

Un/saving Religion: Caputo's Deconstructionist Religion without Religion in Relation to Determinate Religion

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Master Thesis Christianity and Society

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Words: 11.462

July 2020

Je ne sais pas. Il faut croire

- Derrida (1993a, 129) -

Abstract

John Caputo seeks what religion means in the face of a postmodern, Lyotardian incredulity towards metanarratives. He finds the vocabulary for his postmodern rethinking of religion in Derrida's works about deconstruction, which he gives his own twist. His deconstruction of religion leads Caputo to a certain 'religion without religion'. Because of its apparently anti-traditional connotation, this thesis examines this religion without religion in relation to determinate religion. It does so by first discussing Caputo's 'religious' interpretation of deconstruction and then parsing the concept 'religion without religion'. It examines Caputo's deconstructionist critique on the closure of determinate religions, which results in identitarian violence. Then it delves into Caputo's proposal of a deconstructionist religion, which turns on an indeterminate faith without determinate dogma. Subsequently, it comes to a critical consideration of the relation between this indeterminate faith and determinate religion. With this examination of Caputo's religion without religion, this thesis adds to the understanding of religion in the postmodern condition and sheds light on the frictional relation between deconstruction and religion.

Keywords: Caputo, deconstruction, postmodern, religion, religion without religion

Contents

Introduction: Caputo's Incredulous Religion	1
1. Caputo's Deconstruction: Conditional Names and the Promise of Unconditional Events	5
1.1 Derrida's Deconstruction	5
1.2 Caputo's Deconstruction	6
1.3 The 'Religious' Aspect of Caputo's Deconstruction	9
2. Caputo's Deconstructionist Critique on Determinate Religion's Identitarian Violence	12
2.1 Caputo's Postmodern Perspective on Determinate Religion	12
2.2 Deconstruction and Identitarianism	14
2.3 Caputo's Critique on Determinate Religion's Metaphysical Identitarianism	16
3. Religion without Religion: The Deconstructionist Religion of Saint Jacques	18
3.1 Circumcising Exclusivity	18
3.2 Confessions of a Religious Passion for the Impossible	19
4. Religion with/out Religion: Haunting Pharmalogical Messianisms	22
4.1 Two Messianic Spaces	22
4.2 Haunting Determination	24
4.3 Determinate Religion as a Pharmakon	26
5. Conclusion: Un/saving Religion	28
Bibliography	30

Introduction: Caputo's Incredulous Religion

"The way to save the things we love is not to keep them too safe. The point is to see that things are made possible by the very conditions that threaten to make them impossible"

- Olthuis (2002, 5) about Caputo -

At night, little Jackie would lie awake and look at the stars, thinking by himself: "no one knows we are here" (Caputo 2015, 1). Growing up, those stars never left him safe. Even "leaving the world" as a novice, did not dispel the slight suspicion of a cosmic void from the back of his mind (idem., 3). So, Jack Caputo quit the novitiate, to professionally brood over the specter of the stars as professor in philosophy.

In continental philosophy, Caputo encounters thorough formulations of Jackie's musings. A crucial influence on Caputo came from the twentieth century French postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (Caputo 2015, 5-7). In his report on the state of knowledge, Lyotard famously describes the postmodern condition as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). In the core, this means a skepticism about overarching stories that claim to grant objective meaning. Because human beings are always embedded in a historical context, they cannot have an objective, all-overseeing, ahistorical 'God's perspective'. Instead, Lyotard, and postmodern philosophy with him, emphasizes that all meaning is given from a subjective position. Therefore, Lyotard does not ultimately prove those metanarratives false, but from a subjective point of view, he can greet those big stories with incredulity.

Caputo asks himself the question what religion means in the face of this postmodern incredulity. Confessional religion is difficult to reconcile with this incredulity towards metanarratives. Revelation does claim to unfold the aforementioned 'God's perspective', overseeing the ultimate point of it all and thereby forming the metanarrative *par excellence*. However, Caputo does not directly discard the concept of religion altogether for this reason. Rather, he aims to rethink what we mean by religion from the ground, in a search for a certain religion that can reside within Lyotard's postmodern framework (Caputo 2015, 17-18).

Caputo finds the key for this rethinking of religion in the work of another twentieth century French philosopher, namely Jacques Derrida, and builds upon his ideas about deconstruction. In Caputo's interpretation, deconstruction aims to lay bare what is constructed, in order to keep those constructions open to something 'undeconstructible' (Caputo 2019, 99-101). Therefore, to Caputo deconstruction is an exercise in writing with two hands. The first analyzes and

criticizes a construct, while the second seeks to affirm what is undeconstructible (Caputo 2007, 68).

This quest for the undeconstructible leads Caputo to a certain deconstructionist religion which fits with his postmodern framework. He calls this religion a ‘religion without religion’. Caputo’s religion without religion seeks to affirm faith without absolute knowledge or dogma (Robbins 2007, 16). Hence, it seeks to avoid the determinate, historical content of confessional religion. Because of this contrast, in the following, I will speak of ‘determinate religion’.

By his religion without religion, Caputo aims to overcome the exclusionary violence he associates with determinate religion. According to Caputo, this religion without religion “crosses over the divide between believer and unbeliever, theist and atheist, faith and reason, the religious and the secular, this world and the next” (idem., 20). Unlike determinate religion, it does not offer comforting stories of meaning that give little Jackie, the novitiate brother, and professor Caputo a good night’s rest. Rather, it embraces an “endless conversation with the specters of the night” (idem., 21).

Caputo’s religion without religion is the central theme of this thesis. Because of its apparently anti-traditional connotation, I examine how Caputo’s understanding of religion without religion relates to determinate religion. Hereby, I essentially enter into the underlying debate about the frictional relation between deconstruction and religion. To what extent is deconstruction a threat to determinate religion or does it keep determinate religion safe by not keeping it too safe?

This debate has a more theological and a more philosophical side. I focus on the philosophical side, however without having the illusion of creating watertight borders. Caputo himself embraces the tension of the ‘lovers quarrel’ between philosophy and theology (2007, 144). As a postmodern philosopher, he takes his own subjective Christian background to the table. His religion without religion is not objective nor neutral, but a “reinvention of biblical religion in dialogue with deconstruction” (idem., 141). For this reinvention, he draws upon philosophical as well as theological traditions. Here, I intend to pick the fruits of this cross-pollination and follow the discourse where it leads to philosophical arguments about deconstruction and religion.

Before delving into Caputo’s main argument that connects deconstruction to religion, namely his case for a religion without religion, it is important to pay attention to the origin of this term. In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Caputo 1997), Caputo picked up this term of Derrida’s. In this work, Caputo innovatively and controversially portrays Derrida as a religious thinker, while the Frenchman himself said to

“quite rightly pass for an atheist” (Derrida 1993, 155-156). Caputo admits that he does not know who speaks and whose religion is portrayed in this ‘game of Jacks’ (Caputo 1997, xxix), between Jacques Derrida and Jack Caputo. Therefore, in the following, I present Caputo’s ideas as *his* reading, taking note of the Derridean background, without engaging in the debate about the correctness of Caputo’s interpretation. The latter lies beyond the scope of this work, because in this thesis, I specifically seek to understand what *Caputo* means by the concept of religion without religion in its relation to determinate religion.

The initial step I take into this theme, in the first chapter, is a further elaboration of how Caputo understands deconstruction. Here, I lay the groundwork for his deconstruction of religion as evolving in the chapters to come. In this first chapter, I explain the core distinction of Caputo’s deconstruction, that between a constructed name and an undeconstructible event, and examine how Caputo gives deconstruction a religious turn.

Building forth on this groundwork, the approach for the next three chapters is to parse the concept ‘religion without religion’. This structure evolves in a circular excursion. In short, it leads from the second ‘religion’, Caputo’s critique of determinate religion, to the first, namely Caputo’s postmodern, deconstructionist understanding of religion. Subsequently, it takes this postmodern religion back to the touchstone of determinate religion, to evaluate the logic of the ‘without’.

Accordingly, the second chapter centers on Caputo’s critique of determinate religion. I describe Caputo’s postmodern perspective on determinate religion and then I examine the specific deconstructionist critique of it, which focuses on its identitarian violence.

The third chapter is about what is undeconstructible in religion. I explain how Caputo seeks to overcome the violence he associates with determinate religion by relating Derrida’s personal reflections on his ‘religiosity’ to a postmodern, deconstructionist religion without religion, based on an undeconstructible indeterminate faith.

The fourth chapter closes the circle by examining the meaning of the ‘without’. It holds Caputo’s postmodern religion to the fire of determinate religion. For Caputo, this ‘without’ is about violence and it is this alignment of determinate religion with violence that is contested by critics. I consider the critiques that Caputo’s deconstruction results in a pure faith or abstract religion that is evacuated of content and thereby denigrates the unique characteristics of determinate religion (Smith 2004, 59, 116; Milbank 2004, 18) and that Caputo, in *Prayers and Tears*, has been one-sidedly negative of determinate religion, portraying them as necessarily violent (Cudney 2002; Kuipers 2002). Hereby, I come to a critical understanding of how Caputo’s religion without religion relates to determinate religion.

In the conclusion, I return to Olthuis's (2002, 5) opening quote that "the way to save the things we love is not to keep them too safe" and reflect on how Caputo's deconstructionist religion without religion un/saves religion.

The discussion of Caputo's ideas about deconstruction and religion in this thesis has its relevance both inside and outside the academic world. It adds to the philosophical understanding of religion in the postmodern condition and sheds light on the relevance and problems of deconstruction for religion, faith, tradition, and community. The incredulity that lies at the root of deconstruction permeates contemporary societies. Therefore, religious institutions cannot avoid the incredulous questions. No one escapes the specter of the stars. Hence, they might learn from Caputo's deconstructionist attempt to, as Olthuis (2002, 5) states in the opening quote, keep religion safe by not keeping it too safe. Albeit maybe with their own healthy dose of incredulity.

1. Caputo's Deconstruction: Conditional Names and the Promise of Unconditional Events

“What else is deconstruction but the work of analyzing phenomena that contain what they cannot contain in order to release the event they (cannot) contain?”

- Caputo (2007a, 52) -

Caputo's understanding of deconstruction centers on the tension between two categories. There are the “phenomena that contain what they cannot contain” and there are “events” (idem.). In this chapter, I explain these two categories and the way in which they relate to each other, because this distinction is the heart of Caputo's critique on determinate religion and his proposal of a religion without religion in the chapters to come. First, I give a brief overview of Derrida's understanding of deconstruction in 1.1. Then, I explain Caputo's understanding of deconstruction with the help of the distinction between conditional names and unconditional events in 1.2. Finally, I display the particularity of Caputo's interpretation of Derrida in 1.3.

1.1 Derrida's Deconstruction

A chapter on deconstruction must start with mentioning its Derridean origin. Although I cannot do justice to the complexity of Derrida's theory about deconstruction here, a brief introduction is crucial to understand the specter of Derrida that runs through Caputo's deconstruction.

Derrida was a philosopher working in linguistics, who tried to understand the relationship between text and meaning. He noted that words, for example ‘justice’, have different meanings throughout history and to different people. Therefore, in his work *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1976, 49), he rejects the idea of language where words are signifiers that have a stable, authentic meaning, or in other words, refer to a transcendental signified. To him, there is no pure, absolute truth that can be accessed through language. So, to Derrida, words do not have one true meaning that one must try to reasonably articulate as clearly as possible, but rather have an irreducible and undecidable multiplicity of meanings.

Because there is an irreducible multiplicity of interpretations possible, in order to communicate effectively, one has to repress all other potential meanings of a word. This repression is the spark of deconstruction. Derrida deconstructs terms and binaries in order to expose internal logical fallacies and underlying values that lead to unjustified privileging one meaning over another, or in a broader sense, one category over another, like masculinity over

femininity and speech over writing (Derrida 1976). Furthermore, to Derrida, those binaries were never as binary as they seem in the first place. For him, there can be no opposition of two ‘pure’ poles, for there is always contamination. Hence, the unjustifiably privileged is never as pure as claimed, but always inwardly disturbed by something other. Thus, in the core, Derrida’s deconstruction aims to dismantle ‘self-evidence’ and claims of purity, to expose the false stability of what is present. It is about keeping things open to other, neglected meanings or other possibilities, for there is no objective one true meaning.

1.2 Caputo’s Deconstruction

Caputo interprets Derridean deconstruction with his own twist. His interpretation of deconstruction builds upon the distinction with which I opened this chapter, that between the “phenomena that contain what they cannot contain” and “the event” (Caputo 2007a, 52). Starting with the first category, Caputo calls those phenomena ‘names’. Although the use of the term ‘phenomena’ evokes the connotation of what is direct accessibility, Caputo means the opposite when he speaks of names. Names, as understood in common use, are linguistic constructions to indicate something. With his use of the term ‘names’, Caputo emphasizes this constructedness, but he also widens the category of names to indicate all that is constructed (Caputo 2007a, 53). These names belong to the first order in Caputo’s framework, namely the existential order, because they are constructed and therefore exist. Because they are constructed, they can be deconstructed and for Caputo *must* be deconstructed. As shortly mentioned in the introduction, for Caputo, deconstruction is necessary to keep constructions open to something undeconstructible, which introduces the second category.

Names “contain what they cannot contain”, according to Caputo (2007a, 52). They are inwardly disturbed by what he calls ‘events’. Hereby, Caputo builds on the use of the term ‘event’ by Derrida (1977) and Deleuze (1969), but Caputo gives it his own twist and makes it the cornerstone of his own idea of deconstruction. To explain what Caputo means by an event, it is useful to turn to an example. Caputo himself uses the example of how Derrida (1992) wrote about the concept ‘justice’ and its relation to the law. First of all, Derrida noted that a law is a historical construct, or in Caputo’s scheme a name, and therefore deconstructible. In contrast, Derrida writes: “justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond the law, is not deconstructible” (idem., 14). Both those two categories have their limitations. On the one hand, laws do not necessarily promote justice, but only ensure legality (Caputo 2007, 63). On the other hand, justice as such does not exist. Without the law, justice is only a dream (idem.). Justice is not a construction, but rather a promise. It is in itself unconditional, while the law

must conditionally give shape to this promise. Deconstruction, for Caputo, turns on the interval between the undeconstructibility of justice and the deconstructibility of the law (idem.). Deconstruction lays bare the constructedness of the law and exposes it to the promise of justice, so the current form of the law is not taken as a certain essence in itself, which closes it off for reinvention, but keeps being reinvented, inspired by the event of justice.

This example illustrates Caputo's understanding of names and events. It highlights Caputo's foundational distinction between two orders. The first, the order of the name, is conditional and therefore deconstructible; it is about what really exists and therefore Caputo calls it the existential order (Caputo 2007, 63). The second is the order of the event, which is about something unconditional and therefore undeconstructible (Caputo 2007a, 49); about a promise that calls. Therefore, Caputo speaks of the vocative order (Caputo 2007, 59).

That events do not belong to the existential order does not mean that they are like Platonic ideal forms that exist outside space and time and are eternally true, nor that they belong to a pure utopian ideal (Caputo 2007, 64). That would be exactly like the transcendental meaning of words that Derrida reacted so strongly against. It is not about a transcendental ideal that must be realized. Rather, Derrida and Caputo speak of 'quasi-transcendentals' (Caputo 2013, 85). The undeconstructible is what insists upon "the construction of something in its name whose deconstruction it simultaneously demands" (idem.). Hence, the event is not something transcendental that exists as an ideal, but rather depends on its conditional form, that gives it a relatively stable structure in reality, but which it simultaneously problematizes.

Because events do not exist as such, Caputo is cautious in writing about them. He uses the French qualification *s' il y en a* (Caputo 2007, 64). The English translation would be "if there is such thing" (idem.). This qualification works in two ways. First, it is a precaution. Since the realm of the event is beyond the existential order, one cannot be sure there is such a thing as the event. Second, this is why Caputo and Derrida use the French *il y a* or refer to the German *es gibt*. Unlike in English, there is no 'is' in those expressions. To Caputo, it is better to say that an event *calls*, than to say that it *is* (idem.). Events themselves do not exist, but like a specter, solicit and call to us from within what exists (Caputo 2007a, 57)

In terms of temporality, events, like justice, are never present, but solicit from afar. The specter can call us back from the past. In this case, Caputo refers to Johan Baptist Metz' idea of "dangerous memories" (Metz 1980, 109-115). Events or dangerous memories recall from the irremissible past and hereby, in a certain sense, keep the past open. They revoke the injustice suffered by the dead and constitute another provocation, a call for justice from the past (Caputo 2007a, 48).

More emphasized however, is deconstruction's dedication to the open-endedness of what is to come. Events are also provocations and promises calling us from the future (Caputo 2007a, 48). However, Caputo and Derrida have a specific understanding of this future, which is related to the unconditionality of the event. Because the event is by definition unconditional, its promise can never be realized under existing conditions (Caputo 2007, 60). According to Caputo, Derrida has borrowed this idea from a peculiar Jewish understanding of the Messiah, one who never actually comes (idem.). Derrida elucidates this understanding with the Jewish phrase "next year in Jerusalem" (Derrida 1987, 546), which is traditionally sung at Passover and expresses the hope of the rebuilding of the temple, which ushers the messianic era. To Derrida it refers to the promised land, or the land of the promise. Hence, he understands this phrase as alluding to the idea of the indefinite deferring of the fulfillment of that promise. Therefore, rather than of a Platonic ideal form, Derrida and Caputo speak of a pure messianic form (idem.).

This pure messianic form of the event, however, does not belong to the foreseeable future. This foreseeable future we can anticipate and plan for, Caputo calls the "future present" (idem., 62). Rather, it is about a future that "shatters the comfortable horizons of expectation that surround the present" (Caputo 2019, 8), which Caputo calls the "absolute future". Hence, we cannot know what calls and thus responding is a risky business.

Elaborating on this distinction, Caputo calls upon Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality and uses it as a characteristic of his own idea about deconstruction (Derrida 2002a, 362 in Caputo 2007, 75). To Caputo, hospitality resonates with the event. It promises something that cannot quite be delivered. In practice, hospitality means that we invite the people we like. We welcome the same, while to Derrida the promise of hospitality is about welcoming the other. Hence, Derrida detects the tension between invitation and visitation. To him, invitation means conditional hospitality and visitation concerns unconditional and unprogrammed hospitality to the uninvited other. Because of this openness to alterity, for Caputo, hospitality is an important characteristic of deconstruction. This hospitality is risky, because being called by the event from the absolute future is being visited by the *tout autre*, a term Caputo borrows from Levinas (1969), to describe the other that breaks through our horizon of expectation. We do not know who will visit us. However, deconstruction is willing to take this risk. It is based on the premise that allowing systems or names to get closed leads to authoritarianism of false stability, to 'one true form', that is more dangerous than the openness to the event. Therefore, Caputo's (2007a, 52) deconstruction is about keeping the conditional, the "phenomena that contain what they cannot contain" of the opening quote, open-ended, open to the unconditional event.

1.3 The ‘Religious’ Aspect of Caputo’s Deconstruction

The particularity of Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida concerns the ‘religious’ distinction between the conditional and the unconditional that is the heart of Caputo’s deconstruction. Here, I will elaborate on the ‘religious’ aspect of this distinction, by means of contrasting it with Hägglund’s (2015) criticism. The aim here is not to judge the correctness of any interpretation, but to shed light on the specific way Caputo deals with Derrida’s ideas about deconstruction.

As aforementioned, Derrida’s work was about the irreducibility of meaning and interpretation to a supposedly stable, original point of reference. Hence, deconstruction stands for deconstructing the ‘self-evidence’ of what is constructed and conditional. This conditional *is* or *should be* disturbed by something elusive and differential. It is on this normative evaluation that Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida is concentrated.

For Caputo, the unconditional is a promise or dream (Caputo 2004, 38). He writes that “Derrida is dreaming of something unconditional, something for which the current conditions of being are no match, something that belongs to another order” (Caputo 2003, 14). Accordingly, there are the two aforementioned orders, the existential and the vocative order, the conditional and the unconditional. Although Caputo would not deny the risk of the unknowable to come, most of his work emphasizes hope. Caputo exalts the unconditional order with positive terms, like ‘promise’ or ‘dream’ and aligns it with the religious desire for ‘the kingdom of God’, that consists of Derridean concepts, like ‘justice’ and ‘hospitality’. Because of this positive valorization of the event, his “axiom” of deconstruction is to “always and everywhere to keep the future open” (Caputo 2011, 40), in other words, to keep the conditional open to the unconditional, which is exactly the tension between religion without religion and determinate religion that is key to this thesis.

A brief overview of Hägglund’s (2015) contrasting critique on this interpretation helps to identify the specific ‘religious’ aspect of Caputo’s reading of Derrida. Hägglund starts with Derrida’s aforementioned idea of the impossibility of anything pure. According to Derrida, religions are problematically founded on the idea of “the unscathed” (Derrida 2002, 84), “the pure and the untouched, the sacred and the holy” (Hägglund 2015, 180). Deconstructing this religious notion of the ‘pure good’, Derrida develops a concept of ‘radical evil’. This notion, in short, holds that the good always bears evil within itself, and hence there cannot be a ‘pure’ distinction. Therefore, to Hägglund, Caputo’s distinction between the conditional and unconditional is a religious one, in Derrida’s negative sense, preserving an untenable notion of pure good. To Hägglund, the unconditional is not something of a different order to strive for,

but better understood as the inevitable confrontation with alterity within the conditional order (idem., 193). The event is not a call, but “what comes about in an unforeseeable and singular manner” (Derrida 2002b, 146), which is indifferent and could as well form a threat as a promise. Hence, Hägglund does not share Caputo’s plea for openness to the event, but treats it as something one inevitably has to deal with.

Reflecting on the debate between Caputo and Hägglund, DeRoo (2018) concludes that this dispute comes down to the question what deconstruction ultimately is. For Hägglund it is primarily a neutral logic, a way of analyzing constructs. For Caputo this indifferent logic is an irreducible part of deconstruction (Caputo 2010, 187), but only a part. The other part consists of something extra-logical and concerns to what end this logic is applied. It is not the logic of deconstruction that commits it to affirmation, but the context in which it is employed (DeRoo 2018). In the case of Caputo, the religious context is ‘primed’ to favor certain things over others (idem.). This, for DeRoo (2018), highlights the difficulty of reading Derrida. There cannot be a ‘pure’ distinction between logic and extra-logical context, and neither can logical distinctions be abandoned. Hence, in the following, I will work with Caputo’s interpretation of deconstruction, knowing that its distinctions can be problematized.

Discussing those contrasting perspectives underlines the deconstructionist’s conviction that Caputo’s idea of deconstruction is not a neutral, nor self-evident interpretation of Derrida. While discussing its truthfulness to Derrida lies beyond the scope of this paper, the point is to illustrate how Caputo gives Derridean deconstruction his own religious turn in speaking of an unconditional, undeconstructible order of the promise. Hägglund’s critique helps to sharpen the understanding of this particular, affirmative interpretation.

To conclude, Caputo’s understanding of deconstruction is deeply affirmative, affirmative of the promise of the unconditional event. It turns on a certain concept which has an impure conditional form, a name *and* simultaneously bares in it an unconditional promise, an event. Deconstruction seeks to lay bare for the conditional form that it is just that, a constructed, conditional form and not a certain ‘pure’ essence. Hereby deconstruction keeps the name open to the event, which calls it for constant revision. Caputo employs this idea of deconstruction on the concept ‘religion’ and thus seeks to keep its conditional form, namely determinate religion, open to a certain undeconstructible promise. Returning to Caputo’s metaphor of deconstruction as writing with two hands, the following chapter, about determinate religion and its proneness to self-enclosure and identitarian violence, will be written by the critical left hand. However,

not without being followed by a consecutive chapter written by the affirmative right hand, on Caputo's affirmation of a undeconstructible faith in his postmodern religion without religion.

2. Caputo's Deconstructionist Critique on Determinate Religion's Identitarian Violence

"Events are menaced by great monsters who feed on their tender pulp, by large and overarching theories that would catch them in their sweep, organize them, make them march in step to some metaphysical tune or other, right or left, theistic or atheistic, idealist or materialist, realist or antirealist"

- Caputo (2007a, 48-49) -

The mission of deconstruction, for Caputo, is to keep conditional structures open to the irreducibly singular event, as I outlined in the foregoing chapter. This openness to the alterity of the event is threatened by the monsters of overarching theories. Those overarching stories, or metanarratives, to use the Lyotardian term, claim to know the ultimate point of things and hence every singularity can be compressed within this framework. The *tout autre* is contracted within the horizons of the same (Caputo 1997, 150). In this chapter, I examine how Caputo applies this deconstructionist critique to the totalizing mechanism of overarching stories of religion; the aspect that Caputo seeks to avoid in his religion without 'religion'. First, in 2.1, I describe Caputo's postmodern perspective on religion, by reflecting on his position toward modernist critiques of determinate religion. Subsequently, I examine Caputo's specifically deconstructionist critique, which focuses on the closure of determinate religion. Therefore, in 2.2, I further develop deconstruction's criticism of closing structures by discerning its political origin and its case against identitarianism. Then, in 2.3, I relate this critique of identitarianism to the metaphysical claims of determinate religion and its violence, where I come to the heart of Caputo's critique.

2.1 Caputo's Postmodern Perspective on Determinate Religion

With Caputo's critical search for a religion without 'religion', he stands in a long tradition of critiques of religion. His postmodern perspective must be discerned against the background of this tradition. Caputo explains his position with the help of a scheme of periodization, where he contrasts the position of religion in modernity with that in the postmodern condition. As a deconstructionist, he warns the reader in advance for the oversimplification of such an overarching story of periodization, but, with this warning, pursues it anyway, to accentuate his own postmodern position (Caputo 2019, 40).

For Caputo (2019, 44), religion became something problematic in the course of modernity, when philosophers from Descartes to Kant constructed the idea of the self-conscious subject. Rational subjects had to scrutinize their sensations and ideas, to separate external objects from merely internal, subjective, mental affairs (idem., 47). Religion failed to meet Enlightenment's tribunal of reason's criteria of 'objective' proof and demonstration and was thus banished to the demarcated domain of subjectivity (Caputo 2019, 61).

This Enlightenment critique was continued by the masters of suspicion (Caputo 2019, 63), who judged religion as a form of false consciousness (Crockett and Robbins 2018, 21). In short, this suspicion leads Feuerbach to judge God as a human projection that alienates humanity from itself (idem.). For Marx religion is a form of ideology, which functions as a superstructural tool to obscure the material bases of economic, political and social reality (idem., 18). From Freud's psychoanalytical perspective, it is a form of infantile neurosis (idem., 20) and for Nietzsche it is a means in the will to power (Caputo 2019, 64). In the core, their thought celebrates secularism and the Nietzschean 'death of God'.

Caputo (2007a, 67) is critical of the "increasingly dated expression" of the 'death of God'. He understands the death of God in relation to the postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives. Caputo (idem.) interprets it in terms of Nietzschean nihilism, "which means the historical process in which the objectivistic pretensions of metaphysics, of locating an absolute foundation, have withered or become incredible, that is, have emptied or weakened and been replaced by 'perspectives' or interpretative schemata" (Caputo 2007a, 74). Hence, it announces the absence of a single, overarching principle that explains things, in other words, a metanarrative (idem., 68), which makes Nietzsche a progenitor of postmodern philosophy.

Just like religion cannot make "objectivistic pretensions" to the 'Truth', neither can secularism. Feuerbach's theology as anthropology writ large, Freud's psychoanalysis, Marx' unyielding laws of dialectical materialism and Nietzsche's will to power, to Caputo, are *also* perspectives, *also* constructions, or fictions of grammar (Caputo 2007a, 47; idem., 2019, 64). In their attempt to break down religious metanarratives, they made the mistake of creating a new overarching story of the secularist progress of humanity, in which it liberates itself from irrational religion. One could say that in this specific sense, secularists have only created a new religion, one of sacred Reason, whose appeal to a metanarrative, like that of determinate religion, is greeted with incredulity in the postmodern condition.

Caputo's postmodern critique of the definitiveness of modernity's death of God results in a moment where secularism does not have the final say, a moment Caputo (2007b, 133) calls "post-secular". In this moment, where there are only conditional viewpoints, non-rational

religious ideas resurface in a competition of other interpretations. Enlightenment's transcendental 'Pure reason' makes place for good reasons (Caputo 2019, 69). This does not mean that Caputo's postmodern position completely rejects modernity, rather, in a postcritical sense, it has passed through modernity. Caputo seeks to become enlightened about the Enlightenment (Caputo 2007b, 132-133). While rejecting Enlightenment's pure reason's transcendentalism, he picks the fruits of modernity in his conviction that to think clearly about religion, one needs to set aside supernaturalism and magic, to see it as a historically inherited symbolic system (Caputo 2007b, 144; 2019, 51). In conclusion, for Caputo, as a postmodern philosopher, both religion and modernity need to be deprived of their metanarratives.

To understand the further development of Caputo's critique on determinate religion it is important to note that he practices a certain version of postmodernism, which he distinguishes from an "abridged version of postmodernism" when it comes to religion (Caputo 2012, 271). Both versions share a postmodern critique of modernist rationality (idem.). However, the abridged version celebrates the post-secular moment in what Caputo calls a "defensive" way (idem., 276). In this defensive way, the post-secular moment is understood as a moment where religious beliefs are no longer inferior, because they cannot 'objectively' be proven wrong. In contrast, Caputo's 'unabridged', deconstructionist version takes the postmodern emphasis on conditionality further. It emphasizes that the concepts of 'religion', 'faith' and 'God' are names, constructed in a historical context, and hence deconstructible (idem., 302). Therefore, Caputo (idem., 276) ultimately has no interest in making a case against the transcendent existence of a metaphysical God, but is rather interested in what is going on in the notions of 'religion', 'faith' and 'God'. It is here that he strikes a critical pose.

2.2 Deconstruction and Identitarianism

Thus far, I have focused on Caputo's postmodern hermeneutical incredulity towards metanarratives and explained that this is not where he ends, but rather the starting point of deconstruction. As a deconstructionist, committed to the opening of structures in favor of the event, he argues that those overarching stories are not only implausible, but also violent.

This position goes back to deconstruction's sociopolitical background. Its development traces back to the second half of the twentieth century, the epoch of the strong nation-state. Explaining the political dimension of deconstruction's mission, Caputo (1997, 231) states: "The idea behind deconstruction is to deconstruct the workings of strong nation-states with powerful immigration policies, to deconstruct the rhetoric of nationalism, the politics of place, the metaphysics of native land and native tongue... the idea is to disarm the bombs... of identity

that nation-states build to defend themselves against the stranger, against Jews and Arabs and immigrants”. Thus, Caputo (1997, 126) summarizes, deconstruction means the “delimitation of totalization in all its forms”. Deconstruction is engaged in disassembling the closure of actual communities, the narratives of a certain purity to protect, and the exclusionary functioning of community identity formation. Here, I explain the root of this exclusionary mechanism in terms of the archive, before relating it to determinate religion in the third section.

To Caputo and Derrida, the evil of this closure has to do with the idea of an archive (Caputo 1997, 264-265). Caputo notes that the word ‘archive’ houses within itself the memory of its root *arche*. The *arche* is the origin, “the beginning, either in the sense of a physical, metaphysical, or historical origin” (idem., 264). The archive is not the *arche* but the trace of the origin; a conditional trace of the unconditional, in Caputo’s scheme. Problems arise in a failure to remember the distance between the trace and the original, which Derrida (1973, 104) calls *le mal d’archive*, or “archive fever”. He argues that we have to confess that the *arche* always slips away and therefore we always have to do with archives and traces. This echoes Derrida’s aforementioned irreducible plurality of meanings and the unattainability of one ‘true meaning’. Likewise, it reiterates the aforementioned Nietzschean nihilistic movement from objectivistic pretensions towards interpretative schemata, but adds a deconstructionist sensitivity to self-enclosing structures.

This aspect of archive fever is further developed in the meaning of archive as a house, an *arkheion*. Caputo (1997, 265) pursues the metaphor into this house, where the archival records are stored and which is overseen by the *archons*, the keepers of the house. This bares the danger of the “politics of the archive” (Derrida 1995, 10-11), where *archons* protect the ‘official story’ and there is no space for the alterity of the event (Caputo 1997, 265). According to Caputo (idem), “such archive fever may be recognized by the claim that “we” are the exclusive depository, the uniquely chosen archive of the Truth”. Hence, archive fever can be seen as the root of every ‘identitarianism’ (idem).

What Caputo means by this identitarianism is illustrated by his deconstruction of the concept of community. Caputo detects its origin in a military formation, where people construct a common fortification (*com, munire*) around themselves against the other (1997, 271). This gathering into itself of the ‘same’ is never without violence, states Derrida (1995, 50), “nor is the self-affirmation of the Unique”. Thus, this fortification brings forth two interwoven occurrences of violence. Internally, alterity is repressed, to form a homogeneous unity. Then, based on this internal unity, the external other can be excluded, in order to guard the community’s purity and the uniqueness of its archive. Hence, deconstruction pleads against

identitarianism, for its closed structure refuses to see the other, “the other others and the others in oneself” (idem).

2.3 Caputo’s Critique on Determinate Religion’s Metaphysical Identitarianism

Caputo (2007b, 136) shares Derrida’s deconstructive impulses, but deploys his impulses on different materials, namely in the field of religion. Within the foregoing critique on identitarianism, the step to religion was never far away. Yet, determinate religion by its nature is vulnerable to a specific and strong type of archive fever. First, I point out this specifically religious element, to then examine its danger in relation to other identitarianisms.

The core of specifically religious identitarianism lies in an alternative understanding of the *arche* and the archive. Determinate religion’s idea of revelation is at odds with Derrida’s clear distinction between the *arche* and the archive. In determinate religion’s dominant historical view, the *arche*, the origin, does not always slip away, like Derrida claimed, but is present in divine revelation. Hence, scripture is not merely perceived as *an* archive, a trace, but as a privileged link to the *arche*. Thus, Caputo’s (1997, 265) sign of archive fever, namely the claim that “‘we’ are the exclusive depository, the uniquely chosen archive of the Truth” in the case of determinate religion, gets a strong, divine justification, which distinguishes it from other forms of identitarianism like nationalism and racism.

This metaphysically privileged position, for Caputo, is not just violent in the sense of repression of alterity and exclusion, but moreover provokes the actual spilling of blood. According to Caputo (1997, xxi), determinate religions that anoint themselves to be God’s chosen people are “consummately dangerous to everyone else who is not so chosen”, waging endless wars, spilling the blood of the other (idem.) and committing the worst atrocities in God’s name (idem., 287). Determinate religions, having been given a Book, “always use them to spell war not peace” (idem., 307).

Writing his *Prayers and Tears* at the end of the twentieth century, Caputo (1997, 154) sees a return of religion and religious violence. Religion “resurrected in its ugliest form in the resurgence of fundamentalisms that spill the blood and destroy the civil liberties of people around the world” (Caputo 1997, 134). This is not a return in a post-modern, but a thoroughly anti-modern, violent form (2019, 110). It returns not as a matter of private piety, to which secularist modernity attempted to reduce it, but has returned as a public, political affair (idem., 123). Hence, Caputo discerns a resurgence of religion in the form of fundamentalism, without being sensitive enough to the difference between those two in the *Prayers and Tears* (1997). In chapter four I will return to this criticism.

Caputo describes the return of religion in terms of a vengeance (1997, 154). For him, religion “is nurtured on historical tradition, on home and people and nation, on the bodily cycle of birth and marriage and death, on native language and idiom” (idem.). Hence, religion is nourished by what Caputo calls “its place” (idem.). Accordingly, Caputo witnesses a violent reaction to religion’s loss of place in modernity. This being threatened in its place, for Caputo (idem.), explains the rise of fundamentalist violence, which goes together with other identitarianisms, like nationalism. For example, he identifies the fundamentalist violence in Algeria as a violent reaction to Islam’s loss of place due to the “world-historical process of the Latinization and Romanization of the globe, a ‘world-Latinization’” (idem.). To further illustrate this, Caputo names the Gulf war (1997, 205) and the conflict over Jerusalem (idem., 134), to which he adds the more recent examples of the slaughter of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh (Caputo 2019, 114) and the Trump campaign (idem., 120). Thus, bringing those examples back to the story of the archive, the violent return of religion can be understood as the resistance of (self-)anointed *archons*, to safeguard the ‘pure’ common fortification of the archival treasure “uniquely entrusted to them” (Caputo 1997, 272).

In conclusion, Caputo’s critique of determinate religion is embedded in a critique of the “great monsters” of metanarratives, which he mentioned in the opening quote (Caputo 2007a, 48-49). By their claim to know the ultimate point of things, they “feed on the tender pulp of the event” by compressing irreducible alterity into the horizon of a single closed overarching story. In the opening words of Caputo (2007a, 48-49) they “make them march in step to some metaphysical tune or other, right or left, theistic or atheistic, idealist or materialist, realist or antirealist”, of which both sides of the spectrum were illustrated in the first section. Deconstruction emphasizes how this claim to the absolute Truth leads to identitarianism. In the case of determinate religion this identitarianism is enhanced by the claim that one archive has a privileged connection to the *arche* by revelation. This makes religion prone to violence in order to protect the ‘common fortification’ of the “uniquely chosen archive of the Truth” (Caputo 1997, 265).

Ultimately, Caputo has deconstructed what happens in the name of religion and encountered identitarian violence. Being committed to prevent structures from closing in on itself, to keep names open to the event, he seeks to disturb this identitarian side of determinate religion, by a deconstructionist religion that does not strive to decide the overarching horizon, but is open to the alterity of the event. To him, this is a distinction that “spells the difference between war and peace” (idem., 190). I examine this religion, a religion without religion, in the next chapter.

3. Religion without Religion: The Deconstructionist Religion of Saint Jacques

“‘What do I love when I love my God?’ Upon the groundless ground of this beautiful and bottomless question, which is as much as a sigh and a hope and a prayer as a question, quid ergo amo, cum deum meum amo?, Derrida’s life and work is an extended commentary”

- Caputo (1997, xxii) -

The foregoing critical analysis of the identitarian and violent side of determinate religion is not an isolated critique for Caputo, but a first step in a deconstructionist desire for what is undeconstructible within religion (idem., 118). He finds inspiration for a postmodern mode of thinking about religion that “safeguards the irreducibility of the event” (idem., 53), in the way Derrida speaks of “my religion” in his *Circumfessions* (Derrida 1993, 154). This is a contraction of his circumcision and confessions. In this chapter, I take those two elements from the life of Derrida to illustrate Caputo’s religion without religion. First, in 3.1, by an inquiry of the motif of circumcision, I point out how Caputo’s religion without religion seeks to distance itself from the self-enclosing incision of determinate religion. Subsequently, in 3.2, I examine how, pondering over the Augustinian question “What do I love when I love my God?” (St. Augustine 1960, 10:6-7), Caputo discerns an alternative understanding of religiousness, without religion, in a certain undeconstructible faith.

3.1 Circumcising Exclusivity

In the book *Jacques Derrida* (Bennington and Derrida 1993), Geoffrey Bennington attempts to create a systematic compendium of the work of Derrida. However, his part is only written on the upper half of the page. Being a deconstructionist, on the lower half, Derrida disrupts this totalizing with the events of personal memoirs, his *circumfessions* (1997, 282). Surprising, to Caputo, is the disclosure of his personal relation to religion (idem., 283). Derrida is born into an Algerian Jewish family and circumcised on his eighth day. Yet, he says to “rightly pass for an atheist” (Derrida 1993, 155), and has a gentile wife and uncircumcised sons (Caputo 1997, 283).

Caputo’s interpretation turns on this ‘rightly passing for’. He does not say he is an atheist, although he would be judged one by the standards of determinate religion. No, Derrida confesses to have his own religion, one “about which nobody understands anything” (Derrida 1993, 154). He speaks of a “constancy of God” in his life, “called by other names” (idem., 155)

and has an “absolved, absolutely private language” in which he speaks of God all the time, is Caputo’s thesis (Caputo 1997, xviii).

Accordingly, Derrida lives in the scission between being marked by the cut *of* Judaism on his eighth day and the following cut *from* Judaism. Thus, the cut of circumcision is a central motif in his religious life. Derrida himself has reflected on this theme in his work *Shibboleth* (Derrida 1994). *Shibboleth* is a Hebrew word that was used as a test by the Biblical Gileadites to detect the fleeing Ephraimites (Caputo 1997, 250). The Ephraimites were not able to pronounce the *sh*, which was necessary to earn a safe passage across the Jordan (idem.). Hence, a *shibboleth* is a simple diacritical difference and identifying mark (idem., 251), which can spell the difference between belonging and not-belonging. It turns on the two senses of *partager*, explains Derrida (1994, 67-68): one in the sense of partaking, the other in the sense of parting from the other.

Derrida does not deny the singularity of differentiation from the other. He argues: “there must be circumcision” (idem.), but with a difference, adds Caputo (1997, 252). Caputo explains: “The demand for circumcision cannot be denied but it can be cut, itself circumcised, its exclusionary powers cut off” (idem.). The cut itself opened up can be understood as an opening, an opening to the other (idem.). Opening up the self-enclosing dimension of circumcision, circumcision in this second sense can be understood as another name for deconstruction, notes Caputo (idem., 262). Hence, his religion without religion involves a circumcising deconstruction of determinate religion’s exclusive circumcision, to open it up to the other. This dedication to the other is further developed in terms of a confession, a confession without truth.

3.2 Confessions of a Religious Passion for the Impossible

Jacques Derrida is circumcised and in his own words “de-circumcised” (Derrida 1993, 224). This break cannot be made cleanly, for, to Derrida (1987a, 83-119), the clean cut is impossible. In the tension between the worlds of the young Derrida, “a little black and very Arab Jew” (1993, 58) and Derrida the “cosmopolitan secular French philosopher” (Derrida 1995a, 343-344; Caputo 1997, 284), a certain “my religion” (1993, 154) exists, argues Caputo (1997, 284) to which Derrida confesses in his *Circumfessions* (1993). However, this is not a confession *to* truth, for to Derrida we are ‘cut’ from the truth (1993, 314), but rather a confession *without* truth (Caputo 1997, 284).

In his confessions, Derrida relates himself to the confessions of his North African “compatriot” Saint Augustine (Derrida 1993, 18). Caputo (2007, 50) embraces this connection to portray Derrida as a “complicated version of a certain Augustine”; not as the orthodox bishop,

but as a “postmodern Augustine”. It is in the reflections of this “quasi-Augustinian Jew” (Caputo 1997, 283), born on the Rue Saint-Augustin, who speaks of God all the time in his own private language (Derrida 1993, 155-156), that Caputo detects a certain religion without religion.

Writing on the Augustinian question “What do I love when I love my God?” (St. Augustine 1960, 10:6-7), Derrida (1993, 122) asks himself “Can I do anything other than translating this sentence by Saint Augustine into my language. . . the change of meaning and of reference turning on the *meum*?” This question, to Caputo (1997, 287), is the “question of all questions”. For Derrida, rightly passing for an atheist, it is not a matter of theological analysis (idem, 288). ‘His’ God is not a transcendent being (idem.). Rather, Derrida (1993, 118) confesses: “I’m mingling the name of God here with the origin of tears”. In Caputo’s (1997, 332) interpretation, God thus has to do with our prayers and tears, our desire.

Desire has to do with the play between what exists and what does not. Having a desire means that the current, conditional existence is disturbed by something that *is* not yet. It is fed by the power of what does not exist, but what solicits and disturbs us anyway (Caputo 2007a, 57). This is exactly how Caputo described the event. Hence, the desire Caputo writes about is not a desire for the neighbor’s car, but has to do with something more open-ended like the event. That is why the desire Caputo speaks about must be understood within the framework of the conditional and the unconditional, as described the first chapter. It is not the desire for what is possible within our reasonable horizon of expectation, which belongs to the conditional future present. Rather, Caputo (1997, 170) speaks of a “desire beyond desire”, a desire for the *tout autre*, for the event. It is a desire for what belongs to the absolute future and is thus not straightforwardly possible, which Derrida (1991, 29) calls “*the impossible*”.

Derrida not only *desires* the impossible. In *Circumfessions*, he confesses that he has been praying all his life (Derrida 1993, 39-40; 56-58). But to whom does this quasi-Augustinian Jew, who rightly passes for an atheist, pray, pray for the impossible to come? While prayers within determinable faiths have an addressee, Derrida “wanders in the desert” (Caputo 1997, 293). His prayers are directed to who knows where (idem.), for his confession is not one to truth, but one about being ‘cut’ from the ‘one encompassing truth’ (idem., 284). In the words of Caputo (idem., 337): “the lines of this alliance are traced outside the space of cognition”. For him (idem., 291), it is exactly this lack of an addressee that provokes prayer all the more. It is a prayer for the coming of the *tout autre*: *viens!* (idem., 296).

Hence, Derrida’s answer to the question “What do I love when I love my God?”, according to Caputo, is “*Je ne sais pas, il faut croire*” (1993a, 129). This is the faith that Caputo (1997,

338) proposes, a passion for something to come, “something I know not what”. One cannot say whether this is a passion for God or justice, for to Caputo (2007a, 148) God is an endlessly translatable name of what we love and desire. In the words of Caputo (1997, 338), “my God” is “tossed about by the waves of undecidability”, which, to him, does not mean “the apathy of indecision but the passion of faith”, a passion for the impossible.

Finally, let me make explicit how Caputo structures those ponderings over Derrida’s religiousness into a deconstructionist religion without religion. Essentially, Caputo has deconstructed the concept ‘religion’, where he found its conditional form of determinate religious beliefs functioning as a matter of identitarian violence, while recognizing an undeconstructible religiousness in Derrida’s open-ended faith. Hence, Caputo’s religion without religion turns on this distinction between determinate beliefs and indeterminate faith.

As argued in the previous chapter, in a nutshell, for Caputo, determinate beliefs involve metanarratives, which give the community a certain image of purity, around which it consequently closes in and which it violently defends against the other. In his religion without religion, Caputo seeks to escape this mechanism. This exclusionary, violent cut of determinate religion, for Caputo (1997, 250), is to be cut open to the other. His religion without religion, his open-ended faith, occurs by the grace of non-knowing. It confesses being cut off from the absolute truth and thus of knowledge of what is pure. Because hereby it evades the ‘religious’ yearning for the pure and untouched (DeRoo 2018), it does not close in on itself and is open to the other. For Caputo, this openness to the other is a matter of faith; an open-ended faith in the unforeseeable. Religion, in this sense, is a pact with the impossible, that which is not straightforwardly possible, but lures anyway (Caputo 1997, xx). Therefore, this religion without religion, for Caputo, is the best way to be open to the event, even calling it “the religion of the event” (Caputo and Dickinson 2012, 26).

Hence, Caputo’s religion without religion discerns a certain undeconstructible ‘religiousness’ without determinate religion; it is about an open-ended faith without determinate beliefs. Thus, the ‘without’ is fundamental. However, it is also contested. In the next chapter, I further dive into the logic of this ‘without’.

4. Religion with/out Religion: Haunting Pharmalogical Messianisms

“In a religion without religion, it is the without that continues to cause the trouble”

- Moody (2015, 123) -

Caputo’s deconstruction, as I have outlined so far, is fueled by a passion for the undeconstructible. I have laid out how his deconstruction of religion results in a critique on determinate religion’s exclusive identitarian violence towards the other, and leads to an affirmation of an open-ended faith underneath determinate beliefs, in a religion without religion, to disturb this violence. Hence, deconstruction’s passion for the undeconstructible encompasses a passionate case against violence. After having depicted both ‘religions’, it is time to face the troublemaker: the ‘without’. Caputo’s use of the ‘without’ is widely criticized, for in *Prayers and Tears* (Caputo 1997), he would have written off determinate religion as essentially violent. Soon afterwards, he tried to nuance his position, distinguishing between two types of violence. He argued there is a certain “archi-violence”, which is a matter of an inevitable structural condition of differentiation and an empirical violence, which actually spills blood (Caputo 2002, 146-147). However, his adherence to a perspective of violence when it comes to determinate religion is a reason for critique. Diving into different existing critiques in this chapter, I examine how Caputo’s religion without religion relates to determinate religion. In 4.1, I describe how Caputo himself initially positions his religion without religion in relation to determinate religion in *Prayers and Tears* (Caputo 1997). Subsequently, in 4.2, I discuss the issue of archi-violence, examining the critique that Caputo would “denigrate the particular” (Milbank 2004, 18), resulting in an abstract religion that is “evacuated of content” (Smith 2004, 59). Finally, in 4.3, I discuss the critique of Caputo’s alignment of determinate religion with empirical violence and describe the reformulation of his position concerning the relation of religion without religion to determinate religion.

4.1 Two Messianic Spaces

In the foregoing chapter, I have described the idea of Caputo’s religion without religion. What is left unattended is the status of this religion in relation to determinate religion. This status is formulated in the terms ‘messianic’ and ‘messianisms’; a distinction used by Derrida, which Caputo takes up with a critical difference.

In 1992, Derrida (1992, 25) began to use the concept ‘messianic’. He distinguishes determinate messianisms and an indeterminate messianicity (idem., 26). The two are different ways of relating to eschatology. A messianism fills in the eschatological hope. There is determinate content which shapes the hope for the coming of a particular messiah. Hence, determinate religions are messianisms. In contrast, the messianicity, or ‘messianic structure’ expresses deconstruction’s dedication to keep the future genuinely open. Derrida describes it as an “eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated” (Derrida 1994, 65). Thus, it does not fill in the eschatological horizon, because it does not want to compress the alterity of what is to come into the mold of what we can expect. Derrida asks himself the question what the relation is between the messianic and messianisms is. As Caputo (1997, 151) equals a certain understanding of the messianic to his religion without religion, this question can be read as concerning its relation to determinate religion.

Regarding the relation between the messianic and messianisms, Derrida (1996, 168-169) poses two possibilities, between which he says to oscillate. Either, “the religions of the Book are but specific examples of this general structure, of messianicity”, or they are “irreducible events which have unveiled this messianicity” (idem.). For Caputo, this would imply that the messianic is either a “condition of possibility that antedates the concrete messianisms which are but exemplifications of it” or an “abstraction . . . derived from the concrete messianisms” (Caputo 1997, 135).

Caputo problematizes these two options, because for him, Derrida hereby admits a “which-comes-first conundrum” into discussions on religion and deconstruction (Caputo 1996, 168). The problem is that “the whole discussion is framed within an assured set of distinctions - between fact and essence, example and exemplar, real and ideal, particular and universal - which is the whole point of deconstruction to disturb” (Caputo 1997, 138). Those dichotomies run contrary to the anti-essentialism that, for Caputo, shapes deconstruction. Deconstruction, for him, is about the irreducibility and singularity of the event, that is meant to disturb overarching stories of universals and particulars. Therefore, the first option, where messianisms are examples of a general structure, is problematic because here the messianic represents an overarching, universal metalanguage. This makes it no *quasi-* but a straightforward transcendental, argues Caputo (idem.). The second option, for Caputo, is self-contradictory. When the historical messianisms are treated as irreducible singularities, it is exactly this irreducibility that makes it impossible to abstract from it and conclude to a universal messianicity (idem.).

Rejecting both options, Caputo concludes there cannot be a clean-cut, rigorously maintained distinction between the messianic and concrete messianisms (1997, 141). A true, pure messianic or universal structure, for him, is a mistake, for it would be an ahistorical transcendental (idem., 142). Every messianic structure is constructed under determinate, historical conditions (idem.) and therefore cannot be a pure structure, but is always a historically structured structure (DeRoo 2018). Thus, it takes the form of a certain messianism (Caputo 1997, 142). Accordingly, Caputo (idem.) names Derrida's messianic "*one more* messianism, but one with a deconstructive twist". Hence, Caputo ends up in an "aporetic situation" (Caputo 2012, 321), where he understands the messianic, or his religion without religion, as an attempt to touch upon an underlying structure of concrete messianisms, while the messianic itself, at the same time, is a conditional messianism too.

4.2 Haunting Determination

The foregoing reflections ended in an acknowledgement of a necessary conditionality, which Caputo's messianic messianism cannot escape. Here, he touches upon the issue of archi-violence, which for Caputo (2002, 147) is "really just the necessity we are under". To live and communicate, we need to differentiate. Yet, what most commentators contest is how Caputo and his religion without religion relate to this archi-violent necessity of particularity, which marks determinate religion.

John Milbank (2004, 18) argues that the aforementioned distinction between a pure faith and confessional beliefs, between an indeterminate messianic and determinate messianisms, is a denigration of the particular. James K. A. Smith (2009) further develops this critique, accusing Caputo of 'purifying' faith from the particularities of determinate religion (Moody 2015, 124); an "allergy to the scandal of particularity" (Smith 2004, 59) resulting in an abstract religion that is "evacuated of content" (idem., 116).

However, Caputo does not recognize this fear of determination. On the contrary, for Caputo determination is at the root of deconstruction. It has no interest in ahistorical arguments about 'religion', 'faith', and 'God', but rather seeks out what those concepts mean and how they function in determinate linguistic and cultural traditions (Caputo 2012, 274). Thus, Caputo recognizes the importance of determinacy. Here, it is important to remind Caputo's ideas about names and events. As I described in the first chapter, the event itself is an empty promise without a conditional form, albeit 'impure'. It is this 'impurity' that for Caputo is the reason to adhere to the perspective of archi-violence. Speaking of archi-violence reminds us that our differentiation is a matter of construction and contingency. Our differentiations are a matter of

human archives, not of an unmediated ahistorical *arche*. Archi-violence in itself is marked by undecidability. For example, our constructed laws can result in more actual violence and can also protect against it. Hence, for Caputo, being aware of inevitable archi-violence, of our constructed, mediated differentiation, is necessary to prevent the actual violence “that excludes, excommunicates, silences” (Caputo 2018a, 150).

This adherence to a perspective of violence to what is determinate is contested. The critique was not that Caputo would *deny* determinacy, but that he *denigrates* it. Smith (2009, 8-9) notes about Caputo’s deconstruction: “though it *appreciates* the ineluctable nature of our finitude and particularity, it still seems to *evaluate* this situation as if it is regrettable, lamentable and problematic – variously associating the conditions of finitude with violence and injustice”. Smith (2009, 8-9) underlines this statement quoting Caputo: “I do not see how any religious tradition or theological language can take shape without violence . . .” (Caputo 2001, 307). Thus, while Caputo does not deny the importance of determinacy, his identification of determinate existence as violent is contestable. It would imply that being a human, by our necessity to differentiate, would mean “to be caught up in a web of necessary violence” (Cudney 2002, 42).

Hence, in this archi-violent sense, every determinate religion is by its existence violent. This brings us back to the question how then to think of Caputo’s indeterminate open-ended religion without religion, which by its indeterminacy aims to avoid the violence of determinacy. As described in the previous section, it must not be understood as an overarching, universal, abstract structure. Moreover, although by its constructedness it is also a messianism, it would also be a misunderstanding to think of it as an alternative to determinate messianisms (Caputo 2002, 127; 2010, 114). It is not a choice between pure messianic faith and determinate messianisms’ beliefs (Moody 2015, 131). According to Caputo (2018, 98), religion without religion does not even exist. Rather, it insists (*idem.*). To use Derrida’s (1994, 31-32) words, it is not a matter of ontology, of what *is*, but of ‘hauntology’, which pronounced in French are homonyms (Caputo 1997, 120). Hauntology disturbs the distinction between being and non-being. It is like a specter, which is neither present nor absent; not real, but real enough to disturb what is present (*idem.*). Therefore, religion without religion is not an indeterminate, uninhabitable alternative to determinate religion. The ‘pure’ faith as such does not exist, that would be contrary to the case against purity running throughout his deconstruction. Rather, it is a specter that haunts determinate beliefs.

Religion without religion as hauntology thus haunts what is conditional, which is what exists. By existing, we live by definition under conditions and are always in “some determinable faith

or another, some determinable socio-historico-linguistic world or matrix or another” (Caputo 1997, 68). In another interpretation of the aforementioned *mal d’archive*, Derrida says we are *en mal d’archive*, we need archives (Derrida 1995, 57). Therefore, Caputo (2012, 353) embraces Olthuis’s formulation of “religion with/out religion” (Olthuis 2001), as more sensitively recognizing both the “irreducible without” and our concrete historical conditions and therefore inherent archi-violence (Caputo 2012, 353).

4.3 Determinate Religion as a Pharmakon

Having examined the matter of determination and archi-violence, what is left is the other type of violence, the empirical violence that spills blood. Throughout *Prayers and Tears*, Caputo, closely associated determinate religion with this type of violence. Kuipers (2002) and Cudney (2002) problematize this alignment, questioning whether it is a historical or necessary violence. On this point, Caputo (2002, 147) admits a “great rhetorical failure in *Prayers and Tears*”, a failure to maintain the tension of the ‘without’. Hence, Caputo has written as if a clean cut between his religion without religion and determinate religion were possible, and thereby made the mistake of thinking in terms of ‘pure’ opposites, which is exactly what deconstruction seeks to lay bare. Nuancing his position, Caputo acknowledges that religious violence, in an empirical sense, is not a necessity, but a risk (2001a, 307). More sensitive to the undecidability of the with/out, Caputo proposes to speak about determinate religion with another concept he borrows from Derrida (1981), namely the *pharmakon*. Caputo understands the *pharmakon* as a drug that will cure unless it kills first (Caputo 2019, 106). Here he plays with the English word gift and the German *gift*, as poison (idem.) Hence, determinate religions are to be thought of as pharmalogical sites “of both poison and cure, violence and peace, exclusion and healing” (Cudney 2002, 46).

The difficulty with determinate religion, argues Caputo (2019, 126), is that the good and the bad have the same source. The ‘problem’ is that both spring from the depth of the unconditional (idem.). Religion, for Caputo, is a passion for the impossible, and the possibility of the impossible includes both the worst and best possible (Caputo 2019, 126). The unconditional inevitably lays claim on us, calls us, and therefore “the remedy is not to extinguish the depth dimension but to *distinguish* it, to interpret it” (idem.) and this is where deconstruction is necessary. The earlier quoted line “I do not see how any religious tradition or theological language can take shape without violence . . .”, continues “unless it is through and through marked by thinking and acting in a deconstructive style” (Caputo 2001, 307). Deconstruction’s religion without religion is thus meant to disturb determinate religion from taking its scriptures

as facts, always infusing interpretations with non-knowing and alterity and thereby refusing it to close itself off.

In conclusion, the ‘without’ in religion without religion might not be as harsh as Caputo made it seem to be in *Prayers and Tears*, but bears the mark of undecidability. Although Caputo adheres to a perspective of archi-violence, he admits that empirical religious violence is not a necessity, but an inevitable risk of responding to an unconditional call, that brings out and intensifies both the best and the worst. In this context, religion without religion functions as “a negativity that is nonetheless positive and productive” (Caputo 2001, 127-128; Moody 2015, 132). Caputo describes it as a ‘parasite’ (2019, 95), which fundamentally characterizes his religion without religion in a twofold way. First, it illustrates how religion without religion is neither an overarching, nor an alternative religion, but a specter that haunts determinate religion. Second, Caputo notes that parasites are crucial for health (idem.). Reminding determinate religion of its contingency, the specter of an underlying open-ended, non-knowing faith must dismantle determinate religious’ self-enclosing purity narratives, to defuse their risk of identitarian violence and keep them open to the alterity of the other and the event.

5. Conclusion: Un/saving Religion

“Deconstruction is not in the business of defaming good names but of saving them”

- Caputo (1997, 5) -

In this conclusion I reflect on the relation between Caputo’s religion without religion and determinate religion through the lens of the theme of safety. “If deconstruction were a theory”, Caputo notes, “it would be a theory that nothing is safe, pure, clean, uncontaminated, monochromatic, unambiguous” (Caputo 1997, 225). Nothing is safe and undisturbed, not even deconstruction itself. Caputo did not keep deconstruction safe, as a neutral logic, but opened it up to “religious infiltration and subversion” (idem., 19), thereby determining deconstruction as a logic to be primed to affirmation. However, it is more accurate to say that nothing is pure or safe in the first place, and in that sense, Caputo would only have laid bare this ‘religious’ side of deconstruction.

Likewise, Caputo’s deconstruction of religion turns on this matter of safety. The false safety of taking religious beliefs for knowledge, paradoxically makes determinate religion unsafe, in the sense of identitarian violence. However, Caputo does not come around to disturb this unsafe safety. Rather, he aims to uncover the disturbingly unsafe religiousness of an indeterminate faith which lies at the root of determinate religion, but is covered by beliefs taken for knowledge of the absolute and accompanying identitarian violence to keep those beliefs safe.

Hence, the relation between Caputo’s religion without religion and determinate religion is marked by the theme of safety. In the words of Olthuis (2002, 5), Caputo aims to demonstrate that “the way to save the things we love is not to keep them too safe”. In Caputo’s own words: “deconstruction is not in the business of defaming good names but of saving them” (1997, 5). Religion, for Caputo, is one of those good names, which Caputo wishes to deconstruct, to keep safe by not keeping it too safe. However, there is more to this saving. One should remember that Caputo is a lover of the event. In his deconstructionist perspective, determinate religion is a provisional form for the event, a relatively stable structure. The event itself is restlessly seeking for new forms to assume and cannot be pinned down (Caputo 2007a, 47). Hence, Caputo’s commitment to religion is more precisely phrased as a commitment to the event going on in religion. Thus, what Caputo wants to save in religion, is not its current form, which adherents of determinate religions might want to be saved. Whether Caputo saves religion, thus depends on whose ‘religion’ is meant.

A consequent point concerning the saving of determinate religion, is that Caputo promotes openness to the event through a certain dis/association (Caputo 2001, 303-305). This dis/association is a twofold moment of “simultaneous association with and disassociation from a particular messianism” (Moody 2015, 134). By this dis/association, we partake in “first-order beliefs” and practices of confessional communities, which are historically handed down to us, and simultaneously maintain the “second-order discourse” of a deconstructive way of thinking about this participation (idem.). The question that haunts me is whether this dis/association is really possible. Is one really able to participate in a religion, while simultaneously acknowledging its radical contingency? This might be food for an interesting round table with philosophers, psychologists and anthropologists, and I hereby make a reservation for the first row of listeners.

In conclusion, I can see how Caputo’s deconstruction saves religion of its identitarian violence by un-saving it. However, for me, the question of whether Caputo’s religion without religion ultimately saves determinate religion’s continuation, stands or falls on our ability to live in a construction of which we know it is a construction. Is this possible? *Je ne sais pas. Il faut croire.*

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