# GOD WHO MAY BE:
# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

## RICHARD KEARNEY

As a first step towards a phenomenology of religious transfiguration, we will focus on the epiphany of the Burning Bush in Exodus 3:14. Our aim is to identify and address the hidden crux of this enigma: the extraordinary phenomenon of a deity transfiguring itself as an angel which appears and disappears in a fire that burns without burning out, that ignites without consuming, that names itself, paradoxically, as that which cannot be named, and that presents itself in the moment as that which is still to come.

In what follows, we discuss two main traditions of interpretation under the headings, *ontological* and *eschatological*, before offering a third or median option which we call *onto-eschatological*. Our ultimate suggestion is that we might do better to reinterpret the God of Exodus 3 neither as "I who am" nor as "I who am not" but rather as "I am who may be"—that is, as the possibility to be, which obviates the extremes of being and non-being. *'Ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh* might thus be read as signature of the God of the possible, a God who refuses to impose on us or abandon us, traversing the present moment while opening onto an ever-coming future. That, in a word, is our wager.

### I. The Ontological Reading

#### a. Augustine

From the outset the Greeks rendered Exodus 3:14 in terms of the verb "to be", or *einai*. Inheriting the Hellenic formula *ego eimi ho on*—I am the one who is—Augustine and the Latins claimed there was no fundamental difference between this *ego sum qui sum* and the *esse* of metaphysics. The Exodic formula was considered by early and medieval Christian theologians to be

Richard Kearney
Department of Philosophy, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, USA

the highest way of saying *vere esse, ipsum esse*, that is, Being-itself, timeless, immutable, incorporeal, understood as the subsisting act of all existing. While the human soul is split apart into memory (it was), attention (it is) and expectation (it will be), God suffers no such *distentio animi*. The God revealed in Exodus is what He is in Himself, one and the same: his own *essentia—Idipsum esse* existing beyond all time, all history, all movement.[1]

Already in the *Confessions* (XIII, 31, 46), Augustine turns the verbal "is" of God into a substantive formula. And this move becomes more explicit when Augustine comments directly on Exodus 3:14 (which he renders as *Qui est, misit me ad vos*)—"Because he is *Is*, that is to say God is Being itself, *Ipsum esse*, in its most absolute and full sense. '*Esset tibi nomen ipsum esse*', he says to God (Enarr. Ps. 101, 10)."[2] Consolidating this quasi-Parmenidean reading, Augustine makes an important distinction between what God is "for us" (his *nomen misericordiae*) and what He is "in himself" (his *nomen substantiae*) in the Exodic revelation. While the former more historico-anthropomorphic perspective is conveyed by the formula "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", the latter—safeguarding the absolute, inaccessible and transcendent character of God—is expressed by the *ego sum qui sum*. It is this latter sense that Augustine has in mind in the *De Trinitate* when he identifies the God of Exodus with the Greek-Platonic notion of substance (*ousia*) understood as an a-temporal, a-historic, immutable essence: "He is no doubt *substania*, or if one prefers, he is the *essentia* which the Greeks called *ousia* ... *essentia* comes from *esse*. And who 'is' more than He who said to his servant Moses: '*ego sum qui sum*' ... That is why there is only one substance or immutable essence which is God and to which being itself (*ipsum esse*) properly belongs" (*De Trinitate*, V, 2, 3). Augustine concludes from this that anything that changes or is capable of "becoming something which he was not already" cannot be said to possess being itself. We can say of God therefore that "He is" precisely because he is that which does not change and cannot change.

## b. Aquinas

Aquinas developed the Augustinian view that the *qui est* of Exodus is the principal name of God and the highest formulation of being. The revelation of Exodus, he affirmed, designates "true being, that is being that is eternal, immutable, simple self-sufficient, and the cause and principle of every creature".[3] For Aquinas, as for Augustine, the *esse* of God is nothing other than his *essentia*, and as such exists eternally in the present without past or future: that is, without movement, change, desire or possibility—*Deus est actus purus non habens aliquid de potentialitate* (*Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, a. 4, c). With Aquinas and the scholastics, the God of Exodus is thus unequivocally enthroned as the most fully-fledged "act of Being". In both his *Commentary on the Sentences* and *De Substantiis Separatis*, the Exodus verse is invoked by Thomas to corroborate speculative thought about the most ultimate mode of Being. For Being says more of God than either the Good or the One. The

proper name of God revealed in Exodus 3:14 is none other than the absolute identity of divine being and essence. *Esse is the essentia of God*. This obtains for Aquinas no matter how much the divine essence surpasses the limits of rational speculation, approaching God only in an analogical way in the proofs for his existence. Aquinas concedes, after all, that while we can prove *that* God exists we cannot know *what* he is. But these reservations notwithstanding, Aquinas has no hesitation in citing Exodus 3:14 as confirmation of his proofs in the *Summa* (Ad 3). This is how he justifies his conviction that the Exodic formula provides us with the ultimate name for God: "The reason for this name is that, in its reference, it exceeds every form, because it signifies being itself (*ipsum esse*). Moreover, the less determined the names the better they pertain to God, by virtue of their common and absolute character. Every other name in fact connotes a restrictive modality. Now 'He who is' does not define any particular modality of being; but it envelops all indeterminate modes. Nevertheless, the sacred Tetragrammaton preserves better still the incommunicability and singularity of God" (*Summa Theologiae*, q 13, a 11).

Without the encounter of Greek metaphysics with biblical religious thought, philosophers "would have never reached the idea that Being is the proper name of God and that this name designates God's very essence".[4] Or as Etienne Gilson remarked in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, "Exodus lays down the principle from which Christian philosophy will be suspended ... There is but one God and this God is Being, that is the corner-stone of all Christian philosophy."[5] With this scholastic verdict, the traditional notion of faith seeking understanding reaches its logical culmination. The conflation of Yahweh with the supreme Being of the philosophers is sealed. And this conjunction of God and Being was to survive for at least fifteen hundred years—from Bonaventure and Aquinas to Gilson and the neo-Scholastics. Thus did the God of Exodus secure ontological tenure in the God of metaphysics. And this tenure has come to be known, after Heidegger, as "ontotheology": a tendency to reify God by reducing Him to a being (*Seiende*)—albeit the highest, first and most indeterminate of all beings.

Ontotheology, we might say, sought to have its cake and eat it: to equate God with a modality of being while safeguarding His ultimately ineffable and transcendent nature. Unlike the negative theology of Dionysius and the Christian neo-Platonists, however, most scholastics identified God with Being by means of proofs and analogies, seeking some sort of balance between Being's universality and indeterminacy on the one hand, and God's density as a quasi-subject or person (which holds God from descent into infinite dispersion) on the other.[6] It is, some argue, a short step from such ontotheological equilibrium to Hegel's notion of a "concrete universal"; or Schelling's famous equation of the divine "I am" with the self-identification of the transcendental Ego. Indeed, Schelling will go so far as to claim that the "I AM" is "one and the same thing with our immediate self-consciousness".[7] This unification of divine and human consciousness finds modern echoes

not only in German Idealism and romanticism (Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Coleridge), but also in a contemporary strand of new age mysticism.

## II. The Eschatological Reading

There is a powerful counter-tradition which resists ontological approaches to God. This second tradition of interpretation—which I call eschatological—is arguably more attuned to the original biblical context of meaning. Here the emphasis is on the ethical and dynamic character of God. The very framing of the Exodic self-revelation in terms of a response to Moses' question—who shall I say sent me?—opens the phrase toward the "mark of becoming".[8] This reading points to the fact that Exodus 3:14 falls within the framework of a solicitation, that is, assumes the task of summoning us towards an eschatological horizon. Such an understanding of the Exodic Name contrasts sharply with the more essentialist conceptions of divine Being in medieval and post-medieval metaphysics.

### a) The God Who Promises—The Ethical Mandate

It is important to recall here that Moses responds to the call of the burning bush—"Moses! Moses!"—with the reply "Here I am". The self-revelation of God that precedes and follows Moses' reply is less predicative than appellative. Above all else, it is a call and a promise: "This is the name I shall bear forever, by which future generations will call me" (Exodus 3:15). We should be chary, therefore, of hypostatizing the "name" and try to relocate it where it properly belongs, namely, within the orbit of a dynamic mandate.[9] Amplifying the meaning of *'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh* in this manner allows for a plurality of interpretations of the verb "to be" used by God in his address to Moses. And this means reading the formula in terms of function rather than substance, in terms of narrative rather than syllogism, in terms of relation rather than abstraction. God's "I shall be" appears to need Moses' response "Here I am" in order to enter history and blaze the path towards the Kingdom.

One consequence of the infiltration of this transfiguring God into the history of Greek and Latin metaphysics, was to inject the latter with a specifically *ethical* charge. Smoke from the burning bush blurred the clear blue sky of Graeco-Roman assurance. Nobody slept quite so well at night anymore, or breathed quite so easily during the day. There was a whiff of anxiety and expectation in the air now. Dogmatic definitions of God began to fritter and come undone. And even those neo-Platonists who recognized the unknowable nature of God found it difficult to handle the urgency of this eschatological summons. God, it seemed, was undergoing an identity crisis. (Though not a gender one yet; He was still called He for a long while after.) And while it was all very well to agree with the likes of the Pseudo-Dionysius that the accompaniment of every affirmation with a negation points, apophatically, to a God beyond the proper names of Being, one was still left

facing the quandary: if God *is* devoid of *all* historical being is He not then also deprived of the power to act and call and love—a God so distant as to be defunct? So whether it was a question of the metaphysical God of essence or hyper-essence, it was hard to square either with a burning bush God resolved to retrieve the past and inaugurate a new beginning.

One exegetical commentator, André LaCocque, suggests that Moses' question to God may in part be an attempt to acquire this unknown name of divine power, particularly when we remember his competition with the Egyptian magicians. Moses' request, on this reading, is for just such a Name of Power; and God's response to his request may be read accordingly as a *refusal* of this request. The very circularity and indeterminacy of the nameless name—*'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh*—confounds the attempt to glean magical power from it. What God resists is not being addressed by Moses as such—He is invoked on countless occasions in the personal form of "Thou" throughout the *Psalms* (e.g., Psalm 99:6). No, what he resists is being reduced to the status of an idol. In short, God is repudiating any name that would seek to appropriate Him here and now as some thaumaturgical presence. Instead, God keeps Himself open for a future, allowing for a more radical translation of his nameless name as "I am as I shall show myself".[10] In this respect, the linguistic root *hyh* in *'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh* is to be understood, LaCocque argues, less as a mere copula than as a token of agency: more like "to be with, to become, to show oneself … to befall, to happen" (*cadere, evenire*).[11]

The God revealed in Exodus is more, however, than a demystification of pagan tendencies to invoke Divine Names as mythical powers. It also marks a step beyond the capricious deity inherited by the Hebrews themselves from certain ancestral narratives recorded in Genesis—in particular the "sacrificial" account of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22 or the burnt sacrifices performed by Abraham in Genesis 15. Exodus 3:14 may be read thus not only as a biblical critique of other mystery-rite religious but as a self-critique of such traces in biblical religion itself!

According to the eschatological view, the Greek rendition of Exodus as—*ego eimi ho on/ I am the one who is*—misses too much of the original dynamism of the Hebrew expression, and concedes too much to Hellenistic ontology. And so doing it misses its mark. The burning bush epiphany is to be understood less as an ontological substance in opposition to non-being, than as a self-generating event. In this annunciation, an agent is designated whose "work is actualized in Israel's exodus from Egypt"—namely, the self-revealing agency of the "Thou in dialogue with the divine I".[12]

In such light, Moses' question in Exodus 3:14 may be reinterpreted as a radical challenge to the One who has revealed himself as the God of his ancestors to proclaim a new program of action by *becoming different* from what he used to be and has been until now. The fact that Moses returns to Egypt and delivers a message of emancipation to his people signals the

inauguration of an utterly novel mode of divine relation.[13] The One who was experienced by them as the God of their *Fathers*, now discloses himself as the God of their *sons and daughters*.

So the Exodic name, we may now surmise, is *both* an I that is identical with itself in its past *and* a Thou that goes forth into the future. It reveals God as he is, at the same time as it commits God, and his emissary Moses, to an action of salvation. This is why the Name is both theophanic and performative. It serves as the pre-name and sur-name of that which cannot be objectively nominated. And it is this excess or surplus that saves God from being reduced to a mere signified—transcendental or otherwise. The transfiguring God of the burning bush remains a trace which explodes the present towards the future, a *trait* which cannot be bordered or possessed.

God does not reveal himself, therefore, as an essence *in se* but as an I-Self for us. And the most appropriate mode of human response to this exodic revelation is precisely that: *commitment to a response*. Such commitment shows Yhwh as God-the-agent, whose co-respondents, from Moses to the exilic prophets and Jesus, see themselves as implicated in the revelation as receivers of a gift—a Word given by someone who calls them to cooperate with Him in his actions. That is why Moses is called to be as "God for Aaron" and "for the Pharaoh" (Exodus 4:16 and 7:1). Moses and the prophets are *implicated* in the revelation showing us how Yhwh acts concretely through his human emissaries. With the revelation of his Name, "God tells of himself something like 'with you Moses—and with Israel throughout history—I stand or fall!'". Exodus 3 is the proclamation that God has invested the whole of Himself in his emissary's history.

## b) The God Who Comes—Historical Mandate

We may say, consequently, that the Exodic act of divine self-disclosure signals an inextricable communion between God and humans, a radically new sense—as Levinas points out—of fraternity, responsibility and commitment to a shared history of "becoming", beginning with the emancipation from bondage in Egypt. God may henceforth be recognized as someone who *becomes with us*, someone as dependent on us as we are on Him. God's relation with mortals is, in other words, less one of conceptuality than of covenant. From which it follows that most philosophical reflections on God are in need of revision. And certainly, the orthodox ontotheological categories of omnipotence, omniscience and self-causality, originally forged *sub specie aeternitatis*, could do with a radical rethink *sub specie historiae*. Faced with the burning bush one doesn't merely speculate; one runs, or if one holds one's ground, one praises, dances, acts.

The eschatological wager reaches here its most dramatic stakes. Once the "unaccomplished form of the verb"—*'ehyeh*—is taken in its full implications, one realizes that God is what he *will* be when he becomes his Kingdom and his Kingdom comes on earth. At the *eschaton*, God promises to be God

(cf. Isaiah 11:9; Psalm 110:1; Zechariah 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28). Meanwhile, God is in the process of establishing his lordship on earth and the *'ehyeh 'aser 'ehyeh* may be rendered accordingly as "I will be what I will be; I will become what I will become". In addition therefore to the unaccomplished form of the verb we find an "uncannily taut drama" signaled by the relative pronoun *aser* (what/who) "for its content essentially depends on the quality of history that Moses and his people will pour into it".[14]

Thus does the Exodic Name come to supplement *Elohim* as the name for the living God. For if *Elohim*—a name derived from a common noun—is the transcendent God who sat in heaven (Psalm 47), created earth and demanded sacrifice (e.g., of Isaac), Yhwh is more a name-of-invocation which makes the living God more accessible to human relation and history (i.e., more personal and more eschatological). With the revelation of Exodus, "God ceases to be the Unnameable, the inaccessible, the one *a se et per se*. He ceases to be impassible—if he ever was."[15] Yhwh is now revealed as affected and vulnerable, showing himself henceforth as one who wrestles with himself (Hosea), laments (Jeremiah), regrets (Samuel), seduces and forgives (Psalms). Here we witness a God who persuades rather than coerces, invites rather than imposes, asks rather than impels. This God of Mosaic manifestation cannot be God without relating to his other—humanity. And seldom has this wager been so dramatically expressed as in the following Midrash on Isaiah 43:12: "If you are not My witnesses, I am, as it were, not God."[16]

The existential implications of this inauguration of a personal God are revolutionary. For what we are witnessing here is a radical alteration of the metaphysical use of the copula. What is crucial for Greek thought is *to be*, since divine being is ultimately timeless and permanent, ontological rather than ethical. (Just think of Aristotle's God.) For the Hebrews, by contrast, what is most important is *to become, to be able*. Thus while the Hellenists will translate Exodus 3:14 as "I am the Being who is eternal", a non-Hellenic Jew like Maimonides encourages us to conceive of Yhwh as an agent with an active purpose, a God who *does* rather than a *being who is* (*Guide to the Perplexed* 1.54–58).

The unnameable name is, in short, God's way of transfiguring—that is, of appearing-disappearing—in a bush that never burns away. The Exodic revelation is an ingenious wordplay which heralds an eschatological transcendence—a transcendence with the wherewithal to resist the lures of logocentric immanence.

## III: The God Who May Be—*A* Via Tertia

In conclusion we will briefly trace a hermeneutic retrieval (*Wiederholung*) of the Exodic Name which seeks to chart an itinerary beyond the polar opposition between ontotheology and negative theology. My wager here is that at the chiasmus where *'ehyeh* meets *einai* a revolutionary exchange operates—with

God putting being into question just as being gives flesh to God. At this border-crossing, the transfiguring Word carries with it a certain *noli me tangere*, even as it struggles for carnal embodiment, transfiguring itself to the point of self-withdrawal even as it flares and announces itself in the burning bush.

From this onto-eschatological perspective, I will try, by way of a few final remarks—necessarily tentative and selective—to reread some highpoints in the historical interpretations of Exodus 3:14.

When Philo invoked the Greek translation of the Exodus passage— *ego eimi ho on*—he insisted that God here reveals not his content (whatness-essence) but only *that* he exists (the verb *einai*). Christian commentators would later render this passage in the light of the self-revelations in the Gospel of Jesus—e.g., "The one who is, and who was, and who is coming", or again, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). This translation of the Hebrew into Greek (*einai*) and later into Latin (*esse*) was to radicalize the existing plurality and equivocity of the Hellenic terms for being (recognized since Aristotle). It provoked an extraordinary variety of interpretations throughout the history of Western thought. Indeed it is Paul Ricoeur's view that this very plurality of interpretations actually safeguards against the danger of "conceptual idolatry" (so rightly feared by Marion and other postmoderns) and reinforces the enigmatic resonance of the original phrase heard by Moses and his Hebrew followers.[17]

The prefatory command of God to Moses to remove the sandals from his feet may now be seen in its original innovative implications. As also the fact that it is far from his own people, captured in Egypt, that Moses receives his revelation from God. For it is only in the solitary estrangement from his native home that the Other shows itself (as self-consuming fire) and speaks itself (as tautological pun). In this manner, the "dangerous liaisons" between being and God are, as Stanislas Breton suggests, a way of showing God in his transcendence without abandoning all traces of existence: for if there was no burning bush to see or no voice, however riddling, to hear, there would be nothing to witness, and so nothing to remember or promise! There would only be regress to the chaos of pre-creation: the dark before the Word. *Tohu bohu.*

Revisiting Meister Eckhart's much neglected intervention in the Ex 3:14 debate, we might note how this subtle Dominican managed to twist inherited ontological categories in the direction of an eschatological intent. Under his gaze, the "I" of the Exodic tautology is seen to accentuate the sense of God's *difference*: the epithet *discretivum*, with which Eckhart qualifies the "I", connoting a measure of distance. By extension, Eckhart's use of the term *substantia* may be understood in the curious sense of a "being that stands on its own, by its own energy"—the quasi-being encountered at the heart of nothingness, which "carries all things according to the Word". This pure separateness of the divine "I" declines all additions of "this or that" and outstrips the familiar Aristotelian categories of substance utilized by conventional scholasticism.

Eckhart's commentary on the verb *sum* also reinterprets the traditional being of God. "Being-as-coupla" becomes being in "solitude and separation".[18] *Qua sum*, God here absolves himself from all predication, announcing both the ontological difference between Being and beings and the theological difference between divine and human. Here is a *sum* whose very burning-bush indeterminacy, in Breton's words, "expresses the purificatory fire of a certain iconoclasm".[19]

And what, finally, of the *who*? Here again, Eckhart may be seen as stressing the *dynamism* of the self-revealing God: "The repetition which says twice 'I am who I am' is the purity of affirmation which excludes all negation ... it indicates a certain reflexive conversion in itself and on itself, a sanctuary or repose which holds in itself; what is more, it indicates a specific effervescence (or bubbling over) or birth of self: this being, in fact, conceals a fervor which expands within itself and onto itself in a sort of bubbling; light within light, it penetrates everything ...."[20] By means of such hyperbole, Eckhart's rendering of the Exodic verse actually destabilizes and reworks traditional metaphysics. Behind their ostensible orthodoxy, the ontological proposition *esse est Deus* and the theological proposition *Deus est esse* mutually deconstruct each other. But this bilateral deconstruction does not ignore the fundamental co-implication of being and God in flesh. On the contrary, it shows that God's self-nomination cannot dispense with the detour through being, lest it become so unknowable as to pass us by unseen and unheard. There's more to God than being. Granted. But to pass *beyond* being you have to pass *through* it.

Thus the ontological commentaries on the *ego sum qui sum* found in Eckhart, may be seen—from an eschatological viewpoint—to carry a presentiment of God as pure *gift* and *passage*. Pure gift in the sense, noted by Derrida, of self-giving beyond the economic condition of return. "Being", as the Meister put it, "is so superior in rank and purity and so much God's own that no one can give it but he—as he gives himself."[21]

But God is also pure passage in the sense that while he always stays faithful to his promise, He never stays put. Eckhart's own best defense against the charges of ontotheology or mystical ontologism is the reminder that he deemed the dialogue between God and being to be *provisional* rather than final. God passes through being just as we beings pass through God. But the primary verb is just that: *passage*, understood as transition and migration. Reinterpreted from an eschatological angle, God is the *imperative of transit*. "This is a God who disturbs, uproots, reiterates the call of Yahweh to Abraham to 'leave his house'; a God who shakes every edifice, even the venerable *esse subsistens.*"[22] Which is surely why Eckhart takes his leave of being only after he has rendered homage to its imprescribable necessity as passage. His famous formula—"I pray God to rid me of God"—may be read consequently as an echo of the imperative to transit. The move beyond ontology has as corollary the move beyond essentialist theology, surpassing the essence of God

towards God's ultimate promise. In this wise, the metaphysics of exodus (being-word-abyss) becomes an exodus of metaphysics. A self-emptying movement of metaphysics beyond itself. The revelation of God as traversal.

Transiting through and beyond metaphysics, God reveals himself, in keeping with his promissory note in Exodus, as a God that neither is nor is not but *may be*. And here we might add the intellectual dexterity of Cusanus to the deconstructive daring of Eckhart. God, as Nicholas of Cusa puts it, is best considered neither as *esse*, nor as *nihil*, but as *possest*. Transgressing the traditional scholastic capture of God as *esse*, Cusanus redefines God as *Possest* (absolute possibility which includes all that is actual). "Existence (*esse*) presupposes possibility (*posse*)", writes Cusanus, "since it is not the case that anything exists unless there is possibility from which it exists". "God alone", he concludes, "is what he is able to be".[23] It is arguably this same hidden intellectual heritage which resurfaces, however obscurely, in Schelling's definition of the God of Exodus 3:14 as the "possibility to-be" (*seyn wird*) or the "immediate can-be" (*unmittelbar Seyn-konnende*); or again in Heidegger's later understanding of the gift of being as a "loving-possibilizing" (*das Vermögen des Mögens*). This counter-tradition of readings calls, I believe, for a new hermeneutic of God as May-Be. What I term an onto-eschatological hermeneutics. Or more simply, a *poetics of the possible*.[24]

Let me conclude the above explorations with the following surmises: In the circular words, I-AM-WHO-MAY-BE, God transfigures and exceeds being. His *esse* reveals itself, surprisingly and dramatically, as *posse*. The Exodus 3:14 exchange between God and Moses might, I have been suggesting, be usefully reread not as the manifestation of some secret name or essence but as a pledge to remain constant to a promise. God, transfiguring himself in the guise of an angel, speaks through (*per-sona*) a burning bush and seems to say something like this: *I am who may be if you continue to keep my word and struggle for the coming of justice*? The God who reveals himself on Mt. Horeb is and is not, neither is nor is not. It is a God who puns and tautologizes, flares up and withdraws, promising always to return, to become again, to come to be what he is *not yet* for us. This God is the coming God who may-be. The one who resists quietism as much as zealotry, who renounces both the ontotheology of essence and the voluntarist impatience to appropriate promised lands. This Exodic God obviates the extremes of atheistic and theistic dogmatism in the name of a still small voice that whispers and cries in the wilderness: *perhaps*. Yes, perhaps if we remain faithful to the promise, one day, some day, we know not when, I-am-who-may-be may at last be. Be what? we ask. Be how? Be what is promised as it is promised. And what is that? we ask. A kingdom of justice and love. There and then, to the human "Here I am", God may in turn respond, "Here I am". But not yet.

NOTES

1 Emilie Zumbrunn, "L'exégèse augustinienne de 'Ego Sum Qui Sum' et la Métaphysique de l'Exode", in *Dieu et l'être* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), pp. 246–272.
2 See Dominique Dubarle's chapter, "La Nomination ontologique de Dieu", in *L'Ontologie de Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris: Ed. de Cerf, 1996).
3 See Paul Ricoeur, "From Interpretation to Translation", in *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. D. Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 350.
4 Ibid., p. 353.
5 Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Paris: Vrin), p. 51.
6 See Stanislos Breton in "Je suis (celui) qui suis (Ontologie et Métaphysique)", in *Libres Commentaires* (Paris: Ed. de Cerf, 1990), p. 64.
7 For further comments see Gabriel Marcel, *Coleridge et Schelling* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1951).
8 Paul Ricoeur, *op.cit.*, p. 334.
9 Ibid., pp. 337f. and also Joseph O'Leary, "God Deconstructs", in *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 159–204.
10 Gese in "Der Name Gottes" translates Exodus 3:14 as *ich erweise mich, als ich erweisen werde* and *ich bin, als der ich mich erwisen werde* (quoted by André LaCocque, "The Revelation of Revelations", in *Thinking Biblically*, p. 312).
11 A. LaCocque, *op.cit.*, pp. 312f.
12 Ibid., p. 314.
13 A similar shift of emphasis onto the futural potentiality of God is found in Moltmann and the theology of liberation as well as in Whitehead and process theology. See in particular Whitehead's notion of God's "consequent nature", comprising a reservoir of possibilities to be creatively realized as world in *Process and Reality* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1978); see also John B. Cobb, "A Whiteheadian Doctrine of God", in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, D. Brown, R. James and G. Reeves (eds) (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), pp. 215–243; William Dean, "Deconstruction and Process Theology", *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 64, 1984, pp 1–19; and David. R. Griffin, "Postmodern Theology and A/Theology", in *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, D. Griffin, W. Beardslee and J. Holland (eds) (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), pp. 29–61.
14 A. LaCocque, *op.cit.*, p. 324.
15 Ibid., p. 325.
16 *Sifre Deuteronomy* 346 (ed Fin Kelstein), cited by LaCocque, *op.cit.*, p. 325.
17 Paul Ricoeur, *op.cit.*, p. 341.
18 Stanislas Breton, *op.cit.*, p. 64.
19 Meister Eckhart, "In Exodum 3:14", *Lateinische Werke*, II, 21 (cited by Breton, *op.cit.*, pp. 61–62).
20 Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart*, ed R. B. Blanhey, pp. 208–209.
21 Stanislas Breton, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
22 Ibid., p. 67.
23 Nicholas of Cusa, "Dialogus de Possest", in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 120–169. See also, Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 75–78.
24 Richard Kearney, *Poétique du Possible* (Paris: Ed de Beauchesne, 1984)—in particular part 4.