criticism: 'critical discourse and evaluation always arise from a set of canons constituted historically by art and taste' (Vattimo 2012a: 40). The idea that our experience is constituted somehow by texts will be important later so is worth noting now.

b) Historicist metaphysics and difference

Before coming to look at Vattimo's main argument in which he sets out his own position, it is important to outline briefly his treatment of dialectics.

The latter concept has its most famous proponent in Hegel, to which Vattimo alludes in his phrase 'historicist metaphysics.' Hegel proposed that 'absolute spirit' manifests itself gradually in the world in a process that involves a rational dialectic in which spirit will in the end achieve full unity and self-knowledge. History works dialectically, through thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Through his Marxist background, Vattimo refers to the work of a number of early twentieth century thinkers, such as Benjamin, Bloch and Adorno, who have followed Marx's dialectical materialism (the view that historical events are outcomes of opposing forces which have material needs as their underlying source of conflict) to an extent, albeit with what he perceives as a 'dissolutive' gloss tendency with regards to dialectics (Vattimo 2012a: 42). For thinkers such as Benjamin, not only the historical process but also the totality constitutes expressions of mastery, which in turn lead them to see traces of the past in a dissolutive way. Traces, for Benjamin for example, are 'ruins that history has accumulated' at the feet of the angel in Klee's painting in Thesis 9 of his *Theses on History* (Vattimo 2012a: 42). Nevertheless, Vattimo thinks that this dissolutive approach to dialectics represents difference in a way which is complicit with metaphysics as it is linked to the existential idea of 'alienation' (Vattimo 2012a: 43), which is not only a yearning for totality, but also a form of humanism (which, following Heidegger, is also metaphysical). Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God (which Vattimo takes as the end of metaphysics), Vattimo thinks, has exposed the desire for mastery behind metaphysics, for the latter—with its effects of creating feelings of certainty and consolation—are superfluous in the age of modern technology (Vattimo 2012a: 43). In dissolutive forms of difference, Vattimo sees substitutes for metaphysical consolation, such as Bloch's utopian thinking. Instead, Vattimo looks for a more 'radical' notion of difference in the writings on Heidegger.

c) Being and ontological difference

Why is it a problem for Vattimo to think of something—such as a totality or humanism—as metaphysical? The latter is seen as violent, for Vattimo. This position is not explicitly put forward in 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought,' but it is found in many other places throughout his work.

Arguably the most developed assessment on the part of Vattimo on the connection between metaphysics and violence is his essay, 'Metaphysics and Violence,' included in the Santiago Zabala-edited collection of essays, *Weakening Philosophy* (2007). Vattimo states that the link between metaphysics and violence is twofold: firstly, metaphysics constitutes a first principle on which 'everything' depends (Vattimo 2007a: 403). Secondly, 'once metaphysical beliefs are weakened, there is no longer anything that limits the conceptual nature of existence… but by the mere fact of the strong imposing themselves' (Vattimo 2007a: 404). Concerning the former, the violence of metaphysics itself is philosophical, it is the 'silencing of questions' (Vattimo and Zabala 2002: 455). By positing objective truth ('the' truth) and by creating rational foundations which constitute the universal measure or standard against which knowledge is measured, metaphysics closes down debate. With regards to the second of the two reasons Vattimo provides for why metaphysics is violent, he knows that once metaphysics is weakened there are distinctions left between those stratified in society based on the traces of metaphysics, but without any 'strong' reasons to reign-in the excesses of judgements passed and power exerted by those higher up in society on the weaker. As Martin G. Weiss points out (Weiss 2010: 244), violence is speech act for Vattimo. It is not physical violence, even though Vattimo stresses that metaphysical violence can lead to physical violence, such as in the Inquisition where suspected deviation from metaphysically-guaranteed strict orthodoxy had physically painful consequences.

Metaphysics is a forgetting of ontological difference, but what is ontological difference and why is it more radical than negative or utopian thinking? Following Heidegger (Heidegger 1962: 22), ontological difference is the difference between Being (*Sein*) and beings (*seinde*). The latter are not 'self-evident,' to us anymore as we are aware that they appear to us as a 'result of a series of 'positions,' occurrences…historical-cultured 'destined' disclosures that, prior to the object-self-evidence of 'entity,' constitute the meaning of Being' (Vattimo 2012a: 44). These 'disclosures' come about through 'horizons' being 'constructed by a series of echoes, linguistic resonances, and messages coming from the past and from others' (Vattimo 2012a: 44). Traditionally, metaphysics—the thinking of Being

throughout the history of philosophy—has understood Being in the limited temporal sense of stability, of coming to presence. The *ontos on* in the case of Plato, influencing Aristotle's Prime Mover, Aquinas' God, Leibniz' monads and numerous other examples is the idea of constant presence, of eternity, not least for reasons as insecurity in less developed technological times. However, through the transmission of linguistic messages Being 'is' not, but occurs, and it constitutes the *a priori* temporal (not, versus the Neo-Kantians, transcendental) horizon for *Dasein*. As a result, 'True Being never is, but sets itself on the path and sends itself, it trans-mits itself' (Vattimo 2012a: 45). It was mentioned that Being 'occurs,' and this is related closely to the idea of the *Ereignis* (or the 'event of appropriation') in Vattimo's interpretation of Heidegger's thought. The very word *Ereignis* appears in 'Dialectic, Difference, Weak Thought,' and Vattimo admits that the term has many different meanings and uses in Heidegger's own significant body of work (Vattimo 2012a: 47).[3] Being occurs and appropriates *Dasein*, allowing things to come to being. What, though, is *Dasein*?

    Dasein is a Heideggerian term associated most with his most famous work, *Being and Time*. From 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought' it is possible to ascertain what Vattimo takes over from Heidegger with regards to this concept, which will then be explained. The differences between Vattimo's position and Heidegger's will then be briefly outlined. Firstly, Vattimo says about *Dasein* that '*Dasein* is thrown project—thrown time and time again. The foundation, the setting out, the initial sending [*invio*] of our discourse cannot but be a hermeneutical foundation' (Vattimo 2012a: 40).[4] Vattimo mentions this again later in the essay when he says 'The analysis of *Dasein*, of its thrownness as well as of its continually resituated and qualified nature, leads Heidegger to radically temporalize the *a priori*' (Vattimo 2012a: 44). Finally, he says that 'truth' is the result of a 'process of verification' that only takes place within 'the project of the world that constitutes us as *Dasein*' (Vattimo 2012a: 50). The 'existential analytic' of *Dasein* is at the heart of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. There have been

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[3] This is an important issue that, to do it justice, will need a larger section of its own so that it does not detract from the thrust of 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought.'

[4] The term 'sending' will be explained in due course in subsection 'd' and will be touched upon in passing at the end of this subsection, too, but the important thing to recognise here is the idea of 'thrownness.'

numerous detailed explanations of the background and argument of this book (such as Polt 1999), so I will not repeat what others have already written. In an essay entitled 'Hermeneutical Reason/Dialectical Reason,' included in the collection *The Adventure of Difference*, Vattimo explains that Heidegger in *Being and Time* thought of hermeneutics pertaining to *Dasein* along the lines of 'authenticity/fallenness.' However, 'In his subsequent works the affirmation of the Being-language nexus is always linked with the problem of metaphysics as a historical presentation of Being, a presentation that involves an unconcealing/concealing…[which] belongs above all to Being' (Vattimo 1993a: 28). Being and language are more directly linked to historical destining in works after *Being and Time*; Vattimo is overstating his case somewhat as the notion of '*Ge-schick*' (destining) can be found in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962: 436), even if it is not so developed here (especially along the lines that the focus is gradually shifted away from *Dasein* to the history of Being in Heidegger's thought). It is important to note that Vattimo here wrote that this notion of concealing/unconcealing (particularly the idea of concealment) prevented Heidegger from doing what Gadamer later did, which was to identify Being with language.[5] Later, in another essay within *The Adventure of Difference* entitled 'The Decline of the Subject and the Problem of Testimony,' Vattimo writes: 'According to *Being and Time Dasein* is to be found always, already, primordially, in authenticity. In the ontological perspective that is later developed, this means that truth arises and is disclosed always and only in a setting of non-truth, of *epoché*, of suspension and concealment' (Vattimo 1993a: 49). After the so-called '*Kehre*' (turn) in Heidegger's thought, common opinion (the 'They') becomes less important now than historical destining. For Heidegger after the *Kehre*, authenticity is not now a matter of personal choice or responsibility, but a modification of this world through the transformation of one epoch of Being into another (Vattimo 1993a: 50).

How does this historical destining transpire? In 'Dialectic, Difference, Weak Thought,' Vattimo explains how Heidegger's thought developed in the 1930s to place more emphasis on 'the relationship between

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[5] Which I will come on to in the next subsection. This issue will come up again and be of importance in Part Two when I explain how Vattimo's use of Kuhn and Gadamer link to his understanding of Christianity.

being and language' (Vattimo 2012a: 45). Vattimo spells it out when he states that:

> What is more radical about Heidegger is the fact that his discovery of the linguistic character of being's occurrence carries over into his concept of Being itself. Being now ends up stripped of the strong traits attributed to it by metaphysics. Being that can occur does not have the same traits as metaphysical Being with the simple addition of 'eventuality.' It offers itself to thought in a radically different way (Vattimo 2012a: 45).

Liberation can occur through remembering ontological difference as occurrence, by thinking being as a 'reappropriation that no longer deals with Being as stability' (Vattimo 2012a: 45). The latter notion refers to Being 'eventuating,' but how does this relate to language? I will look at the importance of language for Vattimo first, tracing how he has taken elements of his understanding from Heidegger:

> A historical world—a given order and 'meaning' of beings and of man among them—is always born through the institution of language. The sign-meaning relationship can occur solely within an already instituted opening because the establishment of linguistic conventions always comes after the birth of language, which in its origin is never a sign but the becoming world of the world. The eschatological character of openness onto the future is worked out by virtue of the artwork's founding a language and a world (Vattimo 2008: 121).

These words of Vattimo's are taken from his book *Art's Claim to Truth*, and they refer to the idea of Being 'happening' through language. I have briefly alluded to the idea in Heidegger's thought that Being 'occurs' through openings through which things come to presence. For Vattimo, things come to presence through 'the birth of language' which he sees as having its origin in artwork. Before looking at the links to Heidegger's work, three things need to be said here: 1. The role of 'art' and the 'artwork' will be discussed in more depth later in the Introduction; 2. Vattimo distinguishes between more and less influential works of art, and even in this text from 1967 (revised in 1985), he sees the Bible as having a privileged role in the history of the West in terms of founding a world and a language (Vattimo 2008: 121); 3. There is a subtle distinction here between the 'birth of language' and the 'establishment of linguistic conventions.' Much later in Vattimo's thought (Vattimo 2012b; Vattimo 2013), albeit hinted at in *The End of Modernity* (Vattimo 1988a: Ch. 6), Vattimo makes the link between Heidegger's notion of the event and the paradigm concept in Thomas Kuhn's thought, that is, the occurrence of the 'birth of language' is the

scientific revolution and the working out of convention is 'normal science.'[6] The specifically Heideggerian roots of Vattimo's identification of Being with language can be found in Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism,' in which he said 'language is the house of Being' (Heidegger 1993: 161). Davis puts it slightly differently, that 'language demarcates the parameters of a realm wherein humans can meaningfully dwell' (Davis 2010: 10). How does language demarcate the parameters of the dwelling realm for humans? In the essay 'The Turning,' Heidegger writes, 'Language is the primal dimension within which man's essence is first able to correspond at all to Being and its claim, and, in corresponding, to belong to Being. This primal corresponding, expressly carried out, is thinking. Through thinking, we first learn to dwell in the realm in which there comes to pass the restorative surmounting of the destining of Being' (Heidegger 1977: 41). Man '*ek-sists*' by dwelling in language which is the house of Being, as Being corresponds to the essence of man by pervading language (Heidegger 1993: 161). The mention of ecstatic temporality is important here, as is the idea that man is 'guarding' language, and therefore Being. One can relate it to what Heidegger writes elsewhere about man being the 'shepherd' of Being (Heidegger 1993: 159). Taking the 'guarding/shepherding' references and the allusion to ecstatic temporality together, one can link what Heidegger says about language in relation to *Dasein* to the notions of 'transmission' of messages and *Andenken*, the thoughtful remembrance of traces of Being which *Dasein* inherits through language in such a way that it relates these traces to their own projectuality.[7]

At this point, it is worth noting the impact Hans-Georg Gadamer made on Vattimo's thought, something he seems keen to downplay. Jean Grondin puts it as follows: with the Nietzschean axiom adopted by Vattimo, 'There are no facts, only interpretations,' Gadamer would rephrase it 'There are only facts through interpretations' (Grondin 2007: 207). For Gadamer, 'there are no facts without a certain language that expresses them. But he is adamant that it is the *Sache*, the thing itself (or the 'facts'), that comes to

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[6] The working-out of this ill-fitting Kuhnian-Heideggerianism in Vattimo's more recent thought will be discussed later in the dissertation, and the import of these identifications for his interpretation of Christianity in Part Two.

[7] The ideas of 'transmission' and '*Andenken'* will be looked at in more detail in due course.

light through this linguistic unfolding' (Grondin 2007: 208). In Gadamer's own words:

> From the relation of language to world follows its unique factualness (*Sachlichkeit*). It is a matter of fact (*Sachverhalte*) that comes into language. That a thing behaves (*eine Sache verhalt sich*) in various ways permits to recognize its independent otherness, which presupposes a real distance between the speaker and the thing (Gadamer 1989: 445).

Interpretations are of things, but not external to them. Grondin mentions that Gadamer's hermeneutics derives from the performing arts, and to interpret a play, for instance, is 'to play out the work itself' (Grondin 2007: 208). For Vattimo, this notion of a 'work itself' is insufficiently nihilistic. Therefore, with Gadamer's famous sentence 'Being, that can be understood, is language' (Gadamer 1989: 474), Vattimo 'puts the emphasis on language, which ends up absorbing Being in what can be called a linguistic ontology' (Grondin 2007: 211). When Vattimo was translating *Truth and Method* into Italian, he made some interesting philosophical choices with this sentence of Gadamer's. Ashley Woodward notes that 'Vattimo chose to translate this phrase maintaining the commas of the original German omitted in the English translation, so that the phrase is effectively: 'Being, that can be understood, is language.' This choice allows a reading which radically identifies Being with language' (Woodward 2008: 181). For Vattimo, 'there is nothing left of Being as such,' and Being that can be understood is absorbed into language. Therefore, when Gadamer says that 'man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic… hermeneutic experience is verbal in nature' (Gadamer 1989: 443), for Vattimo this is all there is, for there is not a '*Sache*' which is worked out through interpretation (for there are nothing but interpretations for Vattimo).

Arguably the clearest exposition of the linguistic nature of Being found in Vattimo's work is located in the 'Dialogue' between Vattimo, Rorty, and Zabala in *The Future of Religion*. In an extended contribution from Vattimo in this exchange, he exclaims:

> When we think that (1) 'Being' is an event of the *Logos*, (2) the *Logos* is 'dialogue,' and (3) dialogue is the sum of inter-subjective discourse; then our ontological worry is to be able to 'found' Being, not to try to find something that is already there, but construing something that holds, that resists in time (Vattimo, Rorty, Zabala 2006: 66).

In using the term *'Logos,'* a term with a varied etymological and philosophical background in ancient Greek thought, Vattimo is again consciously drawing upon the work of Gadamer. 'As the place of total mediation,' Vattimo writes, 'language is precisely this kind of reason and this *Logos* that lives in the collective belonging to a web of living tradition or an ethos' (Vattimo 1988a: 133). Vattimo's use of *Logos* in this Gadamerian context emphasises the social role of language, that tradition is part of the collective consciousness. A living tradition is also one in which interpretation is not merely a passive receiving of tradition, but a dynamic inheritance within an interpretative family, that the collective consciousness is working out new truths through the worn garments of the traditions that have been passed down. With new interpretative events goes new generation of Being.

The *Logos* is not meant to be understood in an objective way as the rational Logos of ontotheology. While the primacy of language 'has a kind of metaphysical pre-eminence' (Vattimo 2008: 148), it is because we are each thrown into a horizon that is a linguistic tradition; we can understand other people because they use language, too. In *The Future of Religion*, Vattimo writes, 'Being is nothing but the *Logos* interpreted as dialogue, (*Gespräch*) as the actual discussion among people' (Vattimo, Rorty, Zabala 2006: 58). Language, shaped through the tradition which is the heritage into which we are thrown, is Gadamer's way of resolving the Heideggerian problem of the way in which we can conceive of our pre-understanding as *Dasein* without resorting to a Kantian *a priori*. As such, language is required not only for experience, but also as the possibility of thought. Both interlocutors will have language in common behind their own particular horizons, and 'the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language' (Gadamer 1989: 378). When interlocutors engage in dialogue (or, as Vattimo prefers to say, a conversation), an 'event' of interpretation occurs, generating new Being. The continuity of one's own horizon is broken by the novelty of the other. More than a simple exchange of ideas occurs, but a 'fusion of horizons,' 'in which the two interlocutors recognize each other not as they were before but as discovered *anew*, enriched and deepened in their being' (Vattimo 2008:

133; emphasis Vattimo's). What is important to recognise is that truth is not found, but created in a community.

d) Thinking Being weakly

If Being is no longer to be thought of as stable and objectively present, how are its traces thought today? The coming to consciousness of Being as unstable, as groundless does not lead merely to a liberation of difference (what Nietzsche called the liberation of metaphor): 'the illusions of dialectics are not simply abandoned in favor of difference' (Vattimo 2012a: 45). This is where Vattimo introduces the notion of *Verwindung* into his thought as 'The dialectical heritage through which difference is declined' (Vattimo 2012a: 46). Before *Verwindung* is explained, it is important to understand what is meant by 'dialectical heritage.' Here Vattimo draws upon three related terms: *Überlieferung*, *Ge-schick* and *Andenken* (Vattimo 2012a: 46). As already alluded to, the former term refers to transmission, and is mainly a term Vattimo gets from Gadamer. This term is important as it is the link between openings that allows traces of tradition to link between past and present. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes, 'Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated' (Gadamer 1989: 290). The mediating, in Vattimo's interpretation of Gadamer and Heidegger, takes place through the language games in which *Dasein* is involved which in turn are framed in accordance with the sending (*Ge-schick*) of the age, which in the case of late-modernity is living after the death of God. In *The End of Modernity*, Vattimo explicitly states that the 'hermeneutic constitution of *Dasein*' has a 'nihilistic character' due to being founded in an epoch in which man rolls from the centre towards X, in other words in which Being 'tends to identify itself with nothingness' (Vattimo 1988a: 121). For Vattimo 'tradition' in terms of *Überlieferung* (transmission) means 'linguistic messages' which has its importance because 'Being, as a horizon of disclosure in which things appear, can arise only as a trace of past words or as an announcement that has been handed down to us' (Vattimo 1988a: 120). Traces of tradition have an 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschicte*) which encompasses not only their power today, but also the way in which tradition has been interpreted in the past

(Gadamer 1989: 282-283). This is particularly important when one considers the case of the Bible, not least when I will come to look at Vattimo's use of the stages of history and 'ways' of interpreting scripture according to his reading of the medieval theologian Joachim of Fiore. *Wirkungsgeschichte*, together with the idea of *Dasein* responding to a series of announcements which constitute the horizon of disclosure in which things appear, will be significant when I come to look at the case of the Bible in Vattimo's thought.

Andenken is recollective thought, 'it never renders Being present but always recalls it as already 'gone'' (Vattimo 2012a: 47). Being is not a presence, but recalls that which has been passed on. This, Vattimo points out, means that dealing with metaphysical concepts is unavoidable but that one must 'twist' them. If 'transmission' brings inherited traces of words and concepts from past openings to mind which have an 'effective history,' *Andenken* is recollective thought by which one aims to think Being in its history by meditating on its eventual nature. As Peter Warnek writes, 'the history of Being can only be thought of by way of meditative recollection (*besinnnliches Andenken*), and it is inevitably distorted when it is subjected to any kind of pragmatic planning or calculative control' (Warnek 2010: 165). Remembrance is thinking which is also a thanking (Heidegger's play on '*denken*' and '*danken*'), and it is intimately related to his understanding of poetry.[8] Nevertheless, it can be said that *Andenken* is a meditative, recollective thought at the end of metaphysics in which one is grateful for the traditions into which one has been thrown and one responds accordingly, not engaging in attempts to replicate or renew metaphysical thought, but in letting Being be, to come to disclosure in hermeneutical, interpretative thought which takes the traces of tradition which constitute *Dasein*'s horizon and thinking forward in ecstatic projectuality. Vattimo sees Heidegger's philosophical project after *Being and Time* as representing *Andenken*: 'It is by retracing the history of metaphysics as the forgetting of Being that *Dasein* decides for its own death and in this way founds itself as a hermeneutic totality whose foundation consists of a lack of foundation' (Vattimo 1988a: 119). One can see this, for instance, in the way that Heidegger was able to go back to the pre-Socratics in his philosophical

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[8] This will be looked at in more detail in the section on 'Art' in this Introduction.

thinking. Indeed, as Vattimo wants to get beyond the language of 'authenticity' and 'fallenness' of *Being and Time*, he wrote that he sees *Andenken* as the way to think after the end of metaphysics rather than anticipatory resoluteness (Vattimo 1986: 451).

As for *Ge-schick* ('sending,' or 'destining'), this refers to how Being is sent in an epoch. Although how one thinks depends upon whether one thinks and speaks as 'they' speak or instead authentically in *Being and Time*, after the 'turn' (*Kehre*) in Heidegger's thought in the 1930s he places more emphasis on *Logos* being 'destined' by the epoch into which one is thrown. For example, in the essay 'The Age of the World Picture,' Heidegger talks about the incommensurability of historical destinings (Heidegger 1977: 117), and that 'Metaphysics grounds an age, in that through a specific interpretation of what is and through a specification comprehension of truth it gives to that age the basis upon which it is essentially formed' (Heidegger 1977: 115). In this essay, Heidegger contrasts the modern way of thinking of Being as a 'world picture' (a representation of something brought before oneself as an object of calculation) (Heidegger 1977: 132-135), compared with earlier sendings of Being as the *ens creatum* in the Middle Ages (Heidegger 1977: 130), or as 'that which is' for the Greek man (albeit the notion of the image as *eidos* is a dormant idea placed in concealment in the thought of Plato, later to be brought into unconcealment in the modern epoch) (Heidegger 1977: 131). In other words, historical irruptions take the place of the more '*a priori*' structures found in the analytic of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1963: 272). In addition to the notion that *Dasein* is the primary locus of the true through disclosedness based upon the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, this idea of truth as historically-destined openings is very important to Vattimo as shall be shown in his arguments concerning secularisation and that thought in the epoch after the death of God is fundamentally different to before.[9]

Now that 'dialectical heritage' has been explained through looking at *Andenken*, *Ge-schick* and *Überlieferung*, it is now time to look at *Verwindung*. In the words of Giovanna Borradori in her exposition of Vattimo: *Verwindung* is '*Andenken* (to recollect), which allows one to look

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[9] More will be said in due course about 'events,' particularly the difficulty in distinguishing between 'events' and 'the *Ereignis*.'

at the tradition from the point of view of the *Ge-schick*, destiny or historical destination' (Borradori 1988: 44). Vattimo contrasts *Verwindung* with an *Überwindung* (overcoming) of modernity or an *Aufhebung* (dialectical overcoming in the Hegelian sense). To leave metaphysics behind altogether would be to create a new foundation, whether 'locally' or as some sort of new global epistemological foundation, one would be repeating the metaphysical tendency to create foundations. Therefore, rather than a dialectical overcoming, Vattimo thinks interpretation should be a *Verwindung*. This term, little-used by Heidegger, refers to a 'convalescence-alteration,' a 'distortion' which is also a 'resignation' (Vattimo 1988a: 172). *Verwindung* means many things for Vattimo, such as being resigned to tradition, yet also distorting or 'twisting' it and—as a result—getting better from it as a form of 'convalescence.'

If metaphysics is not to be overcome, but 'twisted,' what does this really mean and how does it happen? Lexically, *Verwindung*:

> is a convalescence (in the sense of '*eine Krankheit verwinden*': to heal, to be cured of an illness) and a distorting (although this is a rather marginal meaning linked to '*winden*,' meaning 'to twist,' and to the sense of a deviant alteration which the prefix '*ver—*' also possesses). The notion of 'convalescence' is linked to another meaning as well, that of 'resignation'…Besides these meanings of the term, there is that of 'distortion' to consider as well (Vattimo 1988a: 172-173).

This notion of *Verwindung* is related to nihilism as our 'sole opportunity.' Vattimo follows Nietzsche in referring to an 'accomplished nihilism,' one which aims at creating one's own values after the highest values have been dissolved. The opportunity of accomplished nihilism is limited by language, and this is where *Verwindung* comes in: 'Tradition is the transmitting of linguistic messages that constitute the horizon within which *Dasein* is thrown as an historically determined project: and tradition derives its importance from the fact that Being, as a horizon of disclosure in which things appear, can arise only as a trace of past words' (Vattimo 1988a: 120).

What do metaphysical concepts become once they are recollected and twisted? How should we react to them? Vattimo, recalling Benjamin's 'ruins,' calls the traces of metaphysical heritage of 'monuments,' and the attitude towards them being '*pietas*,' which should evoke an attitude of nostalgia, but 'primarily mortality, finitude, and passing away' (Vattimo

2012a: 47).[10] It is worth noting that Vattimo sees monuments as transmitting the form of messages in works of art (in a largely unspecified sense, but working best with poetry). In successive generations these monuments not only carry and bear, but also lose, interpretations as these generations come and go (Vattimo 1988a: 74). The main implication of *pietas* is the recognition that 'the transcendental…is nothing less than transience' (Vattimo 2012a: 47). Objects are only such because they appear in the open region as described in *Being and Time's* existential analytic, and the metaphysical characteristics which used to strongly pertain to these objects have been passed down through tradition according to historical destinings of Being of which we are now aware due to *Ereignis*, the event of appropriation (Vattimo 2012: 47). Interestingly, in 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought,' Vattimo sees in *pietas* the possibility of an ethic based not on imperatives, but on 'deeds' (Vattimo 2012a: 50). He only discusses it in a handful of places and only cryptically. In *The End of Modernity*, he brings up *pietas* in the context of discussing the consequences of the recognition that all there is happens to be a history of 'sendings' (or 'destinings'); would this not lead to thoroughgoing, destructive relativism? 'This historicism,' writes Vattimo, 'is nevertheless tempered and *verwunden* by an awareness that the history of such overtures is not 'only' the history of errors…but rather is Being itself' (Vattimo 1988a: 175). Likening this attitude to Nietzsche's man of 'good temperament,' Vattimo states that 'The word that best defines this approach to the past and to everything that is transmitted to us (even in the present) is *pietas*' (Vattimo 1988a: 176-177). *Pietas* as an ethic never really materialised in Vattimo's thought, perhaps because it is so vaguely expressed in 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought' and *The End of Modernity*. Nevertheless, this remark by Vattimo shows how even early on in weak thought he held the desire that his 'programme' of philosophy should yield an ethic, something to which he returned in his writings on Christianity which will be the object of 'Part One.'

e) Truth

The transience of Being and contingent presencing of beings does not mean that truth has to be jettisoned altogether. Vattimo recalls Heidegger's

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[10] These 'monuments' will be discussed further below in the context of looking at the 'fourfold' (Heidegger's imagery concerning earth, world, humans and gods).

distinction in §44 of *Being and Time* between truth as correspondence and the openings which allow one to make judgements about correspondence. In this section Heidegger distinguishes between the 'traditional' conception of truth (in the Thomistic sense of *adequatio* between idea and thing) and a more fundamental one. Properly speaking, *Dasein* is primarily true and only secondarily there is truth as Being-uncovering (*aletheia*). The latter is an *existentiale*, and is a characteristic of *Dasein* and is set out in the existential analytic. What is uncovered depends upon the care structure of *Dasein*, based on how it is thrown into the world, whether it is fallen or authentic, and its project, which is more primordial than a relationship between idea and a thing: '*The most primordial phenomenon of truth is first shown by the existential-ontological foundations of uncovering*' (Heidegger 1962: 263). The primordial uncovering is articulated in discourse as a relationship which is both ready-at-hand which can either be fallen (talking about something that has been uncovered in derivative ways) or authentic. Nevertheless, the traditional concept *Logos* (assertion) does obtain when one talks about that which has been uncovered as present-at-hand, as an object. Heidegger is emphatic that truth can only occur because *Dasein* is primarily true, that there was no truth—not even Newton's laws—before *Dasein* (Heidegger 1962: 269). At its heart, Vattimo's philosophical style depends upon this understanding of truth, albeit with a significant modification. In *The Adventure of Difference*, a collection of essays that documents the changes in Vattimo's thought working towards its mature style in *il pensiero debole*, Vattimo writes: 'According to *Being and Time Dasein* is to be found always, already, primordially, in authenticity. In the ontological perspective that is later developed, this means that truth arises and is disclosed always and only in a setting of non-truth, of *epoché*, of suspension and concealment' (Vattimo 1993a: 49). In other words, Vattimo thinks the *Geschick* of the epoch into which one is thrown is more decisive for what counts as truth and is called true than being 'authentic' or 'fallen.'

The sending alone does not determine how one is able to make judgements pertaining to truth or falsity completely. There are also 'forms of life' to consider, too. With regard to making judgements about correspondence, Vattimo likens these open regions to Wittgenstein's language games. There is correspondence within each 'form of life,' but

none of these forms of life inhere in some underlying substratum (Vattimo 2012a: 49). With these forms of life, with their rules and monuments passed down through tradition and sendings, Vattimo sees truth as being 'rhetorical,' of an aesthetic sense to truth in which one tries to persuade people from within—and between—forms of life (Vattimo 2012a: 50). This is a consistently held view of Vattimo's, for in a much later work—*A Farewell to Truth*—he writes, 'The relation of thought to the truth of Being, to the original aperture of truth, to the milieu into which *Dasein* is thrown, is in no sense a cognizance, a theoretical acquisition. Rather, it is what Wittgenstein would call the sharing of a "form of life"' (Vattimo 2011: xxxi). Vattimo is at pains to say this does not entail any kind of irrationalism, but that the form of life involves 'assuming the heritage of the tradition into which we are thrown as a horizon of possibility' (Vattimo 2011: xxxii).

Later, Vattimo downplays the aesthetic and rhetorical elements of persuasion and reconfigures the latter notion by wedding it to ideas of consensus and conversation. Vattimo does not foreground his debt to Gadamer, but the latter thinker's views on a fusion of horizons underlies Vattimo's ideas on truth, at least in his more recent writings. Truth, for Vattimo is neither correspondence, nor coherence, but consensus created through conversation based on an opening.[11] Although Vattimo rejects 'vertical' transcendence, of the 'Wholly Other,' he accepts the necessity of this kind of 'horizontal transcendence' (Vattimo and Dotolo 2009: 17), of the salvific possibility of the event coming from without historically in order to bring people beyond their own horizon by fusing them closer together. The fusion re-establishes the continuity of the horizon, which is similar and yet different after the dialogue. Of course, in the postmodern age of world pictures, is continuity even possible (or desirable)? Perhaps this is why, influenced by his pupil Santiago Zabala (Zabala 2009: 79) and a debt to Rorty, more recently Vattimo has chosen to use 'conversation' rather than 'dialogue.' The latter term in philosophy is reminiscent of the Socratic dialogues in which truth is presupposed from the outset, and continuity is more of an aim than convergence (Vattimo and Zabala 2011: 25-26). Moreover, dialogue may not be possible with some people because they

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[11] 'Opening' is a notion which shall be explained later.

only want to talk, not listen: apparent dialogue would be a monologue. By contrast, Vattimo and Zabala argue that conversation occurs when truth is not presupposed from the beginning (Vattimo and Zabala 2011: 25-26). Where there is no epistemic centre and no shared, universal *Grund*, there are competing traditions with their own claims to truth. Here Vattimo's primary understanding of truth comes through, and that is of 'friendship' and the practice of 'persuasion.' Vattimo's notion of friendship (which shall be interwoven with the idea of *caritas* in his return to religion), is linked to his reading of Gadamer. Nowhere is this clearer than in *The Future of Religion*, in which he explicitly links a discussion of friendship, in which he reverses Aristotle's dictum '*amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas*,' to a mention of Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons.' Vattimo declares that 'no experience of truth can exist without some kind of participation in a community, and not necessarily the closed community…[but in] the ongoing construction of communities that coincide in a 'fusion of horizons'' (Vattimo 2006a: 51). Truth is fashioned through dialogue/conversation, resulting in the generation of new Being and a new horizon for the interlocutors, a conversation which is only possible through friendship, that is, the recognition of the provisional nature of their own traditions (existing horizons) and a willingness to listen to the other. There are philosophical reasons for keeping truth and friendship together in keeping with Vattimo's broader programme: 'keeping the two things [truth and friendship] separate would mean accepting two regimes, and accepting the idea that objective, adequative, scientific truth may well be immoral and savage' (Vattimo 2010a: 98). One may disagree with Vattimo, that if there are 'no facts, only interpretations,' is it the case then that it is not true that '2+2 = 4'? While mathematics of this kind is not disputed by Vattimo, it is not an issue for just about anyone except a handful of theoretical mathematicians. Drawing upon an anecdote of Brecht's, Vattimo in *The Responsibility of the Philosopher* states that 'If someone gets up in front of a crowd of strikers to inform them that two plus two makes four, he'll get jeered. Plainly that's not the kind of truth that's needed' (Vattimo 2010a: 98). Truth becomes an issue where it is most disputed, and this is why friendship and persuasion are of paramount importance for Vattimo. Even with addition, there could be dispute for it is an operation defined by a set of rules and the rules can be set

otherwise as with non-Euclidean geometries. There is an element of pragmatism in Vattimo's thought here, a sign of the influence of Richard Rorty. In a multicultural, multi-ethnic society in the late-modern West, truth cannot be found, but has to be agreed by consensus achieved through dialogue. This can only occur, though, if an attitude of friendship obtains before, during and after dialogue, for without friendship one or more partners in the dialogue (if it happens at all) might wish to impose their own interpreted tradition on the other. Therefore, Vattimo writes that, 'In all fields, including science, truth itself is becoming an affair of consensus, listening, participation in a shared enterprise, rather than one-to-one correspondence with the pure hard objectivity of things' (Vattimo 2004: 35).

3. *The End of Modernity*
a) European Nihilism

So far I have outlined Vattimo's views on dialectics, metaphysics ontological difference, weak thought and Vattimo's views on truth and friendship. Perhaps surprisingly given his reputation as a hermeneutical nihilist, there is no direct discussion of 'nihilism' in his essay 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought.' This is more than made up for in arguably Vattimo's most important book, *The End of Modernity*, published two years after the essay. Why does Vattimo's thought have to be nihilistic? Partly it is an inevitable consequence of him taking the death of God and end of metaphysics seriously, as they both entail that 'Truth' (with a capital 'T') is no longer compelling, that there are no more absolute values and that there are no facts, only interpretations. More importantly, a nihilist position safeguards against mysticism, hidden substrata and the possibility of any kind of 'return' of metaphysics, especially when he makes the move that 'the new' in any foundational sense would be to repeat the worn-out, weakened logic of the metaphysics of modernity. In this section, '*The End of Modernity*,' I will be exploring the themes of this important book, with reference in addition to other works of Vattimo's, mainly from this period, especially *The Transparent Society*. These themes are nihilism and the relationship between hermeneutics, modernity and postmodernity.

It has been mentioned that Vattimo has said that we are living after the death of God, where the need for absolute truth seems superfluous. In

The End of Modernity, Vattimo elaborates on what this means. The opening chapter in the work is 'An Apology for Nihilism,' and he proceeds by elaborating on the meaning of nihilism for us—which is our 'sole opportunity' (Vattimo 1988a: 19)—and how his understanding of nihilism is a fusion between the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Vattimo's position on the relationship between Heidegger and Nietzsche can be found in the article 'Nietzsche and Heidegger,' originally found in the *Stanford Italian Review* (Vattimo 1986), then incorporated into the collection *Nietzsche in Italy* (Harrison 1988), later re-translated and included in Vattimo's *Dialogue with Nietzsche* as 'Nietzsche: Heidegger's Interpreter' (Vattimo 2006b, Ch. 13; Valgenti 2011: 162). In this essay, Vattimo makes it clear at the outset that he does not take a philological approach to Nietzsche as others have done that; instead he pursues theoretical themes in his reading of him (Vattimo 2006b: 181). Vattimo's starting point is the relationship between Nietzsche's writings and the present (Vattimo 2006b: 181). The 'Nietzsche renaissance' in the middle of the twentieth century owes a lot, Vattimo thinks, to the interest in the 'late Heidegger' works, including his lectures on Nietzsche, which came into the consciousness of philosophers and theoreticians in general in the 1950s (Vattimo 2006b: 181). Nietzsche's thought is decisive for Heidegger, in Vattimo's opinion, so much so that 'in addition to the explicit positions taken by Heidegger in his interpretation of Nietzsche, Nietzsche himself opens the door to an understanding of the meaning of Heidegger's philosophy. Thus we may speak not just of Heidegger, Nietzsche's interpreter, but also of Nietzsche, Heidegger's interpreter' (Vattimo 2006b: 182). Clearly here Vattimo is drawing upon his notion that the History of Being is constituted by conversations between texts, past and present. That Nietzsche can 'interpret' Heidegger's work, paradoxically, means that he does not have to present as the Nietzsche of Heidegger's work, but can be used to 'betray' Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's work 'in order to stay true to his most authentic intentions' (Vattimo 2006b: 182).

Reading Heidegger through Nietzsche against Heidegger includes avoiding the latter's view that Nietzsche was the last in a long line of metaphysicians, such as Descartes and Hegel (Vattimo 2006b: 182-183). Although Heidegger realised that the turning point came with Nietzsche in

the History of Being, the overriding impression from Heidegger's works is that Nietzsche was the metaphysician of the will to power. Vattimo notes that Dilthey, slightly earlier than Heidegger, saw more clearly than the latter that, by grouping him among 'philosophical writers' such as Tolstoy and Emerson, Nietzsche was not a metaphysician, but a thinker in a more poetic, subjectivist sense (Vattimo 2006b: 184-185). This is not to say that Nietzsche's thought was simply literature, but that it was not metaphysics either. Instead, Vattimo sees in Nietzsche's thought a 'memorial banquet' of different stages in the History of Being (Vattimo 2006b: 186), of being aware that one is dreaming and that the different courses (to use the banquet semantic field) from Being's history constitute the necessity of thought; as Nietzsche said, one cannot get rid of God until we have got rid of grammar. Vattimo likens this approach to Heidegger's notion of *Andenken*, something Heidegger did not appreciate because he did not realise how nihilistic his thought really was insofar as, like Nietzsche's thought, he regarded Being as event (Vattimo 2006b: 186). *Andenken* is rememoration of that which cannot merely be represented, and it is Nietzsche's 'banquet'-style emphasis on masking which informs this understanding of rethinking the History of Being, of stopping it simply 're-presenting' or laying new foundations (Vattimo 2006b: 188-189). Therefore, while Heidegger puts Nietzsche into perspective in the History of Being that a philological reconstruction of his texts would not be able to do, using Nietzsche to interpret Heidegger can shed light on Heidegger's work itself (Vattimo 2006b: 187).

Vattimo's Nietzsche is taken largely—but not entirely—from Heidegger's reading of him, concentrating mainly on the unpublished works. In this chapter, Vattimo proceeds this way by quoting Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, that nihilism is 'the situation in which 'man rolls from the centre toward X'' (Vattimo 1988a: 19). That is, nihilism is a decentering process which is ongoing. Vattimo also says that Nietzsche's nihilism is identical to 'the kind of nihilism defined by Heidegger, namely the process in which…'there is nothing left' of Being of such…the forgetting of Being by humanity' (Vattimo 1988a: 19). Vattimo is quite clear that nihilism concerns Being first and foremost and is not a psychological thesis (Vattimo 1988a: 20). 'For Nietzsche,' writes Vattimo, 'the entire process of nihilism can be summarized by the death of God, or by the 'devaluation of the

highest values'' (Vattimo 1988a: 20). These two ideas of Nietzsche's will be outlined in accordance with their interpretation by Vattimo, before looking more at how Vattimo reads Heidegger on the end of metaphysics. Finally, there will be some discussion on what Vattimo means when he says that, Nietzsche and Heidegger combined entails that 'Nihilism is thus the reduction of Being to exchange-value' (Vattimo 1988a: 21).

To analyse the Vattimian reading of Nietzsche's 'death of God,' I will start by recounting what he has to say in *The End of Modernity*. For Vattimo's Nietzsche,

> God dies precisely because knowledge no longer needs to arrive at ultimate causes, humanity no longer needs to believe in an immortal soul etc. Even if God dies because he must be negated in the name of the same imperative demand for truth that was always considered one of his own laws, the meaning of an imperative demand for truth itself is lost together with him (Vattimo 1988a: 24).

In this passage there are three points to pick out:

i)   Humanity no longer needs God,

ii) God died at the hand of his own command for truth,

iii) The force of the imperative for truth dies with God.

These three points are interrelated and summarise Vattimo's position on the death of God. The connection between 'God' and 'Truth' can be found in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche writes in Book Five, 'we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by the thousand-year old faith, the Christian faith which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth' (Nietzsche 2001: 201). In an essay entitled 'Art and Identity: On the Relevance of Nietzsche's Aesthetics' (1974) included in the collection of his writing on Nietzsche's thought, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, Vattimo writes: 'excess is the movement that Nietzsche resumes in the proposition 'God is dead' and the concept of nihilism: God is dead as a result of the extreme degree of refinement reached by religiosity, and the same holds good for all supreme values, like truth itself' (Vattimo 2006b: 113). The more fervently Christians followed their God, the more they killed him, to the point where they did not seek God at all. Vattimo takes this from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in which Nietzsche writes 'honest atheism' is 'the outcome of a two-thousand-year training in truthfulness, which finally forbids itself the *lie of belief in God*' (Nietzsche 1996: 134). In Vattimo's words, God dies 'on account of the religiosity of humans and their love of

truth' (Vattimo 2006b: 113). God commanded humans not to lie and Christianity has interpreted this as highlighting the value of truth. Ultimately this has led to the pursuit of scientific discovery in the name of truth, albeit—importantly, as shall become clear in the first part of this study—via the 'turn to the subject' in the philosophy of history when Kant realised that the *a priori* forms of time, space and the categories of the mind constitute experience (Vattimo 1999: 30). As reality is ever more delimited by the scientific method, and technology as the fruit of scientific discovery is able to search space, sea and sky, one finds that God is nowhere and he is a 'lie.' God, therefore, self-consumes. A variation on this 'self-consumption' notion is given in *The End of Modernity* where Vattimo links the death of God to the 'chemical analysis' given by Nietzsche at the very beginning of *Human, All Too Human* (Vattimo 1988a: 166). On this view there are no opposites (rational and irrational, for example), as the metaphysicians would have one believe, but that historical philosophy would discern that 'the most glorious colours are derived from base' (Nietzsche 1996: 12). This chemical analysis dissolves 'higher' values such as 'truth' to find their pre-sublimated origins in human contingencies. The specific highest value of truth has its origin in insecurity, of the nearness of death leading ancient humans to look for something unchanging.

In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo links the death of God to the idea of the 'true' (or 'real') world becoming a 'fable,' a section in Nietzsche's work *Twilight of the Idols* (Vattimo 1997a: 7). In the section called 'How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth' ('fable' is Vattimo's own, probably preferable, translation of the German '*fabel*'), Nietzsche describes how the 'real world' moves from an external, unchanging impersonal basis to that which is in the knowing subject, finally disappearing completely. Nietzsche starts with the eternal Platonic forms. With the rise of Christianity, the 'real' world is promised to the virtuous, faithful believer (as the kingdom of heaven). In the Enlightenment era, the real world is no longer promised, but is seen as a 'thing in itself,' or a Kantian noumenal realm necessary for guaranteeing experience which, ever since Descartes at the beginning of modernity, has retreated ever further into the subject. Empiricism comes to find no use for the noumenal world as 'thinking becomes aware that what is actually real is, as the positivists assert, a

'positive' fact, a given established by science. Establishing, however, is precisely the act of the human subject' (Vattimo 1999: 30). As a result, science and technology produce the world. Not only have we done away with the real, but also the 'apparent' ('empirical,' 'phenomenal') world, too (Nietzsche 1990a: 50-51).

The fabulisation of the world is taken by Vattimo to mean the devaluation of the highest values. Here a link can be made between Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche and Vattimo's reading of Heidegger. In the third of Heidegger's lecture series on Nietzsche he discusses this passage of Nietzsche's (Heidegger III 1991: 33). Heidegger states that Nietzsche brings up terms such as 'truth,' 'value,' 'real world,' 'apparent world' and 'twists' (reminiscent of Vattimo's use of the term *Verwindung*) them from their context in the history of philosophy to accord with his own concerns regarding 'life-enhancement,' as can be seen, for example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* §4: 'The falseness of a judgement is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgement…The question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving' (Nietzsche 1990b: 35). Traditionally, 'truth,' for instance, has been regarded as value-estimating in the sense of judging something to be correct, as with Aquinas' notion of *adequatio* between *eidos* and *res*. By seeing even fabulisation as life-enhancing, Heidegger sees Nietzsche as valuing 'Becoming' over 'Being.' Whereas the latter is associated with permanence and stasis, Nietzsche saw the world in a state of flux, that the world is nothing but competing 'perspectives' (which Vattimo reads as 'interpretations'). Vattimo is fond of quoting one of Nietzsche's fragments published posthumously in *The Will to Power*, that 'there are no facts, only interpretations' and that this itself is 'an interpretation' (if it were not, both Vattimo and Nietzsche would be contradicting themselves) (Vattimo 1997a: 12, 105; quoting Nietzsche 1967: 267). This nihilistic conclusion to the fabling of the world goes against Heidegger's own, for the forgetting of Being continues under Nietzsche in his notion of the will to power by reducing Being to value, of the secure conditions needed for the subject to enhance their life in a world of becoming. Heidegger thinks we do not have to reject the idea of the apparent world, but reinterpret it (Heidegger I 1991: 209). Heidegger reads Nietzsche as rejecting Platonism, but does this mean having to reject the opposite of the 'real' world, too?

Why could the sensible world not be reinterpreted, instead of rejected outright? Rejecting both realms remains within the logic of Platonism, leaving in place a duality and accepting or rejecting both over against the nothing (Heidegger I 1991: 209).

What, though, is meant by 'life-enhancing' and what does this have to do with the end of metaphysics and nihilism in Vattimo's reading of Heidegger? Vattimo is wary of seeing Nietzsche as having relevance primarily for aesthetics or literary studies. For example, Vattimo sees Derrida's reading of Nietzsche as representative of the 'French' school of interpreting his work which is more 'aesthetistic' than Vattimo's own political concerns (Vattimo 2006b: 197-199). By contrast, Vattimo develops the ontological reading of Nietzsche found in Heidegger's work, albeit along more overtly political lines. Although Vattimo does draw upon aesthetics in his reading of both Nietzsche and Heidegger, the political (particularly the notion of 'emancipation,' which will be discussed in due course) is never far away from the ontological. The two principal places in Heidegger's work where he discusses this topic of 'life-enhancement' in relation to the will are in his lectures on Nietzsche and in his essay, 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead".'

In his fourth volume on Nietzsche, Heidegger thought that in modern metaphysics, the question 'what is the being?' had been transformed into one about fundamental truth, therefore exchanging certitude about salvation and revelation for certitude based on the self (Heidegger IV 1991: 97). This can be traced back to Descartes' *Cogito*. While '*cogito ergo sum*' is the most famous and well-known version of Descartes' foundational formula for certain knowledge, in some passages he uses '*percipere*' (to take possession of/represent/that which he can master) (Heidegger IV 1991: 104; Descartes 2013: 50). To be human involves being able to permanently represent things in an open field in the certitude towards which one is brought. If a *res cogitans* represents and takes possession of something, the other side of this duality, *res extensa*, is mathematical in nature and is related back to (and is the consequence of) the first principle of the certainty of representation implicit in the *Cogito*. In the history of metaphysics, this gives rise to machine technology (Heidegger IV 1991: 116-117). In Descartes' work, 'subject' now becomes the proper noun for man, and

everything else becomes an object; Being for him is representedness in secure representation (Heidegger IV 1991: 120). 'Security' comes from the metaphysical need for certitude, which manifests itself in rational calculation and planning in the world of techno-science which is the culmination of metaphysics. Before this, though, certainty comes to be a condition through Kant's transcendental development of the Cartesian *Cogito*. In Descartes one has the 'point of view' as being related both to 'mastery' and 'certainty.' One can relate this to *machenshaft* (machination), a term Heidegger used in the 1930s-1940s as a precursor to *Ge-Stell* (enframing). In the Nietzsche lectures and *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger relates machination to technology and, therefore, to metaphysics. From the latter, Heidegger writes, 'The step taken by Descartes is…the decisive one, whereby machination comes into sovereignty as a transformed truth (correctness), i.e., as certainty' (Heidegger 2012: 104). With Descartes beings have their Being only insofar as they are objects, by which Heidegger thought Descartes meant objects of representations held in certainty by a thinking thing. With Kant, the 'point of view' becomes a 'condition' for truth in the transcendental sense. Kant, though, still held onto a noumenal, of the 'thing-in-itself' that was unknowable. By contrast, inverting Plato (Heidegger I 1991: 154), the start of metaphysics, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche as holding that there was nothing but becoming. Nevertheless, Heidegger also thought that Nietzsche posited a subject who had to live in this becoming. As such, the subject needed to engage with the flux of becoming as follows:

> To be able to be as life, life needs the constant fixity of a 'belief', but this 'belief' calls for holding something to be constant and fixed, taking something as 'in being.' Since life posits values, yet is at the same time concerned about its own securing of permanence, a valuation must belong to life in which it takes something as constant and fixed; that is, as in being that is, as true (Heidegger III 1991: 62-63).

A 'point of view' in the Cartesian sense, combined with the Kantian 'condition,' becomes a 'condition of life' in the sense of a representing as a value. All life is becoming, but the becoming of a subject is the will to power. If the will wills its will, it posits values that it holds fast with the certainty characteristic of the history of metaphysics. In Nietzsche's philosophy this is expressed in the 'doctrine' of the 'eternal recurrence.' As Nietzsche held that becoming is all that there is, this is, for Heidegger, the

mere reversal of Plato's eternal forms. The eternal recurrence is putting one's 'stamp' of Being onto becoming (Heidegger I 1994: 19), in order to fix the values that enable one to live a life as the *Ubermensch* (Heidegger IV 1994: 9, 82). The reduction of Being to a value is, for Heidegger, the ultimate forgetting of Being and the culmination of metaphysics, which contrasts with the 'French' reading of the eternal recurrence which is not metaphysical at all but is 'A principle that differentiates [*fait la différence*] between the ontological candidates for return. A principle that announces, therefore, contrary to what its name indicates, neither the return of the identical, nor the return of all things' (Malabou 2010: 22). For instance, Deleuze writes: 'If eternal return is a wheel, then it must be endowed with a violent centrifugal movement which expels…everything which cannot pass the test' (Deleuze 1994: 55).

Vattimo has struggled to deal with the eternal recurrence in his interpretation of Nietzsche's thought. It figured more prominently in his earlier work on Nietzsche but its prominence has dropped in favour of concentrating on the announcement of nihilism through the death of God. Most representative of Vattimo's early work on Nietzsche is *Il soggetto e la maschera* (1974). In this work, the inner life of man is in tension with an outer life in which 'Socratic' *ratio* (reason) has been manifesting itself through history in the form of metaphysics, themes Vattimo borrows from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Vattimo sees the Dionysiac will as being restrained by Socratic rationality. Art is a creative free space outside of the laws of metaphysics and, as such, is archetypal of the will to power. Vattimo also takes from Heidegger his view of metaphysics as calculating, rationalising, and aiming at appropriation. The term Vattimo gives to metaphysics is 'violence,' for it silences questioning by reducing debate back to unwavering first principles—a '*Grund*' or '*arche.*' The search for certainty is, ultimately, Vattimo believes, to stave off fear of the unknown, of death, and of change. Concerning this fear, Vattimo sees metaphysics also as a history of 'masking' its origins in human insecurity, with even 'unmasking' itself being a further masking. Although Robert Valgenti thinks Nietzsche never uses 'mask' overly much (Valgenti 2011: 153), Douglas Burnham has shown in his *Nietzsche Dictionary* that 'The notion of mask, wearing a disguise, or playing a role are all significant

components of N[ietzsche's] thought concerning society and social behaviours' (Burnham 2015: 211). With interest in Nietzsche's genealogical 'middle period' (from the second *Untimely Meditation* to *The Gay Science*: Vattimo 2002a: 87), Vattimo thought the Nietzschean figure of the Overman would expose the symbolism and logic of fear behind the mask. The Overman would then make an emancipating decision for the eternal recurrence to be free for the multiplicity of images and ways of life opened up by not fearing temporality, reconciling inner and outer: '*La decisione eternizzante come decisione liberatrice è la sola capace di creare un essere nuova, che non soffra piú come noi, e che sappia vivere la grande avventura della scienza e della tecnica fuori dagli schemi del dominio, i quali bloccano scienza e tecnica*' (Vattimo 1974: 347). Influenced by Marxism, Vattimo thought this individual would not only be free from metaphysical-religious violence, but also liberal-capitalist domination, too. However, in the period of his writing about weak thought, Vattimo has said little about the eternal recurrence. One essay—''*Verwindung*,' Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy'—mentions that the end of modernity (an idea I shall explain further below in the section on 'ontology of actuality') involves the eternal recurrence whereby it reveals modernity as the epoch in which the 'new' was the highest value (Vattimo 1987: 9). Vattimo does not develop this idea much in the essay, but one can relate it to themes explored in *The End of Modernity* and *The Transparent Society*, such as the 'routinisation of the new' in Arnold Gehlen's idea of *post-histoire*. Gehlen puts forward the view that developments (or, 'progress') in technology is now required in order for the consumer-capitalist West to stand still. Moreover, progress becomes devalued through imputing to the penultimate the value of being the 'ultimate,' 'best,' or 'perfect' 'driving machine,' for example (Vattimo 1988a: 101-104). The 'eternally new' devalues the value of novelty, revealing modernity and its values for what they are, expressions of the will to power which—in Vattimo's Heideggerian eyes—are metaphysical.

In his essay 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God is Dead",' Heidegger states that the death of God in Nietzsche's philosophy is reducing God to the highest values posited by the will to power (Heidegger 1977: 66, 103-105). 'Value' for Heidegger means 'perspective,' or

'enhancement/preservation' conditions for life (Heidegger 1977: 72). Heidegger says that a value values inasmuch as it counts, by which it posits insofar as it aims. However, gradually 'aim' has changed from '*eidos*' (idea) to '*perceptio*' (perception), and this setting forth (or 'representing') has impetus (*nisus*) which is a springing-forth (Heidegger 1977: 72). Heidegger sees Nietzsche identifying 'Becoming' (and Being) with the 'will to power,' with the former shaping itself 'into centers of the will to power particularized in time' (Heidegger 1977: 74). The 'will to power is revealed as that which posts that point-of-view' (Heidegger 1977: 74), so values are only expressions of this internal principle aiming for the preservation-enhancement of life. How are we now in a state of nihilism and living after the death of God, and what does this have to do with the will to power? Heidegger writes:

> The doing away with that which is in itself, i.e., the killing of God, is accomplished in the making secure of a constant reserve by means of which man makes secure for himself material, bodily, psychic, and spiritual resources, and this for the sake of his own security, which will dominion over whatever is—as the potentially objective—in order to correspond to the Being of whatever is, to the will to power (Heidegger 1977: 107).

The key moment in the history of metaphysics is when Descartes changed the Aristotelian *hypokeimenon* into a self-conscious *subjectum*, while retaining the metaphysical yearning for the absolute in the form of certainty. This threw everything over against the subject as an object. As a result, 'certainty' is taken away from the supra-sensory and laid flat on the plain of immanence. Gradually, the subject does not represent objects, which are mutable, but something certain, which are the values which spring from within—the will to power—and are capable of being taken under command: 'because the will can will only from out of its disposal over something steadily constant, truth is a necessary value precisely out of the essence of the will to power, for that will' (Heidegger 1977: 85). Rather than being content explaining our current state as one of nihilism, Heidegger sees Nietzsche as having attempted to push on through the devaluation of the highest values with an attempt for 'new value-positing' (Heidegger 1977: 95), particularly with regards to art, which enables the will to move beyond itself but from itself and for itself through expressing its value in the form of a creative appropriation in a secure representation of its will (Heidegger 1977: 85-86). The danger Heidegger sees is that of

the will securing objects through its artistic representation so that everything (the 'earth') will be taken up in this way through technology, so that 'The world changes into object' (Heidegger 1977: 100), so that there is no other way to think Being than as value (subject or object of) (Heidegger 1977: 104). Through seeking to secure everything, Nietzsche's notion of the will to power remains within metaphysics whilst still heralding the philosophy of nihilism.

How do 'art' and 'technology' result in metaphysical objectification and—ultimately—nihilism? More clues can be found elsewhere among Heidegger's essays. In the essay 'The Age of the World Picture,' Heidegger says that 'Value is the objectification of needs as goals, wrought by a representing self-establishing within the world as picture' (Heidegger 1977: 142). Representing replaces the substantial objectivity of an object, and is instead a will, a mastery, a 'making stand-over against, an objectifying that goes forward and masters' (Heidegger 1977: 150). Heidegger makes the link between this change in the subject-object relationship wrought by Descartes and reaching its apex in Nietzsche, and technology: 'In the planetary imperialism of technologically organised man, the subjectivism of man attains its acme, from which point it will descend to the level of organised uniformity and there firmly establish itself' (Heidegger 1977: 152). In an essay entitled 'The Will to Power as Art,' one which Vattimo states as being key to his move towards his later thought (Vattimo 1993a: 4), he writes the following:

> In the end of metaphysics as technology, the nexus between metaphysics, domination and will, which had hitherto remained hidden, becomes explicit. The system of total concatenation of causes and effects, prefigured by metaphysics in its 'vision' of the world and actualized by technology, is the expression of a will to dominate. Hence the Nietzschean will to power is simply the most coherent culmination of the history of Western metaphysics (Vattimo 1993a: 86).

Willing, valuing and representing: these activities of the subject culminate in the *Ge-Stell*, in the end of metaphysics in the modern world of technology. This is Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger's interpretation of the relationship between the will to power, technology and the culmination of metaphysics. It was for this reason chiefly that Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as a metaphysician and why he took a dim view of

technology as 'the unfolding of the will to power as technocracy' (Vattimo 1993a: 87). In the essay, 'Dialectics and Difference,' Vattimo writes that, 'The technical world described as *Ge-Stell* is the world of planned production, served by knowledge as representation, and in which man is repeatedly interpellated in an ordering process imposing on him a continuous pursuit of things to serve as reserves of resources' (Vattimo 1993a: 169). Before we look at what is meant by 'representation' in Vattimo's thought contrasted with Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's use of the word 'representation,' and how this links to the will to power and Vattimo's philosophy more broadly, it is important to look at the meaning of the term '*Ge-Stell*.'

In his reading of Heidegger, Vattimo follows him in seeing metaphysics reaching its point of culmination in modern technology. Before looking at Vattimo's specifically nihilistic reading of Heidegger on technology, it is necessary to outline Heidegger's thoughts on the issue. In 'The Question Concerning Technology' (Heidegger 1977) and *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger states that the essence of technology is not something technological: it is not merely instrumental, but also a way of revealing. The idea of 'revealing' comes from Heidegger's phenomenological rejection of Kant divorcing how things appear to us from how they really are; Heidegger thought they are connected, and the appearance of something in our consciousness is how it is revealed to us, how it is brought into unconcealment. Every unconcealment also conceals, however, as our knowledge of beings is always fragmentary; there is always more to the essence of a thing than is revealed to us. Technology's role in unconcealment for Heidegger is evident in the interest he pays to the ancient Greek etymology of *techné*, which emphasises technology's role in 'opening up' and 'revealing.' *Techné* is the form of knowledge appropriate to *poeisis*, a Greek term for a form of (poetic) activity which is a bringing-forth from unconcealment, whether an artisan brings-forth a chalice which was previously a potential chalice, or whether blossom brings itself into bloom.

Primitive technology allowed nature to reveal itself 'poetically,' such as a farmer watching crops grow and harvesting them or a windmill converting the energy generated by the wind when it blew, in line with

Aristotle's definition of *techné* in his Physics, as completing and supplementing nature (Aristotle 1966: 199a16). This view of primitive technology assumes a final cause (*telos*) for natural things, a view at odds with Nietzsche's view that 'purpose is lacking' (Nietzsche 1990a: 65). Nonetheless, industrial technology, on the other hand, 'challenges' nature by placing an unreasonable demand on it, forcing it to produce what is required of it by humans. For example, with man-made hydroelectricity dams the mode of revealing is a 'challenging forth,' the way in which the river reveals itself is no longer the same. Rather than the Rhine appearing poetically as water flowing as a feature of a larger landscape, modern technology has made it become an energy resource. Equally, tourism cannot see the Rhine as an object of nature, but rather merely as a source of income. All nature is challenged in this way. Humans are also challenged, for they are reduced to the level of objects used for production. For example, human resources departments can be viewed as regarding humans as resources for production. A human waiting to go to work is, in this industrial society, like an aeroplane on a runway, having little value being brought-forth themselves, but only for something else; essentially both are 'standing reserve,' valuable only when employed and at the mercy of a system which uses and manipulates them as and when required. The term for this type of revealing which is a challenging on a global scale is *Ge-Stell* (enframing). *Ge-Stell* is the culmination of metaphysics because it involves the total planning of everything in perfectly ordered relationships of cause and effect, all capable of unlimited manipulation. What is missing from this recounting of Heidegger's position on the *Ge-Stell* is the notion of 'representation.' This is due to the particular interpretation Vattimo has made of Heidegger's thought by linking it to information and communications technology, which shall be discussed momentarily.

Living after Heidegger, Vattimo interprets the *Ge-Stell* in information technological terms: 'It is not in the world of machines and engines that humanity and being can shed the mantles of subject and object, but in the world of generalized communication. Here the entity dissolves in the images distributed by the information media' (Vattimo 1992: 116-117). In the play of images and messages attained through media such as television, radio and the internet, the difference between subject and object

dissolves. For instance, one may doubt that someone's online profile is 'real.' Moreover, how could one ever verify its claim to representing reality? What is being hinted at in Vattimo's talk of the 'mantles of subject and object' being 'shed' is what is referred to by both Vattimo and Heidegger as the '*Ereignis*,' or the 'event of appropriation.' The particular passage in Heidegger's work that appeals to Vattimo is one from *Identity and Difference*: 'The event of appropriation is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them' (Heidegger 1969: 37). The 'prelude' to the *Ereignis* is the *Ge-Stell* (Heidegger 1969: 36). In the *Ereignis* which results from *Ge-Stell*, metaphysical designations such as 'subject' and 'object' disappear as everything is challenged-forth. In the Enlightenment era, the rational Cartesian 'thinking thing' is not only the subject, but also the foundation of knowledge. This anthropocentrism continued in different ways through the construction of unilinear narratives surrounding progress and science. The *Ge-Stell* challenges the distinction between humans and Being as they are all reduced to causal determined standing-reserve, with this universal manipulation revealed in the *Ereignis*, what Vattimo, following Heidegger in *Identity and Difference* (Heidegger 1969: 38), calls the 'event of appropriation.' In the *Ereignis*, humanity and Being (traditionally considered as that which grounds the rule of reason) lose their metaphysical properties of subject and object. As a result, Being is shown not as a foundation or a thing, but as an 'exchange value': as 'language and...the tradition constituted by the transmission and interpretation of messages' (Vattimo 1988a: 26).

What Vattimo seems to neglect at first sight, on this view, is that according to modern metaphysics a picture is a representation which is represented by a subject (Heidegger 1991c: 220-221). However, if the *Ereignis* strips both subject and object of their metaphysical qualities, then how can there be 'pictures' left? Indeed, in *The Transparent Society*, Vattimo states that this is why Heidegger thought that we are now living in the age of the world image created by science, not the world view of sovereign human beings (Vattimo 1992: 15-16). Here it is worth acknowledging that Vattimo uses the update he consciously made of

Heidegger's *Ge-Stell* to make a link between this notion and the essay 'The Age of the World Picture.' Vattimo goes on to say: 'The images of the world we receive from the media and the human sciences, albeit on different levels, are not simply different interpretations of a 'reality' that is 'given' regardless, but rather constitute the very objectivity of the world' (Vattimo 1992: 24-25). According to Heidegger in the essay 'The Age of the World Picture,' the world picture 'does not mean a 'picture of the world' but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man' (Heidegger 1977: 129-130). The links to *Ge-Stell* are clear, even if Heidegger's notion of the world picture seems to place more emphasis on the agency of the human being as the 'representing' and 'setting' subject. The reduction of the world to a world picture gives rise to a shadow:

> Everyday opinion sees in the shadow only the lack of light…In truth…the shadow is the manifest, though impenetrable, testimony to the concealed emitting of light. In keeping with this concept of shadow, we experience the incalculable as that which, withdrawn from representation, is nevertheless manifest in whatever is, pointing to Being, which remains concealed (Heidegger 1977: 154).

'The polemical thrust of Heidegger's *Weltbild* essay,' says Karyn Ball in her essay on the metaphor of 'shadow' in Heidegger's essay, 'is to emphasize the unthought that is simultaneously produced and obscured by the growing dominance of a mathematical orientation geared toward calculation' (Ball 2005: 121-122). Vogt thinks that Vattimo's twist on the notion of the world picture is to hold that the shadow 'has to be grasped as [the] immanent and nihilistic consequence in form of a proliferation of conflicting images of the world' (Vogt 2010: 228) given by communications technology, the apex of technology and therefore of metaphysics.

The irreducible plurality of images and messages enabled through technology (especially the internet) in the society of mass communication weakens the principle of reality; there is no longer a world picture and merely a shadow of the unthought, but 'a Babel of conflicting images' (Vattimo 1997a: 26). The result of the first flashing up of *Ereignis* in the *Ge-Stell* through the dissolution of reality in a play of images is the culmination of metaphysics. 'Culmination' is to be understood both in the sense of the apex and dissolution of metaphysics. Information and

communications technology, which challenges not only the world and humanity, but also mechanical machines themselves, allows for an unprecedented level of calculability and manipulation, thereby fulfilling the goal of metaphysics. Nevertheless, as Vattimo has shown in his understanding of the Heideggerian notion of *Weltbild*, reality dissolves in a play of images; from a Heideggerian view, this is the end of metaphysics and it is nihilism, the reduction of Being to value. 'It is modern science,' writes Vattimo in *Beyond Interpretation*, 'heir and completion of metaphysics, that turns the world into a place where there are no longer facts, only interpretations' (Vattimo 1997a: 26). There are no 'facts' left, only a play of interpretations for there is not a real world, nor an apparent one, but only images and traces of being as language inherited through tradition. That the world is a multiplicity of conflicting images is a postmodern and Nietzschean interpretation of Heidegger's thought, one that reads his essay in a very particular way. As shall become apparent in the section on the fourfold below, it is far from obvious that Heidegger would have agreed with Vattimo's interpretation. While this does not matter to Vattimo, especially with his notion of *Verwindung*, it should be important to his readers, not least due to the implications of Vattimo's radical immanentism for issues pertaining to religion and ethics.

In the historically-determined project after the end of metaphysics and the death of God, Being is reduced to the nihilism of exchange-value (Vattimo 1988a: 21). One way of understanding the 'exchange value' of Being is that it is like a 'worn coin,' like it is common currency in the community (Barbiero 1992: 166). Nevertheless, as Ashley Woodward points out, Vattimo in using this phrase is deliberately bringing-together Marx's terminology with Heidegger's philosophy of technology (Woodward 2009: 88). Out of Marx's different ways of construing an object's value, 'exchange-value' refers to the value of one thing relative to another ('one x is worth two ys') (Marx 1906: 43). Woodward writes that: 'Considered as the wholesale conversion of all values into exchange-value, capitalism is nihilistic insofar as it has an ungrounding effect: metaphysical claims to natural essences or secure foundations are swept away in the flux of absolute exchange' (Woodward 2009: 91). After the end of metaphysics, everything has its own exchange-value. There is a clear link here between

'exchange value' and the *Ge-Stell* and consequent *Ereignis*, for information and communications technology drive late-modern capitalism, especially through the stock market; Vattimo himself makes this explicit link in *The End of Modernity* (Vattimo 1988a: 26). Another phrase Vattimo uses to show the inescapable presence of the metaphysical tradition is 'the ontology of decline,' that we are living in 'the Occident' which is 'the land of sunset (and hence, of Being).' This nostalgia is a resignation in the sense that one cannot escape metaphysics without creating a new foundation and thus succumbing to the sort of authoritarianism one wishes to escape. Both 'exchange value' and 'ontology of decline' betray a very different attitude towards images generated by information and communications technology than, say, Baudrillard, for whom simulacra are images that had no original, which never conceal as there no truth to conceal (Baudrillard 1994: 1). For Vattimo, images from information and communications technology are worn out coins, or better (conflating both the 'worn coin' and 'exchange-value' metaphors), 'worn out goods.' It is not necessarily that they are either simulacra or copies of originals which still somehow exist, but they are worn out originals, that the 'originals' were messages that have now been worn out through overuse. Think of Vattimo's messages like an old tapestry that is pulled about in different directions and has new threads added to it.

What I believe Vattimo needs is to show how Christianity came so close to Platonistic metaphysics and how they combined to form a general principle of weakening. As I show in Part One, Vattimo thinks he has achieved this through his notions of *kenosis* and *caritas*. I will go on to indicate why these notions are problematic in his thought. Thinking ahead, I would like to suggest that my own reading of Vattimo which I put forward in the Conclusion is a better solution than the one offered by Vattimo, and it is based on the 'missionary/evangelical' nature of Christianity which led what was at root a Jewish sect with its own personal God to become Hellenised in its encounter with the Gentiles through Paul's mission. Following John Gray (Gray 2002), I would argue that Christianity introduced 'Truth' into religion, which ultimately did damage not only to philosophy, but also to religion. In other words, the fabulisation of the world occurred through an inaugural event in the history of humankind—the

Christ-event, but not in the way either Nietzsche or Vattimo has conceived of it.

Vattimo sees nihilism as something that is neither possible, nor desirable, to overcome. Indeed, Ashley Woodward has written that 'The most unique contribution Vattimo makes to the discourse of nihilism consists in a *positive revaluation* of nihilism; in his thought, nihilism is no longer posed as a problem that must be solved but as a solution to the problems of modernity, which becomes possible as we enter postmodernity' (Woodward 2009: 102). Over the course of the next two subsections it should become clearer why Woodward holds this view of Vattimo. The latter's largely positive view of nihilism constitutes a significant difference between Heidegger and Vattimo, as well as highlighting selectivity in the way in which Vattimo reads Nietzsche. It would appear that Nietzsche thought nihilism was a stage in the development of European thought that was to be overcome. As part of his work, he created a typology of different kinds of nihilism. Nietzsche did not think that the fabulisation of the world was anything to lament, for in 'Broad daylight' and the 'return of cheerfulness and *bons sens,*' Plato 'blushes for shame' and 'all free spirits run riot' (Nietzsche 1990a: 50-51). Yet Nietzsche's own attitude towards, and understanding, of nihilism was complex, sometimes using it as a term of abuse, such as when he attacked Flaubert for expressing that one can only think and write when sitting down (neglecting walking thought, apparently) (Nietzsche 1990a: 36).

Vattimo has talked about the positive nature of nihilism in different ways, but most emphatically he has referred to it as our 'sole opportunity' (Vattimo 1988a: 19). He unpacks what he means by this opportunity later in *The End of Modernity* (Vattimo 1988a: 28). Here, he distinguishes between two ways of understanding nihilism in a positive way: 1. Politically and performatively; 2. theoretically. Concerning the former, Vattimo means the process of secularisation, a notion that would come to mean something far more specific and theological-sounding in his return to religion. At this point, he refers to this process as one in which through mass culture and media one finds there is a 'loss of roots,' making the world seem ever less real. Theoretically, Vattimo sees the meaning of history as being dissolved in the play of interpretations, with history now being reappropriated by

those who make it. The latter argument gets better developed by Vattimo in his analysis of modernity compared with postmodernity in his book *The Transparent Society*, and it will be dealt with more directly in the discussion of his notion of 'ontology of actuality' later in this Introduction.

It would be rash to say Vattimo was in favour of all forms of nihilism, for the latter concept is far from univocal, and Vattimo follows Nietzsche in distinguishing between at least two further senses of the term nihilism, which in fact was a title of an essay of Vattimo's (1989) included in his *Dialogue with Nietzsche*. Nietzsche, Vattimo thinks, distinguished between 'passive' and 'active' nihilism. Passive nihilism is also called 'reactive' nihilism. Passive/reactive nihilism aims 'to conceal the void at the core of everything that was esteemed as Being, value, fixed structure…[it] refuses to admit that neither objective meanings and values nor given structures of Being exist—and that therefore they have to be actively created' (Vattimo 2006b: 135). Active nihilism has two senses for Nietzsche. One is to take up the creation of new values, the other is to ensure that the old values perish. Concerning the latter meaning, Vattimo is unsure of its logic: 'It would after all be possible simply to await the inevitable annihilation of values and structures' (Vattimo 2006b: 135). Furthermore, Vattimo drew upon Nietzsche's distinction between 'complete' and 'incomplete' nihilism. The latter denoted any attempt to leave the condition of nihilism without having revaluated all values, whereas complete nihilism includes the revaluating (Nietzsche 1967: 19). Ashley Woodward has shown how the possibility of a revaluation of values and an escape from nihilism (to a 'complete' nihilism) is impossible for Vattimo due to the phenomenon of the end of modernity in which a new start would not only repeat the logic of modernity which is itself metaphysical, but also cannot be achieved because of the liberation of metaphors after the death of God: 'For Vattimo, Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism is *coextensive* with complete nihilism, and does not constitute a stage beyond it' (Woodward 2002: 63). In *The End of Modernity*, Vattimo says that Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, with his concepts of the death of God and the eternal recurrence, signals 'the end of the era of overcoming, namely that epoch of Being conceived under the sign of the *novum*' (Vattimo 1988a: 168). By the latter, Vattimo is referring to 'the essence of

modernity as the epoch in which Being is reduced to the *novum*,' that is, the value of the new. Vattimo puts this idea more clearly in the opening of *The Transparent Society*, in which he says that 'modernity is the epoch in which simply being modern became a decisive value in itself' (Vattimo 1992: 1). In *The Transparent Society*, Vattimo goes to show the link between postmodernism, communications technology and the end of metaphysics; the plurality of opinions disseminated by radio, television (and, since the book was written, the internet) decentre reality, devalue the new by making it routine and weaken strong structures by always having an alternative viewpoint presented (Vattimo 1992: 7, 116-117). Arguably if Heidegger had experienced the end of modernity in the society of generalised communication that has facilitated the liberation of metaphors, he may well have read Nietzsche differently.

Vattimo's nihilism and rejection of a 'complete' nihilism can be clarified by contrasting it with Derrida's approach in his essay 'The Ends of Man.' In discussing Heidegger and the end of metaphysics, Derrida puts forward two different models of new beginnings. Using a somewhat confused and confusing metaphor of an edifice (or house) on the ground to represent the structure of metaphysics on its foundations (or most fundamental assumptions), Derrida puts forward two strategies. The first is to accept the foundations and change the structure. This strategy 'risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating…that which one allegedly deconstructs' (Derrida 1972: 135). By retreating to the history of metaphysics for resources to construct a new edifice—perhaps such as the watered-down Epicureanism of the consumer-capitalist society, or the second-rate Stoicism of austerity measures—one confirms the past rather than rejecting it. However, the second strategy is also doomed to failure as 'the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground' (Derrida 1972: 135), for even if one wished to get outside the house, 'language is the house of Being' (as Heidegger said) and therefore one cannot escape language, a theme also explored by Vattimo along more Gadamerian lines. If the history of metaphysics is the history of Being, as Vattimo argues, one can see Derrida's two options as, in Richard Zaner's words, '*part and parcel with traditional metaphysics…both remain essentially straightforward and dogmatic*' (Zaner 1972: 388). 'Derrida

warns,' writes Alan Schrift, 'that we must refrain from choosing one strategy rather than the other. The two strategies supplement one another…we must choose both at once…To do so is to effect a change of style in philosophical writing' (Schrift 1988: 92). Derrida does this by referring to the ambiguity in the writing of Nietzsche, who contrasted the 'last man,' who represents everything mediocre after the death of God, and the 'overman.' The 'last man' will seek comfort and pleasure, unconvincingly exclaiming that he has found happiness. The 'last man' has not fully engaged with the implications of the death of God. By contrast, the *Übermensch* will engage with 'active forgetting' (Derrida 1972: 136) of Being of the sort mentioned in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Vattimo would regard this as being too optimistic as even the *Übermensch*, through language, is caught up in tradition, the nexus of messages 'that constitute the horizon within which *Dasein* is thrown as an historically determined project….Being, as a horizon of disclosure in which things appear, can arise only as a trace of past words' (Vattimo 1988: 120). Vattimo would regard the subjective choice between the two 'ends' of man Derrida detected in Nietzsche's work as a decision between passive or reactive nihilism on the one hand (the 'last man') or a restatement of Derrida's second strategy, that is, one naively bound to fail as one cannot radically get beyond metaphysics without then falling back into the first strategy, of creating a new foundation. The latter, with its value of the new, is back within the logic of modernity, which Vattimo deems metaphysical. Instead, Vattimo's notion of *Verwindung*, as shall be shown in due course, is neither a passive acceptance of existing strong (metaphysical and political) structures, nor a radical attempt to get beyond them. Unlike Derrida's two 'strategies,' Vattimo's nihilism is neither an attempt to create a new foundation while keeping the same edifice, nor an attempt to build a new structure atop of the same foundation, even if it is one in which the 'bricks' are taken from the history of metaphysics. Thinking as *Andenken-Verwindung* does not wish to create new foundations, but acknowledges that the existing foundations have lost their strength. Equally, it does not desire to construct a new edifice, but to rearrange the bricks and other structural parts to weaken the overall whole, and this transpires through the

hermeneutic practice of conversation, a notion that shall be discussed further in analysing Vattimo's notion of *caritas*.

b) Art, openings and the event

I have already discussed Vattimo's most important use of the notion of the 'event' in his philosophy, in the context of the *Ge-Stell* and the first flashing-up of *Ereignis*. For Vattimo, the latter is the event that allows us to become conscious of our own historical contingency. Nevertheless, he is aware that although the event of appropriation functions in this illuminating way, it makes us aware that Being has always eventuated. What, then, are the other sites of events? I will take this question as an opportunity to discuss further the notion of the 'event' in Vattimo's philosophy, including recent developments which will be of importance for when I discuss Vattimo's 'return to religion.'

In *Nihilism and Emancipation*, Vattimo writes that in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1936), Heidegger 'hazarded a sort of catalogue of the privileged places of truth's occurrence' (Vattimo 2004: 12), such as 'art, religion, philosophy, morality' (Vattimo 2004: 13). Vattimo (and Gadamer, it seems, from a conversation Vattimo relates having had with him (Vattimo 2004: 14)) has lamented that Heidegger did not pursue the sheer range of sites for openings of truth to occur, and that he 'confined himself to the aperture that takes place in poetry' (Vattimo 2004: 13). Vattimo notes that Heidegger was not entirely consistent in reducing the site of openings to poetry, for how else would Vattimo derive his reading of the link between the *Ereignis* and the *Ge-Stell* from *Identity and Difference*? For all he has lamented the restriction Heidegger placed on himself in restricting the site of openings to poetry, Vattimo in recent years has done much the same. In the interview entitled 'Philosophy as Ontology of Actuality,' Vattimo said that ''Weak thought,' in this sense, springs from the recognition that, in our actual experience of the world, we are never directly concerned with facts but with texts and words. We must thus acknowledge, with Heidegger, that 'language is the house of being'' (Vattimo 2009: 332). Despite the importance of 'images' in communications technology, language itself seems to be the site of Being's disclosure for *Dasein* in Vattimo's philosophy. Vattimo uses sleight of hand to move between 'images' in

referring to the *Ge-Stell* to 'interpretations' (which are linguistic), as can be found, for instance, in his discussion of the *Ge-Stell* in *The Transparent Society* (Vattimo 1992: 117). Vattimo may feel justified in doing this if he is following Heidegger's 'The Age of the World Picture' in that 'picture' means to see how something stands before us (Heidegger 1977: 129), a representing which in the modern sending of Being means 'to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm' (Heidegger 1977: 131), and this appropriative notion of representing is a valuing which then brings us back to interpreting. So, after all, Vattimo wants to keep the analysis of works of art as openings where Being eventuates, he restricts and reduces the artistic to the linguistic, more specifically to the poetical.

4. *Beyond Interpretation*
a) **Hermeneutics as a sending and the 'ontology of actuality'**

If texts are so important to Vattimo, why still talk of Being? Along these lines, some philosophers take the end of metaphysics to constitute a total departure from ontology for they feel it is too closely associated with metaphysical foundationalism. In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo mentions that some philosophers have stopped speaking of Being altogether, naming Derrida as one such philosopher. For Vattimo, 'the decision to stop speaking of Being seems to imply an unconscious metaphysical claim; as if one were to read the Nietzschean announcement of the death of God as on a plane with an announcement of his non-existence' (Vattimo 1997a: 12). As Vattimo sees the history of Being as explaining the provenance of hermeneutics, retaining talk of Being is important. Moreover, as will become clear in the sections below on *Verwindung*, the language of traces of Being delimits experience; talk of Being is inescapable in one way or another, but what is important is our attitude towards it, as was indicated by Nietzsche's 'philosophy of morning.' What Vattimo means by this is that it is a 'kind of thought that is oriented towards proximity rather than towards the origin or foundation…a way of thinking about error' (Vattimo 1988a: 169). It is being able to bear the weight of the past, to take world history as one's own in a cheerful way, showing the influence of Nietzsche's *Human All too Human* (Vattimo 2002b: 79- 82) in which Nietzsche describes 'wanderers' and 'philosophers' at the dawn of the day with pure light

shining on their faces, 'so cheerful and transfigured' (Nietzsche 1996: 203-204).

Vattimo's other problem with this approach is that a non-ontological approach to knowledge locates the origin of knowledge once again in beings, pertaining to their own realms. This issue is essentially one of relativism, that jettisoning talk of Being altogether in light of recognising the devaluation of all highest values due to the death of God belies the 'unintentional metaphysical presupposition that explains the appearance of relativistic irrationalism' (Vattimo 1997a: 12). A mere concatenation of openings could be considered as thoroughgoing relativism, especially if they are taken in the sense of incommensurable paradigms. This is a suspicion harboured by critics of weak thought, even recently such as Jean Grondin (Grondin 2010: 107). In other words, Vattimo is aware of the relativist objection to weak thought and wants to deal with it directly. Religious, political, and ethnic groups will plan and organise their own different realms so that an authority similar to that associated with metaphysical Being in the past is postulated of beings. It could lead to a stale relativism in which local epistemologies or groups are incapable of external criticism. Individuals within these groups might retreat ever further into their realm and, to paraphrase Vattimo's expression, make a metaphysic out of their finitude (Vattimo 2004: 42-43) by rigidifying their own contingent position to make the in-group 'right' and everybody else 'wrong.' Even worse, relativism itself could appear like a metaphysical principle. There is a clear link between this interpretation of relativism and understanding hermeneutics as a meta-theory of interpretation. The project of Vattimo's book *Beyond Interpretation* was to sound caution on how to understand hermeneutics.

In the 1980s Vattimo stated that hermeneutics was the philosophical *koine* of our time. The '*koine*' of postmodern intellectual life means that Vattimo saw in a wide range of thinkers, some of whom are often thought to be conflicting in their aims, ideas and influences, that from the 1980s onwards hermeneutics became the prelevant and predominant way of philosophising through family resemblance (Vattimo 1991a: 283-285). In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo writes, 'not only are Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Pareyson hermeneutic thinkers, but so are Habermas and Apel, Rorty and Charles Taylor, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas'

(Vattimo 1997a: 1). Moreover, Vattimo thinks Nietzsche and Heidegger are saying the 'same' things in different ways, the one balancing and correcting the other in Vattimo's interpretation as both heralding the end of metaphysics (the ordered, calculated attempt to found and organise reality on the basis of first principles), the event of nihilism and the move from the dominance of the monologue to the plurality of voices in dialogue at the dawn of postmodernity. By the time of *Beyond Interpretation* (1994), however, the risk of seeing hermeneutics in this way had become apparent to Vattimo. On this view, hermeneutics could be misunderstood as a 'wholly metaphysical claim (often implicit and unrecognised) to be a finally true description of the (permanent) 'interpretative structure' of human existence' (Vattimo 1997a: 6). To prevent this kind of misunderstanding of hermeneutics, he historicises it by seeing hermeneutics 'as the response to a history of Being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism' (Vattimo 1997a: 8). 'If hermeneutics were only the discovery of the fact that there are different perspectives on the 'world'…the conception of truth as the objective mirroring of how things are…would be confirmed' (Vattimo 1997a: 8). That a correspondence theory of truth is secondary is often argued for, that one can only recognise that a word corresponds to an object because one has a prior understanding of the difference between oneself and that object. However, such a meta-theory of interpretation should recognise its historicity and as a result eliminate 'the final metaphysical equivocality that stands as a threat to it' (Vattimo, 1997a: 9). Vattimo's own interpretation of the history of being as the self-consumption of metaphysics and the resulting dissolution of Being into exchange-value, that is, of modernity as nihilism, is just that: an interpretation. This is all Vattimo claims it to be (Vattimo 1997a: 9-10), but he states that this is the best way to read the signs of the times, of understanding the irreducible plurality of interpretations in the society of mass communication and that the need for highest values is no longer felt.

Concerning reading the 'signs of the times,' Vattimo ingeniously combines an analysis of postmodernity as the end of modernity—which he develops in the book of that name, along with later works such as *The Transparent Society* and *Nihilism and Emancipation*—with his nihilistic ontology. Thinking which accords with the postmodern epoch after the

death of God is one which is an 'ontology of actuality,' a term Vattimo borrows from Foucault, but uses it in a different way as an alternative to philosophy inquiring after truth by looking at 'who we are today' (Risser 2010: 169). For Vattimo the use of the phrase is to be taken 'in its most literal sense' and that 'to mean a discourse that attempts to clarify what Being signifies in the present situation' (Vattimo 2004: 3-4). Vattimo acknowledges that both 'Being' and 'the present situation' are hard to grasp, elaborating that the latter is 'the concrete historical situation of users of language' (Vattimo 2004: 4). The notion of the ontology of actuality is a result of, and depends on, Vattimo's understanding of Being as event as the epochal and contingent sense of Being: 'Because there is no way to grasp Being as something stable apart from its event,' Vattimo states, 'a theory of present existence is a theory that has no other source of information or legitimation apart from the present condition' (Vattimo 2004: 8). Vattimo sees this as a 'slide' from philosophy to sociology.

First of all, what is our situation today? Here it is worth spending some time outlining Vattimo's views on postmodernity in relation to modernity. Vattimo contends that the postmodern experience in the West today is one of the end of history. By this he means that it no longer has a unilinear character, that there no longer is a coherent narrative which is bought-into in the West. The typical modern narrative was one of 'progress,' whether this be to do with scientific and technological innovation, or increasing freedom, or even a Marxist interpretation of history. Secondly, this narrative is characterised by 'coherence,' and therefore it lacks fragmentation. For this coherence to hang together it must view the past in terms of cause and effect, seeing that which has happened before as determining the present and therefore the future. According to Vattimo, history loses its unilinear character in three principal ways: theoretically, demographically, and through the rise of the society of generalised communication. For the first point, concerning the loss of a theoretical unilinear notion of history, Vattimo turns to the philosophy of history of Walter Benjamin, especially his 1938 essay 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in which he puts forward the notion that unilinear history is a product of class conflict. The powerful—kings, emperors, nobles—make history, an opportunity denied to the poor. Vattimo

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acknowledges here that Benjamin was speaking in a then nascent tradition, already begun by Marx and Nietzsche, of seeing history as constructed, that it was not impartial but interested, and this included unilinear history, too. Given the selective, power-laden nature of unilinear history, it would be mistaken, Vattimo surmises, to think there is only one true history. Such a realisation has profound implications for the idea of progress, for if there is not one 'history,' but many histories, then there is no one clear logic to history. This implication applies equally to sacred eschatology, as much as to its secularised cousin: Marxist hopes of world revolution and the realisation of the classless society.

Demographically, in modern Europe where the unilinear notion of history has flourished mass immigration has led to greater awareness of other histories. The rebellion of previously ruled peoples is a common theme in history. What prevents the rebellion of people following the death of Alexander, or the fall of Rome, or in the Reformation, or after the defeat of Napoleon from being postmodern is that they were not rebelling in the age of mass communication, or living in the shadows of World Wars I and II. This relates to the third factor Vattimo provides for the dissolution of the notion of unilinear history, the society of mass communication. Of course, a hallmark of the Reformation is the importance of the printed word. Nevertheless, it still did not give anywhere as much capability to express, and preserve, an alternative viewpoint to as many people as exists today with radio, television and—mostly significantly—the internet. The advent of the society of mass communication is the other major factor in the end of history and the start of the postmodern. What Vattimo proposes is: '(a) that the mass media play a decisive role in the birth of a postmodern society; (b) that they do not make this postmodern more 'transparent', but more complex, even chaotic; and finally (c) that it is in precisely this relative 'chaos' that our hopes for emancipation lie' (Vattimo 1992: 4).

The Transparent Society, where Vattimo outlined his ideas on the end of history most clearly, was written just before the introduction of the internet for consumers, but what Vattimo has to say about mass communication applies even more strongly now in light of the effects of widespread internet use in the West. If alternative television and radio stations gave voice to more groups, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and forums go

beyond giving expression to groups, allowing any individual with access to technology a way to express their worldview. One does not need radio or television broadcasting equipment anymore, but only a computer or, increasingly, a mobile phone. This view of the effect of the culture of mass communication is in contrast, as Vattimo realises, with the views of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Orwell on the subject, for these three thinkers predicted that homogenisation of society would be the result. Although Vattimo does not believe in facts, only interpretations, he takes great pains to show that his diagnosis of the situation of late modernity is a good interpretation, one that in his view makes the best possible sense of the plurality he sees around him. As an aside, it is worth noting that Vattimo has changed his opinion on the liberating function of a plurality of images/representations. In *Not Being God*, Vattimo notes that he consciously changed direction in the preparation of the second edition of his 1989 book *The Transparent Society*. The chapter he added, 'The Limits of Derealisation,' talks about the uniformity of the world under a sole empire, the United States. While image and reality are becoming, or have become, indistinguishable, it is unlikely that the image given to me has not been filtered by the powers that be for control, a theme Vattimo acknowledges he finds in Adorno's works (Vattimo and Paterlini 2009: 156). This notion of control through technology has also featured in his more overtly political works from recent years, since his return to religion, especially *Ecce comu* (2007). The author(s) of media control in *Ecce comu* are not only the United States, but also Berlusconi in Vattimo's own country. Expressing his concern about control in the media, Vattimo sees it as a possibility for those who own the media in a country to control the outcome of elections by causing the 'immobility' of the electorate who move within an information 'bubble' that the media outlets own (Vattimo 2007b: 48).

What has postmodernity got to do with the ontology of actuality? There is a theme common to both which Vattimo develops in the opening chapter of *Nihilism and Emancipation*. In this chapter Vattimo argues that the *Ge-Stell* has created a need, and an opportunity, for an ontology of actuality to provide a sense of unity over the fragmentation of experience. The *Ge-Stell*, in Vattimo's reading, is the culmination of metaphysics in the society of generalised communication, as the age of the world pictures. The

proliferation of images corresponds to the fragmentation of knowledge and language through the increased specialisations in science facilitated by technology. This is our sending of Being, one of irreducible plurality without centre. In the fragmentation of experience after the *Ge-Stell*, the past metaphysical need for a first principle becomes a need for a notion of Being 'to allow us to refashion a unitary significance for our experience in the epoch of fragmentation' (Vattimo 2004: 9). The ontology of actuality reveals within the aperture of Being proper to modernity, a new aperture that could unify a sense of existence beyond the specialisation and fragmentation (through the media, the internet and mobile technology in particular) of the late/post-modern epoch (Vattimo 2004: 12). Where can we find the traits of the new aperture? It cannot be stable, for the *Ereignis* revealed that Being is not a presence. Indeed, this is what allows the *Ge-Stell* to be the site of this new sending of Being as the latter no longer has to be a *Grund*. Vattimo sees in the *Ge-Stell/Ereignis* a site of Being which reveals it as having a tendency for weakening, not only for specialisation/fragmentation, but also in the syncretism and de-centred nature of life through late-modern technology. Reading the signs of the times, the most plausible interpretation of Being, of the 'way things are' today is to see it in terms of weakening and therefore to hermeneutics as there are no facts, only interpretations.

Why, though, develop an ontology of actuality? 'The demand for an 'ontology of actuality,'' Vattimo writes, 'and the sociologism that arose in response, should be understood as a reaction to the menace of the 'total organisation' of society that was beginning to take shape early in the twentieth century' (Vattimo 2004: 9). The process of rationalisation achieved by the culmination of the *Ge-Stell* by organising and individuating society fragments meaning 'actually lived out by everyone' (Vattimo 2004: 9). At the end of metaphysics, it is not possible to criticise the current situation. Gavin Hyman draws conclusions from Vattimo's ontology of actuality, that 'if philosophy is not exactly synonymous with a simple description of the present situation—it does after all claim to interpret it—it must nonetheless be consistent with, and not at odds with, the present situation' (Hyman 2007: 126). To judge against the present situation would be to invoke a transcendent principle and therefore to return to metaphysics.

Rather, what the ontology of actuality sets out to achieve is 'the possibility of a reconstruction of the unitary sense of existence beyond the specialisation and fragmentation proper to modernity' (Vattimo 2004: 12). By a 'giving-form to widely felt sentiments about the meaning of being alive' (Vattimo 2004: 87) in a society, Vattimo's ontology of actuality bears a resemblance to Hegel's 'spirit of the age,' something he recognises but nevertheless disavows. The ontology of actuality is not an expression of an age, but an interpretation which nevertheless aims to persuade. This persuasion does not use threats or flattery (Vattimo 2010a: 69), but works to give form through dialogue to irreducible plurality of voices characteristic of late-modernity. As an ontology of actuality, Vattimo makes judgements based on what is, such as stating that democracy is the philosophy of the age as 'the legitimacy of liberal democracy is hardly contested any longer by anyone' (Vattimo 2004: 85), showing another link between him and Rorty, especially the latter's 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy' (Rorty 1988). Imposing form on the fragmentation of individuals in society also creates the 'possibility of *connecting* the multiple notions of being as a necessary condition for clarifying what being means in the present situation' (Risser 2010: 170). Tradition, traces of Being, can fall into the hands of technicians, experts, who will, if allowed, interpret them for others. Moreover, if fragmentation is not given any form, individuals can retreat into their own realms and harden differences in a relativistic way by using a type of authoritarianism associated with metaphysical thought. The ontology of actuality aims to avoid either of these negative consequences of the loss of foundations at the end of metaphysics.

Vattimo's notion of the 'ontology of actuality' makes one wonder whether his ontology really does take difference into account, for although he refers to 'forms of life' and local rationalities along broadly Wittgensteinian lines, he tends to speak as though the best interpretation of late-modernity is one of nihilism, branding people as either belonging to hermeneutics or as strong thinkers ('reactive nihilists'). It is possible to see this through the way in which he uses one of his favourite phrases from Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*, which he renders 'there are no facts, only interpretations, and of course this too is an interpretation' (Vattimo 1997a:

6; see Nietzsche 1967: 267). Franca D'Agostini has analysed Vattimo's reasoning:

> From the perspective of weak thought, we then have three theses arrayed in reflexive steps:
> V0 = 'everything is interpretation"
> followed immediately by:
> V1= 'V0 is also an interpretation'
> and finally by the admission, the typical starting point of weak thought, that
> V2 = 'we must inevitably think this self-refuting game' (D'Agostini 2010: 4).

D'Agostini thinks that V0 pertains to the unaccomplished nihilist, but V1 is the position of the complete nihilist. V0 alone could lead to the kind of meta-theory of interpretation Vattimo wishes to avoid, for it is a reactive fall back into the glorification of simulacra put forward by thinkers such as Deleuze. 'V2 is actually a description of facts, like V0,' D'Agostini admits, but 'the facts in question are no longer the simple facts of knowledge and experience, but rather *historico-linguistic events*' (D'Agostini 2010: 5), involving a form of compulsion (one can think of the anesthetisation of experience mentioned in GV2a) to think in accordance with the 'sending' of Being into which we are thrown in the late-modern. As D'Agostini writes elsewhere, 'nihilism is neither properly a choice nor a point of view. It is not a point of view, because it is instead the property and nature of the entire world…We are somehow forced to be nihilist. This is what Vattimo expresses by saying that nihilism 'is a destiny'' (D'Agostini 2011: 36). However, Valgenti holds this argument shows that 'this is precisely the point where Vattimo's philosophical commitments seem blurred,' and that the level of compulsion in V2 relating back to V0 'carries with it a responsibility more akin to a moral imperative than a descriptive one' (Valgenti 2010: 65). Valgenti thinks that Vattimo does not invoke criteria of interpretation (Valgenti 2010: 67), but I would argue that he does, not only with *pietas* (which was not sufficiently developed), but also with charity which gradually became '*caritas*.' *Pietas* has already been mentioned, but now it is time to look briefly at 'charity,' before the latter term is analysed more in Part One when I look at it in its proper context of Vattimo's return to religion.

b) Charity

Vattimo does in fact develop a moral/ethical stance to prevent an 'anything goes' relativism, and also to ground hermeneutics in a history of weakening, and this circumvents D'Agostini's criticisms of weak thought. She still holds on to the notion of truth in a 'strong' sense, whereas Vattimo sees truth as an opening which is historical, something which is clear in Vattimo's mature work and no more so than in *Beyond Interpretation*. Summarising the arguments of the book, the Second Appendix of *Beyond Interpretation* aims to avoid an unchanging foundation or a merely aesthetic choice based on taste or preference through Vattimo showing how hermeneutics relies on a history of philosophy as the inheritance sent to it as the end of metaphysics and the occurrence of nihilism. Hermeneutics is a response to a message, an articulation of belonging to a tradition (Vattimo 1997a: 108). This tradition is not meant to be one among others, for this would leave the possibility of Being outside of tradition/history, beyond our interpretations of it, but the history of Being is the only tradition we have. The history of Being is not one among others as it is of emancipation from strong structures, leading to a principle of 'weakening' that Vattimo has variously termed '*pietas,*' 'friendship,' or '*caritas.*' With the latter term, Vattimo has linked it back to an attempt to ground the hermeneutical plurality of late modernity on an archetype of Being that is historically and linguistically plural in the form of the way in which a sacred text interprets itself anew, such as the way in which the New Testament writers reimagined texts from the Old (rather than in the metaphysical, substantial Aristotelian sense) (Vattimo 1997a: 48). Beginning with *Beyond Interpretation*, and then through later books such as *Belief* and *After Christianity*, Vattimo has developed a 'return' to Christianity in the ontological sense in which he performs a *Verwindung* on the Christian message, something I will look at in depth in Part One.

The developments in Vattimo's philosophy in his return to religion have surprised many of Vattimo's contemporaries for a variety of reasons. For Peter Carravetta, talk of 'emancipation' seems Hegelian, reinstating the metanarratives of modernity he had previously thought discredited (Carravetta 2010: 89). Moreover, Vattimo's programme in the return seemed not only to appeal to the notion of Being as eventual, but also to

ground hermeneutics historically through tradition. As Silvia Benso has pointed out, this stresses continuity, not rupture (Benso 2010: 214), which could be interpreted as going against the view that sendings are radically contingent 'ruptures' (Chiurazzi 2010: 18). There have also been criticisms of Vattimo's attempts to derive an ethic from this continuity. Some have thought that an attempt to derive an ethic from a hermeneutical nihilist position is impossible (Welsch 2007: 100), whereas other thinkers have thought that Vattimo has been trying to create an absolute with '*caritas*' where he has no right to do so (Depoortere 2008: 20).

5. <u>'Left' Heideggerianism, sendings and metaphysics as the history of Being</u>

a) Left and Right Heideggerianism

It could be argued that not only is Vattimo inconsistent in developing a seemingly absolute ethic of charity, but also arbitrary in how he has read Heidegger, for must the 'ontology of actuality' lead inexorably to hermeneutical nihilism? This is an important question for my argument, for I will go on to show that Vattimo's reading of Heidegger is partial, with important consequences both for Vattimo's return to religion and his philosophy more broadly. In choosing to draw upon ontology for his hermeneutical philosophy, Vattimo had a decision to make in how he read Heidegger, not least in whether he followed Heidegger in regarding Nietzsche as the last metaphysician. Heidegger lectured on Nietzsche from 1935, culminating in published works on him. Heidegger saw in Nietzsche's work a tension between the death of God as the end of Platonism (metaphysics) and the devaluation of the highest values on the one hand, and the aim to create a 'revaluation of all values' on the other. In Mendieta's words: 'in Heidegger's reading, this deep ambiguity about nihilism shows that Nietzsche still remains within the grasp of metaphysics, because 'fulfilled' nihilism is still a positing of Being as a value, as that which is posited by man and for man' (Mendieta 2010: 156). As shall be shown later, both Heidegger and Vattimo (following Heidegger) see humanism as synonymous with metaphysics.

Heidegger accuses Nietzsche of thinking within metaphysical categories, yet 'a similar charge could be levelled against Heidegger' on the

basis of what he writes about Nietzsche's madman at the end of his essay from 1943, 'Nietzsche's Word: "God is Dead"' (Mendieta 2010: 157): 'In what respect is this man mad? He is 'de-ranged.' For he is dis-lodged from the level of man hitherto, where the ideals of the suprasensory world, which have become unreal, are passed off for real while yet their opposite is realizing itself' (Heidegger 1977: 111). The distinction Heidegger is making is one between 'reason' (which is metaphysical and 'sane') and 'thinking.' Sanity is a box, limiting thought and possibilities of ways to be. The 'sane' people left in the marketplace have killed God because they are incapable of seeking him now due to being caught up with being rational. By contrast, the madman seeks, cries out after God due to 'thinking'; insofar as he is not rational, he thinks. 'This conclusion,' writes Mendieta, 'is astonishing, and turns on its feet Nietzsche's parable. It is the madman who calls us to faith, by evoking a form of thinking that is beyond the jealous and intolerant nihilism of a reason that fears threats to its opinions' (Mendieta 2010: 157).

The position of Heidegger at the end of this essay on Nietzsche can be described as him having 'nostalgia' for Being. Some interpreters of Heidegger have read his 'propheticism and crypto-fideism' (Mendieta 2010: 164, n. 30) as intimating a return of Being, of leaving room for a God outside of tradition and language (see Macquarrie 2009). For Vattimo talk of a return to God is complicated. Nevertheless, what is clear is that he does not want 'thinking' to be equated with nostalgia for a return of metaphysics in some form or seeing God as a being beyond Being of any kind:

> Vattimo urges us to inoculate Heidegger's metaphysical nostalgia for Being with Nietzsche's nihilism. For Vattimo, Heidegger, as he in turn argued against Nietzsche, is still caught in the grip of metaphysics, in as much as he thinks that Being can be a giving and granting, the *Ereignis*, that irrupts from without. For Vattimo, Heidegger should have stopped at the giving and granting that take place in the tradition (Mendieta 2010: 158).

It has already been mentioned that Heidegger thought that the *Selbst* 'destines' or 'gives' (*Geschicke*) in different epochs through irruptive events. What Vattimo did not want is for the '*Selbst*' in Heidegger's thought to be identified with anything metaphysical. The language of 'Being' can sometimes verge upon it being personified (D'Arcais 2007: 263). As a result, 'Vattimo has sought to secularize Heidegger, as Gadamer sought to urbanize him' (Mendieta 2010: 163 n. 30). Comparing Vattimo with Mendieta is instructive, though, for the latter conceived of the *Ereignis* too

much as an event irrupting from without (Mendieta 2010: 158), as if Being could 'be' apart from *Dasein*. At least Vattimo's 'left' reading of the notion of the event allows him to avoid this, staying more strictly to Heidegger's view that Being needs *Dasein* to appear and that *Dasein* can only think through Being in which the horizon of disclosure is always already the linguistic traditions into which we are thrown and reciprocally transmit through interpretation. Indeed, it is the contribution of Gadamer that enables Vattimo to develop a 'Left' Heideggerianism, a term which Vattimo uses himself (Vattimo and Girard 2010: 77). 'Left' and 'right' do not refer to political persuasions in this context. Rather, they function much like 'left' and 'right' designate schools of followers who interpreted Hegel in different ways. 'Right' Heideggerians interpret passages such as the end of 'Nietzsche's Word: "God is Dead"' to anticipate a return of Being, of some continuation of metaphysics or a 'beyond' external to the immanent and secular world.

The 'left' position rejects a 'return of Being.' Instead, what Vattimo proposes is 'the history of Being as the story of a 'long goodbye,' of an interminable weakening of Being' (Vattimo 1997a: 13). In doing so, Vattimo thinks that he is being 'faithful' to Heidegger's notion of ontological difference spelled out in *Being and Time*: ''Being' cannot indeed be conceived as an entity' (Heidegger 1962: 23), nor can it be seen as a 'class' or 'genus,' 'yet it pertains to every entity' (Heidegger 1962: 62). Therefore, Vattimo cannot see Being as being made 'present again' (Vattimo 1997a: 13), that is, of Being as a being which is present. Even if one imagines the possibility of Being as transcending language or understanding, Vattimo still considers this 'rightist' interpretation of Being as forgetting ontological difference, of reducing Being to a being. In short, Vattimo thinks one should remember Being in the light of hermeneutical nihilism, of the event of the death of God and the reduction of Being to exchange value. This distinction between 'left' and 'right' readings of Heidegger is not only important for understanding Vattimo's philosophy in general, but also it will prove to be of great significance for providing the backdrop to his philosophy of religion. 'Left' Heideggerians see the end of metaphysics as the late modern world as one in which both metaphysics and secularisation have culminated, in which there is nothing left of Being as

such, and in which the highest values have been devalued into 'exchange value' in an interminable decline. There are other options Vattimo could have taken, however, that find a middle ground between his 'Left' Heideggerianism and the vertical transcendence of a 'rightist' return to Being, and this third way will be explored when I discuss Vattimo's 'Left' Heideggerianism in conjunction with his return to religion in Part Two.

b) Left Heideggerianism, the end of metaphysics and the end of Humanism

Vattimo's weak thought aims to twist and be healed from the traditions it encounters through a hermeneutical process. As such, it is a way of dealing with the post-metaphysical situation, one which is aware of the horizon of the postmodern which is living after the death of God. In *The End of Modernity*, Vattimo shares the joke that in the contemporary world 'God is dead, but man isn't doing so well himself' (Vattimo 1988a: 31). Indeed, Vattimo surmises that 'humanism is in crisis *because* God is dead' (Vattimo 1988a: 32). Vattimo draws the death of God and the crisis in humanism together in order to contrast his approach to the contemporary situation of nihilism with 'reappropriative' or 'reactionary' intellectual movements, such as existentialism, which aim to keep humans as foundational and central, thus avoiding the dislocation of the postmodern described by Nietzsche in man rolling 'from the centre toward X.' Movements such as existentialism in the first half of the twentieth century acknowledged the devaluation of humankind through the practices of science, technology and politics, but nevertheless upheld the central place of the human subject theoretically along broadly traditional lines. Existentialism and other movements, such as Expressionism in art and the apocalyptic thought of thinkers such as Spengler do not take into account the close connection between metaphysics, humanism, and technology.

To make this identification, Vattimo draws heavily upon Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' (1946). According to Vattimo's interpretation of Heidegger's argument in this text, humanism is metaphysical: 'There is no humanism without the bringing into play of a metaphysics in which the human subject determines a role for itself which is necessarily central and exclusive' (Vattimo 1988a: 32). Early in modernity

one finds human rationality is designated as the ground of all knowledge (Descartes and Kant). Then human progress is reified into the value of the new. Ironically, it is the progress of science and technology that self-consume the value of the human being by not only dislocating it from the centre in a practical way, but also dissolving the notion of subjectivity entirely. The triumph of rationalism is the triumph of technology, but this is nothing other than the culmination of metaphysics as the attempt to order the world in regulative, predictable relations of cause and effect. Since at least early modernity, the human subject has been regarded as the seat of rationality, such as the Cartesian *res intellectum*. There is a further identification in this triumvirate of ideas, and that is the way in which Descartes conceived of the human subject as a '*res*' in which subjectivity was reduced to consciousness itself. The subject was a 'thinking thing' identified as a clear and distinct idea, that is, as '*evidence,*' as Vattimo puts it (Vattimo 1988a: 42). In other words, 'the reasons for Heidegger's (and Nietzsche's) anti-humanism become ever clearer: the subject, conceived of by humanism as self-consciousness, is simply the correlative of metaphysical Being which is defined in terms of objectivity, that is, in terms of clarity, stability, and unshakable certainty' (Vattimo 1988a: 42). As such, the subject conceived in this humanistic way eliminates what is truly subjective about *Dasein*, that is, its historicity and interpretative nature.

In conceiving of the human being as *Dasein*, there is a danger that Heidegger's thought is 'reappropriative,' too. Indeed, his work from *Being and Time* in particular has been of highly significant interest to existentialists afterwards, such as Sartre. To conceive of *Dasein* as an interpreting thing could lead to a reappropriation of the human subject in order to place it in a central role *vis a vis* the world. Heidegger has been criticised for privileging the human subject (Welsch 2007: 95), and the 'thrownness' of human existence in *Being and Time* 'still risked being understood as Kantian transcendentalism' (Marramao 2007: 78). Perhaps Heidegger realised this danger, especially with concepts such as 'authenticity' and a decision towards death, which tend, according to Vattimo, to figure ever less in his later work. In Vattimo's words,

> The intensity with which Heidegger explores in his late works the notion of *Ereignis* and the related concepts of *Ver-eignen*, *Ent-eignen*, and *Über-eignen*, can be explained as more than just a

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concern for the nature of Being as an event which is not simply-present; rather, it is an effort to free his original concept of *Eigentlichkeit*, or 'authenticity,' from any suggestion of potential reappropriation, which would still be metaphysical and humanistic (Vattimo 1988a: 44).

Being is eventual, opening a series of horizons of disclosure for, and through *Dasein* in different epochs from a non-transcendent '*Selbst'* which permits thought and language. Being needs *Dasein* as an opening, whereas *Dasein* needs Being to think at all.

Some philosophers, such as Welsch (Welsch 2007: 95) still criticise the later Heidegger's formulations of the relationship between Being and human beings as privileging humanity, for only humans act as the 'shepherd' of Being, as Heidegger puts it in his 'Letter on Humanism' (Heidegger 1993: 167). However, on the later Heidegger's view, Being is not under the control of humans, but humans are reliant upon the sending of Being through its unconcealment. 'We can neither reappropriate humanism, nor leave it behind,' says Prosman in his exposition of Vattimo's thought (Prosman 2011: 186). Rather, Vattimo aims to create a *Verwindung* of humanism, vividly described by him as a 'crash diet for the subject' which would allow 'the subject to listen to the call of Being that no longer arises in the peremptory tone of the *Grund*' (Vattimo 1988a: 47). Vattimo does not spend a long time in *The End of Modernity* explaining how the *Verwindung* would take place or what kind of weakened subject would be left at the end of the twisting and weakening. He alludes to the Nietzschean image of 'many souls' replacing the notion of there being only one soul in the Cartesian sense (Vattimo 1988a: 41). At the very end of his chapter on humanism in *The End of Modernity* Vattimo also mentions enigmatically that the 'twisted-healed' subject 'dissolves its presence-absence into the network offered by a society increasingly transformed into an extremely sensitive organism of communication' (Vattimo 1988a: 47). As enigmatic as it seems, it is important to relate this 'crash-diet' subject back to the ontology of actuality which is essentially nihilistic and hermeneutical. With regard to the latter, at the level of interpretation, Being is reduced to 'exchange value,' to 'common currency' in which traditions are received and reinterpreted to generate further Being. There is both, then, the horizon into which we are thrown which affects how we will interpret the traditions we receive and the traditions themselves which are traces of Being from

past epochs. The recognition that this is all there is brings a realisation that there is weak ontology, and this is the upshot of Vattimo's 'left' Heideggerianism. It is this 'left' Heideggerianism which led Vattimo back to religion in the late 1980s and 1990s. To this 'return to religion,' we will now turn.

Part One: Vattimo's Return to Religion and Thoughts on Christianity

Chapter One: Vattimo's Return to Religion

a) Introduction

On the face of it, Vattimo has created a philosophical style, although not a 'system' (Snyder 1988: liv), which can get along without reference to religion. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of Vattimo's writings in the last twenty years have been devoted to religion and religious themes, particularly the idea of *kenosis*. In Part One I will look at Vattimo's return to religion and the principal objections to it. Vattimo's return to religion in his writings was gradual, getting a brief mention in the mid-late nineteen-eighties, but appearing in full form in the nineteen-nineties. What, then, can explain Vattimo's perceived need to draw upon the religious in his writings? Three main reasons present themselves: the personal, the societal, and the theoretical.

b) Personal

'None of us in our western culture,' writes Vattimo, 'begins from zero with the question of religious faith' (Vattimo 1999: 21). Vattimo's own personal return, then, 'is precisely the return of a thematic…that has engaged me in the past' (Vattimo 1999: 21). What this 'thematic' is and means—and Vattimo recognises this is a vague term to use—can be inferred from Vattimo's own intellectual journey.

'Vattimo's intellectual journey traces a circle,' writes Depoortere, '[s]tarting from religion, the fervent Catholicism of his youth, he moved to politics and philosophy…[which] resulted in disillusion which was reflected upon philosophically' (Depoortere 2008a: 3). This philosophical reflection 'eventually resulted in his return to religion' (Depoortere 2008a: 3). Religion entered into Vattimo's life through education; two sisters who lived near the boy Vattimo suggested he went to the oratory (Vattimo and Paterlini 2009: 42). At first Vattimo went for friendship and games, but he got drawn into Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action), the community life, and Mass. Vattimo saw his religion as 'interwoven with [his] philosophical and political commitment,' so that when he 'lost contact with Italian politics,

boom, it [his faith] was all over' (Vattimo and Paterlini 2007: 27). When Vattimo won the Humboldt Fellowship in his mid-twenties, Vattimo went to study in Germany, lost regular contact with Italian politics and thus his faith dwindled, too, implying how much his faith had in fact been attributable to cultural factors. Nevertheless, the thematic of this early faith led Vattimo to Nietzsche and Heidegger, he contends. 'I am aware,' Vattimo writes, 'that I have a preference for Nietzsche and Heidegger… seems to be above all in harmony with a specifically Christian religious substratum that has remained a living part of me' (Vattimo 1999: 33). Vattimo's own 'return' to religion is more of a recovery. Paradoxically, though, this faith had never left him, although he thought for a long time that it had, for it had manifested itself through his own particular interpretations of, and preferences for, Nietzsche and Heidegger.

What was it that triggered Vattimo's recovery of religion, of his realisation that the thematic of religion, the trace of a faith in his life, had influenced him in the way that it had? Personally, contingent factors within his own life, mostly to do with his advancing years, have played their part in his recovery of religion. Vattimo admits that his return 'is related to the experience of death—of people dear to me' (Vattimo 1999: 22). Related to this point is 'the question of religion,' Vattimo writes, poses itself 'at a certain time of life [and] has to do with the physiology of maturity and of getting old' (Vattimo 1999: 22). Vattimo considers the Kantian postulates of practical reason of God and immortality, wondering whether there is an afterlife (Vattimo 1999: 22-23). Additionally, Vattimo mentions both personal and social disillusionment where 'projects…[to] which I had been deeply committed were shattered in a wholly contingent way' (Vattimo 1999: 24). Here Vattimo is alluding, for instance, to the political causes he had been involved in. More broadly, this point about disenchantment is related to a 'discrepancy between fact and meaning…which he describes in terms of post-revolutionary disillusionment' (Depoortere 2008a: 9).

c) Societal

This disillusionment, Vattimo thinks, is more than a personal issue, but is, as Depoortere summarises it, the Zeitgeist of the late-modern, that 'contemporary society has encountered the limits of human reason and

progress' (Depoortere 2008a: 9). The personal is related to the social as follows:

> Yet even the historical circumstances bringing back the problem of faith share a trait in common with the physiology of ageing: in both cases the problem of God is posed in relation to the encounter with a limit as the occurrence of a defeat: we believed that we could realize justice on earth, but now reckon that it is no longer possible and turn our hopes to God (Vattimo 1999: 24).

Vattimo poses the question whether one only turns to God 'where one clashes against something utterly unpleasant' (Vattimo 1999: 24-25). The examples Vattimo provides of 'pressing problems confronting late-modern humanity' include those 'in bioethics, from genetic manipulation to ecology, and problems concerning the explosion of violence in the new conditions of existence within mass society' (Vattimo 1999: 25). Vattimo is not comfortable with this idea that God emerges when humans encounter adversity. Thinking about God this way is, Vattimo suggests, an inheritance from natural religion, of seeing God as a 'threatening power of nature,' associated with earthquakes and thunder, which led primitive humans 'to conceive transcendence as the opposite of every rationality' (Vattimo 1999: 25). Vattimo's argument here is curious, for he moves from late-modern concerns in areas such as bioethics, with the threatening power of human technology, to the violent God of natural religion. Recourse to the divine in the face of the march of science and technology is looking for a divine standard over and against human reason, but this is not to do with divine threats except insofar as scientists may abrogate divine commands. Rather, it is to do with principles such as the 'sanctity of life.'

In addition to the limits of, and fears concerning, human reason, Vattimo sees society as being more interested in religion due to political reasons. The political reasons 'may be traced back to the decisive role played by Pope Wojtyla in the erosion and dissolution of the east European communist regimes' (Vattimo 1999: 26; Vattimo 2002a: 84). The influence and relevance of the pope is also matched, Vattimo thinks, in the 'increasing political importance of Islamic religious hierarchies' (Vattimo 1999: 26). Vattimo discusses whether or not the increased political importance of religion is a cause or effect of a return to religion, or is a symptom of other circumstances. The emergence of Islamic political hierarchies, for instance, could be seen as a symptom of the epoch of the end of colonialism, or the

result of the petrol 'war' with the West in the 1970s (Vattimo 1999: 27). These societal-cultural considerations interest Vattimo, but are not decisive for his argument, as he himself realises.

d) Theoretical

Vattimo makes very interesting autobiographical reflections, and these shall be looked at more in Part Two in the light of philosophical considerations. First and foremost, however, Vattimo is a philosopher. Therefore, Vattimo himself looks for philosophical reasons for his recovery of religion, for what made him realise that the thematic of his faith had been influencing him all along and is relevant for an analysis of the condition of the late-modern. Intellectually, Vattimo says '[t]here are many overlapping reasons' (Vattimo and Paterlini 2007: 149) for this return, although in his quasi-autobiography, *Not Being God*, Vattimo only gives two clear reasons. The first reason is his interpretation of Heidegger, his 'leftist' interpretation of his thought, something which has been outlined already in the Introduction. The second reason Vattimo gives is chancing upon the theological anthropology of René Girard, an influence on his thought that shall be covered in due course.

e) Two returns, cultural and philosophical

In *Belief*, Vattimo makes the threefold distinction above, of a personal return, societal return, and a philosophical return. Later, in *After Christianity* Chapter Six, Vattimo mentions a twofold return, culturally and philosophically. The former, 'cultural,' return bears similarity to the societal return in *Belief*. Factors involved in the cultural return include the role of the pope in the breakdown of the Soviet Union and worries about bioethics leading people back in search of a moral anchor, as well as the search for a social identity in an increasingly pluralistic West. Philosophically, Vattimo is mainly concerned in *After Christianity* with the death of metanarratives, in particular Positivism, with its rejection of religion on scientific-rational principles. The decline of Positivism opens the door for a secular space in which a return to religion can occur in philosophical thought.

Ingeniously, Vattimo connects the two returns. Vattimo has observed a problem with the cultural return to religion, for it can result in aggressive, separatist relativism (reactive nihilism). A return to religion can

be an example of a hardened local identity, other examples being nationalist or ethnic identities. In the face of ever-increasing cultural pluralism in the West, particular groups can retreat into their cultural identities and then use the postmodern argument that there are no facts, only interpretations as a way to make themselves immune from criticism. Indeed, this is part of the problem of viewing hermeneutics as a meta-theory, which is why for a long time now Vattimo has been trying to ground hermeneutics historically and with some sort of ethical backdrop. The philosophical return to religion can, Vattimo thinks, temper the cultural return insofar as one can see both returns as effects of the same process, one of weakening. The peremptoriness, the thread, of weakening 'can operate as an internal criterion that reveals itself in modernity as the logic for the dissolution of metaphysics, to which critical thought is committed to conform itself' (Vattimo 2002a: 91). For reasons that shall become clear over the course of the following chapters, this thread of weakening is a transcription of the incarnation, the *kenosis* of God, a course of history driven toward emancipation by diminishing strong structures.

f) Relevant texts

Three expositions of Vattimo's thoughts on Christianity from his 'return' will be outlined and analysed in turn, starting with his earliest extended treatment of *kenosis* in *Beyond Interpretation* from 1994 (translated 1997a), moving on to *Belief* and *After Christianity*. The reason for choosing three and not more is partly due to space, but largely due to the importance of these texts. According to Nancy K. Frankenberry in her contribution to the Santiago Zabala edited collection of texts on themes in Vattimo's philosophy entitled *Weakening Philosophy*, 'the main elements of Vattimo's account unfold from his *Beyond Interpretation* and *The End of Modernity* to his recent works *Belief* and *After Christianity*' (Frankenberry 2007: 275). *The End of Modernity* looks at Vattimo's understanding of secularisation, as do other texts of his written in the 1980s, but this work has less emphasis on Christianity compared to the other three books mentioned by Frankenberry and shall only be mentioned in relation to the other texts, particularly *Beyond Interpretation* for it built on the theme of 'secularisation' explored in *The End of Modernity*. These three works constitute the core and

development of Vattimo's position on Christianity from its infancy in *Beyond Interpretation*, through semi-autobiography in *Belief*, to an accomplished lecture series in *After Christianity*. The short, but important, essay 'The Trace of the Trace' will be included where appropriate to elaborate on positions being discussed in chapters three and four. To a significant extent Vattimo's later work on Christianity, in books such as *The Future of Religion*, *Christianity Truth and Weakening Faith*, and *A Farewell to Truth*, are elaborations and retellings of some of the themes and ideas outlined in the following three works. Where appropriate, there will be allusions to these later works in the first three chapters. Nevertheless, as Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger's notion of 'event' has developed in recent years, he has also articulated his vision of Christianity differently, too; this will be the focus of Part Two. Before the end of Part Two, I will look at some of the main debates surrounding Vattimo's interpretation of Christianity, particularly the question of history and the charge of 'supersessionism.'

Chapter Two: Beyond Interpretation

a) **The project of *Beyond Interpretation***

Near the end of the 1980s Vattimo was referring to hermeneutics as the '*koine*' or 'dominant trope' of philosophy in late-modernity. Although Vattimo still believed this was the case in the 1990s, '*because* of this…hermeneutics may have lost its originary philosophical significance' (Carravetta 2010: 84). In *Beyond Interpretation* Vattimo argues that hermeneutics is more than a generic meta-theory of interpretation, for '[i]n contemporary philosophy, hermeneutics has begun to acquire an 'ecumenical' form so vague and generic that, in my view, it is losing much of its meaning' (Vattimo 1997a: ix). More troublingly, Vattimo thought hermeneutics was verging on being portrayed as a metaphysical theory, that there *are* no facts, only interpretations: 'In fact if hermeneutics is not to be accepted as a comfortable meta-theory of the universality of interpretative phenomena, as a sort of view from nowhere of the perennial conflict, or play, of interpretations,' Vattimo writes, 'the (only, I believe) alternative is to think the philosophy of interpretation as the final stage in a series of events…as the conclusion of a history we feel unable to tell (interpret)

except in the terms of nihilism that we find for the first time in Nietzsche' (Vattimo 1997a: 8). For Vattimo, hermeneutics is the sending of Being in late-modernity, that we are in the age of interpretation, but to legitimate this understanding of our situation we need to refer to the history of Being, seeing this history of Being as a series of events.

On the surface of things, Vattimo should not have had to look very far for the answer to his problem of 'legitimating' hermeneutics historically, thereby offering a less 'violent' and more credible alternative than regarding hermeneutics as a general theory of interpretation. Vattimo already has three historical 'accounts' of the history of Being as self-consumptive in the metaphor of the death of God, the narrative of the fabulisation of the world, and metaphysics as the history of Being culminating in the *Ge-Stell*/first flashing-up of *Ereignis*. Indeed, in the first chapter of *Beyond Interpretation* where Vattimo is presenting his concern over the lapse of hermeneutics into metaphysics he does mention these histories.

b) Emancipation and charity

Why, then, does Vattimo draw upon religious concepts? Vattimo moves from trying to ground hermeneutics historically to religious concepts via the notions of 'emancipation' and 'charity.' Concerning the former concept, Vattimo argues against relativism and reactive nihilism by stating that one should consider nihilism and the play of interpretation as an opportunity: 'Instead of reacting to the dissolution of the principle of reality by attempting to recuperate a sense of identity and belonging that are at once reassuring and punitive, it is a matter of grasping nihilism as a *chance*…of emancipation' (Vattimo 1997a: 40). Hermeneutical nihilism can be an opportunity to free ourselves from authoritarianism and from adhering to strong structures and hardened identities. With this opportunity for emancipation, though, goes responsibility to negotiate one's way through the play of interpretations by recognising that other people are doing so, too:

> Thinking that no longer understands itself as the recognition and acceptance of an objective authoritarian foundation will develop a new sense of responsibility as ready and able, literally, to respond to others whom, insofar as it is not founded on the eternal structure of Being, its knows to be its 'provenance' (Vattimo 1997a: 40).

Here there is a reference to what Vattimo has since developed more explicitly as his theory of truth, the notion of truth as friendship: '*Amica*

veritas, sed magis amicus Plato, perhaps. Is it chance that some philosophers…speak today about a principle of charity?' (Vattimo 1997a: 40). This important passage brings together Vattimo's thinking on nihilism, hermeneutics, truth and ethics. Immediately Vattimo acknowledges that there will be objections to engaging with the principle of charity, not least because it could appear like a metaphysical principle. Vattimo situates charity within the Christian tradition of the West, even though other philosophers such as Donald Davidson had been developing the principle of charity in recent times already and broadly independently of this tradition. On the basis of the principle of charity, Vattimo sees it as necessary to engage with religion. While also being discussed in the context of interpretation, Davidson's use of the 'principle of charity' is quite different from Vattimo's. Firstly, this principle is similar to Vattimo's own use of 'charity' in that it describes an approach to interpretation that is working towards agreement. However, this agreement concerns the notions of 'belief' and 'meaning.' When trying to interpret what someone is saying, 'one cannot assign meanings to a speaker's utterances without knowing what the speaker believes, while one cannot identify beliefs without knowing what the speaker's utterances mean' (Malpas 2014). Therefore, one needs to create agreement between 'belief' and 'meaning' by postulating that there is an external cause for the belief that provides meaning for it. Moreover, the principle of charity involves an injunction to converge between one's own beliefs and those of the person whose utterance is trying to interpret. 'Attributions of belief and assignments of meaning,' writes Jeff Malpas in describing Davidson's theory, 'must be consistent with one another and with the speaker's overall behaviour; they must also be consistent with the evidence afforded by our knowledge of the speaker's environment' (Malpas 2014). The latter part of this statement highlights the importance of drawing upon one's own beliefs to interpret those of others. One can see why this would appeal to Vattimo, for the latter's Heideggerian philosophy involves the recognition of one's own thrownness and thus the importance of recognising that one cannot interpret anything without bringing one's own worldview to bear. Nevertheless, unlike Vattimo, Davidson places more emphasis on the importance of correspondence between perception and the object of perception which is the cause of beliefs, and therefore of meaning.

c) Secularisation and *kenosis*

Vattimo wanted to draw upon religion in order both to ground hermeneutics historically in the tradition of the West to prevent it from being regarded as a meta-theory of interpretation, and also to develop an ethic of charity for hermeneutics to provide a criterion of, and for, interpretation. Even before *Beyond Interpretation* Vattimo had begun to develop a theory of secularisation which he would go on to use to link Christianity with hermeneutics. In four texts in particular before *Beyond Interpretation* Vattimo begin to write about secularisation. The first place where Vattimo discusses secularisation is the article 'Myth and the Fate of Secularisation.' Here, the thought of René Girard is drawn upon in a way that Vattimo will use later in his work and which shall be discussed below. In short, 'Christ shows that the sacred *is* violence' (Vattimo 1985: 35), opening up the possibility of a new history. Modern Europe is an heir to this past not so much in the form of an overcoming, but as a *Verwindung*, weakening reason and the polarities of rational and irrational to leave room for hermeneutical plurality. Traces of Christianity are inherited and twisted through secularisation. The links between Girard, *Verwindung*, and hermeneutical pluralism are as yet not fully realised in Vattimo's thought at this stage. The second place is *The End of Modernity*. Principally here Vattimo links secularisation to Arnold Gehlen's notion of *post-histoire*: faith in the progress of science and technology is the secularisation of the Christian hope for salvation in the progress of the kingdom of heaven (Vattimo 1988a: 7-8, 100-103). The third place is Vattimo's essay 'Metaphysics, Violence, Secularization.' Here, Vattimo compares and contrasts his philosophy with that of Levinas. In short, for Vattimo secularization is another way of referring to *Verwindung*: 'In its 'theoretical' and, inseparably, its 'epochal' aspects (*Ge-Stell*), the *Verwindung* of metaphysics is nothing other than secularization' (Vattimo 1988b: 61). The essay mentions the 'continuity' of the biblical message through its interpretations and translations (Vattimo 1988b: 60). The fourth text which helps set the scene for *Beyond Interpretation* is *The Transparent Society*. Here Vattimo relates secularisation to the phrase from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, of continuing to dream knowing that one is dreaming. Again, the link to

Verwindung is clear; one cannot regard certain beliefs as true anymore (such as Plato's forms) but one cannot fully escape them as they are traces of tradition that limit thought (*Denken* is *Andenken*), yet through knowing that one is dreaming one can weaken them. With reference to Christianity, Vattimo supplies, among other examples, that of Max Weber, who knew that modern capitalism is the secularisation, the 'transformation,' of the Protestant work ethic.

All four of these texts emphasise that secularisation involves continuity, not rupture. 'Modern European culture is thus linked to its own religious past not only by a relation of overcoming and emancipation,' writes Vattimo, 'but also, and inseparably, by a relation of conservation-distortion-evacuation: progress is in a sense nostalgic by nature' (Vattimo 1992: 42). By emphasising continuity even through transformation, Vattimo moves away from what Marta Frascati-Lochhead described as the 'reactive' and 'triumphalist' ways of thinking secularisation (Frascati-Lochhead 1998: 151-152). The former sees secularisation as the loss of a centre and of God, whereas the latter sees secularisation as a liberation from God through finding a more authentic way of existing. *Beyond Interpretation* builds on the understanding of secularisation as continuity, as *Verwindung*, that he had built up over the course of these texts and others. What Vattimo adds in *Beyond Interpretation* is a deep link between secularisation and hermeneutics by drawing upon the Christian notion of the incarnation. Already Vattimo's concept of *Verwindung* commits him to seeing continuity instead of rupture, for overcoming Christianity completely would not only be impossible, but also would be to repeat modernity by placing down new foundations.

During modernity hermeneutics was initially tied to specific branches of hermeneutics, particularly biblical hermeneutics after Luther's '*sola scriptura.*' Hermeneutics followed the Enlightenment in becoming ever more rationalistic, with Schleiermacher positing that interpretation had to aim for objective fidelity. It was with Heidegger that hermeneutics changed, particularly with his notion of *Dasein* as a thrown project. This jettisoning of the requirement for interpretation to be a valid conformity between terms and their referents 'undermines the rationalist, empiricist, positivist and even idealist and Marxist negations of the possibility of

religious experience' (Vattimo 1997a: 45). Such interpretative and creative freedom is permitted by the emancipatory effects of post-Heideggerian hermeneutics on religion, but while hermeneutics is liberating, the way in which it functions here is described by Vattimo as 'negative.' Hermeneutics 'frees reason from its slavery to the scientistic ideal of objectivity, only to pave the way to a philosophy of culture whose limits (and meaning) cannot ultimately be determined' (Vattimo 1997a: 45).

Vattimo searches around for a way of looking at hermeneutics in order to ground its liberation of interpretative plurality more positively. To this end, Vattimo compares and contrasts two western 'archetypal' expressions pertaining to plurality: Aristotle's *to on léghetai pollachôs* ('Being is said in many ways'), and St Paul's '*multifariam multisque modis olim loquens Deus patribus in prophetis*' (Hebrews 1:1) (Vattimo 1997a: 46). The context of the phrase from Aristotle is his idea of substance, whereas the context for St Paul's statement is the incarnation of the son of God, understood by Vattimo to be *kenosis*, a theological phrase that usually refers to God's self-emptying in the incarnation. The sense of self-emptying in incarnation as *kenosis* is implied in *Beyond Interpretation*, although I get the sense that Vattimo had an intuition about the relationship between weak thought and Christianity which he had yet to crystallise in his work. The quote from Hebrews indicates hermeneutical plurality, that God has communicated differently at various times, weakening the idea of a simple, impassable, eternal God (which becomes more of an explicit concern for him in *Belief*), as well as 'contaminating' Aristotelian metaphysics (Vattimo 1997a: 47). While Vattimo had mentioned secularisation and Christianity before *Beyond Interpretation*, the introduction of the term *kenosis* was something new in his philosophy, save for a brief allusion to the term in an interview in 1989 (Vattimo 1989: 402). In *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo relates St Paul's expression to the phrase from Aristotle as the nihilistic ontology he is trying to 'discern in hermeneutics is rather than outcome of a 'contamination' of Aristotelian pluralism by Pauline 'historicism'' (Vattimo 1997a: 47), for Aristotle's expression by itself, even without a reference to substance, 'remains an objectivistic-metaphysical thesis (the Being is said in many ways because, and only because, it *is* in many ways)' (Vattimo 1997a: 47). The contradiction within Aristotle's phrase is resolved by placing the

statement within a history of weakening of strong structures, along the lines indicated by St Paul. The incarnation is referred to by Vattimo as a 'key event' which confers meaning 'on the many preceding and succeeding events' (Vattimo 1997a: 46). The historicising effect of the Pauline notion of the incarnation on Aristotle's understanding of the plurivocity of Being is to create a nihilistic ontology without hierarchy.

Secularisation is 'a festival of interpretative plurality' (Guarino 2009: 20). Relating this to *kenosis*, it is 'the gradual realization in history of the kenotic self-abasement of God' (Guarino 2009: 20). It is interesting that Guarino, as a Catholic Professor of Systematic Theology, picks up on the language of the 'self-abasement' of God, for in *Beyond Interpretation* this theme is relatively undeveloped (Vattimo 1997a: 48). Self-abasement, humbling and the incarnation in any traditional sense associated with Philippians 2:7, the 'standard' kenotic text, is conspicuously absent here. Instead, Hebrews 1:1 is offered as an archetype of interpretative plurality. Secularisation is thus a plural view of reality passed on as a message working its way through history. Vattimo does not do a lot to show *how* hermeneutics is 'the fruit' of secularisation which itself is the 'application' of the Christian revelation of *kenosis* and *caritas* (charity) (Vattimo 1997a: 52). Reading between the lines, one can see the 'contamination' of the Aristotelian understanding of Being by Pauline historicism as inaugurating a principle of 'weakening' through historicising which we can see again with Heidegger's historicising Being through his conceiving of it as epochal. Throughout history one can see this weakening in action, for instance through the secularising of transcendent hopes with the kingdom of God, becoming secularised in rationalist hopes for progress, then losing its teleology altogether at the end of modernity. Moreover, the weakening of the medieval worldview, both scripturally and in eschatological expectations, led both to the increasing rationalisation of hermeneutics through Spinoza and Schleiermacher, and to the development of science, technology and positivism (respectively), which ended up self-consuming in the end of modernity and the *Ge-Stell*, leading to the play of interpretations in hermeneutics.

Vattimo realises that many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, may be sceptical about his interpretation of Christianity as a stimulus

to weakening strong, violent structures. Therefore, Vattimo draws upon the work of the philosophical anthropologist René Girard to support his hypothesis. Girard's ideas are given a brief outline by Vattimo. Natural religions are founded upon the need to make victims to keep order in society. The mimetic drive in humans to desire what the other has escalates until violence threatens to consume society. A sacrificial scapegoat is killed to prevent the society's destruction. Over time this becomes ever more ritualised and 'assumes a sacral and divine character' (Vattimo 1997a: 50). Girard sees the Old and New Testaments as intended to reveal the victimary mechanism, the person of Jesus being put to death because of his message of love, revealing this mechanism. Vattimo's way of tying-in Girard to his account of the incarnation is somewhat tendentious, for he argues that the message of Jesus, his love and this unmasking of the violence of the scapegoat mechanism, could only have been divine (Vattimo 1997a: 50-51). Nevertheless, insofar as de-sacralisation is secularisation, and if the sacred is violent, Vattimo's reading of Girard is still evidence for the uniqueness of Christianity as the stimulus for the principle of weakening that has resulted in hermeneutical nihilism in late-modernity.

d) Caritas

Kenosis is not only the stimulus, but also the process of weakening, referred to by Vattimo as 'secularisation' (the transmission of the kenotic message) which is carried on by the 'Spirit,' schematised by Vattimo through the Trinitarian historicism of Joachim of Fiore. Joachim, a twelfth-century abbot from Calabria (a place of personal significance also to Vattimo, for he lived there for a while) divided history into three '*stases*' or epochs: that of the Father, the Son, and of the Spirit. The 'Age of the Father,' commensurable with the Old Testament, is one of the letter and authority, that of the Son (from the time of Jesus to the present day) is one of filial obedience with the rise of the Church, the final age to come is that of the Spirit and this is of increasing lightening and weakening of bonds in newfound spiritual maturity. Joachim identified the Spirit with a barefoot monastic order, which leant itself to being interpreted with the Franciscans in mind. According to one way of reading Vattimo's interpretation of Joachim (Sciglitano 2013), the ages of the Father (Old Testament) and Son

(New Testament and rise of the Church) are surpassed by the 'Age of the Spirit.' In the latter, 'the 'spiritual' sense of the scriptures is increasingly in evidence, with charity taking the place of discipline' (Vattimo 1997a: 49). Vattimo does not follow Joachim's ideas strictly, but uses his conception of history as a broad framework against which to position his own understanding of *kenosis*. Within this framework Vattimo also places Schleiermacher's hope for everyone to be the author of their own Bible, and Novalis' aesthetic and anti-disciplinarian conception of Christianity (Vattimo 1997a: 49). Vattimo sees the link he has found between the religious tradition of the West and hermeneutics as beneficial for many reasons, such as encouraging thinking about the centrality of interpretation, liberating readers from myth of objectivity, and that the 'spiritual' reading of Scripture in this broadly Joachimist framework may enable believers to overcome ecclesiastical discipline (Vattimo 1997a: 49-50).

Some commentators on Vattimo's work, such as Carravetta, have criticised Vattimo for his seemingly arbitrary selection of *caritas* as the key Christian virtue (Carravetta 2010: 89). However, the anti-disciplinarian character of the 'Age of the Spirit,' along with the message of love taken from the gospel as well as from Girard's theory, go some way to explaining Vattimo's choice of *caritas* ('charity') as the limit for secularisation; this question will be dealt with in Part Two. *Caritas* here is not understood in any standardly theological way, but it is divine love insofar as it is the criterion for secularisation based on the kenotic model, that is, of weakening. *Caritas* is therefore the 'criterion that permits the distinction of secularization from phenomena that confine themselves to applying the Christian tradition, often in a distorted fashion, yet which are themselves outside or indeed in opposition to it' (Vattimo 1997a: 51). By 'outside' or 'in opposition' to the Christian tradition in relation to the measure of *caritas* and secularisation means any interpretation or interpretative act which is 'strong' and metaphysical.

e) Vattimo's argument: summarising and drawing the implications

By exploring a paradox at the heart of hermeneutics, Vattimo gets closer to linking together nihilism, hermeneutics, *kenosis*, and secularisation. The paradox is that the Enlightenment origins of hermeneutics concerned

demythologising and rationalistic interpretation, yet the whole notion of objectivity has been exposed as a myth in contemporary hermeneutic philosophy, leaving the public space open for a plurality of interpretations, in other words, for hermeneutics itself. Vattimo sees a parallel between this paradox and the Christian tradition: 'nihilism is too much 'like' *kenosis* for one to see this likeness as simply a coincidence' (Vattimo 1997a: 52). The nihilistic origins of hermeneutics are in fact found in the message of *kenosis*, of the weakening of strong structures in the message of historical plurivocity which contaminated Aristotelian plurivocity. This message was passed down, culminating in the secularisation of modernity which removed the transcendent realm and emphasised rationalisation to the point at which it self-consumed, leaving the way open for hermeneutics as the *koine* of philosophy and the play of interpretations constituting reality. The ethical dimension can be taken from the corollary of *kenosis* for choice, and that is weakening. *Caritas* is the spiritual-ethical dimension of *kenosis*. In the 'Age of the Spirit,' in Vattimo's reading of Joachim of Fiore, discipline gives way to charity, much in the same way that Jesus' message of love overturned the violence of the natural sacred in Vattimo's other, Girard-influenced, account of how the incarnation is a stimulus for weakening, for de-sacralisation.

Chapter Three: *Belief*

a) **The project of** *Belief*

Belief is a very different kind of book from *Beyond Interpretation*. Written a few years later in 1996 (translated 1999), *Belief* is an intensely personal, largely first-person account of his return to religion. It is not divided up neatly into chapters, but consists of a series of loosely related subheadings. The first twelve pages and two subheadings deal with reasons explaining his return to religion, at first personal and cultural, then philosophical. These reasons were explained in Chapter One. In short, they were largely about getting old, seeing his friends grow ill and die for 'personal' reasons, seeing religion re-emerge on the global stage in the decline of Communism and in the Iranian Revolution for 'cultural' and 'societal' reasons, and seeing the end of modernity as clearing a space theoretically for a return to religion. Although Vattimo sees Nietzschean-Heideggerian hermeneutic nihilism as the best interpretation of the late-modern, a surprise comes when he states

that 'my preference for the Heideggerian 'solution' to contemporary philosophical problems is conditioned, and profoundly inspired by the Christian inheritance' culturally, and therefore in his life (Vattimo 1999: 32). The rest of the book is essentially an unpacking of this statement.

b) Secularisation and incarnation

In *Belief* Vattimo again develops his idea of secularisation, which he sees as 'the constitutive trait of an authentic religious experience' (Vattimo 1999: 21). The theme of *Verwindung* is still present here, for secularisation is a moving away from a sacred core which 'nevertheless remains active even in its 'fallen' version, reduced to purely worldly terms' (Vattimo 1999: 22). The history of Being as a history of weakening is a 'transcription' of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God (Vattimo 1999: 36). The Son of God, for Vattimo, is weakening, secularisation and incarnation. It is to the thought of René Girard that Vattimo turns to explain this transcription. Although Girard was mentioned and drawn upon by Vattimo to support his understandings of *kenosis* and secularisation in *Beyond Interpretation*, his ideas have a much more central role to play here. Girard's ideas explain in a more technical sense what it means for secularisation to move away from a 'sacral' core, for secularisation, for Vattimo, is here literally de-sacralisation.

If Vattimo was to show how Heidegger's philosophy is the transcription of the Christian message, he needed to tie-in Girard closer to the German philosopher's thought. Therefore, Vattimo distinguished 'religion' from the 'Christian faith.' The former is a very human phenomenon of creating a divinity based out of human inclinations and wish fulfilment, the sort of cultural practice which lends itself to 'the powerful critique inaugurated by Feuerbach and then carried on by Marx' (Vattimo 1999: 38). When divinities are created, they often carry within them the psychological burden of a thirst for revenge. Here is where Girard comes in. After having outlined Girard's ideas on the natural sacred, Vattimo expands Girard's concept of the 'natural sacred' to include this kind of vengeful deity. The latter has all the traditional attributes of the onto-theological, metaphysical God, such as omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity and transcendence. This move allows Vattimo to make a link between

'secularisation—the progressive dissolution of the natural sacred' (Vattimo 1999: 50) and Heidegger's notion of metaphysics as the history of the weakening of Being.

If there is identification between secularisation and Heideggerian weak ontology, *how* does secularisation originate? At first sight there seem to be mixed messages coming from Vattimo. For Vattimo, 'what seems decisive in Girard's theses…is the idea of the incarnation as the dissolution of the sacred as violence' (Vattimo 1999: 38), that secularisation began with the incarnation of Christ (see also Vattimo 1999: 48). However, Vattimo also writes that secularisation is a 'positive effect of Jesus' teaching' (Vattimo 1999: 41). So for Vattimo, what is the origin of secularisation: the incarnation of Christ or the message of Jesus? From Vattimo's philosophy it should be clear that he would not believe in a literal incarnation in the 'dogmatic' sense for this would be metaphysical (Vattimo 1997a: 47). Therefore, in *Belief* Vattimo says for kenotic weakening there is the message of the incarnation and Jesus' teachings to take into account, rather than simply the interpretative plurality of Hebrews 1 which was the main argument of *kenosis* in *Beyond Interpretation*.

Vattimo admits, there are 'gaps' in his argument (Vattimo 1999: 45), but the most important point is to link the person of Jesus Christ to the reduction of violence, putting the de-sacralising secularisation process in motion. Returning to Girard, Vattimo sees Girard's Christ as coming to reveal the nexus between violence and the sacred. In Vattimo's account in *Belief*, he mentions just *that* it is an incarnation that reveals; there is no elaboration on *how* the incarnation reveals (Vattimo 1999: 37). Turning to *kenosis*, Vattimo states that it is God's 'abasement to the level of humanity' which indicates a distinctive vocation for weakening in the post-metaphysical God (Vattimo 1999: 39). Later, Vattimo elaborates a little on this 'abasement,' for it 'undermines the 'natural' features of divinity' (Vattimo 1999: 47). Again, this cannot be a literal *kenosis*, so what is this message? One would like to say, akin to *Beyond Interpretation*, that it is the message of God historicising himself in messages which dissolves the 'naturally religious,' metaphysical features ascribed to him. This argument is not explicitly spelled out and developed, perhaps because for Vattimo it was so obvious it did not need stating. Indeed, in the Postscript to *Belief*

Vattimo states that 'through the act of incarnation God, according to all the senses of *kenosis*, has made possible a historical engagement' (Vattimo 1999: 96). 'All the senses' implies this obviousness of the importance of the historical in the notion of *kenosis*. Conceived this way, the way in which *kenosis* works as the stimulus for secularisation is not so far removed from the sense in *Beyond Interpretation*, that is, of historicising that which is rigidly immutable: in *Beyond Interpretation* it is Aristotelian 'Being,' in *Belief* it is the God of the natural religions. The two senses are then combined through Vattimo's reading of Girard, of Heidegger's weak ontology being a 'transcription' of the kenotic message, by linking the 'violence' of the natural sacred with the violence of metaphysics. Vattimo expands Girard's concept of the 'natural sacred' to include this kind of vengeful deity. The latter has all the traditional attributes of the onto-theological, metaphysical God, such as omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity and transcendence. This move allows Vattimo to make a link between 'secularization—the progressive dissolution of the natural sacred' (Vattimo 1999: 50) and Heidegger's notion of metaphysics as the history of the weakening of Being. Vattimo has even gone so far as to say that his reading of Girard has helped him 'complete' Heidegger (Vattimo 2010b: 78). Even if this is going too far, in Vattimo's mind there is a clear parallel between the two thinkers, as is clear from his statement that '[f]or both Girard and Heidegger, the emancipatory meaning of history—the salvation that takes place in it—is related to a self-consumption of the violence that characterises natural religion or, in Heidegger—the metaphysical oblivion of Being' (Vattimo 2010b: 85).

There is more to Vattimo's notion of *kenosis*, however, than merely historicising the divine. What also has to be taken into account is not only the message *of* Jesus, but also Jesus' message of 'the friendliness of God towards his creatures' (Vattimo 1999: 95). The message of friendliness constitutes also the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, that of 'you heard it was said…but I tell you…' (the 'Antitheses' in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew) and 'I no longer call you servants but friends' (John 15:15; see Vattimo 1999: 49 for both of these quotations). 'The guiding thread of Jesus' interpretation of the Old Testament,' writes Vattimo, 'is the new and more profound relation of charity established

between God and humanity, and consequently between human beings themselves' (Vattimo 1999: 49). Here again the message of charity comes to the fore. Vattimo sums up the meaning of the incarnation in a way which emphasises both the message of Jesus and Jesus' message: 'The interpretation given by Jesus Christ of Old Testament prophecies, or (better) the interpretation which he himself *is*, reveals its true and only meaning: God's love for his creatures' (Vattimo 1999: 64). In other words, *kenosis* is something ontological, it is a revealing of Being in its weakness which we can recognise today because it is a message with an effective history—secularisation—which has come to fruition today: 'my interpretation of Heidegger's thought as 'weak ontology' or weakening can be thought of as a rediscovery of Christianity and as the outcome of its permanent action' (Vattimo 1999: 35). According to Girard's thesis which Vattimo takes over and modifies, it is the Judaeo-Christian tradition that seeks to reveal the violence of the natural sacred through his message of God's love for, and friendship with, the world. As such, in Antonello's words Christianity acts like a 'Trojan horse,' that it must 'temporarily clothe itself as an institutional religion' in order to 'destructure' all the 'archaic religions' (Antonello 2006: 8). Antonello's own vision of the Vattimian Christological schema also goes some way to explain why Christianity historically appears to strengthen thought and metaphysics at times, not weaken it.

Throughout the Bible there are plenty of sayings that call for obedience in a master-servant-style relationship. One can think of the calls for obedience to the one God in the Decalogue (Exodus 20) as a prime example. Even if Vattimo appeals to the 'antithetical' character of the New Testament ('it was said…but I say to you…'—see Matthew 5), or the Joachimist conception of the three ages, this reading presumes some exegetical model he has to legitimate himself independently in more detail and with greater persuasiveness than he has done. Even if one accepts that it is the New Testament message with which we should be concerned, God is still referred to as a 'master' here, too. The Greek word '*despotes*' is often used to refer in the New Testament to masters of slaves (1 Timothy 6:1). This word is also applied to God (Acts 4:24). Therefore, against Vattimo, the stance of the New Testament is not unequivocal on this issue of the 'hierarchy' of values. In Vattimo's defence, one has to take into account the

consciously 'circular' nature of his enterprise. His reading of the New Testament comes from the sending of Being as the death of God and the end of metaphysics, so when recovering Christianity he will read it in a weak way. The twist in Vattimo's thought is that it must have been Christianity that set the stimulus for secularisation in the first place.

Vattimo is able to link Christianity to weak ontology through Girard's work in relation to the message of the New Testament. However, Vattimo admits that he goes 'just a little bit beyond Girard' in his use of his concept of the natural sacred (Vattimo 1999: 38). Already in *Beyond Interpretation* Vattimo writes that 'Girard…does not seek to extend his thesis into a genuine theory of secularization as the authentic destiny of Christianity…Yet there are good reasons for such an extension' (Vattimo 1997a: 51). There are at least three significant ways in which the views of Vattimo and Girard, for all they appear similar, are very different. The best place to look for this difference is a series of essays and debates between them collected in the Pierpaolo Antonello edited book *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue* (2006). The three principal reasons are the dangers of the exposition of the victimary mechanism, the question of the 'sacrifice' of Jesus on the cross, and the epistemological question of whether there are only interpretations or whether there are facts, too. However, although each of these three points of difference will be outlined, it should become apparent that, to a significant extent, these points of difference are merely differences. A larger problem which is not considered in the book edited by Antonello is how Vattimo understands 'violence' in Girard's work and in Heidegger's history of the weakening of Being.

The first difference, pointed out by Antonello in his Introduction to the joint effort by Vattimo and Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith*, is on the issue of accounting for 'the recurrence of violence even in the Christian ages' (Antonello 2006: 12). Vattimo blames the violence on the distortion of the Christian message by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in particular through him using Wilhelm Dilthey's understanding of the history of philosophy which 'suggested that the tendency of the Church to 'misunderstand' the meaning of revelation…sprang from the supplement role of early Christianity in the late-ancient world, after the fall of the Roman Empire,' that 'in the vacuum of civil institutions Popes and bishops

were the only authorities capable of assuring a minimal basis of sociability' (Vattimo 1999: 53). As such, the Church tends to make absolute 'contingent historical horizons, which are claimed to be inseparable from the truth of revelation' (Vattimo 1999: 53). In other words, Vattimo reads Dilthey as implying that the Church prevented the message of weakening from being manifested more quickly through its adoption of Greek metaphysics, which is perhaps another way of looking at the 'contamination' of Greek metaphysics by its being 'historicised' and 'weakened' by the message of the *kenosis* of God. By contrast, Girard thinks that 'the Christian message…stripped mankind of those sacral protections that had been put in place to protect it against its own violence' (Antonello 2006: 13). Christianity can therefore be seen as being 'creatively liberating,' but it also leaves room for destruction by revealing the true nature of the mechanism which prevented the unleashing of mimetic violence, all against all. This 'creativity' manifests itself in different 'containment structures to forestall the apocalyptic event' of the culmination of mimetic violence (Antonello 2006: 13). Antonello mentions examples of this kind of 'secularised forms of transcendence' such as democracy and mass media spectacle. Against this, Antonello says that 'Vattimo…rejects any apocalyptic perspective, foreseeing a progressive liberation…from any need for limits of any sort' (Antonello 2006: 14). In his estimation of the difference between Vattimo and Girard, Antonello overstates his case somewhat. Vattimo certainly does not want any metaphysical or authoritarian-institutional limit, and does see history as a progressive emancipation from strong structures. However, Vattimo does see one limit to prevent violence and that is *caritas* as a formal principle guiding interpretation.

The second difference between Vattimo and Girard concerns the issue of sacrifice in the death of Jesus. Girard admits in his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978) that he consciously refrained from describing the death of Jesus as a sacrifice. This was a deliberate decision due to research he had conducted onto blood sacrifices in non-Christian religions. Girard was 'impressed' with the 'discontinuity' between these blood sacrifices and the death of Jesus on the cross to the extent that in his book he was not prepared to identify the latter with the former. As such, Vattimo follows suit, for it was *Things Hidden* that made

such a great impression on him: 'Jesus' incarnation did not take place to supply the father with a victim adequate to his wrath' (Vattimo 1999: 37); Jesus 'comes to be put to death not because he is the perfect victim, as has always been understood' (Vattimo 1997a: 50). Girard changed his mind, he said, after having read the work of Raymund Schwager, that 'The attachment of orthodox theologians to certain traditional *words*, such as 'sacrifice,' even if it still needs to be explored, is never without reason' (Girard, 2006: 93).

The third point of difference between Vattimo and Girard is epistemological and, to an extent, methodological. With these two thinkers one has to remember that one is a philosopher and the other is an anthropologist. Moreover, Girard is a more conservative thinker than Vattimo anyway, as he is ready to admit. Girard thinks not only that there are interpretations, but also that there are facts. Furthermore, Girard does not think that the Nietzschean phrase that there are 'no facts, only interpretations' can provide a 'functional theory of interpretation. To have nothing but interpretation is the same as having none' (Girard 2006: 94). Girard simply is not a nihilist, nor does he think that transcendence has to be violent in a metaphysical way. Rather, in Depoortere's phrasing, Girard's solution to thinking Christianity in modernity is to regard God not in his radical immanence, but in his 'transcendence of love' (Depoortere 2008a: 61). On the other hand, Girard is an anthropologist and makes anthropological claims, that they are 'facts,' such as that 'all human societies are afflicted with some kind of malfunction' that results in violence (Girard 2006: 105). One such claim concerns the essentially violent state of human beings in nature: 'When we realize that Girard sees any type of human culture as originally violent, this stands in sharp contrast to Vattimo' (Prosman 2011: 200). Theoretically, at least, Vattimo considers a non-violent society as possible, not least because he does not believe in anthropological facts. This leads on to the other fact of significance to Girard in this context concerns the status of the unmasking of the natural sacred effected by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For Girard, it is important that we know about the natural sacred, keeping it in mind in order to prevent an apocalypse. For Vattimo, it is not enough to posit:

> a scientific, nonvictimary knowledge of human nature. I know that this is not Girard's intention, but as a matter of fact, even the

redemptive power of Jesus seems to reside, for him, in a pure and simple theoretical unmasking of the violent essence of the natural notion of the sacred (Vattimo 2006b: 86).

For Vattimo, knowledge of the natural sacred is not only impossible in a factual fashion, but would also be irrelevant were it not wedded to a history of weakening, for the important matter for Vattimo is to be able to ground and commit to a practise of weakening in the present through orienting interpretation towards further weakening of strong structures in accordance with *caritas* as the sole hermeneutical criterion.

The above three points constitute differences between the two thinkers, but ones which are not fatal to Vattimo drawing upon Girard's ideas. On the issue of 'facts' and 'interpretations,' Vattimo is going to transcribe Girard's 'factual' findings into a hermeneutical tool because he is a hermeneutical nihilist. All one has to do is to think of Girard's insights not so much as facts about human nature, but as ways of understanding the uniqueness of Christianity (which is, after all, a matter of faith for Vattimo) *vis a vis* the naturally violent 'archaic' religions. The issue of the 'sacrifice' of Jesus will not trouble Vattimo too much, for he is not interested in 'facts'; Girard's original proclamation that Jesus' death was not a sacrifice 'spoke' to him and seemed persuasive in a way that the 'traditional' reading of his death, to which Girard has returned, does not. As for the different ways in which Vattimo and Girard think that the unmasking of the victimary mechanism and the natural sacred play out, here again is a theoretical difference; Girard is an academic, whereas Vattimo has a self-consciously ethico-political vocation within philosophy. Antonello describes Girard as a 'thinker who has, in contrast [to Vattimo] made little use of his own anthropological theory to interpret contemporary social and political reality' (Antonello 2006: 4).

Even if these three other issues are resolvable, there is another issue with Vattimo's reading of Girard which is not a point of difference between the two thinkers, but is a question of how he interprets the latter's concept of the natural sacred, specifically in relation to the similarity he draws with Heidegger's notion of the ontology of weakening. Vattimo is able to see Heidegger's thought as a transcription of Girard's thinking on the natural sacred largely because he sees a parallel between the natural sacred and metaphysical violence. According to Martin G. Weiss, Vattimo thinks

violence 'is identified with the kind of speech that allows no contradiction' (Weiss 2010: 244), a concept which bears similarity to Lyotard's notion of the '*differend*,' of a failure between interlocutors to create a common standard of judgement which leads the victim's judgement to be recognised (for example, Aboriginal Australian's claims to land being dismissed as they offer a standard of ownership not recognised under Australian law) (Woodward 2015). This is metaphysical violence, reducing what can be said to objective knowledge and foundational first principles. However, the type of violence described by Girard is physical, the actual killing of a person. Physical violence may follow from a metaphysically grounded view of reality, such as the Inquisition. However, violence may also result from anarchy, instinct, or for any number of other reasons. The identification between the natural sacred and metaphysics is important for Vattimo as he wants to develop de-sacralisation into his history of secularisation as a religious parallel (or stimulus to) an ontology of decline. By at least questioning a key premise in this identification, Vattimo's understanding of the history of philosophy and religion is itself weakened.

c) Salvation

Vattimo realises that he has made choices in his understanding of the fulfilment of Christianity as secularisation. Firstly, he has chosen that Christianity should not aim to enshrine itself in dogma and doctrine, as it has done in the past and continues, in some quarters, to do still today: 'Revelation does not speak of an objective truth, but of an ongoing salvation' (Vattimo 1999: 48). Rather, Christianity is fulfilled in weakening. The lay state, autonomy in morals, the reduction of the temporal power of the popes—these are examples of the kind of weakening Vattimo is talking about, the realisation of *kenosis*, 'undermining the 'natural' features of divinity' (Vattimo 1999: 47). There is an anti-authoritarian strand running through Vattimo's work here, identifying the use of authority by figures such as John Paul II with 'metaphysics.' Contrasting such authoritarianism with the revelation of *kenosis*, Vattimo closely links the 'history of salvation' with 'the history of interpretation' (Vattimo 1999: 49). Interpretation here does not mean the correct application of teachings that one has heard, but the realisation of the message of *kenosis*. The latter has

the same relationship as Jesus' words had to the Old Testament, the 'Antitheses' of Matthew 5 ('you heard it was said…but I tell you…'). Here again, Vattimo draws upon John 15:15, of the message of salvation in *kenosis* being that humans are now called not to be God's servants, but friends—the 'bizarre' and 'threatening' facets pertaining to the natural sacred are dissolved in receiving this message. One could make a link between Christ taking the form of a servant in Philippians 2:6-8 and God calling us to be friends, not servants; it is almost as though God has lowered himself to the level of the servant and that we are fellow servants of his. The implication is that there is no privileged truth (whether divine or of Humanism—we, too, are servants) and therefore views of humanity and of God are caught-up in exchange-value, the nihilistic vocation of hermeneutics as the result of the inheritance of this Christian message. As Vattimo has chosen that the Christian revelation is ongoing salvation and not the application of evangelical teaching, 'secularisation—the progressive dissolution of the natural sacred—is the very essence of Christianity' (Vattimo 1999: 50), in a very specific sense. In other words, the process of secularisation is a kenotic process, with its guiding thread and limit as charity, *caritas* (Vattimo 1999: 64). Salvation comes through desacralising interpretation, ever-weakening strong authoritarian structures.

d) *Caritas* and Secularisation

Today, there is a contrast between searching for faith and finding the Church of the pope, and discovering the 'doctrine of salvation' in the form of kenotic Christianity as put forward by Vattimo. The ecclesiastical hierarchy will demand that one adheres to an outmoded, metaphysical conception of human nature and the personal and social ethics that are built upon this anthropology. Vattimo contrasts this with what he refers to as the 'limit' for secularisation, the notion of *caritas*, which is a 'critical principle' derived from the incarnation understood as *kenosis* (Vattimo 1999: 62-63). With secularisation, it is not as though any and all phenomena encountered in late-modernity can be judged to be the fruit of secularised Christianity. Some, such as the realist ethics of the Catholic Church proscribing homosexual relationships and women priests, are not, in Vattimo's eyes, in harmony with the Christian message of weakening.

Vattimo sees a 'parallelism between a theology of secularisation and an ontology of weakening' (Vattimo 1999: 63). A weak ontology is a 'long farewell to the strong structures of Being,' a process without end. If the process were to end, then nihilism would be a state of nothingness, which paradoxically would be to return to the notion of presence. This is why Vattimo thinks one 'can only conceive nihilism as history' (Vattimo 1999: 63). Vattimo sees a 'Christian inspiration' in nihilism, with the latter being a 'transcription' of the biblical message. 'If one thinks of nihilism as an infinite history in terms of the religious 'text' that is its basis and interpretation,' writes Vattimo, 'it will speak of *kenosis* as guided, limited and endowed with meaning, by God's love' (Vattimo 1999: 64). Although Vattimo speaks of love (*caritas*) as the 'limit' of secularisation, it is also the power of the driving force behind it, the process of the message of *kenosis* working its way through history. At the heart of the New Testament message, in Vattimo's eyes, is love, a view which is widely shared, not least by the biblical text itself, for love is declared by Jesus to be the 'greatest commandment' (Matthew 22; see also 1 Corinthians 13). Love is the criterion by which secularisation is 'examined' (Vattimo 1999: 64).

Critics of Vattimo have questioned whether he is consistent if love cannot be secularised (Jonkers 2000: 386), with love taking on the appearance at least of 'something absolute' in Vattimo's philosophy (Depoortere 2008a: 20). However, Vattimo is quick to state that *caritas* is 'not really ultimate' as it is not a 'metaphysical principle' (Vattimo 1999: 64). Rather, it is a 'formal' principle much like Kant's Categorical Imperative (Vattimo 1999: 66), which is perhaps surprising given that the latter was grounded in universal reason and that Vattimo thinks that postmodernism has shattered the idea of there being universal reason due to the liberation of local rationalities through information and communications technology. While this issue will be discussed more later, it is worth briefly mentioning the difference between a 'metaphysical principle' and a 'formal principle.' The former has some substantive content, such as in Natural Moral Law, where there is metaphysical, teleological content about the purposes of human beings based on the eternal law in the mind of God which is revealed, supposedly, both in the Bible and through nature. A formal principle gives more of a *way* to decide how to proceed. Kant's

Categorical Imperative was ingenious in that it was both a formal and metaphysical principle, something which Vattimo seems keen to downplay. The formal principle was contingent on the metaphysical principle of universal rationality constraining what one could will without contradiction. *Caritas* differs from a metaphysical principle as it is not referring to a presence, but it also differs from the categorical imperative as it is the power behind a message, of God's *kenosis*. This message is the 'interpretation' which is 'Jesus Christ,' that of 'God's love for his creatures' (Vattimo 1999: 64). Christ is reduced to a message, and the message is of God's love. From this one may infer that *kenosis* and *caritas* are one and the same, looked at from different perspectives. The latter is the ethical dimension of the former. Moreover, *kenosis* (the message of God's becoming historical in his friendship for humankind) inaugurates secularisation which is then carried on with 'spiritual' power (if one thinks of Joachim's age of the Spirit) which is *caritas*; the history of salvation is the history of this unmasking inaugurated by *kenosis* and limited by *caritas* (Vattimo 1999: 66).Vattimo sees Christ as the unmasker of the myths of Christian revelation, presumably referring to the miraculous and supernatural outdated features of the biblical narrative, although Vattimo does not state so explicitly here, yet he does refer to 'metaphysical prejudices.'

e) The kind of Christianity recovered[12]

Caritas has important implications for the type of Christianity one recovers. Vattimo asks the question whether he can still call God 'Father,' or whether the Lord's Prayer has any meaning for him. After careful consideration, he states that these things still have purchase for him, but only because of his 'own biography,' that he was brought up with these traditions (Vattimo 1999: 77-78). Concerning the phrase 'God the Father,' Vattimo's argument is a little troubling here, for he alludes to Schleiermacher's notion of a 'feeling of dependence' justifying the term 'Father.' This is the 'kernel' that, in Vattimo's view, 'cannot be an object of reduction or demythification' (Vattimo 1999: 78). What is beyond reduction: *caritas*, or dependence? Vattimo ties himself in knots here, trying to ground this feeling on an awareness that weak ontology is dependent on 'an initiative that is not

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[12] This subsection owes a lot to my article on the topic of God the Father in Vattimo's understanding of Christianity for *The Heythrop Journal* (Harris 2013a).

mine,' begun long ago (Vattimo 1999: 78); later in his works he makes it clear that is the biblical tradition upon which he is dependent, taking his work down a more clearly linguistic line he begins to explore in more detail in *After Christianity*, even though he revisits 'dependence' in particular in *The Future of Religion* (Vattimo 2004: 77).[13] Returning to *Belief*, Vattimo does not have to try so hard to justify his choice, his feeling that God is a Father, and he alludes to it anyway, and that is his provenance. If Being is nothing but language, the Italian Catholic form of life in which he was brought up would have referred to God as a Father.

Vattimo relates *caritas* to his own life, to being able to remember the traditions that he has inherited: 'I do not feel the need to free myself from the traces…of my Catholic upbringing' (Vattimo 1999: 81). These traces have helped Vattimo throughout his life, from motivating him, acting as his conscience, and orienting him in the world. Vattimo contrasts the political and moral forms of Catholicism he inherited with the 'apocalyptic' form of Christianity that he sees as widely popular today. The latter is essentially the 'tragic' Christianity mentioned earlier in this chapter, although Vattimo goes into more detail here in *Belief*. An important feature of this tragic/apocalyptic Christianity is that an event is looked for which devalues conventional world history, where there is a distinction made between salvation history and world history. Vattimo acknowledges that this kind of Christianity is also 'an effect of the end of metaphysics' (Vattimo 1999: 82), such as that the ideal of objective knowledge has dissolved due to philosophical criticism. God is not, on this view, an objective presence, but 'his transcendence is nonetheless reaffirmed' (Vattimo 1999: 82). This God, the 'wholly other,' is evoked when terrible crises occur that throw conventional wisdom into jeopardy, such as the Holocaust. Vattimo does not so much argue against this existential, tragic form of Christianity, as state that it is 'regressive,' returning to a form of theology more associated with the Old Testament, the kind of theology which makes it difficult to conceive of an imminence, an incarnation. Somewhat unfairly (Baird 2007), Vattimo states that for Derrida, Levinas et al, 'there is no real difference between historical times; since every historical moment is immediately related to eternity' (Vattimo 1999: 84). Indeed, there is little 'salvation

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[13] I shall return to these questions in Chapter Nine, section 'b.'

history' to be found in the view of tragic Christianity. Nevertheless, this by itself does not make it wrong. Could it not be that Vattimo's biography makes him choose the historical, moral and political over and against the existentialist, tragic and apocalyptic? Vattimo implies as much when he says 'I concede that my upbringing has been less mystical than moral (and, perhaps, political)' (Vattimo 1999: 81). Ironically, although he mentions the mystical here, he does not pursue its links with the idea of Being. In the Postscriptum to *Belief*, Vattimo acknowledges, on reflection and in virtue of the comments of his early readers of his manuscript, that he was perhaps too hasty in 'reduc[ing] the theology of 'the wholly other' to a tragicism which merely reproduces the naturalistic conception of divinity as a mysterious and capricious Being impervious to reason' (Vattimo 1999: 95).

There is one more promising argument that Vattimo introduces for disregarding tragic thought, and that is the interpretation of the Bible. If one opts for the 'leap of faith,' embracing total alterity, what does one do with difficult passages of the Bible, such as 'If your eye offends you, pluck it out and throw it away from you?' One could take it literally, but nobody does. Should one choose, then, to interpret it allegorically and on what basis does one select some passages for this treatment, and not others? This distinction, Vattimo contends, would have to be decided on 'the presupposition of a metaphysical rationality that is proclaimed to be natural or, more often, by delegating the decision to the authority of the Church' (Vattimo 1999: 85). In other words, tragic Christianity has metaphysical and/or authoritarian baggage, the sort of which can be avoided if Vattimo's approach to secularisation, with its notions of *kenosis* and *caritas*, is adopted instead. However, Vattimo's views both on 'otherness' and God the Father have important implications for his return to religion and philosophy more generally, for in Part Two the issue of transcendence will be discussed more and near the end of Part One the question of what Vattimo means by 'God the Father' will have implications for whether he views Christianity as 'superseding' Judaism.

f) Belief?

A final point needs considering, and that is the extent to which the foregoing in the analysis of *Belief* describes a return to 'religion.' *Belief*, as has been

stated already, unlike *Beyond Interpretation* which claims nothing more than dealing with hermeneutics, is a book concerned with Vattimo's own personal return to religion. The central thesis of *Belief* is that secularisation is the fruit, and essence, of the Christian, kenotic message of weakening, a gradual weakening of strong metaphysical-sacral structures in history. Vattimo's focus has been, then, on religion as a message, or a message to weaken the religious—Christianity is the sheep in wolf's clothing. In his focus on a message, Vattimo neglects both 'beliefs' and 'practices.' Although Vattimo calls his book *Belief* (or 'I believe that I believe,' or some variant on this difficult to translate Italian phrase—see Miles 2007: 304), there is little to do with believing, a point brought up first by Rorty in *The Future of Religion*, then by Frankenberry in an essay in the Zabala-edited collection of essays on Vattimo, *Weakening Philosophy*. Rorty states that 'if a belief is true, everybody ought to share it. But Vattimo does not think that all human beings ought to be theists' (Rorty 2006: 34). Frankenberry makes even clearer than Rorty why 'belief' is an inadequate description of Vattimo's return, perhaps not to religion, but to religious categories, as it turns out. 'If the propositional attitude 'believing' entails holding as true,' Frankenberry writes, 'Vattimo's strategy is to remove religion from the epistemic realm altogether' (Frankenberry 2007: 293 n. 15). Even more, if Christianity is the stimulus to weakening, 'Christianity is more 'true' than all the other religions precisely on account of the fact that there is a sense in which is *it is not a religion*' (Vattimo 2006: 52). Jesus Christ has, for Vattimo, set him free of idols (Vattimo 2006: 53). Although Vattimo talks of 'truths' in the weakened sense of traces piously remembered and twisted, he certainly wants to remove truth with a capital 'T,' and so the universalising tendencies of belief to which Frankenberry is referring; the issue of 'universalising' is only dealt with by Vattimo in a later work, *After Christianity*, as shall be shown. Rather than describing his return in terms of 'belief,' Frankenberry thinks instead that 'His narrative could be called a History of How the West was Weaned—first from God, and then from other quasi-divine authorities such as Science, or Nature, or History' (Frankenberry 2007: 279).

Chapter Four: *After Christianity*

a) **The project of** *After Christianity*

Unlike *Beyond Interpretation* and *Belief*, *After Christianity*, the third of the most important books of Vattimo's return to religion, is comprised of ten loosely connected chapters, some of which, such as Chapter Five, had been published earlier. The book is part of the Italian Academy Lectures series. Not all of the book will be dealt with in this critically analytical summary (the final chapter on Heidegger's relationship with Christianity is better suited to a study squarely on Heidegger), but the main points of difference will be outlined.

b) **The centrality of Nietzsche and 'the death of God'**

i) *Belief* and *After Christianity*

Arguably the most significant difference between Vattimo's writing concerning the return to religion (or, more specifically, Christianity) in *Belief* and that in his next major work, *After Christianity*, is the greater emphasis in the latter text on Nietzsche, especially his notion of the death of God. The extent to which this is a stylistic matter or a substantial development in his thought is a moot point. That the centrality of Nietzsche differs from the chapter on Religion in *Beyond Interpretation* needs little argument, for neither Nietzsche nor 'the death of God' turn up at all bar one brief allusion to Nietzsche despising humanitarianism (Vattimo 1997a: 51), even though, of course, the philosophical framework in which Vattimo is writing is that of hermeneutical nihilism which owes a large debt to Nietzsche. Nevertheless, the similarities and differences between *After Christianity* and *Belief* require more elaboration given that Nietzsche is mentioned in the latter work, albeit only on a few occasions (Vattimo 1999: 29, 32-33, 39).

A key issue on the question of the extent to which Vattimo's changes in *After Christianity* are stylistic or substantial is whether when Vattimo outlines the broadly Heideggerian scheme of 'weakening' in *Belief* he is in fact influenced by Nietzsche, and if so, in what sense, for while Vattimo can talk about the 'nihilism' of Heidegger, this is not a 'standard' reading of his work. Vattimo is candid about his interpretation of these thinkers, that he reads Nietzsche through Heidegger, and Heidegger through

Nietzsche. Specifically, in *After Christianity*, Vattimo argues that 'the Nietzschean announcement of the death of God and the Heideggerian announcement…of the end of metaphysics can provide the general framework for characterising late-modern experience' (Vattimo 2002a: 12). More strongly still, '[i]n Heidegger's thought, the event of 'the end of metaphysics' has basically the same meaning of the death of God' (Vattimo 2002a: 13). Even though Vattimo is more emphatic of the connection between these two notions in *After Christianity*, it may well be reasonable to read back this strong connection between them into *Belief*, where Vattimo mentions 'the end of metaphysics' (Vattimo 1999: 29). Indeed, Vattimo even states that 'The dissolution of metaphysics is also the end of this image of God [as an objective being], the death of God of which Nietzsche spoke' (Vattimo 1999: 39). Therefore, the connection is present in *Belief*, although presented at greater length in *After Christianity*, as if Vattimo had begun warming to his theme. Much will rest, then, on whether the links between Nietzsche's ideas and Christianity in *After Christianity* are substantially different to the Nietzschean-Heideggerian hermeneutical-ontological framework of a history of weakening presented in *Belief*. Are the arguments in *After Christianity* merely those in *Belief* phrased in a different way, or are they suggesting substantially different connections between Nietzsche's thought and Christianity? Greater focus on Nietzsche develops the points made in *Beyond Interpretation* and *Belief*, as well as leading towards an explanation of secularisation and the death of God along Nietzschean lines, that is, in terms of a chemical analysis, leading to a view of history which can—surprisingly—appear Hegelian when combined with insights from Joachim of Fiore and Wilhelm Dilthey, and this will be the subject of debate later in Part One.

Vattimo uses Nietzsche's 'God is dead' to express ideas he has put forward elsewhere in different terms. Starting in the Introduction to *After Christianity*, Vattimo mentions that the death of God is 'not an atheistic thesis,' for to claim the non-existence of God would be to uphold a metaphysical principle (Vattimo 2002a: 3). This is a very similar line of argument to that found in *Belief*, where under the subheading 'Secularisation: The Limit of Charity,' Vattimo states that nihilism is not a 'nothingness,' for this 'would be an objectively laid out presence,' merely

repeating metaphysics, not weakening it further (Vattimo 1999: 63). Instead, nihilism can only be conceived as a history. In *After Christianity*, Vattimo states that the death of God 'means nothing else than the fact that there is no ultimate foundation' (Vattimo 2002a: 3), even if one wonders what Vattimo means by 'fact' here (he would probably defend himself by stating it is the best interpretation of the situation of late-modernity). Aside from these brief discussions of Nietzschean themes in the Introduction of *After Christianity*, it is better to discuss the similarity and difference between the use Vattimo makes of Nietzsche's notion of the 'death of God' within the specific arguments of the chapters of *After Christianity*, especially the first and eighth chapters.

ii) Chapter One of *After Christianity*

For Vattimo, the death of God in Nietzsche's work is, like the end of metaphysics in Heidegger's thought, the end of the moral God, the 'founder and guarantor of the objective world order' (Vattimo 2002a: 13). By 'end' Vattimo does not think Nietzsche meant 'overcome' or 'disproved,' but 'put aside,' due to factors such as the lightening of existence and the command not to lie becoming obsolete in the complex world of the society of mass communication, late-modernity, that God has been found to be a 'lie' himself. Heidegger's work expresses the same meaning, in Vattimo's eyes, through the notion of *Ge-Stell*, that the culmination of metaphysics was its dissolution in the total organisation of society. Vattimo's nihilistic reading of Heidegger's reflection upon the dissolution of Being after the so-called *kehre* in his thought places emphasis on his interest in the proliferation of images and specialisation of language in the society of mass communication (the latter notion being Vattimo's own 'twist' on Heidegger), leading to a 'Babel-like pluralism of late-modern society' which has 'made the thought of a unified world order impossible to conceive' (Vattimo 2002a: 15). The Babel-like irreducible plurality of images and voices in late-modernity, as an experience, coincides with the Nietzschean-Heideggerian announcement of the death of God/end of metaphysics, corroborating and making compelling this interpretation of the society in which, and horizon by, we live.

Nihilism of the kind described by Vattimo here is our 'sole opportunity.' This can be interpreted in many ways, but in the context of *After Christianity*, Vattimo refers to the possibility of a return to religion in light of the death of the moral God. The weakening of faith in foundationalism provides the opportunity for religious experience, to which Nietzsche refers as the 'liberation of metaphor.' Local and subjective narratives are liberated with the death of the 'master narrative' of the socially dominant way of speaking which had been validated through foundationalism, and the socially dominant way of speaking in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been a scientific positivism that had banished religion from the public sphere. The Babel-like situation of late-modernity takes away a centre and reduces languages, as with values, to exchange-value by removing a hierarchy, revealing any surviving hierarchical structures to be the result of 'power's unequal distribution' (Vattimo 2002a: 16). In theoretical work, Vattimo argues, the liberation of metaphor has been widespread, allowing 'philosophers to speak of angels and redemption without providing an explicit justification for the use of these terms' (Vattimo 2002a: 17). Vattimo's point here allows him to counter critics who see a contradiction between his arguments against metaphysics, while sometimes writing as if God were a being.

What the liberation of metaphor also does, in Vattimo's eyes, is to 'liquidate' the philosophical basis for atheism. Vattimo had argued along these lines in *Beyond Interpretation*, holding that hermeneutics as a *koine* prepares the way for a return of religion (Vattimo 1997a: 44-45). Nevertheless, this is not an argument that features in *Belief*, and even in *Beyond Interpretation* Vattimo does not make an explicit link to the death of God. Concurrent with the liberation of metaphor from a hierarchy of language is the sociological return to religion for demographical reasons, such as the end of colonialism and the beginnings of pluralistic societies in the West. Such pluralism itself 'decentres' views of reality and flattens hierarchies of values. The liberation of metaphor feeds into this sociological issue, for it removes any linguistic yardstick by which each culture in society is measured. However, while the rationalistic criteria are jettisoned, the return to religion has often been accompanied with a leap of faith to a transcendent divine being or beings beyond rationality, precluding

engagement with other religions and cultures which have been liberated from both rationalism and colonialism (Vattimo 2002a: 19). This is a 'paradox' for Vattimo (Vattimo 2002a: 19), and one with some results which he sees as unfortunate, such as the legitimation of relativism and fundamentalism, that is, of religious and ethnic groups retreating into their belief systems and values. The death of God entails that one cannot but speak metaphorically, so although there is no rational yardstick by which cultures' views should be measured, this also should not entail a retreat into fundamentalism. Concerning the latter problem, fundamentalism and extremism could occur if all there was happened to be thoroughgoing relativism, for groups would have neither an objective standard against which their beliefs and values could be judged, not any persuasive reason to listen to others. As a result, a thoroughgoing relativism might accommodate groups who retreat into factional identities and dogmas. Moreover, there is a problem if one steps back and looks at relativism, for its values of 'tolerance' and 'pluralism' are themselves myths if considered at a meta-level. In short, 'The radical overcoming of metaphysics cannot be reduced to the pure and simple legitimisation of myth, ideology, and the Pascalian leap of faith' (Vattimo 2002a: 21).

The radical overcoming of metaphysics can be looked at from a different angle, though, and that is through the philosophy of Heidegger, specifically that Being is not to be identified with a stable foundation, but as an event, that our experience is only ever given within a horizon. Here the radical overcoming of metaphysics involves a leap, not of faith, but into tradition: 'Heidegger believes that to think of Being as event means recollecting Being's history: for him, *Denken* is *andenken'* (Vattimo 2002a: 22). The link with tradition which makes thinking possible is an engagement with traces of Being's past that constitutes a weakening. This weakening is attributed by Vattimo to the Christian inheritance in the West, as we are 'heirs of a tradition that has absorbed 'Christian' values like brotherhood, charity and non-violence' (Vattimo 2002a: 23-24). These Christian ideas at root come from the incarnation, God's *kenosis*. Heidegger's emphasis on the inescapability of tradition entails we should look back and see what has led to the history of the weakening of Being: 'the history of Being as a destiny of weakening, cannot be separated from the tradition to which it belongs'

(Vattimo 2002a: 24). Vattimo refers to a 'family resemblance,' not a logical one, but of one between the biblical message and a philosophy of weakening (Vattimo 2002a: 23-24). Therefore, Vattimo sees the history of Being as a weakening as 'secularisation,' that the 'weakening of Being realises itself as the *kenosis* of God' (Vattimo 2002a: 24).

The function of the 'death of God' in Vattimo's text here in Chapter One of *After Christianity* is to frame the situation of the return to religion in late-modernity to set it up as a cultural horizon of the liberation of metaphor and of the dissolution of the idea of objective, foundational truth. Vattimo makes clear that the God killed by the faithful (Vattimo 2002a: 26) is the 'moral-metaphysical' God. For Vattimo this act leaves room for a return to religion. In *Belief* it is also clear that it is the ontotheological God who has been killed, although the link is made via Girard's notion of the 'natural sacred' rather than through Nietzsche. In short, the death of God is the description of the hermeneutical nihilism of late-modernity. The link between the incarnation and the death of God occurs through the 'family resemblance' Vattimo writes about but does not define (Vattimo 2002a: 25), for the death of God takes on a normative quality when it is seen in this light (the Italian is '*parentala*,' the same word as is used when the same phrase of Wittgenstein's is translated into Italian). As it stands, the death of God in Nietzschean terms alone creates the problems expressed in the paradox of the liberation of metaphor, for it could lead only to a recognition of philosophy's weakness, leaving the door open to the 'Pascalian Wager' arguments of philosophers such as Derrida and Levinas (at least as Vattimo interprets their philosophies). Again, Vattimo does not argue convincingly against these 'negative' philosophers, unless one sides with his interpretation of Heidegger as a nihilist, and that the death of God has its 'family resemblance' in Heidegger's notion of the history of Being as weakening. Vattimo brackets Derrida and Levinas with theologians such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as 'death of God' theologians Altizer, Van Buren, Hamilton and Cox (Vattimo 2002a: 36-37). All of these thinkers, in Vattimo's view, ignore the incarnation and have a transcendent, 'other' God who is 'the same old God of metaphysics' (Vattimo 2002a: 38). Altizer does take the incarnation seriously (Harris 2011), and Vattimo does not distinguish between different types of transcendence; Levinas' God is

not the same metaphysical God as that found in medieval ontotheology (Baird 2007). Nonetheless, Vattimo sees his 'left Heideggerian' approach as a transcription of the biblical message of weakening as preventing a retreat into Otherness which would be as violent as the strong authoritarian ecclesiastical structures he wishes to dissolve through the ethical principle of charity. Essentially what Vattimo is doing by unfolding the idea of the death of God in Nietzschean, Heideggerian, and biblical terms (liberation of metaphor, weakening of Being, and secularisation as *kenosis*) is explaining the need in his thought for the family resemblance, justifying his 'historical' approach over and against that of the negative philosophers. Here in the first chapter of *After Christianity*, Vattimo is drawing upon Nietzsche's notion of the death of God to explain in more detail the backdrop to his thoughts in *Belief*. However, in explaining the 'family resemblance,' Vattimo is making a deeper philosophical link between the ideas of Nietzsche, Heidegger and the biblical message, which is a development not found in *Belief*, where the main link is between Heidegger's notion of metaphysics as a history of weakening of Being and the biblical message.

iii) Chapter Eight of *After Christianity*: The death of God on the cross and the subjective turn

Two of the biggest differences between *Belief* and *After Christianity* are the link between Christianity and the subjective turn of the fabulisation of the world and the emphasis Vattimo places in Chapter Eight on the death, rather than just the incarnation, of Jesus Christ. *Belief* spoke of a simple message of friendship on God's part after having humiliated himself by stepping down from his transcendence, but there is a more Nietzschean message of truth dissolving itself in *After Christianity*. A parallel is drawn between the death of God in Nietzsche's thought and the death of Christ on the cross. Nietzsche's announcement of the death of the moral-metaphysical God is a 'repetition' of Christ's death, for it is akin to Dostoyevsky's choice for Christ at the price of truth (Vattimo 2002a: 104; see also Vattimo 2004: 46, 50). The traditional interpretation of Jesus being 'the way, the truth, and the life' is to identify Christ with truth, and therefore loving truth more than Plato is loving Christ, with the latter allowing the identification of redemption with knowledge of unchanging foundational structures (Vattimo

2002a: 104-105). Dostoyevsky, in separating love of Christ from love of truth, is praised by Vattimo for overcoming this classical, traditional identification and therefore marks a change in interpretation, being in Vattimo's eyes closer to the Gospel than thinkers before him. Nietzsche is even closer to the Gospel message than Dostoyevsky for Vattimo in that the death of God is the death of the moral-metaphysical God, the ultimate symbol of truth with a capital 'T.' Why and how Vattimo brings in Jesus Christ's death and 'sacrifice' here is unclear, especially as elsewhere Vattimo writes against the logic of seeing his death as a sacrifice (Vattimo 1999: 37).

Vattimo goes on to make large leaps in logic, between 'the death of Jesus narrated by the Gospels' and 'what Heidegger calls the end of metaphysics' (Vattimo 2002a: 105). This nihilism 'is the loss of credence in an objective truth in favour of a perspective that conceives truth as an effect of power in the manifold sense of this expressions…the active will of subjects' (Vattimo 2002a: 105). This may not seem clear at present, but will be unpacked momentarily. Nonetheless, the key factor to consider in the history of weakening is that the message of Jesus (and Jesus' message) is one of a turn inward that reduced external objectivist truth claims and ended up pushing subjective certainty to breaking point in the end of metaphysics. There is a link, then, between the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for his message of love and end of servitude in favour of friendship as an event in distant history on the one hand, and the realisation in the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger that objective truth is an expression of the subjective will leading to the dissolution of all objective truth claims in exchange value on the other. The death of God is the death of a belief in an objective world order, or 'what Heidegger calls the end of metaphysics' (Vattimo 2002a: 105). This is done by realising that 'there is no 'objective,' ontological truth that might be upheld as anything other than friendship, will to power, or subjective bond' (Vattimo 2002a: 105). According to Vattimo,

> Christianity is the condition that paved the way for the dissolution of metaphysics and for its replacement by gnoseology—in Dilthey's terms, by Kantianism. The principles that inspired Descartes and Kant—the emphasis on the subject, the foundation of knowledge on a self-certain interiority- are the same ones that hold sway in modern philosophy (Vattimo 2002a: 107).

In other words, Christianity was the driving force behind the subjective turn inward. This is linked to one of Vattimo's favourite Nietzschean passages, 'How the Real World Became a Fable' (Vattimo 2002a: 111; see also Vattimo 2004: 46). The Platonic realm had ideas outside space and time, which Christianity turns inward 'putting at the centre the will rather than the intellect' (Vattimo 2002a: 106). Over time, the Christian thread reappears in Kantianism, where the *a priori* synthetic judgements of the individual subject constitute reality. This lends itself, gradually, to be weakened into the form of perspectivism put forward by Nietzsche. This Nietzschean narrative of how the world became a fable can be found in *Belief*, too, although without a reference to Christianity's role in the subjective turn (Vattimo 1999: 29-30). In short, Vattimo uses a combination of Dilthey and Nietzsche to indicate with greater precision than in *Belief* Christianity's role in fabling the world. Dilthey argued that Christianity inaugurated an important moment in the history of metaphysics by contributing to the formation of the subject. By virtue of a message of brotherly love through faith, Christians turned inwards, away from concern with Messianic-inspired political hopes (for Jews) or the Platonic forms (for gentile converts) (Dilthey 1979: 229). The turn inwards, inspired by God's message of unconditional love for all through friendship in the message of *kenosis*, became lost or downplayed due to the absorption of Christianity in the Roman Empire, with men such as Augustine doing all that was required to maintain civilisation in face of its collapse. Although Vattimo does not spell it out, there is the implication in his thought that the turn inward under Paul and Augustine feeds into the history of metaphysics as trace picked up on by Descartes, leading to the mastery of the world in the *Ge-Stell* and the first flashing up of *Ereignis.*

Where does *kenosis* come into the picture, for is this 'subjective turn' a new argument not found in *Beyond Interpretation* and *Belief*? A link is made implicitly when Vattimo states that, 'The death of the moral God marks the impossibility of preferring truth to friendship, because the meaning of that death is that there is no 'objective' ontological truth that might be upheld as anything other than friendship' (Vattimo 2002a: 104-105), that is, the state of nihilism. The 'truth' and 'friendship' distinction is a long-standing play on Aristotle's phrase that he would prefer truth to

being a friend of Plato's. Nevertheless, the 'friendship' theme is reminiscent of the 'kenotic' biblical quotation from John 15:15, that one is now called to be friends of God, not his servants, a key argument more clearly stated in *Belief*. What Vattimo means here, then, is that Nietzsche's death of God opens us up to a return to weakened religion, one without the violent metaphysical God of the natural sacred. Paradoxically, of course, Vattimo is also suggesting with his notion of the subjective turn inward that Christianity instigated the return through its slow corrosion of belief in an objective external truth as presence through emphasis on a shared brotherhood based on faith. *Kenosis* as a term, though, is not explicitly present in this argument. Indeed, in some later works of Vattimo's this notion of the subjective turn inward is put forward as Vattimo's main argument for the historical grounding of hermeneutical nihilism in Christianity, with *kenosis* as a term not mentioned at all, a point taken up and developed further in Part Two (Vattimo 2006). To find the kenotic link, one has to read between the lines. Nevertheless, 'incarnation' as a term is still present, as is the argument presented in a different way than in *Belief*, that the kernel of the gospel is preferring friendship to truth or, better, interpreting truth as being synonymous with friendship. In fact, what Vattimo does here in *After Christianity* is to fill in some of the 'how' of secularisation. The process of secularisation in *Belief* is recorded only piecemeal, not really as a process at all, drawing on concrete, discrete examples such as Weber on the Protestant work ethic, the transformation from 'divinely sanctioned constitutional monarchy' to representative democracies, Elias' views on the secularisation of the subject (Vattimo 1999: 41-42). Even Vattimo himself realises that 'It might be remarked that the extension of the notion of secularization to phenomena that are so different borders on the arbitrary' (Vattimo 1999: 42).

By linking *kenosis* and secularisation to Nietzsche's 'how the world became a fable' and Dilthey's history of the turn to the subject, Vattimo makes his argument for secularisation as a process tighter, although conditional on convincing his readers that Christianity did effect such a subjective turn inward. In Chapter Eight of *After Christianity*, Vattimo outlines his interpretation of what Dilthey meant by the 'subjective turn' effected by Christianity. The central contrast is between pre-Christian

metaphysics, represented by Plato, and the change brought about in this by the Christian message. As is well known, very early on in the history of Christianity the gentile mission led to the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus being clothed in the garments of Greek philosophy, especially Middle Platonism and Stoicism. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 CE) heads a list of Apologists who were highly educated, willing and able to use philosophical terminology to explain and defend their new faith. Whereas Plato's concept of Being, on Dilthey's view, is an external 'phenomenon' (the 'ideas'), 'Christianity shifts the attention of thought inward, putting at the centre the will rather than the intellect' (Vattimo 2002a: 106). Vattimo quotes from Dilthey's *Einleitung*: 'For the Greek mind, knowing was mirroring an objective thing in the intelligence. Now [i.e., in Christianity], experience becomes the focal point…With the enormous interest they generate, experiences of the will and of the heart swallow up every other object of knowledge' (Vattimo 2002a: 106-107). Christianity for Dilthey inaugurates the turn away from the external world of knowledge to the inner experience of the will.

Vattimo tends to rely heavily on particular scholars to shoulder significant elements of his interpretation of Christianity. Just as Vattimo depends upon Girard as an anthropologist not only for distinguishing Christianity from 'violent' natural religions, but also on for the notion of the natural sacred (Ten Kate 2002), Vattimo requires Dilthey's contribution in order to explain why and how Christianity inaugurated a weakening of metaphysics. Of course, unlike with the case of Girard, Vattimo refers to many more philosophers than just Dilthey. Nevertheless, there is a sense that without Dilthey's contribution, Vattimo would be left only with piecemeal examples of secularisation, such as the theories and examples of Weber and Elias, along with isolated and ambiguous Bible passages such as John 15:15 as 'evidence' of weakening. In other words, Dilthey is important to Vattimo, for without it he has little to support his 'experimental' theology when it comes for justifying his interpretation of Christianity as the message with secularisation as its essence, that it is the 'Trojan horse' to dissolve strong structures in metaphysics and religion.

How strong is Dilthey's argument, at least insofar as Vattimo interprets it? There is precious little on Dilthey's understanding of

Christianity as creating an inward turn in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences*; as was mentioned above, there is a brief comment from Dilthey that Christianity made humans turn inwards due to the importance of brotherly love through faith, rather than some outward signifier such as race, nationality or social status (Dilthey 1979: 229). Despite the lack of development on Dilthey's part of this idea, there are two ways of analysing the distinction Vattimo sees Dilthey making between Platonic and Christian metaphysics. Firstly, one can question the extent to which Platonic ideas are 'external' to the subject. Secondly, one can assess how far it is accurate to state that Christianity effected a turn away from 'knowledge' of external things in favour of an inward turn towards the 'will.' On the issue of whether Platonic ideas are 'external' to the knowing subject, some scholars interpret Plato as holding that these 'forms' are objects of knowledge in the sense that they are literally transcendent things with an independent ontological status (Prior 1985). Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret the forms in a very different way. 'For the early Greeks,' writes Waugh and Wilkinson, 'language naturally maps what is real, and this mapping does not occur across the ontological and epistemological gulf posited by modern theories of representation. The logical space of reasons is not confined to thoughts and statements that represent objects in a world that neither thinks nor talks' (Waugh and Wilkinson 2002: 222). Waugh and Wilkinson argue that the distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' is a modern one that is read back into ancient texts. This may well be Vattimo's own approach, but it is to be expected as being a trait of his hermeneutical enterprise, reinterpreting traces of the past in the light of his current experience of living after the death of God in the irreducible plurality of the late modern.

c) The status of *kenosis*

The role of Dilthey in Vattimo's work raises the question about the extent to which it is important whether *kenosis* 'really happened,' either as an historical event or as a linguistic tradition. Sometimes Vattimo seems to refer to *kenosis* in a way that implies he thinks of the event as a historical event, as *Gewesen* (having been) rather than *Überlieferung* (tradition), of the Son becoming 'human in the bosom of Mary' (Vattimo 2002a: 60). However, in *After Christianity* Vattimo clarifies how he understands the

ontological status of *kenosis*, drawing upon Gadamer's notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* ('effective history') (Vattimo 2002a: 112). Guarino elaborates on what this phrase means: 'This term, popularized by Gadamer, reminds us that we exist, inescapably, within the horizons of the founding events and stories that define our culture' (Guarino 2009: 99). The incarnation is not a historical event, but a symbol which exerts a tremendous influence over Western civilisation, 'one of the major accounts which has established the horizon within which we exist' (Guarino 2009: 99-100).

Some commentators on Vattimo's work have criticised this understanding of *kenosis* for not conforming to orthodoxy or to the biblical text. Frascati-Lochhead states, for instance, that Vattimo's view of *kenosis* is flawed for not taking into account the 'glory' of God which the Son will inherit from God which Hebrews 1:1-2a indeed mentions (Frascati-Lochhead 1998: 155). Similarly, with Philippians 2, Depoortere argues that 'Vattimo's version of *kenosis* is a very poor one. He only reads half of the Christological hymn found in Philippians 2 and simply skips the part in which the *exaltation* of Christ is mentioned' (Depoortere 2008a: 21). In other words, both of these commentators think that Vattimo has chosen to include in his interpretation of Scripture the aspects of it that will fit with his notion of Christianity as a stimulus for weakening. On the surface, these commentators could be understood as making a flat-footed complaint about orthodoxy of interpretation or trying to invoke metaphysical dogmas. However, if *kenosis* is 'effective history,' the resurrection of Jesus is as important as his incarnation and death. In fact, Girard argues that it is the resurrection that enabled the Gospels to be written at all, for before the Paraclete (the Spirit of the Lord acting as a 'defence' lawyer for the disciples) enabled the disciples to see the risen Christ, they were involved in scapegoating, too (Girard 2006: 104-105). Without taking the resurrection into account, Vattimo's account of the effective history of Jesus Christ is one-sided.

There are ways around this problem that are consistent with Vattimo's reading of *kenosis*, although it would mean drawing upon Rudolf Bultmann, a theologian about whom Vattimo has mixed feelings. On the one hand, Bultmann had a lot to do with Heidegger. However, on the other hand not only was Bultmann caught up with Existentialism, but also he

bought into the modern myth of scientific progress. Bultmann is the most famous proponent of 'demythologisation' of the Bible, a fact Vattimo realises (Vattimo 1999: 54 n. 14). Bultmann wrote, 'We cannot use electric lights and radios…and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament' (Bultmann 1984: 4), and thought the 'bizarre' features of the Gospel which are not in keeping with the modern scientific worldview should be 'demythologised' to find the '*kerygma'* (or 'essence') of the Gospel. The *kerygma* of the resurrection for Bultmann was not the literal rising of the body of Jesus from the dead, but the 'rising' of the Church. Bultmann's emphasis on not reading certain elements of Scripture literally is in line with Vattimo's programme, but most importantly this understanding of the resurrection allows Vattimo to make sense out of it as a piece of effective history without having to posit any metaphysical notions or supernatural entities.

d) The importance of Joachim of Fiore for Vattimo's notion of Christianity

While Joachim appeared briefly in *Beyond Interpretation*, he did not figure in *Belief*. Nevertheless, there is a whole chapter devoted to his ideas in *After Christianity*. Joachim is used by Vattimo here to present another argument against negative/dialectical theology. In *Beyond Interpretation*, Joachim of Fiore was brought in by Vattimo to give evidence of resources within Christianity that looked to the future in which a ''spiritual' sense of the scriptures is increasingly in evidence, with charity taking the place of discipline' (Vattimo 1997a: 49). However, Vattimo did not dwell long on his ideas, preferring instead to regard the task in hand as 'a matter here of taking *kenosis* seriously' (Vattimo 1997a: 49). In other words, at this point it is implied that Vattimo was trying to marshal a single argument for his insight, whereas the drift in *After Christianity* is towards a series of arguments to express his fundamental intuition that the horizon of late-modernity is the result of the progression of the biblical message towards realising its essence as secularisation.

What Joachim brings to the argument is his view of the Trinitarian historicity of revelation, something which Vattimo interprets as an expression of the eventual nature of Being. The eventual disclosure of late-

modernity is the end of metaphysics and the rise of charity. In Joachim's 'Trinitarian' understanding of history, one cannot reduce the spirit to the letter and one should look for charitable, contemplative ways to weaken authoritarian attitudes and structures wherever one finds them. Vattimo traces the influence of Joachim in the centuries after he wrote, such as anti-Protestantism in Novalis, and the analyses of Schleiermacher, Schelling and De Lubac. Secularisation, on this view, is the increasing spiritualisation of reading the Bible and of moving away from authoritarian literalism in religion. For Vattimo, this increasing spiritualisation is constitutive of modernity as the realisation of Christian history. The function of Joachim's historical schema in Vattimo's argument is to provide further justification for Vattimo eschewing negative theology, for the latter would (Vattimo names Barth, Derrida, Lévinas, Cox, Hamilton, Van Buren, and – curiously—Altizer, which I have shown elsewhere to be inaccurate—Harris 2011), 'go back to a theology of the first age, ignoring incarnation and consequently conceiving secularisation as the fall in which God's transcendence as the wholly other can be revealed' (Vattimo 2002a: 37). Vattimo is, therefore, working throughout *After Christianity* on semantic fields, grouping together notions such as 'literalist,' 'metaphysical,' 'violent,' 'Old Testament' and 'natural sacred' on the one hand, and 'spiritual,' 'New Testament,' 'charity,' '*kenosis,*' 'secularisation,' and 'weakening' on the other. Other critics have noted this, and it has led them to question whether Vattimo deliberately polarises the testaments, widening the breach between Judaism and Christianity, perhaps even making the latter supersede the former (Depoortere 2008a). It has been argued that anyone who introduces Joachim's ideas runs the risk of supersessionism in the Trinity (Caputo 2007), and it is only a small step between identifying the 'Father' with Judaism and the 'Son' and 'Spirit' with Christianity, something that will be looked at more closely later in Part One.

e) History of Salvation, History of Interpretation

So far I have shown how Vattimo has fleshed-out how *kenosis* as secularisation works for him by drawing more not only on Nietzsche, but also (more importantly) on Dilthey. In Chapter Four, Vattimo constructs another argument for the relationship between the incarnation, hermeneutics

and the history of salvation by focusing on the relationship between the history of salvation and the history of interpretation. Although he is reluctant to identify these two histories completely, of regarding one as merely another name for the other, he is aware that they are very closely linked. Starting with the incarnation, Vattimo reflects on the different ways in which 'interpretation' and 'salvation' are 'joint' in the Christian tradition (Vattimo 2002a: 59). At one level there is the 'antithetical' nature of Jesus' sayings: "You heard it was said…, but I say…". Although these are called 'Antitheses' (Matthew Ch. 5), they are more to do with fulfilling the law through weakening, such as not loving only one's neighbour, but also one's enemy. Beyond the hermeneutical quality of Jesus' sayings, that is, his self-conscious interpretation of the Old Testament which, historically, was not unusual at all (rabbinical interpretation was common at the time, such as the schools of Hilel and Shammai), Vattimo argues that 'the event of salvation (Jesus' coming) is itself, deep down, a hermeneutical occurrence' (Vattimo 2002a: 59). However, Jesus can be claimed to be hermeneutical 'only to a point.' Jesus, as the *Logos*, is not only the 'living interpretation' of the Scriptures, but also their fulfilment. With this fulfilment goes a definitiveness, but yet also there awaits a further fulfilment. Here Vattimo gets closer to a reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, for he draws upon the notion of the Paraclete and the event of Pentecost. Indeed, 'The Trinity is a hermeneutical structure par excellence, for the Son is the *Logos* of the Father and the Spirit is their relation, the hypostatising of their love-understanding' (Vattimo 2002a: 60).

Reimagining traditional Christian doctrines in this way is interesting, but not without difficulties. For a start, the language of 'hypostatising' gets uncomfortably close to metaphysics, for it is not coincidental that patristic thought often conceived of the persons of the Trinity in terms of *hypostases*, concrete instantiations of an abstract essence. Secondly, Vattimo is keener on the Son and Spirit than the Father. In theological terms, is Vattimo's Trinity supersessionist in its economy (unfolding of the Trinity)? Is the Father to be identified with the 'natural sacred' which is first broken down by the Son, that is, the weakening of sacral claims in the offer of friendship over servitude, to be spread by the Spirit as secularisation ever more clearly becomes a reality in modernity? It has already been shown that Vattimo

veers towards this understanding of the link between testaments in his reading of Joachim of Fiore, a concern that will be central in my analysis of Vattimo later when I address accusations that his understanding of Christianity is 'supersessionist.' Vattimo's primary concern is showing how closely salvation is linked to the history of interpretation, all the while trying to secure the curiously, and typically, theological premise of the uniqueness and definitiveness of Jesus Christ: 'It is true that the announcement of salvation is given once and for all—in Jesus and the prophets—but it is equally true that, having given itself, it needs interpretations that receive it, actualise it, and enrich it' (Vattimo 2002a: 60). In other words, the Son is the message of kenotic *caritas*, that is, of friendship, of weakening—which requires further interpretations to realise itself, and it is the Spirit that enables this to occur. The Spirit is that of Pentecost, of many voices carrying the message. Salvation is a hermeneutical interface between the tradition which has as its kernel the kenotic message, and the creative interpretations of individuals of successive generations who heed its message of spiritualisation; a link to his concept of *Verwindung* is implicit. Vattimo is keen to stress it is not merely the 'biological fact' of new generations interpreting the kenotic message, but that this message sets off in a direction, and that is of spiritualisation, secularisation: 'Jesus' incarnation (the *kenosis*, the self-lowering of God), as an event both salvific and hermeneutical, is already indeed an archetypical occurrence of secularisation' (Vattimo 2002a: 67). Ontological hermeneutics and 'modern techno-science,' in which metaphysics culminates, 'spring from the action of the Christian message throughout the history of Western civilisation,' that is, due to secularisation (Vattimo 2002a: 66-67).

It is difficult to understand how, without appealing to supernatural or metaphysical arguments such as Hegel's 'cunning of reason' (where the Spirit seems to be going against its own purposes, in order to fulfil its purpose), one can guarantee this direction of weakening, this relationship between 'Son' and 'Spirit' without trivialising 'weakening.' Vattimo would point to the corrosive effect Christianity had on Greek metaphysics, as he did in *Beyond Interpretation*. However, this relationship between Greek thought and the Christian revelation could be read in other ways, as Savater mentions is carried out by John Gray in his book *Straw Dogs* (Savater 2007:

299). In a line of reasoning 'opposite to Vattimo's' (Savater 2007: 299), Gray sees Christianity as introducing the value of truth into religion, whereas pagan polytheists had not been interested in metaphysics. Indeed, the Inquisition brought together the two forms of violence Vattimo conflates in his 'family resemblance,' the violence of metaphysics (closing debating, reducing Being to presence) and physical violence (of the natural sacred, of punishing people for heresy), and it is easier to see this as a result of the Christian message prioritising 'truth' over 'friendship.' Just as Vattimo has his favourite quotation from The Gospel of John in Chapter 15, verse 15, Gray could easily cherry-pick a quotation of Jesus' and hang an interpretation of Christianity on it, such as Jesus saying that he is 'the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6). The consistent use of the definite article in John 14:6 is inimical to the kind of hermeneutical plurality Vattimo seeks to express, explain, and reflect. Moreover, Rorty states that 'Vattimo turns away from the passages in the Epistle to the Romans that Karl Barth liked best, and reduces the Christian message to the passage in Paul that most other people like best: 1 Corinthians 13,' that is, of the primacy of love (Rorty 2006: 35). The Epistle to the Romans contains phrases such as the 'truth about God' (Romans 1:25) which Barth interpreted in the strong sense. As for Barth, he wrote that 'the Truth itself has proclaimed to us that Truth is Truth' (Barth 1968: 298). The emphasis in Romans is more about truth than love, and Barth follows Paul's lead wholeheartedly. The point is that one can select 'love' as the overriding message of the New Testament, but one can also emphasise 'truth,' too. Vattimo may respond that 'truth' is primarily 'friendship.' However, in John Chapter 1, in which 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14), the Word is 'full of grace and truth' (John 1: 14) and is a 'light' so that people will 'believe in' him (John 1: 12). The emphasis in John 1 is not on truth as love or friendship, but on truth in relation to belief. Admittedly, truth here is not 'correspondence' as *adequatio* between concept and thing in the sense identified by Heidegger as secondary in *On the Essence of Truth*, but of faith, which is akin Heidegger's notion of truth as a mode of disclosure more fundamental than statements and their correspondence to reality. In his interpretation of Christianity, Vattimo is setting up an opposition between Christianity, subjectivity, and love on the one hand in which truth is

primarily friendship, and the objectivising metaphysics from Plato onwards in which truth is correspondence of language to objects external to thought. The third kind of truth he misses is the truth of faith, ironically of the value of 'belief,' the title of a book in which he says precious little about this concept. It is truth as belief, a faith in a transcendent God which has little or nothing to do with a correspondence theory of truth, which he neglects. What one finds, then, is that Vattimo creates Christianity in his image, something I will look at in more detail in the paragraphs on philosophy as autobiography near the end of Part Two.

f) The West or Christianity: *Andenken* and radical historicity

The chapters of *After Christianity* are quite unconnected apart from the broad thematic of dealing with Christianity. So far in Chapter Four, the main developments in Vattimo's understanding of Christianity put forward in *After Christianity* have been outlined, such as his increased use of Nietzsche, the importance of Dilthey and Joachim in developing his notion of secularisation and his increasing willingness to identify the history of the West as the emergence of hermeneutics with the salvation history of Christianity. The remaining subsections of Chapter Four will look at other themes which come out of *After Christianity*, such as Vattimo's view of the West and his views on violence, which will include some critical points in relation to this theme.

In Chapter Five of *After Christianity*, 'The West or Christianity,' Vattimo argues that the experience of modernity 'must be interpreted as the weakening of reality's peremptoriness, and in a related sense, of authoritarianism in politics, of the strict hierarchical conception of the individual subject, and of direct violence' (Vattimo 2002a: 82). This experience 'must be considered in effect a Christian event…*par excellence*…, as attestation that the seed of the divine Word has borne fruit' (Vattimo 2002a: 82). Where Vattimo writes about the experience of modernity, though, he means for 'us,' that is, in the West: 'not only is the West today only definable as a unified entity as secularised Christianity, but also, Christianity today rediscovers itself authentically only if it identifies itself as Western' (Vattimo 2002a: 80). It is surprising not only how Eurocentric is Vattimo's focus, but also how far he employs the language of

unity, necessity and teleology in his account. Even if one can accept his use of Joachim of Fiore, Vattimo still refers to the effective history of the incarnation as 'a teleology in which every ontic structure is weakened in favour of ontological Being' (Vattimo 2002a: 112).[14]

The products of this Christian message, and by this Vattimo means the kenotic message, are not the Catechism of the Catholic Church, or Creationism, or anything else which seeks to ossify, dominate, or exclude. Instead, Vattimo sees Christianity in secularised notions such as 'communication, community, dialogue, consensus, democracy, etc.'—these are 'conclusions' of modern thought (Vattimo 2002a: 82). 'To grasp and develop the meaning of these signs,' Vattimo states, 'is the task that today presents itself to those who profess to be openly Christian' (Vattimo 2002a: 82). Whether or not one is openly Christian, Vattimo likes to invoke Benedetto Croce's phrase that we 'cannot not call [our]selves Christians' (Vattimo 2002a: 82) in the West. Vattimo explicitly links the 'West,' 'Europe' and 'modernity, seeing them as synonymous (Vattimo 2002a: 73). At the root of the West, Europe, and modernity, Vattimo sees their constitutive character as 'the civilisation of scientific, economic, and technological rationality' (Vattimo 2002a: 75). Vattimo sees these traits as the secularised inheritance of monotheism and the Protestant work ethic, as well as drawing upon Colin Campbell's research on the links between consumerism, the modern tendency towards fantasy, and the secularised inheritance of belief in other worlds. Along with the tendency of the modern towards democracy, Vattimo looks to interpret other phenomena, such as the 'end of history' and the breakdown of reality in the plurality of images as communicated by the mass media as examples of secularisation. At this point he cannot fully explain why and how this can be the case, even though he invokes the term '*kenosis*' as a weakening of God in an attempt so show how the drift of Being as weakening has a Christian basis (Vattimo 2002a: 80). That this link is not fully explained here in Chapter Five of *After Christianity* is to be expected, as the chapter was originally an essay from 1993. From later works, though, such as *Beyond Interpretation*, *Belief*, and other chapters from *After Christianity*, we know that the message of kenotic *caritas* can lead to secularisation through its call to friendship and

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[14] This is a problem that shall be discussed later in Part One.

affirmation that God has spoken to his people in different ways, in other words to the reduction of value to exchange value and the archetype of hermeneutical plurality (respectively).

Why can secularisation not be considered a 'break' with the Christian tradition? Surely it is possible to imagine that democracy, the society of mass communication, and increased dialogue are products of thought antithetical to Christianity, or at the very least seeing the latter as irrelevant? This is akin to the argument put forward by Hans Blumenberg, and it is rejected by Vattimo. In Chapter Five of *After Christianity*, Vattimo does not spend long explaining why Blumenberg is wrong, instead putting forward his own view of secularisation. Nevertheless, there is a hint concerning the reasoning behind Vattimo's objection to Blumenberg which is given in the chapter that is developed more in his work elsewhere. Blumenberg's view, in Vattimo's opinion, 'ignores the hermeneutic circularity into which every existence is *de facto* thrown' (Vattimo 2002a: 74). Vattimo invokes his favourite quotation of Croce's, 'We cannot but call ourselves Christians' to this end.

g) Christianity and violence

Chapter Nine is an investigation of the link between Christianity and violence, picking up themes from his earlier work and expanding on them. Vattimo gets close to a definition of metaphysical violence, which is the main type of violence with which he is concerned (although he does slip between this kind of violence and physical violence, especially in his use of Girard's 'scapegoat mechanism' in which a victim would be killed to appease the masses, with little acknowledgement of a change in direction). 'Metaphysical violence is,' Vattimo writes, 'all identification between law and nature, which has dominated the traditional teaching of the Church' (Vattimo 2002a: 114). Aquinas' 'Natural Moral Law' is a case in point. Astutely, Vattimo declares that violence of this kind is permitted by all who ignore Hume's Law, that one cannot derive an 'ought' from a 'is,' that is, that one cannot formulate a normative ethical argument based on descriptive premises. Vattimo speculates on the origins of natural law, reasoning with a degree of probability that natural law, natural rights and other such notions were invented to prevent bloodshed in society, that is, natural law has its

origins in violence. The link between natural laws, theism and atheism, and the death of God becomes much clearer in later works which elaborate on themes found in *After Christianity*. In *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, Vattimo states that his 'atheism' is of disregarding the idolatrous link between God and the laws of nature (Vattimo 2006: 34). Laws of nature make it easy to do violence by imposing upon others 'natural' modes of ethics, such as ethics pertaining to human relationships and bioethics, on all sorts of issues ranging from contraception to the role of women, abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering and more besides. Focus on natural laws takes on a more political aspect, implicitly at least, in that attributing supreme value to laws of nature is dangerous due to the fact that people will always claim to know them better than you (Vattimo 2006: 36), resulting in a broadly Platonic 'philosopher king' kind of technocracy (Vattimo 2011), a theme Vattimo has developed ever more in recent years and that will be picked up and critiqued in a later chapter.

To analyse the complex link between Christianity and violence, Vattimo draws upon the twin figures of Dilthey and Girard. As was shown earlier, the former posited, like Vattimo, that Christianity was the 'beginning of the end of metaphysics' (Vattimo 2002a: 115-116), but that metaphysics carried on long past the inauguration of the kenotic message due to cultural conditions because 'the Church inherited the historical structures of antiquity, and in order to ensure its survival had to preserve that culture. Thus Saint Augustine is at once the philosopher of the *Confessions* and the bishop who exercises historical and political power' (Vattimo 2002a: 116). Vattimo consciously goes further than Dilthey by using Girard to 'radicalise' Dilthey's thesis, using Girard here in a clearer and slightly different way than in earlier works. The 'victim-based mechanism' recurs in the history of Christianity which explains why violence comes to the surface at various points in time. Given his long-standing linking of Girard with Heidegger, Vattimo sees the deep-rooted mimetic violence as equivalent to metaphysics in terms of being ineradicable and central to being human, that it can be weakened and twisted but not overcome completely (Vattimo 2002a: 116).

Not only does Vattimo make it clear how violence remains in Christianity more than it should through ecclesiastical authoritarianism, but

also he attempts to account for how it entered Christianity. Vattimo sees multiple factors at work, from the example taken from Dilthey of Augustine as representative of the responsibility of Christianity had as the only remaining temporal power in late-antiquity, to the 'classical identification' between 'Christian existence with the philosophical existence: the human being can realise humanity fully by rising to the knowledge of the first principles' (Vattimo 2002a: 117). As Vattimo states, the latter notion has little to do with *caritas*: 'What ultimately matters is knowledge of the truth' (Vattimo 2002a: 117). Natural law, Vattimo argues, belongs to this tradition, and is a 'manifestation of *hubris*' and a source of further violence 'through the imposition of the natural law against the will of men' (Vattimo 2002a: 118). So violence enters Christianity: a) because of its role in temporal power, b) because of its relation to philosophy. Does Vattimo therefore have to separate Christianity from philosophy? To an extent, yes, as he recognises a domain apart from philosophy called 'Theology' (Vattimo 1997a: x), and that Christianity is based on a message about a personal God which never claims to be subject to proof. Beyond the theoretical dimension of 'Theology,' moreover, Vattimo sees Christianity as putting together religious violence (Girard) and metaphysical violence (Heidegger's history of metaphysics) (Vattimo 1999: 38-39). I believe that more could be made of this cross-contamination of disciplines and forms of life, that this exchange of methods and principles between disciplines opens-up an alternative, albeit related, history of weakening which avoids some of the problems endemic to Vattimo's style of thought. The latter's problems will be explored later in this part and my solution will be presented in the Conclusion.

Vattimo aims to rethink Christianity in relation to metaphysics and violence. It is not possible to overcome metaphysics, to be able, for instance, to think of metaphysics as something other than the application of first principles. In this regard, Vattimo is following Heidegger. Vattimo aims not at an overcoming, but a twisting, of metaphysics, which is something he relates to Girard. Vattimo sees 'secularisation as the continuation of Christian revelation's saving action' (Vattimo 2002a: 119). Jesus' sacrifice, for Vattimo, exposes the victim-based logic of the natural sacred. Whereas Girard the revelation of the sacrifice of Jesus as revealing

an anthropological fact, about the victimary mechanism, Vattimo sees it as a message that calls for redeeming and weakening (Vattimo 2006: 45). Victim-based logic, like metaphysics on Heidegger's view, cannot be overcome, only *verwunden*. Therefore, it, and thus violence, has to be a part of the Christian message, even if it is twisted. If Jesus was priest and sacrifice, then he did not undergo violence at the hands of another, but 'If the remission of sins requires sacrifice, it confirms the logic of the victim-based mechanism, for the God who demands the satisfaction of 'justice' is still conceived of as the violent God of natural religions' (Vattimo 2002a: 120).

Curiously, Vattimo states that 'if Jesus' free sacrifice was inspired by something other than the victim-based logic, then we must take seriously the idea that it demands to be understood as kenotic salvation' whereby '*Kenosis* is not a ransom but ransom itself' (Vattimo 2002a: 120). This is very cryptic—what does 'ransom itself' really mean? What Vattimo is trying to do is unclear. If one introduces victim-based logic into *kenosis* one would, as Vattimo realises, be returning to Girard's thesis after all. It would be clearer if Vattimo explained the parallel between the persistence and impossibility of overcoming victim-based logic and metaphysics through an analogy to *Ge-Stell/Ereignis*, that the victim-based mechanism had to reach its apex, through the murder of a person both innocent and divine, in order for its logic to break down. In a similar way that one cannot talk about Being and beings without metaphysical language leading one to twist and weaken rather than overcome, one cannot talk about the exposure of the mechanism without remembering victim-based logic. Vattimo explains the persistence of metaphysics (and therefore, if metaphysics is a transcription of the Girardian notion of violence, the victim-based mechanism) in a clearer way in his dialogue with Rorty and Zabala in *The Future of Religion* a few years later. Here Vattimo states that 'Metaphysics has survived because (and together with) the ancient structure of 'power' has survived. So, for instance, the Christian church, being the head of the Roman Empire, could not abandon this structure of power and was not able to develop all the antimetaphysical implications of Christianity' (Vattimo 2004: 62). As the Roman Church has survived and often resists change, therefore the antimetaphysical implications of the Gospel have still not been fully

developed within this institution, even if they are increasingly realised without it.

Chapter Five: Vattimo, Gauchet and the Löwith-Blumenberg debate[15]

a) Vattimo and the Löwith-Blumenberg debate

Where does Vattimo's 'return to religion' sit in relation to contemporary thought on secularisation and/or the postmodern in relation to the place of religion in cultural thought in the twentieth century? Despite his interest in secularisation and the history of ideas, Vattimo has not engaged with mainstream discourse on secularisation, the Löwith-Blumenberg debate, in his mature works on Christianity. The most sustained discussion of this debate in Vattimo's work is in an essay entitled 'L'Occident o la Christianità' ('The West or Christianity') from 1993, predating his chapter on Christianity in *Beyond Interpretation* by a year. This essay appeared later as part of *After Christianity*. Although this essay predates Vattimo's elaborate working-out of all the details of his understanding of Christianity, the bare bones are there as he has already included the terms '*kenosis,*' 'charity' and 'secularisation' (Vattimo 2002a: 72, 80, 82). Therefore, it is fair to say that this essay is representative of Vattimo's views on the debate in relation to his marginally later work on Christianity, which was probably one reason why he selected the essay to appear alongside his Italian Academy Lectures in *After Christianity*. It is to these views of Vattimo's on Blumenberg that we now turn.

In 'The West or Christianity,' Vattimo understands Blumenberg's argument to entail that modernity has replaced 'Copernican man' with 'Ptolemaic man,' i.e., the human who has thrown-off placed reason as the final authority in all matters. This is a human being who has jettisoned the eschatological legacy of their Judaeo-Christian heritage having cultivated a disposition 'to organize reality in accordance with a rationality that is entirely independent from any utopia' (Vattimo 2002a: 70-71). Describing this relationship between Christianity and the West as 'insufficient and untenable,' Vattimo sees Blumenberg's interpretation as stemming from 'an

excessive dose of confidence in the possibility of the radically new and an overall emphasis on the creativity, originality, and absolute freedom of man' (Vattimo 2002a: 71). Vattimo identifies Blumenberg's thesis with Catholic 'reactionary' efforts to see modernity as something apart from, and even against, the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Both views make 'panoramic' claims, making judgements about modernity from 'outside' (that is, from beyond modernity), claiming to be immune from the ways of thinking of modernity (Vattimo 2002a: 72). Vattimo is critical of such an attempt, not least because he feels it is impossible to be completely free from the effects of any period of thinking in history, even if these traces of thought seem somewhat alien, mythological and ill-fitting. This thesis means 'above all that secularization is not a radical abandonment or break, since this would imply the possibility of an absolutely new beginning, of the kind conceptualized by Blumenberg…This view, I argue, ignores the hermeneutic circularity into which every existence is *de facto* thrown' (Vattimo 2002a: 73-74). On Vattimian terms, this move makes sense, as we cannot escape the linguistic traditions into which we are thrown. If language is the house of Being and thinking is thinking of Being, then any attempt at a new foundation of thought cannot but have recourse to prior thinking, and this goes not only for the move to modernity, but also to postmodernity; Vattimo's contribution to these two debates is to emphasise the necessity of continuity at the linguistic level, which for him is the only level there is. This is not to say that modernity did not alter the way we think, but on Vattimian lines it is wrong to think that any stage in the history of Being involves radical discontinuity with a previous stage. It is for this reason that Vattimo thinks the postmodern, too, is not a radical break with the modern, but a continuation which is also a distortion. This is why Vattimo is against other Neo-Marxist approaches to the postmodern condition, such as Gramsci's ideas on 'hegemony,' which encourage a new set of values, a new beginning or utopian ideals. How, though, should one conceive of this continuity? To answer this question, it is to Vattimo's views on Löwith's work that we shall soon turn.

Before we turn to Vattimo's views on Löwith, it is worth pointing out that Vattimo creates something of a straw person out of Blumenberg, or at the very least caricatures his position. This is because Blumenberg was

not naïve enough to believe in radical discontinuity. He thought that there was continuity in the 'function' of ideas based on human needs, even if the 'content' of the ideas changes. Ideas can be 'reoccupied' by ideas that are even diametrically opposed in content if they somehow fulfil the same need (Wallace 1983: xxvi). For example, God used to be the guarantor of certainty, which then became replaced with Descartes' *Cogito* (to run the risk of oversimplifying). Both ideas function in analogous ways with content which is nonetheless heterogeneous. Despite this added complexity, one which raises a number of questions about the nature, origins and veracity of the claims concerning these needs and functions, Vattimo would find reasons to disagree with Blumenberg. Primarily, and decisively for Vattimo, he would object to what he would perceive as the anthropological notion of 'need' underpinning ideas; he would see this as 'factual,' which is also where Vattimo parts ways with Girard (Vattimo 2010b: 86). Whereas Girard sees his own research as factual and precluding theorising history as one of secularisation, Vattimo interprets it as a reading of history. Blumenberg's talk of 'needs' and 'functions' would appear to sociological-anthropological and therefore as assuming a fixed human nature. In turn this objection raises the larger issue of whether Vattimo is correct in his hermeneutical nihilism, that there are 'no facts, only interpretations.' This question is too large a diversion for this paper as it gets to the heart of Vattimo's entire philosophical style. Nevertheless, it is briefly worth considering Girard's own reply to Vattimo. In the context of discussing Nietzsche's aphorism, much used by Vattimo, that there are 'no facts, only interpretations,' Girard acknowledges its rhetorical importance against positivists but puts forward the view that this 'cannot provide a functional theory of interpretation. To have nothing but interpretations is the same as having none' (Girard 2010: 94). Girard does not spell out precisely why, but one can ponder his reasoning. For instance, hermeneutics might presume something like an intentional object: interpretation is 'interpretation-of,' and this cannot merely be another interpretation, for this would lead to an infinite regress of interpretations.

b) Vattimo and Löwith: A Meditation on Modernity

Vattimo has written more on Löwith than he has on Blumenberg, which is not altogether surprising when one considers that Löwith's was among the most important of the earlier interpretations of Nietzsche, one of Vattimo's principal influences. I will not dwell on Vattimo's reading of Löwith's interpretation of Nietzsche except where it directly relates to Löwith's views on secularisation. Vattimo was writing about Löwith before his 'return to religion' got underway. Nevertheless, his analysis of Löwith's views on the 'legitimacy' of the modern age help pave the way for his later return to religion. In his book *Ethique de l'interprétation* (1991), Vattimo writes '*La modernité est l'époque de la legitimation métaphysico-historiciste; la post-modernité est la mise en question explicite de ce mode de legitimation*' (Vattimo 1991: 17). In other words, post-modernity is the posing of a question of the legitimation of the modern age, and that the whole notion of legitimation loses its focus as a result of post-modernity. If the notion of legitimation is no longer to be taken into account, how else should Löwith's thought on secularisation in relation to modernity be understood, or should it be ignored?

The answer may come elsewhere, where Vattimo writes approvingly of Löwith's views on history, but thinks he has not gone far enough, which for Vattimo means as far as Heidegger. Writes Vattimo, 'for Löwith, as for Heidegger, Nietzsche stands at the end of the process of western thought, which Löwith characterizes as historicism, and the end leads to a sort of return, to the point of departure, to the experience of the pre-Socratics' (Vattimo 2006b: 144). Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return of the same constitutes the existential crisis writ-large, of secularised Judaeo-Christian linearity running up against pre-Christian, Greek eternity. After this quotation, Vattimo goes on to mention that 'Löwith does not, however, make the decisive leap that Heidegger makes, failing to see total technological dominion over the world as the very culmination of historicism and metaphysics… Löwith's interpretations…remains profoundly linked to the spirit of existentialism' (Vattimo 2006b: 144). Heidegger, through linking the end of history to technological domination, sees these phenomena jointly as disclosing ontologically the essence of technology as metaphysical and the latter as violent. For Vattimo, this gets

beyond the essentially humanistic (and therefore metaphysical) preoccupations of existentialism. What Vattimo appeals to the Heideggerian notion of *Verwindung* to show is that one cannot regard forms of historical continuity and discontinuity as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate,' but that one should think instead in terms of convalescence-distortion, a theme to which I shall return later (Vattimo 1991b: 18).

c) The equivalence of Christianity with the West

As Andreas Michel observes in a chapter in the volume *Radical Secularization?,* entitled 'The Strength of Weakness: Vattimo and Gauchet on Secularization,' Vattimo and Marcel Gauchet both offer alternatives not only to Löwith's views, but also to Blumenberg's on the matter of secularization in relation to modernity. Rather than having to see modernity as an illegitimate, secularised heir to Judaeo-Christian messianism (Löwith) or as radically new as a result of filling the void left by religious secularisation in ecclesiastical terms and from the complete transcendence of God in nominalism (Blumenberg), modernity for Vattimo and Gauchet follows a logic from within Christianity in the form of continuity. 'This view,' writes Michel, 'locates the origin of secularization long before the rise of modernity' (Michel 2015: 67). Michel emphasises how Marcel Gauchet's views on secularisation are in some ways not too different from Vattimo's own. For different reasons both thinkers regard the incarnation as being central to the history of the West and the inaugural point of secularisation. Gauchet, like Vattimo thought not only that the incarnation as central to the history of the West, but also that the world has been reduced to interpretation. Nevertheless, Gauchet considers transcendence to be a central category of Christian thought as the incarnation highlighted the irreducible otherness of the divine and the devaluing of the world. In the vacuum created by the absence of God and the gap created between the world and humans, humans are the creators of purpose and meaning. The world was an object to be studied and the human will was the source of purpose and meaning:

> As God withdrew, the world changed from something presented as unalterable to something to be constituted. God having become Other to the world, the world now became Other to humans, in two ways: by its objectivity at the level of representation, and by its ability to be transformed at the level of action (Gauchet 1997: 95).

The figure of the Messiah, built up in Jewish culture to be a powerful saviour figure such as Moses, was inverted through Christ, who combined divine favour and humanity in an everyday person far removed from power (Gauchet 1997: 119). This confused the world and pointed to divine otherness. By contrast, Vattimo argued that Christianity came to dissolve transcendence through *kenosis*. God moves ever closer to humans as their friend in what seems like an economic, modalistic Trinity in which the Father becomes the Son and then—in the 'Age of Interpretation'—becomes the Spirit (Vattimo 2006a: 43). The Age of the Spirit/Interpretation is synonymous with the late-modern West, for Vattimo, as much as the Age of the Son was co-extensive with the rise of the Church up to the Reformation (at least). The Age of the Father, one assumes, was the pre-Christian age. For this Trinitarian historicism, Vattimo acknowledges a heavy debt to a (not particularly close) reading of Joachim of Fiore (Vattimo 2002a: 60).

Against Blumenberg (and also analogous Catholic claims), Vattimo sees the West and Christianity as equivalent to one another, a view he puts forth in 'The West or Christianity.' At this early stage of his meditations on the role of Christianity in the intellectual life of the West, Vattimo was putting forward a range of arguments to connect the two. Some of his arguments were not very convincing. For example, the recognition of the West's Christian heritage is the only unifying factor for Europe after the fall of its enemy in Communism, or even the simple point of the religious 'revival' in the West is evidence of its unifying force (Vattimo 2002a: 74). Later on in time, in the essay 'History of Salvation, History of Interpretation,' Vattimo reiterates his earlier view. 'The point is,' Vattimo argues, 'that the various processes of secularization occurring throughout modernity need not be seen as a leave-taking from the religious source—as is argued by Hans Blumenberg…Rather, these can be seen as processes of secularization, application, enrichment, and specification of that source' (Vattimo 2002a: 65). This insight of Vattimo's epitomises the value of his contribution. As far back as *Beyond Interpretation*, Vattimo has emphasised not only that the result of secularisation is hermeneutics (which Vattimo at the time regarded as the *koine* of late-modernity), but also that secularisation has its origins in a hermeneutical event: the incarnation (Vattimo 1997a: 42). Arguably, Vattimo puts this complex idea best in *Belief*: 'The interpretation given by

Jesus Christ of Old Testament prophecies, or (better) the interpretation which he himself is, reveals its true and only meaning: God's love for his creatures' (Vattimo 1999: 64). The message *of* Christ as the personification of God's new revelation of his friendship (his love) for his creatures, as much or more than *his* message of *caritas*, is a hermeneutical event that sets off a change in humanity's perception of the absolute through gradual weakening, historicising and making contingent.

d) The Value of Vattimo's Contribution: Getting Beyond the Metaphysics of Opposites

What is the value of Vattimo's contribution to the Löwith-Blumenberg debate? I would argue that not only does he, along with Gauchet, get past the central point of conflict of the debate, but also that his solution is more productive than Gauchet's. Gauchet's contribution indicates that the Christian message of the incarnation reversed the logic of the axial age through de-hierarchisation; the temporal order was subordinate to the spiritual until the logic of the incarnation, with its transformation of Messianism, came into view with the breakdown of the Medieval worldview in which the incarnation's message was masked by external pressures associated with the aftermath of the decline of the Roman Empire (Gauchet 1997: 153). The development of the temporal sphere as an objective space, a blank canvas for the human will, was only possible by creating a distance between God and humans and humans and the world. This was effected by the incarnation: 'Only by reversing all possible mediation between heaven and earth, as Jesus did, could such a system of dual otherness crystallize, a system where God's distance from the world corresponded symmetrically to humans' distance from it' (Gauchet 1997: 122). Jesus reversed the exclusiveness of the covenant, won a worldly victory to allow humans to benefit more in the next life than this one, was a mediator who was still yet other and would nonetheless trump any other human mediation (which was all the more poignant when papal claims grew ever more extravagant) and more besides. For thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Vattimo a mere reversal remains within the logic of metaphysics. In an essay entitled 'The Two Senses of Nihilism in Nietzsche,' Vattimo writes:

> If active nihilism wishes to avoid reversing its polarity and becoming
> a new metaphysics that puts life, force, and the will to power in the

place of the Platonic *ontos on*, it will have to interpret itself in the end as a doctrine of the 'vanishing' of Being—of vanishing, weakening, and so on as the 'essential' character of Being itself. Nihilism is the process in the course of which…there is nothing left of Being as such (Vattimo 2006b: 140).

Gauchet's conceptual schema, above all transcendence and immanence, remains within the logic of metaphysics. The only alternative to the metaphysics of a new beginning (if it were at all possible) would be a gradual weakening to the point at which the traces of metaphysical tradition no longer hold their 'essential character' and therefore their violence. If hitherto the mediator between transcendence and immanence was located at the top of the social tree, it becomes not more liberating if it is at the bottom: while the 'the last shall be first, and the first last' (Matthew 8:12), there is still a first and last. Gauchet's mediating messiah could merely be viewed as a Nietzschean subterranean slave revolt move. Moreover, this message is only one more among others, another interpretation amid the plurality of ways of conceiving the relation between transcendence and immanence in late antiquity. One requires a more compelling move to see how this inverted logic of the mediator becomes integral to the history of the West.

By contrast, Vattimo's interpretation of the relationship between secularisation and modernity benefits for three main reasons. Firstly, the inaugural message of secularisation gets beyond the metaphysical logic of opposites (against Vattimo on the issue of transcendence, it is another question entirely about whether there is a possibility of anything beyond the tradition of linguistic messages into which we are thrown, and this is a topic for Part Two). Secondly, in the form of Vattimo's mature work on Christianity the inner logic of secularisation intertwines with metaphysics as the history of Being to bring notions of 'the West' and 'Christianity' closer together. Thirdly, Vattimo's use of the idea of *Verwindung* enables him to take a more nuanced approach to both 'similarity' and 'difference' to get beyond less subtle, contrasting approaches found in the works of Löwith and Gauchet in particular. The first and second of these benefits of Vattimo's approach have been discussed already, but the remaining benefit will now be looked at in some detail.

e) Verwindung: Secularisation, Interiority and Distortion

Distinctions such as 'transcendence and immanence' for Gauchet, 'legitimate and illegitimate' for Löwith and 'old and new' for Blumenberg all belong to premodernity and/or modernity. However, key to Vattimo's positive thesis of what kind of thinking is possible after the death of God is his distinction between modernity and postmodernity, a distinction that has been alluded to already and discussed in the Introduction. One cannot get rid of God until one has got rid of grammar, as Nietzsche said (Nietzsche 1990a: 48), and Vattimo takes this to mean that the history of Being is one of interminable weakening, which challenges Blumenberg and Gauchet in their different views on how modernity took leave of sacrality; Vattimo would have modernity connected far more intimately to pre-modernity in a way which was uni-directional (Gauchet, by contrast, sees the temporal as a contingent development from strengthening of the sacred). The traces of tradition allow one to think, but one must reinterpret them to divest them of any remaining metaphysical, 'strong' content. With the transcendent out of bounds as a source of value because Vattimo regards it as metaphysical, all one can do is recollect the traces of Being (*Andenken*) in an endless, immanent hermeneutical game in which the Overman is now a 'moderate' thinker walking through the museums of history trying on different masks with playful irony (Vattimo 1992: 8). Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'urbanisation' of Heidegger, particularly the notion that Being is only linguistic, Vattimo believes we inherit a textual tradition within a form of life that bounds our horizon (Vattimo 1988a: 120. 132). As Valgenti puts it, *Verwindung* collapses the distinction between 'passive' and 'active' nihilism for even with the latter the Overman engages in a passive resignation to the tradition it has inherited (Valgenti 2011: 160).

Given the plurality of interpretations and developments in response to the postmodern and death of God, in the 1980s Vattimo believed hermeneutics was, and should be, the *koiné* of contemporary philosophy. Not only did he see philosophers such as himself, Gadamer, and Rorty doing hermeneutics (Vattimo 1997a: 1), but also he saw developments in other disciplines as following suit. For example, he saw in the philosophy of science figures such as Thomas Kuhn showing through his paradigm concept that science does not deal with objectivity, but is radically

interpretative. In response to the *Ge-Stell*, Vattimo thought that philosophy's role was to weaken all forms of life through engaging with them in dialogue as he describes in 'On the challenge of art to philosophy: Aesthetics at the end of epistemology' (Vattimo 1993b: 13). As Snyder puts it, 'The practice of 'weak thought' would consist in contaminating the rational languages of science and technology by insisting on their connection to, and unity with, the other languages of contemporary culture' (Snyder 1988: liii). This can only occur if all values are reduced to 'exchange value,' with strong structure contaminated through *Verwindung* in the same way that 'high art' has been contaminated through popular idioms and mechanical reproduction (Vattimo 1988a: 54-55). From this Vattimo develops the notion of truth as 'rhetoric,' of 'persuasion through discourse' (Vattimo 1988a: 135), drawing upon Gadamer's view that language is primarily ethical rather than semiotic. Putting together Gadamer, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, Vattimo contends that language is discourse shared between a form of life that finds its 'densest' point in works of art. Given that the event of the death of God has led to an aesthetising of experience, with truth appearing through tradition as monuments (Vattimo 1988a: 12), truth as rhetoric involves leading (or 'persuading') the particular discourses (such as the sciences) back to the '*sensus communis*' to the larger unity of languages operating in the light of the nihilism of late-modernity (Vattimo 1988a: 140); if all languages have been released from a hierarchy imposed by metaphysical domination, even scientific discourse, arising from the ethos within a scientific form of life, is monumental, having 'exchange value.' This leads to a general contamination and weakening of the rational by the aesthetic.

The aesthetic has its 'check' in *caritas*, bringing together Vattimo's weak thought and his more particular meditations on the notion of secularisation. Strong metaphysical structures become weakened through being 'twisted,' but secularisation describes the means by which this occurs, and this is by the coming to fruition of the Christian message of 'friendship' in which one listens to the other like one listens to oneself, which is Vattimo's version of *caritas*. 'if you turn toward your inner self, oughtn't you also try to heed 'the other as yourself' (Vattimo 2011: 76)? This view of *caritas* is a reflection of *kenosis*, of God abandoning his transcendence to bring himself to the level of humanity; God heeded the other as himself

through the incarnation and the cross, establishing a kingdom which was not of this world. Faith in this kingdom created an interior life which has gradually dissolved even the notion of interiority into a proliferation of interpretations. Nevertheless, *caritas* remains for Vattimo the one thing incapable of secularisation as listening to others like you is the driving force of secularisation itself, of weakening (Vattimo 1999: 63). A weak ontology is a 'long farewell to the strong structures of Being,' a process without end. If the process were to end, then nihilism would be a state of nothingness, which paradoxically would be to return to the notion of presence. This is why Vattimo thinks one 'can only conceive nihilism as history' (Vattimo 1999: 63). Vattimo sees a 'Christian inspiration' in nihilism, with the latter being a 'transcription' of the biblical message. 'If one thinks of nihilism as an infinite history in terms of the religious 'text' that is its basis and interpretation,' writes Vattimo, 'it will speak of *kenosis* as guided, limited and endowed with meaning, by God's love' (Vattimo 1999: 64). Although Vattimo speaks of love (*caritas*) as the 'limit' of secularisation, it is also the power of the driving force behind it, the process of the message of *kenosis* working its way through history. At the heart of the New Testament message, in Vattimo's eyes, is love, a view which is widely shared, not least by the biblical text itself, for love is declared by Jesus to be the 'greatest commandment' (Matthew 22; see also 1 Corinthians 13). Love is the criterion by which secularisation is 'examined' (Vattimo 1999: 64). This has the distinct advantage over Gauchet's interpretation of the incarnation which emphasises the otherness (or 'difference') of God. If secularisation occurs due to the distance of God, this leaves open the possibility either of the distance closing again and/or God as 'Other' functioning in a way which is reminiscent of Levinas' 'Other,' which Vattimo considers metaphysical (Vattimo 2002a: 37). For all Vattimo's solution seems preferable over Gauchet's, larger questions remain not only about the consistency of Vattimo's return to religion (such as whether he rules out all forms of transcendence *a priori*), but also about the originality of his return in terms of his views concerning *kenosis*, secularisation and the death of God. It is to the latter topic to which we now turn.

Chapter Six: Vattimo and the Death of God Theologians

a) Introduction

Although Vattimo's contribution helps move the discourse about secularisation on from the Löwith-Blumenberg debate, to what extent are its methods derivative in drawing on 'Death of God Theology'? In this and the following chapters we shall look at other implications of Vattimo's earlier work on the return to religion: whether Vattimo is repeating Death of God Theology (especially Thomas Altizer's early work) in Chapter Six, if Vattimo is being inconsistent in constructing a 'unilinear history' in Chapter Seven, and whether he is guilty of a Marcionite attitude towards Judaism in Chapter Eight. Together these questions are important in addressing the extent to which Vattimo has created an interpretation of Christianity which is not only self-consistent, but also fit to engage with other traditions, such as Judaism, in a way which is 'friendly' and open towards them.[16]

b) Vattimo and Altizer

i. Comparisons made

There have been a number of criticisms brought by theologians concerning Vattimo's return to religion. Most of them are more appropriate for a directly theological study and so will only be dealt with briefly here. Frederiek Depoortere's criticisms of Vattimo's interpretation of Christianity are listed in the opening chapter of his book *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*. 'It is clear,' Depoortere writes, 'that [Vattimo's] version of Christianity is a very reduced one' for reasons such as his 'limited' use of Scripture (Depoortere cites John 15:15 and Philippians 2:7), 'read completely isolated from any context,' and that 'Vattimo's version of *kenosis* is a very poor one' (Depoortere 2008: 21). On the latter point, Depoortere writes that Vattimo only reads half of the Christological hymn found in Philippians 2 and so simply skips the part in which the exaltation of Christ is mentioned' (Depoortere 2008: 21), echoing a similar point made by Marta Frascati-Lochhead a decade earlier (Frascati-Lochhead 1998: 154-155). Similarly, another theologian Frans Vosman has criticised Vattimo for reading John 15:15 out of context, too (Vosman 2000: 418). Depoortere also states that 'the incarnation indeed plays a role in his philosophy, but without

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[16] This chapter borrows heavily from my article on Vattimo and Altizer from the journal *Minerva* (Harris 2011).

the cross and without the resurrection' and that Vattimo's Christianity is 'heterodox' (Depoortere 2008: 21), concluding that his Christianity is 'philosophical' and that there is no 'interchange' between philosophy and theology, a point also made by Thomas Guarino, who accuses Vattimo of filling up old wineskins with an 'alien new vintage' (Guarino 2009: 152).

These criticisms can be countered by considering what Vattimo is trying to do. In a less accusatory tone, Thomas Guarino has also stated that 'Vattimo has little interest…in 'reconstructive' hermeneutics, i.e., in the recovery of a stable textual meaning that endures over the course of time' (Guarino 2009: 129). It would not matter to Vattimo to find parallel phrases in contemporary Greek texts for a phrase found in Philippians, for instance. Rather, as Guarino acknowledges, the relationship between the text and the reader is not for Vattimo one of passively receiving tradition, but creating a spiritually and socially liberating conversation between the traces of tradition and the hermeneutical situatedness of the reader. This in turn generates new Being by 'twisting' the tradition to relieve it of its metaphysical strength in an indefinite process of interpretation and reinterpretation. With this understanding of Vattimo's intentions, it becomes clearer what traditional Christian terms mean for him. Although Depoortere thinks Vattimo does not deal with the resurrection, in his dialogue with Pierangelo Sequeri and Giovanni Ruggeri entitled *Interrogazioni sul Cristianesimo*, Vattimo makes clear that he believes Christ is resurrected because what Jesus said was so attractive he cannot not believe in him (Vattimo 2000: 49). In some ways this is the opposite of Alain Badiou's position. For Badiou, like with St. Paul on the road to Damascus, an event has meaning because it is personally transformative in a way that cannot be reduced to a message. Similarly to Badiou, the event is transformative and inescapable, but for Vattimo the event is grounded on the strength in weakness of Jesus' message of charity and the message *of* God's *kenosis* in Jesus. Concerning Badiou, Depoortere has indicated he believes that 'anachronistic interpretations' of Scripture 'can shed fresh light on these all-too-familiar texts' and that 'it is a basic insight of hermeneutics that the meaning of a text cannot be limited to the intention of its author or the way it was understood by its first readers…the new context can produce new and unheard-of meanings' (Depoortere 2013: 163). Depoortere's assessment of

the value of Badiou's approach to ancient texts has merit, although there are parallels between Badiou's and Vattimo's treatment of Scripture as both are trying to form a conversation with the past in order to release us from violence in the present. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether Vattimo succeeds in removing violence, especially as his approach to interpretation can be arbitrary. For example, Erik Meganck notes that while Vattimo is fond of quoting John 15:15 in which Jesus announces that he is no longer the master of human beings, but their friend, Vattimo omits reference to the preceding verse in which Jesus links friendship to doing what he commands (Meganck 2014: 420). Meganck sees the arbitrariness in this approach the kind of metaphysics Vattimo is trying to avoid. Is arbitrariness metaphysical, and therefore violent? (Meganck 2014: 430 n.3). Or is arbitrariness a symptom of the 'liberation of metaphor,' and perhaps therefore a recognition that more traditional forms of exegesis and interpretative standards no longer apply?

Vattimo's arbitrariness is a theme picked up at an even deeper level of his thought—concerning the notion of the event—in Part Two. For now, though, I would like to concentrate on a particular accusation against Vattimo that his return to religion is derivative. I am dwelling on this charge first and foremost because it leads into the other, more serious objection that Vattimo's return to religion is 'supsersessionist,' that is, it treats Christianity as superior to Judaism which is inconsistent with weak thought (where all Being is reduced to exchange value) and goes against his desire to derive an ethic of tolerance from history. Recent commentators on Vattimo's thought (Sciglitano 2007; Depoortere 2008a) have remarked that Vattimo's Christianity bears a striking resemblance to that of the influential American death of God theologian, Thomas J. J. Altizer (b. 1927), particularly his *magnum opus, The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (1967). Altizer has drawn heavily upon thinkers such as Nietzsche, Blake and Hegel for his nihilistic Christianity. Central to Altizer's conception of Christianity is the emptying of God through history to make himself immanent; by eliminating the transcendent realm, believers would focus on the present, the here and now. In terms of comparing both Vattimo and Altizer, both thinkers have been influenced by Nietzsche, particularly his idea of the 'death of God.' Vattimo, like Altizer, sees history as the weakening of God, Vattimo and

Altizer drawing on the Pauline idea of the 'emptying'/'humiliation' of God in the incarnation (the technical term for which is the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:5-11), leading to the liberation of humans from the constricting violence of the transcendent. Vattimo admits that the death of God movement 'is not something I've studied intensely' (Vattimo 2007c: 91). This becomes apparent in his homogenising of its thought in *After Christianity*, for Vattimo suspects that the death of God theologians, including Altizer, have not 'articulated an explicit theory of secularisation and of the death of God as the positive affirmation of divinity based on the idea of incarnation' (Vattimo 2002a: 37). In view of this, Vattimo thinks Altizer, and the other death of God theologians, follow Bonhoeffer and Barth in affirming the 'total 'alterity' of the biblical God' (Vattimo 2002a: 36-37). As with his criticism of Derrida and Lévinas, he believes alterity leads back to 'the same old God of metaphysics, conceived of as the ultimate inaccessible ground of religion' (Vattimo 2002a: 38). Vattimo is wrong in his view of Altizer's theology, for 'there can be little doubt that Altizer did articulate an explicit theory of secularisation rooted in the ideas of *kenosis*, incarnation and divine death' (Sciglitano 2007: 535-536). Indeed, Altizer opposed the idea of the 'otherness' of God due to transcendence being a distraction for believers away from the present.

Regarding Vattimo's thought as nothing more than a restatement of Altizer's theology ignores his philosophical contributions and, in my opinion, overlooks the subtleties in both his methods and conclusions. Moreover, it is important to distance Vattimo from Altizer because Altizer's thought was metaphysical and, therefore, according to Vattimo's schema, violent; it would be contradictory for Vattimo's return to religion to return to something he regards as ethically reprehensible. As a result, for consistency's sake it is imperative to show how Vattimo and Altizer differ, and the question of history in relation to metaphysics is at the heart of this endeavour. I will deal with the main points of comparison between Altizer and Vattimo as put forward in Anthony C. Sciglitano's article 'Contesting the World and the Divine: Balthasar's Trinitarian Response to Gianni Vattimo's Secular Christianity' (2007), and Frederiek Depoortere's book *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard, Slavoj Žižek* (2008a). My main argument will be that Altizer's explicit Hegelianism

adds a metaphysical element to the development of history which is absent in Vattimo's attempt to create a history of Christianity which allows for the reduction/twisting of metaphysical, 'strong' structures. Having dealt with these points, in the next chapter I will turn to the claim by Sciglitano (2007) that Vattimo's thought is Hegelian, even if Vattimo does not fully realise the debt Sciglitano thinks he owes to Hegel.

ii. Christianity and religiosity

Vattimo and Altizer 'share the Barthian idea that there is a clear distinction between Christianity on the one side and natural religiosity on the other' (Depoortere 2008a: 25). Vattimo follows Girard in regarding Christianity as unmasking the violence inherent to the natural sacred of the religious. In Girardian anthropology (Vattimo and Girard 2010), very briefly summarised here, through mimetic desire each person covets what another has, ending up in an arms race. To protect the society, a 'scapegoat' is formed as a mechanism to dispense with the violence, the sacral power imputed onto it making it powerful enough to restore the social order. By cloaking Christianity in the mythological language of the kind pertaining to the scapegoat mechanism and the natural sacred, Christianity acts 'like a Trojan horse' (Antonello 2010: 8), for unlike other victims Christ was wholly innocent, a point which is made clear through his mythology as passed on through the New Testament and tradition. Vattimo links this insight from Girardian anthropology with Heidegger's weakening of 'Being.' Concerning Heidegger's notion of the weakening of 'Being,' Vattimo reads Heidegger's philosophy as the conclusion of a conception of metaphysics which began with Plato's forms. The latter, like the traditional Christian ideas concerning God and heaven, pertained to an ideal realm removed from immediate experience. When metaphysics, in more recent times, has been identified with science and technology, and pertains to humans, it makes being human unthinkable insofar as all spontaneity and openness is ruled out by the laws and objects of science (Vattimo 2002a: 12-13). For Vattimo, this means a rejection of the identification of Being with presence. Instead, Being should be seen as 'event,' such as the event of the late-modern, namely irreducible plurality and the end of metaphysics (Vattimo 2002a).

Altizer's main claim for the uniqueness of Christianity is to see other religions as promoting a 'backward' movement away from history to Primordial Being, whereas the incarnation should be 'conceived as a progressive movement of Spirit into flesh' (Altizer 1967: 46) which accepts and redeems the secular/profane world. Vattimo, too, is wary of the urge to return to Primordial Oneness, for any God which is too 'Other' is 'inaccessible' and 'is the same old God of metaphysics,' which he also identifies with the gods of natural religions in reference to Girard (Vattimo 2002a: 37-39). The starting point for Altizer is dynamism in history, of forwards versus backwards movements, of progressive immanence of the spirit compared to Primordial Oneness; this is all reminiscent of Hegel, a point not lost on the Vattimian commentator Sciglitano (2007). Vattimo's starting point, however, is his critique of metaphysics, whether it be in his quasi-anthropological appropriations from Girard, or in his incarnation-centred repudiation of conceptualising the divine as 'the Other,' whether this be in accordance with Plato, Barth, the 'death of God' theologians, Lévinas, Derrida, or natural religions.

iii. Transcendence and incarnation

For 'both Vattimo and Altizer, the core of Christianity is the event of the incarnation. Both authors interpret the incarnation as the end of God's transcendence, as the death of the 'God of beyond.' They both use the term '*kenosis*' and consider the incarnation as the start of a process of desacralization and secularisation' (Depoortere 2008a: 25). For Altizer there are two *kenoses*. One is a historical, actual death of God, as, for him, Theology must come to an understanding of the 'inevitable correlation between God's self-revelation and his self-negation or *kenosis*…history becomes not simply the arena of revelation but the very incarnate Body of God' (Altizer 1967: 86). Again, Altizer here owes a debt to Hegel for this understanding of the death of God:

> Hegel's dialectical method succeeds in effecting an inversion of the Western ontological tradition, for he does not simply negate the root idea of the aseity of Being, he reverses this idea by conceiving Being as a perpetual process of becoming its own other, a process that is known in myth or religious belief as the self-sacrifice of the divine Being (Altizer 1967: 63)

The second *kenosis* concerns the emptying of this event into common experience as atonement, an experience which is 'a negative process of reversing every alien other…of every power confining life and energy' (Altizer 1967: 114). After the epiphany of the cross, the event becomes ossified into 'alien others' such as creeds formulas, what Altizer refers to as 'Satan,' all of which eventually become emptied (Altizer 1967: 112-113). The two are related due to the former effecting the latter by God relinquishing his transcendence in becoming immanent to complete himself.

By contrast, for Vattimo, there is only one *kenosis*, and that is the long process of secularisation which is begun in the incarnation and is an on-going process which is never fully completed. Vattimo sees *kenosis* as the process of secularisation, a process which is indistinguishable from both interpretation and salvation; there is not a *kenosis* in *Dasein* mirroring that which occurred in Being, but rather the weakening of strong metaphysical structures allows *Dasein* greater freedom. Given Vattimo's stance concerning metaphysics, arguably the best way to read what Vattimo has to say concerning *kenosis* is to interpret the event of *kenosis* as a message which is communicated and reinterpreted throughout history from the time of the New Testament onwards. Indeed, Vattimo states that salvation 'is the *announcement* that God saves us through a historical process of education' (Vattimo 2010b: 86; emphasis added), and that 'Christianity is a stimulus, a *message* that sets in motion a tradition of thought that will eventually realise its freedom from metaphysics' (Vattimo 2007d: 35; emphasis added). It is also questionable about the extent to which Altizer, unlike Vattimo, can be said to be a theologian of secularisation, for while he talks about God emptying himself into history, he maintains an at least formal distinction between the sacred and the profane, both being transformed through the process of *kenosis* as Ogletree mentions in his summary of Altizer's thought (Ogletree 1966: 83).

According to both Vattimo and Altizer, 'the true meaning of the incarnation has only recently been exposed' (Depoortere 2008a: 25). Altizer refers to 'modern historical consciousness' (Altizer 1967: 4), by which he means 'for the first time historical events appeared as radically particular, as confined in their meaning and value to the actual but singular process in which they occur' (Altizer 1967: 74). Backwards-reference to Primordial

Being had meant events and situations were defined in advance for humanity through the 'givenness' of the present and norms in relation to this Absolute. 'The radical Christian knows that God has truly died in Jesus and that his death,' Altizer thinks, 'liberated humanity from the oppressive presence of primordial Being' (Altizer 1967: 71). However, this 'modern historical consciousness' appears to be an effect, not a cause, of liberation. In Altizer's eyes, though, in this instance cause and effect are the same thing, for, in Ogletree's concise summary of Altizer, 'The incarnate Word completes itself in a human community embodying in its own self-consciousness the same 'consciousness' which was first manifest in Jesus' (Ogletree 1966: 71). Through *kenosis*, the Word moves from the particular (Jesus) to the universal ('modern historical consciousness') to reverse human dependence on backward-looking (to Primordial Oneness) to interpret the particular (the present). Historically, this modern historical consciousness first became apparent, Altizer thinks, with nineteenth century figures such as Nietzsche. The latter's nihilism not only 'foresaw' the 'one clear portal to the twentieth century' (Altizer 1967: 22), but also 'disclosed God to be the very embodiment of an infinitude of man's self-hatred and guilt' (Altizer 1967: 22).

Insofar as a connection is made between the *kenosis* of God realising itself in modern nihilism, Altizer is close to Vattimo. In Vattimo's opinion (Vattimo 1999), his Catholic upbringing drew him to Nietzsche and Heidegger, who made him reflect back on history to the point of realising that nihilism and the end of metaphysics was a product of the message of the *kenosis* of God. That is, the possibility of hermeneutics is founded upon the message of *kenosis*. Differences between Altizer and Vattimo appear when one probes deeper into how the incarnation can take effect in the modern era. For Altizer it is part of the larger *kenotic* process, of Spirit becoming 'incarnate in its opposite' (Altizer 1967: 68), moving forward to its own self redemption, as 'Spirit only becomes realised or historically actualised in self-consciousness while Spirit is in a state of alienation and estrangement from itself' (Altizer 1967: 66). The second *kenosis*, then, of the movement of the Word into the universal consciousness of humanity is caused by the kenotic process of God emptying himself fully into Jesus in the first *kenosis*. For Vattimo this would seem to rely too much upon the

metaphysics of which he wishes to dispose when one recalls that for Vattimo it is the message of *kenosis*, the focus on interpretation, which is liberating and salvific.

Vattimo does not want to prove his hermeneutics, for 'proof' would constitute a return to metaphysics which he wants to avoid; Vattimo is more interested in 'plausibility' and 'persuasiveness' (Vattimo 2002a: 50). Nevertheless, Vattimo wants to make his hermeneutics look the most plausible interpretation of the mind-set of the late-modern. In order to do so, he looks at how historical factors have mixed with the essence of the message of the Gospel in order to effect a gradual weakening of strong structures in the West down to the present day. The weakening essence of Christianity was hindered by the fall of the Roman Empire, Vattimo appealing to Wilhelm Dilthey's view that figures such as Augustine were adopting Greco-Roman modes of thought and societal structures because they were solely responsible for the continuation of civilisation in any form (Vattimo 2002a: 116). Nevertheless, over time these structures were weakened by the essence of the Christian message, the Reformation being a distinctive event. Vattimo draws on the work of Max Weber (1958) and Colin Campbell (1987) to show how modern consumer-capitalist culture was based on the Protestant work ethic (Weber) and a tendency for fantasy left by a faith which had been weakened through the Reformation which found its outlet in consumerism (Campbell) (Vattimo 2002a: 76). Vattimo argues it was the objective world-order made possible by Christian monotheism which leant itself to the scientific-technological rationalism which made the gradual separation of faith and reason possible from the early modern period onwards in which reformed principles took shape (Vattimo 2002a: 75). In short, while Altizer and Vattimo see a *prima facie* circular relationship between modern historical consciousness of the death of God (and a feeling of its liberating effects) and the event of the incarnation, Altizer draws heavily on Hegelian metaphysics as an explanation of this apparent circularity, whereas Vattimo explains the relevance, and increasing presence, of the message of *kenosis* and the weakening of strong structures through a quasi-historical account of the journey of this message from the time of Jesus to the present day as the basis for the possibility of hermeneutics, a point to which we shall return

much later. Altizer talks about the 'Christian and eschatological passage through the actuality of history and experience' (Altizer 1967: 134) which is the 'ever fuller movement of the Word or Spirit into history' (Altizer 1967: 108). The 'Word' comes across as something metaphysical which is ridding itself of its 'givenness' and transcendence by being transformed into a liberating experience in the present for Christians, that there is a real divine process for Altizer which is then mimicked by humans. For Vattimo, there is only a history of messages which have the meaning of *kenosis* for us today because we are living after the death of God; Vattimo only complicates matters when he hints that Christianity gave rise to the death of God, although how much he relies on this argument simply to ground hermeneutics historically in a quasi-pragmatic way is difficult to tell.

On the issue of whether transcendence cannot but be 'violent and oppressive' (Depoortere 2008a: 26), there is indeed superficial similarity between Altizer and Vattimo. The former refers to the 'bondage' of 'a transcendent, a sovereign, and an impassive God' (Altizer 1967: 42). Indeed, redemption for Altizer can be characterised as 'man's release from an alien and distant 'Other' who in sovereign freedom dispenses the fate of men' (Ogletree 1966: 73). The idea of the transcendent, 'alien' other here conjured up by Altizer is of a being removed from the world but who nevertheless decrees for it, setting up rules and commands for humans to follow. There is also the Hegelian element of Altizer's thought which holds that a being is unfulfilled insofar as it remains wholly transcendent. By contrast, Vattimo thinks transcendence is violent because it is the perfect example of metaphysics. Violence is caused by metaphysics because it is an expression of the will to power in order to appropriate the other totally through defining them by pre-existing measurements and categories (Vattimo 1999: 30-32). Vattimo is not worried about transcendence for the reason that it could involve humans being on the receiving end of the arbitrary fiat of a being that has not experienced the world directly, for he thinks that this conception of God is flat-footed.

Depoortere thinks that for both Altizer and Vattimo, the death of God 'is not a metaphor for a change in human experience, but part of the life of the Absolute itself' (Depoortere 2008a: 26). While he is right in his judgement of Altizer, he is wrong in hastily applying it to Vattimo. It has

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already been shown earlier that Vattimo did not want to construe God in terms of an 'Absolute' which has been weakened in ontic terms, that is, in terms of his nature. Rather, Vattimo was concerned with the message, the story of *kenosis* and its working-out in history as the process of secularisation, of weakening strong structures. A possible reason why Depoortere makes this judgement is because he himself is deeply influenced by more 'traditional' theology, as is evident from his book *The Death of God* (2008b) in which he states 'Should it indeed not be argued, in contrast to the often-repeated common opinion, that the metaphysical God and the God of Christian faith have much more in common than is often supposed?' (Depoortere 2008b: 4). Admittedly, sometimes Vattimo speaks as if he was referring to a change in the nature of God, such as, 'Secularisation is the way in which *kenosis*, having begun with the incarnation of Christ…continues to realise itself more and more clearly' (Vattimo 1999: 48). Taken out of context, Vattimo would appear to be making a positive assertion about a state of affairs which 'happened' in the past. However, when one finishes the quotation one can understand what Vattimo is saying differently: '…by furthering the education of mankind concerning the overcoming of originary violence essential to the sacred and to social life itself' (Vattimo 1999: 48). Again, the term 'education' implies that the importance of the incarnation concerns pedagogy, as a message which is passed on, taught, and reinterpreted in accordance with the signs of the times. It is wrong, then, to attribute to Vattimo, as it would not be with Altizer, a belief in the changing nature of God/the Absolute. How Depoortere can interpret Vattimo's conception of history of the dissolution of Being on Heideggerian lines with 'change…[in] the life of the Absolute itself' (Depoortere 2008a: 26) is difficult to imagine, for language of the 'Absolute' pertains far more readily to Hegelian, not Heideggerian, thought, which is therefore more appropriate to the theology of Altizer than the philosophy of Vattimo given the latter's distaste for metaphysics. Moreover, *kenosis* refers to more than a 'metaphor' for Vattimo, for it is this message of weakening, of the revelation of the violence of the natural sacred.

iv. Jesus

'Like Vattimo,' Sciglitano says, 'Altizer is interested in neither Jesus nor in the Jesus of Church tradition, but in the incarnate Word as he will come to be known in the third epoch or Joachim's Age of Spirit' (Sciglitano 2007: 536). This is because for 'Altizer, Hegel, and Vattimo, if God is to be love, then God can no longer be essentially different from the world itself' (Sciglitano 2007: 536). These two points of comparison made by Sciglitano are to be dealt with together, for one follows on from another. At first sight, Sciglitano seems to have misjudged Altizer on the issue of his neglect of the person of Jesus. Altizer goes to great lengths to show the importance of Jesus: 'God *is* Jesus' (Altizer 1967: 68; Altizer's emphasis). However, when one looks at what Altizer means by Jesus it is clear that he is not interested in the man Jesus except insofar as he is representative of an opposite to Absolute Spirit, abstracted from the concrete: 'God *is* Jesus, proclaims the radical Christian, and by this he means that the Incarnation is a total and all-consuming act: as Spirit becomes the Word that empties the Speaker of himself, the whole reality of Spirit becomes incarnate in its opposite' (Altizer 1967: 68). Therefore, Sciglitano is right in saying that Altizer does not have an interest in Jesus, *a fortiori* the Jesus of the dogmas of the Church.

To an extent Sciglitano is right in stating that Vattimo follows Altizer. Vattimo's main interest in the message of the New Testament is its message of *kenosis*. Nevertheless, Vattimo's interest in Jesus does extend slightly more than just to *kenosis*, but also to its ethical corollary, Jesus' message of *caritas*, charity. By *caritas*, though, it is questionable about the extent to which Vattimo's understanding of the concept has anything to do with the one held by Jesus (insofar as it is possible to know what he meant by the term), or the Church's. Vattimo distinguished between *pensiero forte* (strong thought) and *pensiero debole* (weak thought). To recap from the Introduction, the former refers to holding one's beliefs, values and traditions—and therefore, one's culture—as objective and absolute, reducing others' cultures to one's own, causing exclusionary violence to the 'other.' The latter is a way of holding one's views in accordance with the virtue of *caritas*, that is, 'Charity,' or 'Love' (Vattimo 2007d: 41). That which can be weakened through secularisation has no limit except *caritas*,

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the ethical corollary of *kenosis,* which is, to recall, a formal principle in his eyes, akin to Kant's categorical imperative (Depoortere 2008a: 14). Formally, one recognises the situatedness and provisional character of one's own views and tolerates, and learns from, other cultures through one's loving disposition. With nihilism, 'The call is thus not for a society with *no* values but for a society without *supreme and exclusive* values. On this model, cultures are complex conversations among varying conceptions of the world. Such dialogue can, and must not, shift into a dogmatic clash between conflicting truths' (Vattimo and Zabala 2002: 454). *Caritas*, then, is 'an active commitment to diminishing violence in all its forms' (Vattimo 2002a: 51-52) on the recognition of one's own provisionality. Vattimo's understanding of Jesus' message of *caritas* differs greatly from, for instance, the twentieth-century Lutheran's thinker Anders Nygren's view of *caritas* (Nygren 1932), which he sees as a later, Latinising distortion of *agape*, the latter meaning God's love for humans dispensed through his grace, or from the modern Catholic view of the papal encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2006) which sees love coming from God and not only commanding, but uniting, humanity to love Him. Vattimo's divine love is immanent, human in origin, and is devoted to weakening. Similarly, Altizer sees love as immanent, for 'Christian love is an incarnate love, a self-giving to the fullness of the world, an immersion in the actuality of time and the flesh. Therefore, our Yes-saying must give us totally to the moment before us' (Altizer 1967: 156). The immanent, incarnate love mentioned by Altizer is, though, the realisation in human consciousness and experience of the kenotic Word. Once again, there is metaphysics in the background of Altizer's thought whereas there is none apparent in Vattimo's.

Sciglitano goes on to say 'Like Vattimo, Altizer eliminates from Paul's narrative of *kenosis* the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, for such an exaltation would reinstate the 'primordial Creator, an eternal and unchanging Lord.'' (Sciglitano 2007: 536). A criticism of Vattimo and Altizer is that they focus on verses five to eight of Philippians chapter two, leaving out the rest of the Pauline hymn, verses nine to eleven, which emphasise the glory of God's resurrection and exaltation through his resurrection. It is true that they both neglect to deal with this aspect of hymn, preferring to concentrate on the humiliation and emptying of God in

the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Altizer goes so far to state that 'The radical Christian repudiates the Christian dogma of the resurrection of Christ and his ascension into a celestial and transcendent realm because radical faith revolves about a participation in the Christ who is fully and totally present to us' (Altizer 1967: 120). Going further, Altizer even suggests reversing the resurrection and ascension by using the 'symbolic language of Christianity' to 'transpose the traditional vision of the resurrection into a contemporary vision of the descent into Hell' of the crucifixion to express how Christ does not become resurrected after death, but 'descends ever more fully into darkness and flesh' (Altizer 1967: 120). In drawing upon the tradition of the 'harrowing of hell' developed out of 1 Peter, Altizer twists the resources of the Christian tradition away from the hope of resurrection to his own 'radical Christian' conception of the *kenosis* of God in history. Unlike Altizer, Vattimo has far less to say about the resurrection. In his introduction to Vattimo's book *Belief* (1999), Luca D'Isanto states that 'Vattimo follows René Girard's hypothesis that Christ's death and resurrection eliminates the violence of all sacrificial religion through its very unmasking' (D'Isanto 1999: 10). This is not strictly accurate, for Vattimo follows Joachim of Fiore, who saw history as comprised of ages representative of the Trinity (Father: Old Testament times; Son: New Testament times; Spirit: some time during or after the thirteenth century), in making the most out of the 'now-not yet' eschatological tension in the New Testament to the extent that he, like Joachim, does not believe in a closed canon: 'although salvation is essentially 'fulfilled' in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it awaits further fulfilment. Thus the Paraclete…has been assigned the task of assisting them in this further hermeneutical project' (Vattimo 2002a: 59-60). Reading between the lines, 'salvation' for Vattimo has little or nothing to do with traditional Christian beliefs in 'grace' and 'bodily resurrection.' Indeed, he follows Joachim in reading scripture 'spiritually,' eliminating such literalisms (Vattimo 2002a). Sciglitano is therefore right in seeing a similarity between Altizer and Vattimo on this issue of the resurrection and ascension. Nevertheless, whereas Altizer explicitly writes against the resurrection and ascension, not fitting into his largely Hegelian scheme of *kenosis*, Vattimo is not interested in this issue, at most 'twisting'

resurrection into a longer scheme of salvation-as-hermeneutics. Insofar as Sciglitano's comparison of Altizer and Vattimo here is a criticism, it is wide of the mark. Altizer is a self-confessed 'radical' Christian, while Vattimo is primarily a philosopher. Neither are interested in returning to 'traditional' doctrines and beliefs. Indeed, Vattimo thought that the 'return to religion' in the West cannot be an uncritical flight back to tradition this is in large part due to the importance Vattimo places on the Spirit, that we are now living in the Age of Interpretation (or of the 'Spirit,' part of Vattimo's Joachimite Trinitarian schema) (Vattimo 2006a), the topic of the next section.

v.   The Holy Spirit

Sciglitano thinks that, 'The strong pneumatological turn and the Trinitarian progressivism that springs from Joachim serves for Altizer and for Vattimo as a way to give theological movements a kind of contemporary authority over against the biblical canon, Church authorities, tradition, etc.' (Sciglitano 2007: 536). Concerning Joachim, Altizer states that 'The radical Christian…inherits both the ancient prophetic belief that revelation continues in history and the eschatological belief of the tradition following Joachim of Floris' (Altizer 1967: 27), that 'we are now living in the third and final age of the Spirit' (Altizer 1967: 27). *Kenosis* involves the Spirit moving into flesh, transfiguring both (Altizer 1967: 47). Spirit exists for itself (*für sich*) when it exists as its own opposite or other (Altizer 1967: 64). Only when Spirit knows itself in its own otherness will it fulfil its destiny as Spirit, achieving self-redemption (Altizer 1967: 65). Altizer does think that the final Age of the Spirit 'effects a negation and transcendence of the dogma of the Church' (Altizer 1967: 64), for the Spirit liberates us from the memory of transcendence and from the ossifying quality of creeds and formulas, again linking back to the dual sense of *kenosis* in his theology.

Vattimo has a similar understanding of Joachim to Altizer. However, he uses Joachim's ideas differently in his philosophy. Although, like Altizer, he sees Joachim's 'third age' prophecy, 'emphasis[ing] the openness to the future implicit in the dogma of incarnation' (Vattimo 2002a: 28) and that salvation history is still in progress and Trinitarian in character (Vattimo 2002a: 29-32), Vattimo's main interest in Joachim is in his reading of scripture in light of this third age, that is, not literally or analogically, but

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spiritually. Vattimo is taken by Joachim's idea of the 'spiritual intelligence' of Scripture (Vattimo 2002a: 28), of grasping events in the Bible as 'figures' of other historical events. For Vattimo, Joachim's exegetical method, in light of the Age of the Spirit, 'stresses not the letter but the spirit of revelation; no longer servants but friends; no longer awe or faith but charity' (Vattimo 2002a: 31). Joachim's appeal is in the immanence of salvation allowing one to reinterpret Scripture in a spiritual way which sees salvation as an on-going process in progress. Vattimo is not interested in the literalistic aspects of Joachim's prophecies (Vattimo 2002a: 28-39), for events cannot be symbols of another discrete historical event. Vattimo and Altizer both make use of Joachim, particularly the idea of the lack of a closed canon, Altizer construes 'Spirit' in more Hegelian terms, whereas Vattimo ties it in more closely to his hermeneutics.

There are superficial similarities between Altizer and Vattimo. Both thinkers draw upon Nietzsche, particularly his sentiment that we are living in a nihilistic age encapsulated by the phrase the 'death of God.' Vattimo, like Altizer before him, also saw history as a gradual weakening of God, using the idea of *kenosis* to refer to this weakening in conceptual terms. Where the two thinkers differ fundamentally is how this weakening took place. In appealing explicitly to Hegel, Altizer draws upon his idea of spirit in such a way to suggest strongly that he posits that there has been a metaphysical weakening over time, that there was objectively some transcendent thing which has emptied itself into history which has led up to the nihilism of the present. By contrast, Vattimo sees the *message* of *kenosis* as being the cause of the weakening of strong structures in all forms since the time of Christ to the present day. Acknowledging hermeneutical plurality, this understanding of weakening is not even an objective, univocal construal of history, but an interpretation of a received, inescapable tradition from within the situatedness of being a citizen of the West in late-modernity (Vattimo 1999; Vattimo 2002a).

Chapter Seven: Vattimo and Hegel

a) Vattimo, Altizer and Hegel

All that has been said to distinguish Vattimo from Altizer could falter if Vattimo himself is a Hegelian thinker, but does it make him a metaphysician and, therefore, self-contradictory? This is what Sciglitano (2007) argues, and so he thinks, 'if Hegel is his prime influence, then Vattimo's position against metaphysical grounding or ontotheology becomes highly suspect, indeed impossible to maintain' (Sciglitano 2007: 528). While I agree with Sciglitano that if Vattimo is Hegelian in a strong, metaphysical sense, then he would be guilty of inconsistency, but Vattimo—with his notion of *Verwindung*—might well be consistent if he was Hegelian in a 'weakened' sense. Before establishing what the latter means, it is important to see the extent to which Vattimo is Hegelian in the strong sense. Sciglitano mentions that Vattimo names Hegel as an influence (Sciglitano 2007: 537), specifying seven points which mark Vattimo out as a Hegelian in his eyes:

> (1) the Trinity is de-personalized; (2) the divine-world relation is given a modalistic and ultimately monistic reading; (3) Passibility is radical and history becomes constitutive, or stronger, determinative, of divine being; (4) Scriptural revelation is overcome by a 'spiritual sense' reading that envisions a reconciliation between divine being and the being of the world, thus asserting some form of identity; (5) Jesus' historical existence becomes religiously insignificant; (6) Resurrection does not lead to exaltation and end *kenosis*, and does not apply to Jesus as an individual, but rather continues *kenosis* as a general diffusion of divine Being into the secular or as the secular; (7) Divine will, election, missions are excised from theological reflection (Sciglitano 2007: 538).

Expanding on these points, concerning 1-3 the de-personalisation of the Trinity is Vattimo's modalism due to the Joachimite dividing of history into ages (Sciglitano 2007: 538). Concerning the third point, Vattimo's conception of history is not of 'divine being,' but the message of *kenosis*. This history is not of 'strengthening,' but of 'weakening.' Vattimo is not interested in making objective statements about the nature of the divine, but is talking about the nature of belief in different eras. Sciglitano is broadly right on points 5 and 7. For 5, Vattimo is interested in the message of *kenosis*, not whether an actual person named Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead (Sciglitano 2007: 539). As for 7, divine will is a non-issue for Vattimo as he is not interested in a being. Concerning 6, although Sciglitano is right in holding that Vattimo does not regard the resurrection as exalting

the divine being, his analysis is hampered because he talks about 'diffusion of divine Being,' for once again, Vattimo is interested in the message of weakening, not of positing what has or has not happened to beings. I have not dealt with objection '4' yet, and I will come back to this point in due course as Vattimo's faith in the 'spiritual' sense of Scripture provides him with resources to overcome charges of supersessionism.

There are at least two more significant reasons to reject Sciglitano's classification of Vattimo as a Hegelian in a strong sense. Firstly, many of his seven points are derived from categories of classical theology, a term he even uses himself (Sciglitano 2007: 538). Vattimo is not in any shape or form a 'classical theologian.' Indeed, Vattimo rejects what he sees as the dogmatism of classical theology. It is ironic and inappropriate to use these categories for assessing and categorising Vattimian thought, even if it is to compare him with another thinker. Superficial similarities of Vattimo's thought to theological categories such as 'modalism' disappear when one considers that Vattimo is not trying to create a univocal, objective theology or philosophy of history. One of Vattimo's premises in his own hermeneutics is interpretative plurality, extended even to history after events such as the two world wars and the end of colonialism shattered the West's belief in a monolithic, univocal world history (Vattimo 1992: 4). Vattimo goes to great pains to show how personal his interpretation of both religion and history is to him (Vattimo 1999). The last thing he would intend to do is to smash idols of theology only to erect new ones in their place. He is keen on citing Nietzsche's aphorism that 'new gods' will replace the old (Vattimo 2002a: 16), but the term 'gods' is in the plural; we are living, Vattimo never tires of repeating, in a world of infinite plurality (Vattimo 2002a: 15). Where Vattimo thinks his particular interpretation of the current state of the world has its force is twofold, one because he thinks it matches a common experience of the West: plurality, a lack of interpretative centre, and the collapse of old, absolute values, as well as, secondly, an anchor in the tradition of the West—Christian tradition—even if it is twisted almost to the point of breaking; unlike many postmodern philosophers, Vattimo insists on the importance of history (Pireddu 2002: 302). Vattimo's emphasis on the 'three ages' appears to be an example of a univocal philosophy of history *a la* Hegel. However, at most, and here is the second reason to reject

Sciglitano's classification of Vattimo, it is a 'twisting' Christianity, Hegel and even, perhaps, of Heidegger. Therefore, in Vattimo's return to religion we see a twisted version of '*kenosis,*' an ontological version of Hegel's 'spirit of the age,' and an atypical reading of Heidegger (respectively). Scratch the surface and one finds a lack of 'monism' because there is no 'objective,' 'metaphysical' being (with a small 'b') which empties itself in Vattimo's theology, unlike both Altizer and Hegel, and no univocal history, only an anchoring in tradition to make sense of how one interprets the present, and I will be going on to address the teleological dimension of Hegelian thought below.

Although he underestimates the similarity of Altizer's theology to his own thought, Vattimo's conception of the importance of *kenosis* may differ from Altizer's in at least one other significant respect, one which Vattimo does realise. Mentioning a number of theologians, including Altizer, he goes on to say 'they could never have done this work without Luther or Nietzsche' (Vattimo 2007c: 92). More than this, Vattimo states that 'my use of the death of God depends very much on the history of Being as connected to the problem of ontotheology…my notion of weak thought can actually help the death of God theologies better understand their origins in Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophy' (Vattimo 2007c: 92). In other words, it is Vattimo's wedding of the idea of *kenosis* to postmodern hermeneutics and the death of metaphysics which constitutes his novelty. To what extent is Vattimo right in his estimation? Altizer has certainly acknowledged Nietzsche's influence concerning the idea of the death of God in his early books, as a thinking whose nihilism has helped shape the modern historical consciousness, the explanation for which ultimately being the second *kenosis* to which Altizer referred. As for Heidegger's influence on Altizer, Ward mentions in an introductory section to Altizer's essay in a volume which he was editing, 'Heidegger is mentioned briefly' by Altizer, but not dealt with at length (Altizer 2005: 428). However, his essay entitled 'The Self-Saving of God,' which appeared in the *Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* under the 'Heideggerian' heading, constitutes arguably Altizer's first concerted engagement with Heidegger's thought. Nevertheless, while Altizer writes Vattimo-esque sentences such as 'Heidegger can know that the realization that 'God is dead' is not atheism

but rather 'ontotheology,' and an ontotheology in which both metaphysics and nihilism are fulfilled' (Altizer 2005: 434), Altizer reads Heidegger through Hegel. The continuing influence of Hegel is clear when he talks about the 'event' (to draw on Heidegger's terminology) of the self-saving of God through the transcendence of God becoming completely actualised in its immanence (Altizer 2005: 441). Altizer is not dealing with hermeneutics when considering the death of God, even after bringing Heidegger into the equation, whereas Vattimo is.

b) A weakened Hegelianism and the spectre of unilinear history

It could be argued that Vattimo is Hegelian in a different sense. In an earlier piece of work I had argued for Vattimo not being Hegelian at all (Harris 2011), but I have revised this view. Vattimo is more in debt to Hegel than Kant, and he follows Rorty in believing all modern philosophy is dependent on one of these two authors for its basic structure, as Vattimo says in his essay 'Philosophy, Metaphysics, Democracy' (Vattimo 1997b: 7). The contrast Vattimo, following Rorty, is trying to bring out is between a philosophy that is ahistorical (Kant) and one that is historical (Hegel). Nevertheless, unlike Hegel he does not believe in an Absolute Spirit entering into history, nor does he believe in dialectical overcoming. Therefore, we are left with what I, to use a phrase of Giovanni Giorgio's, would call a 'weakened Hegelianism' (Giorgio 2009: xvi). Vattimo and Paterlini use the term 'watered-down' Hegelians (Vattimo and Paterlini 2009: 157). There is dialectical re-appropriation of past traces in Vattimo's philosophy, as well as a reading of the 'spirit of the age' in Vattimo's notion of the 'ontology of actuality.'

How does Vattimo's weakened Hegelianism relate to his return to religion? Here one can bring to bear Thomas Guarino's observations concerning Vattimo's use of Hegel. Guarino says Vattimo 'distinguishes himself from the worst excesses of Hegel' (Guarino 2009: 176 n. 205), although Guarino notes that 'the frequently stated Vattimian position [is] that kenotic Christianity *gives rise* to weak thought' (Guarino 2009: 176 n. 205). In talking about the 'Age of the Spirit,' and Joachim, Guarino sees Vattimo drifting close to Hegel (Guarino 2009: 130-131). Indeed, in Sciglitano's nine-point Hegelian profile, Vattimo is 'guilty' of number four:

'Scriptural revelation is overcome by a 'spiritual sense' reading that envisions a reconciliation between divine being and the being of the world, thus asserting some form of identity' (Sciglitano 2007: 538). In distinguishing between a 'material' and a 'formal' continuity with texts, Vattimo is interested in the latter, not the former, as formal continuity means community of interpreters engaged with a text in a tradition, not the content of the tradition (Guarino 2009: 139). According to this distinction, there is no 'thing' being incarnated in history, manifesting itself in the 'Age of the Spirit.' Instead, 'a formal community of interpreters who, reflecting on the same text (the Bible), constantly offer new and productive understandings guided entirely by the living experience of the community' (Guarino 2009: 139). The 'ontology of actuality' is what helps the community interpret the text according to the 'spirit of the age.' Vattimo's ingenious suggestion is that the current spirit of the age has the biblical message of friendship at its root: the plurality of interpretations that have given rise to hermeneutics as the *koine* of late-modernity (and therefore of the requirement to recognise one's own contingency) has come from the message of friendliness through interiority that arose from the Bible. Rorty made this comparison between Vattimo and Hegel: 'Hegel too saw human history as constituting the Incarnation of the Spirit, and its slaughter-bench as the cross. But Hegel was unwilling to put aside truth in favour of love' (Rorty 2006: 35). Is love, though, merely 'consensus' based on recognising the secularising drift of western thought towards nihilism, that is, as *Dasein* becoming aware of itself as *Dasein*, and therefore respecting and listening to the other in this capacity? If so, 'love' is nothing more than being aware of the 'signs of the times,' or, in Hegelian language, the 'spirit of the age' (Vattimo 2004: 87-88), or in Foucault's language, 'the ontology of actuality.' Vattimo has even gone so far to state that the immediacy of reporting of events through information technology is the realisation of Hegel's 'absolute spirit' (Vattimo 1988: 51; Vattimo 1992: 6).

Vattimo's debt to Hegel extends beyond the notion of the 'spirit of the Age' to his position that history has a direction in that it is oriented to weakening. As Zabala said in his introduction to *Weakening Philosophy*, 'When Vattimo now affirms that 'emancipation' is 'weakening' and that weakening is nothing else than transferring everything to the realm of

symbolism and simulacrum, he intends that 'emancipation' as a Hegelian spiritualization without the absolute Spirit' (Zabala 2007: 9). One can see why Vattimo has admitted being Hegelian in method, although not in system, because of the idea of the gradual manifestation of an idea, in his case of friendship as weakening. Vattimo says the main difference between him and Hegel's system is that he, unlike Hegel, does not believe in any kind of final consummation, for the death of God is, for Vattimo, an indefinitely ongoing process because meaning will never be completed so long as there are new generations of living, breathing interpreters with their own contingent thrownness (Vattimo 2000: 32). For all Vattimo does not believe that the death of God has a culminating point or an end, he does believe that 'God is love,' 'From a Hegelian viewpoint, we may take this horizon to be that absolute spirit which never allows itself to be entirely set aside but becomes the final horizon of history that legitimates all our nearer-term choices' (Vattimo 2011: 140). This apparent contradiction can be explained, although not defended, with reference to Vattimo's views on Heidegger. Vattimo wants to hold that, from our position within history, Being has a nihilistic vocation for weakening, the story of which is a transcription of the Christian belief in *kenosis*, of God's friendship with us, which yielded an ethic of charity (our friendship with others) which constitutes the limit of weakening today (as it is itself a recognition of one's hermeneutic contingency). Nevertheless, Vattimo also wishes to make an identification between Being and language, and secondly, as well as holding that modernity has ended (thus precluding anything 'new' in the foundational sense). Both in disavowing the possibility of new foundationalism in terms of metaphysics, as well as abjuring the notion that Being could dwell beyond language (including metaphysics), Vattimo sees himself as justified (in the weak sense) in regarding *caritas* as the final horizon that 'legitimates all our nearer-term choices.' What else could legitimate our 'longer-term' choices Vattimo does not explain, and it is far from clear what the difference 'long' and 'near' make to decision-making in his eyes. What is clear is that Vattimo has made a number of questionable assumptions with his watered-down Hegelianism, not least of which is his interpretation of Christianity. Vattimo's watered-down Hegelianism is important because it enables his particular interpretation of modernity to

justify the quasi-ethical notion of *caritas* he thinks is the limit of interpretation today. Moreover, it is at the heart of what might be his 'supersessionist' attitude towards the New Testament and Old Testament, a notion I will look in the next chapter.

c) Which Christian tradition?

Vattimo's watered-down Hegelianism depends on being able to identify 'God is love' as the kerygma of the Bible, especially if one can link it to the principle of interiority as a hidden strand within Christianity's history which manifests itself slowly, almost imperceptibly through time. It is true that one can find a proto-Cogito in Augustine's thought. In Book XI 26 of his *City of God*, he states that if he is mistaken, he is. If this contribution from Augustine is too philosophical, in the Middle Ages Thomas a Kempis' book *The Imitation of Christ* puts significant emphasis on the interior life and withdrawal from the world. *The Imitation of Christ* is but a particularly popular example of a mystical tradition that runs through Christianity. Vattimo is not particularly interested in the truth or value of the claims of these mystics, but the implications for metaphysics of the turn inward of the Christian message exemplified in this tradition; it is clear from Vattimo's work that he has little time for any kind of 'leap of faith' or any attempt to make God overly transcendent. The mystical tradition must, though, take its inspiration from somewhere. What is more fundamental in the Christian message is the biblical notion of the kingdom of heaven being within you (Luke 17:21). One may argue that there are parallel traditions running through the history of Christianity. Just as the mystics, with their emphasis on the interior life, have the ecclesiastical hierarchy for contrast, so the message of the kingdom of heaven within one has its external equivalents of importance in the biblical stories of the renewal of the earth, the bodily resurrection, and the importance of spreading the Word of God through the Church. In other words, there is no single Christian tradition (D'Arcais 2007), no single Christian message, no reducible 'essence' of Christianity of which secularisation in late-modernity is a realisation. Vattimo is against strong thought that closes down debate and fails to admit interpretative plurality. In his estimation of Christianity, Vattimo surely cannot be insisting that there was a single narrative that has progressively realised

itself in history. Instead, his choice of Dilthey's schematic distinction between pre and post Christian metaphysics is informed by his philosophy of weak thought. Vattimo's decision to see the essence of Christianity as secularisation, and secularisation as the realisation of the Christian tendency towards moving towards the interior life, is indicative of a broader issue of the relationship between philosophy and theology in his thought, something that shall be discussed in Part 2.

Chapter Eight: Vattimo and Judaism—the danger of supersessionism[17]

a) Supersessionism

While Vattimo's weakened Hegelianism might suffer from some questionable assumptions, it also gives rise to the unwelcome interpretation, of Anthony Sciglitano's, that Christianity has superseded Judaism because the 'spirit of the Age' today is the 'Age of the Spirit,' the result of the biblical messages of *kenosis* and *caritas*. Apart from the implication of anti-Semitism, there are philosophical reasons why supersessionism would be unwelcome. Firstly, it implies objective criteria why one message is better than another, and secondly the spectre of Joachim of Fiore looms large over the historical schema Vattimo offers, indicating a unilinear history of progress from Old Testament, to New Testament to the Age of Interpretation. Although Vattimo would respond that the former problem could be got around by holding that criteria for 'better' or 'worse' interpretations do not have to be objective and could simply be responses to reading the 'signs of the times,' he finds it more difficult to answer the second objection because he seems to wish to hold somehow that the message of weakening (the kenotic event) somehow gave rise to a hermeneutical chain of interpretation which has resulted in the current situation of nihilism.

Where Vattimo writes 'biblical,' he is primarily referring to a New Testament message, emphasising the *kenosis* of God in his revelation as the Son (not the Father of the Old Testament God) and the message of *caritas* giving rise to the Age of the Spirit (the secularisation of Christianity into the plurality of interpretations with an orientation towards friendship). Sciglitano initially put forward this criticism of Vattimo in an article for

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[17] This chapter borrows from my article on this topic (Harris 2014a).

Modern Theology entitled 'Contesting the World and the Divine: Balthasar's Trinitarian 'Response' to Gianni Vattimo's Secular Christianity.' One of his points was that Vattimo's interpretation of Christianity was 'a form of Marcionism' (Sciglitano 2007: 546). Marcion of Pontus was an early Christian leader in Rome, commanding a large following in the middle of the second century CE. Taking Scripture literally, Marcion thought the God of the Old Testament created the physical world, had a covenant with the descendants of Abraham, and pointed forward to a saviour figure, the Messiah. However, as Stuart G. Hall explains:

> for Marcion such a God cannot be the God and Father of Jesus Christ, who is absolutely good. Jesus says that a good tree cannot produce evil fruit (Luke 6:43-44), and that people are not to judge, but to be merciful as their father is merciful (Luke 6:36). The behaviour of the Creator is incompatible with these principles (Hall 1991: 37).

According to Marcion, not the Creator of the Old Testament, but the Unknown God, sent Christ out of pity for a creation that was not his own in an extraordinary act of love. In Irenaeus' summary of Marcion's theology, the latter thought the Creator is 'the author of evils, a lover of war, inconsistent in judgement, and contrary to himself' (Stevenson 1987: 92). The notion of the Creator being an 'author of evils' is a subjective judgement and somewhat ambiguous. However, when it comes to the Creator proscribing murder in the Decalogue, then wiping out Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the apparent lack of consistency over his commands to Abraham, then Marcion's system has, Hall says, 'strong pathetic appeal' to allow one to resolve 'the undoubted moral, literary and historical difficulties of the Old Testament' (Hall 1991: 38). Vattimo might find Marcion's exegesis flat-footed in its literal approach to Scripture, as, for Vattimo, 'The language of God as father is so obviously an allegorical language' (Vattimo 2007d: 42). Marcion's literalism would not have the same appeal for Vattimo as Joachim's spiritual interpretation of Scripture, regardless of how well or badly Vattimo understands his thought. Moreover, Marcion's exegesis does not sit well with Vattimo's program of emancipation through weakening of strong structures, as salvation for Marcion involved escaping our embodied existence through a quasi-Platonic notion of redemption through correct knowledge of Marcion's system (Stevenson 1987: 96). The whole idea of a literal God beyond God (and a world beyond a world)

would not appeal to Vattimo given the frequent use he makes of Nietzsche's story from *Twilight of the Idols* of 'How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth.' Therefore, any possible supersessionism in Vattimo's thought would be nearer to a particular reading of Joachim of Fiore than to the theology of Marcion. However, Sciglitano's criticism of Vattimo appears to take this into account.

Sciglitano's criticism of Vattimo as a Marcionite was a brief aside in his 2007 article, the main focus of which was showing how Vattimo was effectively a death of God theologian. However, this criticism is of central importance in his more recent chapter on Vattimo in a volume edited by Peter Frick, *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers* (Sciglitano 2013). Sciglitano links Vattimo's acceptance of Joachim's historical schema with Marcionism. *After Christianity* is the principal text of Vattimo's that Sciglitano identifies as having supersessionist undertones, in which through a 'metanarrative formula' Vattimo moves 'from an externalist metaphysical law-giving God to the revelation of God as Love in the form of a particular person…to the diffusion of Spirit in the community' (Sciglitano 2013: 131). 'In other words,' writes Sciglitano, 'Vattimo's reading of salvation history not only marginalizes the sacramental structures of Christian life and practice, but also juxtaposes the Pauline kenotic God to the Jewish transcendent God in ways that suggest anti-Judaism and Marcionism' (Sciglitano 2013: 133). It is easy to identify God the Father with the Jewish God of the covenant, the Son with the New Testament and rise of the Church, and the Spirit with the Spirit of the Age (the ontology of actuality). This is very important as Vattimo is meant to be putting forward an ethic of tolerance in the form of '*caritas*,' generated out of a history of Being in which the latter has been reduced to 'exchange-value'; if the 'highest values' have been devalued, how can one tradition be 'better' than another? If Vattimo argues that Christianity is more in line with the 'signs of the times' in terms of its methods of exegesis (spiritual, rather than literal), this argument has the appearance of rigging the game to make one tradition look better and another worse. Moreover, given his very public comments against Israel in recent years and accusations of anti-Semitism (Ashkenazy 2014), there is the lingering suspicion that Vattimo has constructed a philosophy of religion to buttress his own prejudices. I have no concrete evidence that

Vattimo was trying to do this, and so I want to be charitable to him. Moreover, having been rebuked by John D. Caputo in 2007 for adopting Joachimism in a way that Caputo regarded as supersessionist (Caputo 2007: 79), Sciglitano believes Vattimo has consciously toned-down his use of Joachim (Sciglitano 2013: 132), something I will look at in Part Two. What Sciglitano does not consider is whether this downplaying is due to philosophical persuasion or prudence. If it were for philosophical reasons it might be because Vattimo has thought twice about how his weakened Hegelianism might be perceived as constructing a new metanarrative, which would be inconsistent with postmodernism.

Sciglitano thinks Vattimo's supersessionism is deeply embedded into his return to religion, even features of his theory which do not seem such. For instance, Vattimo mentions on more than one occasion that '*kenosis*' includes creation (Vattimo 1999: 66; Vattimo 2003: 35), an act primarily associated with the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Sciglitano has got an answer for this, that even the creative act is subsumed by a category (*kenosis*) that is bound to the New Testament dispensation, thus showing how redemption and *kenosis* have surpassed the Old Testament revelation (Sciglitano 2013: 137). Where Vattimo has run together 'Judaeo-Christian' (or anything of this kind), such as in *After Christianity* (Vattimo 2002a: 7), Sciglitano also sees this continuity as implying supersession as 'Christian' comes after 'Jewish' (Sciglitano 2013: 135 n.2). Therefore, in order to show that Vattimo is not supersessionist in any kind of anti-Semitic or metanarrative-based way (which would be repugnant or self-contradictory, respectively), it is necessary to delve further into Vattimo's theoretical framework, specifically his use of Thomas Kuhn's paradigm concept to argue that different ways of thinking, past and present, are 'incommensurable.' In the following part this notion of 'incommensurability' will be linked to developments in Vattimo's return to religion and a discussion of the extent to which Vattimo's reliance on Kuhn accords well with his Heideggerianism.

b) Vattimo on the past in relation to the present

Sciglitano's contention is that Vattimo juxtaposed not two gods, as Marcion did, but 'stages of 'revelation'' (Sciglitano 2013: 137). This remained a

'genuine temptation for Vattimo' up to and possibly including his 2009 book, *A Farewell to Truth*. Although Sciglitano does not explore the implications of Vattimo giving up his Marcionite interpretation of Joachim (if he did), it would raise questions about continuity (ontological or otherwise) and the uniqueness of the Christ-event. Nevertheless, as Luca Bagetto notes in his essay 'Deciding to Bear Witness,' for Vattimo, 'The coming-before and the coming-after describe a procedure that is not peacefully continuous. They imply tension, a comparison of testimonies, the confrontation between an Old and a New Testament' (Bagetto 2010: 191). In Vattimo's thought, this tension is expressed through the notion of *Verwindung*. The traces of a previous eventual disclosure are received, yet show themselves in a different way, in light of a new opening. By using Heidegger's language of resignation-convalescence-alteration, Vattimo gives the impression that thought from a previous eventual disclosure is worse than the Being that is produced in the present. In truth, Vattimo admits he, like Heidegger, has an ambivalent relationship with traces from the past. For instance, it would be wrong, Vattimo states, to regard the history of metaphysics as if it was a series of foolish or pernicious errors, let alone 'evil' in the apocalyptic sense in which Sciglitano would have him bracketed (Sciglitano 2013: 140). Rather, whereas in the past metaphysics acted as a way to make sense of a world in which change and diversity were regarded as confusing and threatening, from the situation in which we have been thrown we not only need, but also have to weaken metaphysics insofar as foundational first principles are extravagant, unnecessary, and restrictive upon the irreducible hermeneutical plurality of voices that constitute the ontology of actuality.

To understand Vattimo's notion of the event and its implications for the accusations of Marcionism levelled at his interpretation of Christianity better, it is important to look at some of Vattimo's more recent work. Vattimo's notion of the event has been criticised as empty and formalistic by Van Harvey (Vattimo and Girard 2010: 73). In his tiny pamphlet on Heidegger and in his Gifford Lectures, Vattimo responds to this criticism by elaborating on the event to make it more specific, in no small part by drawing on the work of the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn. A philosopher of science, Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

(Kuhn 1996), first published in 1962, stated that advancement in science was not linear. Instead, progress can only be made within 'paradigms.' A paradigm refers to the model of science which is normative in a field (such as chemistry or physics) at any one time (usually based on a classic text, such as Newtonian Physics based on his *Principia*) held by a community of scientists who work according to the principles and assumptions of the model, which is called 'normal science.' After a long period of time, normal science will start to problematise the paradigm because anomalies will appear during the course of experimentation which cannot be explained in accordance with the rules of the paradigm. When these anomalies reach critical mass, a 'scientific revolution' (or 'paradigm-shift') will occur, and a new paradigm will be instituted. The new paradigm is not 'better' than the previous one, but explains the world in a different way to take the anomalies into account. This led Kuhn to describe paradigms as 'incommensurable,' which sounded to many ears as relativistic, a label he tried to reject subsequent to the publishing of the initial text. While Sciglitano is correct in identifying that Vattimo, following Heidegger, prioritises truth as opening to truth as correspondence, there is good reason for believing that Vattimo does not subscribe to any form of supersessionism. This is because increasingly Vattimo has drawn his understanding of Being as eventuality (or 'opening') towards Kuhn's paradigm concept, and he is not the only Heidegger scholar to make this connection. Bret D. Davis has likened openings to Kuhn's paradigm shifts, for instance (Davis 2010: 5).

Vattimo has drawn his understanding of Being as eventuality (or 'opening') towards Kuhn's paradigm concept. It is fair to say that Vattimo has had an interest in Kuhn's work for a long time, citing *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as an indication that hermeneutics has penetrated even the realms of science as far back as the mid-1980s (Vattimo 1988: 90-91). In *The End of Modernity*, in a chapter called 'The Structure of Artistic Revolutions,' Vattimo sees art as having a privileged place outside of the western metaphysical concern for 'truth' and 'validity.' While there may be some concern for these notions within 'models and canons,' the transformation of these models and canons in artistic revolutions changes the criteria in a way which is more radical than in metaphysics where the importance of 'certainty' and 'presence' endure despite revolutions

(Vattimo 1988: 90). On Vattimo's view, new paradigms emerge through 'persuasion,' which can be linked to his notion of the rhetorical nature of truth (Vattimo 1988a: 92). However, Vattimo then in a discussion of Kant in relation to Kuhn picks up on the idea that the 'particular historicity…of the genius,' such as Newton, whose work is epoch-making and this is to be found not only in the sciences, but also in the arts (Vattimo 1988a: 94-95). This idea of Vattimo's lay dormant but in more recent years he has developed it further in relation to the idea of the event in Heidegger's work.

After downplaying the link between Heidegger and Kuhn's thought for a number of years, the latter's influence upon Vattimo has come to the fore in recent times. It is difficult to tell how far Vattimo is using Kuhn's terminology to clarify certain aspects of the notion of the event for a more general audience less acquainted with Heidegger's works, or whether the connections he has been making between the two authors is indicative of Vattimo's 'left Heideggerian' focus on history. In his short pamphlet on Heidegger, Vattimo likens the epochal nature of Being in its history to the paradigms of Kuhn: '*Allora per Heidegger, se l'Essere non è Oggetività, ma ciò che si dà entro schemi storico-culturali, che lui chiama epoche (o paradigm, per dirla con Kuhn), la Storia di questi paradigm è ciò che lui chiama la Storia dell'Essere*' (Vattimo 2013: 33). Three years earlier, in his Gifford Lectures given in Glasgow and included in his 2012 work *Della realtà*, Vattimo elaborated on how the Kuhnian paradigm concept can act as a model to understand not only the founding of a historical, contingent, epochal ground, but also the relationship between truth as opening and truth as correspondence. Vattimo writes: '*Verità come alétheia è il darsi storico del paradigm, che, non essendo struttura eterna di un Essere metafisico e parmenideo, va pensato come evento. Ma verità è anche la proposizione verificata secondo i criteri propri del paradigm, dunque la scienza normale nel senso di Kuhn*' (Vattimo 2012b: 125). In other words, the opening is the revolution, the paradigm-shift, whereas the subsequent work completed within the historical opening is the normal science, the truth as correspondence that works itself out along routine lines in accordance with the norms and regulations founded by the horizons constituted by the truth as opening. This is not some whim of Vattimo's, for elsewhere in his work

he identifies the horizon of possibility into which *Dasein* is thrown as a 'paradigm' (Vattimo 2011: xxxii).

From where does the historical opening as paradigm-shift come about? Clearly here there is a significant link between Vattimo's work and Gadamer's, for the latter thought we are always bound within a linguistic horizon, more than one in fact (Gadamer 1989: 302). Vattimo locates the origin of paradigms (or epochal openings, events) with era-defining texts. For Kuhn these were texts in the history of science such as Newton's *Principia* (Kuhn 1996: 10), a 'concrete scientific achievement' around which people would build a living tradition (Kuhn 1996: 11). It is doubtful that Kuhn would have been comfortable completely reducing paradigms to classic texts, as he thought that paradigms emerge out of anomalies in older theories accumulating to the point of the collapse of the old theory (previous paradigm) (Kuhn 1996: 89). Nevertheless, Vattimo steers Kuhn closer to identifying the paradigm with the text. For Vattimo, classic texts are milestones in culture that, surprisingly, Vattimo identifies along national lines (at least in the examples he provides). In his pamphlet on Heidegger, Vattimo writes '*Shakespeare per gli inglesi, Dante per gli italiani, Cervantes per gli spagnoli. Queste persone hanno modificato la lingua e hanno trasformato il nostro modo di vedere il mondo*' (Vattimo 2013: 43). Nevertheless, he also writes *'Personalmente, dopo aver letto Dostoevskij non sono più lo stesso. E questo è l'inizio di un'epoca: ciò accade anche per popoli e lingue'* (Vattimo 2013: 43). Here Vattimo implies that although individual writers such as Shakespeare, Cervantes and Dante have made indelible, paradigmatic, era-defining impressions beyond the levels of the national character and culture, that is, ontologically, eventuality occurs at the level of the greatness of language from any situation, even nineteenth-century Russia, to effect a personal transformation. A comparison can be made between Vattimo and Heidegger here, for the importance the former places on classical works of European literature finds a parallel with the emphasis the latter gave to 'great art' in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (Heidegger 1993:105). For Heidegger, 'the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge' (Heidegger 1993: 105). The essence of art is the truth of beings

setting itself into work, and the historical happening of art opens up the Being of beings, between earth and world. The work comes into the world, sheltering the earth and through the work historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. The earth unfolds itself in inexhaustible shapes, letting earth jut through the world. The truth occurs in the simultaneous clearing and concealing, the opposition of world and earth. Great works of art, such as Van Gogh's 'A Pair of Shoes' (1886), lead to a sense of realisation of the equipmentality of shoes and the whole form of life (or world) pertaining to them, beyond the level of merely treating the shoes as an object held over and against the subject. In other words, the work of art has a poetic mode of revealing. This is similar to the ontological founding role given to classic texts by Vattimo, although the latter is much more centred on the founding role of the text—of the written (or spoken) word as an art form—than Heidegger. While the latter of course gave importance to the role of classic texts, especially those of Hölderlin, Vattimo tends only to speak of classic texts and not paintings or other forms of visual art. This could be because of a combination of Gadamer's influence on Vattimo and his own nihilism, and so could only find Being in language whilst seeing the interpretation as something linguistic which alone had being, rather than as an articulation of something (which could be visual). To allow there to be a something which one could articulate would leave the door open for something beyond hermeneutical nihilism, some kind of radical Other or substratum.

The crucial benefit of drawing upon Kuhn's paradigm concept when it comes to dealing with Sciglitano's accusation of Marcionism is that paradigms are incommensurable and equal in value. Famously, Kuhn stated that 'Copernicus' theory was not more accurate than Ptolemy's and did not lead directly to any improvement in the calendar' (Kuhn 1996: 154). On this view, if epochs are paradigmatic then one eventual disclosure is no better than another: they are merely different. Sciglitano himself regards the *kenosis* of God as one such 'event' in the history of the withdrawal of Being for Vattimo (Sciglitano 2013: 119). If *kenosis* is one event, and the Old Testament revelation is another, and if the 'Age of Interpretation' is another such event, then on this Kuhnian reading of epochality they are neither better, nor worse than one another. Therefore, not only is Vattimo not

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Marcionite with respect to believing in two separate gods (as Sciglitano admits), but also he is not Marcionite in viewing revelation in a supersessionist way (as Sciglitano maintains in both his articles on Vattimo).

Where Vattimo runs into difficulties is in reconciling his paradigmatic conception of the event, a conception of disclosure that emphasises rupture, and the Hegelian thematic of secularisation/weakening of which Jesus' message is the inaugurating event. It is almost as though Vattimo requires there to be a master event that nudges every other in the direction of weakening. The mixture of Hegel, Heidegger and Kuhn is an uncomfortable one. Nevertheless, without some kind of master event or golden thread that runs through these epochal paradigms, there would only be left some kind of empty relativism in which 'anything goes.' On the one hand Vattimo thinks absolutist claims leave us cold as strong thought is neither plausible, nor required. On the other hand, there is nothing preventing minority groups retreating into their own identities, shunning dialogue amid competing truth claims. Between these approaches to truth and Being in late-modernity, Vattimo realises he cannot have recourse to a vertically transcendent, 'violent,' principle (although some critics of Vattimo, such as Jonkers, have questioned whether all transcendence has to be violent; Jonkers 2000: 389). Equally redundant would be to impose some once-for-all 'theory of communicative action' or other Habermasian system that is too rigid and unfounded in what Vattimo sees as a necessity to engage with history. Here Vattimo is ingenious in appealing to how he experiences the Bible in his more recent writings on religion which will be the subject of the first sections of Part Two.

a) A summary of these later works

As Vattimo does not divide up his works himself into neat stages, it seems difficult and rather arbitrary to notice a shift in Vattimo's thought during his 'return' to religion at any one specific point. Nevertheless, after *After Christianity*, the term *kenosis* recedes from view, with *caritas* being reconfigured as 'friendship' in relation to other ideas such as '*Logos*,' 'consensus' and 'dialogue.' From *The Future of Religion* in particular Vattimo's position seems to change, and the most interesting material comes from a dialogue between Vattimo, Zabala and Rorty on 16 December 2002. By discerning a separate way of arguing for the priority of the Bible for the West which downplays the Joachimist schema of his earlier work on religion, Vattimo is able to reconcile Christianity with Heidegger, Hegel and Kuhn, albeit not without difficulty.

This part will begin by showing how Vattimo has changed from putting forward the view that *kenosis* was an event to the notion that the Bible was an epochal paradigm, creating an opening upon which we are dependent. I will then discuss where this leaves Vattimo in terms of how faithful he is to Heidegger, with reference not only to his Hölderlin lectures, but also to his work *Contributions to Philosophy*. I will argue that Vattimo's reading of Heidegger is particular to the point of being subjective, and that recourse to the hermeneutic circle will not do enough to persuade others that his observations concerning late-modernity are a fair reading of the 'signs of the times.' Along with his partial reading of Heidegger and understanding of religion which would not be recognisable to most religious people due to its complete lack of vertical transcendence, the ethic Vattimo derives from his return to religion—*caritas*—also suffers from being applicable among fellow weak thinkers.

b) Classic texts

In an essay entitled 'Toward a Nonreligious Christianity' in his collaborative work *After the Death of God*, Vattimo argues that he is who he is due to inheriting a textual tradition: 'Take away the Bible and I would not

be what I am' (Vattimo 2007a: 36). Without the Bible he could not understand Dante or Shakespeare, even if he could read the Bible without needing to read these two authors. 'If I reflect on my existence,' Vattimo states, 'I must realise that without the text of the Bible I would be bereft of the very instruments I have in order to think and talk' (Vattimo 2007a: 36; see also Vattimo 2004: 53). Vattimo jumps from his own personal existence to Europe, invoking his favourite quotation of Croce's, 'We cannot but call ourselves Christians,' a quotation Vattimo uses in Chapter Five of *After Christianity* in the context of talking about Europe/The West/Modernity. Is Vattimo, therefore, merely extrapolating from his own personal existence and generalising his reflections upon the importance of the Bible in his life to apply to everybody else in Europe? More than this, is he extending the importance of his reflections beyond geographical bounds, making his personal reflections epoch-defining insofar as he identifies an epoch ('modernity') with a place (Europe/The West), even if, as he does, Vattimo makes Europe conceptual (the place of the development of techno-scientific rationality and mass communication)? To a degree, yes, and the theme of 'philosophy as autobiography' is one to which I shall return later in this part. Provisionally, in defence of Vattimo he may well be taking the approach of Heidegger's in *Being and Time* in which in order to investigate Being one must interrogate *Dasein*. By interrogating himself, he is exploring his thrownness and the ontological structure which discloses the world to him. As such, he sees the religious history of the West (particularly Christianity) as being of central importance for this disclosure.

To appreciate Vattimo's point here one should consider his philosophy at a deeper level through drawing upon Gadamer's view that the nature of Being is linguistic. Vattimo talks about the 'text' of the Bible which has permeated and shaped his existence. This language, written in the Bible and spoken in the conversations of his childhood, constitutes, on his understanding of Being as mediated through his reading of Heidegger and Gadamer, the horizon in which he is living just as much as the Homeric poems have done (Vattimo 2004: 53). Increasingly, Vattimo is emphasising the importance of the Bible as a trace, as a tradition without which he would not be able to exist, so much have the themes of the Bible shaped his life. How should one relate to this tradition: to appropriate it by reconstructing

its origins or to 'piously remember' it? The former action would be to return to presencing, to metaphysical thought. It is the latter option that Vattimo, following Heidegger, regards as the type of thought opposed to metaphysics that one should pursue: through *Andenken* ('recollective thought'), by 'retracing the history of metaphysics as the forgetting of Being that *Dasein* decides for its own death and in this way founds itself as a hermeneutic totality whose foundation consists of a lack of foundation' (Vattimo 1988a: 119). Through *Andenken*, one finds liberation by 'entrusting' oneself to the traditions that are available to us. Relating *Andenken* to Vattimo's return to religion, in *The Future of Religion*, Vattimo even talks about our 'existential condition,' that 'we cannot place ourselves outside the tradition opened up by the proclamation of Christ' (Vattimo 2004: 54). With tradition goes accepting certain distinctions:

> when I say "thanks to God I am an atheist" and I have become an atheist thanks to Jesus' existence, "thanks to Jesus" implies that I accept that there is a sort of cutoff point in history: B.C. before and A.D. after. If I do not accept this radical historicity, I find myself again in the situation of having to admit a sort of basic, authentic, realistic, stable structure of reality that I discover at a certain point. That there is no metaphysical foundation is still a foundation. If I accept radically my historicity, I do not see any other possibility than to speak of religion (Vattimo 2004: 63).

Going beyond Vattimo, but working within the spirit of his work, one could 'twist' the text of Matthew 16:19, of 'binding' and 'loosing' of the Christian proclamation in relation to salvation, along the lines of the inescapability in the West of the Christian tradition, and the loosing of *Dasein* entrusting itself to 'the liberating bond that positions it in the *Über-lieferung* ('tradition')' (Vattimo 1988a: 119). Vattimo attributes radical historicism to a 'transcendental dialogue' between him, the history of foundations, and God, 'otherwise everything would be a guide throughout history' – so 'thanks to God that I am an atheist' means 'thanks to the history of the revelation, the salvation, the dissolution of Being that I'm an atheist and this history actually is my paradoxical foundation' (Vattimo 2004: 63). Responding to Vattimo, Zabala quotes Nietzsche: 'I fear that we shall be unable to get rid of God, since we still believe in grammar' (Vattimo 2004: 63-64). Language as transmission—such as the dating system A.D. and B.C.—indicates the paradoxical foundation of the religious background into which he is thrown. Salvation, the experience of the divine, is feeling

dependent on biblical tradition and accepting it in one's radical historicity (Vattimo 2004: 77-78). The *Bible* underlies this tradition and acts as a paradigm, *not kenosis* as an event. The links between 'texts,' 'paradigms,' 'epochs' and 'events' will be discussed shortly. What is worthy of note is that I believe Vattimo moved away from *kenosis* to avoid parallels being drawn between his thought and the likes of Altizer, to downplay the idea of a being (such as God) being incarnated in a person or in history itself, moving between events in a more strongly Hegelian way. This is not to say that Vattimo's later thought is not 'weakly' Hegelian as I argued in Part One, but this is only in the sense that there is an idea manifesting itself in history. What Vattimo did by emphasising more his dependence on the Bible rather than *kenosis* is shifting the focus from theology to the text. By drawing attention to the latter, Vattimo is in much more obviously Gadamerian territory, as dependence is on tradition which is linguistic, and what book in the West has been more influential than the Bible? The key is then for Vattimo to show how the Bible gives rise to *caritas* as weakening, of showing 'friendship' in a way which is not the flipside of *kenosis* (or at least reconfiguring the latter concept to mean a friendship embedded within the text, as he did in *A Farewell to Truth*).

Vattimo attempts to do this by drawing upon Matthew 18, that where two or more are gathered in his name, there God is (Vattimo 2004: 66). Dialogue, Vattimo thinks, creates Being, and 'Being is an event of the *Logos*' (Vattimo 2004: 66). Remembering tradition, speaking it and interpreting it through dialogue generates new Being. Vattimo even writes:

> even if there is no objective *Logos* of the nature of reality, every time we agree on something we actually give a sort of testimony, we realize a sort of continuity of the *Logos*, which is the only criterion we actually have. This is the reason why I insist on charity, because charity could be thought of as a metarule that obliges and pushes us to accept the different language games, the different rules of the language games (Vattimo 2004: 59).

Logos is dialogue, and where dialogue forms consensus there is *caritas*; this is a creative reading of the notion of charity which has little to do with Davidson's view of it except that it approaches interpretation through the medium of a formal principle, drawing on Gadamer through the notion of creating truth through consensus. Vattimo misses a trick by not explicitly rejecting the idea of *kenosis* in favour of the idea of the Word (*Logos*) being made flesh (John 1:14) in human interpretation, in the gathering of people

together in friendship (consensus). In yet more recent works, such as *Hermeneutic Communism* with his pupil Santiago Zabala, Vattimo has drawn more upon Rorty's term 'conversation,' rather than dialogue, and charity (*caritas*) has receded from the picture somewhat. The core idea is that there is continuity, but no objective reality. Continuity and consensus involve firstly a dialogue (or conversation) between the interpreter (or 'subject') and tradition, and secondly between two interpreters. *Logos* (or 'dialogue,' or 'reason') is weakened because it is oriented towards its own decline. Matthew 18 comes into the picture when Vattimo puts forward the idea that if Being is *Logos*, and *Logos* the result of intersubjective dialogue, then the ontological worry is how to found Being (and the solution he suggests is tradition) (Vattimo 2004: 66).

Here one can make a link between '*Logos*' and the 'spiritual' exegesis of which Vattimo has been speaking. Interpretation, he argues, should not be imposed or accepted dogmatically, but created in consensus, and this involves taking power away from ecclesiastical authorities. Vattimo writes 'Joachim's text can still be our guide because of the general meaning of the age of spirit, which stresses not the letter, but the spirit of revelation; no longer servants but friends; no longer awe or faith but charity; and perhaps not action but contemplation' (Vattimo 2002a: 31). This quotation from Vattimo's earlier text, *After Christianity* brings all the pieces together. The Age of the Spirit (or 'Interpretation,' for Vattimo) is the current age, the epoch of nihilism in which his understanding of the revelation of the friendliness of God through Christ, has reached its secularising culmination. By 'secularisation,' Vattimo means the stripping away of the 'violent' naturally sacred features, such as authoritarianism in all its forms, with charity taking its place. The 'spiritual interpretation' of Scripture involves, Vattimo thinks, an overturning of superstition, and persecution of the clergy, and predicts that the 'blind awe of the people toward the wise and its priests shall be no more' (Vattimo 2002a: 33). With the decline of literalism, or the 'letter' of the texts, 'sacred texts will no longer be the exclusive heritage of priestly authority' (Vattimo 2002a: 33), the kind of external authority that Paul associated with the 'letter.' One can think of examples today such as Catholic dogma against the ordination of women and against same sex couples. If Christ's death was to reveal the violence of the natural sacred

and the naturally religious, his resurrection can be seen in the rising up of the spiritualisation of the world, which includes not only Scripture, but also any authoritarian, 'strong' structures that are dependent upon literalism to maintain their power. On this reading of Vattimo, he has a lot in common with Rudolf Bultmann, who tried to 'demythologise' the New Testament of the 'bizarre' features it had retained as a result of its New Testament worldview of angels, demons and spirits. For Bultmann, the kerygma of the New Testament involved the 'rising up' in faith of the disciples, rather than a literal body rising up out of the tomb. Bultmann, for all he was influenced by Heidegger, still believed in the programme of demythologisation. With his nihilistic style of weak thought, Vattimo, though, acknowledges the disenchantment even with the programme of disenchantment, and that even demythologisation is a myth (Vattimo 1992: 39). Nevertheless, like Bultmann he sees the danger in literalism and its tendency to give rise to authoritarianism. Rather than literalism, Vattimo would say that the 'Age of the Spirit' is one in which we are currently living, 'An epoch in which our religiosity can finally develop into the form of charity no longer dependent on truth' in which Plato is a greater friend than truth (Vattimo 2011: 59). Charity is 'welcoming the other,' based on a recognition of our own textual history which has Scripture as its historical foundation. We welcome the other because this is the message of Scripture, one which makes us look inside ourselves and outside at others like us (Vattimo 2011 75-76).

David Newheiser, in his article on Vattimo's use of Joachim of Fiore, laments that Vattimo is 'hostile' to literal readings of Scripture, stating that if Vattimo was more open to other viewpoints and ways of reading texts then this would enrich his own hermeneutics (Newheiser 2011: 10). Newheiser quotes Joachim himself remarking how 'something happened' to him after reading a particular text. Ironically, Vattimo's own account of the effect of reading Dostoyevsky is remarkably similar (Vattimo 2013: 43). The difference between the two thinkers, Joachim and Vattimo, takes the former's value for the latter into account; Vattimo can have a personal transformation circumscribed within the bounds of the larger horizon of the ontology of actuality. Language has a transformative power based on the way in which individual classic texts have reconfigured the way in which we see ourselves. Nevertheless, there is the relationship

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between the one and the many to take into consideration today. With an irreducibly plural interpretative world before us in the West, literalism closes down dialogue and seals one off from the other when both for practical reasons and out of respect for fellow interpreters similar and yet different from ourselves, isolation is not an option. This view of Joachim has nothing to do with supersession, but of how best to view our heritage in the light of the signs of the times, that is, of having a lighter, more spiritual approach to interpretation based upon the lack of concrete foundation or centre by virtue of the contemporary experience of ever-increasing plurality. Vattimo, like Joachim before him, has read the signs of the times and the way in which texts transform us occurs within a larger horizon. Vattimo's ingenious insight comes from the recognition that this apparently irreducible plurality can in fact be reduced to a common historical origin in the text of the Bible. Behind Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, Dostoyevsky and all other greats of European literature besides, of all epochs, is the Bible. One cannot understand these figures and their works without reference to the Bible (Vattimo 2007: 36). Today, from the situation into which we are thrown, we can see the Bible not as giving rise to the logic of the divine right of kings and the Inquisition, but to the turn to the subject and weakening based on charitable interpretation. Interpreting according to the spirit of the age means hermeneutical practise that accords with the Age of the Spirit (that is, for Vattimo, the 'Age of Interpretation'), occupying the space between the event of personal transformation and the ontological landscape after the death of God. Again, this theme of how personal Vattimo's interpretation of Christianity appears will be a significant one and shall be discussed later in Part Two.

c) Vattimo's intention

In *The Future of Religion* there was an opportunity for Vattimo to identify *caritas* as the fruit of the Word (*Logos*) in order to make persuasive arguments for a gradual incarnation of the idea of weakening in history. He could even have used this argument to rebut counters made to him by Richard Rorty. On this issue Rorty replies to Vattimo that he sees not so much A.D. and B.C. as important, and the Christ event as definitive, but for him the French Revolution was the decisive moment in history. With this

event came new values, that 'Christian charity changed into *liberté, egalité, fraternité*' (Vattimo, Zabala, Rorty 2006: 65). Against Rorty's point, Vattimo would trace the emancipatory value of these ideas back to the Bible, interpreting the French Revolution as the outcome of the gradual incarnation of the *Logos* in dialogue, even if 'dialogue' involved (sometimes extreme) conflict in physical terms.

That Vattimo does not take this opportunity is instructive, and in these later works the tone and nature of Vattimo's argument seems to shift. Vattimo drops the grand historical schema he appeared to have created in his earlier works on Christianity. Take the following example from 'The Trace of the Trace': 'The philosophy that responds to the call for the overcoming of metaphysics comes from the Hebraic-Christian tradition, and the content of its overcoming of metaphysics simply amounts to the maturing awareness of this provenance' (Vattimo 1998: 89). A short while later, in *After Christianity*, Vattimo writes that the Son is the *Logos* of the Father (Vattimo 2002a: 60), and the Son becomes human through Mary. These two passages together, in light of his conception of secularisation as weakening, could combine to enable Vattimo to draw the conclusion that the incarnation as *kenosis* works itself out as the *Logos* in a history of weakening in which, only now, we are becoming aware of the provenance of hermeneutical nihilism. Such is the proximity between this position and Death of God theologians that Thomas Guarino has said that 'At times Vattimo speaks as if the Incarnation of the Eternal Word is an objective, historical reality' (Guarino 2009: 98). Guarino notes that even in *After Christianity* Vattimo uses Gadamer's term *Wirkungsgeschichte* (effective history) (Guarino 2009: 99) to indicate that the incarnation is not a 'real' event, but effective history. Nevertheless, where Vattimo makes this distinction (Vattimo 2002a: 112), he does mention that there is a 'teleology' in which the incarnation of the '*Logos*' is the ontological Being that weakens 'every ontic structure' in being 'shared' as 'Dialogue' that 'constitutes us as historical beings.' Elsewhere in the book this incarnation is referred to as the '*kenosis*' of God that is the 'archetypical occurrence' of secularisation (Vattimo 2002a: 67). The *Logos* is 'an opening, which is language' (Vattimo 2002a: 66) that is a *Logos* insofar as it is a 'continuity' (Vattimo 2002a: 67). On this reading, even if one separates it from the

Joachimist schema in which it is entangled, *kenosis* appears to be causal, that is, an event in the world historical terms which sets into motion a train of weakening (De Lange 2002). In some way *kenosis* was an event which has culminated through a process of secularisation in the death of God, liberation of metaphor, end of metaphysics and return of religion. The 'effective history' is the strength of the weakness in recollection of the incarnation in charitable dialogue. However, this raises the question about what the 'archetypical occurrence' was, and whether or not it was a 'real' incarnation of a thing (the eternal *Logos*) in the body of Christ, or whether it was the embodying of a message in a classic text (which would bring the earlier work by Vattimo on religion closer to the later). Is there is a teleology resulting from this embodiment (this ontological opening, which is essentially what Vattimo is conveying) that works itself out in history? I think for Vattimo what comes across in his philosophy of religion as a teleology (this awkward alliance between Heidegger, Hegel and Kuhn) appears as much because of our thrownness after the end of metaphysics in which the ontology of actuality is one with a tendency towards weakness. The nearest one can find in Vattimo's later works to this more strident position from 'The Trace of the Trace' and *After Christianity* is from *A Farewell to Truth* (Vattimo 2011: 70) and *After the Death of God* (Vattimo 2007: 35) in which Vattimo says that the message of Christianity is a 'stimulus' for the liberation from metaphysics. However, by now, tempered by his more recent views on religion, the *Logos* is intersubjective dialogue, which *appears* to be the *result* of the process of secularisation in the earlier Vattimo writings on religion; Vattimo then reads it back into the Bible, as he did with Matthew 18 mentioned earlier. In the later works, such as *After the Death of God* and *A Farewell to Truth*, some of the explanations of secularisation are retained, such as invoking Dilthey. What is missing in the later works on religion by Vattimo is the notion of the incarnation and the language which gives a sense of teleology that goes with it. This is probably for the best for if the archetypal event drops out, this is more faithful to Vattimo's Heideggerian style of weak thought, for the notion of an archetypal occurrence is too much of an ontic reading of the event by attributing weakening to the event of a person (Jesus Christ) or interpretations of his sayings by his evangelists. Moreover, jettisoning the

ontic reading of weakening in an 'actual' *kenosis* reduces the teleology associated with it, that is, of some 'thing' (or even, thinking ontologically, 'opening') unfolding in history from the time of Christ to the present, thus reducing the opportunities for interpreting it in a 'supersessionist' way.

It would be misleading to state that *kenosis* drops out of Vattimo's thought entirely after late 2002. For instance, two pages are devoted to the term in *A Farewell to Truth* (Vattimo 2009: 54-55), in which he states that 'the incarnation understood as *kenosis*…is being realized more fully today,' that he relates the term to the 'destiny of metaphysics.' However, in this text there is no intricate linking of the term *kenosis* to the *Logos*, or to teleology, or to the notion of 'event.' Nevertheless, in *After the Death of God* the term *kenosis* is conspicuous by its absence in Vattimo's contributions to the volume. Anthony Sciglitano has mentioned that after this volume Vattimo downplays the role of Joachim of Fiore and the attendant metanarrative that goes with his thought. Sciglitano identifies this metanarrative with Vattimo's use of the term *kenosis* (Sciglitano 2013: 130-131). Attributing Vattimo's apparent change in approach to Christianity to his dialogue with John D. Caputo in *After the Death of God*, Sciglitano sees Vattimo's understanding of Joachim's thought in particular as downplayed in *A Farewell to Truth*. Caputo, Sciglitano thinks, 'points out that death of God theology usually institutes a metanarrative in which supersession is a prominent feature…[which] consign[s] Judaism to a stage that is irretrievably in the past' (Sciglitano 2013: 132). Caputo says that death of God theologies, to which he thinks Vattimo's schema bears a significant similarity, set 'a trap for Judaism' (Caputo 2007: 149). Nevertheless, while Caputo's contributions to *After the Death of God* may have influenced Vattimo's subsequent direction after 2007, it would appear as though they would have influenced Vattimo's contribution to *After the Death of God*. The dialogue took place in 2004. If (and here it is unclear) Vattimo heard it or heard of it, this would explain the absence of *kenosis* and downplaying of Joachim in his schema in his 2007 essay for the collection. What it would not explain is the almost complete absence of the term *kenosis* and the Joachimist metanarrative in *The Future of Religion* from 2004, let alone *Interrogazioni sul Cristianesimo* from 2000.

Interestingly, although *After Christianity* was published in both Italian and English in 2002, it was based on earlier chapters and an Italian Academy lecture series from around the time Vattimo was putting together *Belief*. In the original Italian edition of *After Christianity*, *Dopo la cristianità*, Vattimo states that the first three chapters (Part 1) were given as lectures in 1996 (Vattimo 2002b: 143). The latest essay was from 2001, concerning Heidegger's views on Christianity, and this is the final essay, largely unconnected to the main arguments in the book. The other essays ranged from 1993-2000. Reasons will not be sought if they do not present themselves, but it would nonetheless appear as though Vattimo has gradually changed his position concerning the role of *kenosis* in his 'return to religion.' Vattimo even hints as much in a dialogue with Giovanni Giorgio and Carmelo Dotolo:

> *Il punto é che io, forse sempre di più, da dopo Credere di credere, ho cominciato ad avere molto timore di fare delle affermazioni teologiche, nel senso proprio di affermazioni 'su Dio.' Certamente la kenosis mi permette di ascoltare il messaggio della rivelazione giudaico-cristiana, ma se la prendo troppo alla lettera, intendendola comme una 'descrizione' di come é Dio, la cosa comincia a turbarmi* (Giorgio, Dotolo and Vattimo 2009: 4-5).

In short, Vattimo became concerned by reaction to *Belief* that he was being interpreted theologically, as if he was making pronouncements concerning the life of God. While this did not prevent him from publishing *After Christianity*, which probably did nothing more than cement him as a 'Death of God' theologian in the minds of many of his newer readers unacquainted with his previous work, it would appear as though from the turn of the Millennium Vattimo has retreated from quasi-theological pronouncements to explaining how an hermeneutical ethic centred around charity can arise due to our connection through language with the Bible as the 'master event' that nudges all the other openings based around classic linguistic texts in the West.[18] Vattimo goes further to suggest that *kenosis* can only be used in a practical way, as a way to critique the practical action of the Church today (Giorgio, Dotolo and Vattimo 2009: 6).

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[18] The nature and role of the Bible for Vattimo will be explored in Chapter Nine, section 'a' below.

Chapter Nine: paradigms, concealment and reductionism[19]

   a) Art, paradigms and monuments

It has been shown how Vattimo's more recent turn to Kuhn to elucidate Heidegger's notion of the event could get around the problem of supersessionism, focusing on the importance of the Bible. In prioritising 'classic texts,' Vattimo opens himself up to a number of objections. Is he too focused on the classic text as something ontic, reducing the ontological to 'things'? It shall be shown that there is precedent within Heidegger's thought for the importance of classic texts, particularly in his treatment of Hölderlin's work. Having looked at the latter, I will show how Vattimo understands the founding and influence of a classic text as event, particularly in relation to the fourfold. 'The fourfold,' writes Andrew J. Mitchell, 'is a thinking of things. The fourfold names the 'gathering' of earth, sky, mortals and divinities that comes to constitute the thing for Heidegger' (Mitchell 2010: 208). More than in *Being and Time*, the fourfold in the post-war work of Heidegger is a 'phenomenologically more robust' working-out of the thing (Mitchell 2010: 208). Michael Wheeler also points out that along with Heidegger developing his understanding of the thing, the fourfold was also a way to reimagine the 'world' by thinking of it as something culturally structured by including some reference to nature (such as 'earth') (Wheeler 2011). The fourfold, however, along with his attempt to understand the history of the West in terms of weakening founded by the Bible as the paradigmatic European text, are read by Vattimo through his understanding of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) based on a combination of Heidegger's texts *Identity and Difference* and 'The Age of the World Picture;' *Contributions to Philosophy* appeared in German in 1989 and so could not influence Vattimo's earlier work, but he has had twenty-seven years to incorporate it into his 'return to religion,' which he has not done. Drawing upon the work of Modesto Berciano and Reiner Schürmann I proceed to show the limitations of Vattimo's understanding of Heidegger and the fatal implications of these for his return to religion.

Arguably, Vattimo too easily identifies 'openings' with classic texts, such as the Bible and Shakespeare's plays. By conflating 'event' with 'epoch,' as well as 'paradigm,' Vattimo places Being too much into the

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[19] This chapter borrows from my article on Vattimo's views on *caritas*, especially in subsection b (Harris 2014b).

hands of human artistry. It is as though Vattimo takes Heidegger's 'On the Origin of the Work of Art' too seriously. Vattimo has admitted downplaying the semantic field of 'conflict' in Heidegger's thought (Vattimo 2012b: 126), and with that he has lost the tension between 'earth' and 'world,' and with it, also, the tension between the finitude of *Dasein* and what withdraws from thought. What withdraws, what is abyssal, is from history, and can therefore leave us with a simplified view of history. By 'abyssal' here I am referring to Heidegger's distinction between beings, which have a ground, and that which withdraws—Being—which has no ground. As Heidegger writes in the *Contributions*, 'The abyssal ground is the primessential clearing concealment, the essential occurrence of truth' (Heidegger 2012: 300). This quote draws attention to the ground as something which is simultaneously an eventual occurrence which clears and founds a world, as well as remaining concealed and not reducible to the ontic. However, through jettisoning the tension between earth and world, Vattimo reduces the ontological to the ontic by prioritising the classic text. Here, too, one can see the influence of Gadamer in Vattimo's 'left Heideggerianism' (Vattimo 2010b: 77).

Perhaps part of the problem is in Vattimo's oversimplification of Heidegger that caricatures the 'right' position as a form of onto-theology and positions the 'left' as far away as possible in a form of philosophy that is closer to Kuhn, with much of what is interesting about Heidegger situated in the middle. This may be why Vattimo does not often draw from Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy*, which indicates that the *Ereignis* is 'enowning,' and that it is not to be identified with an artefact, person, event or human creation. Take the following quotation from the *Contributions*:

> Eventuating here and refusal and remaining absent, incursion and accident, restraint and transfiguration, freedom and compulsion. Such things eventuate, i.e., belong to the essential occurrence of the event itself. Every way of ordering, rearranging, and intermixing 'categories' fails here, because the categories are said on the basis of beings and apply to beings and never name or know beyng itself (Heidegger 2012: 220).

The opening is of time and space, and it concerns aspects of our Being such as 'transfiguration' and 'compulsion.' It is the event whereby being and man co-belong, and as such cannot be historically localised, and it depends necessarily on the finitude of both man and being, hence the exposure of the

abyss, nothingness, the inclusion of withdrawal and closure in the event of opening. As such, Heidegger did not think of *Ereignis* as being identifiable with a particular event in time or anything ontic, even if he seemed to move nearer this position in 'On the Origin of the Work of Art.' The event gives the formal structure of the event of disclosure, which opens history, and in and through which human existence and understanding is related to Being. So event as intended here is, in effect, the ontological dimension to ontic events, which make up history as ordinarily understood.

It could be argued that Vattimo may be able to derive his desired position from the *Contributions* in order to avoid supersessionism, but at the cost of taking on more ontology than he would like. As Philip Tonner states, 'No one epoch in this history of the sending of Being to thought can be privileged' (Tonner 2011: 120). Vattimo does distinguish between openings (*aletheia*) and *Ereignis*, even if he sometimes seems to use them interchangeably. When Vattimo does discuss the *Ereignis*, it is usually in the context of *Identity and Difference* (Berciano 1993: 18), linking it with the *Ge-Stell*: 'The experience of *Ge-Stell* leads us to grasp *Ereignis*, and therefore above all to uncover the eventual nature of Being' (Vattimo 1993a: 176). Choosing the *Identity and Difference* understanding of *Ereignis* is important for Vattimo as it links technology both to liberation (through its pluralising effects) and violence (through its history in the development of metaphysics). This interpretation of *Ereignis* raises the question about the relationship between *Ereignis* and event (in the sense of an opening), for Vattimo still talks about the 'eventuality of Being' in different 'epochs' (Vattimo 1993a: 176). Is the *Ereignis* merely the sending of Being (an event) that brings to consciousness the other events, or, as Richard Polt speculates when discussing the *Ereignis* in the context of the *Contributions*, is it something 'deeper than any event' (Polt 1999: 77)? While the *Ereignis* 'throws light retrospectively on the eventual nature of every epoch' (Vattimo 1993a: 176), do these epochs get reduced to classic texts in paradigmatic fashion, something against which the *Contributions* cautioned? If not, then the importance of texts such as the Bible become secondary to the sendings (and this does not preclude a 'right Heideggerian' approach, something Vattimo would abjure). Whether they do or do not, why prioritise the Bible if it is the *Ereignis*, through the *Ge-Stell*, which

brings about the change of consciousness, a narrative that can make sense without recourse to Christianity? Vattimo wants an ethic, a limit to hermeneutics to prevent an 'anything goes' approach, and so looks to Christianity, with its 'spiritualisation' of texts to this end. However, if events cannot be reduced to the ontic (such as texts), but instead the texts are the result of listening and interpreting to sendings, why pay so much attention to a 'master event' such as *kenosis* as recorded in the Bible? Can Vattimo appeal to the Bible without presuming its importance in a way that is inconsistent with his broader Heideggerian schema of weak thought?

There are resources within Heidegger's own work to justify Vattimo's prioritising of classic texts, and these can be found above all in his lectures on Hölderlin. A crucial distinction need to be made between reducing the opening to the work as a thing which is an object of authorial intention (that is, something ontic, a representation of will to power), and a work which allows Beyng to come through. By the latter, Heidegger meant that recollective thought (*Andenken*). A work which is itself, or gives rise to, recollective thought allows Being to come through a thing 'so that it is in the thing and as the thing that Being makes its appeal to us' (Richardson 1963: 574). A work which allows Beyng to come through is Heidegger's position in the Hölderlin lectures. In his lectures on 'Germania,' Heidegger says that the poet harnesses the power of the gods and opens himself up to Beyng, which appropriates him through language: 'It is not we who have language, rather language has us' (Heidegger 1980: 23). The work of the poet is an event which is placed as a founding for his people, those who speak the same language, for the poet's words 'harnesses the lightning flashes of the god, compelling them into the word, and places this lightning-charged word into the language of his people' (Heidegger 1980: 30). 'Gods,' here does not refer to deities in the straightforwardly religious sense, but more a looking forward to future possibilities, of a kind of thinking not ruled by the metaphysics of technoscience in which the receptivity of disclosure is dulled. The poet's works, then, are places in which *Dasein* historically dwells, linguistically.

By drawing upon Vattimo's book *Art's Claim to Truth*, I can show how he has developed an understanding of how a work founds a world which is similar to Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin in some ways,

albeit different in others. In this book, Vattimo writes 'To dwell in the world founded by the work is to live in the light of it. The history of an epoch is, in the end, solely an exegesis of one or more artworks, wherein a certain 'epoch' of being was instituted and opened' (Vattimo 2008: 159). Heavily influenced by 'On the Origin of the Work of Art,' Vattimo interprets the founding of a world (the event of the opening of a clearing, or '*lichtung*,' which gives the light of disclosure to *Dasein*) as instituted by a work which draws from the earth, the permanent reserve of meaning which is not identifiable with nature (Vattimo 2008: 157); the 'gods' (or divinities) do not have a large part to play in 'On the Origin…' Earth, world, divinities and mortals are part of Heidegger's concept of the '*Geviert*' ('fourfold') which frame the event in terms of what it means for *Dasein*. It was Heidegger's opinion that man is appropriated by Beyng as the site of the event which works itself out as a conflict between world and earth, humans and gods. Admittedly, sometimes the fourfold (*Geviert*) is worked out in greater harmony, as earth, sky, mortals and divinities, such as on 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (Heidegger 1993: 246). For Heidegger, the fourfold work to explain the thrownness of interpretation in a way that links with nature (earth and sky) which nonetheless emphasises the centrality of human dwelling with others (mortals). Figures from the past illuminate the present and guide the future (divinities, similar to the 'heroes' from *Being and Time*). One is thrown into a linguistic tradition, and Being appropriates by happening through *Dasein* dwelling among the fourfold. However, in 'On the Origin of the Work of Art' there is conflict between the earth and world, as one also finds in the *Contributions*, such as talk of 'strife' between earth and world (Heidegger 2012: 25).

For Vattimo in *Art's Claim to Truth*, 'The earth…represents the permanent ontological reserve of meanings, which makes is [sic] so that the work cannot be exhausted by interpretation' (Vattimo 2008: 157). The work opens worlds through an infinite plurality of interpretations which come from it, but there is a 'permanent reserve of new interpretations' in the work 'and for this reason Heidegger sees in it the presence of the earth, which is always given as that which withdraws and holds itself in reserve' (Vattimo 2008: 157). The importance of the work is because it 'has a privileged link to Being in that it connects the world to the earth as permanent reserve of

meanings, and thus to Being itself in its originating force' (Vattimo 2008: 157). With regard to hermeneutics, 'Interpretation…is always a linguistic event, which is made possible by the community of language shared between speaker and listener, presupposed as the basis of any conventional institution of meaning' (Vattimo 2008: 148). Here is the influence of Gadamer in Vattimo's argument: Being is through and through linguistic, and so interpretations are linguistic events. Now it can be seen how the work relates to linguistic conventions in Vattimo's mind through the Kuhnian language of the paradigm shift (revolutionary science) being developed through normal science, the day-to-day linguistic exchanges. For instance, Vattimo writes that 'A historical world…is always born through the institution of language…the establishment of linguistic conventions always comes after the birth of language' (Vattimo 2008: 121). As with Heidegger's work on Hölderlin, the work is the site of an opening of Being in language which acts as the founding of the world for a community which dwells in the truth of the work, which nonetheless conceals as it reveals. The main difference in Vattimo's analysis is that he downplays the role of the gods.

Vattimo relates this ontological analysis of the role of the work to the Bible, and here one gets a hint at what he means by 'community.' Valgenti has stated that 'Vattimo does not provide an explicit analysis of community' (Valgenti 2015: 30), and he is right. Nevertheless, one can infer what Vattimo means by the term when he talks about 'belonging' through inheriting a linguistic tradition based on a work, and above all the foundational work in the West: The Bible. 'The Word of God does not signify a preconstituted world; rather, it creates it' (Vattimo 2008: 121). The Bible as a work 'embodies a real prophetic character, instead of being a purely historical document of a past event…the unsaid that lies in its background is not something provisionally concealed but constitutive' (Vattimo 2008: 119). By the 'unsaid,' Vattimo means 'earth,' the permanent possibility of new meaning from the text. As for the scope of new meaning, the importance of the Bible is primary for Vattimo when he says that, 'In the case of the Bible, we stand before an entire civilization that constitutes and develops itself as the exegesis of a book. The history of the West is in its essential development the history of the interpretation of the Bible'

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(Vattimo 2008: 119). 'To belong to this civilization,' writes Vattimo, 'signifies belonging to that specific text, and in this sense we should conceive of the belonging of the reader/interpreter to the work in its fullest form' (Vattimo 2008: 119). What one finds in his most recent philosophical work, *Della realtà*, is a link between the work considered ontologically as an opening, the conflict between 'world' and 'earth,' and the notion of 'belonging' to a community conceived in terms of the normal science from Kuhn's paradigm concept, all wedded to a hermeneutical nihilistic philosophical schema style based on the key Nietzsche-Heidegger axis. '*Ciò a cui Heidegger sembra pensare è che*,' Vattimo writes, '*siccome la verità di una proposizione qualunque si prova solo all'interno di un paradigma storico, il quale non è semplicemente l'articolarsi di una struttura eternale…ma accade, nasce, ha un'origine….la sede di questo accadere va cercata nell'opera d'arte*' (Vattimo 2012b: 224). Vattimo proceeds to give examples of paradigms: *The Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's works, Homer's poems, and '*anzitutto*,' the Bible (Vattimo 2012b: 224). These paradigms are horizons which create openings in which there is conflict between world and earth: '*Quel che costituisce la base della forza inaugurale dell'opera d'arte, e questo mi sembra oggi più importante di quanto non mi apparisse in passato, è il fatto che essa mantiene aperto il conflitto tra mondo e terra*' (Vattimo 2012b: 225). The work (or 'paradigm') opens the world and lets us dwell there in its language: '*il mondo, come l'orizzonte articolato, il paradigma, che l'opera inaugura e dentro cui ci fa abitare*' (Vattimo 2012b: 225). The earth is the inexhaustible reserve of meaning from the paradigm: '*la terra, come quella riserva di sempre ulteriori significata che, lo dice il termine stesso*' (Vattimo 2012b: 225), which changes with each generation of interpreters, to the point where a revolution occurs which is never from dialogue, consensus or rationality (Vattimo 2012b: 225). Instead, changes are often due to imposed power, politically, by people such as George Bush (Vattimo 2012b: 226).

Despite referring to it, Vattimo, in *Della realtà*, consciously admits to having downplayed the language of conflict in Heidegger's work (Vattimo 2012b: 126). Where there is harmony, there is greater similarity to Vattimo's interpretation of the fourfold, but what about strife? What is it that causes this 'strife,' and how does Vattimo deal with it? Vattimo

reinterprets 'earth' in the context of 'setting into work of truth' in the following way in *The End of Modernity*: 'In the monument that is art as the occurrence of truth in the conflict between world and earth, there is no emergence and recognition of a deep and essential truth. In this sense, as well, essence is *Wesen* in its verbal aspect' (Vattimo 1988: 87). Linking the priority of the poetic found in 'On the Origin of the Work of Art,' with the fourfold, as well as with the importance Gadamer placed on architecture as the foundation of art, Vattimo sees the poetic in the monumental as the setting-into-work of truth in providing openings for *Dasein*. Therefore, what is the monumental for Vattimo? Monument is a metaphor for Vattimo, and it is clear from his chapter 'Postmodern Criticism: Postmodern Critique' in the David Wood edited book, *Writing the Future*, that texts can be monuments, too (Vattimo 1990: 64). Enduring and capable of endless interpretation by each generation (and here is an uncharacteristically literal reference to 'mortals'), monuments bring together both earth and world. There can sometimes be conflict in the way in which different generations, or even individual *Dasein* of the same generation from different thrown projects, interpret the same monument. The monument may fade into the background of experience, but it is still there. Here we can make sense of Vattimo's metaphor of dwelling in a 'library of Babel' in *Beyond Interpretation* (Vattimo 1997a: 90), clearly not only echoing, but also developing Heidegger's dictum that 'language is the house of Being' from his 'Letter on Humanism' (Heidegger 1993: 161). Even as far back as his early book on Heidegger, *Introduzione a Heidegger* (1971), Vattimo makes it clear that the place of dwelling is not time and space (seemingly at odds with Heidegger's views in *Contributions to Philosophy*), but poetic language: '*la cosa é davvero cosa solo in quanto fa dimorare presso di se terra e cielo, mortali e divini; ma ciò essa fa non in quanto presenza spazio-temporale, ma nella parola poetica*' (Vattimo 1971: 128). We can also make a link between the final chapter of *Della realtà* and *The End of Modernity*: the classic texts such as the works of Shakespeare, Dante, as well as scientists including Newton and prophets such as the Bible, are monuments, which are also paradigms and poetic openings where Being eventuates. The works of Shakespeare, Dante and—possibly—Newton as well would also have been considered 'monuments' by Nietzsche, who used

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the term 'monumental history' to refer to one of the types of history outlined in his second *Untimely Meditation*, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life.' With 'the monumentalistic conception of the past,' writes Nietzsche, one 'learns from it that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again' (Nietzsche 1997: 69). Like the 'earth' in Heidegger's work, monuments are a reserve of meaning for Nietzsche, but they are more ontic and subjective in the sense that the monuments are meant to be inspirational rather than era-defining, and what could be inspirational for one person may not have any influence over another. Therefore, the twin language of Gadamerian 'monuments' and Kuhnian 'paradigms' allows Vattimo to bring out the ontology of the 'same' (monument, that which endures) and difference (the paradigm shifts), which both have their root in the paradigmatic nature of the work itself providing an opening and a linguistic community based around the work. Nietzsche's understanding of monuments is similar, but betrays a more individualistic approach.

Before I move on to problematise Vattimo's interpretation of 'earth,' it is worth dealing with a couple of standard objections to Vattimo's understanding of the Bible. Firstly, it may be objected that he is wrong in prioritising the Bible, that behind all the other classic textual openings (Dante, Shakespeare and so on) there is the Bible. In reply I could imagine that Vattimo would be on very safe ground in saying that the language, themes and idioms used in these works are incomprehensible without at least a pre-understanding of the Bible. Dante's *Inferno*, for instance, cannot be understood without the biblical themes of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' in hell. Another criticism given against Vattimo by D'Arcais is that people understand the Bible differently: Do we inherit the meek, loving Jesus or the Christ of the Crusades (D'Arcais 2007: 259)? Therefore, how could it be a 'monument' or a 'paradigm,' for the former implies sameness and the latter homogeneity? Two things could be said here. Monuments can be interpreted differently. For example, the Taj Mahal is sometimes interpreted as the epitome of beauty, whereas other people see it as the epitome of cruelty concerning how the building was constructed using slaves who were killed during its construction. Moreover, in the second edition of Kuhn's text he put forward the notion of a paradigm as a

'disciplinary matrix' (Kuhn 1996: 184), where there are fundamentals upon which interpreters agree (and in Christianity this may be something like a linear conception of time, God as creator, Jesus' teaching, death and resurrection), and then these fundamentals can be interpreted in opposing ways (fundamentalist see Jesus' resurrection as literally bodily, Bultmann saw it was the rising up of the church to faith). Vattimo would have no problem with different interpretations of the Bible; in fact, he would encourage it. These would be successive generations' '*Andenken*,' of their thought commemorating the monument of the Bible, or the 'normal science' of working within current paradigms understanding the older one. Vattimo does the exact same thing. For Vattimo is working out the paradigm of the *Ge-Stell*/*Ereignis*, trying then to gather up the traces of paradigms prior— such as the Bible—by historicising them, reading them in the signs of the times. The hermeneutic circle into which Vattimo is thrown means he then has to understand this paradigm, this destining of the end of metaphysics and death of God historically in order to prevent the thinking proper to it— hermeneutics—from appearing as relativism. Here he returns to the Bible to historicise hermeneutical nihilism, to see it as the consequence of a chain of messages from a monument of the Word which have been interpreted and reinterpreted by successive generations, where the key message has been the nihilistic drift of *kenosis* (of God coming to earth to announce his friendship) and *caritas* (which is friendship itself). The former's message of friendship, of internal brotherhood, wound up as the will to power and the age of the world pictures, whereas the latter is the way to orient ourselves today with regards to adjudicating between interpretations, that is, taking the other into account by recognising that they—like I—are *Dasein*, a historically-thrown being who shares a linguistic tradition that has its origin in weakening.

b) Vattimo and the *Contributions to Philosophy*: appropriation versus transpropriation

The term 'earth' appears most notably in 'On the Origin of the Work of Art' and in the *Contributions to Philosophy*. While Vattimo quotes extensively from the former, as Modesto Berciano points out, in his article 'Heidegger, Vattimo y la Deconstrucción,' he says Vattimo does not tend to refer to the

Contributions. Instead, he draws heavily upon *Identity and Difference* for his interpretation of the all-important notion of the event in Heidegger's philosophy (Berciano 1993: 26-27). This is significant because the understanding of Being is explained differently in *Contributions* than in *Identity and Difference,* particularly the notions of the direction of 'appropriation' and the conflict between 'world' and 'earth.' This will become important when I look at whether Vattimo understands the Bible in a way which *a priori* rules out other forms of coming to presence, which not only conflicts with the general message of tolerance coming from his style of thought, but also would not 'persuade' other European thinkers who, too, have been brought up with the Bible within their linguistic tradition. Berciano argues it is a shame that Vattimo uses limited sources on the *Ereignis* (and the link between *Ge-Stell* and *Ereignis*), privileging *Identity and Difference* for Vattimo seems to understand this link only from the perspective of the relationship between man and the technical (Berciano 1993: 20). Berciano reminds Vattimo that Heidegger thought there are other ways to the *Ereignis* as well, not just through technology (Berciano 1993: 27-28). This is slightly unfair on Vattimo as we have seen that he believes there are openings beyond the technical, albeit Vattimo draws on classic texts as forms of 'art' in which truth is disclosed; indeed, it seems to be the other way around, with the technical being the exception in Vattimo's thought to the notion of classic texts constituting openings. Before I mention what Berciano has to say about the *Contributions*, it is worth trying to unpack what Vattimo really believes about the relationship between *Geschick* and event. Concerning these notions, he writes 'The eventuality of Being is not separable from its aspect as *Geschick*' (Vattimo 1988a: 155), and that concerning Being, 'we can do nothing except re-think—from the point of view of the *Ge-Schick*—the same history of metaphysical errancy that constitutes us and that 'constitutes' Being as *Überlieferung*' (Vattimo 1988a: 175). These traditions (*Überlieferung*) come from openings, which Vattimo variously refers to as 'event,' '*aletheia*,' 'aperture' and 'paradigm.' In *Nihilism and Emancipation,* Vattimo writes that 'Since the aperture does not confer stability on the object…Being should be thought of as 'event'' (Vattimo 2004: 6). In *A Farewell to Truth*, Vattimo writes that for Heidegger 'truth [is] *aletheia* as the opening of a horizon (or paradigm)'

(Vattimo 2011: xxx). Vattimo brings all of these disparate terms together in a passage from *Della realtà* which exemplifies the link he makes between 'the event,' 'paradigm' and 'opening' being the following: '*Verità come alétheia è il darsi storico del paradigma, che, non essendo struttura eterna di un essere metafisico e parmenideo, va pensato come evento. Ma verità è anche la proposizione verificata secondo i criteri propri del paradigma, dunque la scienza normale nel senso di Kuhn*' (Vattimo 2012b: 125). It is ambiguous, however, where destining fits in. In *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, Vattimo says that 'the historico-destinate apertures in which things come to Being are epochal' (Vattimo 2006: 189), so here again there is a link between 'apertures' and 'destining.' From *Art's Claim to Truth*, we can get closer to identifying these classic texts, such as the Bible, with destining. If Being is eventual, and events are paradigmatic apertures based on classic works, and if these apertures are 'epochal' and 'destining,' Vattimo always refers to the ''epochal'' character of the artwork,' acting as a 'model' (in his later works, paradigm) for a 'determinate historical epoch,' 'founding' it (Vattimo 2008: 119). It should be clear that 'destining' and 'founding' are inextricably linked for Vattimo, which explains his aforementioned comment that 'The eventuality of Being is not separable from its aspect as *Geschick*' (Vattimo 1988a: 155).

This leaves us with a quandary. For while Vattimo expresses his surprise at Heidegger restricting himself to 'the aperture that takes place in poetry' (Vattimo 2004: 13), this is essentially what Vattimo himself does. He makes an exception for the reading of the *Ge-Stell*, of an opening coming to us through technology, pouncing on Heidegger's account of the relationship between the *Ge-Stell* and *Ereignis* in *Identity and Difference*, relating it closely to another of his essays 'The Age of the World Picture' (Vattimo 2004 15-16). By going to 'The Age of the World Picture,' the term *bild* ('picture') means 'structured image,' but as a copy or imitation of the world but setting it in place ('*stellen*') as *Dasein* getting in the picture, or becoming acquainted with it as an object of representation (Heidegger 1977: 129). Here there are clear links with the *Ge-Stell*. This would enable Vattimo to make the move he wishes to make in interpreting the *Ereignis* as the outcome of the *Ge-Stell* as the culmination of the history of Being, the end of metaphysics. However, there are other ways of reading 'image' that

do not automatically bring it back primarily to 'representation.' Take what Heidegger says about 'images' elsewhere. In his lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger states how the meaning of 'image' changes with different epochs in the history of Being. While earlier in medieval thought, image meant referential correspondence in the order of creation and in modern times it means 'representational object' (Heidegger III, 1991: 29-30), originally, in the works of the Greeks, it meant *physis* (coming to presence); this will be discussed more below in the context of the work of Reiner Schürmann. Vattimo has posited *Ge-Stell/Ereignis* as the destining of the later-modern epoch, one of nihilism as the end of metaphysics. Whilst Heidegger would admit that 'getting in the picture' is a setting-into-place representationally of the world by a modern *subiectum* which is linguistic in nature, the opening does not come from a classic text; could openings come from elsewhere, reducing the importance of the Bible as the 'master event' (particularly its messages of *kenosis* and *caritas*). We shall reconsider this possibility shortly.

Vattimo might well reply that it is the *Ge-Stell/Ereignis* which then, in accordance with the destining of nihilism into which he was thrown, has enabled him to go back and see the history of Being as one of the transmission of messages which began with the Greek, with a crucial intervention from the Bible. However, why prioritise the reading of the *Ereignis* from *Identity and Difference*? Here we return to Berciano, who mentions the very different reading of the conflict between 'earth' and 'world' found in Heidegger's *Contributions*. Concerning Beyng and the conflict between 'earth' and 'world,' a passage from the *Contributions* reads:

> Beyng is the conflictual appropriation which originarily gathers that which is appropriated in it (the Da-sein of the human being) and that which is refused in it (god) into the abyss of its 'between.' In the clearing of the 'between' world and earth contest the belonging of their essence to the field of time-space wherein what is true comes to be preserved. What is true, as a 'being,' finds itself brought in such preservation to the simplicity of its essence in beyng (in the event) (Heidegger 2012: 382).

Whereas Vattimo emphasises the transpropriation and humans and Being in the *Ge-Stell* in accordance with Heidegger's position in *Identity and Difference*, Berciano draws attention to the view of 'event' put forward by Heidegger in the *Contributions*, that 'Beyng un-settles by appropriating Da-

sein' (Heidegger 2012: 380). The opening is of time and space, and it concerns aspects of our Being such as 'transfiguration' and 'compulsion.' It is the event whereby being and man co-belong, and as such cannot be historically localised, and it depends necessarily on the finitude of both man and being, hence the exposure of the abyss, nothingness, the inclusion of withdrawal and closure in the event of opening. The opening takes place through and in *Dasein*, and it changes the way in which *Dasein* interacts with the world. Therefore, there is not a single event of appropriation as transpropriation which highlights the case that Being is eventual, as in the case of Vattimo's reading from *Identity and Difference*. By limiting his interpretation of Heidegger on *Ereignis* largely to *Identity and Difference*, Vattimo sees it as the culmination of a history of metaphysics that looks almost unilinear, starting from the Greeks and the Bible, and working up to the *Ge-Stell* via Descartes, Kant and Nietzsche. By rejecting the unilinear notion of *Ereignis* Vattimo acquired by concentrating on *Identity and Difference*, Berciano reads the notion of *Geschick* in the *Contributions* as indicating that there is more than one sending in modernity (Berciano 1993: 28), even though Vattimo seems to have followed Heidegger in *Identity and Difference* in holding that the *Ereignis* was unique (Heidegger 1969: 36). If Berciano's criticism of Vattimo is right, then it has important implications for Vattimo's view of nihilism, which in turn have significant consequences for his understanding of Christianity.

Berciano points out that in *Identity and Difference*, the event of appropriation, this unique event, is portrayed by Heidegger as being prior to the constellation man-Being, something one does not find in the *Contributions* (Berciano 1993: 28). Indeed, in *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger writes: 'The event of appropriation is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them' (Heidegger 1969: 37). Thinking can apply itself to this realm insofar as it gives itself over to language. Nevertheless, that the realm appears to be prior to man and Being seems more likely when Heidegger writes: 'The appropriation appropriates man and Being to their essential togetherness' (Heidegger 1969: 38), similar to how Heidegger later, with *Time and Being* (1968), referred to Being as 'it gives.' It is ironic that

Vattimo draws upon *Identity and Difference* as much as he does, for the text seems to support the notion that although Being 'is not,' but 'happens,' there are happenings beyond language which raise the possibility for a 'return' of Being or some other parallel or new history of Being which could occur outside the tradition of transmissions from metaphysics as a history of Being. This is a possibility which finds expression in the *Contributions* where the *Ereignis* is where Being appropriates humans; it is an appropriation, not a transpropriation (especially one in which the *Ereignis* is somehow prior to the Being-human constellation). In the *Contributions*, the *Ereignis* is considered as opening (*Da*), is regarded by Heidegger here as the foundation of everything. About this, Daniela Vallega-Neu writes: 'Letting be and building (or taking care and creating) are the two fundamental modes of what Heidegger calls the 'sheltering' of truth in beings, which means that things are necessary to provide in their being a historical site for the truth of be-ing. Beings (words, works of art, deeds, things) are necessary in order to let be-ing occur in its original abysmality' (Vallega-Neu 2003: 256). Being finds a site in all manner of beings to come open up as world and yet also simultaneously conceal itself as earth; Being happens in the strife between world and earth. Linking back to 'On the Origin of the Work of Art,' Vallega-Neu alludes to the Greek Temple, the form of which opened up onto and into the culture of the time, yet not only the stone, but also the plants and animals conceal the self-secluding earth lets appear (Vallega-Neu 2003: 257-258). The work is a site which shelters Being as it brings it out of unconcealment into the clearing. Nevertheless, in the *Contributions*, Being appropriates humans differently at different times, enabling them to conceive of things anew, such as the case of the term 'image' being understood in contrasting ways between the Greeks, medieval thinkers and moderns. Here it is not difficult to see how and why Vattimo conceived of 'openings' as paradigm shifts. Nevertheless, the issue is whether Being appears as language or through language. Vattimo, with his Gadamerian influence, reduces the latter to the former. However, works such as a Greek Temple can reveal beings whilst also concealing; what other 'sites' can there be for beings to come to presence? If the *Ge-Stell* is not the primary way of destining in the late-modern epoch, then not only will there be other destinings in the late modern which are not necessarily nihilistic (and

therefore do not require an ontology of weakening), but also reveal other things. Here we are back to the problem of 'earth' and 'world' which deserves one more mention before moving on.

Key to the *Ereignis* in the *Contributions* is the fourfold developed there. It is tempting to regard the 'earth' as something natural, but arguably it simply represents how whenever Being appropriates *Dasein* in one linguistic disclosure of meaning (through tradition), in doing so it leaves out other ways of understanding the world linguistically. The former is the 'world,' the latter is the 'earth,' and the 'conflict' between them is unconcealing (world) and concealing (earth). This means interpreting the fourfold poetically. Vattimo sees the conflict of 'earth' with 'world' as the former disappearing over time into concealment due to the passing of generations. However, on the model of the *Contributions*, earth is a conflict worked out synchronically, at any given time with the 'mystery' surrounding concealing/earth being due to our thrownness where other linguistic traditions are concealed. Vattimo would then argue in reply that these concatenations of openings and different interpretations based upon varying inheritances all point to an ontology of weakening, to the 'specialisation of languages.' However, Vattimo's reply is based on his reading of the *Ereignis* as the result of the *Ge-Stell*, in which both man *and* being have lost their metaphysical epithets. Instead, we are simply left with people interpreting differently based on thrownness and the way in which Being appropriates through works which one will interpret based on their inherited linguistic tradition. What about destining, especially when in 'The Question Concerning Technology' Heidegger writes that the *Ge-Stell* 'drives out every other possibility of revealing' (Heidegger 1977: 27)? However, also in the same text he states that destiny is not a 'fate that compels' (Heidegger 1977: 25), as where there is danger there also grows what saves; only the gods can save us now. By gods he seems to have meant a cultural template, linguistic-cultural models with significance to a group of people, or something like a disclosure of Being based on a heroic figure for a group of people (Young 2002: 98). Relating this to Christianity, Jesus may well have functioned in this way, and his messages concerning the resurrection, *Parousia* and judgement all constitute the linguistic parameters of the horizon for this group of people. They would not recognise Vattimo's

interpretation of Christianity, and they would not regard themselves as being 'destined' by technology. In short, if *Identity and Difference* is put to the forefront, then Vattimo has a case to support his weak thought, where one responds to the destining of an era at the end of metaphysics. However, if the *Contributions* is prioritised, then his weak thought is not persuasive as it stands. As for 'destining' for the *Contributions*, this seems much more about strife in relation to *Dasein*, of how the latter relates to the coming to presence of Beyng in unconcealment which is also concealment: 'What propels human around is their thrownness into beings, a thrownness that destines humans to be projectors of being (of the truth of beyng)' (Heidegger 2012: 37). In short, if the *Ge-Stell* is not the destiny of (late) modernity, then there is no ontology of actuality in the sense of weakening as the defining way of thinking in our age as Vattimo wishes. If so, hermeneutics is not necessarily the *koine* of late modernity and it neither needs a historical grounding to escape relativism, nor does it need an ethic to adjudicate between interpretations. For these reasons, Vattimo's Christianity is left theoretically redundant if one does not accept his reading of Heidegger's key concept of the *Ereignis*.

Making a different, but related, point to Berciano is Reiner Schürmann who distinguished between three stages in Heidegger's development. The first, approximately of *Being and Time*, involves Heidegger being concerned with the meaning of Being, rather than the truth of Being, in which ecstatic temporality comes across as being almost neo-Kantian (Schürmann 2007: 125). After this stage, Schürmann sees Heidegger as developing the notion of the epoch, adding a greater sense of history to the way in which things open for *Dasein* beyond ecstatic temporality. The final stage Schürmann sees in Heidegger's development is that of event understood in terms of *physis* (coming to presence of nature): 'Heidegger's understanding of 'event' as presencing is topological inasmuch as the topoi where presencing occurs are many: not only diachronically but also synchronically. *Ereignis* designates the originary phenomenon, which is the condition for historical, as well as ecstatic, time' (Schürmann 2007: 125). '*Physis*,' Schürmann writes, 'as an event-like measure is irreducible to dialectics, since it implies no reappropriation of past historical effects' (Schürmann 2007: 125). In other words, Schürmann

points out that this concept of *physis* implies that there is another understanding of the notion of the event in Heidegger's writing that Vattimo ignores. Significantly, this understanding of the event is one in which history and tradition do not have roles to play. Rather than appropriating traces of past *linguistic* events, emphasis is instead placed on *nature* emerging into presence. In the essay 'Science and Reflection,' Heidegger writes that nature is only one way in which what presences has been named *physis* (Heidegger 1977: 174). It is not as though Being is identified with the natural order, as this would be too simplistic. Rather, nature coming to presence constitutes an opening for *Dasein*. Whilst *Dasein* standing within this opening will interpret nature, doubtless through linguistic categories, the coming to presence is not an ontological trace of a past opening in linguistic terms, but 'the simple appearance of a phenomenon, any phenomenon, here and now' (Schürmann 2007: 125). To an extent Schürmann is right here in that we do distinguish nature from history, as Heidegger did, too. Nevertheless, Heidegger realised that both 'nature' and 'history' have the same root in the sense that they both *are* (Heidegger 1976: 241). What we need to distinguish, Heidegger thought in his lecture 'On the Essence and Concept of *Physis* in Aristotle's Physics B, 1' is between, as the title indicates, the essence and concept of *physis*. This distinction is explained by Günter Figal in the following way: 'only the 'concept' of *physis* ties us to a particular realm of beings, that is, natural beings, whereas the original 'essence' or *physis* is supposedly emergence and self-showing without restriction' (Figal 2010: 38-39). Figal recounts how Heidegger struggled to show how *physis* could be grasped 'on its own,' as Figal puts it, 'without restriction,' for focus on beings is not only the 'sole realization' of *physis*, as Figal notes, but also historically conditioned. This is why, Figal points out, Heidegger returned 'to his early guiding concept of *aletheia*' (Figal 2010: 39). Nevertheless, with *physis* in principle Heidegger has identified a way of coming to presence which, as Schurmann put forward, 'implies no reappropriation of past historical effects' (Schürmann 2007: 125). Schürmann's point, taken seriously, undermines Vattimo's Gadamerian reading of Heidegger as now there is more to Being than language which, combined with the idea of 'earth' as a concealing of

meaning from someone which is open to another *Dasein*, leaves the door open for a different understanding of religion.

c) The question of transcendence

i. The possibility of transcendence

It is now expedient to summarise the previous section and relate it more directly to the issue of Vattimo's return to religion. So far in this chapter we have looked at the problem of Vattimo reducing the ontological to the ontic in his appeal to the Bible as a paradigmatic text/opening which has central to the West, which is recognised as such after the *Ge-Stell/Ereignis* have allowed those who read the 'signs of the times' to understand that Being is not, but happens and that remembrance (*Andenken*) is commemorative recollection of the linguistic traditions into which we are thrown as *Dasein*. I appealed to the importance Heidegger himself gave to classic texts in his reading of Hölderlin to support Vattimo. Nevertheless, in Vattimo's own development of Heidegger's position on this the question of the fourfold comes about in the 'birth' of a language through the conflict between earth and world. The 'conflict' is taken by Vattimo as being the leaving behind of interpretations by generations, and the Bible has influenced successive generations in the West and has been the constant reserve of meaning behind other openings, such as the works of Dante, Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky. Here, though, there is conflict between the importance Vattimo places on texts and the technical in the *Ge-Stell*. Vattimo reduces the latter to the increased specialisation of languages revealed in the society of generalised communication, with talk of a proliferation of 'world images' being related to the will to power in Nietzsche's sense of representation/value-thinking. Nevertheless, why prioritise the *Ge-Stell* at all? I drew upon Berciano's thinking to highlight the lack of attention Vattimo has paid to other readings of the *Ge-Stell* in Heidegger's thought, especially in the *Contributions*. Here terms such as 'earth,' 'world' and '*Ereignis*' mean different things, leaving open the possibility that there is more than one 'sending' in modernity. The *Ereignis* is not a transpropriation in which 'Being' and 'man' lose their metaphysical epithets, but an appropriation of man by Being in which man is transformed and Being finds not only a clearing, but also a sheltering, which can occur in any being.

Whilst Being is understood *as* language, it is not necessarily disclosed *through* language, leaving open more sites of Being than Vattimo would wish to limit in the import he gives to classical texts, downplaying the role of the Bible. Even if one argued that Heidegger would still place importance of the *Ge-Stell* as heralding the *Ereignis*, the latter could be understood as the event of appropriation rather than transpropriation, whereby the former epithet refers to ways in which Being takes hold of *Dasein* and allows it to rethink earlier, perhaps lost, traces of Being, including sites which are not primarily linguistic; it is here, thinking of Schürmann, that Heidegger might imagine thought returning to *physis*, or even a way of reclaiming *poesis* from the technical. The net result is that Vattimo's interpretation of the *Ereignis* resulting from the *Ge-Stell* is reduced, which opens the possibility of a plurality of destinings in modernity as well as the plurality of sites of Being indicating that there are other ways of reading classic texts and language games in which ideas such as 'faith' and 'transcendence' could be interpreted differently. Most importantly, if Vattimo's interpretation of the *Ge-Stell* is not seen as 'destining' modernity in the unilinear sense of a transpropriation which leads to hermeneutical nihilism, then there is less reason a) to think we are in an age of nihilism, b) to see nihilism as our sole opportunity and c) to understand our sending as resulting in nothing more than a play of interpretations. Without this 'ontology of actuality' (viz. weakening), there is less need to seek out historical foundations for hermeneutics and to derive from this history an ethic of charity. Moreover, if one takes what Schürmann says seriously of the idea that, through *physis*, things could come to presence simply in appearance in an extra-linguistic way (even if it then dwells in language), there opens the possibility of transcendence, of being able to consider 'faith' and 'religion' in a way which is not reduced to a 'left'-Heideggerian reading. It is this latter possibility and its implications for Vattimo's thought which shall be explored in the following section.

Vattimo has been criticised for leaving out the possibility of transcendence with regard to his return to religion, with numerous commentators on Vattimo's work reacting negatively to this blind-spot in his thinking (Antiseri 1996; Depoortere 2008; Roldán 2007; Sciglitano 2010; Ten Kate 2002; Zimmerman 2009). Antiseri was prominent among

the early commentators on Vattimo's return to religion in criticising Vattimo for the lack of vertical transcendence in his thought. Antiseri was right for the wrong reasons, for he is correct in his assertion that Vattimo is too quick to dismiss transcendence, as shall be shown in the course of this dissertation, but Antiseri argues for transcendence along existentialist lines, particularly those of Kierkegaard and Pareyson. Antiseri thinks that that 'The choice between the existence and non-existence of God is an existential act of acceptance and repudiation' (Antiseri 1997: 121). Vattimo, who sticks closely to his interpretation of Heidegger, thinks that the latter repudiated the existentialist notion of choice after the *kehre* ('turn') in his thought, downplaying the notion of authenticity and instead holding that 'choice' is circumscribed within a historical destining (Vattimo 1993a: 50). Moreover, Vattimo, again following Heidegger, sees existentialism as a form of metaphysics in which the human being is central in a continuation of the anthropocentric Enlightenment project. As regards Kierkegaard, in broad brush-strokes Vattimo sees his theology as an example of 'apocalyptic faith,' of a nostalgia for Being and ignoring the nihilism that has come from the event of the death of God (Vattimo 2004: 139-141), or as 'tragic' Christianity, which adds up to the same thing (Vattimo 1999: 94-95): 'submission' to something 'beyond' is nostalgia for certain foundations which have disappeared after the death of God and the end of metaphysics. In putting *kenosis* at the forefront of his return, Vattimo sets out his stall with respect to transcendence in that the latter could not be vertical, but fully divested into history in the form of messages. It is not as though Vattimo thought that *kenosis* is a weakening of the second person of the Trinity which could then be reversed, for *kenosis* does not necessarily entail a weakening of God (Hart 2010), but weakening in God itself for his Trinity is economic (Sciglitano 2010), with the age of the Father giving way to that of the Son (Vattimo 2014: 20-21). With *kenosis* Vattimo's God is emptied wholly not into history, but into transmission. Indeed, it is wrong to think that there is a being—God—who is emptied. Rather, *kenosis* is the giving-way of the idea of transcendence in favour of emphasising immanence, friendship. This approach is made more clear in Vattimo's more recent writings on religion where he emphasises Matthew 18 (where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, that is where he will be) and the *Logos* in the

Bible and the latter as the paradigmatic text of the West. Mancini has stated that Vattimo is wrong to identify the sacred with transcendence (Repolschi 2010: 47), and it is this identification of transcendence with metaphysics in philosophy and the sacred in religion (and therefore, through the 'family resemblance' he sees between Girard and Heidegger, also metaphysics as it is onto-theological) that makes Vattimo rule-out *a priori* any form of transcendence as 'violent.' I will go on to argue in the latter section of Part Two that this, ironically, leads to 'violence' being done against religion through Vattimo's own thought, an opinion shared by Klun (Klun 2014: 52).

With respect to the possibility of transcendence, the problem with Vattimo's Heideggerianism is that he does not take '*physis*' seriously. Schürmann said that Vattimo remains 'stuck' in the second development of Heidegger's thinking, in which the 'historical-cultural epoch…determines every possible occurrence…It transcends [*Dasein*], but more like a system of transcendental conditions than like a transcendent model' (Schürmann 2007: 124). Whereas Heidegger 'move[d] beyond what Vattimo describes as his historicism,' with '*physis*,' Vattimo has not, and instead—due to his reliance on Gadamer—reduced the transcendental to *aletheia*, historico-cultural openings (or 'paradigms'). In short, Vattimo is against any form of transcendent except horizontal transcendence (Giorgio 2009: xvi), which is a transcendental based not on the *a priori* synthetic, but a historical aperture which recognises ontological difference between Being which comes to presence within an opening, and *Dasein* for whom the opening founds a world. This is in large part due to biographical reasons. It could be argued that although Heidegger thought *physis* could happen in a way not restricted by concepts, it can only be understood through concepts which are historically embedded and, therefore, linguistic (Figal 2010: 39). However, just because Being can only be understood as language, who is to say that all Being has to be understood? Vattimo's particular reading of Gadamer brings together 'Being' and 'understood' in the sense that there can be no Being which is not understood, and no understanding which is not linguistic. However, there remains the possibility with *physis* that Vattimo is wrong on this point, and this can leave room open for Being which is not understood in terms of nature and (as, and/or in addition) the divine, which links back to the tradition in many religions in which the divine is a mystery.

In *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, Vattimo cites his 'proletarian roots' (Vattimo 2010a: 105), for the interest he has taken in 'emancipation.' His father was a policeman who died before his time, leaving his mother widowed and needing to move across Italy. As a result, Vattimo felt like an outsider in the North, having lived in the South of Italy. This experience, along with having lived through the social upheaval of the 1960s and the student revolutions of 1968, may have drawn him to Marx and Mao. In conjunction with his Catholic upbringing, it is easy to see how emancipation dovetailed with theology, but in a context very different from Latin America. In a profession surrounded by middle class university lecturers and politicians, the oppressor was not holding a machine gun, but a copy of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Shortly after, on the following page of *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, Vattimo says 'In a sense I was born philosophically within that outlook—which from the religious point of view had its defects, like being moralistic rather than mystical, for example' (Vattimo 2010a: 106). By 'that outlook' Vattimo means seeing himself based on his proletarian roots, being 'involved in an undertaking of historical and emancipatory scope' (Vattimo 2010a: 106). His proletarian and Marxist roots influenced him to be suspicious of vertical transcendence. Vattimo's interest in comradeship in a Marxist-Maoist sense leads him to posit a universal brotherhood of all people as friends, even with God who has lowered himself to this level. The manifestation of the idea of *caritas* in history is the growing idea of historical embeddedness, much like the growing emancipation of a communist struggle; even with the apparent defeat of *caritas* under Augustine and the Middle Ages afterwards, this is like the cunning of reason, again displaying Vattimo's interest in history even in a Hegelian sense. As D'Isanto puts it, Vattimo has an awareness of belonging to a chain of messages (D'Isanto 1999: 8), but Vattimo sees this chain as all there is, and that he is adding to this chain by entering into conversation with these messages. As Borradori realises, Vattimo's interest in Christianity is neither as an object to be studied or appropriated by him, nor as a whim, but both as a *Geschich* and an opening based on his interests in the Heideggerian and Gadamerian senses of these terms (respectively) (Borradori 2010: 144). Vattimo is not interested in apologetics, but 'belongs to his life story and his

heritage' (Borradori 2010: 144). 'Vattimo's writing personalises itself,' writes Repolschi, as 'to talk about faith is possible in your own name' (Repolschi 2010: 47).

This autobiographical attitude extends to how he reads the Bible. Due to being born into an Italian post-war Catholic family, he finds that when he reads the Bible the history of the Jews 'has nothing to do with me' (Vattimo 2014: 20). More than this, Vattimo has said that he suspects 'the God of Israel who was believed to be the father of Jesus Christ is instead only and properly the God of the hosts of nomadic people' (Vattimo 2014: 20). Here, in the text 'How to Become an Anti-Zionist,' Vattimo explains that this attitude is autobiographical (Vattimo 2014: 19) and is based upon his growing realisation that Israel has been acting unlawfully in its treatment of Palestine. This is not the place to expand upon Vattimo's anti-Zionism or to analyse the significant controversy it has created, although it is worth noting that he has made pronouncements sufficiently inflammatory to be referred to as an 'inveterate anti-Semite' in the online magazine, *The European* (Ashkenazy 2014). What is important to recognise is that anti-Zionism seems to have affected his perception of transcendence of even a personal god. Vattimo sees all transcendence as being violent because he sees how claims over land vouchsafed by a transcendent being have been a source of exclusionary, and physical, violence, citing Zionist beliefs about a chosen people and a promised land based on the covenant. That Vattimo identifies this God of the covenant with God the Father is interesting, and it is more explicit in this very recent text than in previous works, otherwise it would have informed my article on the subject (Harris 2013a). In light of this, *kenosis* is the emptying of transcendence and the authoritarian 'father' characteristics of the Old Testament God. This is perhaps why Vattimo points out the 'Old Testament' is the 'Hebrew Bible' (Vattimo 2014: 21). Of course, this position of Vattimo's is supersessionist and modalist, but I have already shown that there are resources within his thought to help circumvent this problem, albeit raising other issues. Like Vattimo's views on the *Ge-Stell*, if one does not interpret the covenant as exclusive (which was the whole point of the work of St. Paul), one will not regard it as violent. As a result, transcendence would not have to be considered as violent and the whole Bible could be read together. The point I am trying to make is that

Vattimo has styled not only a philosophy, but also a religion based on his own preferences and as a result they have little direct relevance to others beside himself.

What are the implications of Vattimo's views on transcendence for religion? Vattimo has been heavily criticised by numerous commentators on his work for neglecting the dimension of transcendence (or 'vertical' transcendence to distinguish it from *aletheia* as a horizontal aperture). There are two main reasons why this is a problem for Vattimo: i) neglecting the religious experience of people who are 'full' believers (compared to his own status as a self-confessed, 'half believer' (Vattimo 1999: 77)); ii) internal inconsistencies with Vattimo's own arguments, both ethically and hermeneutically. Klun points out the lack of vertical transcendence in Vattimo's Christianity, that 'transforming' religion into a story does violence to a believer's religious experience, and that in his emphasis on spiritualisation Vattimo removes the lasting role of incarnation in terms of the flesh, particularly the importance of the resurrection (Klun 2014: 52). Again, whilst one may agree with Vattimo in his view that Being can be understood as language, it does not have to come to presence through language, in classic textual works alone. Focusing on Klun's objection, it is important to note the significance he placed on the 'flesh' of Jesus. While Klun accented the resurrection, Jesus' flesh is at the heart of Christianity and is inseparable from the messages of *kenosis* and *caritas*. In turn, this flesh is inextricably linked to transcendence. *Kenosis* is linked to an emptying which then returns to fullness through the resurrection (the parabola from transcendence, and back), while *caritas* is linked to obedience to a transcendent source of authority, as shall be shown later in the section on *caritas*. Of course, the notion of 'flesh' is linked to the Eucharist, and this is more a topic to be discussed in the Conclusion.

Arguably, Jesus' flesh was a site in which Being came to presence in terms of *physis*, dwelling in the language of *kenosis*, *caritas*, Eucharist and so on, whilst also hiding much of who he was, how he related to the historical world of Judaism and the world at large, and—importantly—being capable of infinite interpretability. In his dialogue with Vattimo, Dotolo notes that Christianity is critical of transcendence without a name, and so transcendence becomes historical (Dotolo 2009: 30). Although

transcendence becomes historical in Dotolo's understanding of Christianity, it does not dissolve into a play of horizons—it cannot be exhausted in immanence (Roldán 2007: 92). Rather, the incarnation for Dotolo acts as a question-mark towards authoritarian, scientistic understandings of what it means to be human. The Chalcedonian definition—Jesus as God and human unmixed and combined— brings together transcendence and immanence in a way in which the truth of Christianity is a meeting with Jesus, who is inexhaustible insofar as he is divine (Dotolo 2009: 56-57). The meeting is an opening, one which is a dialogue between the interpreter and Jesus (Dotolo 2009: 56). While this could be understood in a Gadamerian sense of transcendence as an event which harbours the potential for an infinity of meanings, I would prefer to see it in terms of the conflict of the fourfold. The body of Christ was an event which came to presence and dwelt in language (the *Logos*: the Word made flesh, John 1:14). The inexhaustible nature of the divinity placed in relation to humanity, as Dotolo puts it, opens up a world but closes it off as it is a notion which is incapable of ever being fully understood. Nevertheless, for mortals Jesus was a god (in the Heideggerian sense) in that he provided a cultural model normative for future thinking. Crucially, though, the 'divinity' requires the possibility of vertical transcendence, not only of there being a 'divine' that emptied himself into history (*kenosis*), but also one which has a relation to its Father. This does not entail the flat-footed move of identifying God with Being; far from it. Instead, if, as I have shown, there are sufficient resources in Heidegger's thought to think of ontological difference without understanding the *Ereignis* as being nihilistic by reducing it to a Nietzschean-Gadamerian interpretation of an event of transpropriation arising from the *Ge-Stell*, one does not have to eliminate the possibility of transcendence coming to presence in experience, subsequently articulated in language through religious ideas. This is not Being irrupting from the 'outside' such as in the work of Mendieta, but of a connection with a beyond which takes place in a work which is simultaneously articulated in language.

Before moving on it would be worth mentioning that vertical transcendence does not equate to metaphysics or violence. Baird questions this assumption, as does Jonkers (Jonkers 2000: 389). Baird's work on the

subject is particularly interesting as he compares Vattimo's views on *kenosis* with those of Levinas. The latter's distinction between the absolutely transcendent Yahweh and the less remote (but still vertically transcendent) Elohim is important, for *kenosis* pertains to the latter in its humility and inability to interact with the world it has created without ethical input from humans (Baird 2007: 424). Along similar lines, ironically, other commentators have noticed exclusionary violence in Vattimo's own account of religion, particularly in his obliteration of the vertically transcendent dimension of religion in his reduction of the religious into a story, at odds with the experience of some religious believers, not allowing religious believers to conceive of their belief as anything more than the reception of a message, or even as a story (Klun 2014: 52). This approach of Vattimo's seems to be at odds with his notion of *caritas*, an idea that needs to be pursued more in the following sections.

ii.   Transcendence and *caritas*

'By attempting to reduce the transcendent to the immanent,' writes Phillip Blond, 'Vattimo forgets that there is no peace without reference to a transcendent order in respect of which the immanent is similarly so ordered' (Blond 2002: 285). It is unlikely that Vattimo 'forgets' this point, but disagrees with it. A more difficult question for Vattimo is whether, as Erik Meganck has emphasised, Vattimo's principle of *caritas* can be thought without transcendence, emphasising that John 15:15, a passage which Vattimo cites as promoting 'friendship' between God and humans, is preceded in the previous verse by Jesus giving a disciple a command to love another. Nevertheless, what Meganck does not draw attention to are the verses preceding number 14 in which Christ refers to the Father commanding him: 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love' (John 15:9-10). I would be prepared to say that *caritas* could be interpreted to mean concern for the other, no-matter who they are. This involves a reaching-out to them, just as God reached out to humans in friendship through Christ, who followed his Father's commands by emptying himself to the point of death. Transcendence here can be seen in the relationship

between the Father and the Son. In the Conclusion will go on to develop this line of argument in my re-imagining of Vattimo's notion of secularisation.

If *caritas* is relational (between the Father and Son, and between the Son and humans), then some of the criticism Vattimo has received for it being 'something absolute, something transcendent' (Depoortere 2008: 20) is unfair. Anticipating such criticism, Vattimo writes in *Belief* that 'Perhaps the reason why nihilism is an infinite, never-ending process lies in the fact that love, as the 'ultimate' meaning of revelation, is not truly ultimate' (Vattimo 1999: 65). *Caritas*, then, is not a moral absolute or transcendent principle, but it is the only limit of secularisation. Secularisation is the nihilistic process of weakening strong structures. It would appear that *caritas* is the self-limiting of secularisation, with its tendency for weakening as its limiting factor. If *caritas* is to be treated as a kind of ethic, what would it be and how would it be related to nihilism as a process? Cryptically, Vattimo writes in *Belief* that 'love…is a 'formal' commandment, not unlike Kant's Categorical Imperative, which does not command something specific once and for all, but rather applications that must be 'invented' in dialogue' (Vattimo 1999: 66). Elsewhere, in an essay called 'Ethics without Transcendence,' Vattimo elaborates a little more on how he sees *caritas* functioning both historically and formally: 'It should not be forgotten that the categorical imperative of Kant in its most memorable formulations does little more than express in secular terms that Christian imperative of *caritas*' (Vattimo and Zabala 2003: 403). Through traces of both Kant and the Christian principle of love, Vattimo aims to derive a limit of secularisation that is both ethical and hermeneutical. If Vattimo can successfully create a post-Kantian ethic which takes into account not only the death of God as an ontological event, but also retain the sense of duty and ethical structure from Kant's work, then he would have made an important contribution to post-Kantian thought. This is especially so as Kantian thinkers in the Anglo-American tradition such as David Wiggins have expressed scepticism concerning the possibility of post-Kantian universalism in ethics, only seeing some sort of preference utilitarianism with an 'impartial spectator' as a live possibility (Wiggins 1991). While Vattimo did not want to retain the strong notion of an objective, universal moral law, he did want to 'twist' this Kantian structural feature to retain a universally available (in the normative

sense) criterion for adjudicating between interpretations based on a respect for others, the latter feature being picked out by Kant scholars such as Jerome Schneewind as an integral feature of Kant's work (Schneewind 1992: 309-341).

It was with later works, such as *After Christianity* (2002a), *The Future of Religion* (2004) and *After the Death of God* (2007) that Vattimo developed his historicised understanding of the Categorical Imperative further. Vattimo's method is to trace the Kantian concerns with interiority and universality that underlie the Categorical Imperative not only back to the Christian revelation, but also forward to the collapse of compelling reasons for their 'rationalist' interpretation. For the former part of his method Vattimo appeals to the German hermeneutic philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey (d. 1911), who thought the most significant consequence of the Christian revelation was that it involved people turning inwards to discover the truth. As mentioned in Part One, in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* Dilthey argued that Jesus Christ unified people through faith, an inner truth (Dilthey 1979: 229). This focus on the inner life, which Vattimo refers to as the 'principle of interiority,' constitutes a universality in the sense that the Christian faith is for all people, regardless of race, nationality, class, or gender. Corresponding approximately to Nietzsche's story of how the world became a fable, it is with Christianity that the absolute became interiorised, historicised, and universalised in terms of faith. Vattimo notes in *After Christianity*, the book of his that most discussed Dilthey's ideas that 'the new principle of subjectivity introduced by Christianity did not immediately succeed' (Vattimo 2002a: 107). Nevertheless, Vattimo points to thinkers such as Augustine in whom the tension between 'the novelty of Christian interiority and the hegemony of Greek aesthetic or 'visual' objectivism' was embodied (Vattimo 2002a: 107).

'A struggle between Christianity's offering of a new possibility to thought and metaphysics' endurance,' writes Vattimo in *After Christianity*, 'goes on up to Kant, who draws the anti-metaphysical implications of the inaugural move of the Christian message.' On the one hand, the Greek aestheticist idealist objectivism stipulated that absolute truth was located exterior to the intellect in the forms. On the other hand, Christianity emphasised 'inwardness, will, certitude of the *cogito*' that had been

recollected by Descartes (Vattimo 2002a: 108), and from whose thought Kant was drawing further conclusions. The turn inward, begun with Christ, moving slowly through Augustine, Descartes and Kant, weakened the dominant Platonic-Aristotelian notion of truth as correspondence, that is, of objectivity. If truth is found within one, then one need not match statements to external things. Of course, as Vattimo realises, with Descartes and Kant's thought there occurred merely a relocation of metaphysics; the metaphysical needs did not disappear, but simply moved to the subject, such as Descartes' requirement for 'clear and distinct' ideas and his foundationalism. Kant, similarly, thought that a universal, absolute moral law could be established on the subject's rational will. The death of God undermined faith in this rational will, however, through the various insights of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, among others, through various hermeneutics of suspicion, the death of God and the end of metaphysics in the *Ge-Stell/Ereignis*.

iii. A postmodern Categorical Imperative?[20]

It was said above that Vattimo's method also involved moving forward to the way in which we can 'piously remember' the linguistic traces of tradition, in this case of the Categorical Imperative. The latter already had the character of a secularised, weakened Christian universalism, which in turn is a historicised Platonism, 'for the people,' as Nietzsche said in *Beyond Good and Evil* (Nietzsche 1990b: 32). Nevertheless, since Kant there has been the world-historical event of the death of God, liberating all traditions from being placed in a metaphysically ordered hierarchy. With the culmination of metaphysics goes a need to reconfigure notions such as rationality, universality, and objectivity. Vattimo's starting point in twisting these traces of Enlightenment rationality is the present situation in which objectivity is not possible or plausible due to the decentred hermeneutical plurality that is the defining feature of late-modernity (or 'postmodernity'), and that this nihilism is the result of recognising our finitude through secularisation inaugurated by Christianity's principle of interiority. Vattimo states in *The Future of Religion* that with *caritas* he is developing 'a metarule that obliges and pushes us to accept the different language games'

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[20] This subsection owes a lot to my article on 'otherness' in Vattimo's thought for *Otherness: Essays and Studies* (Harris 2013b), as well as to my article on Kant's postmodern categorical imperative for *Kritike* (Harris 2014b).

that have been liberated by the event of the death of God (Vattimo, Rorty and Zabala 2005: 59). In *A Farewell to Truth*, Vattimo responds to Augustine's precept, 'look within yourself,' which Vattimo regards as 'an advance on the truth of the object,' with the question, 'if you turn toward your inner self, oughtn't you also try to heed 'the other as yourself'?' (Vattimo 2011: 76).

Vattimo's logic here is reminiscent of Kant's. For Kant, if one recognises that one is a rational self-legislator and is willing to obey one's own laws, then one should be able to see this capacity for self-legislation in others, giving them the same moral value you would give to yourself. Vattimo's appropriation of Augustine's 'look within yourself,' in turn based upon a universal brotherhood of faith according to Dilthey's understanding of Christianity's appeal, is far less defined. Augustine's turn inward had value on the assumption that it was possible for the human being to have an inner connection with God. As Vattimo has no need for, or belief in, an objectively existing metaphysical God, then this justification for turning inward has no purpose; here, again, the lack of transcendence in Vattimo's return to religion is problematic. All we are left with, in fact, is an inward-gazing, with no adequately reason for it; our subjectivism is nihilistic and empty. Nevertheless, we still do in fact turn inwards. If we do turn inwards, surely we should look to others who just so happen to do the same to find a way to establish ethical norms. Indeed, in finding no objective truths within or without, all we can do is to turn to one-another to fuse one's limited horizons in dialogue.

To whom should one turn in *caritas*, and how should one conduct oneself in this turning? Moreover, what would be the result of this action? The answers to these questions will reveal Vattimo's postmodern Categorical Imperative. In *After the Death of God*, Vattimo writes 'once you turn inward you must also try to listen to others like you' (Vattimo 2007: 42). What does Vattimo mean by others 'like you'? Clearly he cannot mean anything like a Platonic universal of humanity or a Kantian rational subject. In Vattimo's book *The End of Modernity*, he calls for the need for a 'crash diet' for the subject (Vattimo 1988a: 47), of a reduced subjectivity, even if he does not flesh out the details. It would appear that Vattimo would prefer to follow Heidegger in conceiving of the individual more in terms of

Dasein's relation to Being than as an autonomous subject who moves out of herself to have relationships with other people and relations to other things. Vattimo believes people should interpret late-modernity accordingly as the nihilistic epoch of Being. Writing in *Nihilism and Emancipation*, this becomes clear as Vattimo states:

> The situation to which we really belong before all else, and toward which we are responsible in our ethical choices, is that of the dissolution of principles, of nihilism. If we choose instead to find our ultimate points of reference in the most specific kinds of attachment (to race, ethnic group, family, or class), then we limit our perspective right at the outset (Vattimo 2004: 41).

As this quotation makes clear, 'like you' does not mean attachment to racial, national or class groups, but a shared awareness of one's own provisional, contingent thrownness. With a 'dissolution of principles,' there is no centre, no objectivity and no absolute against which anything can be measured in terms of its truth value. This situation has liberated a plurality of interpretations, which is why Vattimo believes his hermeneutical nihilism is the *koiné* of late-modernity. Accordingly, ethics should take the form of 'discourse-dialogue between defenders of finite positions who recognize that this is what they are and who shun the temptation to impose their position on others' (Vattimo 2004: 46). This form of ethics 'will certainly retain…some aspects of Kantism (especially the formulation of the categorical imperative in terms of respect for the other…stripped of any dogmatic residue)' (Vattimo 2004: 46). Vattimo's crash-diet subject is, then, one who has piously recollected Being in its current nihilistic sending; recognising her own finitude by turning inward and finding no divine spark or foundational rationality there, she will turn to others like her.

What will these postmodern, weakened subjects do? Vattimo has implied that they will engage in dialogue, but for what end? Vattimo writes in *A Farewell to Truth* that 'we don't reach agreement when we have discovered the truth, we say we have discovered the truth when we reach agreement. In other words, charity takes the place of truth' (Vattimo 2011: 77). Elsewhere, in *Christianity, Truth and Weakening Faith,* Vattimo puts his position more clearly by stating that 'It is still possible to speak of truth…but only because we have realized *caritas* through agreement. *Caritas* with respect to opinion, with respect to choices about values, will become the truth when it is shared' (Vattimo 2005: 51). The 'universal,'

writes Vattimo in *Nihilism and Emancipation*, is only regarded 'by passing through dialogue, through consent, if you like through *caritas*…truth is born in consent and from consent' (Vattimo 2004: xxvi). In fact, Vattimo priorities 'listening' over talking, for Christian charity, in its secularised universal mission, involves acknowledging that others might be right so that 'universality' should give rise to charitable hospitality, as Vattimo writes in *After Christianity* (Vattimo 2002a: 101-102). Listening to others will further weaken one's own position, as well as gathering in multiple interpretations in order to fuse horizons to create more syncretistic, less logically coherent positions. This is how *caritas* is the stimulus to weakening, the nihilistic force behind secularisation. Vattimo's postmodern Categorical Imperative, then, is forming truth as dialogue. This dialogue is the coming together of 'weak' subjects fusing their horizons as a result of recognising their finitude as a consequence of turning inward and reading the 'signs of the times' (Vattimo 1998: 91-92), that we are living in the epoch of the consummation of the nihilistic vocation of Being.

Through the relation of *caritas* to nihilism, Vattimo seems to introduce the conditional into the Categorical Imperative: if others are like you, then listen to them. Can you have a conditional Categorical Imperative? Unsurprisingly, the answer is "No," for it would be a contradiction in terms. A conditional imperative is a hypothetical imperative, such as 'If you want to go to the cinema, then you have to buy a ticket.' This is instrumental reasoning, based on an individual or a community deciding a goal and then deducing what would be the rational course of action required in order to achieve this goal. In the case of Vattimo, this goal-setting and instrumental rationality occurs at a different point in the ethical decision-making process than in Kant's ethics. For Vattimo, the goal-setting occurs through the dialogue, but the decision to enter into dialogue is based on whether the other party is willing to engage. 'Strong' thinkers would not be dialogue partners, for they presume the 'correctness' of their views at the outset, precluding dialogue and, therefore, truth. In recent years, in collaboration with his pupil Santiago Zabala in the work *Hermeneutic Communism*, Vattimo has preferred to use the term 'conversation' rather than dialogue, for the latter term is reminiscent of Platonic dialogues in which truth is presupposed at the outset (Vattimo and

Zabala 2011: 25-26, 79). Truth for Vattimo and Zabala is identical with 'friendship,' and the latter is forged in the fusion of horizons that constitutes weakening of Being in accordance with the secularising power of *caritas*, that is, its nihilistic vocation as a process in history.

It has been written elsewhere that the separation of people into 'strong' and 'weak' thinkers is regrettable not only because it retains a metaphysical dualism, but also because the semantic field of 'friendship,' 'truth,' and 'charity' indicates that those who are not prepared to engage in dialogue can be ignored and not listened to (Harris 2013b: 1-21). Moreover, the value judgement behind Vattimo's assessment of 'strong' thinkers reveals the inconsistencies in Vattimo's philosophy. 'The unconditional is violent' is ironically an unconditional assessment. One can liken this inconsistency to Bernard Williams' criticisms of subjectivism in his book *Morality*: if a subjectivist says someone 'has no right' to criticise another's opinion, then this idea of 'no right' takes one beyond a merely subjectivist ethic; it is some sort of metaethic or transcendental, pre-content schema in which ethical opinions are separated out and managed (Williams 1973: 41). If Vattimo criticises strong thought on the basis of it being 'violent,' and if Vattimo backs out of a genuinely Categorical Imperative of universal respect for others based on an 'inner turn' primarily on the basis that some people are strong thinkers, then he is just like Williams' subjectivist holding that people have 'no right' to condemn someone else's beliefs. In other words, Vattimo's view that 'violence is wrong' is his implicit moral absolute, just in the same way the subjectivist still conceives of a 'right' and 'wrong' when it comes to judging peoples' opinions. Of course, Vattimo would not even consider himself a relativist, let alone a subjectivist. Vattimo would argue that he is appealing to history to ground a criterion for interpretation that takes him beyond relativism and subjectivism. Vattimo's problem is in trying to create a criterion for interpretation out of hermeneutical nihilism. 'For this problem,' writes Wolfgang Welsch in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, '[that is] of the multiplicity of competing interpretations and the absence of a noninterpretative metacriterion—Vattimo has no solution' (Welsch 2007: 100). Welsch does not think that a 'noninterpretative metacriterion' is possible after the death of God. Vattimo may argue that we should try to

recollect traces of Being to weaken them to reduce violence. Being has weakened itself despite 'strong' thinkers from the time of Late-Antiquity up to the present; indeed, as Vattimo pointed out, the 'principle of interiority' took its time to develop between Augustine and Descartes, but it did. Therefore, if we are 'thrown' into the world as *Dasein*, and if Being is inescapably linguistic, surely it is impossible to fail to recollect it in some way, and it takes further, strong reasons to argue for weak thinking and the reduction of violence? If one argues that we should all be weak thinkers (and therefore conversation partners), that we should interpret the traces of Being charitably, then sooner or later one runs into an ethical absolute. Vattimo would reply that he is reading the signs of the times and that the 'ontology of actuality' shows Being orienting itself towards weakening. However, as I have shown earlier this depends upon his selective reading of the *Ereignis* arising from the *Ge-Stell*. Without the latter, Vattimo is left merely with hermeneutical plurality. The latter alone is capable of many readings; it could be that one sees the plurality as widespread error in light of one's own certainty (which is what one sees with fundamentalism in its many stripes). It is only in light of Vattimo's partial Heideggerianism that one finds *kenosis* as the inaugural message of a secularisation which gives rise to the hermeneutical nihilism, and *caritas* is the ethical flipside of the kenotic coin.

It was mentioned earlier that others 'like you' does not refer to nationality, race or class, and it is likely that Vattimo considers those 'like you' only as those people interested in listening to the sending of Being as 'weakening.' In addition to the circularity of deriving *caritas* from *kenosis*, which is in turn derived from an unpersuasive reading of the signs of the times in terms of an ontology of actuality which as 'weakening,' there are more practical problems in the sense that I think *caritas* is preaching to the converted, neglecting 'strong' thinkers. 'Like you' means only those people who realise both they and their beliefs are contingent and historically situated; in other words, that one should only listen to other people who have put friendship before objective truth. Put yet another way, one should listen to those who are not prepared to fuse horizons and agree. Taking the case of Vattimo's views on Islam, he tacitly agrees with Richard Rorty when the latter stated that 'dialogue with Islam is pointless' (Vattimo,

Rorty, and Zabala: 2005: 72). In this exchange with Rorty, recorded in the book *The Future of Religion*, Vattimo notes that the West is 'refused' by 'some parts of the Islamic world' (Vattimo, Rorty, and Zabala 2005: 72). Elsewhere, Vattimo's reasoning behind such an opinion is clarified, for in an article for *La Stampa* (17 February 1989) called 'Our Savage Brother,' Vattimo noted that Islam has 'strong values' (quoted in Antiseri 1996: 69). Later, in lectures published as *After Christianity*, Vattimo stated practices based on a 'strong identity' (indicating Vattimo identifying approaches to knowledge with personhood), such as women wearing the chador, should be outlawed (Vattimo 2002a: 101). 'Strong values' and 'strong identity' are examples of 'strong thought.' 'Strong thought' (*pensiero forte*) is not a term outlined and elaborated on much by Vattimo, but it is the logical antonym of weak thought (*pensiero debole*). In 'Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought,' he describes strong thought as 'deductive cogency, which fears letting the initial move escape, the move after which everything falls into place' (Vattimo 2012a: 39). The 'initial move' mentioned in this quotation is the 'first principle,' religious ('God') or philosophical ('substance'), against which everything is measured and to which everything is reduced. With the example of the chador, there is the suspicion that in Vattimo's society, 'strong thinkers' are not to be considered others 'like you' but others 'unlike you' who need to be banished to the margins. There is a paradox in Vattimo's thought in the sense that for all Vattimo is interested in going to the margins to bring the other back in from exclusion (Vattimo and Zabala 2011: 50-51), these others would have embraced weak thought as a way of combating the metanarratives and strong values of metaphysics and the natural sacred, such as homosexuals who have been marginalised by Natural Moral Law. Vattimo himself is an example, of somebody who sought out Nietzsche and Heidegger and turned his back on the Thomism with which he was brought up because it made him an 'other,' 'not like' other heterosexual Catholics (Vattimo and Paterlini 2009: 13). Neo-Thomists, however, will be banished to the margins should a form of weak thought become normative as they are 'strong' thinkers with ethical naturalism as their cognitivist metaethical standpoint. Ironically, Vattimo's thought is a repeat, and inversion, of the Enlightenment in which religion was banished from public respectability and debate. A similar observation has been made

by Thomas Guarino. 'The contrast between the crucifix and the chador is revelatory,' writes Guarino, 'because it indicates that, for Vattimo, no one with strong beliefs can truly participate in the public sphere' (Guarino 2009: 71). Guarino worries that the cognitive content of religious belief will be emptied if it were to participate in a public sphere organised along Vattimian lines (although it could just be that the public sphere will not be constructed on strong foundations). Another worry not mentioned by Guarino is what about those who neither know, nor care, about weak thought; will there simply be no effort to go to the 'margins' to engage with 'strong' thinkers? Will 'charity' be extended to these people? When considering 'friendship' (another way of Vattimo's for referring to charity, normally used by him when not discussing religion) below, this theme will be taken up once more.

iv.   Conclusion

There is a distinct sense that Vattimo's approach to Christianity is not satisfactory to religious people and by standards of internal consistency. Concerning the former, Vattimo is filling up old wineskins with an alien vintage to the point of rupture, a point made by Thomas Guarino about Vattimo's approach to Christianity in general (Guarino 2009: 152). Guarino points out Vattimo's Christianity is a one-way street in which there is no exchange of ideas. Christianity has to conform to weak thought, which involves no vertical transcendence and a principle of charity which is wedded to hermeneutics. What Vattimo has done is to create a vision of Christianity based on his own preferences for Heidegger and Nietzsche, primarily, but also based on Gadamer, Dilthey and Marx. Vattimo has created God in his own image, based on his view that all there is happens to be the plane of history in which texts constitute how Being is disclosed. As someone who has faced discrimination over his sexuality and Marxism, Vattimo is against authoritarianism, such as in Catholic dogma. Seeing the possibility for liberation from dogmatism through interpreting hermeneutical plurality as oriented towards weakening, Vattimo has tied in the development of information and communications technology to the history of Being. While the latter takes a positive turn in Vattimo's thought through its identification with our sole possibility of liberation, it is a one-

sided reading not only of this technology, but also of the history of Being, one which neglects other readings of Heidegger. This partiality grounds Vattimo's reading of Christianity, for *kenosis* is required to reduce transcendence to immanence, weakening and the turn inwards, a message which—through secularisation—reached its culmination in the death of God. While the hermeneutic circle is to be expected, the sheer subjectivity of Vattimo's return to religion means it will have little purchase beyond himself, for even though Vattimo appeals to the 'signs of the times' these are not unambiguous and are read through Vattimo's philosophical lens. As Jonkers puts it, 'the limiting of secularisation by the commandment of love is nothing but an arbitrary decision on the part of Vattimo as an individual' (Jonkers 2000: 386). It is not as though there are no good reasons for accepting one view over another except for strong, objective reasons (the very thing Vattimo disavows), but that a persuasive case needs to be made. Taking Vattimo's approach to Christianity into account, for example, Vattimo needed to make a persuasive case if he wanted other people to adopt his interpretation of Christianity. One way of making a persuasive case is to move within the 'language game' of the topic at hand, in this case the religion and theology of Christianity. Vattimo himself recognises that truth is constructed in dialogue (or, better, 'conversation') within language games (Rorty, Vattimo, Zabala 2006: 59), so he would accept what I am writing about here with regard to persuasion. That Vattimo has not adequately entered into the language game of Christianity is evident from the numerous criticisms that have been made, especially as Vattimo has left omitted much of the language (and rules) of the game, such as the 'cross,' 'resurrection' and 'transcendence (Depoortere 2008a: 17-22). This is not to say that Vattimo has to submit to rigid preconceived rules, like in chess, but that he had a chance to cross-pollinate the language game of theology with that of another game, postmodernism, thereby weakening the claims of 'strong' theologians who might have entered into dialogue with him.[21] However, instead he created a god so particular and subjective that it did not fully engage the language game of theology, only choosing a select few words and then filling these old wineskins with an 'alien and new vintage' (Guarino 2009: 152).

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[21] If they would have done at all; 'dialogue' among with thinkers is preaching to the converted.

More than being subjective and autobiographical, Vattimo's interpretation of Christianity is, however, unsuccessful in yielding an ethic in the form of the 'limit' of secularisation (by which one can read the process of nihilism). By restricting *caritas* to other weak thinkers, Vattimo has not created a universal principle but is preaching to the converted, by which I mean other weak thinkers. Worse than this, by dismissing the possibility of vertical transcendence *a priori*, Vattimo has done violence, as Klun would put it to any person or group who believes in this possibility (Klun 2014: 52). As Antiseri has said (Antiseri 1996: 123), Vattimo has created a prison out of history, I would argue to the point where he has developed a metaphysics of the *Logos*. 'So when Vattimo speaks of supplanting strong ontology by weak,' writes Phillip Blond, 'he is merely repeating rather than overcoming the grammar of modernity…the idea of weakening is just the decline of strong objectivity into its dialectical opposite' (Blond 2002: 283-284). The absolutes from modernity (such as the Cartesian ego and Kantian *a priori*) are dissolved into Vattimian weakness, but in forms and for reasons that are 'capricious' (Blond 2002: 284). Blond sees this as repeating the logic of modernity, which always had the absolute and arbitrary working in tandem (such as the Kantian 'noumenal' as the arbitrary backdrop to the *a priori* to which knowledge corresponded). While Vattimo thinks he is being more peaceful with his weakened structures, 'the arbitrary is just as violent as any objective metaphysical structure' (Blond 2002: 284). It would be far more consistent with Vattimo's style of thought to leave the vertically transcendent open as a possibility, but one which he personally does not entertain. For reasons which shall be discussed more at the beginning of the main conclusion, appeals made by groups to found strong thought on anything—including the vertically transcendent—are likely to fail to persuade.

Conclusion: A weakened Vattimo?

If Vattimo's return to religion needs modifying heavily to the extent that vertical transcendence must be allowed and that nihilism should no longer be seen as 'destining' the West, is there anything left of his position? What benefits could there be to Vattimo's position, or should we stop talking about an 'ontology of actuality'? Here it is prudent to distinguish between Vattimo's position and the benefits of it. While I have shown that it is little more than Vattimo's own interpretation of the 'signs of the times' that we are living after the death of God and the end of metaphysics, his insights into 'postmodernity' are actually persuasive. Considering the latter, we are living in a decentred, infinitely plural time for the reasons he has provided: modern information and communications technology—especially the internet—have shrunk the world, giving minorities a voice and have sewn confusion on beliefs, values and traditions. Vattimo conflates sociology with ontology by moving from plurality to a lack of Truth, which he extends beyond the latter to all forms of vertical transcendence altogether in his hermeneutical nihilism. This is because he reads the sociological phenomenon through the lens of his particular reading of the *Ge-Stell*/*Ereignis*. Nevertheless, I have shown the pitfalls of this reading of Heidegger in this way. However, for all it's worth, Vattimo's reasons for nihilism are unpersuasive, neither Heidegger nor the contemporary sociological situation lend themselves to supporting 'strong' truth claims, even in the field of ethics. Heidegger, whether we conceived of truth as *aletheia* or *physis*, would have guarded against truth in an absolute sense as the former openings or presencings are historical and contingent. As for the sociological phenomenon of plurality, there is the epistemological problem of knowing what is True or Right, and the rhetorical issue of persuading somebody else equally sure of their opinions as you that you are right and they are wrong. Essentially the paradigmatic case of this problem today can be seen in the West and Isis clashing over endless moral, political and cultural issues, from women's rights to the treatment of homosexuals and beyond.

Although Vattimo's reasoning is unpersuasive, there are benefits to Vattimo's approach, especially the ethic of weakening he tried to derive historically. For example, Aguirre thinks that 'A 'nihilistic hermeneutic,''

like Vattimo's, which speaks out of its own contingency, wishes to keep open the space for dialogue and tolerance of the other' (Aguirre 2010: 114). Elsewhere, Frascati-Lochhead used Vattimo's approach to argue that minority voices should not retreat into 'reactive nihilism,' that it is important to recognise not only that one has an interpretation, but also that it is nothing but an interpretation:

> The experience of emancipation, as Vattimo describes it, does not make it possible to absolutise a given historical situation, even as a minority position. For the experience of Being is not the contemplation of self-fulfilling plenitude, of presence completely enfleshed, of wholeness; it is the awareness of how risky, opaque, and precarious our interpretations are (Frascati-Lochhead 1998: 177).

As a result, there are incentives to derive a weak ontology after all, since Vattimo's basic intuition that strong thought is violent happens to be a good one. His appeal to Christianity as the inheritance of the West provides resources for restructuring his argument to provide a persuasive case for the notion that Being is directed towards weakening. At the end of Part Two I made a case for the centrality of the person of Jesus as a 'god' in the Heideggerian sense, of the possibility of vertical transcendence, drawing on Dotolo's notion of the endless reinterpretability of the person of Jesus, linking this to Klun's point about the centrality of 'flesh' in relation to the significance of Jesus. In turn, this was linked to vertical transcendence which does not have to be understood as metaphysical and therefore violent; this has the benefit of being more authentic and persuasive for the religiously-minded as it accords more with their faith and religious experience. At no point, though, was this transcendence identified with Being. What I want to put forward is a 'horizontal' link between the endless reinterpretability of Christ and his last command in order to explain this weakening which Vattimo perceives in the history of western thought, which should also yield an ethic which is appropriate to our current pluralistic times. In other words, I propose to link the body of the incarnate Christ (the *Logos* made flesh—see John 1:14) which Dotolo sees as functioning somewhat as 'earth' in Heidegger's fourfold, with how and why it has been constantly reinterpreted. While Dotolo himself emphasises the Chalcedonian Definition as the source of his interpretability, I would put it down more to the hermeneutical nature of Christianity as an evangelical religion which has foreshadowed the current situation of postmodern

plurality by always adapting itself to other cultures. I would argue that, intentionally or otherwise, Christianity acted as a 'Trojan Horse' for religion, to use Pierpaolo Antonello's phrase (Antonello 2010: 8). By this I mean that the message of Christ (and Christ's message) entered the milieu between religion and philosophy through its encounter with both, irrevocably changing how both would be understood through a process of secularisation.

This reworking of secularisation in Vattimo's thought that has been developed in part by Carmelo Dotolo (Dotolo 1999) and by me elsewhere (Harris 2013c; Harris 2014c), and is being extended further in this present study. Dotolo argues that the Christian message brought about a de-Hellenising in philosophy and a reduction of onto-theology in the content of philosophy. For philosophy, Dotolo interprets Vattimo as stating that philosophy was weakened based on its encounter with the Hebrew-Judaic temporally linear eschatological horizon, replacing the eternal view of time found in Greek philosophy. Ontotheological religious claims were then weakened later, in Dotolo's eyes, by being recovered in the late-modern environment in which transcendence no longer has any purchase (Dotolo 1999: 406). I interpret the workings of secularisation slightly differently, such that the evangelical message of friendliness brought together both philosophy and religion, weakening both as Christianity was in essence neither, even if this has taken a long time to show. My own position will be developed here more explicitly in the missionary context of Christianity in which friendliness has entailed spreading the 'good news' to all nations, thus explaining why Christianity took philosophy into itself in order to weaken it.

The risen Christ told his disciples before he ascended to heaven to make disciples of 'all the nations' (Matthew 28:18-20), the 'Great Commission' as it is known. Greek philosophy was part of the cultural milieu of the Near East of the first century, and on St Paul's mission to the Gentiles he encountered the philosophers of Athens. Most were unimpressed with his scandal of the cross; it was 'foolishness' to the Gentiles who believed in the eternal soul, not the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 1:23). Nevertheless, a handful were receptive, especially Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34). By the second century, however, Christianity had

found an impressively educated, albeit small, Gentile audience, including the philosophers Athenagoras, Theophilus, and most notably Justin Martyr. The theme in ecclesiastical history that Christianity became 'Hellenised' as a result of this early encounter with the Greeks is an old and contentious one, famously put forward by Adolf von Harnack (Harnack 1902). More interesting is the claim by the contemporary British philosopher John Gray that Christianity did not abolish strong structures, but actually *introduced* the value of 'truth' into religion through its appropriation of philosophy (Gray 2002). Fernando Savater places Gray's reading in opposition to Vattimo's (Savater 2007: 299), but one could actually use it to extend Antonello's analysis of the function of Christianity as a 'Trojan Horse.' Christianity has posed variously as a religion and a philosophically justified faith, taking in the concepts of both philosophy and religion to weaken them in an indefinite process.

It is possible to indicate how Christianity has functioned as a 'Trojan Horse' in the weakening of metaphysics. Karl Löwith has said that philosophies of history are ideological and are not interested in 'what actually happens' (Löwith 1949: 3-4). Nevertheless, if secularisation is to be a plausible philosophy of history, rather than the kind of teleological unilinear history about which Löwith was writing, it should at least be persuasive. To this end, examples can be found of Christianity weakening metaphysics in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the controversies concerning the Trinity and Incarnation in Late Antiquity there were frequent arguments over how metaphysical terms should be used. There was confusion, for instance, over how the Greek term '*hypostases*' should translate into Latin; was '*personae*' good enough? If so, it made the Trinity three separate beings, but according to Gregory of Nyssa they were not, for they shared a common '*ousia*' (essence), just as Peter, Andrew, John and James shared the common essence of humanity as four different *hypostases* of the *ousia*. Insistence on the use of these terms did no good for metaphysics, for it was making the normal conform to the exceptional, the immanent and human conform to the transcendent and divine, all due to the scandal of the particular: the incarnation of Christ. For although through the notion of *ousia* Peter, Andrew, John and James share a common human nature it would have been normal to regard them as separate human beings,

Gregory of Nyssa would have had one think otherwise. Moreover, the use of *ousia* as 'essence' rather than 'substance' confused matters further, with the differences between *ousia* and *hypostasis* unclear even among the Church Fathers (Peters 1993: 195 n. 19-21).

The recovery of Aristotle in the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries only made matters worse for metaphysics. Aquinas 'twisted' Aristotle in various ways, forcing his eternal view of the universe into a Hebrew-Christian linear temporality, thus making his Prime Mover a first mover of creation, rather than acting as something akin to an eternal magnet as final cause for everything else in the universe. Therefore, Aquinas made problems for issues such as mutability, potentiality, actuality, and causation by using Aristotelian terms outside of their context and conventional usage. Even more problematically, Aquinas used Aristotelian terms such as 'substance' and 'accidents' for his explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist through transubstantiation, but, in the words of P. J. Fitzpatrick, 'abuses them to the point of nonsense' (Fitzpatrick 1993: 11). This is because Aquinas thought 'free floating' accidents of the bread and wine remained once the host had been consecrated: 'it is clear that the body of Christ is in this sacrament 'by way of substance,' and not by way of [the accident of] quantity' (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 76, a.1). Aristotle did not think it was possible for there to be free-floating accidents not qualifying a substance. Therefore, the absolute importance of a contingent event—the Incarnation of Christ—meant a philosophical system had to bend to the point of breaking in order to explain articles of faith. That this philosophy had to be brought to bear at all comes down firstly to the Great Commission, the evangelical imperative of the risen Christ's, and to the insistence on truth which came from the philosophy the evangelists brought into Christianity. This latter point is explicit in the work of the second century Apologists and is traceable even to early second century canonical works such as the Gospel of John, which betrays strong Stoic influences particularly in the opening '*Logos* Hymn' (John 1).

Another example of how Christianity made philosophy contingent is the 'God of the philosophers.' This issue of 'ontotheology' links to weakening in at least two respects: the problem of 'freedom' and the

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problem of 'evil.' Concerning the former, one can take the example of Boethius' attempt to explain how an omnipotent, omniscient and eternal God can nonetheless allow for human freedom (Boethius 1999); if God knows everything, then he would predestine all humans by knowing both their future choices and actions. Boethius responded to this by stating that God is outside of time and comprehends everything in a single glance, a 'flash of simultaneity' in which he sees the choices we freely make. Whereas God knows necessarily what a tree will be doing for its existence because of his knowledge of the nature of the thing as a tree, God knows what a human will be doing of necessity (because God is omniscient) but on the condition that the human being chooses to do something by its own volition. As God is outside of time he sees the freely made, conditional choices of humans from the beginning of time to its end. Boethius' solution is elegant, but not without problems. One problem is that the God of Israel interacted with his people, and unless he willed this interaction 'from eternity' his responses should have been affected by gaining knowledge of what people would say. Moreover, God would also have known 'from eternity' that humans would sin and why did he not do enough to stop it, unless he requires human freedom in some way in order that they freely choose to love him, which would then mean that God is not self-sufficient (aseity)? If the latter were the case, it would mean that, unlike Plato's forms and the Prime Mover, God really is not ultimate in the traditional, philosophical sense; theology and religion have contaminated philosophy and have distorted the traditional, Greek sense of the ultimate, with the Judaeo-Christian tradition weakening with philosophical principles after having mixed due to the Great Commission.[22] Even more fundamentally, how could an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God create and/or permit evil and suffering in the world? The classic formulation of this problem comes from David Hume in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: 'Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?' (Hume 1993: 100). Of course, this issue has been debated and argued about considerably, and the point is not to re-tread such a worn path but to show

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[22] Admittedly, some Jewish thinkers prior to Jesus were mixing their beliefs with philosophy, notably Philo of Alexandria, but these were unique figures.

how problems for both philosophy and religion have arisen from bringing them both together in the God of Christianity. Problems for philosophy have occurred for being placed under greater scrutiny as a result of particular issues arising due to ontotheology. For example, in the case of the problem of evil, Christian responses to the problem have included analysing the doctrine of omnipotence. Whereas the idea of 'perfection' or an 'intrinsic maximum' made sense, or were at least not questioned, in Platonism, their place within theology put these notions under scrutiny. Aquinas, for instance, thought that 'omnipotence' did not really mean omnipotence in the sense that 'all-powerful' pertained to the type of being associated with power. So that, unlike Descartes later who thought that God could square a circle (Descartes 1978), Aquinas stated that it was proper for God not to be able to do certain things, such as sin or climb a tree, as it was not proper for an omnibenevolent and incorporeal being to do these things (Aquinas 1989). Although unintended, the net result of this kind of reasoning has been to undermine the 'universal' by adding conditions to it, and these conditions come from the particular, the religious. Matters are complicated further when one considers that Christ lived in time, that he had a body and that he sometimes did things which one might not consider good, such as get angry in the Temple and prioritise himself because the disciples would always have the poor with them (Matthew 26:11).

If Christianity supplied a fatal dose of contingency to philosophy, 'contaminating' it as Vattimo himself says (Vattimo 1997a: 47), apart from introducing the notions of atemporality and an intrinsic maximum, how did philosophy weaken religion through its Christian guise? As has been mentioned, Savater reads Gray's theory of secularisation as holding that Christianity introduced 'Truth' with a capital 'T' into religion: 'Atheism is a late bloom of a Christian passion for truth' (Gray 2002: 127), strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'atheism…*its will to truth*…is *not* the antithesis of the ideal which it appears to be; it is rather only one of the last phases of its development' (Nietzsche 1996: 134). Christianity posed as a religion in the way Girard described, in taking on the appearance of a religion through the scapegoat mechanism, except in Jesus' case he was fully innocent and revealed the natural sacred for what it really was, highlighting the brutal truth of the scapegoat mechanism. As Girard

has described this aspect of religion so well (and I recounted his ideas in Part One), I will not dwell on it further. Here one can depart from Savater, Gray and Girard to take a far more familiarly Nietzschean-Vattimian line. The Hebrew-Judaic God was part of a linear view of salvation history based on a covenant, not on God being representative of the Absolute Truth. Nevertheless, monotheism leant itself to being read through the lens of philosophical first principles. Therefore, once the missionary element of Christianity necessitated that Gentile Apologists place a Hellenistic gloss over the Christian *kerygma*, the identification of God with the Truth was destined. However, a religion based on 'Truth' and 'truthfulness' will collapse when it is discovered to be a 'lie' (Vattimo 1997a: 7). Of course, neither Nietzsche nor Vattimo have held that this discovery revealed God as a lie in a flat-footed literal sense. Rather, this 'lie' has been interpreted variously, including such that God as the guarantor of the security of society is no longer required given the advances in science and technology that were permitted by monotheism (and here one can relate this history to the Heideggerian *Ge-Stell* and *Ereignis*), or that the value of truth and its concomitant, knowledge, led to the subjective turn inward and therefore down the road to the fabling of the world as narrated by Nietzsche (through Descartes, Kant, positivism, and its unmasking as a play of forces and situatedness). One could even interpret the 'lie' as pertaining to the 'Trojan Horse' effect in particular, such that it has been found out, through Girard's work, that the value of Christ was not as a sacrificial victim, but as an unmasker of the natural sacred.

If these examples suffice to indicate how Christianity weakened not only religion, but also philosophy, what lay behind the success of missionary endeavours beyond accommodating the *kerygma* to local belief-systems and means of expression? In other words, if Christianity became cloaked by, and interwoven with, Hellenistic terminology (for example), why did the Gentiles take it on board to begin with? Here I can connect this question with the significant motivation for Vattimo in recovering Christianity, to find an ethic to adjudicate the irreducible hermeneutic plurality of late-modernity. Vattimo thought he found it in '*caritas.*' His own account of *caritas* was flawed, but how will Christianity as a Trojan Horse yield an ethic of charity? Here an answer can again be found along

Vattimian lines. If using philosophy as a handmaiden for theology occurred on the grounds of serving the servant, the kenotic Word, then essentially weakening took place in the name of friendship. Aristotle's metaphysics was weakened in the name of fellowship (communion) and due to a history of salvation based on a contingent event, the Incarnation. Now, if the Incarnation functioned as an unmasking of the natural sacred due to a message of friendship (God lowering himself and announcing he was no longer master, but friend), then this message itself is the historical and historic announcement that is the guiding, normative thread for weakening interpretations that persists to the present day and is not capable of being secularised. Here one can draw upon Vattimo's use of Dilthey's understanding of Christianity; the latter effected an inwards-turning based on brotherhood, a turn to the subject based on shared faith. The Marxist historian G.E.M. de Ste. Croix has also seen this reason as an influential factor with respect to the success of early Christianity in spreading to diverse groups, that slave, free, Jew, Gentile, male and female were not one externally, but 'in Christ' (Ste Croix 1981: 418-425; see Galatians 3:28). Returning to Vattimo's reading of Dilthey, friendship towards one-another based on an inner faith, rather than socio-political or economic factors, helped spread Christianity, backed-up by the idea that God, too, is a friend as is shown through Christ, which is a link to Vattimo's understanding of *kenosis*. Therefore, Vattimo has a principle of friendship based on the hermeneutical occurrence of the Incarnation and Jesus Christ's own interpretative of action, of lightening the burden, of lessening enmity in his Antitheses ('love your enemy'), and his calling of everyone to friendship: 'all the nations' and a renewal of all creation (Matthew 19:28).

Textual justification for this reading of Vattimo on friendship comes in the form of what he has written about 'truth.' In *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, Vattimo writes that 'I can no longer keep the notion of truth and evangelical charity apart' (Vattimo 2008: 97). Charity in this context, for Vattimo, is 'a life of heeding others and responding to others in dialogue' (Vattimo 2008: 97); in short, 'friendship' (Vattimo 2008: 98). It is interesting that Vattimo should qualify 'charity' with 'evangelical.' This term has two main meanings in the context of Christianity. On the one hand, it is a synonym for 'good news,' and thus simply the Gospel message, and

this may well be the way in which Vattimo wishes to use the term. Nevertheless, 'evangelical' can also mean spreading this good news, and this is where the nihilistic missionary vocation of Christianity comes in. Truth is made, for Vattimo, in consensus in which the primary value is the dialogue itself, only secondly the consensus that is made out of 'interpreting our common situation along certain lines and from shared assumptions' (Vattimo 2008: 69). Traditionally, evangelism in the missionary sense meant conversion through reduction. However, dialogue itself would presume weakening, for absolute positions preclude genuine dialogue. Indeed, to reach out to others in the first place means there is a desire to listen to others. In this *Verwindung* of the evangelical, the good news is that of weakening, abasement, and, above all, charity, friendship. In an ironic distortion of the Great Commission, the good news is that of spreading the good news, of seeking the other through dialogue. For this reason, Vattimo refers to the missionary vocation of Christianity after the end of metaphysics as moving 'from universality to hospitality' (Vattimo 2002a: 100), deliberately invoking Derrida's work on hospitality. The latter term means placing 'oneself in the hands of one's guest, that is, an entrustment of oneself to him' (Vattimo 2002a: 101). In dialogue, 'this signifies acknowledging that the other might be right,' and that in the spirit of charity the Christian 'must limit [himself] almost entirely to listening' (Vattimo 2002a: 101). On these grounds, one can reach out even to those 'strong' interpreters, for the primary action of this 'twisted' missionary activity is listening, not trying to convince the other. The very weakening that occurred in the setting-up of Christianity as the Trojan Horse for both religion and philosophy can be regarded as the archetype for such a relationship to the other. The Christian gospel of weakness spread out and quickly found a Hellenistic Gentile culture to which it listened, adopting principles from its philosophy, Stoicism in particular. Later it listened to, and adopted, from other cultures, such as Roman governance after the conversion of Constantine, through the recovery of Aristotle all the way up to listening to Marxism and the struggle of people in countries that developed liberation theologies. As such, one can see why Vattimo thinks that in *caritas* (the driving force of secularisation due, on this reading, to its 'weak evangelism' based on friendship and hospitality) he finds 'the original 'text' of which

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weak ontology is the transcription' (Vattimo 1999: 70). *Caritas* and weak ontology weaken strong structures by finding the other based on the announcement that God—representative of absolutist strong thought—has been weakened (*kenosis*). Indeed, as Vattimo realises, it is due to this secularisation that the death of God occurred and the philosophy of 'weak ontology' is possible at all.

The missionary focus of the Christian announcement led to the spread of Christianity to the Gentile world. Whereas Christianity was a Trojan Horse for religion in the sense that Girard describes, this became the exemplar for the notion of Truth in philosophy; in both cases, Christianity successfully posed as something it was not in order to weaken it to the point of breaking. Jesus' calling to friendship and his death on the cross unmasked the 'natural sacred,' but the power of this memory as a trace, a tradition, made philosophies such as Stoicism, Platonism in its various forms, and Aristotelianism all break under the weight of having to accommodate the exceptional and contingently historical. This re-reading of Vattimo's theory of secularisation can still yield the results he wants, that is, to ground hermeneutics historically and yield an ethic of weakening, in other words, one of secularisation. The ethic in question remains one of *caritas*, but disparate elements of Vattimo's return to Christianity have been brought together to show that there are a lot of resources within his work with which to construct a philosophy of dialogue based on charity understood in terms of friendship and hospitality. These two notions involve seeking out the other and listening to them, which was commanded by the risen Christ's 'Great Commission.' This found its archetypal form very quickly in the mission to the Gentiles which yielded the Trojan Horse effect of the message of the weakening of God (*kenosis*) meeting philosophy.

There is another consequence of the turn inward based on charity which underlay the Great Commission which has relevance to the idea of weakening, and that is nominalism. Nominalism is the view that things, such as tables, only share their name in common; there is no 'essence' to a table in reality. Links have been made between weak thought and nominalism, particularly in the work of Jean Grondin, who sees in nominalism the logic of modernity:

> According to Gadamer, the Nietzschean and postmodernist destruction of truth secretly rests on the *nominalism* of modernity,

according to which there is no meaning in the 'world itself,' which is
nothing but senseless matter. In this perspective, sense comes out
only through the act of the understanding subject, who 'injects'
meaning into the world 'out there' (Grondin 2007: 209).

Although Grondin sees in nominalism the logic of modernity, it has its roots
in the Later Middle Ages, particularly the work of Ockham (c.1285-1349),
who was sceptical with respect to the reality of universals: 'we have to say
that every universal is one singular thing. Therefore, nothing is universal
except by signification by being a sign of several things' (Ockham 1957:
33). Grondin sees the equation between 'Being' and 'language' in
postmodern thought (rather than in Gadamer's, who thought interpretation
was *of* something) as 'the contemporary form of nominalism' as 'one can
never overcome the realm of historical and linguistic interpretations, and
from this perspective arise the 'nihilistic' consequences of modernity's
insistence on subjectivity (or human language)' (Grondin 2007: 209). If
'reality' is based on the subject—through 'faith' in the Medieval worldview,
and through Cartesian certainty which gave way to science after the first
nominalist controversy with Ockham, as nominalism 'corresponds to the
prevailing scientific view of the world' (Grondin 2007: 209)—then doubt is
cast on external essences (which then self-consumes with respect to the
subject as an idea, based ironically on the scientific method). Whether
Medieval (Ockham), modern (the scientific outlook on the world) or
postmodern (Vattimo's weak thought), nominalism gives rise to weakening
of the *ontos on*, of metaphysical structures. As Zimmerman writes,

> Vattimo's equation of transcendence with metaphysics and
> metaphysics with Christianity is theologically and historically
> inaccurate. Nor is his interpretation of secularization as the anti-
> metaphysical substance of Christianity convincing. Indeed, a good
> case has been made that beginning with nominalism in the thirteenth
> century, secularism as the disintegration of theology is responsible
> for the rise of scientific objectivism (Zimmerman 2009: 316).

Equally, Blond says that recent scholarship shows that ''modern' nihilism
extends no further back that [sic] the end of the thirteenth and beginning of
the fourteenth century' through the work of Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus
and William of Ockham who 'constructed a truly modern autonomous
secular metaphysics…that divided faith from reason' to create dogmatic
theology and rationalist atheism (Blond 2002: 285). What Zimmerman and
Blond do not consider is that Vattimo's understanding of Christianity can
lend itself to explaining how nominalism came about in the history of ideas,

through my idea of tying it in with the idea of the Trojan Horse through Vattimo's use of Dilthey. Guarino mentions that Louis Dupré, too, has linked nominalism to the loss of the *ontos on*, to the passage to modernity and a world constituted by a subject (Guarino 2009: 169 n. 131). However, in Dilthey's thought the original appeal of Christianity was from the inner brotherhood of believers, which again links to my emphasis on the missionary, evangelical dimension of the Christian notion of *caritas* picked out by Vattimo; nominalism in Ockham's thought could be seen as an expression of the key Christian message and function, of the inward turn. Modernity developed Ockham's insight further, but the stimulus for this development can be perceived in the original Christian message. Here one can link 'interiority' and 'truth' to 'the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you' (John 14:17). This quotation also links truth and interiority to the 'spirit,' which is Vattimo's description of the current age of hermeneutics—'the Age of the Spirit'—which is based around dialogue and forging truth out of consensus. Chiurazzi also thinks that Vattimo's interpretation of Gadamer, as entailing that Being can be identified with language, is effectively nominalism, something Gadamer himself rejected (Chiurazzi 2014: 185).

In agreement with Vattimo, it has been argued that *kenosis* is the message given in Christ of the weakening of God from master to friend. However, differently from Vattimo, it has been suggested that one should pay more attention to the missionary tendency within Christianity, of organising the hermeneutical principle around seeking the other in terms of seeking them out and listening to them no-matter who they are (*caritas*). The Great Commission was founded on a notion of universal brotherhood through faith, which is compatible with Vattimo's use of Dilthey's argument concerning the subjective turn. When in the early fruit of a charitable exchange of ideas the covenant-based historical religious 'Jesus Movement' met Gentiles, a fusion of horizons took place that weakened both philosophy and religion. This fusion has played itself out in history in the form of secularisation, reinterpreted here as making the religious worldlier through its gradual unmasking at the hand of the ideal of truth incorporated from philosophy. Furthermore, the importance of the contingent was taken into

philosophy through religion and has proved fatal to metaphysical philosophy. A process of weakening strong religious and metaphysics structures (secularisation) has thus taken place as a result of the weakening of God through *kenosis* and its hermeneutical principle of *caritas* involving both the cross-contamination of religion and philosophy in addition to nominalism arising out of the notion of the subject which has its root in the inward turn established by universal brotherhood based on faith. Nominalism reduced belief in universal essences and weakened the idea of the *ontos on*. Here, then, we can have Vattimo's desire to create an ethical principle of weakening for hermeneutics without supersessionism or—crucially—without having to rule out vertical transcendence completely; the door is left open for it, but that it does not explicitly figure in creating an ethic. Moreover, it is a position that does not make any claims that all transcendence is violent. Metaphysics is still posited as violent, but it is not equated with all forms of transcendence. This prevents this modified version of weak thought from being reductionist and, ironically, 'strong' in approach after all.

One avenue for further research would be to find a way to link Vattimo more closely to Levinas as a way of addressing the 'blind spot' in Vattimo's philosophy, namely vertical transcendence. Levinas' philosophy of alterity (the Other) offers resources to address this lacuna in Vattimo's thought. In conversation the Other is to be regarded as something personal rather than as a thing, and awaiting a response from the Other is evidence of this difference. The unknown—a reason why one is entering into conversation with the Other to begin with—means that one cannot reduce the interlocutor to presence and to categories of thought under which they can be subsumed in the way an object can. Links can be made here with Vattimo's concern with *caritas* and the weakened 'missionary' element of his thought I have outlined. In turn, the 'postmodern' dimension of Vattimo's thought and his concern with technology could be used to add other dimensions to Levinas' work if a genuine conversation could be effected by me between my interpretation of Vattimo and the work of Levinas.

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