

# Introduction

## The Question and the Claim

My claim, which this book unfolds, is threefold. First: metaphysics has always been a political act. This is necessarily the case because metaphysics, as a discourse that hides its own production, is unavoidably ideological. Second: theology, which metaphysics secretly harbors as an authorizing force, has made possible metaphysics' ideological ruminations. Therefore, theology, too, has always been a political act. Third, and as a sort of normative complement to the first two: Theologians and religious believers should reject this ideological metaphysical discourse and instead preferentially pursue an orthopraxical and revolutionary political theology. It is now past time to recognize the unavoidability of the political and ensure that theology's underlying political commitments are revolutionary in general and anti-capitalist in particular.

On the one hand, the deconstruction of metaphysics—which, as Jacques Derrida demonstrates, and which I explore in detail in this text's second chapter—presents difficulties for the possibility of any theology, political or not: As will become clear, it is precisely theology that structurally articulates and defends the key metaphysical notion of the isomorphism of thinking and being. It is in this sense that metaphysics harbors theology as a sort of secret. And it is in this sense that one could even say, as Derrida does, that metaphysics *is* theology, and that, vice versa, theology is metaphysics. The deconstruction of metaphysics is the deconstruction of theology *tout court*.

But on the other hand, this book's argument concerns not theology in the abstract, but orthopraxical and revolutionary political theology in particular. The type of theologian in whom I am interested resembles John Brown more than Thomas Aquinas,<sup>1</sup> and, contra-continental philosophy's recent interest in St. Paul's alleged political universalism or messianism, the

type of theology in which I am interested responds more to St. James's declaration that the rich have "fattened their hearts for the day of slaughter" (James 5:5) than it does Paul's claim that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).<sup>2</sup> As Jeffrey Robbins notes, the "philosophers' Paul" is a thinker seemingly devoid of particular political content.<sup>3</sup> And so my preference for James should be read as a materialist and praxis-oriented response to idealist formalisms and to the resurgence of political Platonism—most explicitly through Badiou—in contemporary continental philosophy.

Of course, given this emancipatory and material specification, the collapse of metaphysics might not so quickly sound theology's death knell. For while Derrida and a whole tradition of deconstructors have demonstrated the identity of metaphysics and what they call "infiniteist" theology—which, as we will see, is quite different than demonstrating the identity of metaphysics and faith—Karl Marx and a whole tradition of anti-capitalist theorists have demonstrated if not the identity, at least the intimacy and complication of metaphysics and capitalism. Yes, metaphysics is theology. But capitalism also has a theology of its own, and, as I will argue and as Marx argued, the capitalist's theology is not so different from the theology of the metaphysicians.

Marx notes this entanglement of theology and capitalism in the famous commodity fetishism section of the first volume of *Capital*:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labor. It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him.

Yet when we look beyond this use value—when we dig beneath the surface appearance of the commodity—we discover a hidden infrastructural world of production: "The social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the

relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. This is the reason why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.”

This ideological inversion, wherein the social relation between workers and owners is masked by the pseudo-objective exchange relation between buyer and seller, follows a logic recognizably religious: “In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands.”<sup>4</sup> Whereas capitalism masks workers’ production of commodities, theology masks theologians’ production of God. Marx sees clearly the similarity between these two ideological logics: they both mask the site (and sight) of production. But he less directly articulates their difference. In capitalism, the owner hides the proletariat’s work. In theology, on the other hand, the theologian hides the work of his or herself: central to the theological gesture is the claim that the theologian responds to, but does not and cannot produce, God. For the theologian to maintain any sort of credibility, God cannot be a product of theology: God, as theology has always understood God, must be unproduced, outside of production, uncreated and unmoving, *sui generis*, not just substantial but supersubstantial, supereminent, outside of the text of metaphysics.

This brief turn to Marx, then, quickly brings us back to Derrida. Where Marx offers a political-economic critique of the ideological function of metaphysics, Derrida offers a deconstruction of the theoretical “grounding” of all metaphysical claims. Which is not to say that Marx is uninterested in philosophical critiques or Derrida in political ones. Indeed, and as will become apparent throughout this book, the line between Marxist critique and Derridean deconstruction is less opaque than either Marxist critics of “postmodernism” or post-structural critics of “metanarratives” might let on. In both, the Marxist critique of capitalism and the Derridean critique of metaphysics, the major point remains structurally analogous: An ideological-theological appearance obfuscates a hidden infrastructural reality. Or, what amounts to the same but in simpler terms: *The metaphysics of God and of commodities—metaphysics itself—is a lie that hides production.*

Because metaphysics is an ideology that hides, and because metaphysics is theology, all theology is necessarily political theology. This is true in a

double sense. First, all theology is political because, as ideology, it necessarily obfuscates some underlying material reality. This process of obfuscation is unavoidably political. Second, all theology is political because the material reality that it hides is itself political. A dispute on this point is precisely why Marx left the Young Hegelians: For Marx, religion is worthy of critique not primarily because it is metaphysically incorrect, but because of the particular underlying material relations that particular religions obfuscate.<sup>5</sup> It is this attention to particularity—and not, contra Feuerbach, a psychological argument concerning fantasy projection—that leads Marx to write that Christianity, “especially in its more bourgeois developments, Protestantism and Deism,” is “the most fitting form of religion” under capitalism (Marx, 51).

This discussion of theology’s role in the ideological defense of capital is important for reminding us of the dangers of idealism. To say that theology is impossible—that is, to say that there is no metaphysical concept because there is no outside text, to say that theologians made God and that God did not make theologians—is not to say that theology does not actually exist. So long as universities have theology departments, so long as theologians exist, so too will theology. Theology’s lack of metaphysical rigor is not an outright dismissal of the possibility of actually existing theology, in much the same way that the commodity’s lack of ontological status within the productive processes does not mean that commodities do not exist as such. Ideologies can be effective with or without ontological ground or reality, and this is precisely the reason they must be fought not only in the intellectual realm, but also and predominantly in material actuality. To think the opposite—that a textual deconstruction of theology, or that a written critique of capitalism, amounts to an overcoming of theology or capitalism—is itself an idealist metaphysical gesture that assumes reality follows the mandates of logic. But reality does not do so.

That is, theology’s actual possibility, the possibility of theology continuing to exist as a material actuality, has very little to do with the coherence of arguments concerning theology’s theoretical impossibility or political danger. Ideologies simply do not need to make sense to function, and they certainly do not need to make sense to exist. Racism, which will receive extensive treatment throughout this project but especially in chapter five, is proof of this disconnect between the mandates of thought and the actuality of existence. And so the fall of metaphysics as a credible discourse in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries will not lead to the necessary overcoming of theology any more than did Marx’s critique of capital lead to the necessary overcoming of capitalism. Here, Derrida is perhaps more

helpful than Marx: ideology might never be overcome, because there might not be a Truth, Logos, or God that or who could secure and determine non-ideological thought.

If theology and ideology mutually constitute each other, and if ideology is a perhaps unavoidable dimension of all thought, and if all theology is political in the double sense of ideologically obfuscating a particular political regime and, by the act of hiding, supporting said regime, then the question pertinent to theology is not “Will theology be political?” but is instead “What sort of politics will theology pursue and defend?” We can now understand my answer to this project’s question—What kind of theology, if any, should one pursue after the deconstruction of metaphysics?—in some more detail. First, the question is not “What sort of theology is possible after metaphysics?” Theology is both impossible according to thinking and actual according to reality. This lack of identity between thinking and being—which will become important for this project beginning in its second chapter, and which grounds and defines all metaphysics as metaphysics—prevents any simple descriptive solution to the problem of theology’s relation to ideology. Theology’s relation to ideology—that is, to both metaphysics and politics, to both Derrida and Marx—will be determined and decided in material history and cannot be adequately described in ideal thought.

This book argues that theologians and religious believers should pursue an orthopraxical and revolutionary political theology over metaphysical alternatives. Specifically, theologians and religious believers should pursue an explicitly anti-capitalist theology. Metaphysical theologies are forced by their own ideological limitations to structurally deny their own political implications, and so should be treated critically as the reactionary theories that they always in fact have been. Idealist theologies that prioritize doxy over praxis, or thinking over being, should be treated in like manner. If the practice of doing theology demands an answer to the question “What political regime do you support?” then, as this book passionately argues, the practice of theology must always strive for the material emancipation of the poor, the oppressed, and the exploited. Such an emancipation demands not reform, aid, or structural readjustment, and certainly not a mere “rethinking” of the status quo or an “openness to dialogue,” but instead an actual revolution of the entire global capitalist order. As I hope to demonstrate later, any theology that chooses otherwise is in fact a reactionary enemy of the sort of love promoted not only by Jesus Christ, but also by revolutionaries like John Brown, Fred Hampton, and Che Guevara—all of whom I consider saints. Theology must be political; it should be revolutionary.<sup>6</sup>

## Clarification of Terms

Before outlining the book's trajectory in detail, it would be helpful to clarify a few terms and concepts upon which I have already relied.

First: *Metaphysics*. And relatedly, *deconstruction*. As I discuss in some detail in this text's second chapter, the critique of metaphysics—and so also its defense—has become something of a motif in analytical and continental philosophy, systematic and constructive theology, and in what has unhelpfully come to be known as “theory.” As happens in philosophy, often these discussions turn into debates concerning the definition of metaphysics. For the purpose of this book, I intend the signifier “metaphysics” to refer to *any discourse that assumes or relies upon the philosopheme of the identity of thinking and being*. While the contemporary landscape does not offer any agreed upon sense of metaphysics, and so while my proposed heuristic definition above will not receive widespread acceptance in current academic literature, I do think there are good reasons to identify what has come to be thought of as metaphysics with this particular philosopheme.

We can turn, for example, to Parmenides, who wrote that “thinking and being are the same.”<sup>7</sup> Another study could trace the iteration of this theme in Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, up through medieval debates concerning univocity, into the Renaissance's trust in soul, the Enlightenment's trust in reason, Spinozist monism and its later twentieth century reception in Deleuze,<sup>8</sup> through Kantian and Hegelian idealisms, into phenomenology, and, today, in the resurgence of realism in the forms of object oriented ontology, critical realism, and “new materialisms.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has suggested, “the whole text of philosophy (metaphysics)” could be understood as beginning with Parmenides's claim and ending with Nietzsche's refutation: “Parmenides said: ‘One cannot think of what is not.’ We are at the other extreme, and say: ‘What can be thought of must certainly be a fiction.’”<sup>10</sup>

As Lacoue-Labarthe notes, this reference to fiction brings us to Derrida, who (in)famously wrote and argued that there is no outside text.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, Derrida argues that metaphysical writing has always—and as a matter of structural necessity—relied upon, even as it produces, some transcendental Truth, God, or Logos that or who could secure the identity of thinking and being. That is, metaphysics, in its reliance on its own textual productions, has always looked to justify Parmenides's third fragment. This is what Derrida means by “the metaphysics of presence”: the belief—and it is a belief—that the philosopher's text can and does refer to something outside of it, to another text, to an outside text. Deconstruction, then, is

both a reading of the impossibility of this motif—thinking and being are not actually isomorphic, there is a necessary gap between thinking and being, there is, as Derrida says, no such thing as a metaphysical concept, only concepts about metaphysics—and a reading of its use and function in philosophical texts. In short: thinking and being are not the same, although philosophy thinks and requires that they are. Deconstruction reads the tension caused by this difference, which Derrida calls *différance*.

This double structure of metaphysics means that deconstructions of metaphysics are always a bit provisional and double themselves. An example: Michael Marder argues that Carl Schmitt is a post-metaphysical thinker of political ontology.<sup>12</sup> By this, Marder means that Schmitt is a “post-foundational” thinker reliant on a sort of Heideggerian existential ontology. And so for Marder, metaphysics means not a use of the philosopheme of the identity of thinking and being, but a reliance on epistemic foundationalism. I argue in the next chapter that Schmitt does rely on classically metaphysical concepts like substance and sovereignty. Yet, ultimately, and despite our disagreement on the extent to which Schmitt is a metaphysician, my argument is not that far from Marder’s: Marder emphasizes the importance of “groundless” existential decision in Schmitt, and my reading agrees. Precisely because there are no metaphysical concepts, and precisely because thinking and being are not isomorphic, when I write that Schmitt is a metaphysician, or write that Schmitt is doing ontology, I am also writing that Schmitt is an ideologist. Schmitt relies on ostensibly ontological and metaphysical concepts to conceal his prior political decisions. Schmitt both is a metaphysician—he writes metaphysics—and is not a metaphysician—there is no such thing as metaphysics. This both/and structure is what led Derrida (and Heidegger) to occasionally write “Being” under erasure. And it is this both/and, this discursive concealing of political productions, that makes Schmitt ideological.

While I do believe I demonstrate that ideologists like Schmitt have relied upon this philosopheme, my goal is not and could not be to provide a thoroughly encyclopedic reading of the role of this philosopheme in the work of every self-proclaimed “metaphysician.” It is possible that there are thinkers who think themselves metaphysicians who do not rely on or use this philosopheme. I do not know if such a person exists, but if he or she does, then he or she is not the object of my critique, of my deconstruction. Again: When I write *metaphysics*, I refer to the tradition of thought that assumes the identity of thinking and being. Sometimes *metaphysics* might not be the most readily available signifier to describe a particular thinker.

As Marder argues regarding Schmitt, *ontology* might be better. Or, as my discussion of metonym in chapter five suggests, sometimes the most appropriate word is *poetry*. I do believe that *metaphysics* is a generally historically appropriate word to signify the tradition of thought that assumes or uses the philosopheme of the identity of thinking and being, but it is not the only word that could be used to refer to this tradition. That is fine. The object of my critique is not the word *metaphysics* but the metaphysical/ontological/poetic/and so on use and abuse of the alleged identity of thinking and being. As this book demonstrates, this tradition is broad, hegemonic, and, ultimately, ideological.

To recapitulate and summarize the above: my critiques of metaphysics, ontology, and other discourses that use and assume an isomorphism of thinking and being should be understood as primarily political. My critique of the myth of ontological race, which appears in chapter one and receives extensive treatment in chapter five, does not deny that “race” “exists” within the frames of particular political or social ontologies, but instead critiques the belief that any ontological category necessarily coheres to a material or, in Kierkegaard’s language, actual phenomenon. Whether or not something “exists” according to any *en vogue* ontology of the day—existential, hermeneutic, naturalist, dialectical, transcendental—is not my concern. Instead, I am concerned with the ways in which claims, concepts, and arguments—and they are usually metaphysical—are used to essentialize, reify, and substantialize historical, contingent, and political phenomena like race, private property, and so on. I am in particular concerned with the ways in which these reifications rely on the philosopheme of the identity of thinking and being.

And so my interest in metaphysics is ultimately inseparable from my interest in ideology. This relationship between metaphysics and ideology—and I argue that the relationship is a structurally necessary and intrinsic one—is what links the Derridean and the Marxist strands of this argument. Although a full exposition of Marxist political economy is well outside the scope of this book, a few guiding methodological notes will help situate Marx’s role in this text.

In general, this book takes from Marx three primary concepts: Ideology, prescriptive materialism, and the critique of capitalist exploitation. Following Žižek, I understand the Marxist notion of ideology to refer to a discourse (or any “superstructural” phenomenon) that conceals its own political motivations or implications.<sup>13</sup> In this way, ideologies could be empirically accurate statements. For example, claims that the Taliban oppresses women are more or less empirically accurate. Yet, when these arguments are put



forward by lobbyists and representatives of the military industrial complex, they function ideologically: These contractors and representatives use feminist arguments not to better the lives of women, but to better pursue their own financial and geopolitical interests.<sup>14</sup> As I argue, a similar pattern is at work throughout Schmitt's corpus, which uses truisms and apparently descriptive claims in order to ideologically advance a decisively anti-capitalist and antisemitic political program.

At the same time, sometimes ideological claims are self-evidently false. This is the case with all racist arguments. White supremacy is a patently ridiculous notion, and yet white supremacist claims and beliefs function in society. The point made by ideology critique is that we should not simply reject racist arguments at face value; more radically, the ideological premises that underly racist notions should be uncovered and critiqued. As mentioned above, the failure to advance to this second stage of critique is ultimately why Marx distanced himself from the Young Hegelians, who were myopically concerned with metaphysical arguments for atheism and not enough concerned with the ideological function of religion. In this case, Marx was aware that metaphysical and theological claims ideologically defend particular political-economic regimes. And so my argument that the deconstruction of metaphysics coheres with ideology critique could be taken as an elaboration of Marx on this point: As I will demonstrate through Derrida, a truly metaphysical claim regarding the nature of being, one that assumes thought has access to the presence of truth, is impossible. Yet, these claims are made all the time. The question, then, is what these metaphysical claims hide or elide. The tension between the impossibility of metaphysical concepts and their proliferation in philosophical and theological discourse is not only that which is read by deconstruction as *différance* but is also that which is read by Marx as ideology.

The second element of Marx's thought that this project takes up is his emphasis on prescriptive materialism. A traditional reading of Marx sees in him a rejection of idealism. In this rather simplistic view, idealists believe that ideas and concepts determine material reality, whereas Marx and other materialists believe that material reality (especially economic reality, the "base" of a society) determine ideas and concepts (which in part constitute a social "superstructure"). As should already be clear in regards to the material force of ideologies like racism and private property, and as contemporary theorists of "real abstractions" have argued,<sup>15</sup> such a view is inaccurate and politically unhelpful. But there is another sense of materialism that coheres more neatly not only with Marx's own arguments, but with James's, as referenced

above. I call this a prescriptive materialism. By this I mean, as did Marx, that liberation is measured materially. Changes in hearts and minds alone do not do anything to alleviate the lived experiences of the oppressed and exploited. Or, in the words of James, faith without works is dead. This is the normative component of Marx's (and James's) thought that I accept: The work of an orthopraxical revolutionary political theology should be to improve the actual conditions in which the oppressed and exploited live. *Metaphysicians have merely described the world; the point is to change it.*

Which brings us to the third element of Marx's thought that this text employs: The actual conditions in which the oppressed and exploited live are those of late capitalism. This is not to deny that ostensibly non-economic forms of oppression like racism and sexism exist, but it is to deny that these forms of oppression are actually dissociable from political economy. The basic Marxist critique of the capitalist form of political economy, in its most simple form, is that there are two classes of people in capitalism: the proletariat, who trade their labor for money and then trade their money for commodities; and the capitalist class, who trade their money for commodities and then use those commodities to acquire more money. Workers work to live, and capitalists live off others' work.<sup>16</sup>

As I will discuss in much detail in chapters one and five, the ideologies of nationalism and racism (and, controversially, perhaps anti-racism) have functioned to create antagonisms within the proletariat, and so have functioned to secure the interests of capital. But as the proliferation of so-called corporate social responsibility has shown, capitalism does not need to rely on racisms and nationalisms to function. Capitalism is immensely flexible. In this way, the overcoming of racism—an undeniable good—would not necessarily lead to the overcoming of capital. Nor, however, do I naively argue that the overthrowing of capitalism would inevitably lead to the overcoming of racism. A communist can be a racist, even if racism works against his or her own class interests. Yet, it remains the case that, under capitalism, racial oppression leads to a stratified and so artificially divided working class, and so an anti-capitalist's interests should reside in overcoming the ideology of racism. The marginalized and oppressed are the "super exploited."<sup>17</sup> This super-exploitation, combined with the prescriptive materialism above, means that anti-capitalism is the best means we have at our disposal for improving the conditions of not only the working class in general, but of socially oppressed workers in particular. Of course, plenty of anti-racists—in this text, James Cone above all—have found Marxism lacking in its ability to overcome racism. Part of my intention in this book is to argue against

that view by demonstrating that Marx does in fact provide us the critical means necessary for overcoming not only the ideology of racism but also the political-economic exploitation that feeds and feeds off of this ideology.

By emphasizing these three dimensions of Marx's thought, I do not mean to blindly countersign his entire project (which would be a task ripe with contradictions, as Marx himself developed throughout his life). For example, this project does not much care about whether or not Marx was right concerning the falling rate of profit, or that machines cannot produce value. These are tangential to Marx's emphasis on materialism and class struggle, and do not feature in my argument. Nor do I think that a simple re-reading of Marx is sufficient for my purposes. While I do believe that his central insights concerning materialism, ideology, and capital are correct and allow them to normatively work on my text, I also recognize the historical limitations of Marx. For example, Marx had very little to say about financial derivatives, yet we undeniably live in a time of finance capital. And while I argue against views that Marx did not account for race—he undeniably did—I do recognize, at the same time, that Marx is necessarily incapable of directly speaking of contemporary racial ideologies. For these reasons and others that will become apparent in time, I have found it necessary to rely on contemporary thinkers who are inspired by, but do much more than simply repeat, Marx, including David Harvey, Wolfgang Streeck, Claudia Jones, and, above all, Cornel West. Likewise, my use of Marx in conjunction with Derrida should reveal that I find Marx's critique of metaphysics less philosophically and theoretically compelling than the analysis offered by Derridean (and Kierkegaardian) deconstruction.

## The Structure of the Argument

The project's first chapter begins by reviewing the recent attempt by some leftist political theorists, most notably Chantal Mouffe, to retrieve the reactionary political theologian Carl Schmitt for emancipatory purposes. For theorists like Mouffe, Schmitt offers a "post-Marxist" politics capable of re-politicizing liberal parliamentary democracy. These left-Schmittians argue that Schmitt's famous friend-enemy distinction is a useful heuristic by which the left can distinguish between emancipatory and reactionary figures and projects. More, they hold that Schmitt's formalism is sufficiently broad to redress Marxism's alleged economic reductionism, and so argue that a turn to Schmitt is a helpful way to advance beyond Marx. In all of these ways,

left-Schmittians argue that Schmitt presents a decisionistic political theology that is useful for emancipatory politics.

Against these views, I argue that left-Schmittianism falls short in part because left-Schmittians do not engage with Schmitt's underlying theological and metaphysical commitments. While Schmitt alleges himself to promote decisionism, his political theology is so thoroughly embedded within an essentialist metaphysical paradigm as to render all decisions "decided" in advance. Indeed, for Schmitt, whether one is a "friend" or an "enemy" is an ontological-racial condition that has been decided in advance—has been decided since the beginning of time—by God. To this end, the problem with Schmitt's project is not only its obvious commitment to fascism, capitalism, and antisemitism, but is also its divinization and ontologization of these horrors. Moreover, and as the above suggests, this ontologization-divinization serves the ideological function of hiding the true location of decision in Schmitt's work. Where left-Schmittians applaud Schmitt's decisionism, the only decisions actually operative in Schmitt's works are his related decisions against Marxism and for antisemitism. In other words, Schmitt's text claims to offer a description of the reality of political theology, but actually offers a polemical defense of a particular fascist political theology. While I show in this chapter that the distinction between normative and descriptive registers is never clean—the description of a norm often descriptively countersigns a prior normative gesture, indeed, this is Schmitt's argument—it is the case that my project could be understood as an intentionally normative register. I recognize that theology is always normatively political, and that the denial of this normative dimension marks theology as ideological. In this way, by claiming my own normative commitments to a certain Marxist anti-capitalism, I look to avoid the ideological effects of the over-reliance on the normative/descriptive distinction.

The project then turns to Derridean deconstruction to argue that metaphysics as such, and so not just Schmitt's reactionary metaphysics, is a necessarily ideological discourse. While the relationship between theology and metaphysics has received significant scholarly attention, Derrida's direct contribution to this topic—which differs significantly from the projects of Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney, and others—has not yet been fully appreciated. After briefly rehearsing Derrida's argument against metaphysics and metaphysics' implicit theology, the chapter adjudicates the debate between John Caputo and Martin Hägglund concerning Derrida's relationship to religion. Here, I argue that both Caputo and Hägglund offer correct but incomplete readings of Derrida. Specifically, neither explicitly account for

Derrida's primary contribution to the deconstruction of metaphysics: the deconstruction of the identity of thinking and being. It is within this identity that the theologic according to which God is truth and truth is the truth of God finds articulation. With this identity deconstructed, only a non-metaphysical religion remains theoretically possible. At the same time, it is only with this deconstruction of the identity of thinking and being that such a non-metaphysical religion becomes *possible*, because possibility requires that everything not be decided in advance. One possible manifestation of this form of non-metaphysical religion is exhibited in Derrida's lived encounters with Judaism. Derrida's non-metaphysical Judaism, I argue, demonstrates that the actual existence of a material and praxical religion does not contradict a deconstruction of theology.

Before analyzing two other materialist and praxical forms of religion—Søren Kierkegaard's and James Cone's—the project offers a brief interlude on the secularism of the Norwegian novelist and essayist Karl Ove Knausgaard. While Kierkegaard and Cone do demonstrate forms of religion responsive to the deconstructive critique of metaphysics, Derrida's deconstruction of theology prevents any sort of theistic methodological imperialism. That is, while Kierkegaard and Cone do offer credible responses to Derridean deconstruction, not all credible responses need to be religious. To this end, Knausgaard's secularism stands counter to some contemporary efforts in systematic theology to universalize both theological thinking and religious belief structures. The most prominent and influential of these views belongs to John Milbank and his "radical orthodoxy" school. For Milbank, the secular lacks the transcendent dimension that is both constitutive of and necessary for human flourishing. Moreover, Milbank argues that transcendence is simply ontologically the case, and so any secularism must be the result of a "violent" imposition. Such violence, according to Milbank, is reflected in the actual content of secular belief, which he holds to be "nihilistic." Against this position, Knausgaard embraces an immanent secularism that is intentionally antagonistic to religious interpretations. In doing so, Knausgaard's autofictional novels and essays demonstrate that a decision for the secular is not only intellectually defensible but is also morally and politically laudatory. Because he is interested in a secular peace and love, and he pursues such without any necessary reliance on theological structures or motifs, religious rejections of Knausgaard's position actually impose an imperialism and violence antithetical to the "ontological peace" allegedly defended by John Milbank and other radical orthodox theologians. Knausgaard's love for the world can and should be embraced without sublating it within some

ostensibly higher religious frame. While more secular readers of this text might find this chapter a bit out of place, it serves an important function for the text's more religiously inclined readers: Although I suggest that a non-ideological theology is *possible* after the deconstruction of metaphysics, Knausgaard's project affirms that such a theology is in no way necessary.

After this engagement with Knausgaard, the project returns in its fourth chapter to the task of developing a political theology responsive to the deconstruction of metaphysics and does so through a constructive engagement with the Christian existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard. In particular, I argue that Kierkegaard's under-discussed political theology is both anti-metaphysical and, at least incipiently, anti-capitalist. The standard narrative, from both Marxists and Kierkegaardians, is that Kierkegaard and Marx agree that religion and politics are antithetical to each other. Given this opposition, Kierkegaard is held to side with religion against politics; Marx, with politics against religion. According to this accepted distinction, Kierkegaard is best understood as a philosopher of abstract inwardness unconcerned with, or even antithetical to, worldly political projects. For most Marxists who engage with Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard's relative popularity in the twentieth century is itself evidence of Kierkegaard's friendliness to capital: Kierkegaard, in this view, is a supremely bourgeois, idealist, and irrational philosopher who argues for everything a Marxist materialist would argue against.

I dispute this standard narrative by arguing that Kierkegaard is better understood as a dialectical materialist philosopher. The argument is made through a close reading of the Kierkegaardian distinction between "actuality" and "reality," which is analogous to Derrida's distinction between being and thinking. With this distinction, Kierkegaard resists philosophical idealism, which he associates with "reality," in favor of a materialist existentialism that requires actual praxis. For Kierkegaard, idealist philosophers deny or avoid the necessity of making existentially meaningful decisions, which, by definition, must happen in "actuality." Moreover, because Kierkegaard prioritizes materialist actuality over idealist reality, his understanding of truth is necessarily historical and social. For Kierkegaard, this privileging of historical actuality is marked of Christianity: Christianity divinizes actuality through Christ and so calls people to engagement with the actual world. All of this emphasis on actuality is entirely missed by Marxist critiques that portray Kierkegaard as an otherworldly philosopher.

After establishing Kierkegaard's philosophical materialism as found in the pseudonymous works, the chapter turns to Kierkegaard's later authorship to demonstrate that Kierkegaard populated this materialist structure with

decidedly anti-capitalist content. For Kierkegaard, this socialist materialism is mandated by scripture and the Christian prophetic tradition. Kierkegaard does not argue against socialism in favor of religion, but more radically argues against any conception of religion—like Schmitt’s—that is not itself socialist.

While Kierkegaard’s historical materialist political theology is clearly aligned with socialist and emancipatory positions, Kierkegaard does not provide much by way of particular political content. In some ways, this lack of particularity and political analysis is itself part of Kierkegaard’s project: The poor should not be poor, and Kierkegaard does not think much more analysis than that is necessary. While wanting to maintain Kierkegaard’s sense of decisive urgency, the project’s final chapter looks to James Cone as a source for providing a more analytically rigorous and politically specific form of orthopraxic revolutionary political theology. The introduction of Cone, and especially Cornel West’s Marxist development and specification of Cone, provides just that political theology. In other words, while Kierkegaard provides an explicitly anti-metaphysical theology, it is only with Cone, helped by West, that we find a fully and explicitly anti-metaphysical, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist political theology.

The chapter begins by situating an anti-essentialist understanding of race—informed by the deconstructive and Marxist motifs articulated above—against current hegemonic “race relations” and “diversity” frameworks. I argue that these latter frameworks, wary of class reductionism, unhelpfully dissociate race from class and so are liable to create market-friendly anti-racisms. Moreover, these frameworks tend toward a fetishization of dialogue and conversation, and so idealistically misplace the actual site of racist oppression. In this sense, race-relations frameworks operate within the (ideological) realm of Kierkegaardian reality, but never address the (infra-structural, materialist) machinations of actuality. Against these approaches, Cone provides the intellectual framework for an explicitly anti-racist and anti-capitalist political theology. He does this primarily through an epistemological and moral privileging of “the oppressed.” Cone, especially in his earlier works, radically orders all truth claims through reference to emancipation: something is only true to the extent that it supports the “truth” that the oppressed should be emancipated. If race relations frameworks do not actually produce the emancipation of the racially oppressed and economically exploited, then they are not “true” in Cone’s sense.

Against such liberal idealism, for Cone, Marxism provides the best means by which one could understand and revolutionize racist and capitalist societies. Such a turn to Marxism as a source for anti-racism is especially

important in the contemporary political climate, which seems to prefer to speak of socialism *or* anti-racism. Cone's position, and it is one supported not only by West but also by the entire trajectory of this project, is that this choice between anti-capitalism and anti-racism is a false one. However, and despite this embrace of a Marxist anti-racism, Cone was concerned that historical rifts and strategic disputes between Marxist anti-capitalists and black anti-racists would prevent the development of an emancipatory solidarity of anti-racists and anti-capitalists. In its conclusion, this chapter addresses Cone's concerns by turning to West, who articulates an explicitly anti-racist Marxism.

Finally, the project's conclusion begins by recapitulating the arguments made so far in a decidedly normative register: An orthopraxic and revolutionary political theology should reject both reactionary politics (contra Schmitt) and metaphysics (by way of Derrida), should leave open the possibility of embracing secularism (Knausgaard), employ a dialectical materialist philosophy (Kierkegaard), and establish the orthopraxic norms of anti-racist socialism (Cone and West). Then, in an effort to demonstrate the immediately political consequences of this sort of political theology, I provide a brief reading of the political theology of John Brown. While the majority of the project deals with texts, readings, theory, and intellectual positions, Brown demonstrates that such a decisive political theology is far from (only) an academic enterprise. Although existing before Derridean deconstructive, and likely oblivious to Marx's critiques of capital, Brown's religiously motivated lust for freedom demonstrates the sort of political theology—non-metaphysical, emancipatory, orthopraxical, revolutionary—for which this project argues. This turn to Brown, finally, brings the project full circle, back to the first chapter's critique of left-Schmittians. More than Schmitt, it is Brown and other revolutionaries who appear throughout the project—Che Guevara, Fred Hampton, anti-fascist French resistance fighters—who best actualize an emancipatory political theology responsive to the deconstruction of metaphysics.

While such is the book's main argument, and has been hinted at above, I intend this book to make at least three interventions in the literature concerning metaphysics, political theology, and ideology:

- First, the disparate discourses that have stemmed from Marx and Derrida should be brought together. While Marx has inspired a plethora of liberation theologians, and Derrida a plethora of "postmodern" ones, not enough has been done



to recognize Derrida's debt to and clarification of Marx. This recognition can and will advance the discussion concerning theology and ideology.

- Second, the effects of the deconstruction of the identity of thinking and being have not been fully appreciated. While Derrida and Kierkegaard each imply this deconstruction, neither formulate nor thematize its effects in a thorough way. With thinking and being dissociated, we enter into a more wild and risky realm of action, one not motivated or measured by thought or logic. It is from out of these wild depths that saints like Brown, Hampton, and Guevara operate.
- Third, and as a result of the above, "truth" should no longer be considered a transcendental and primarily philosophical-theological category, but a political one. After the deconstructive and Marxist critiques of metaphysics, no one should naively interpret the measure of truth as the logos, the truth of being, or any other transcendental schema. As Cone argues and as I countersign, the "truth" is that the exploited should be freed. The orthopraxical adequacy of all other interpretations of truth is determined by those interpretations' allegiance to the emancipation of the exploited.

Above all, I intend this project as a work of ideology critique directed against reactionary metaphysicians and theologians—such as Carl Schmitt—and as an endorsement of revolutionary thinkers like Marx and Derrida, theologians like Kierkegaard and Cone, and saints like Brown and Guevara. May the fall of metaphysics lead to the rise of a new theology, an anti-metaphysical theology, an anti-capitalist theology, an orthopraxical and revolutionary theology.