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"RELIGION WITHOUT RELIGION":¹
CAPUTO, DERRIDA, AND THE VIOLENCE
OF PARTICULARITY²

Shane R. Cudney

Jack Caputo's most recent book follows Derrida in proposing a "religion without religion", a posture that, while committed to the *general* structure of religion, attempts to philosophically distance itself from *specific*, historical exemplifications of that structure. I propose that by determining what motivates the distinction between what is termed the "messianic" and "messianisms", a space opens that allows us to call into question this "desert religion." I will conclude by suggesting an alternative posture, one that attempts to honor *both* the universal structure of religion, *and* the particular, historical content of religion.

"The question is not whether there is a *désir de Dieu*, a passion for God in Jacques Derrida. Who could ever doubt that?... The question is, rather, the one put by his North African "compatriot" St. Augustine: "What do I love when I love my God?" Upon the groundless ground of this beautiful and bottomless question ... Derrida's life and work is an extended commentary."³

INTRODUCTION: Religion Without Religion

In his most recent book, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, John Caputo returns to a careful and sensitive, indeed, surprising re-reading of "Derrida's later, more autobiographical pieces,"⁴ a rendering which emphasizes that "[w]e will read him [Derrida] less and less well unless we hear the [deeply religious] yes that punctuates and accents the text, the yes to the promise that resonates throughout all his works, a yes first, a yes last, a constant yes. *Oui, oui.*"⁵ Anticipating the blow that his "academic colleagues" and "secularizing friends" no doubt will suffer from the very idea of linking Derrida with religion, people "for whom the only blasphemy is infidelity to Nietzsche, whom I will have shocked and traumatized by this provocative scene of Derrida weeping at his *prie-Dieu*," Caputo begs their pardon and implores their forgiveness in advance.⁶

In a passionate, deconstructive bid to avoid the violence associated with traditional, content-full "religions of the Book",⁷ Caputo, following Derrida, proposes an alternative "religion without religion", a posture that, while committed to the *general* structure of religion, attempts to distance itself from the *specific* historical exemplifications of that structure. In the same way that a flower defies the rigid dictates of a concrete jungle and



finds its way to the surface in an affirmative burst of life, deconstruction is in the business of insinuating itself into the cracks and crevices of the present in a way that "works the provocation of what is to come, ... against the complacency of the present, against the pleasure the present takes in itself, in order to prevent it from closing in on itself, from collapsing into self-identity."⁸ So strained and bent are the sails of deconstruction "toward what is coming," so deep runs "its posture of expectancy, its passion for the impossible," that it would be "absolutely" impossible for the messiah to arrive in the flesh.⁹ This is the "law of the impossible, the 'impossible-rule,'" which means "never to confuse his coming (*venue*) with being present, ... never to collapse the coming of the just one into the order of what is present or absent."¹⁰

But what are we to make of this religion without religion, of what Caputo will refer to as a religion of the desert; what are we to do with this region that is haunted by the ghost of a bloodless and bodiless messiah? What are we to "think" of the attempt to relegate religion to the realm of reason alone,¹¹ the desire to confine its content within the bounds of a certain abstraction?¹² Is not the attempt to "bracket" all *doxa*, a posture which is itself committed to a certain ideal that inevitably harbors determinate features? How is one able to maintain a universal religion without driving a wedge between faith (*pistis*) and faith(s)? Considering that deconstruction emphasizes the retrieval of a full-bodied existence from a tradition that has often sacrificed the particular (body) on the altar of the universal (ideal), these are curious anomalies, to be sure.

In this paper, I propose that by determining the motive behind what I will argue is a (philosophical) rift between the "messianic" and Abrahamic "messianisms", we will be able to catch a glimpse of the elusive specter that animates the deconstructive gesture, an "in-site" that will allow us to call into question this "desert religion",¹³ or, if you will, "prophetic post-modernism."¹⁴ In so doing, I will suggest that something new is able to emerge, a radicalized, post-Kierkegaardian-type faith, one might say, rooted in the suffering love of God, one that repeats the possibility of religion within the limits of faith, and faith within the limits religion. This remythologized myth of justice attempts the "impossible": to honor *both* the universal structure of religion *and* the particular, historical instantiations of that structure.

I. On the "Messianic" and "Messianisms"

Part III (The Messianic) of *Prayers and Tears* is arguably the heart of Caputo's text, not only because it is here that we feel its prophetic-messianic pulse, but also because it is here that we find Caputo holding Derrida's hand to the fire of religion, a gesture he believes is necessary if deconstruction is to be consistently deconstructive, that is, true to its original ideals, faithful to its "founding vision," if we can say such things.

Because of his increasing concern for those who fall through the cracks and get crushed by the political and religious power structures that be, his hyper-sensitivity to the violence done in the name of particular "messianisms" of the Marxist, neo-Hegelian, Islamic or Christian type, Derrida,

like Levinas before him, began by the early 1990s to think in terms of a general "messianic" structure, "one that is cut to fit the hand of deconstruction."¹⁵ By 1994, however, Caputo observes that between the two editions of "The Force of Law"¹⁶ Derrida had sharpened the edges of deconstruction on the whetstone of Marxism which produced a messianic structure that took on the *form* of a more conventional universal, one that seemed more distant from the nitty-gritty of particularity. With a raised eyebrow, yet with a religious reverence, Jack the "bookkeeper" has taken it upon himself to follow Jack the "ragpicker"¹⁷ with an outstretched hand, waiting to catch him lest he fall into the ditch of old philosophical debates that deconstruction is supposed to gingerly avoid. In this "game of Jacks"¹⁸ one might irreverently say that Jack is watching out for Jack's *derrière*.

In final pages of *Specters of Marx*¹⁹ Derrida elaborates on the distinction between the messianic and messianisms by posing the following question in a certain, straightforward kind-of way that seems to turn, as Caputo suggests, on the classical distinction between form and content, between the universal and the particular, "between a 'universal' structure and the concrete realization or embodiment of that structure, between ... 'a structure of experience' and a 'religion.'"²⁰ Derrida formulates the question as follows: "If the messianic appeal belongs properly to a universal structure ... how is one to *think it with* the figures of Abraham[ic] messianism?"²¹ But, on Derrida's own terms, this is a less than adequate formulation.²² Indeed, are we really to believe that Derrida has finally come home (*Heim*) to roost? Has he not spent his entire life attempting to deprive us of the familiar creature comforts of home?. Yet, given this present formulation, Derrida does seem to pose two possibilities: *either* the messianic structure precedes the concrete messianism as an "originary condition," *or*, the concrete messianisms come before the messianic structure as its origin. "Does Abrahamic messianism serve as the source or origin from which we derive an abstract concept of the messianic? Or is the messianic a condition of possibility that antedates the concrete messianisms which are but exemplifications of it?"²³

What is important to emphasize, especially for the purpose of our discussion, is that these questions bear not only on the relationship between faith, religion and philosophy but also on the nature of the pre-theoretical commitments that undergird and infuse all of our theoretical endeavors. And while there are distinct religio-prophetic overtones in Derrida's use of this distinction, the very attempt to keep religion(s) at bay—a gap that Caputo will creatively try to negotiate²⁴—betrays a certain alliance with the Western tradition that needs to be teased out and questioned. By attempting to suspend the content that faith itself entails, is it possible that Derrida (and Caputo) paradoxically conflates religion and faith? And could it be that the very move which paves the way for his structural religion, is one that harbours a motive similar to that which gave rise to the traditional distinction between faith and philosophy? We will return to these questions below.

So, the aforementioned Derridean dilemma, Caputo observes, leads us back to a similar Heideggerian (Marburgian) formulation:

Can there be an "atheological heritage" of the biblical messianisms?
Can one strip the biblical messianisms down to an atheological core?

Can one, by a work of "desertification" and denuding, by a deconstructive ascesis, remove a biblical surface from a messianic structure?²⁵

In other words, the question is whether Derrida's quasi-atheistic, messianic is the condition for biblical messianisms,²⁶ or an aftereffect, a distillation derived from particular religious accounts, in which case, "[t]he messianic in general would be a conceptual ghost, a specter of philosophy, a poor abstraction, whose cash value is drawn from the accounts of the religions of the Book."²⁷

In Derrida's own (English) words, he emphasizes the difficulty that surrounds his "religion without religion", a problem that he promises to return to, but constantly defers.

The problem remains ... whether the religions, say, for instance, the religions of the Book, are but specific examples of this general structure of messianicity. There is the general structure of messianicity, as a structure of experience, and on this groundless ground there have been revelations, a history which one calls Judaism or Christianity and so on. That is one possibility, and then you would have a Heideggerian gesture, in style. You would have to go back from these religions to the fundamental ontological conditions of possibilities of religion, to describe the structure of messianicity on the ground of groundless ground on which religions have been made possible.

That is one hypothesis. The other hypothesis - and I confess that I hesitate between these two possibilities - is that the events of revelation ... have been absolute events, irreducible events which have unveiled this messianicity. We would not know what messianicity is without messianism, without these events which were Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and so on. In that case singular events would have unveiled or revealed these universal possibilities and it is only on that condition that we can describe messianicity.²⁸

Although Derrida insists that there exists a certain complementarity between these two possibilities, and that he oscillates between them, I suggest that he unwittingly favours one of his sons because it "impossible" not to, given, that is, my reading of the assumption that underlies the formulation. On the surface, at least, what allows Derrida to linger on the threshold between these two spaces, in the manner he believes he can, is the notion that religious faith and philosophy are quite distinct from one another. Because the philosopher can only say so much, eventually philosophy pushes against the limits of its horizon, beyond which only faith and angels dare to tread. Indeed, whoever or whatever is calling must remain anonymous and this anonymity is the horizon of faith. The undecidability that surrounds the above distinction between which Derrida oscillates, exists primarily because we are dealing here with philosophical knowledge which by definition excludes religious faith. Even though Derrida and Caputo insist that a religious-like trust undergirds and precedes our theorizing, their language betrays a certain "commitment" to, or shall we say,

faith in, a rather traditional distinction. The assumption that gives shape to this posture I will deal with in section III.

While Caputo is rightly concerned about the drift of deconstruction, and has plotted in his own course, adjusting his sail accordingly, my hunch is that because he too sees determinate religions through the lens of a religious (overarching?) structure, he is unable to pull away from Derrida's wake.

II. On the Disjunction Between the "Messianic" and "Messianisms"

Not completely content then with swabbing the deck of the Good ship "messianic" which purportedly leads to justice, a justice that is always to come, Caputo has, in the spirit of *Radical Hermeneutics*,²⁹ launched out for himself in order to situate himself on the side of the deconstructive strait that is closest to Kierkegaard. Inspired by the spirit of deconstruction and religious faith, Caputo has cause to question Derrida's recent formulation of the messianic and the implicit "either/or" assumptions which are beginning to leak from it. In an effort to rescue deconstruction from being drawn into "old debates" that would pull it into the whirlpool of some sort of Jewish or even Judeo-Christian philosophy, Caputo insists that these "two standpoints complement rather than compete with each other and it is not a matter of choosing between them."³⁰ As we have already alluded, it is because deconstruction "constitutes a certain anti-essentialism or nominalism" that Caputo is worried that Derrida's formulation of the question problematizes the whole discussion by framing it "within an assured set of distinctions ... which is the whole point of deconstruction to disturb. For deconstruction ... ought not to be drawn into any debates about whether facts precede essences or essences precede facts, or whether each precedes the other but in different orders and in different ways."³¹

According to Caputo, if we pay close attention to Derrida's "absolute events"³² we will see that he means something which is not a specific instance of something more general. "In the messianic time of singularities, historical happenings are idiosyncratic 'events' and not 'moments' in a larger, teleological or eschatological movement."³³ Moreover, given the "Babelianism of deconstruction and its delimitation of the traditional idea of translation ... Derrida can hardly put himself in the position of saying that the 'messianic' represents the overarching, universal, metalanguage into which the various concrete messianisms can be translated."³⁴ The matter does get muddled, however, when Derrida goes so far as to say that he is in search of "a universal culture of singularities",³⁵ "where every other is wholly other." In this case one must ask with Caputo: what kind of universality does he have in mind here? Indeed, how can he avoid employing a good-old-fashioned universal in all of this? The question of how one is to "describe the *status* of this indeterminability, this indeterminate messianic ... which cannot be a true or conventional or garden variety universal",³⁶ is the challenge.

Faced with the seeming incommensurability of these competing possibilities, Caputo pulls the notion of "formal indication" from his erstwhile Heideggerian hat in order to remedy the situation. This notion, he tells us,

unlike the traditional philosophical concept which attempts to encompass and comprehend its object, is purportedly a nonobjectifying indicator, "a projective sketch that traces out in advance certain salient features of an entity or region of entities The formal indication is not a universal that 'contains' 'particulars' 'underneath' it, but a sign ... pointing to a region where it itself cannot enter."³⁷ Caputo is convinced that because the "formal indication" is akin to the factual (immanent) region, it has no transcendental compulsion to control and contain the particulars in a universal meta-net. Understanding the factual requires then a certain *Einstellung*, a comportment which leaves philosophy to its own devices, whilst a detached, philosophically and religiously stripped, ethically sensitive questioning attitude breaks through, in Heidegger's case, into the "prephilosophical" "'revolutionary' experiences" of "the New Testament and the *Nichomachean Ethics*."³⁸

Based as it is on the fundamental distrust, indeed, violence of philosophical discourse, Heidegger employed his notion of formal indication in the business of incessantly questioning traditional categories of thought. Thus, he attempted to forge, as Caputo says, "a quasi-conceptuality, formed of 'formal indications' which are related to the singularity of existence, to factual life, as imperfect sketches or anticipatory foreshadowings of a prior and irreducible excess, an excess that can only be 'engaged' or entered into existentially, not grasped conceptually."³⁹ Because the particular is not taken as an inferior chip off the universal block, because "the singular is not a *fall* (*casus*) from universality whose feet are soaked by the particularity of matter or potency,"⁴⁰ Caputo sees this Heideggerian gesture as one that might moisten Derrida's parched lips enough to bring him out of a state of heat exhaustion which has induced these very spooky and disturbing hallucinations.

On this account, the messianic would be a more benevolent, modest universal, one that has no pretensions, no illusions of grandeur. However, says Caputo, there is a *certain* price one pays in travelling the low road of facticity. For if Derrida were to steadfastly follow this less trodden, more difficult path, he would have to concede that the messianic is historically conditioned, which means that he would have to admit, indeed, "confess" that it harbors "determinable features",⁴¹ which in turn levels the ground to the extent that his "religion without religion" would be ushered into the realm of competing messianisms. "So rather than taking Derrida's messianic as in any way overarching the three historical messianisms of the religions of the Book," Caputo thinks it is more helpful to see it as "*one more* messianism but with a deconstructive twist"⁴² "After all," insists Caputo,

the Derridean messianic does have *certain* determinable features, some of which ... it has borrowed from the prophetic tradition, and some of which are Derrida's own invention. For Derrida's messianic is through and through an ethico-political idea, having to do all the way down with justice and a democracy to come, and organized under the idea of the "new International." Having begun, like everyone else, and just as he himself predicts, where one is ... Derrida's messianic has emerged under determinate historical conditions and takes a determinate form.⁴³

III. On the Motive for the Disjunction Between the “
Messianic” and “Messiamisms”

In all of this Caputo has rightly and inventively attempted to undo the dilemma that deconstruction seems to have worked itself into. That Caputo has, it seems paradoxically, opened some breathing room between the two “spaces” with the help of Heidegger’s formal indication there is little doubt. The question is: Is this necessarily a better way to keep the future from being closed off? Is this enough of a departure from Derrida to make a difference? Must we conclude that to minimize the inevitable violence of particular messianisms, one must “formalize” or bracket out religion? Although in *Prayers and Tears* Caputo presents us with a demythologized Heidegger who has received deconstructive “treatments,” what concerns me about this alternative are the assumptions that undergird the idea that there exists some “nonobjectifying,” “atheistic,” “quasi,” or “certain” kind of language, a way of *thinking* or poeticizing that is able to pull away from and, in effect, detach (or, at the very least, distance) itself from the violence of discourse.

While Caputo’s version of the messianic is no doubt a more humble, modest universal, I maintain that because it drinks from the same philosophical cistern as Derrida, it does not, indeed, cannot sufficiently loosen the ties that presently bind deconstruction. So even though Caputo has kept the philosophical dust from settling (something he does quite well), it seems to me that his “neutered” universal, this de-masculinized, gelded, more subdued Heideggerianism still cannot genuinely connect with or penetrate the surface of concrete religions, even if it can sing a little higher. Stripped of its aggressive, violent tendencies, the problem is that this docile, more manageable messianic is also stripped of *certain*, very human, gonadian features, which also strikes me as violent.

Although Caputo assures us that on his accounting the singular is not “a fall (*casus*) from universality,” I suggest that the singular is a fall *within* particularity.⁴⁴ This means (à la Heidegger) that because every philosophical move, every decision is structurally finite, they are seen as “cuts,” incisions which necessarily amputate and exclude.⁴⁵ Indeed, for this reason, the very gesture of philosophy is one of violence. With Derrida, Caputo has all along maintained that the origin is always already fissured from the beginning, that at the origin of language, prior to empirical violence, there is the “arche-violence” of “arche-writing” with its “harsh law of spacing” as “an originary accessory and an essential accident.”⁴⁶ As such, that which is constitutive to human be-ing is considered structurally violent. Thus, to be human is to be caught in a web of necessary violence. This construal, I suggest, is precisely what binds deconstruction, and what links Caputo and Derrida to one another and to the tradition they rightly seek to deconstruct.

On the surface, at least, the rather obvious reason for the quasi-ascetic, linguistic acrobatics and inventions that surround the production of Derrida’s (and Caputo’s) “religion without religion” is the violence that determinate “content-full” faiths *inevitably* inflict in the name of the Law, Truth, and Messiahs. No doubt religions of the Book have a disturbing legacy of violence, and it for this reason both Derrida and Caputo consider it imperative to develop a general structure of justice which highlights a

desert-like, ascetic detachment from the historical expressions of such a structure. Derrida believes this is necessary, for

[a]s soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism, then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism.⁴⁷

The question of structural violence leads us back another step to the question of trust (that is, [religious] faith [*pistis*] construed here in the broadest possible sense), to the assumption which undergirds and gives shape to the motive to develop a general structure of religion. If the general messianic, on Derrida's account, is the condition for specific messianisms, is it not also true that his belief in this structure presupposes a certain trust, a certain faith in the primordially of the heterogenous, desert-like "placeless displacing place"⁴⁸ called *khôra*, whose sister is the messianic, the place where an a-personal justice from nowhere resides?⁴⁹ And if discourse remains grounded in faith as Derrida himself confesses in *Memoirs of the Blind*,⁵⁰ is it not possible to think otherwise than of "Khôra" as the condition for im/possibility? And might not this other birth-space produce different offspring?

In an attempt to escape the strictures of ousiology, which inevitably harbours secrets, Derrida, in his article "How Not to Speak",⁵¹ which Caputo highlights, has us trek to the far side of negativity where he explores the analogy and the disanalogy of the *khôra* with the God of negative theology, a place where we are taken to the very limits of language — and beyond. Here Derrida paints a picture of the tension in Plato between what he calls the "two movements or two tropics of negativity",⁵² the "two opposing ways in which philosophical thought finds itself up against its limits ... two things equally unsayable but for quite opposite reasons."⁵³ While the first movement presses toward that high hyper-ousiological point above the clouds which inspires awe in both Neoplatonists and negative theologians alike, the second movement slips under the border of being, below phenomenality, beyond the reach of "all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, all truth."⁵⁴ This no-place called *khôra* "is neither form (*idea*), nor sensible thing, but the place (*lieu*) in which the demiurge impresses or cuts images of the intelligible paradigms, the place which was already there," a pre-originary origin from nowhere.⁵⁵

Like the owl "Old Brown" in Beatrix Potter's classic who has a penchant for honey which lies beyond his means to reach it, Derrida takes a keen interest in *khôra* precisely because of its ability to "resist any analogizing or participatory schema, to remain adrift and lost."⁵⁶ "*Khôra* is neither present nor absent, active nor passive, the Good nor evil, living nor nonliving." It is "[n]either theomorphic nor anthropomorphic" rather, it is "atheological and nonhuman"⁵⁷ Indeed, *khôra* must have no recourse to "meaning", "essence", or "identity." Otherwise, in the language of the gift, it becomes implicated in the economy of exchange where it would take on the appearance of the giver of all good gifts, a giver that no doubt will eventually come to collect. This re-inscription into the same goes against the "impos-

sible-rule" because "the *khôra* is *tout autre*, very."⁵⁸ In order then to avoid the violence that lurks behind every tree in a "tit for tat," "dog eat dog" jungle economy, Derrida prefers to speak of the aridity of the desert, a haunted place where messianic spirits love to hide.

But (seriously) what are we to make of the non-historical, historical names of *khôra* and her sibling the messianic? How are we to "think" of this placeless place that cannot be "assimilated into philosophy" or religion, this place that historical "things do not in any way stain or mark," that "belongs to a time out mind, out of memory," out of sight?⁵⁹ Through this lens, one can certainly see why Derrida and Caputo cannot say whether *khôra* gives or does not give, and why one must ask: "What do I love when I love my God, God or *khôra*? How are we to decide? Do we have to choose?"⁶⁰ As I suggested earlier, what this produces is the notion that philosophy can only say so much. Because the philosopher can say only so much, philosophy itself eventually pushes against the limits of its horizon, a point at which philosophy is a little lost for words and finds itself beginning to stutter as it looks for the exit sign.

As far back as *Radical Hermeneutics*,⁶¹ Caputo articulated this same sentiment when he emphasized that one cannot say whether Nietzsche (the tragic) or Kierkegaard (the religious) is right because philosophy is not in the business of making this kind of decision. Not surprisingly, this same distinction is re-peated in *Against Ethics* where Caputo once again is backed into a philosophical corner when he finds himself unable to say who or what it is that calls, *il* or *il y a*.⁶² Things happen, Caputo says, "[t]hey happen 'because' (*weil*) they happen There is no 'why' What happens is what there is (*es gibt*). That is all."⁶³ In Caputo's latest work, the distinction re-peats itself once again in the form of "religion without religion" a messianic without messianisms. Faith in, or "passion for the impossible," as he calls it, must keep the messianic in the realm of the *viens* for once we pull justice into the realm of the possible it is given over to distortion and violence, a place where "moth and rust doth corrupt."

On my reading, the way Caputo slices the pie (something we all of course do if we want a piece) is reminiscent of a Thomistic gesture which dictates that faith remain extrinsic to philosophy. If it is true that humanity is insatiably religious, if we are fundamentally creatures of faith, whose profound experience of both the brokenness and the goodness of life find us hoping and praying, spiralling and re-peating forward, it is difficult to imagine faith being absent from or extrinsic to any mode of being-in-the-world. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a "call" without a "gift," a "yes" without the strings that a symbiotic relationship necessarily entails.

It seems to me that even though Caputo and Derrida posit a "gift," a religio-ethical "yes" which comes before all of life and language, this "yes" is in danger of being nullified, swallowed up by a Barthian-like "No" which is posited against any and all determinate commitments. If it is true that this Ankhoral "No" is synonymous with Derrida's fractured pre-originary origin, from whence comes love and the possibility of justice? And if justice is always to come, always "impossible," how is it that evil and violence are not conflated with goodness and thereby put on equal footing? What else can we make of the kind of violence that "always crosses the dis-

tance of the other," a violence that permeates and "violates the space of the other"? Is not this kind of "radical evil" the stuff on which deconstruction's "desert, khôral, ankhôral religion stands or falls"?⁶⁴

It seems clear that what we are left with here is a justice that is relegated to the realm of chance, and manifests itself only as a random flash-in-the-pan event that immediately burns up upon entering our atmosphere. What *kind* of justice is this? Must the beautiful thought of justice turn immediately ugly upon its arrival? Might there be another "possibility," another way to navigate the deconstructive strait between the messianic and messianism, another way to prevent the future from being closed off?

While Derrida and Caputo believe that their structural religion is the cleanest dirty way to keep the future open, what bothers me is the same thing that troubles me as a parent who, more often than not, finds myself in the frustrating position of saying to my kids the very things that my father said to me, things that I vowed I would never say. Somehow, in some insidious way they ooze out, betraying a familial bond that runs deeper than we would sometimes like to think. In deconstruction's zeal to purge philosophy of its violence, I hear other voices, a cacophony of past and present voices, one of which it seems to me sanctions a neo-Scholastic bifurcation that, in its deconstructive expression, relegates religious faith to a place that excludes it as a mode of knowing. Though, admittedly, faith knowing cannot be reduced to philosophical knowing, I do suggest that faith permeates every mode of human experience. Whether we are witnessing a beautiful sunset, smelling cowslips in the field, or reflecting on Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, are we not always already surrendering to the experience of the world which is the very condition of knowing the world?

CONCLUSION: Religion Within Faith

While I have no doubt that an affirmative, indeed, religio-ethical "yes" marks the texts of both philosophers, it seems to me that this bitesized "yes" inevitably gets swallowed up in the "heterodidactics between life and death."⁶⁵ If this is the case, might it be possible to enlarge this "yes"? Is it possible that this affirmative "yes," can be re-thought of as an (inter)personal, life-giving "yes"? And could we say that this "yes" is synonymous with love, a love which is the oxygen that is the very condition for the possibility of all our particular faith(s), whatever they might be?

This shift in emphasis would highlight the reality that, because we live in a world of *both* connection *and* disconnection, it is not a matter of oscillating back and forth in a volatile, quasi-neutral space between two absolutes, attempting to escape the tyranny of two despots, being spooked (*Es spukt*)⁶⁶ by the "ghost of full presence."⁶⁷ The focus, instead, would become more persistently ethical, becoming a question, not of how one is to escape violence, but of how one is to respond to the call of love. Indeed, in this economy, the call of love is at once a "gift" that compels us to respond, and a "call" that can be ignored, refused and abused.

Moreover, this shift would radicalize the notion of undecidability by highlighting the reality that human beings are inherently religious. As creatures of faith who are always already caught in the grip of precariously held

beliefs, it makes good ethical sense to bring our particular faiths to the fore and confess them (in "fear and trembling"). It is here, in plain view, that we "myth-makers" will be better able to keep our stories, and their potential for violence, in check.

Although Caputo remains religiously committed to his Ankhôral Religion of withdrawal, which implicates him in Derrida's dilemma, this is not an altogether bad thing on my reading. For by conceding that Derrida's absolute desert is unlivable, and that the messianic hope cannot live apart from the determinable faiths, Caputo's analysis not only allows for a certain content, it also admits of a certain genealogy and geography⁶⁸ which helps bring the messianic closer to the messianisms. For despite his protestations to the contrary, Derrida's "religion" has very determinable features which include an affinity for a particular form of democracy and a very specific brand of prophetic justice.⁶⁹ Indeed, deconstruction itself was forged "at the end of the totalitarianisms of the left and the right, of fascism and Stalinism"⁷⁰

If this is the case, if we allow Caputo to have his way with Derrida, if we admit content into Derrida's messianic structure (will he forgive us?), then the ground would level out to the extent that, not only would the messianic become a pharmacological site - and therefore be subject to deconstruction - but concrete messianisms, by the same token, could not be written off as *essentially* poisonous. This, as we have already alluded, highlights the crucial difference between "necessary" violence and "historical" violence. Allowing for the ubiquity of violence rather than the necessity of violence opens "a political space which can grapple with both the possibility of peace and violence - that is, a political structure that confronts violence as violence precisely against a horizon of possible peace and justice."⁷¹ So instead of having determinate religions be the whipping boy of the messianic, the messianic itself is also ushered into the "beautiful fray" as another messianism among messianisms. In this way, we could release religion to be understood as "a fundamentally deconstructive gesture," yet also a pharmacological site where there exists the possibility "of both poison and cure, violence and peace, exclusion and healing."⁷² In other words, if Derrida cannot have his cake and eat it too, if it is impossible to maintain his desert religion, and if we also confess that all discourse begins in faith, then instead of dismissing out of hand the viability of determinate religions in the call for justice, we would be free to bring our particular faiths to the fore in order to cultivate a religio-ethical vigilance that has an ear bent toward the other.

Was not this kind of vigilance demonstrated, for example, by a certain Galilean who by his own account was *both* prophet *and* priest, *both* human *and* divine, whose kingdom is *both* "now" *and* "not yet," and whose "particular" words and work are "universal" in intent and scope?

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NOTES

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Olthuis, and Jack Caputo, whose insightful comments and criticisms greatly improved the quality of this essay.

1. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

2. It is important at the outset to emphasize that for the deconstructionist the very gesture of philosophy is one of violence. Because the impulse of the Western philosophical/theological tradition has been one largely focused on a search for an unmovable centerpiece for its house of being, it is believed that this impulse, this spirit, has all along sacrificed *difference* on the altar of *sameness*. Indeed, the discovery of the mathematical - that most Greek of all Greek discoveries, which itself stands as a paradigm for philosophical thought - at the same time was a violent rupture that has given birth to many and varied dualisms which the deconstructionist is particularly sensitive to and suspicious of. As the reason, that is, *logos*, for what appears, this intelligible, mathematical essence became the veritable apex of reality itself. As such, the *logos* becomes first in the order of being, a throne from which this Unmediated absolute rules absolutely. In this way, because the *logos* cannot help but think totality, reason inevitably "dictates that what is is and what isn't isn't, and that what is, whatever it be, is more truly than what simply appears to be which, strictly speaking, is not at all, or, at the very least, is not really *real*." See Gary B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988). p. 129. This way of thinking, that is, *logos* as *causa sui*, is traced along the path of development where it finds its full formulation in the modernity of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel. Since the time Descartes set out to establish the ego as a point of absolute certainty, being has been characterized by what Spinoza termed *conatus essendi*: "Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being." See Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*. in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1955). p. 136. Since for Spinoza God's power is synonymous with his essence, and all things are modes of God, the will-to-power, notes Levinas, becomes the linchpin of modern ontologies. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969). p. 46. On this reading, what has developed over a long history is a process whereby reason has become an instrument of terror, a tool of oppression and domination used by an ego or a society of egos to suppress what is other or different. Jacques Derrida terms this totalizing "motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence*." See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). p. 228. Although this paper reflects a deep affinity and respect for the work of Caputo and Derrida, it struggles to think otherwise on this very crucial point of *necessary* violence. See part III below.

3. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xxii.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

5. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi. By strategically positioning a "formidable" circle of "secularist hermeneutic guards around the text" Caputo, after Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). pp. 42-47., argues that it is typical of Derrida's commentators to want "to make deconstruction safe for secularism...." What deconstruction is concerned with, however, is discourse that is totalizing. "Theology has hardly cornered the market on totalization. If there is any totalizing going on here ... it is among the secularist commentators on Derrida who would forbid the contamination or 'infestation' of good secular academic goods such as deconstruction with God." J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, pp. 18-19.

7. Ibid., p. 136.
8. Ibid., p. xx.
9. Ibid., p. xxiii.
10. Ibid., p. xxiv.
11. Ibid., pp. 154-55.
12. Jacques Derrida, "Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la «religion» aux limites de la simple raison," In *La Religion*, ed. T. Marchaisse (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996). pp. 16-17. All translations are my own.
13. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 155.
14. Ibid., p. 150. Although this is Cornell West's expression, Caputo thinks it is a good "spectral image" for the convergence between the "deconstructive resources of religion" and the "religious resources of deconstruction." See also John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993). p. 201. Even though Caputo himself reservedly uses the term "postmodernism," he rightly considers that it has become an overused and much abused word, one that has "been ground into senselessness by opportunistic overuse" J.D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 119. However, as a heuristic term, it does help to describe a growing sense of suspicion and dis-ease in Western culture. From pop culture to politics, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Enlightenment myth of progress is fast losing its ability to inspire enthusiasm and generate faith among its advocates, the spirit of which the term "postmodern" nicely captures.
15. Ibid., p. 117.
16. Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. M. Quaintance, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. D. Cornell et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992). See also *Force de loi: 'Fondement mystique de l'autorité'* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).
17. John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 21.
18. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xxix.
19. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 167.
20. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 135
21. J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 167.
22. J. Derrida, "The Force of Law," p. 25.
23. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 135.
24. Ibid., pp. 139-143.
25. Ibid., p. 135.
26. J. Derrida, "Foi et Savoir," pp. 26-27.
27. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 136.
28. Jacques Derrida, "Deconstruction and Tradition: The Villanova Roundtable with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. J. D. Caputo (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 1997). pp. 23-24.
29. John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987). Although Caputo has come full circle (almost) since *Radical Hermeneutics*, in my opinion, his religious strategizing has changed very little. Although he has since given up the attempt to cross-pollinate Derrida's metaphors of play and frivolity with Heidegger's metaphors of stillness and meditation (by injecting a "mystical element" into the abyss of withdrawal), he still has his religious camp set up on

the side of the deconstructive mean that is closest to Kierkegaard. See Chapter 7, "Cold Hermeneutics: Heidegger/Derrida," pp. 187-206. My modest attempt in this paper is to merely hint at the contours of a philosophy (ethics, politics, or whatever the discipline) that is as inescapably religious as it is philosophical.

30. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 137.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. J. Derrida, "*Foi et Savoir*," p. 28.

36. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, pp. 138-139.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

40. *Ibid.*

41. J. Derrida, "*Foi et Savoir*," p. 29.

42. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 142.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 140, emphasis added. What I mean here - and this is an important point - is that whereas the postmodern critique is concerned to deconstruct the modern assumption that particularity is an inferior chip off the universal block (in other words, a "fall from universality"), I contend that the valorization of the messianic represents the flipside of the same economy, a shift that repeats a post-lapsarian fall into necessary violence. In this way, violence resurfaces again in a different guise. This time as a "fall within particularity." So, while this shift in sensitivities needfully addresses metaphysical violence, it does not, however, address the question of structural (creational) violence, or the difference between the two.

45. J. D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, p. 196.

46. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). pp. 112; 200.

47. J. Derrida, "Deconstruction and Tradition," p. 23.

48. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 154.

49. On the significance of this quasi-neutral, arid-like, "khora" space that precedes and engulfs our "yes" and "no," see Jacques Derrida, "*Khora*"; *Sauf le nom*," in *On the Name*, ed. T. Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

50. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. P-A. Brault and M. Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). pp. 29-30.

51. Jacques Derrida, "How Not to Speak: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. H. Coward and T. Foshay, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

53. J. D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 93.

54. J. Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 124.

55. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 35.

56. J. D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 94.

57. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, pp. 35-36.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

59. J. D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, pp. 94-95.

60. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 37.

61. J. D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, pp. 278-288.

62. J. D. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, pp. 245-247.

63. Ibid., p. 223.
64. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 158.
65. J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. xviii.
66. Ibid., p. 172.
67. I owe this phrase to James H. Olthuis, "A Hermeneutics of Suffering Love," in *The Very Idea of Radical Hermeneutics*, ed. R. Martinez (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997). p. 160.
68. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 142.
69. J. Derrida, "Foi et Savoir," p. 29.
70. J. D. Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. 142.
71. James K. A. Smith, "Determined Violence: Derrida's Structural Religion," *Journal of Religion* 78 (April 1998): 211.
72. Ibid.