

John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington, Ind. Indiana University Press, 2013).

The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps makes the audacious claim, in the tradition of Tillich, that God does not “exist,” not as an individual entity, but instead God “insists,” that is, the name of God is the name of a “call” that summons us beyond ourselves. With this, Caputo pushes past Tillich by claiming that God is not only not an existent being but also that God is not the “ground of beings.” He proposes a new “divine name,” that the name of God is the name of “perhaps,” not in the sense of something indecisive but in the sense of what pushes us beyond the possible to the hitherto unimaginable. “Perhaps,” he says, is not a “sleepy indifference” but “a steely, indefatigable, resolute openness to what seems to have been closed off” to an unforeseeable future. The book, which he describes as an exercise in “theo-poetics,” is a bold new view of God, arguably the boldest and most original statement about God since Tillich himself.

The book stands at the heart of the contemporary conversation going on in what has been called the “post-secular” environment of today, one where theology has become once again a respectable topic of discussion by secular intellectuals. Caputo enters into a detailed dialogue with and critique of two leading theorists of the day, Catherine Malabou and Slavoj Žižek, both of whom have resuscitated in their own way a new version of the “death of God” theology that descends from Hegel. Caputo positions himself (for the first time), like Malabou and Žižek, in the Hegelian tradition, but he pursues a more religiously affirmative version of this tradition. The radical view he sets forth, neither evangelical nor militantly atheistic, belongs to what he calls a radical theology or what Derrida would call a religion without religion.

Moreover, the book pushes continental philosophy of religion beyond its old boundaries by entering into dialogue with what is variously called the “new materialism,” or the “new realism,” or “speculative realism,” centered around the work of Quentin Meillassoux, a student of Badiou. Meillassoux spearheads a new generation of French and Anglo-phone philosophers who charge continental philosophy with subjectivism and call for a new realism, respectful of the mathematical sciences. Surprisingly, Caputo agrees with much of this criticism. In the final section of the book, he makes use of the work of Bruno Latour, re-situates his “theo-poetics” within a “cosmo-poetics.” The result is not a cosmic nihilism, what Nietzsche called the “cosmic stupidity” (the stars don’t know we’re here) but what Caputo calls the “nihilism of grace,” not the cosmic stupidity but the cosmic luck or grace of life, which intensifies the unique value of life instead of undermining it.

This is the boldest, most powerful, and most original work of constructive theology to appear in many years. It will significantly contribute to keeping the work of constructive theology alive and well, threatened as it is by the growing interest in sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. It will also be an important impetus in moving continentalist approaches to religion into a deeper dialogue with the mathematical sciences and contemporary physics.