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On Caputo's Heidegger: A Prolegomenon of Transgressions to a Religion *without* Religion

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Abstract: This article seeks to distill key moments in the early work of the philosopher John D. Caputo. In considering his early investigations of Martin Heidegger, it argues that an adequate account of the trajectory of his later theological project requires a refraction through a crucial double gesture in these earlier writings. To this end, the article follows Caputo's relationship with Heidegger where the optics of 'overcoming metaphysics' are laid bare (the first gesture). In these deliberations, alongside Neo-Scholastic Thomism, it is clear that what constitutes (theological) metaphysics for Caputo is any thinking which fails to think that which 'gives' the distinction between Being and beings. The second gesture, then, reveals 'a certain way' (*d'une certaine manière*) of reading that allows him not only the unique possibility to re-read Scholastic Thomism by way of Meister Eckhart, but also the delimitation of the mythological construal of Being in the later Heidegger himself. The article's methodological argument is that this *transgressionary impulse* gleaned from Heidegger, constitutes the 'origins' of Caputo's move into the ethical-religious paradigm of deconstruction and, therefore, is also axiomatic for his later radical theology of 'religion without religion.'

Keywords: John D. Caputo, Martin Heidegger, Religion without Religion, Transgression

1 Introduction

The impact of the writing career of John D. Caputo spanning more than forty years cannot be overstated. His ironic style and playful erudition marking his recent work, coupled with the trenchant but lucid clarity of his earlier monographs, has resulted in both creative and penetrating contributions to continental philosophy, philosophy of religion, and in the last couple of decades theology. It appears that for the foreseeable future he will continue to challenge and excite scholars from across these disciplines.¹ The 'foreseeable future' is an expression which positions Caputo in relation to Jacques Derrida, the animating figure behind his most influential writings in philosophy of religion. But Caputo and Derrida would protest the foreseeable with the 'unforeseeable'—the openness to the 'absolute future', to what *cannot* be seen.² And yet, it is the question of the future that ought to be asked: i.e., what comes after Derrida? What comes after Caputo?

These sentiments are captured in a recent collection of essays titled *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion* (2014). In their editors' introduction, Clayton Crockett, B. Keith Putt and Jeffrey Robbins suggest that the "path forward will have to be forged *without* Derrida," that is, the future will have to become "a thinking of what deconstruction left unthought," a future of continental philosophy

¹ Caputo's productivity has not abated, releasing this year another volume expanding on his theological project; see Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos*.

² Derrida, *Rogues*, 84-87.

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of religion *after* Derrida.³ Some have recently taken on this task; Crockett, for his part, leaning heavily on Catherine Malabou, experiments with Derrida “as a new materialist”⁴ and enlists Caputo’s work on ‘theology of weakness’ to aid in thinking through political theology’s central problem of sovereignty.⁵ Indeed, a ‘weak theology’ is synonymous with Caputo and has become an inspiring resource not only for philosophers but also theologians from confessional backgrounds.⁶ This article affirms these efforts to think ‘after’ deconstruction, but wants to pause at the recent reception of Caputo in particular, for it is in the interest of taking this project *forward* that we might also be advised to take a look *back* to the forgotten or ‘unthought thought’ of Caputo’s Heidegger. The audience that I have in mind for what follows are those readers who have been inspired by Caputo’s more theological works but who are for the most part indifferent to his earlier writings.⁷ By (re)turning to his relationship with Martin Heidegger in this article, I endeavor not to resolve any suspected lacuna in Caputo’s oeuvre, but to emphasize the more modest proposal that Heidegger’s influence on him is one that should be more fully recognized, appropriately situated and, more importantly, expanded upon. My aim, then, is to make interested readers *better* readers of Caputo and, as the argument progresses, to allow this aim to be shaped by the desire to re-emphasize the claim that the role of Heidegger is more fundamental for the development of his religion *without* religion than it has usually been given credit for.

At this point, one should state the obvious fact that it goes without saying Heidegger’s influence on Derrida is substantial,⁸ and that Caputo has often insisted that it was indeed *Derrida* who ‘loosened his tongue’.⁹ However, it remains somewhat regrettable that Heidegger’s influence on Caputo is usually treated as a biographical gloss in virtue of this implicit relationship with Derrida.¹⁰ Interestingly, as a matter of historical fact, Caputo’s first two publications on Heidegger, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (1978) and *Heidegger and Aquinas* (1982), emerged when Derrida was beginning to cause waves on the international scene but contain virtually no references to him directly.¹¹ While it is clear that there is a development in Caputo’s thinking, especially when making the explicit move to Derrida in his pivotal *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987), I want to illustrate the way in which this development is also in *continuity* with his early writings. To the extent that this can be shown, we venture into the territory of describing a certain postmodern prolegomenon to Caputo’s ‘religion *without* religion.’ A postmodern prolegomenon which is not interested in defining parameters or laying foundations in the manner of dogmatics, but rather in offering a promissory note to a ‘non-foundational’ theology that is concerned with ‘moments

3 “[W]hat comes next after the death of the generation consisting of Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, and Levinas—the so-called 68ers? Is there a future afterlife for those thinkers who have left such a deep impact on Continental philosophy of religion?” Crockett, Putt and Robbins (eds.), *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*, 1.

4 Crockett, *Derrida after the End of Writing*, 3. The motivation to read Derrida through Malabou has been pressing Crockett for some time now. Already in 2010 he was voicing his concerns over a certain privileging of Christianity in the language of ‘messianicity’. See Crockett and Malabou, “Plasticity and the Future of Philosophy and Theology”, 15-34.

5 Crockett, *Derrida After the End of Writing*, 93-108.

6 By way of introduction see Simmons and Minister (eds.), *Reexamining Deconstruction and Determinate Religion*.

7 Caputo is a genuine Heidegger scholar in his own right. Apart from his dissertation later published as *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (1978), and the three subsequent publications that are of interest for this essay, *Heidegger and Aquinas* (1982), *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987) and *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), he published more than thirty articles directly related to Heidegger throughout the 70s, 80s and early 90s. The choice to concentrate on the publications mentioned above is because they condense and represent the majority of the theses already worked out in his separately published essays.

8 As Derrida himself readily admitted; see Derrida, “Deconstruction and the Other”, 9, 110. See also Derrida, *Positions*, 9-10; 54-55.

9 Raschke, “Loosening Philosophy’s Tongue: A Conversation with Jack Caputo”, §8.

10 Such is the case in an otherwise superb study by Moody, *Radical Theology and Emerging Christian Practice*. See also Christopher Ben Simpson’s monograph treatment of Caputo and William Desmond, which also does not treat in any substantial way Caputo’s reading of Heidegger. Simpson, *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern*.

11 Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* and Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*. Only in the revised reprint of the former does Caputo’s new introduction refer to Derrida. In *Heidegger and Aquinas* there is a single reference to Derrida and his use of ‘deconstruction’ as opposed to ‘*Destruktion*’ in the concluding chapter, see, 247.

and movements'—a double-gesturing which animates Caputo's postmodern dialectic.¹² As such, I will be less interested in polemically engaging Caputo's reading of Heidegger (or Aquinas for that matter) than in paying attention to what interests and influences Caputo about Heidegger, and which becomes formative for his later religion *without* religion.

These moments and influences in Caputo's early writings will be explored in three descriptive parts. Part one considers the body of Caputo's second publication, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, where he enacts the first gesture of 'over-coming' metaphysics. Following his reading of the 'late Heidegger'¹³ through several critical texts, Caputo claims to displace the neo-Thomist assertion that Thomas Aquinas and scholastic metaphysics escape the charge of the 'oblivion of being' or *Seinsvergessenheit*. The operative terms in these texts—*Austrag*, difference and *Ereignis*—constitute the first treatment and delimiting gesture of 'onto-theo-logic' for Caputo, and should be seen as structural points of reference for his later theological reflections. In part two I will show that it is Caputo's important appropriation of Heidegger's commitment to the matter of thought (*die Sache des Denkens*), which inspires a second gesture culminating in his daring move to re-read Aquinas in light of the medieval mystic, Meister Eckhart.

This double-gesturing,¹⁴ which is not the 'end' (*Vollendung*) of philosophy or thinking but the opening of thought in a new and productive way, is folded back onto Heidegger himself in the late 80s and early 90s. In the third part of the article, I turn to this critical stage in Caputo's relationship with Heidegger, particularly to his important volumes *Radical Hermeneutics* and *Demythologizing Heidegger*. In the former I demonstrate Caputo's attempt to 'repeat' Heidegger in a salvaged reading of *Being and Time* that wants to liberate Heidegger from Derrida's critique of 'onto-hermeneutics.' While the sense here is still to stage an 'interplay' between the two figures, developing his idea of 'cold hermeneutics', it becomes increasingly clear that the very movements Caputo first learned from Heidegger are repeated with far greater nuance and acuity by Derrida. *Demythologizing Heidegger*, therefore, sets out Caputo's final act in this long-standing relationship. Here he undertakes an incisive critique of Heidegger's totalizing pagan mythology of the Greek *Anfang* (following Derrida), which is forgetful of the Judeo-Christian sources informing the early writings of his fundamental ontology. The later mystical writings that so inspired Caputo's early work become bracketed for their virtue in exposing onto-theo-logic and technical-calculative thinking, while the mythical structure of the phenomenal world of Heidegger's mysticism is abandoned for fundamentally neglecting the fleshly bodies that are caught up in it. With the 're-mythologization' of the 'jewgreek'—the myth of justice and mercy—Caputo aligns himself with the prophetic imagination of the biblical narratives and the philosophical projects of Levinas and Derrida, and this subsequently allows him to reinstate Heidegger, albeit in a thoroughly de-mythologized way.

In the description, which follows below, however, one always runs the risk of enclosing Caputo's Heidegger within a philosophical context, chronological biography, or some kind of 'deconstructive methodology.' Such a risk is unavoidable, since any commentary is never 'neutral;' it necessarily makes *decisions* on themes, concepts, and authors at the expense of others. Moreover, precisely because this description takes the transgression of philosophical description as its theme (that is, the project set out by Heidegger and continued by Derrida), it is inextricably involved in an economy of betrayal which denies this very transgression. It is within this movement of double-gestures and economies of transgression that

¹² For a helpful introductory discussion on theological methodology in the context of postmodernism, see Stiver, "Theological Method", 170-185.

¹³ The discussion of the 'early' and 'late' Heidegger invokes an industry of Heidegger scholarship, as scholars debate the nature, timing and even veracity of such a distinction. Despite the disagreement and debate, for the sake of simplicity here, we follow Caputo's designation that a shift occurs in Heidegger's thinking after the Marburg period (1923-1928). What takes place before and up to Heidegger's succession of Edmund Husserl in Freiburg (1928) is considered 'early' and after is considered 'late.' See Caputo, "Heidegger and Theology", 270-288. Caputo identifies the 'crest' of the 'late' Heidegger in the text *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936-8) and the lecture course of 1935, *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

¹⁴ Readers will easily recognize the idiosyncratic 'double-gesture' in Derrida's writing. I have decided to stay with this rather less opaque formulation with respect to Caputo, though one could describe it in many other ways. For example, I am partial to Simon Critchley's notion of what he calls 'clôtural reading'. See Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 88-97. Critchley's discussion of the problem of metaphysical 'closure' here is also the sense in which I use the term 'transgression' throughout this essay.

a postmodern prolegomenon to Caputo's religion *without* religion is to be situated. Importantly, it is in the irreducible undecidability maintained in these sequences that a certain event announces itself—an event of transgression that transfigures (poetics). It is the argument of this article that this 'methodological' impulse of transgression is 'given' to Caputo in his early work on Heidegger: on the one hand, through the transgression of metaphysics by thought; and on the other, through the transgression of (scholastic) theology by the sacred. It is with these, which I would call twin 'transgressionary impulses,' that the originary axiomatics of Caputo's project are constituted and which crucially move it *forward* by their mutual transgression of each other¹⁵—the transgression of transgression. If, as Caputo will claim, Heidegger's *Sache des Denkens* places into question/transgresses Aquinas' ('metaphysical') theology, allowing theology to reflect on itself with the impulse of the sacred, then it is the transgressionary impulse of the sacred which puts into question Heidegger's later mythology, allowing the '*Destruktion*' of metaphysics to reflect on itself with the impulse of deconstruction. Seen in this way, it therefore becomes less surprising, perhaps, that Caputo's enduring insight would not only be that Derridian deconstruction maintains the undecidability between faith (sacred) and knowledge (thought), but that this undecidability is of itself productive of a future, a quasi-religious productivity for creative invention and transfiguration, or, indeed, a religion *without religion*.

2 The Transgression of Thought

In Caputo's early work, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, he is primarily concerned with elucidating Heidegger's critique of medieval ontology. This takes place for Caputo in the context of the neo-Thomist schools of thought circulating in the 1950's and 60's. In part, Caputo's book is a reaction to thinkers like Étienne Gilson, who asserted that Thomas Aquinas, and scholastic metaphysics more generally, escape Heidegger's charge of *Seinsvergessenheit*.¹⁶ Caputo attempts to displace this claim by demonstrating that the Thomist metaphysics of *esse* fails to think the distinctive Heideggerian sense of that-which-gives Being: the opening-up of the distinction between *esse* (the act of being, *that which makes a thing to be*) and *ens* (Being, *that which has the act of being, esse*). As is well-known, the existential analytic in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and the subsequent temporal analysis determined that the *meaning of Being* was to be understood in terms of temporality and care. These initial phenomenological-existential investigations set the stage for Heidegger's challenge to the history of Being and metaphysics as presented by the West, i.e. the problem of 'onto-theo-logic' that elevates presence (*Vorhandensein, Anwesenheit, Präsenz*) and construes true Being as a stationary and static 'now'.¹⁷ This challenge would be explicitly taken up after Heidegger's period in Marburg (roughly 1928) in a series of texts over the next three decades. Here, Heidegger's criticism of medieval scholasticism effectively nourishes Caputo's healthy skepticism of Christianity, while at the same time does not extinguish it, precisely in virtue of Heidegger's own hermeneutic method that understands that 'overcoming' (*Überwindung*) can only proceed by way of appropriation/re-reading (*Verwindung*).¹⁸

In dialogue with Heidegger's four theses on Being in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1928), Caputo points to the failings of the Greek and medieval ontologies informing scholastic metaphysics. They are unable to think the fact that the origins of their own concepts (*essentia-existensia*) are a function of the horizon of Dasein. Instead, what is discernable in Christian theology, remodeled according to the categories of Greek and medieval ontology, is "a single, identifiable understanding of Being in terms of production."¹⁹ Scholastic grammar, for Caputo, is reduced to the structure of Heidegger's 'present-at-hand' and takes on the ontological character of production. Conversely, Dasein is neither 'thatness' (*existensia*) nor 'whatness' (*essentia*), "but an 'I,' not a what but a 'who'" — a uniquely existing individual in the Kierkegaardian sense.²⁰

15 Caputo, "The Experience of God and the Axiology of the Impossible", 23-145.

16 Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*.

17 Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics", 42-74.

18 Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 91.

19 Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 78.

20 Ibid., 78-79.

In short, the conception of Being that is given through medieval ontology does not have a transcendental hermeneutic: such categories lack “an appreciation of the Being of *Existenz*.”²¹

But Caputo's deep interests in Heidegger really begin with what emerges after the Marburg period. It is in the *Nietzsche* lectures of 1943²² where everything seems to change; here the projective understanding of Dasein's Being is replaced by what Caputo calls the “Being-historical shape” of Being's own withdrawal. The idea here is that the metaphysical formations of Being (mind, will, spirit, etc.) are progressive histories made possible not by our own reflections of reality, but by Being's own historical movement of concealment and un-concealment. Instead of Dasein raising for itself the question of Being as in *Being and Time*, Being now of its own initiative ‘reveals’ itself to Dasein. The implication of this historical process of un/concealment for Heidegger is that Being is now thought in the present day in terms of ‘actuality’ (*Wirklichkeit*, *actualis*) denoting that which is actual; what has been made standing outside of its causes. It has the same connotation with *ex-istere*, literally ‘stepping outside.’ This account of Being is where one is able to locate Caputo's central philosophical agitation with scholastic Christianity:

The medieval Christian conception of Being in terms of making and what is made is articulated in a language which belongs to the people of making and doing. The ‘Roman Church’ is not just an historical appellation. It points to an inner harmony between Christian metaphysics and the metaphysics of making, which come together in the conception of Being as *Wirklichkeit*. Our tradition then is more Roman than Greek.²³

The continuity with ‘our tradition’ (Caputo's Catholic tradition)²⁴ renders reality through the principles of actuality and causality. Being is that which brings into permanence (or into actuality), and since nothing can bring God into presence he is himself pure-presence, permanence itself. “This self-persisting being (*für sich Bestehendes*),” Caputo writes, “is the *summum ens* [supreme being] and as such the *summum bonum* [supreme good], which makes Him the cause of causes.”²⁵ The God of scholasticism for Heidegger and Caputo is a figure with causal meaning; it is a God who *effects* and as the ultimate Being effectuates being. It is this medieval ontological legacy and its modern iterations which are, in fact, the ‘god of philosophy,’²⁶ and are consistently in the background of Caputo's criticism of much contemporary theology. He rhetorically reminds us of this particular God throughout his theological texts, as seen for example in the opening section of *The Weakness of God* (2006).²⁷

If the combination of Heidegger's transcendental hermeneutic and his later ruminations on the history of Being begin to cast doubt on Thomistic ontology, then for Caputo it is with the essays in Heidegger's *Identity and Difference* (1957), complemented by the essay on “Language” (1965) and *On Time and Being*

²¹ Ibid., 94.

²² Caputo is interested specifically in Heidegger's essay, “Metaphysics as the History of Being”, 1-19.

²³ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 81.

²⁴ Caputo has written about his upbringing in pre-Vatican II Catholicism, and that it was his exposure to philosophy in his undergraduate classes while still a scholasticate member of The De LaSalle Brothers (a Catholic order) that would draw him to graduate studies. When this request was denied, he left the religious order after four years and began graduate school. It was this deep connection to the religious life, as well as its increasing ‘incredulity,’ that would attract him to Heidegger; the eminent Continental philosopher at the time who was also of Catholic provenance, and had a deep familiarity with medieval philosophy and mysticism. Interestingly, less than a year into his MA program at Villanova, Pope John XXIII would convene Vatican II. One wonders, given the modernization of the religious orders that would ensue, whether Caputo's trajectory would have been any different had he been allowed to continue within the religious order to pursue his studies at Fordham, as he had originally requested. See Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 23-26.

²⁵ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 90.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 72.

²⁷ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 23-41. While space does not permit a full discussion, much theological engagement with Caputo's later work has been critical of this somewhat one-dimensional rendering of God in terms of the ‘unity of the One.’ Such a configuration naturally ignores the rich Trinitarian and relational ontology that occupies patristic thought, for example. I would argue, not only in light of this criticism, but also because Caputo has found himself more and more in theological territory these days, that his approach toward ‘theology’ has become less acerbic and more nuanced. Accordingly, he now speaks of the ‘becoming radical of confessional theology.’ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 68-74. In this latter regard, see also his popular book, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct*, specifically written for religious audiences, as well as his *The Folly of God*.

(1969), that the real radical transgression of metaphysics occurs. As alluded to above, the medieval historian Étienne Gilson had argued that there is indeed an ‘existential metaphysics’ in Aquinas, i.e. a conception of Being which is far removed from the essentialism of contemporary Thomism.²⁸ Caputo agrees with Gilson to the extent that he does think Aquinas prioritizes *esse* (the act of being) over *ens* (that which has the act of being) and therefore demonstrates, albeit in Latinized terms, a deep awareness of the ontological distinction.²⁹ But the thrust of these late Heidegger essays fundamentally undermines any hopes for Aquinas and Gilson, for they continue to miss the radical transgression that moves ‘beyond’ the ontological distinction. In what are often considered Heidegger’s most esoteric writings, Caputo’s analyses of these texts are remarkably lucid and essential reading for those uninitiated in the late Heidegger. For our purposes, it will suffice to pause over the concept of *Ereignis*, which Caputo refers to as “the Archimedean point of every fundamental Heideggerian theme”³⁰—and is, perhaps, the prefiguring Archimedean point for all of Caputo’s own theologically accented semantic transformations i.e. the *without why*, the event, the perhaps, theopoetics etc.

Ereignis or the ‘event of appropriation’ as it is commonly translated, does not mean an occurrence in time but rather sets the conditions which make any occurrence possible. It relates to the ontological distinction between Being and beings, insofar as it describes the process by which Being ‘gives’ itself to beings. *Ereignis*, therefore, does not refer to any beings in the world, but as an ontological event better captured by an impersonal ‘it’ (*das Es*), it gives the possibility of the world through the ongoing process of Being’s manifestation through language. The relationship between Being and ‘man’ is held together in a distinctive historical epoch by the response of language to Being. For Caputo, it is clear that Aquinas does not make the “historical reduction” which thinks the tradition as a tradition, i.e. he does not see that metaphysics is “a function of the particular linguistic constellation called Latin.”³¹ Instead, as a medieval thinker, Aquinas is caught in the history of the tradition delivered over to him by *Ereignis*. What is at stake in a conception of history is the ability to see “that all metaphysical thought arises from a withdrawal, that every account of ‘Being’ has a deeper source.”³² In this way, the character of *Seinsvergessenheit* becomes clearer: the ‘oblivion of Being’ is not the forgetfulness of Being, but the oblivion and forgetfulness of the *Ereignis* that ‘sends’ Being into its own and which constitutes the history of metaphysics. The task for thinking (the responsibility of ‘man’) is to “turn into the *Ereignis* (*Einkehren in das Ereignis*)” in order to attend to it, to think this withdrawal as withdrawal. One cannot step outside of the withdrawal of Being, but one can become awakened to it. It is at this point, Caputo notes, that Heidegger envisions the possibility of a ‘new beginning’ of histories of sendings, which may be comparable to the experience of the early Greeks.

3 Transgression of the Sacred

The penultimate move for Caputo’s reading of the late Heidegger is to compare the experience of Being-as-presencing in the early Greeks, before its congealment into ‘presence’, with the Thomistic experience of Being as *esse*. As Caputo sees it, the phenomenological and semantic investigations that Heidegger performs in *Early Greek Thinking*³³ of Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides are to be considered ‘alethiological.’³⁴ That is, they describe a moment of exhilarating presence; a rising up of presence into what is present or the emergence of things into unconcealment (*ἀλήθεια*) before receding again into concealment (*λήθεια*). While Caputo does indicate that these texts do not think the *Ereignis* as such, they nonetheless display a proximity to it that cannot be seen in the metaphysics of *esse*. What interests us is that, in spite of the conclusion that Thomistic thinking is consigned to the history of metaphysics, the transgressionary movement of thought

²⁸ See Caputo’s presentation of Gilson, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 100-121.

²⁹ See chapter four, “*Esse* and the Metaphysics of Participation in Thomas Aquinas”, 122-146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167. For the development of this concept in Heidegger see Vallega-Neu, “*Ereignis*: the event of appropriation”, 140-154.

³¹ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 166.

³² *Ibid.*, 175.

³³ Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*.

³⁴ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 185-210.

in the alethiological reading of the early Greeks is then taken up by Caputo and 'applied' to Aquinas. The transgression of thought now opens up the possibility of the transgression of theology.

Caputo asserts that in order to emancipate Aquinas from Heidegger's charge he will treat what is left 'unsaid' in Aquinas. Such an attempt is only possible if the scholastic mode of Aquinas' metaphysics is bracketed. To bring together Heidegger and Aquinas in a meaningful way is to think about the "constellation of *possibilities*" that are necessarily left unsaid, and only then can a genuine philosophical dialogue be staged. The hermeneutic reorientation from historical differences to philosophical possibilities of convergence Caputo explicitly attributes to Heidegger's own approach developed with respect to the Greek fragments: "[a]s Heidegger says, speaking of the interpretation of the Heraclitean fragments: 'Wishing to pursue the 'objectively correct' teaching of Heraclitus means refusing to run the salutary risk of being confounded by the truth of a thinking.'"³⁵ Heidegger's instruction is to run the 'risk of thinking' for the sake of the 'truth of thinking,' and this is precisely what Caputo will attempt to do with Thomistic metaphysics and Meister Eckhart's mysticism.

Caputo also revealingly prefaces this last chapter in *Heidegger and Aquinas* by saying he will commence in a retrieval or 'deconstruction' of Thomistic metaphysics. While indicating that he prefers Jacques Derrida's 'deconstruction' to Heidegger's *Destruktion*, this is no more than a passing reference to his awareness of Derrida's earlier work, since it receives no further explanation or exposition. Instead he refers us back to the German sense of *'Ab-bauen'*: "the positive sense of taking a text apart in order to find its most essential and enlivening insights."³⁶ Caputo at this stage is still firmly positioned within the Heideggerian tradition of *Destruktion* first proclaimed in *Being and Time*, a tradition which famously recalls Luther's *destructio* in the Heidelberg disputations. Despite this, however, there is still an affirmative preservation of Luther's meaning in Heidegger's recapitulation that Caputo is after.³⁷ Later, as we will see, Caputo will fully embrace the sense in which Derrida marks the distinction between his use own of *deconstruction* and that of Heidegger's, since the latter is more concerned with an 'originary' interpretation of *logos* that remains attached to finding the 'truth' of Being.³⁸

So how does Caputo deploy this Heideggerian hermeneutic in search of a non-Heideggerian, non-metaphysical and non-onto-theo-logical overcoming of metaphysics? What is the transgression of the sacred? Caputo suggests that Aquinas's work must be seen in the context of a certain mystical experience he had at the end of his life.³⁹ This religious-mystical experience—something of an experience of the divine (*visio beatifica*)—is held, according to Caputo, outside of the bounds of metaphysics and is at least *analogous* to Heidegger's 'step-back.' However, Aquinas does not get far, for even if he implicitly escapes metaphysics through this mystical experience,⁴⁰ Caputo says, it nonetheless remains a positive intuition of God articulated in the mode of presence. Accordingly, Caputo turns to Meister Eckhart's negative mysticism, which expresses what Aquinas left unsaid—its 'lethic' dimension. The 'lethic' dimension is understood by Eckhart as the transcendent mystery of God within the Godhead. Everything we say of God is 'not' God, the Godhead "remains behind, its essential Being untouched by this discourse."⁴¹ In the doctrine

³⁵ Ibid., 246.

³⁶ Ibid., 247.

³⁷ The argument for the continuity between Luther's sense of *destructio* and Heidegger's *Destruktion* can be found in Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*, 47-48. One should also emphasize that Heidegger deliberately avoided using the German word for destruction (*Zerstörung*), and instead opted for the Latinate *Destruktion* and *Abbau* in order to avoid the confusion with Nietzsche's "demolition". Indeed, as Heidegger himself writes, "Destruction does not mean destroying but dismantling, liquidating, putting to one side the merely historical assertions about the history of philosophy." Heidegger, *What Is Philosophy?*, 71-73.

³⁸ For a summary of these distinctions see Derrida, *Rogues*, 173-175. See also Caputo and Vattimo, Robbins (ed.) *After the Death of God*, 186, fn. 17.

³⁹ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 252-253. Caputo, quoting Aquinas from his personal secretary, Reginald of Piperno, writes, "'Everything which I have written seems like straw to me compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me' (*Omnia, quae scripsi, videntur mihi paleae respectu eorum, quae vidi et revelata sunt mihi*)."

⁴⁰ Ibid., 278.

⁴¹ Ibid., 276. Caputo's thorough statement on Meister Eckhart is found in his first work, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*. See also Caputo, "Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism", 197-225.

of *Gelassenheit*, as Eckhart articulates it, we surrender the soul to the divine Being without attempting to objectify it, resulting in the preservation of the lethic dimension. This is why, as Caputo has shown elsewhere, Heidegger took over this term from Eckhart in his own elaborations of being, taking it to mean an ‘openness to Mystery.’⁴² If Aquinas’s mysticism was a vision of divine union (of ascension into light) then Eckhart’s was the opposite, a mysticism into divine darkness. Eckhart, who drew much of his mystical formulations from what he saw as implicit within Aquinas, therefore makes possible what was impossible for Aquinas to say himself.

For Caputo and Heidegger, Eckhart himself is not free from the logic of metaphysics. The ‘lethic’ dimension operates within the ‘alethic’; being withdraws but ultimately shows itself to itself in the end. The depths of God may be hidden from the religious mystic but they are not hidden from the Godhead, and thus we can place our trust in this impenetrable mystery. “Religious *Gelassenheit*,” Caputo writes, “is openness to the mystery, but the mystery is not concealed from itself. It is, and this is the believer’s faith, a sphere of self-openness, self-presence.”⁴³ Caputo’s re-reading of the metaphysics of *esse* culminates in this negative mysticism. It holds sway with respect to Heidegger only insofar as it is analogous to the ‘step back’, which Caputo repeatedly links with Heidegger’s use of Angelus Silesius’ rose that blossoms ‘without why’ (*ohne warum*).⁴⁴ But where Heidegger imagines a source in *a-lethia* from which the epochs of being are sent, Eckhart and Aquinas have in mind a perfect being at the end of the tunnel. God for Heidegger is a function of the *Ereignis*, not the reverse.

In the end, Caputo re-reads the scholastic metaphysics of Aquinas in terms of the ‘positive’ mysticism of Aquinas, which is subsequently read in terms of the negative mysticism of Eckhart, and finally re-read again in terms of what Thomas Sheehan has called the negative mysticism of Caputo (*Caputo mysticus*)—“a negative natural religious mysticism that alone offers an alternative to Heidegger’s *Ereignis*.”⁴⁵ What becomes apparent, Sheehan notes, is that Caputo’s negative religious mysticism is, indeed, not so different from Heidegger’s own ‘openness to mystery.’⁴⁶ However, if Caputo’s investigation has brought together Heidegger and Aquinas in a fruitful philosophical dialogue providing greater insight into the possibilities of religious thinking, then what remains open to question is Caputo’s commitment to ‘the matter of thought.’ In virtue of this commitment, the ‘negative religious’ outcome or the Heideggerian ‘openness to mystery’ will itself need to be interrogated, and will require a translation and delimitation from the openness to mystery to the openness to otherness. Thus, within the idiom of transgression, one can see that the productive generation of these impulses in Caputo’s early discussions with Heidegger and Eckhart serve to mutually supplement one another. We may interpret this insight in the following way: if scholastic theology is transgressed by thought, and thought is transgressed by the apophatic sacred, then it is not a matter of maintaining a superiority of one against the other, but precisely about understanding in what sense these transgressions are maintained—i.e. to think the transgression of transgression itself.

4 Transgression of Transgression

In this third section, I will sketch two final phases of Caputo’s engagement with Heidegger. In the first phase, I will demonstrate the lengths Caputo undergoes to re-read Heidegger’s *Being and Time* in *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987). This reading works to portend the coming critique of Jacques Derrida. The latter will occasion the second phase, addressing this critique head-on as it emerges in *Radical Hermeneutics*, on the one hand, but also systematically in Caputo’s *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), on the other. A third and final phase addressed in the concluding section of the article will consist in a consideration of what in Heidegger is to be preserved and discarded and how this generates Caputo’s ethical-religious turn to French postmodernism in general and Derrida in particular. Again, while these discussions of Caputo’s reading of

⁴² See footnote above and Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 278.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁴ Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, 97-139.

⁴⁵ Sheehan, “A Way Out of Metaphysics?”.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

Heidegger act on the level of description, the methodological claim I am making is that in the confrontation with Derrida, the logic of transgression we have observed above now turns on itself and is treated less as an activation of thought or a moment of meditative waiting, but ontologically, where transgression is not left to a final act but is itself always exposed to transgression. Crucially, this 'transgressive-ontology'—or what B. Keith Putt has recently called an 'ontology of sacred anarchy'⁴⁷—is understood by Caputo as productive or 'affirmative', and this he interprets as a quasi-ethical-religious position.

4.1 The 'upon-which' in *Being and Time*

In the late 80's Caputo became increasingly disillusioned with Heidegger's thought. Though it had not fully manifested itself, one can sense a confrontation emerging in *Radical Hermeneutics*. As we have seen above, Caputo's earlier concerns with the late Heidegger were an attempt to find a point of extrication in Aquinas from 'onto-theo-logic' and the charge of *Seinsvergessenheit*. In *Radical Hermeneutics*, however, Caputo returns to *Being and Time* in anticipation of a critique that will arise from Jacques Derrida against the late Heidegger. This anticipatory reading argues, on the one hand, for an interpretation latent in the early Heidegger which equates not to an outright defense of the late Heidegger against Derrida, but rather seeks to establish a point of contact between them. On the other hand, it also demonstrates a continuity between the Heidegger of the Marburg period and the later Heidegger with respect to the driving question which animates his work, namely, the question not of Being *itself* but of that which grants and makes Being possible. This emerging confrontation, then, is framed in *Radical Hermeneutics* less as an antagonism and more as a productivity, with the added subtlety of a discreet Heideggerian apologia.

What is the nature of Caputo's reading of *Being and Time* that allows this productivity? In its simplest formulation, Caputo argues that Heidegger has always from the start been concerned not with *Being*, but with what goes *beyond* Being. In the later Heidegger, this is confirmed when going *beyond* Being means that which grants Being and which 'lets' Being be: *Ereignis*, *a-lethia* etc. In *Being and Time* this point is made, according to Caputo, in a 'meaning structure' that consists in the movement of a two-fold projection of a being on its Being; an easily missed distinction between a primary and secondary projection which distinguishes *Being* and the *meaning* of Being in a unique sense. To understand this, Caputo indicates the context of the culmination of the text of *Being and Time* in §74, where the ontology of repetition is defined and defended. The context of this section depends on the elaboration of the 'temporality of Dasein' in §65 and which is itself prefaced by another discussion of the importance of the 'constancy' of the self in §64. These three sections for Caputo are explicitly drawn from Kierkegaard's philosophy of repetition,⁴⁸ which Heidegger underplays to his own detriment.⁴⁹ In order to issue the ontology of repetition which follows from the repetition of the existential analytic, Heidegger first determined the Being of Dasein as care in Division I. Now he must characterize care in terms of temporality to bring the existential analytic to its head.

The discussion of temporality is prefaced (§64) by an argument that Dasein is not a unity in a Kantian sense, but rather a 'constancy' insofar as it stands 'anticipatorily resolute' in the flux of its inauthentic 'they-self'. It is only a unity to the extent that it unifies itself in "the unity of a projection in which it binds itself to what it has been all along."⁵⁰ For it to "bind itself," Dasein needs a theory of temporality offered in

⁴⁷ Putt, "The Repetition of Sacred Anarchy: Risking a Reading of Radical Hermeneutics", 8.

⁴⁸ "The treatment of the constancy of the self comes from the discussion of the 'continuance of sin' in *The Sickness unto Death*. The analysis of temporality is dependent upon the analysis of existential temporality in the second volume of *Either/Or*. And the all-important discussion of repetition [§74] is based quite directly upon Kierkegaard, as I have been arguing throughout." Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 82-83.

⁴⁹ This is the difficulty, according to Caputo, for the Heidegger of the Marburg period when he produced *Being and Time*. Heidegger was still 'under the spell' of Husserl's conviction that saw phenomenology as a universal science. Giving too much to the latter meant that Heidegger's hermeneutics did not distrust the history of ontology enough, thus eliciting Derrida's critique of 'onto-hermeneutics'. Had Heidegger been more faithful to his Kierkegaardian influence he may have side-stepped Derrida's critique, Caputo claims. *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

§65 that moves from the ‘care-structure’ to the ‘meaning-structure’ of care. This ‘meaning-structure’ is the central ‘radical’ hermeneutic point for Caputo, which will allow him to speak of Being as an “effect” — to use Derridian language. The ‘meaning-structure’ is described in accordance with the *meaning* of care as temporality. Everything hangs here on what is understood by *meaning*. Caputo writes:

Meaning is not the object of understanding, *what* is understood by the understanding, but, more exactly, the organizing component *in* what is understood, that upon which the understandability depends, around which it is organized and “maintained” (*sich halten*) ... ‘Meaning’ signifies the ‘upon-which’ [*das Woraufhin*] of a primary projection in terms of which something can be conceived in its possibility as that which it is.⁵¹

The ‘upon-which’ or *das Woraufhin* is the prethematic operation that guides and organizes the projection of a being on its *Being*. Thus, if temporality is the ‘meaning’ of ontological care, then it is also that ‘upon-which’ something can be conceived in its possibilities of that which it is. The ‘upon-which’, therefore, describes a radical hermeneutic thrust in *Being and Time*, which not only regards this or that being or entity but is concerned with Being *in general*. Heidegger is, thus, engaged in a hermeneutic that is not so much interested in Being or beings but rather in what makes Being possible. Caputo writes, “To think Being is to remain within the first projective cut, but to think the meaning of Being is to make a hermeneutic determination of so radical a sort that it leaves metaphysics and its ‘Being’ behind.”⁵² This ‘upon-which’ proves to be the existential structure of temporality, the projection of the Being of Dasein as care, which allows care, and therefore Dasein, to be what it is.

Caputo’s point here is to draw a parallel between what he believes the early Heidegger has conceived, namely, the beings/Being/meaning structure and the beings/Being/*Ereignis* structure of the late Heidegger we saw above. If successful, Caputo will be able to preserve a coefficient in Heidegger’s thought that divests it of transcendental remnants and lends credence to his claim that there is a productive point of contact between Heidegger and Derrida.

4.2 “Cold Hermeneutics”

After *Being and Time*, Caputo makes clear from texts such as *Discourse on Thinking* and *On the Way to Language*, respectively, that on the one hand, Heidegger himself became uncertain about ‘transcendental horizontal’ language⁵³ and, on the other, he needed to enact a certain retrieval of hermeneutics. The language of Dasein and projection in *Being and Time* was too close to Nietzschean ‘willing’ (*Vor-stellen*) and thus needed to be delimited in favor of that which lets the horizon be without projecting onto it. Above, this was expressed variously by terms such as ‘the open,’ *alēthia*, *Gelassenheit*, *Austrag* and *Ereignis*. Subsequently, Caputo identifies a correspondence and continuity in this two-fold step from the language of willing to that of ‘the open,’ and the quest for ‘meaning’ beyond Being (the ‘upon-which’) in *Being and Time*. When compared to *Being and Time*, there is certainly something different going in the later Heidegger, for indeed he drops the term “hermeneutics” after *Being and Time* completely. However, Caputo notes that Heidegger, nonetheless, “never really drops anything,” but reworks or repeats his language in the interest of thought. The question now arises: with what in this repetition does Derrida take issue? And how — having established the continuity in Heidegger’s thinking — will this occasion a point of contact between Derrida and Heidegger, allowing Caputo to set them together in what he calls a “Cold Hermeneutics”?

Derrida’s critique of Heidegger initially emerges in *Spurs* (1978), his essay “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy” (1982) and *Margins of Philosophy* (1982). In the former Heidegger is challenged by a synthesis between Nietzsche’s critique of truth and Derrida’s semiotic effect produced by *différance*. The problem according to Derrida is that Heidegger essentially misread Nietzsche insofar as he

⁵¹ Ibid., 84. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 370-371.

⁵² Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 85.

⁵³ Ibid., 98-115.

did not pick up the irony of Nietzsche's woman — that she herself believes that she is a fiction; “indeed, if woman is truth, *she* at least knows that there is no truth.”⁵⁴ Derrida's interpretation of Nietzsche derides the sexual difference. For him, it is an enforced construction and a fiction unto itself, leaving those who *believe* in it to be fooled by it. Heidegger is the hermeneut who does not recognize this style in Nietzsche; he is fooled into believing truth, whether the ‘truth of Being’ or *alēthia*.⁵⁵ His is an ‘onto-hermeneutics’ that plumbs the depths for truth. However, as we have seen, Caputo argues in *Radical Hermeneutics* that this does not tell the full story of Heidegger. Derrida himself recognized this in *Spurs* when he wrote, “[e]ach time that Heidegger refers the question of Being to the question of the property (*proprie*), of propiety, of appropriation (*eigen*, *eignen*, *ereignen*, *Ereignis* especially) this dehiscence bursts forth anew.”⁵⁶ And again, when he comments on *Ereignis*, “Its irruption here does not mark a rupture or turning point in the order of Heidegger's thought.”⁵⁷ In citing these remarks, Caputo is pointing to a repetition and recognition of Heidegger's early work by Derrida that opens space for intertwining their projects in support of his own. But before Caputo can present his ‘Cold Hermeneutics,’ he must address the second (and most important) thrust of Derrida's critique — alluded to above as Heidegger's ‘mythical-eschatological’ tendencies.

If the beginning of Heidegger's *Kehre* involved surrendering the hermeneutics of ‘transcendental-horizonal’ language (jettisoning the fore-structures of *Being and Time*) then it ended by re-reading hermeneutics in terms of a more primordial experience of Being, indeed, a certain “message of destiny (*Geschick*)” that is *heard* from Being. This messaging introduces a portrait of the relationship between ‘Man’ and Being that emerges in the late Heidegger as more ascetic, insofar as we are always already in the possession of Being. What becomes of the hermeneut is akin to receiving messages from the Greek god Hermes, where the latter is the epochal sendings of Being, and the former is the hermeneut who can read and interpret them.⁵⁸ Heidegger's hermeneutics becomes not “a question of supplying an anticipatory projection of the Being of beings but of hearing a message (‘eine Botschaft zu hören’) that is not about supplying anticipatory horizons but about listening to what is sent our way.”⁵⁹ Thus, one observes the beginning of a certain mythical-eschatology in Heidegger, encompassing an almost mythological partiality for the early Greeks, and also such a severe withdrawal of Being that at the end one is now waiting for the *eschaton* — the inauguration of the new. Indeed, this is the context in which Caputo locates Heidegger's oft-quoted phrase at the end of the infamous *Der Spiegel* interview: “[o]nly a god can save us now.”⁶⁰ It is with this mythical and eschatological ‘epistolary principle’ that Derrida takes issue.

In the discussion concerning the early Greeks, we saw how those investigations sought to describe a process of the rising up of presence into what is present (*das Anwesende des Anwesen*), or the emergence of things into un-concealment before receding again. We saw that for the late Heidegger this process is favored in the early Greeks because they supposedly experienced Being in a unique and pristine way before congealing over. Now, at the height of congealment in the history of Being in the West, the task of thinking is to listen again to the messages of this primordial sending. In doing so, “[t]he *eschaton*,” Caputo writes, “repeats the *arche*, retrieves the possible, saves us all just at that moment when all is dark, indeed darkest.”⁶¹ The capacity of the *Seinsgeschick* to ‘save us’ resides in the unity of its sending and in our ability to hear the unity of its message. According to Derrida, such a unity is a suspicious dream and a function

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Spurs*, 53.

⁵⁵ Caputo's argument here shows a clear development with respect to his reading of Derrida. In 1984 he published a short essay where he makes his skepticism of the Dionysian woman clear, “Derrida's Dionysian strategies serve a purpose; but left to themselves they cut us off entirely from the things themselves, delivering us over to a surfeit of fictions and willful constructions.” Caputo, “‘Supposing Truth To Be A Woman...’”, 21.

⁵⁶ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 172, quoted from Derrida, *Spurs*, 115-117. Here in *Radical Hermeneutics* there is always a movement beyond Being in Heidegger's writing for Caputo: “Although Heidegger is always talking about Being and *Ereignis*, he invariably ends up in a movement beyond Being, ground, presence, and truth, landing in an abyss (*Ab-grund*) of dis-appropriation (*Ent-eignis*),” Ibid., 158.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 29.

⁵⁹ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 103.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 160.

⁶¹ Ibid., 165.

of eschatological and apocalyptic thinking, where the deep essence of truth is presupposed even in the announcement of the apocalypse itself.⁶² The extent of this suspicion is heightened when considered under the re-reading that Derrida undertook of Husserl against the possibilities of “effective communication.”⁶³ In the postal system of sending and receiving there can never be a determinable message or recipient, only the play of the alterable chain of signifiers.

However, there is again something in Heidegger that even Derrida recognizes does not fully accord with this reading. There is a Heidegger that can be read *against* Heidegger. Even while there is a reading of Heidegger which — thanks to Heidegger himself — Derrida’s work opens up (when he speaks of an ‘apocalypse without apocalypse,’ for example), Caputo assumes responsibility to present and pursue this ‘radical’ reading. This will culminate in Caputo’s ‘demythologized Heidegger.’ With Derrida’s Nietzschean-inspired critique and his equally important hesitation to resist ever closing down Heidegger’s text, therefore, Caputo is able to defend a version of Heidegger he has already begun formulating in his early work, while at the same time now bringing Derrida alongside his project of a radical or ‘Cold Hermeneutics.’ Cold hermeneutics is precisely this intertwining of both the Heideggerian transgression and the transgression of Nietzsche-Derrida, a ‘cold hermeneutic shiver’ effectuated by the mutual transgressions of a demythologized Heidegger and a disruptive Derrida. In Caputo’s ‘Cold Hermeneutics’ neither Heidegger nor Derrida get ahead of the other. When we think that Derrida has delimited Heidegger’s project as just another raised degree of metaphysics (onto-hermeneutics and belief in the truth of Being’s sending and receiving), “Heidegger infiltrates Derrida with a hermeneutic moment — an apophatic, not cataphatic, hermeneutics — a moment in which we concede the play in which we are caught up, a moment of openness to the mystery which everywhere invades us,”⁶⁴ that is, the *lethic* quality in a hyphenated *a-lēthia*.

For the remainder of *Radical Hermeneutics*, and its last three chapters in particular, Caputo oscillates between the metaphors of Derrida and Heidegger. For example, he explains how Derrida’s deconstruction is done in the ‘marketplace’ — it has an ethico-political and liberative effect,⁶⁵ whereas Heidegger, in contrast, falls short of the political edge. His hermeneutics is carried out on a ‘country path,’ a metaphors of ‘stillness and simplicity’ that emphasizes openness to the mystery of Being’s withdrawal. On the basis of Caputo’s demythologized Heidegger, this does not necessarily mean inaction, however. Indeed, in the final chapters of *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo reaches to develop from the ontological and epistemological implications of this renewed Heidegger an ‘Ethics of *Gelassenheit*,’ where “*Gelassenheit* is a certain intervention in these power systems which releases their grip and lets things be.”⁶⁶ But this is only a ‘reach,’ for in the final analysis this ethical-political ‘lack’ and its implications motivate Caputo to move *beyond* Heidegger.⁶⁷ To understand this shift, we must consider more precisely what it is that causes Caputo to adopt a more critical and guarded view of Heidegger. We find this in the final book he publishes on Heidegger in the early nineties, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993).

5 Conclusion: Transgression as Transfiguration

It should be noted that Derrida’s criticisms of Heidegger were not the origination of Caputo’s own critical concerns. Already in his first book, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (1978), Caputo had raised questions over the status of ethics.⁶⁸ However, it was Derrida above all who enhanced these concerns, making Caputo’s earlier reading of Heideggerian terms like *Das Woraufin*, *Ereignis* and *alēthia* that much

⁶² Ibid., 166-67.

⁶³ See chapter 5 “Repetition and the Emancipation of Signs,” Ibid., 120-152, where Caputo traces Derrida’s re-reading of Husserl and addresses many of Derrida’s early writings.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 192-198.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 205 and 264-267. Heidegger claims the term *Gelassenheit* from Meister Eckhart. Caputo devotes a number of pages to this in *The Mystical Element*, 118-127.

⁶⁷ In an earlier essay, while the title is misleading, Caputo expressly refers to these two tensions between Heidegger and Derrida as ‘two transgressions’. Caputo, “Three Transgressions”, 75.

⁶⁸ Caputo, *The Mystical Element*, 254-258.

more pertinent. A further shadow was also cast when research began appearing that confirmed his own internal philosophical concerns,⁶⁹ as well as a growing body of literature that presented incontrovertible historical evidence of Heidegger's nefarious political engagements.⁷⁰ The tandem effect of this situation in the late 80's led to Caputo's reappraisal of Heidegger that locates his fall from grace and its philosophical development in his later thought from the 1930's onward.

Caputo argues that Heidegger was held captive by a myth of Being and a great Greek beginning. His earlier accents of Martin Luther, St. Paul, Aristotle and Søren Kierkegaard faded into the background in favor of the Eleatics and the poetry of Hölderlin.⁷¹ As we have seen, the 'mythological operation' does not exist and is, in fact, opposed in *Being and Time*. The 'meaning' of Being does not have historical instantiation but is a theory about *how* that history is constructed and about the conditions that allow Being to have meaning. The 'mythological operation' comes to the fore explicitly only in the *Grundfrage der Philosophie* (1937-38) lecture course, where the 'meaning' of Being takes on a historical role as opposed to a functional one. Instead of modernity being seen as a breakthrough with respect to its conception of time and the subject (Kant), it was now seen as the most extreme end (eschaton) in the history of ontology. Everything after the early Greeks is seen as a 'falling away' from the self-showing of Being (the Greek experience).⁷² The project of the Freiburg period culminating in *Being and Time* had now, according to Caputo, undergone a significant overhaul. The investigations into facticity from biblical sources and Aristotelian ethics that characterized that period of Heidegger's thought were cut down to an exclusive Greek *Anfang*.

In short, Heidegger had 'essentialized' his project.⁷³ The task of 'demythologizing', then, will not only consist in articulating the causes of this mythology but also in 're-mythologizing' *differently*. It is here we see that transgression becomes the condition of transfiguration for Caputo. The transgressionary impulse generated by Heidegger's commitment to *die Sache des Denkens*, which Caputo appropriated to transgress thought with Eckhart's apophatism, is now re-deployed via Derrida as a transgression of the event.⁷⁴ To re-mythologize, then, is to think the myth of the 'jewgreek' or the myth of justice, where the latter, contrary to Heidegger, is not the 'jointure' (*Fug*) of Being as presence to itself, but the irreducible excess of disjuncture (*Un-fuge*), as Derrida suggests in *Spectres of Marx* (1993). It is to reinstate what Heidegger excluded when he (mis)read the New Testament. In schematizing the categories of care and difficulty he left out the "whole thematics of the ethics of mercy, the cry for justice."⁷⁵ It is at this moment that the turn is formally inaugurated in Caputo's thought, first through Levinas and then Derrida. Indeed, the book that Caputo cites as a 'companion' to *Demythologizing Heidegger* is his *Against Ethics* published in the same year.⁷⁶ One can say that previously (in *Radical Hermeneutics*), Caputo was still reading Derrida in the narrow sense of 'writing', which is why he needed Heidegger and Kierkegaard to supplement an existential affirmation of life. There are, indeed, hints of an 'ethics of dissemination' in *Radical Hermeneutics* which point in the direction of a phenomenology of religion,⁷⁷ but only when he has put Heidegger to rest can he effect the

⁶⁹ With respect to ethics and politics, Caputo cites Lacoue-Labarthe's *La fiction du politique* (1987) and Lyotard's *Heidegger et "les juifs"* (1988).

⁷⁰ Caputo cites Victor Farías', *Heidegger and Nazism* (1989) and Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (1988).

⁷¹ Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 148-68.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 9-39.

⁷³ See chapter six "Heidegger's Essentialism", 118-130.

⁷⁴ "The decisions I defend below depend upon the analyses of texts and the soundness of my views, not upon settling the affair of Heidegger's biography. This is not a book about Heidegger's Nazism, but about Heidegger's thought. However, biography and thought are never extricated from one another, which is precisely why a work of 'demythologizing' will also necessarily be "an operation of denazification." *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁶ Caputo, *Against Ethics*.

⁷⁷ The religious hermeneutic for Caputo is connected to suffering: "Religion arises as an expression of solidarity with the suffering." Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 280.

transition.⁷⁸ To put this another way, radical hermeneutics has to do with an existential affirmation of life by ‘restoring life to its original difficulty,’ but this affirmation was not enough when met with the obligation of the other and his/her suffering. This is what the Derridian impulse, informed early on by Nietzsche and Levinas, means: it is transgression as an event “of protest and disruption, which is carried out in the name of liberation or emancipation.” The event of transfiguration that Caputo sees in Derrida, and which he develops into the poetics of religion *without* religion in his later work, is the legacy of transgression that, as I have argued, is born in his conversations with Heidegger and remains indispensable if there is to be a future of Continental Philosophy of Religion *after* Derrida, and indeed, although hopefully in a still distant future, *after* Caputo.

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⁷⁸ As already noted, the die is already being cast in the final chapters of *Radical Hermeneutics*, but can also be seen in chapter ten of *Demythologizing Heidegger*, “Hyperbolic Justice”, 186-208. Following Levinas and Derrida, Caputo here begins to start problematizing the relationship between ethics, politics and justice. Although he is still committed to ‘mythologizing differently,’ from *Against Ethics* onward, he seems to have heeded Levinas’ call from *Otherwise than Being* for the “demythization of the myths,” and drops the vocabulary of myth completely. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 180.

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