

# SAINTS AND POSTMODERNISM

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## INTRODUCTION

This book of essays on the work of one of the most exciting and controversial American Continental philosophers, John D. Caputo, attempts not only to put the latter's challenging ideas into context, but also to provide a context for some of the world's leading thinkers to discuss issues that are currently central to debates in the area of Continental philosophy and beyond. The issues that have preoccupied Caputo from his early work on Aquinas, Eckhart, and Heidegger, to his more recent ruminations on postmodern philosophers such as Levinas and Derrida, are so vast and wide-ranging that they have serious implications for philosophy and theology well beyond the purview of Caputo's particular specializations. His writings on ethics and religion, for example, while being indebted primarily to the insights of Jacques Derrida, are nevertheless ground-breaking in their own right; the implications for our understanding of the role of "God" in the contemporary situation, as well as the consequences for political debate of his claim that we have reached "the end of ethics," are indeed enormous. As such, this book seeks to tease out and test the efficacy of many of these contentious views that challenge not only many of the inherent presuppositions in recent philosophy but also in the humanities writ large.

My initial aim and aspiration in bringing together people as intellectually different from one another as Norris Clarke, Jacques Derrida, Lewis Ayres, and Tom Flynn, was to show the rich diversity of Caputo's writings, and to demonstrate how he himself has managed to reconcile traditions that ostensibly appear at variance but which prove to be much more congruous at a deeper level of inquiry. I am thinking here, for example, of how he has made a convincing case for the affinity between the Medieval mystics and deconstruction, about which I shall say more below. The result, however, is a book that far exceeds those initial aspirations. *A Passion for the Impossible* is not

simply a retrospective appreciation, but a volume that launches us into new territory in the areas of ethics, religion, political philosophy, hermeneutics, deconstruction, post-structuralism, and of course, Medieval and mystical thought. In his extensive replies to each of the papers gathered here, Caputo not only defends his position on a host of vexed and complicated issues, but also brings the debate up a notch or two by vigorously testing the coherence of his critics' theses and claims. The result is an extraordinary dialogue that refuses to stand on ceremony and tackles the issues robustly but in a manner accessible to those with even a cursory knowledge of contemporary philosophical/theological thought. Indeed, it could be said that by way of his own original contribution to the volume, "God and Anonymity," and by way of his engaging rejoinders to each of his interlocutors, Caputo furnishes us with a book's worth of his most recent reflections.

One of the highlights of this confrontation between Caputo and his critics comes in the form of an interview that I held with Jacques Derrida in January 2000. The interview is noteworthy for the praise that Derrida heaps on Caputo for his work and commitment, but also for what it adds to the whole question of the relationship between religion and deconstruction, a question that has fundamentally preoccupied Caputo over much of the last decade. In the course of our exchange, Derrida addresses not only the nature of his "religion without religion," about which Caputo has so evocatively written, but he also reflects on how the name "God" functions for one who "rightly passes for an atheist." In many ways, this is the clearest statement by Derrida on God and religion to date, and I hope that it will act as a springboard, not only for further debate around Caputo's incisive reading of Derrida in this regard, but also for a much more comprehensive debate on these issues by all those influenced by Derrida from whatever quarter.

Moreover, thanks to papers by Norris Clarke and Tom Carlson, we not only get an insight into how Caputo reconciles his early interests with his later day preoccupations, but we are also given a glimpse into the current general state of Thomism and negative theology. The same goes for those essays that challenge Caputo's readings of Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Levinas, and Rorty. In each case, the reader is invited to take sides in debates that are currently exercising scholars each of whom is at the cutting edge of his or her respective fields of research.

*A Passion for the Impossible*, therefore, provides a forum in which some of the more salient issues in the work of John D. Caputo as well as in the broader philosophical and theological scene, are subjected to rigorous and original appraisal, thus reinvigorating in surprising and exciting ways many debates that have long since become arid and stale. So much for the general profile of the book. In order to set things in context for the reader, allow me

to devote what remains of this introduction to painting a general profile of Caputo and his intellectual formation and trajectory.

I think many will concur when I say that Jack Caputo is one of the most versatile, humorous, sensitive, and astute philosophers writing in the English-speaking world today. Caputo's intellectual adventure has taken him from Medieval to postmodern Paris, from Eckhart and Aquinas to Derrida, from mystics and magi to deconstructionists. Even today, steeped as he now is in the writings of Heidegger, Derrida, and Levinas, Caputo will invariably and fondly invoke the names and ideas of the scholastic masters to whom he owes an enormous personal debt. It was his early encounter with these saints and mystical scholars that inspired him to abandon life as he had known it in order to dedicate himself to learning and writing philosophy. Even his most "impish and impious" works, as he likes to describe his most recent output, bear testimony to his time studying the French Catholic intellectuals, like Jacques Maritain and Pierre Rousselot, writers who illuminated the texts of Aquinas for him in exciting and startling ways. In Caputo, the voices of "the Tradition" harmoniously intermingle with the rhapsodic ruminations of the saints of postmodernism.

It is this blend of the old and the new, of pre-Modernity and the post-Modern, which characterizes John D. Caputo's writings at their best. Unlike many "Continental" philosophers of his generation, he shirks the temptation to indulge in gratuitous esotericism, preferring instead to address his reader in a style reminiscent not only of the medieval monks, but also of his favorite proto-postmodernist, Søren Kierkegaard. In a recent exchange with Michael Zimmerman, Caputo remarks that "time and again I have succumbed to the temptation to make myself clear, which is, as someone once warned me, a very dangerous business. For nothing offers a philosopher better protection and a surer escape than an enveloping cloud of continentalist obscurity." He follows this up by saying that, as writers go, few can match his "not-so-secret hero" Mr. Either/Or: "For those who care about such things, it is not hard to tell that *Radical Hermeneutics* is a retelling of Constantine Constantius's *Repetition*, while *Against Ethics* is a postmodern version of *Fear and Trembling*."<sup>1</sup> Caputo's deployment of certain Kierkegaardian techniques—irony, clarity, humor and wit—have enabled him to render Continental philosophy accessible and intelligible to many who had long since abandoned ship. He has helped convince those of a more traditional persuasion that many of the themes being treated in contemporary European thought have their origins in the texts of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Eckhart. He has shown how it is indeed possible to love both the pre-Moderns and the Postmodernists, how it is feasible, in other words, to talk of St. Thomas and Heidegger, the Bishop of Hippo and Derrida, in the same breath. Caputo's writings have

served to debunk the myth that Continental philosophy is nothing short of fatuous and frivolous word play devoid of argument and reason. They bear witness to the fact that such philosophy can be as “serious” in content and tone, or as rich in argument, as any of its rivals.

So what exactly does this lover of mystics, saints, and maji, have to teach his reader? To what end does he aim the literary strategies borrowed from his not-so-secret Danish hero? I think Caputo’s message is most poignantly encapsulated in the following passage from his most recent book, *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Indiana, 2000):

... I cling steadfastly to Husserl’s ‘principle of all principles,’ to stick to what is given just insofar as it is given, which has always meant for me a minimalist injunction *not* to put a more sanguine gloss on things than they warrant. I have always been both braced and terrified by Friedrich Nietzsche’s demand to take the truth straight up, forgoing the need to have it ‘attenuated, veiled, sweetened, blunted and falsified.’ I readily confess that we have not been handpicked to be Being’s or God’s mouthpiece, that it is always necessary to get a reading, even if (and precisely because) the reading is there is no Reading, no final game-ending Meaning, no decisive and sweeping Story that wraps things up. Even if the secret is, there is no Secret. We do not know who we are—that is who we are. (*More Radical Hermeneutics*, 12)

Caputo’s is a minimalist position to the extent that he is deeply suspicious of any maximalist philosophical, scientific, ethical, religious, or political structure that pretends to be more than a provisional formation. He steadfastly abides by the Kierkegaardian suggestion that we are, from the very outset, ineluctably situated in the rush of existence, caught in the grip of factual life, exposed to the merciless vicissitudes of time and chance. As “poor existing individuals” we are always already embedded in socio-linguistic frameworks, webs of beliefs and practices that determine how we view the world and how we relate to the others with whom we share it. This, of course, is not only Kierkegaard’s belief, but also that of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. As such, Caputo’s *radical* hermeneutic turn, a turn that he took in the mid-eighties, has been dominated by these figures and their stress on historicity, the aleatoric flux of events, and the mediated character of experience.

The point of radicalizing hermeneutics in this way is to suggest that, whether we like it or not, we are unable to override interpretation, that there are no uninterpreted facts of the matter, and that the world is unavailable to us in any naked or raw sense. This is not to say that we are, as certain critics tend to argue, caught in a prison house of language, but simply that we have

no way of knowing whether our interpretations accurately correspond to the way things are in themselves. Only those who believe that they can wash themselves clean of their socio-historical conditioning and assume a view from nowhere, would claim that their interpretations correspond to facts. To belong to a tradition means that one is claimed by a language, a language that is not one's own, but one which is comprised of multifarious voices and tongues. Languages are neither homogeneous nor univocal, but heterogeneous and plurivocal; they are contaminated from within by an assortment of dialects and vocabularies, all of which freely bleed into one another. Thus, when I speak I bear witness to the fact that purity is an illusion, that I simply cannot excuse myself from my heritage, and that I have no means of filtering out the words and signs that get closer to reality than the others with which I have been lumbered.

For Caputo, the upshot of this is clear: we must be prepared to face the worst, we must, that is, be prepared to go the distance with Nietzsche when he suggests that we are but clever little animals making our way in the midst of an anonymous rumbling which is devoid of sense and meaning. For we simply do not know if there is anything that acts as a firm foundation for our beliefs, values, judgments, and truths. We are not in a position, as factually situated beings, to fully unravel the various strands and threads that tenuously hold our traditions together so as to access some extra-contextual reality. Once you take history and context seriously, and once you realize that it is simply impossible to transcend one's time and place through an act of metaphysical bravado, then you will be more inclined to agree with Nietzsche that there is a distinct possibility that one day the little star will grow cold and the clever animals who inhabit it will have to die.

Caputo's radical hermeneutics endeavors, therefore, make trouble for those committed to the view that we can get out from under—either through metaphysical system building, or through the tools of theology—the network of finite structures and institutions into which we have been thrown, and through which we have been acculturated. It seeks to engender a sense of humility akin to that called for by Johannes Climacus when faced with Hegel's world-historical process. Like the pseudonym, Caputo contends that there is no *one* tradition, no *pure* language, and no history that is not already laden with heavy doses of fiction. There are, as stressed above, traditions, languages and histories, all of which are inhabited from within by even more complex traditions, languages, and histories. Consequently, the so-called "subject" is incapable, in a manner reminiscent of Hegel and Heidegger, of fully gathering itself up from a past that has never been present. This suggests that any attempt to spin a grand narrative of how we came to be where we are, is predicated upon the dubious assumption that there is a way of disentangling the disparate and highly convoluted linguistic and historical matrices in which we

find ourselves. But such attempts at construing what Paul Ricoeur calls a “supreme plot,” are always destined to fail, for there is simply no way that even the most skilled hermeneuts or historians can *fully* unfurl the manifold layers of history, no way that every trace of the past can be recovered from decay or deformation. There will always be a need, as Caputo repeatedly reminds his reader, to continually probe our texts and our histories in the name of those who never made it as far as the officially sanctioned record of events, those whose traces have long since turned to dust or ash. With Climacus and Derrida, Caputo stays on the lookout for the debris that falls from Hegel’s desk as he crafts his systematic account of world-history.

For Caputo, thus, radical hermeneutics seeks to keep us attentive to the fact that we have to try to make sense of ourselves from where we stand. We cannot, he insists, circumvent the difficulties which existence presents by simply pushing aside the inordinate amount of traces, signs, tracks, and marks that constitute the past. As such, we are never quite sure as to *who* we are or whence we came. We are, as Derrida argues, always already lost (*destin-errant*), always already cut from the origin and forbidden access to the *terminus ad quem*. Our identities are, as Hegel suggests, constituted through a dialectical mediation of identity and difference. But, unlike Hegel, Caputo argues in favor of the belief that difference is not merely the antithesis of sameness, or something which, through a process of dialectical mediation, can be reconciled to the same. Rather, difference on this reading resists assimilation because it is synonymous with death and loss. Due to our being unable to fully recover the past, and due also to our being incapable of prying apart the multitudinous languages and traditions that feed into “our” own, we are somewhat alien and foreign to ourselves. We are, in other words, inhabited by many whose voices will never be heard either because they have been brutally suppressed, or simply because they have been lost to memory. Consequently, “we” should always be circumspect when “we” say “we,” for no identity is ever pure and uncontaminated. What “we” call an “identity” is a highly miscegenated and contingent formation that has, over time, come to seem homogeneous and virginal.

Hence, Caputo’s claim that “[w]e do not know who we are—that is who we are.” For him, we are debarred from “The Secret,” or from a supreme Truth of truths which could only be accessed after one had found a way of cheating time, language, and interpretation. The Secret is that which resists the overarching schemes that mortals try to erect in order to twist free of their mortality, or the sacred codes with which ontotheologists try to enter eternity through the back door. Being as we are always already severed from the origin, we can never—not at least if we have a certain degree of hermeneutic honesty and humility—bring to reality the dreams which the philosophers of self-presence have, since Plato, put forward for our consid-

eration. The fact that one does not *know* The Secret is another way of saying that, try as I might, I cannot trace my ancestry back to some divine or infinite source. That is not to say, however, that some such source does not exist. Rather, it is a way of saying that if there is such a source, this poor existing individual is unable to reach it.

We are all, says Caputo in one of his most arresting phrases, “siblings of the same dark night,” devoid of any privileged access to “God,” “Being,” or “Truth” (capitalized). There are no such master names in radical hermeneutics, no names that are not components of some natural or historical language. *All* names, thus, have a history, which means, in turn, that no name picks out a natural kind. Consequently, when you privilege a name by giving it a saving quality, radical hermeneutics urges you to undertake a careful genealogy or etymology of the name. It enjoins you take a closer look at the socio-linguistic cum historical matrix in which the said name is contextualized. In so doing, you will notice that names do not fall from the sky, that, *pace* Heidegger, there are no names which attach to reality more precisely than others. So we do our best to make our way through the dark night with the disconcerting realization that we shall not get any closer to cracking The Secret by invoking a name which has been, to employ a line from Nietzsche which Caputo loves, “enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seems firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people.” (From “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufman ed., Random House, 1980, pp. 42–47).

But how precisely does all of this connect up with Caputo’s formative training in such classical and traditional authors like Eckhart and Aquinas? How, in other words, does Caputo, as I contend at the outset, reconcile his love for both the philosophical and religious traditions, with his radical hermeneutics? Has he not thrown the baby out with the bath water? Has he not mercilessly sacrificed his beloved saints and mystics on Zarathustra’s altar? I think the answer to these questions and concerns is revealed quite clearly in the course of the respective dialogues between Caputo and his critics in the remainder of this book. In nearly each case, Caputo responds by pointing out that his is not a negative or nihilistic position, but one full of hope, faith, and affirmation. Moreover, he tries to convey a sense of the *religious* spirit which drives radical hermeneutics, and this is, I think, what marks Caputo off from many of the so-called “postmodern” thinkers with whom he is normally associated. He convincingly shows us how we can preserve what we consider valuable in our traditions, while concomitantly cultivating a hermeneutic sensitivity towards them. Caputo’s brand of hermeneutics, that is, does not set out to destroy or decimate tradition, but only to make it a little more honest with regard to its origins, thus ensuring that it does not become, in Kierkegaard’s words, a “fossilized formalism.”

He wants to keep all structures and institutions—political, theological, ethical, sexual, philosophical—from closing in upon themselves, or from becoming overdetermined.

It would, therefore, be a serious mistake to accuse Caputo of celebrating nothingness or nihilism. Quite to the contrary, his aim is to expose tradition to the voiceless and nameless that lie buried beneath its *constructed* foundations, and to show that even the most ostensibly determined structures have a hidden history. This is a process that is thoroughly affirmative, one that does not close off any possibility or any avenue of inquiry no matter how embarrassing to the tradition the findings of such inquiries might be. While we may never be capable, for all the reasons proffered above, of cracking The Secret, this should not prevent us from trying to unlock it as best we can. We should, according to Caputo, push against what seems closed off to us, even if, after having penetrated the outer layer, we find ourselves mired in even deeper and more complex layers. Radical hermeneutics invites us to go the extra mile, to push against the prevailing reading, even if we will never hit upon a final Reading which will still the turbulent currents of interpretation.

What we can take from this is that, in affirming tradition and the heterogeneous forces that disturb it from within, Caputo's work is not an exercise in irresponsible iconoclasm. Neither is it a philosophizing with a hammer simply for its own sake. It is rather an approach to questions of meaning and value that endeavors to keep us as attentive to the insuperable difficulties that human life has to contend with. It tries to take the steam out of any edifice that purports to be more than the product of human hands. As such, it signals a twilight of the idols of metaphysics, theology, science, and morality. It is in the moment when radical hermeneutics resists the seduction of the idols that it joins up with the Medieval and classical heritage out of which it emerged. Caputo's affirmation of his Catholic and scholastic training becomes manifest, that is, when he draws parallels between his deconstructive tendencies and those of his Medieval masters.

This is, of course, why Caputo's other not-so-secret hero is Jacques Derrida—the Rabbi Augustinus Judaeus. In Derrida, Caputo has found a radical hermeneut who shows how it is possible to love one's tradition with all one's heart, while at the same time subjecting it to penetrating critique and scrutiny. But even more importantly, Derrida's is not a violent critique, nor one that seeks to dance on the graves of our most hallowed certainties, but one that listens in a painstakingly rigorous fashion to the solicitations of those for whom the claim to greatness of the tradition has proved to be disastrous. Such attention to those whose memory has been erased is, on Caputo's reading of Derrida, a prophetic cum religious appeal for justice, for the type of mercy and justice demanded by the prophets Amos and Yeshua. For, like these prophets before him, Derrida encourages us to stay alert to the singu-



lar cries of those whose only desire is for justice beyond the law, or for a justice which exceeds that of the universal order. Such prophets enjoin us to respond to those whose miserable plight shows up the deficiencies in the law. This is Derrida's "religion without religion," about which Caputo writes so movingly throughout his magisterial *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Indiana, 1997), a subject to which Derrida returns in his interview with me included in this volume.

The most significant point of convergence between Derrida and the Medieval and scholastic traditions, according to Caputo, occurs when, in the course of a remarkable confessional piece entitled *Circumfession* (Chicago, 1993), Derrida conjures up the spirit of St. Augustine as he asks, "what do I love when I love my God?" In this moment, Derrida dons his tallith, falls to his knees, looks skywards, and, as he weeps in anxious expectation, cries out "Come! Please come!" This is the prayer of one who knows that there is no escaping the hermeneutic fix in which we find ourselves, no way, that is, of repairing to some neutral vantage point to determine the efficacy of our beliefs and practices. But this ineluctable feature of our lot does not deter the radical hermeneut from hoping against hope for the impossible dream of universal justice and democracy, or for a time when the law of unconditional hospitality and forgiveness of the type preached by the prophets, will prevail.

This is what Derrida and Caputo call a "passion for *the* impossible," or a passion for The Secret. As mentioned above, just because The Secret resists decoding does not mean that we ought to abjure from trying to crack it. For it is precisely when The Secret seems to have absolutely and totally confounded our cognitive grasp, that we are impassioned all the more to access and disclose it. Such a passion prevents us from ever believing that we have at last broken a sacred code, or that we have laid claim to the word of God, Being, or Truth. It is what keeps us hermeneutically humble and what saves us from our tendency to succumb to ontotheological hubris. It is that which keeps faith alive.

These prayers and tears of radical hermeneutics, Caputo argues, are no less passionate than those of the mystics. Indeed, Derrida's Augustinian prayer—"What do I love when I love my God?" is structurally of the same order as that beautiful line of Meister Eckhart, one so touching it could easily be mistaken for a verse from *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "Therefore I pray God that he may make me free of God" (cited in Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 250). Both radical hermeneutics and mysticism share a love of the impossible, or for that which challenges our most sacred certainties. They both hope against hope for impossible dreams, dreams that revolve around the name of "God." When Eckhart begs God to be rid of God, he is engaging in, as Caputo suggests, "a sublime form of language which calls for, which prays and weeps for, the other of language, for the incoming of the

other, *l'invention de l'autre*" (Ibid., p. 251). The silence that mysticism encourages is not a means of cheating language, but the means by which language assumes its most sublime form, not because it has, at last, corresponded with reality, but because it takes the form of a prayer for what is *wholly other*—The Secret, the impossible, or, as Derrida might say, the *tout autre*. Silence is a way of *saying* or *signaling* (both linguistic operations) that, try as I might, I cannot make the impossible possible.

Caputo admits, of course, that there are significant and undeniable differences between the Meister, a figure who has hovered over all of the former's writings since *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Fordham, 1982), and deconstruction. These divergences notwithstanding, however, it is more than credible to argue that Eckhart was a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*, that is, of course, if deconstruction is defined *a la Caputo*, as a prophetic/biblical appeal for justice. In a similar vein to Derrida, Eckhart does not contend that the *name* of "God," the signifier, can claim to have captured the essence of God, the signified; that is, for the mystic there can be no unmediated access to God-in-itself, no ideal cognitive or epistemic situation in which the knower apprehends the known in a purely factual sense. For, to repeat, it is impossible for a poor existing individual to bracket out interpretation in an effort to strike at the heart of the thing itself. For both the radical hermeneut and the mystic, the word "God" acquires its force and meaning through its relationship to other signs and names in the textual chain. There is simply no point at which we can disengage the sign from its context, and match it up to an extra-textual entity. Moreover, for Eckhart, to predicate something of God was not to describe the features and attributes of the thing we call "God," but rather a way of drawing that name further into a complex network of signifiers.

Like Derrida, Eckhart does not believe that there will come a point at which we will be able to dispense with the name of "God" because we will have succeeded in leaving language behind through some form of magical transcendental trickery. While he does contend that God is One, and while he does hold, *pace* radical hermeneutics, that beyond the anonymous rumbling of factual life there must be supreme signified (The Secret), Eckhart nonetheless insists that all our attempts at enclosing and circumscribing God through naming, pushes us further away from the "reality" of God. Once we name, as Derrida argues, the subject quietly slips away, and because we cannot but name we can never claim to *know* the subject through and through. To pray God to rid oneself of God, thus, is a way of staying alert to the ineluctability of interpretation, or a way of sensitizing oneself to the fact that no one sign is any closer to an uninterpreted fact of the matter than any other. It is a good deconstructive way of keeping us on the watch for the idols of self-presence.

The originality of Caputo's work is evidenced, therefore, in the way in which he deftly and convincingly shows how radical hermeneutics does not

seek to destroy or purge tradition, but tries rather to keep it open and sensitive to its *other* voices, the voices which, like Eckhart's, disturb it from within. Caputo identifies in Eckhart the same type of joyful wisdom that directs Derrida's work, and the same type of critical vigilance that animates the most responsible of postmodern thought. In Eckhart one hears the first great theological voice of dissent, the first great act of affirmative deconstruction. Caputo opens up a space in which to hear the deeply religious tones of deconstructive faith, a faith that is not informed by knowledge of a Godhead, but a messianic faith in a kingdom that is always to come. Like Eckhart, Caputo and Derrida do not consider the inaccessibility of The Secret to be bad news, but an opportunity to become even more intensely impassioned by the impossible. They each stand like the woman at the foot of the cross in Daniele da Volterra's evocative painting reproduced by Derrida in his *Memoirs of the Blind* (Chicago, 1993), and resketched by Kathy Caputo as the frontispiece for *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*; a woman whose prayer is punctuated by a faith (messianic, anchorite) without faith (in the strong determinate sense epitomized by the concrete messianisms).

The faith of one who is impassioned by The Secret, thus, takes the form of an admission that we, by virtue of our factual situatedness, are debarred from predicting or programming the future, that we are at the mercy of the aleatoric nature of events. As such, it is a passion not driven by knowledge (*la passion du non-savoir*), for none of us knows the code to the absolute secret, but by a much more indeterminate act of affirmation for what presently exceeds our cognitive grasp. We are, as stated above, always already cut (circumcised) from the origin, always already a stranger to ourselves, always already enmeshed in a myriad of linguistic, political, religious, and sexual networks that resist the disentangling prowess of even the most qualified and eminent historians, narrators, geologists, archaeologists, theologians, and psychoanalysts. As such, there is no escaping the claim that tradition, history and language make upon us. But we can hope, these obstacles notwithstanding, that one day we may indeed *see* the truth. Faith is only faith when it longs for what appears impossible, for what it cannot presently see. It is, as Kierkegaard, reminds us constantly, a leap in the dark. Genuine faith is only for the blind.

Much of what Caputo debates in his responses to the many papers assembled here, revolves around the nature and viability of this anchoring religion without determinate religion, and especially around his contention that the positive messianisms—Christianity, Judaism, Islam—confuse faith with knowledge. Their reluctance to bite the bullet and admit that we simply do not know who we are, is what generates sectarian division, holy war, and ethnic disharmony. For once a sect declares that it has been visited from on high by a divinity, thus inferring that it now has a monopoly on truth because it is in on The Secret, it sets off rival claims by its competitors,

which, in turn, culminates in a battle for possession of minds and souls. Caputo follows Derrida in arguing—and this I believe is the culmination of his long trajectory from Aquinas through Eckhart, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida—that the call that issues to me from tradition might indeed be the summons of a supreme deity, but it might also be the anonymous forces of history appealing for justice, or for the realization of an ancient promise. The fact is that *I* simply do not know *who* or *what* calls. I am debarred from The Secret. But deconstruction shows that when the passage appears blocked, or when I can see no way through, the passion of faith becomes most intense. For at that moment the prayers and tears of one who is a little lost (*destinerrant*) flow like never before. At that moment one falls on bended knee and begs like mad for the impossible. As Derrida says, there is an undecidable fluctuation between God and the impossible. Longing for one cannot be separated from longing for the other.

“I can’t go on. I must go on! It is necessary to believe (*il faut croire*).” Undecidability, Caputo has taught, is not to be confused with indecision or with paralysis, as many detractors maintain, but is rather that which sets the flames of faith alight. It is the point at which the wheels of hope and desire are set in motion, the point at which we press against the current in the belief that we will reach dry land. I do not know *what* it is that I love when I love my God—that is the spin that Derrida and Caputo put on Augustine’s weepy supplication. The name of God does not cut nature at the joints, does not break through the network of traces and signs to some signified beyond language and temporality. It is rather the name of what I most long for. It is a longing for what exceeds the present order, what suspends the law in the name of the singular demand for justice. It is what disturbs the restricted economy of Hegelianism, an economy (*oikonomia*) predicated upon closure, in favor of the general economy that strives to give credit without the usual “terms and conditions.” The name of God, for Caputo, does not signify presence, but that which shatters the illusion of presence in the name of what has been driven out of the present order, and for what challenges its borders from beyond. “‘My God’,” he says, “is not addressed to a being or an essence, an explanatory cause or the solution of an epistemic cramp. When Moses starts to get nosy about God’s meaning and name, Yahweh told him ‘I am who I am, nothing you will understand,’ the clear implication being that Moses should mind his own business, and keep his mind on the business at hand, which is justice, not ontotheologic” (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, p. 335).

God, justice, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional hospitality, the democracy to come, the gift—these are the impossible names that shatter the orders of presence and law, as well as the overdetermined religious contexts that tend to embrace idols and golden calves before the suffering flesh of the lepers and the lame. The prayers and tears of Jack Caputo, his prayer to God to rid him of God, is a prayer for such justice. He has all the while been

reminding us that religion and philosophy are not antithetical to one another, but that one nourishes the other. From his early invocation on behalf of the mystical element in St. Thomas' thought, to his book on Jacques Derrida's religion without religion, he has earnestly tried to show how important it is for the borders separating Athens and Jerusalem to tremble. Philosophy which is not guided by religion without religion, is one which risks favoring the call of Being over the gentle pleas for mercy issued by the widows, orphans, and strangers. Caputo's Derridean/Joycean belief is that there is no clear demarcation between the bloodlines of the Jews and the Greeks. Purity, we will remember, does not go all the way down. To silence the voice of the Jew, thus, would be to silence the prophetic call for justice, a call which stymies the totalizing tendencies of Greek ontology. That, in a nutshell, is Jack Caputo's *modus vivendi*; to keep reminding the Greeks that the Jews, the saints, and the mystics are never too far behind.

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## NOTES

1. John D. Caputo, "An American and a Liberal: A Response to Michael Zimmerman" in *Continental Philosophy Review* 31:215–220 (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 215.