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Caputo on Heidegger and ethics

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Abstract-Résumé

Evaluation of Heidegger's ethical thinking or "originary ethics" is necessary due to recent ethical questions resulting from Heidegger's biography. According to John D. Caputo, Heidegger does not care for the "other". This thesis analyzes Caputo's basis for those claims along with his rejection of Heidegger's notion that our relation to poetizing is needful for an ethics in a scientific, technological age. Heidegger's ethics of non-objectification offers hope with regard not only to the domination and oppression of humans but also for non-humans as well. Heidegger's understanding of 'technique qua metaphysics' is important for addressing the political claims of Caputo.

L'évaluation de la pensée éthique de Heidegger, ou "éthique originaire," est nécessaire à cause des questions d'éthique récentes reliées à la biographie de Heidegger. Selon John D. Caputo, Heidegger ne s'intéresse pas aux « autres. » Cette thèse analyse le fondement des appréciations de Caputo et son rejet de l'idée de Heidegger pour qui la relation à la poésie est essentielle à l'éthique dans un âge scientifique et technologique. L'éthique de la non-objectivation de Heidegger donne l'espoir non seulement face à la domination et à l'oppression des humains, mais aussi en ce qui concerne les non-humains. La compréhension de la 'technique en tant que métaphysique' de Heidegger est importante pour apprécier les revendications politiques de Caputo.

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Abbreviations*

AE	[C] <i>Against Ethics</i> , 1993.
AFW	[C] “A Final Word (Eight Famous Ones),” 1992.
AIM	[H] <i>An Introduction to Metaphysics</i> , 1959.
BaW	[H] <i>Basic Writings</i> , 1977.
BC	[H] <i>Basic Concepts</i> , 1993.
BT	[H] <i>Being and Time</i> , 1962.
DeH	[C] <i>Demythologizing Heidegger</i> , 1993.
DO	[C] “Disseminating Originary Ethics and the Ethics of...”, 1989.
DT	[H] <i>Discourse On Thinking</i> , 1966.
ED	[C] “Spirit and Danger”, in: <i>Ethics and Danger</i> , 1992.
EJP	Augustine. <i>Sur L'Épître de S. Jean “aux Parthes”</i> , 1983.
FCI	[C] <i>Foucault and the Critique of Institutions</i> , 1993.
GA	[H] <i>Gesamtausgabe</i> .
GGP	[C] <i>God, the Gift, and Postmodernism</i> , 1999.
HA	[C] <i>Heidegger and Aquinas</i> , 1982.
HeI	R. Polt. <i>Heidegger: An Introduction</i> , 1999.
HEP	J. Derrida. “Heidegger’s Ear: Philopolemology,” 1993.
HeS	[C] “Heidegger’s Scandal,” 1992.
HG	[C] “Heidegger’s God and the Lord of History,” 1983.
HOE	[C] “Heidegger’s Original Ethics,” 1971.
ID	[H] <i>Identity and Difference</i> , 1969.
LaD	F. Schalow. <i>Language and Deed: Rediscovering Politics...</i> , 1998.
LoPh	[C] “Loosening Philosophy’s Tongue: A Conversation...”, 2002.
MaH	A. Milchman and A. Rosenberg. <i>Martin Heidegger...</i> , 1996.
MEHT	[C] <i>The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought</i> , 1978.
MELH	[C] “Meister Eckhart and the Later Heidegger,” 1975.
MRH	[C] <i>More Radical Hermeneutics</i> , 2000.
NFT	J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb. <i>New Frontiers in Theology</i> , 1963.
OaG	[C] “Only a God Can Save Us”, 1976.
OBI	[C] “On Being Inside/Outside Truth,” 1992.

OL	[H] <i>On the Way to Language</i> , 1985.
PeG	[C] “People of God, people of being;...,” 2000.
PLT	[H] <i>Poetry, Language, Thought</i> , 1965.
PrR	[H] <i>The Principle of Reason</i> , 1997.
PT	[C] <i>The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida</i> , 1997.
PTH	[H] <i>The Piety of Thinking</i> , 1976.
QuE	C. E. Scott. <i>The Question of Ethics</i> , 1990.
RaH	[C] <i>Radical Hermeneutics</i> , 1987.
RO	P. L. Bowden. <i>Relations with Others</i> , 1987.
RW	[C] “The Rose Is Without Why”, 1971.
SD	[C] “Spirit and Danger”, 1992.
TB	[H] <i>On Time and Being</i> , 1969.
ThR	[C] <i>The Religious</i> , 2002.
TPTC	[C] “Toward a Postmodern Theology of the Cross,” 1999.
WT	[H] <i>What Is A Thing?</i> , 1967.

*[C] = John D. Caputo; [H] = Martin Heidegger.- Other abbreviations are indicated in Siegfried M. Schwertner, *International Glossary of Abbreviations for Theology and Related Subjects*, 2nd ed. (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), xli + 488 p.

Preface

This study examines the ethical dimension of John D. Caputo's analysis of Heidegger. How does Caputo use ethics to further our understanding of Heidegger's thought? Is Caputo's standard of ethics the same as the philosophy of ethics found in Heidegger's "Letter On Humanism"? When Caputo speaks of Heidegger's ethics or lack of ethics, does he take into consideration Heidegger's own views, or does he bring a different ethical element into the discussion? What are the consequences of Caputo's ethical critique for the development of theological thought in connection with Heidegger?

Introduction

For ethics is nothing other than a structure of meaning, an aspect of the unfolding of the one and indivisible theme of theology, of the subject matter of faith, which is such as to place a claim upon us, and hence requires explication and illumination in the sense of ethical reflection. (NFT 102)

Post-Holocaust issues have become the driving force behind current analyses on Heidegger. In the aftermath of the horrors of suffering a certain responsibility to respond has arisen which cannot be sidestepped. Given Heidegger's brief involvement with the Nazi Socialist Party (NSDAP), current investigations of his philosophy and biography have become prevalent. The recent rejection of the compatibility of Heidegger's philosophy with Christianity's biblical roots results, no doubt, in part from the interplay of Heidegger's association with Nazism. A renewed interest and effort is being taken to re-analyze Martin Heidegger's works. Previous standpoints have to be reevaluated, and Christian theologians have to reassess the connections and usefulness of Heidegger's philosophy to Christian faith.

Heidegger's themes and language have close affinity to Christian thought and have been utilized by Christian theologians. The dialogue by James M. Robinson initiated in the 1960's set the stage for questioning the understanding of Heidegger's notion of God and religion. The correlation between Heidegger's thinking and theological thinking has been the point of discussion among German and American

theologians as they have sought to uncover the validity of Heidegger's unique approach and its implications for systematic theology. The German and American discussion sparked lively debate that continues to this day to be relevant for the theologian in terms of the similarity of structure found within the relationship of Being and Dasein, and God and the thinking within faith (MEHT 143-44). James M. Robinson revisited various themes such as "grounding and the nothing," the "claim of being," and "essential thinking" (NFT 11-13, 103-110, 122-23, 211). *Heidegger und die Theologie. Beginn und Fortgang der Diskussion* by Gerhard Noller is also an important exchange that deals with the significance of Heidegger's philosophy for theology by exploring themes such as "God and Nothingness." Further stimulus to a revival of interest in Heidegger's thought has come from the American approach seeking to equate ethics with religious issues. This movement, combined with the difficulty of Heidegger's biography, has led to the change of emphasis in the literature on Heidegger today and has resulted in prolific ethical discourse. Robinson and Noller's earlier constructions, though, continue to be useful for a definitive discussion of ethics in relation to Heidegger and can be traced in contemporary critiques. Whereas Heidegger's work has been viewed from philosophical perspectives, now there is a shift revealing that his writings are also of social, political and ethical importance.

A survey of John D. Caputo's perspective on Heidegger reflects the present shift of focus on Heidegger. Caputo belongs to those showing a continued interest in the religious aspect of Heidegger's thought. With the increasing literature addressing Heidegger's religious position, Caputo approaches the question of the divine in Heidegger by addressing the question of ethics. Caputo's primary critique focuses on

Heidegger's understanding of the relation between faith, reason, and ethics. The ethical component of his critique addresses holocaust matters, but suggests a more complete understanding of Heidegger's thought.

Caputo's unique contribution centers on the "overlooked" aspects of Catholicism and Scholasticism in Heidegger's thinking (HA 17). Caputo highlights Heidegger's beginning preparation for the priesthood and accentuates the particular influence of Catholic thought on Heidegger. Heidegger returns to initial thoughts coming from these particular sacred influences. Although Heidegger's thought has its roots in Catholic thought, Caputo shows the points of departure from it, which in turn, effects a changing – and in Caputo's mind, sometimes dangerous course for Heidegger's life and thought.

Chapter 1

Originary Ethics

By “original ethics” (*ursprüngliche Ethik*) Heidegger means that “thinking” which is directed at man’s mode of “dwelling” (*Wohnen*) in the “world.” *Ethos* means for Heidegger man’s abode, man’s mode of being-in-the-world. Original ethics therefore does not have to do with conduct which is measured by a rule - which would be for him a derivative, “metaphysical” sense of the word ethics. Now man’s mode of dwelling is ultimately determined by his relationship to Being, which is itself based upon whether we are “thinking” or not. (MEHT 256)

1.1 Survey of the Literature

A survey of literature on Heidegger and “originary ethics” (“*ursprüngliche Ethik*”) points out different elements worth mentioning. Charles E. Scott poses the question: does Heidegger fail to question the ethos? (QuE 148-172) If the German community that shaped Heidegger’s thinking is not questioned, could that lack have led to the nationalistic tendencies and thus to the human atrocities of the National Socialist Movement? Through a survey of Heidegger’s Rectorial Address (1933), Scott asks whether it is enough to find one’s ethos, and discusses Heidegger’s opinion that the way a given people dwell is allowed ultimate hierarchy in the way ethics is played out. The essence of the German people as a culture and the recovery by the Germans of their lost heritage from among Greek thinking is the pursuit of an ethics in Heidegger’s framework. A nationalism tied with ethical meaning is for Scott enough for questioning the relevance of such an essence and for asking whether in fact it is not rather inessential.

Michel Haar in *Heidegger and the Essence of Man* questions Heidegger's focus on essence and asks whether humankind existed in other civilizations prior to the Greek beginning (Haar 1993, 174).

Frank Schalow in his ethical critique refers to Caputo who suggests that "in the deferral that transfers concern away from any enduring ethical standard, we discover the key to the *appearance* of a sense of 'justice,' namely, the heeding of its 'call' by cultivating the possible as possible" (LaD 120). "Seen in this light, an 'original' ethics does not consist simply of what it advocates for human praxis" (LaD 120). However, can there be an ethics that is not prescriptive? But does a prescriptive ethics cease to be ethics and start to be morality? Does not an ethic call for thought and action to work together? As Schalow indicates, thinking for Heidegger turns out to be an activity of the highest kind (LaD 121). Schalow suggests that "if Heidegger's dismantlement of the tradition is to continue to bear fruits for a postmodern age, then it must promote further exploration of the relation between thought and action" (LaD 105). Schalow's idea of "transgressing the barrier separating Heidegger's thought and ethics" will "allow the richness of the former to be experienced through its contribution to the latter" (LaD 113).

David Farrell Krell in his introduction to the "Letter On Humanism" raises the idea that originary ethics precedes the differentiation of thinking and praxis: "Returning at the end to the question of action, Heidegger claims that thought of Being occurs prior to the distinction between theory and practice or contemplation and deed. Such thinking seems of the highest importance to Heidegger - yet he warns us not to overestimate it in terms of practical consequences" (BaW 192). Is then "contemplation" merely "theory"?

Heidegger's concern with human relations and ethics is currently a source of debate and criticism. Although Heidegger identified with the German peasants in a way which characterizes his own upbringing, the complaint is made that he only hears "some others" (MaH 29). Robert John Sheffler Manning addresses Caputo's point about Heidegger hearing the call of Being but being unable to hear the call of people (MaH 22). These remarks indicate an exclusionary thinking in Heidegger which has also been emphasized by Richard Polt. He quotes Emmanuel Levinas in stressing Heidegger's lack of ethical responsibility to the "other": "To affirm the priority of Being over beings, is to subordinate the relation with someone, who is a being (the ethical relation), to a relation with the Being of beings, which is impersonal" (HeI 171).

Scott indicates in his analysis that he doubts we can hear each other well so long as we are saving the everyday from everydayness. For Scott, Heidegger, like everyone of us, was preoccupied with some things but not others, and never questioned the priority of Being itself. Heidegger's privilege and elevation must be interrupted, and it must be firmly stated that we are not saved by these sorts of things (QuE 186).

Within the analysis of other contributors dealing with Caputo's thought comes the question of whether Heidegger's ethics is adequate. With Caputo's critique that Heidegger is deaf to the cry of "others", or as Emmanuel Levinas has previously stressed, the "face" of others, do we just explain away the posthumous *Der Spiegel* interview, the infamous "agriculture remark", as well as his brief involvement (May, 1933 until March, 1934) with Nazism? Invariably the bearing of Heidegger's own personal biography enters and with that, his thought comes under judgment.

Caputo claims that the political realm is virtually excluded from Heidegger's ethics and that we have to look hard to find the *polis* situated within the community. Does the silence of Heidegger regarding ethics within the political sphere and the silence in connection to his own ethico-political doings bring questions to the notion of originary ethics? ¹

Caputo makes some interesting observations in his pivotal article on originary ethics which still provokes controversy today.² Citing a study by Renée Weber in his article on "Heidegger's Original Ethics", Caputo emphasizes the error of "blurring the distinction between the ontological and the ontic" (HOE 138). Weber, according to Caputo, fails to notice that Heidegger keeps open the distinction between the ontic and the ontological. Weber mistakenly links together man and Dasein, whereas for Heidegger, Dasein is not merely to be interpreted as man. "For man is *a being* and Dasein is the process by which a clearing is made so that beings may make an appearance...Dasein is not a being, but a process that comes to pass *within* a being (man)" (HOE 130). The ontic relationship of man with man is of interest to Weber, but Heidegger deals with Dasein and Being and their ontological relationship instead, according to Caputo (HOE 131). A focus on directives, axioms, and moral prescriptives ignores Heidegger's originary ethics which is instead concerned about the "bond between Dasein and Being" (HOE 132).

¹ This is a question that comes later for Caputo, for within his earlier writings he addressed the often posed implications of Heidegger's thought in connection with his political involvement, and his article "Heidegger's Original Ethics" was originally his own defense for Heidegger before the dossier of the '80's changed his mind.

² William J. Richardson recycles Caputo's argument against him in "Heidegger's Fall" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 69/ 2 (1995) 229-253, to stress the necessity of responding to ontological difference on Heidegger's own conditions.

Although these initial arguments Caputo makes are still valid with reference to originary ethics in conjunction with political claim, Caputo shifts to other aspects of originary ethics which interest him, namely, the bond between Dasein and Being. This particular bond is of interest for Caputo for it is the launching pad for what he says later about ethics and obligation:

One detects the flavor of an “obligation” in much of what Heidegger says about Being and Dasein. Dasein “belongs” (*gehört*) to Being and so it must “heed” (*hört*) it. Being lays claim to (*in Anspruch nehmen*) Dasein, a claim to which Dasein must make response (*Entsprechung*). Being is that which is most worthy of thought (*Bedenklichste*). (HOE 134)

With the decision to move away from originary ethics as exposé of Heidegger’s ontological project and subsequent defense of political acceptability, to an emphasis on obligation, does that bring a different component to Caputo’s comprehension of Heidegger’s originary ethics?

James Carey’s Ph.D. dissertation on *Reembodying Original Ethics: A Response to the Levinasian Critique of Heidegger* is favorable to the notion of originary ethics, unlike most critiques, and advocates that “ethical action requires ontological understanding and ‘originary ethics’” (Carey 1995, 120). He argues that Caputo’s philosophy of the flesh is rooted in Cartesian understandings of the body and as such is lacking. Obligation to the other cannot be ethical without knowing what the body is or how it works (Carey 1995, 134). Re-embodied original ethics is an effort to “develop the fullness required to desire the other for the other’s sake” (Carey 1995, 19), in order to provide the inherent volition needed to display compassion and mercy, which makes this “ethos ethics” indispensable.

Caputo explores what is known as “originary ethics,” a major concern for Heidegger whose “Letter On Humanism” is indicative of how it has to be viewed.

Therefore, the “Letter On Humanism” is taken here as the main source for the analysis of Caputo’s understanding of Heidegger’s questioning of ethics. In this “Letter” (published in 1947) to Jean Beaufret regarding Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement, “Existentialism is a humanism,” Heidegger makes a short reference to an ethics prior to the time when ethics became a particular topic for philosophy qua metaphysics. Physics, logic and ethics in Western metaphysics were not distinguished in the beginning, Heidegger contends (BaW 232). Yet, he adds, prior thinkers were no less ethical, but they obviously were not interested in developing ethics apart from, for example, cosmology. Originary ethics existed before a metaphysical ethics of representation or an ethics that had to do with conceptual thinking.

Caputo points out that Heidegger is blamed for not holding to a metaphysical ethics. According to Caputo, such a critique misses the fact that metaphysical ethics was never Heidegger’s intention (MEHT 256). Such a misunderstanding on the part of most analyses is the reason why Caputo emphasizes and examines Heidegger’s own understanding of ethics. According to him, “Heidegger’s aim was to gain a higher or deeper ground than ethics, [...] a concern with human well-being, in order to get at something ‘more originary’ (ursprünglicher) than ethics, which is what he meant by ‘originary ethics’ (ursprüngliche Ethik)” (DeH 166). For Caputo, Heidegger’s “thought is neither ethical, unethical nor meta-ethical. It simply takes place in a sphere which has left all metaphysics and metaphysical ethics behind” (METH 236). However, moral directives, universal principles, and value judgments belonging to the metaphysical realm of ethics are not simply rejected and dismissed by Heidegger, although they are different from originary ethics. Caputo argues for a proper engagement with, and an assessment of

originary ethics before criticizing Heidegger. Rather than imposing evaluations incongruous to Heidegger's position, critiques need to be open to what Heidegger is getting at, for instance when he rejects humanism because of its metaphysical bent, quite particularly because, while humanism "considers human beings valuable", "it does not understand what it is to be human" (HeI 164-68).

In the "Letter On Humanism", Heidegger directs us to the misconceptions made of humanism, or logic, or values. Because these terms are considered positive, any opposition to them is presumed to be negative. Heidegger invites us to know what it is to think, when he states: "It ought to be somewhat clearer now that opposition to "humanism" in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas" (BaW 227). Heidegger's thinking is often misunderstood, as the following question by Frank Schalow suggests: "If values have such a positive connotation for us within our liberal culture and rhetoric, why should they appear so negatively for Heidegger?" (LaD 89). Questions such as these underestimate the heuristic strategy of thinking Heidegger uses, and divert us away from the whole notion of originary ethics. Another study by Peta Lyn Bowden aptly states of Heidegger:

By identifying the locus of co-being deep in the primordial structure of existence he penetrates the presuppositional ground of ethical values, and thereby delimits and liberates their possibilities. In this sense relationships with others are sustained in that caring attention and solicitude that frees each person for their own freedom, for their own self-interpreted possibilities. (RO 137)

Questioning the boundaries of thinking in no way rejects what is being questioned. Inquiring into the essence of something is what has to be thought. Originary thinking challenges the presuppositions of the thinking subject and with it the primacy of judging, and it questions the grounding of things. According to Caputo, Heidegger's

challenging of values by “originary ethics” is not campaigning for the value-less, but responds to the nihilistic, will-to-power philosophy (RaH 247) so prevalent in value ethics. Caputo’s position is: “Originary ethics is an important delimitation of value theory which stands value theory on its head [...] As the reversal of the ethics of values, originary ethics remains within the sphere of influence of the metaphysics of truth” (RaH 237).

As Heidegger’s “Letter On Humanism” suggests, for him, to think against something, for example, values, is “to bring the lighting of the truth of Being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects” (BaW 228). Heidegger highlights a primordial thinking as that thinking that points toward the truth of Being. Caputo elaborates this thought further:

For the truth of Being means nothing less than the way a historical people “dwells” (wohnen), that is, the constellation of art, science, and political arrangements within which they live out their lives [...] And so he rightly insisted that his “thinking” is a more originary ethics, which is better prepared to think what is all around us today than any bankrupt “theory of values.” (RaH 236)

Another author, Richard Polt in writing on Heidegger and originary ethics says: “Since to think is essentially to recognize Being, thinking turns out to be the highest form of action, for it is the deepest way to find our ethos” (HeI 170). In order to address the urgency of modern times, a responsiveness to the ethos is critical and basic. Caputo writes: “In originary thinking the only question is to discern what one’s ethos demands, never to found or rationalize it” (RaH 247). For Caputo, Heidegger underscores the necessity of understanding our present ethos. Ethics is fundamentally historical in character; the needs of each culture and time must be met (RaH 255-56). Originary thinking guards against the tendency to fixate axioms and prevent outdated measures for

living, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to carefully weigh compromising tendencies that excuse or ignore an articulation of Being. The balance that is called for remains as long as we are in harmony with our historical context, our communal existence, our thinking on the ethos, or the way a given people dwell, and are not subject to metaphysical rationality alone.

For Heidegger, the first and foremost task is to learn what it is to be human. A study by Milchman and Rosenberg indicates: “Our humanity lies in our essence... the essence of Dasein is Being-with-others” (MaH 27). Proceeding from this original concern for our neighbors we then acquire the ethical which substantiates Heidegger’s notion that ethics is “secondary, derivative” (MaH 31). Being-with-others means having concern for those who are near, those who are similar to us, those who live in our particular locale and in our time and destiny. We share a kinship and rootedness of being, a bonding which portrays the belonging that constitutes originary ethics.

The essential meaning of *ethos* is abode. Heidegger writes in the “Letter On Humanism”: “dwelling is the essence of being-in-the-world” (BaW 236). There may be a real literal lack of dwelling places, and homelessness. However, providing housing or shelter, although necessary, “threatens to blind us to the deeper need of *Heimat* (*Heimatlosigkeit*), which is the dwelling that is built by thinking” (DeH 137). Originary ethics refers to a more fundamental or essential thinking. Essentializing thinking thinks the “primordial destructiveness” behind nuclear bombs (DeH 140).

Following World War II, there was a desperate shortage of housing available in Germany. Heidegger reacted to the frenzied scramble to meet the pressing need for shelter, not because he was insensitive to the suffering, but because of the lack of

attention given to what it was that brought about homelessness. He saw housing provision as a temporary solution falling short of what dwelling is all about. Heidegger notes our failure to deal with the root of problems and our wish to settle for immediate solutions. This attentiveness to the essential is the reason for the emphasis Heidegger puts on originary ethics. Heidegger writes the following words in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* concerning being and being-there in history and whether we stand or are staggering: “We move about in all directions amid the essent, and no longer know how it stands with being. Least of all do we know that we no longer know” (AIM 202). Caputo mirrors this same passage when he writes: “The need for dwelling is not merely that we do not know the essence of dwelling but that we do not know that we do not know, that we do not know that this is necessary, what is needed most of all” (DeH 137).

A new ethos is needed in this day and age. “Such an *ethos* could come only as a gift; it could never be founded by merely human actions” (MaH 252). Modernity brings with it the need for a new way of dwelling on the earth. Heidegger is espousing a preparedness to respond to the claim. Caputo, however, forgets how central the experience with language is for Heidegger (OL 57). The call to be is ‘dwelling,’ properly understood. Likewise, homelessness has to do with the destruction of our relation to poetizing, which Caputo sees as scandalous (MRH 169-70). Caputo mocks Heidegger’s essentialism when he says: “To a world which had just witnessed the explosion of the first atomic device on a civilian population, that contemplated the prospect of the destruction of all human life on the planet, he said that the real destruction and the ‘greater danger’ really is to be found in the ruining of our poetic relation to things” (MRH 169).

Of central importance is Caputo's denigrating evaluation of Heidegger's relation to poetizing. Understanding Caputo's view of Heidegger's dwelling thinking is to contemplate Theodor Adorno's admonition against the "aestheticization of Auschwitz" (AE 183); that there is no poetry after Auschwitz (Adorno, 1973, 362). Caputo remarks, "Heidegger does not, as he claims, open up a dialogue of thinking and poetry, or expose philosophy or thinking to the otherness of the poet. On the contrary, as Veronique Foti has shown - I would say decisively, and authoritatively - Heidegger is intractably resistant to the density [...] of poetizing [...] Heidegger constantly 'deflects' what happens in poetry, Foti says" (AE 184-5). Caputo contends that Heidegger is removed from the "poetics of suffering or of the disaster" (AE 185). "His denkendes Dichten and dichtendes Denken are precisely the occlusion and deflection of the poetics of suffering, one might even say, its extermination in the name of phainesthetics, the extermination of everything jewgreek in the name of the higher, purer, more essential poetry of a mythical Greco-Germania" (AE 185).

The relation to poetizing and thinking is of utmost relevance for an understanding of Heidegger's originary ethics. The *Der Spiegel* interview provides us with clues that are easily overlooked:

Philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. That is not only true of philosophy but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The sole possibility that is left for us is to prepare a sort of readiness, though thinking and poetizing, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god in the time of foundering; for in the face of the god who is absent, we founder.³ (OaG 277 = GA 16, 671)

³ "Die Philosophie wird keine unmittelbare Veränderung des jetzigen Weltzustandes bewirken können. Dies gilt nicht nur von der Philosophie, sondern von allem bloß menschlichen Sinnen und Trachten. Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten. Die einzige Möglichkeit einer Rettung sehe ich darin, im Denken und Dichten eine Bereitschaft vorzubereiten für die Erscheinung des Gottes oder für die Abwesenheit des Gottes

Heidegger advocates that we need to prepare for the appearance of the divine by thinking and poetizing. What is this readiness for the occurrence or for the absence of the divine?

To engage in thinking and poetizing there must be readiness. How does the appearing or the absence of the divine bring in moral action? Is Heidegger some sort of modern day John the Baptist, as it were, calling in the technological wilderness and saying: prepare the way? This time is a time where we have left all readiness aside and seek instead solutions and answers. We look for principles that will guide us, but our reflection rests on things that have happened without meditating on the source. Creating a readiness means first of all an awareness to waiting which is a kind of action, albeit one that seemingly does not address the imminent and crying needs before us.

Readiness implies stopping from our dictating ways of addressing one situation or another, and instead listening to the meanings of what is on the surface, in order to get in touch with the ways in which we unknowingly try to master or control our circumstances. We are unaware of mindset and worldviews that dominate our thinking; everyone is in a rush for answers. Whereas for Heidegger, “questioning is the piety of thinking,” as he says at the very end of his lecture on “The Question Concerning Technology”. An experience of the divine or of the holy is not found in calculative realms that continue to heighten our preoccupation with representation and objectification.

Understanding originary ethics means to understand the following question and Heidegger’s answer to it: “Do we then have a right to the opinion that the thinking entry

im Untergang; daß wir nicht, grob gesagt, “verrecken”, sondern wenn wir untergehen, im Angesicht des abwesenden Gottes untergehen” (GA 16, 671).

into the essential source of identity could be achieved in a day? Precisely because this entry requires a spring, it must take its time, the time of thinking which is different from the time of calculation that pulls our thinking in all directions” (ID 4).

In the sixties already, James M. Robinson’s dialogue opened up the impermanence and indeterminacy characteristic of the experiential character of essential thinking:

But essential thinking does not arrive at results; it never arrives at a goal but always remains on the way. It is no establishing of facts from a distance but rather is experience, encounter. As such it is the essential act of man. It is a response to a claim. To be sure not every thinker and not every epoch stand under the same claim, but rather each great thinker has *his* path. (NFT 108)

1.2 Originary Ethics as Eschatological

How does Caputo respond to the notion of originary ethics? Is Heidegger’s insight on ethics another way to found an idea of humanity as such, such as Freud’s philogenetic theory, or Augustine’s doctrine of original sin? What about the origin of originary ethics?

Caputo is skeptical about all this talk of originary ethics. Originary ethics assumes that people did the right thing before ethics was created. For Caputo, that is a naïve assertion and there is too much glory given it. First, the question of the qualifying appendage “originary” which Heidegger allocates to ethics (LaD 108) is suspect. Caputo calls originary ethics a myth and he cannot reconcile the difficulty of the passage from originary ethics to ethics (MEHT 256). For him, there is no split between *ethos* and ethics; therefore, “[w]hy are we to privilege one over the other?” (RaH 251). Caputo’s strategy is to deconstruct the “privileged *ethos*” (RaH 248) and to relativize the

overemphasized status of the early Greeks. Caputo's task is to react to any exclusionary myth for his own purpose of exposing Heidegger's preferential tendency. Heidegger's favored Greek beginning of original ethics is, according to Caputo, a tale "prior to the subject-object split" which is interrupted by the *Ereignis* (DO 57).

For Caputo, ethics has always been there from the start (DeH 167). He dismisses originary ethics since it is an eschatological ethics. Eschatological ethics speaks of a primordial ethos and epoch. Caputo maintains that we are too far away from originary ethics to do anything but speculate. Heidegger is not actually able to reach back to another era, the primordial beginnings he espouses. Other viewpoints concur with Caputo on the fact that Heidegger's thinking "seeks too great of continuity between the recovery of the Greek *ethos* and its impact upon overturning the problems of modern existence" (LaD 92).

Caputo indicates Heidegger's eschatology, for example, by his use of eschatological (salvific) language and an eschatological figure when he states "only a god can save us" (RaH 255) in the *Der Spiegel* interview from Sept. 23, 1966. The notion of reaching back to some former epoch in order to retrieve an earlier elusive ethos coupled with waiting for the manifestation of the possible gift of the divine to occur leaves most critiques abandoning Heidegger's original ethics. Critics are skeptical of any attempt to fixate an origin within humanity, even one that is to be recovered. They are just as reticent to accept the ambiguity characterizing Heidegger's idea of the Holy sketched out particularly in the "Letter On Humanism" (1947), and the lack of applied action in which humans are to be involved with others.

Caputo brings something new to the study on originary ethics by arguing that Heidegger has an ethics, but that his ethics is eschatological. According to Caputo, in *Early Greek Thinking* Heidegger talks about the Anaximander Fragment. He points out that Heidegger's view of Being was not teleological like Hegel. The movement of the history of Being was toward the eschaton. The notion of it gets dark before the dawn, and then comes a new beginning. In all this, Caputo attests, Heidegger forgets concrete fates of individual beings or "facticity". Caputo also contends that the earlier work of *Being and Time* emphasized facticity but later it became mystified. Original ethics is like a 'grand récit', a meta-narrative which is hierarchializing, i.e. only a few have it; all great poetry is about the destiny of the history of Being.

Does original ethics leave the domain of facticity, or factual life? Or is Heidegger's facticity mistaken for mystification by the demythologizing process?

An essay by Robert Bernasconi raises a question concerning Caputo's interpretation of Heidegger. He indicates that Caputo reads "Heidegger's mythological account of the history of being as itself a historiological event," and because of this betrays Heidegger's own regard for "responding to the call of being" (PeG 25).

Caputo's standpoint is that Heidegger did spiritualize Being in his writings and he treated philosophical writings as sacred texts. Caputo intimates that Germany and the Germans become the promised land and people for Heidegger, and in so doing, the Jews are ignored. Heidegger's utilization of themes within the biblical tradition undirected to their proper source is also, Caputo thinks, a reduction of them. Using the same vernacular as the Hebrews, probably unaware of his doing, Heidegger, according to Caputo, repeats an uncanny resemblance to the Hebraic experience by inserting an

alternate story. This replication, on Caputo's telling, dilutes the Hebraic people of God and all for which they stand. He also emphasizes that the later works of Heidegger continually privilege the Greeks and neglect the fact that prior to the Greeks, there were Hebrews. Caputo criticizes Heidegger's repressed thought, he questions his "call" that is devoid of biblical "*hospitality and justice*" (PeG 99). Appealing to Heidegger's phainesthetics, Caputo argues that Heidegger's "alethiology leaves no room for a hagiology" (PeG 99). Drawing upon Zarader who points out that because Heidegger misses the distinctly Hebraic part of Western culture and has as a result reinstated another people, another language, and other origins, Heidegger, says Caputo, has "bootlegged" the Judaic tradition. Heidegger's earlier project of the hermeneutics of facticity is abandoned for "the essencing of presencing", for the *Wesen* taken verbally (PeG 86-87).

Caputo's argument is that delimiting metaphysical value theory needs also to be followed by openly disclosing Heidegger's originary ethics, by deconstructing his eschatology. For Caputo, the problem for originary ethics in thinking the truth of Being is that it is a place along the path that Heidegger passes by: "The meaning of Being ends up as the multiplicity of meanings - in the plural - which unfold in the history of the West" (DO 57). The truth of Being turns out to be that there are many truths of Being.

Heidegger goes beyond the truth of Being to the *Ereignis* which is what gives Being the truths of Being, according to Caputo. Caputo zeroes in on these manifold meanings or truths of Being granted by the "*es gibt*" in the *Ereignis*, and he underscores the radical plurality that results. "But if the originary *ethos* always comes back to the truth of Being, then there is no primordial *ethos* but only the manifold senses of *ethos*, of the various historical forms that dwelling takes. The dissemination of the truth of Being

implies the dissemination of the truth of dwelling, of originary ethics” (DO 57), and there are not only multiple meanings of Being, but multiple meanings of *ethos*. Caputo’s deconstruction disrupts Heidegger’s nostalgic recovery and repetition of some age-old unifying cohesion that existed. Furthermore, Caputo points to the fact that “[a] metaphysical eschatology still clings to originary ethics” (DO 57).

Fully radicalized, Heidegger’s thought moves beyond all the nostalgia and hope clinging residually to the talk of the truth of Being. A metaphysical ‘eschatology’ still clings to originary ethics. For it tells the story of a privileged and primordial *ethos* and the great beginning, prior to the subject-object split, and it looks ahead to a new dawn, which is to be an eschatological repetition and renewal of what began in the first dawn, before metaphysics and all metaphysical ethics. (DO 57-58)

According to the substitution of Heidegger’s originary ethics for value theory and metaphysical ethics, Caputo works out a deconstruction of Heidegger’s eschatology. Caputo’s intent is to elaborate an ethics of dissemination in order that freedom to come may release the play of multiple meanings of *ethos* and liberate the various senses of ethnological plurality. He does this by reintroducing *Gelassenheit* as “an ethics after metaphysics” (DO 59) “which is addressed to the sociology that is everywhere around us today” (DO 60).

1.3 *Gelassenheit* and Originary Ethics

The one point I would urge in dealing with Heidegger, however, is that he tends to be a little more interested in letting jugs and bridges be and to let it go at that, and he never quite gets around to letting *others* be, to our being-with others as mortals, to fellowship or community of mortals which I mentioned above. I do not think there is anything in what he says which excludes his doing this. He just never does. So we will do it for him and, by doing so, restore to *Gelassenheit* its ethical context. (RaH 267)

Within his analysis of Heidegger’s originary ethics, Caputo chooses to highlight the notion of *Gelassenheit* as crucial for an ethics. Apart from a small reference to

“letting be” of beings (BaW 238), Heidegger does not mention the word *Gelassenheit* at all in the “Letter On Humanism”, although he emphasizes it in his later works, particularly *Gelassenheit*, a Memorial Address given on October 30, 1955, honoring the 175th birthday of composer, Conradin Kreutzer (DT 43). It was published in 1959, and translated into English in 1966 as *Discourse on Thinking*. Divided into two parts, the Address and a dialogue, “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” form the basis of Heidegger’s understanding of *Gelassenheit*, or “releasement”. Heidegger writes concerning *Gelassenheit*: “Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it” (DT 55).

Caputo in understanding Heidegger, returns to Catholic sources of which Heidegger was immersed and traces their significance within Heidegger’s own thought. One of these pivotal religious influences upon Heidegger comes from the thought of the mystic, Meister Eckhart, a Dominican friar from the 14th century. The *Gelassenheit* that Caputo wants to introduce originates with Meister Eckhart. Eckhart’s language of *Gelassenheit* was utilized by Heidegger, although according to Caputo, the meaning has changed. The idea of Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*, or letting-be, is one that “liberates and sets free,” whereas, when Heidegger reintroduces *Gelassenheit*, “the emancipatory tone that announces the liberation of us all” is missing (DO 61). Caputo also attests that for Heidegger, the restructured *Gelassenheit* is the entry point of a danger in Heidegger’s thought which should not go unnoticed.

Caputo indicates that Heidegger borrows from Eckhart, using the term *Gelassenheit* to “name the sort of relationship we require in order to deal with the earth and sky and the gods, in order to let them be and thereby to let ourselves be, as ‘mortals’” (RaH 266). But Heidegger does not himself connect *Gelassenheit* with the unity of the fourfold in the *Discourse on Thinking*. Caputo observes that Heidegger is more interested in letting jugs and bridges be, but fails to let *others* be (RaH 266). “Otherness” is the basis of Caputo’s attaching equally opposing myths such as the important missing element of the community of mortals in making a critique about Heidegger’s inadvertent silence toward others. By creating an equally different myth and letting Eckhart’s experience of love dominate, *Gelassenheit* is then reinstated to its ethical dimension. Caputo’s aim is to create what is lost or missing in Heidegger’s thinking, to create a Heidegger against Heidegger.

With the move toward *Gelassenheit* in view of “others”, Caputo’s evaluation of Heidegger’s understanding of ethics overlooks Heidegger’s earlier notions from *Being and Time* such as care and being-in-the-world, and also *Mit-Sein*. In the “Letter On Humanism”, Heidegger writes that “[t]he reference in *Being and Time* (p.54) to ‘being-in’ as ‘dwelling’ is no etymological game” (BaW 236). What seems to be ignored by Caputo is the emphasis on the equiprimordiality (*Gleichursprünglichkeit*) of Heidegger’s *In-Sein*, *Mit- and Für-Sein*, *Aus-Sein- auf*, and *Sein-zu*. Through an analysis of Bultmann’s theological usage of Heidegger’s thinking, Maurice Boutin further elaborates the significance of the interdependence of the four-dimensional set of relations that is the core of a human being.

The correlates of this four-dimensional set of relations are: world, others, God, and the self. They cannot be deduced from one another, and of course they cannot be isolated from one another or even opposed to one another. These four relations simultaneously constitute human being, and the understanding of their correlates is given with the very fact (Dass) of being human. (Boutin 1992, 66)

Equiprimordiality is a possible area of development for understanding an ethics of otherness *within* Heidegger's thinking.

Gelassenheit is meditative thinking as opposed to calculative thinking (DT 46), which for Heidegger means releasement toward things and openness to the mystery. Yet, Caputo wants rather to introduce openness to the mystery of others. The reverencing of things is not to be compared to the wonder of the person, according to Caputo. It is as if the two could not be connected in any way. And, we might ask, what are we to do with Caputo's oversight of the biotic community in his fixation on "the other"? Does not Caputo exclude non-humans when adapting Heidegger's thought of the fourfold?

Does Caputo forget that Heidegger taught a different way of thinking about things? Our relationship to nature and the world is to be rethought especially in this modern technological era. Caputo's "jugs and bridges" critique does not allow for Heidegger's unique relation of man to thing and the world. When Heidegger is emphasizing "jugs" and "bridges", his thought is to move us from calculative and objectifying realms. We do not place objects in our horizon, they come out to meet us. Nature discloses itself to us and at the same time withdraws itself from us. Heidegger's position is to displace the way in which we tend to dominate and manipulate the world around us, and just such an idea exists as far as people are concerned.

"Otherness" or alterity is a concept Caputo uses like Levinas does. There is a "claim" which the other has on us. Caputo transmutes the understanding of Meister

Eckhart's wholly Other into his project concerning the *other*. "For Heidegger and Eckhart alike realize that the way to deal with the transcendent and 'simply other' reality (of God or Being) is not to deal with it at all, but to let it deal with us" (MEHT 25), says Caputo in 1978. In 1993, he uses this idea of "letting be" or *Gelassenheit* with reference to the *other*: "Here is something that we do not...lay claim to but that lays claim to us, that we do not...constitute but that is always already constituting us..." (AE 83). Caputo's reinstatement of *Gelassenheit* is first a return to Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*, and means, "letting God be God, letting him be - in yourself, in others, in everything - a very nonexclusionary idea" (DO 61).

"The soul which abandons itself to God does not consider how it will profit by its own actions, and so it is like the rose without why" (RW 7). The poem "The Rose Is Without Why" by the German mystic, Angelus Silesius (1624-77), is quoted here by Caputo:

The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms;
It thinks not upon itself, nor does it ask if anyone sees it. (RW 3)

Caputo indicates that Heidegger's Being and Dasein correspond to Eckhart's God and the Soul. Eckhart's thought of God and the Soul is the seedbed for the structure of Heidegger's Dasein and Being. For Eckhart the ground of the soul is the dwelling place of God. For Heidegger, Dasein in man is helped by the Truth of Being. The Silesian poem furthers our insight into how the relationship works. In "The Rose Is Without Why" Caputo illustrates how the rose's task is to open up before the sun. The rose "is"

through blooming. So too, says Eckhart, the Soul is to open up to God and is then able to flourish.

Dasein, likewise, is like the rose in its opening up to Being (RW 11). The relationship of God and the Soul and the relationship of Being and Dasein each find fulfillment in belonging together, each needing the other (RW 11). Like the rose, Eckhart's soul must let go of creatures, and Heidegger too speaks of "'being loosened'...from beings and the thinking concerned with beings" (MELH 66). "The rose illustrates the same point which Eckhart makes when he says that the soul which lives without why is like life itself. Life is not desired *for* something other than itself but *because* it is life: life is without why; it lives because it lives" (MELH 67). Heidegger also has stated that human being "never truly is until he is in his way like the rose - without why" (MELH 68).

The Silesian poem is an exception to the Leibnizian formula. Caputo is aware that already Heidegger had informed us that the principle of reason, "Nothing is without reason," which G. W. Leibniz brought to our attention, is an objectifying and representing activity of humans that does not take place at all with other species. Humans are the only ones that require reasons. Heidegger, too, quotes Angelus Silesius' poem found in *The Cherubic Wanderer: Sensual description of the Four Final Things* from 1657 (PrR 36). Heidegger maintains that the rose does not need to have reasons for itself, although there are reasons for the rose. The rose as a thing does not require grounds or reasons as humans do in their existence. However, the rose is not without a ground. The "because" in the Leibnizian fragment gives the basis on which the rose rests, and that foundation is the beingness of the rose, or its blooming (PrR 57). "Because" hinders and prevents the

“why” from being analyzed. The “because” is the ground and is without “why” (PrR 127). Heidegger points out that “Being, as what grounds, has no ground” (PrR 113). Furthermore, modern society needs to release the relentless pursuit of having a ground. Having no ground does not mean that life is meaningless (BC 106). Heidegger strives for a thinking that thinks without the why and traces the history of philosophy to explain that the meaning of Being was established as Logos (BC 101).

On Caputo’s reading, *Gelassenheit* loosened from its religious roots becomes ominous and foreboding. He states the difference between Eckhart and Heidegger: “It is no longer releasement to a loving God, but releasement to a truth which is equiprimordially un-truth” (MEHT 249). Caputo elevates the virtuous life of the mystic and depicts Heidegger’s standpoint as bankrupt: “The difficulty with Heidegger is not that he is a mystic, but that he is *not*” (MEHT 252). Caputo emphasizes the virtues of the mystical life in connection with the ethical realm: “The mystical life itself has left all willing and striving behind. It has broken through the sphere of ethics altogether in order to enter a new realm. But it has done so by passing *through* ethics in order to realize that for which the ethical is but a preparation, viz., union with the Son” (MEHT 254).

As Caputo points out, Eckhart spoke of ridding the soul of self-will and abandonment unto God’s will, whereas Heidegger speaks not of self-will but of elevating the thinking subject as “the highest principle of Being” (MELH 65), which is to place a being above Being, like man placing himself above God.

The problem, on Caputo’s score, stems from Heidegger’s mistaking Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit*, “the will not to will” to be a “willing of the divine will,” or a passivity of a moral or ethical category (MEHT 180). But Caputo elucidates that Eckhart is not

restricted to the ethical paradigm, as Heidegger had assumed. Eckhart unites with God in his ground “prior to any dimension of God’s being which can be named ‘divine will’” (MEHT 181). Eckhart goes beyond good wills and bad wills to enter a realm where God and his ground are the same. This is not just a unity with God, but a coming together such that God needs man even as man needs God. Caputo writes, “For Eckhart, God is a loving Father who engenders His only begotten Son in our hearts” (MEHT 181). Caputo points out that Heidegger’s relationship of Being and Dasein was not one of love, nor of comfort, in fact there is much to be feared in the event of Being in comparison to Eckhart’s experience in God. Caputo says that Heidegger criticizes Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* inaccurately, by stating that Eckhart remained in the domain of willing, and as such, metaphysics (MEHT 142). For sure, Caputo contends, Eckhart does have some residual effects of metaphysics in his thought, such as staying within the area of time and eternity (MEHT 229), but not in the domain of willing. More importantly Caputo shows that “Eckhart’s God does not ultimately depend upon man for His self revelation,” whereas Heidegger’s Being needs a clearing (MEHT 183).

Although for Caputo “Eckhart’s *Gelassenheit* is not an ethical-moral category,” he however states that within *Gelassenheit* moral life is never better and continues in “unity with a virtuous life” (MEHT 238). “[I]n Eckhart the mystical sphere *presupposes* the ethical as a *precondition*” (MEHT 237). But as Caputo would stress, Heidegger’s thought is not mystical and he is not under obligation to the ethical sphere. “Nor does he regard moral self-purification as a precondition for entering into thought” (MEHT 237).

The “will not to will” is an original impulse traced in Eckhart in order to unlock the highest of ethics. This is not a passive stance, as Caputo shows; it requires our utmost

cooperation. In this same capacity, Caputo also revives Kant's philosophy of treating each person with respect, not as a means to an end, but "as an 'end in itself'" (RaH 266), and appropriates Heidegger's openness to the mystery of the fourfold, albeit stressing the absent community of mortals in order to "restore to *Gelassenheit* its ethical context" (RaH 267). The unity of the fourfold, earth, sky, mortals and gods, commonly mentioned by Caputo are not mentioned in Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* (*Discourse on Thinking*) nor in the "Letter On Humanism", the context of an originary ethics (although Heidegger uses it elsewhere, particularly in his comments on Hölderlin's poetry); this unity is emphasized by Caputo and utilized to impress particularly the relationship needed with "others". To overcome Heidegger's lack, Caputo's ethics of dissemination; of multiple goods, and his own ethics of *Gelassenheit* become complete within his understanding of Augustine's "Love God and do what you will" (RaH 267). Caputo employs *Gelassenheit* as openness toward the mystery of the other in order to emphasize the welcoming of the other. Something different and new occurs with every encounter; each person is different and that is enough to shake up the present order of things. Otherness challenges ethics (MRH 176-77).

Is Caputo's *Gelassenheit* a tolerance that involves allowing the other to be without any kind of judgment? "Respect for the life and dignity of the other" (OBI 190) is the bottom line of Caputo's ethics. Caputo makes it clear that his "tolerating difference" does not allow for someone such as a rapist, and that his radical hermeneutics do not permit or endorse "differences which do not respect others" for it is not a "difference to be respected but rather a failure to respect the different, i.e., the other, the vulnerable other, the other who cannot defend herself or himself" (OBI 191). These understandings

are necessary to not misunderstand Caputo regarding a sort of relativizing tolerance that can easily be attached to a philosophy of “letting-be”.

Chapter 2

Caputo's Ethics

Our strategy is to suspend the practical move, to put [it] in question [...] in order to see whether that very practical movement may be characterized by problems that compound suffering and tragedy. (QuE 3-4)

2.1 The End of Ethics and the Emphasis on Obligation

For Caputo, reading Heidegger continues to be of necessity for ethics (DeH 9). If “[t]he very question of ethics arises out of ethical concern” (AE 4), what does it mean to say that ethics needs Heidegger’s thought?

Caputo points to Heidegger’s endeavor to deal with the “ontological” rather than the “ontic” to answer why there are no moral directives to be found in Heidegger’s works. Heidegger’s preoccupation was with the essence, not determinate activities of human being (MEHT 256). Heidegger’s rejection of ethics in the metaphysical sense is only a partial understanding of the ethical stance of Heidegger according to Caputo. “For Heidegger, to be *against* ethics is just as much to be *for* something more primordial, a more originary ethics so that one can show one is not being immoral or illogical” (AE 2, *italics mine*).

Caputo agrees with Charles Scott’s contention that “[t]he question of ethics arises out of ethical concern” (QuE 1). Due to rapid advances in science, the present situation of pressing sociological and technological issues require that answers be given. Caputo and the *Der Spiegel* interviewer, Richard Wisser both ask how Heidegger’s thought can help us. The values and thought of the day in which Heidegger was immersed produced questions in his mind concerning nihilistic thinking, and concern about the ethics emerging from actual situations - for example, the housing shortage and other current

problems related to technology. Heidegger was concerned about all these things and particularly interested in what it meant to be human. His “Letter On Humanism” denounces not only the notion of man as subject - whether “I” or “We”-, but also the subject/object relationship, because these are ways to miss the essence of human being. “Rather, before all this, man in his essence is eksistent into the openness of Being, into the open region that lights the ‘between’ within which a ‘relation’ of subject to object can ‘be’” (BaW 229). An ethics of values rooted in subjectivity, i.e., metaphysical ethics, is empty. Values do not adequately address human complexity and diversity. In the process of establishing some values over others, values can be undermined, and no one identity embodies a value structure to its full extent (QuE 5). Instead of an ethics of values, Heidegger brings up originary ethics. And yet, Caputo finds originary ethics unsatisfactory because it does not care for the “other”.

“The question of ethics does not arise outside of ethics, but from within it” (QuE 7). Caputo highlights the problematic nature of ethics when he says: “Indeed, it is the claim of radical hermeneutics that we get the best results by yielding to the difficulty in ‘reason,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘faith,’ not by trying to cover it over” (RaH 7). Metaphysical thinking glosses over the dilemmas found in ethics. When we are presented with the flux, the abyss, or the experience of the nothing, ethics is exposed for what it is. That is why the tragedies are more insightful about *ethos*, about the “difficulty of life”, than any philosophical discourse could be (AE 4). For Caputo, exposure to the flux releases action; a transformation takes place that allows for the needed action. Our own inadequacies in the face of the flux fosters compassion for the “other.” The humility of

not being in control, sharing a common discomfort actually becomes the ethical conduct of compassion (RaH 258-59).

“The question of ethics does not lead to a new ethics” (QuE 7). For Caputo, metaphysical ethics has lost its reputation. “Ethics is intended to counter the abysmal thought that everything is innocent, that there is a dumb anonymity at the heart of things [...]” (AE 236). Ethics has not been able to deliver what it has promised. The time has come to show just how troubled ethics is. As reason fails when it relies on sufficient reason, rule of method, and rational principle so too, ethical theories and structures collapse even as they are being built (RaH 211-22). Doing away with ethics does not mean doing away with ethical decision, but it does point to the tremendous challenge of the many options available (MRH 173). Edith Wyschogrod highlights the difficulty of the ordinary ways of doing ethics in her essay on “Does Continental Ethics Have a Future?” She states: “So long as an appeal is made to theoreticity, the results of thinking, including thinking that takes human conduct as its problematic, falls under the sway of the science of logic. This can only reduce the other to a calculable unit in accordance with the structure of thinking in the present epoch” (SD 238).

With the emphasis on ethical theory and the violence that emerges, the converse notions of non-violence attempt to merge in the ethics of “otherness”. But otherness is not without violence. As Wyschogrod remarks concerning the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-François Lyotard, their thought lacks in providing “the authority of imperatives, that is, the command function that militates the restraint of violence against the other. Commands cannot be derived from ontology any more than from intentional consciousness” (SD 233).

After delimiting ethics and originary ethics, Caputo speaks of being “against ethics” (AE 4) and of the end of ethics (MRH 172-189). He wants to go beyond originary ethics but not in the primordial sense: “‘Ethics’ own doing, [and] ethics own undoing is shown by the deconstructive process” (AE 4). Caputo shuns a metaphysical back-up plan (AE 4). Obligation is not to be construed with duty as something that ought to be done. If ethics is no more than duty, then Caputo is “against ethics” (MRH 185). The worn-out notion of duty circumvents the spirit of the obligation that Caputo celebrates. Obligation is going beyond reciprocation and normal expectations. “To follow the way of obligation means to be stirred by the appeals, to answer the calls of lowly proper names, of what is laid low” (AE 237).

Caputo focuses on the question of the origin of obligation. Disasters and events out of control point to the one and only law of judgment: Augustine’s instruction: “*Dilige, et quod vis fac*”. Love, and do what you will (AE 121). This is for Caputo “a quasi-transcendental principle that says that you do not need principles. It is the way one makes one’s way around in an abyss, the way one negotiates among singulars” (AE 121). As Caputo moves from a stance of being against ethics to the end of ethics, it is the law of the singular that is guiding the way. Singularity puts us in contact with factual life, existence itself, and the finalizing of ethics culminates in the singular individual’s experience (MRH 190).

The “end of ethics” signals the end of universals in favor of singularity. Generalization betrays the character of ethics. Caputo is talking about the difference in the posture that takes place: “When I am in a singular situation, faced with something singular, I do not have it, but rather it has me” (MRH 180). I am overtaken by the other,

implicated in singularity by the one singular person in need. Caputo focuses on the involvement taking place on account of the other's crisis, which is different from pre-established norms and vacuous guidelines that currently dominate our system. The end of ethics is summed up as love in the kingdom of God with Jesus (MRH 189). For Caputo, "[t]o a certain extent, the end of ethics is a little bit like the death of God for people who still believe in God: it clears away the idols and allows a more divine God to break out" (MRH 174). Ethics is largely a finite affair. The face of the other calls for a response. "The task of a radical hermeneutics is not to decipher the speaker beneath the mask but to alert us to the distance which separates them - and then to preserve and keep it open" (RaH 290).

As I write this section, I receive a call of help from a friend. She is panicking and is overwhelmed by the circumstances pressing upon her. The government office called and said that the refugee family of nine from Tanzania is to arrive in three days, rather than the three months as anticipated. My friend, Pascaline, a Burundian, barely survives from month to month on her own limited income and suddenly needs to buy food, lots of it, suitable clothes for winter wear, and find housing. It is all too much, impossible, and there's not enough time (not to mention final exams for both of us!). This is one of those helpless situations that makes me push away the books, go out on the street to my neighbors to ask for clothes, visit the local grocery store to beg for a donation, find a way, ask a favor, but do anything for nine people who have dwelt under tents for six years. There are nine people who may never know me, probably never come to my church, suddenly tugging on my heartstrings, and Pascaline, saying, "help me!" whose well-being I would want to support even as I have been supported in life. Within a matter of hours

there were car loads of clothes and food and when Pascaline went with me to an apartment loaned free of charge for two months (another request honored by passion), I had the sense that I had touched on the understanding of Caputo's following words: "...the needs of flesh are all you need for obligation" (AE 237). To understand Caputo's obligation is to understand suffering. What is the claim that goes above humanitarian, altruistic, and compassionate charities? What is the call that keeps us awake in the night until we act? Shall we not inquire until we seek and find understanding?

2.2 A Phenomenology of Suffering

Mark Yount asks "Is Reason Caputo?" (Yount 1992, 29) in reference to Caputo's rationality which restrains from making judgment calls on the boundaries of what reasonableness includes. Caputo knows that things boil down to making best choices, and with that, authority enters in and corruption spreads. Our current system of justice based on presence, on deciding what "is" trembles in undecidability according to Caputo (PT 339). Recapping Caputo's ethics of the trembling, Yount emphasizes lack of trembling within the text itself. Although Caputo talks *about* suffering, the text does not speak of knowing it. With that inadequacy, there is a problem with Caputo's attempt to give a credible account for suffering. For Caputo, "not knowing" speaks of a trembling as we make our way through this world while not knowing who we are and not knowing who the other is, either.

Caputo is interested in a justice to come, justice as an ideal, whereas Jeffrey M. Dudiak questions: "It seems to me that Caputo is trying to put justice in its place, whereas the whole 'experience' of justice, even according to Caputo himself, is precisely that it puts us in our place" (in Olthuis 1997, 203).

Caputo's ethical concern is to get beyond the arrogance that results in emphasis on constant binary oppositions, in the pride of ethics which is everywhere as soon as norms get established, and instead, in a meek and lowly position, make one's way in a world of singulars, cope with the flux which is ever before one, tremble and be moved by a responsibility that wells up toward the other.

Caputo develops a "phenomenology of the oppressed and the excluded" (OBI 125). Caputo's project has an extraordinary ability to identify a contemporary experience of otherness, in terms of the excluded and oppressed. Caputo's vision of obligation engages us with a renewed sense of the profundity and extent of the voice of others that are crying around us. A phenomenology of suffering is akin to the ethico-political questions of factual existence (OBI 125), the ethico-political sphere found lacking in Heidegger which Caputo optimizes as an opportunity to address not only the source of it (Heidegger's problem with pain and his essentializing ways), but its result (Nazism). Caputo wants to get at the impulse or call of the other, "responsibility as a responsiveness to the call of the other" (OBI 127), and he compares this responsibility to the Judaeo-Christian element in Kant's second version of the categorical imperative. He states: "But the imperative can't be categorical; it's not purely rational and respect is not a feeling of pure reason" (OBI 127). Caputo is interested in an ethical element that precedes reason and tries to deconstruct Kant's element regarding the metaphysical formulation of imperative to arrive at the phenomenological experience that enlivens it.

2.3 The Concept of Alterity: When Otherness Goes Awry

Caputo's interest is the following:

How to prepare for the coming of one for whom the only preparation is to be prepared for anything, for whom the only adequate preparation is to confess that we cannot be prepared for what is coming? How to address and respond to the "other," who by definition is a shore we cannot reach, a domain we cannot inhabit, a *terra incognita*, not only unexplored but unexplorable? (MRH 56)

Otherness challenges ethics (MRH 176-77), the claim of the other is a task striving for justice. Giving allows for the invention of the other to happen, for singularity to take place, for being and presence and essence to be challenged. The "invention" of alterity does have a flip side, albeit one that is slightly mentioned. Caputo refers to Jacques

Derrida's (1983) *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie*:

Viens... is not, of course, foolproof and absolutely safe. There is nothing to protect it, absolutely, from ductive violence, nothing to say that *viens* cannot be co-opted into the rallying call of the worst violence, nothing to stop *viens* from being used to lead the charge in which innocents are slaughtered, as the name in whose name the most extreme dogmatic and doctrinal, apocalyptical and eschatological violence, is perpetrated. (PT 98-99)

The "other" as a call may be a burning passion, but lacks the guardrails of protection for the other. Does an ethic of otherness that lets others be operate from naïve assumptions about humankind? The ethics of alterity often does not want to address these kinds of things. We cannot judge another person or another's heart (PT 180). For how does one delimit the concept of the other that is beyond? Or can one deconstruct the "claim" of the "other"? What are we to make of the many times when there is no claim from the other, as is common today in our impersonal world? If that which addresses and calls for a response comes from the other (the face, the eyes, the flesh), then is the love

that Caputo endorses based on a feeling? At times he bases the need to act for the other on one's own human experience of suffering. At other times he stresses instead that love is a decision we make.

Closure is a totalizing gesture and Caputo resists all such capitalization. The secret is there is no Secret. The truth is there is no Truth. Caputo elucidates:

The problem, I am always arguing, lies in laying claim to some privileged access to the Secret in any of its versions, whether as Scientific Truth or Pure Reason, as the Truth of Being or the Word of God, and not settling for such truths as we have the good fortune to come upon, as come our way, in the course of the day. The more radical hermeneutical claim is that we are on our own, devising such constructs as we can to make sense out of our lives and our experience, without Direct Assistance from On High. (MRH 154)

One could echo back to Caputo, "The claim is there is no Claim." There is not one claim of the other, but many claims of the other. The claim of the other, obligation, is but one among a multiplicity of calls issued by the other. And sometimes, there is no call. Most pronounced on that score is the "daily news," which indicates that at times there is no claim of the other. Caputo does capitalize obligation as the universal claim of the other. But can the claim itself be deconstructed? For one, a need does not necessarily constitute a call. There are needs everywhere. Which ones do we heed? The one question Caputo never answers or is – with right! - unable to answer is the origin of that call. It simply is not his task to peel off the mask hiding the force that propels us to do and to act on behalf of others. But others need for us to ask these questions for we may be tempted to think we are helping someone when, in fact, we are not.

2.4 Augustine's Motif: *Dilige et quod vis fac*

Augustine's *Dilige, et quod vis fac* - love God and do what you will - addresses the claim that is "without why", or "life for the sake of life" (PT 229). For Caputo, love

is without why, love is without law. “The principle without principle, the unprinciple of all unprinciples in the kingdom is to love and do what you will” (PT 228). This statement is reminiscent of Caputo’s earlier writings on Meister Eckhart when he says that “Eckhart’s God is ‘principle without principle...’” (MELH 75).

Augustine’s “*dilige et quod vis fac*” is found in his commentary of the first epistle of John. The historical context for Augustine’s precept is made clear by Henri de Lubac in a footnote in *Traité VII* (EJP 69-70).

The historical setting in which this statement emerges is Augustine’s challenge against the heretical teaching of his day. A time of persecution for the Christian Church brought on by the reign of Roman emperor Diocletian (284-313) served to fuel the fires for the Donatist controversy. In February of 303, an edict passed that all Christian books were to be burned and churches destroyed. Christian leaders who submitted their books were considered by the Donatists to be traitors and incapable of administering the sacraments (McGrath 1997, 463). Augustine in penning these words was willing to justify the strict measures taken by his church against the Donatists. De Lubac points out the fact that Augustine and the church were tough on the Donatists and that proved that they loved them. An example given by Augustine is the child disciplined by his father for his own good (EJP 69). The freedom out of which the action of love springs is not the easy relativizing tolerance Caputo attaches to this verse. It is a tough love based in 1 John 4:7-12 that Augustine advocates. Caputo affixes modern day *Gelassenheit* “letting be” nuances which escape Augustine’s view when he writes: “The kingdom is release, for-giving, dis-missing: love and do what you will” (PT 229). Is love somehow allowing people to be “whatever” and accepting that diversity? The original context of

Augustine's statement suggests that loving makes difficult decisions, not of the forgiving sort, because one loves Truth. This is in contrast to the Derridean mood that Caputo explores which is to say that the truth is, there is no Truth (MRH 17).

Augustine's action was for the Good, a paradigm that does not embrace plurality of goods as Caputo suggests. Just as there is no one underlying meaning but multiple meanings, there are many goods (MRH 137). Caputo resists fixating an identity of any sort, for identity is categorization that tends to violently erupt in essentializing ways (MRH 129). According to Caputo, promoting the Good instead of many goods eventually "goes bad" (MRH 129) and leaves out those who are not in on the Secret, whether it be scientific truth, or the Truth of Being, or the Word of God, according to Caputo (MRH 154). Our identity is at stake with the arrival of the other (MRH 218), which is to say that we do not know who we are in isolation from others and on our own.

Caputo leaves a door open for afflicted peoples such as blacks, women and homosexuals to have justice. Caputo's plurality of "goods," multiple meanings, and priority to varieties of experience dictate a certain "letting be" that differs from the Augustinian context. It is interesting to note that Caputo's latest book, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, a reemphasis and clarification of common themes within Caputo's writings is strangely silent on the favorite Augustinian quote. In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, Robert Dodaro, Augustinian scholar, links together love and judgment in assessing the spirit of Augustine's motif in its context as contrasted with Caputo's interpretation. He states: "*Dilige, et quod vis fac* is, consequently, a dangerous principle, a license to love one's neighbor enough to beat the daylights out of him. It is instructive to remember that Augustine's best-known aphorism derives from an ethic of reform"

(GGP 96). At the heart of theological ethics is indeed this notion put forth by Augustine: the love of God is the whole principle. Love of God springs into a rule of action, but loving God is a liberating effect upon action.

Chapter 3

Deconstructing Ethics and Derrida's Influence on Caputo

What is the difference between affirmation with a sense of ultimate meaning and affirmation with the sense of the mortality of meaning as such? (QuE 10)

3.1 Totalizing Tendencies

Although Caputo takes his own departure from Heidegger's ethical views, Derrida's thought plays an even more impacting role on him in the final analysis. With right does Mark Yount state that "Caputo Derridizes Heidegger" (Yount 1992, 23). The way in which Caputo identifies Heidegger's ethics as eschatological and thus is delimited, is but one example of deconstruction after the fashion of Derrida. Caputo, like Derrida, resists any totalizing tendency to shut things down. Caputo takes Heidegger's essentializing ways for instance, and shows how it eventually leads to exclusionary tendencies and tactics. By re-situating the *es gibt* or *Gelassenheit* in Derridean style, Caputo reveals an even greater play at work and opens up the possibility for something more to come. Caputo locates Heidegger's limits and exposes them in order to amplify as he thinks, the otherwise diminishing concepts. It is Derrida's influence on Caputo that enables him to expand, as he is convinced of, Heidegger's notions. As Caputo indicates, Derrida's questioning of religion and tradition does not devalue either one, but instead allows for a new breath of fresh wind to flow through them and revive them where they have become dead or are dying.

Of importance to Caputo is Derrida's "*oui, oui, viens*". Derrida's "come" invites hope for a better democracy. *Oui* calls out with expectation for the unknown to come.

There is no faith unless there are impossibilities, and impossibilities are the driving force behind Derrida's writings (Boutin 1996).

Viens is the call that precedes, the undeterminable objectification, the “‘affirmation’ of language that is deeper than or prior to any determinate word or sentence or linguistic category” (PT 97). *Oui, oui, viens* issues from the other, for the other, by the other (PT 98). According to Caputo, Derrida's *oui, oui*, is reminiscent of Heidegger's openness towards the mystery of things, but centers more on “the good news of alterity” (PT 18).

The way in which Caputo makes reference to the “claim” is derived from a Derridean approach to the unknown that keeps us open to the “other”. Caputo indicates that with Heidegger, culmination takes place in *Ereignis*, whereas with Derrida, we have, as such, no knowledge. There is no special insight guiding our path. The call of the other is not reduced to virtue, or *imago dei*, or simply Kantian duty. Obligation occurs, but without why.

Derrida's influence comes into play in terms of justice. According to Caputo, justice is lacking in Heidegger, whereas Derrida emphasizes justice even to the point of elevating its preeminence over religion. Obligation, the call of the other is meant to bring about a ‘more just’ justice, as it were, as Caputo is fond of saying, following Derrida.

3.2 Deconstruction as a Passion for Justice

Caputo's understanding of Heidegger requires an unraveling of the stylistic elements of Heidegger's thought. Caputo identifies the great meta-narratives of Heidegger and tries to find out what is underlying the myths of Being, history of Being, the epochs, primordial origins and the eschatological. Caputo's strategy for delimiting

the grandeur which goes along with these myths is to identify the external trappings in which we are caught up. We see him for instance, pleading ignorance of Heidegger's great Greek beginning, or making fun of the pretensions of eschatology, as demonstration of missed realities and opportunities of the present with these kinds of stories (RaH 241). Lest one thinks that they will get comfortable with any position, Caputo always looks over the fence at the other side and delimits any other underpinnings that are clung to, as well. Sometimes it is not a matter of taking sides, theistic or atheistic, Christian or unchristian, but of the difference found therein.

In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997), Caputo defines deconstructive analysis and suggests that an interpretation is not to be found in what the text says, but rather in "a form of faith" (PT 18). Deconstruction wants to let faith be faith, and hence to disturb determinable religions where faith is no more faith but knowledge that allows for a particular triumphalism to occur. Deconstruction taunts determinable faith in the hope that the indeterminacy characterizing faith's movement itself will emerge and thus be a faith that is more faith (PT 57). This is not to demolish determinable faith, for Derrida is out to save a passion for faith, "a decision made in the midst of undecidability" (PT 59). Derrida raises the caution about the dogmatic extremes that happen, the politics that occur, and releases hope for justice that "precedes truth" (PT 70). For deconstruction makes clear that faith belongs to all and that "deconstruction is *itself* a form of faith" (PT 18). "[D]econstruction [...] raises our level of vigilance about what calls itself meaning or reference, subjectivity or objectivity - or 'truth,' 'tradition,' or 'ethics'" (PT 17-18). Aimed at that which never yet arrives, this spirituality is not so much vision as it is lack of vision, the ability for faith to emerge in

unknowability. This loss of ontological spirituality invokes a certain spirituality without objectification, (Boutin 1988, 245-46), so that there is free access to God and not only for some favored people. Derrida, according to Caputo, wants to portray that religions do not hold a corner on the market of faith. Determinable faiths are in jeopardy with a fundamentalism that denotes the “return of the repressed” (PT 152).

In Caputo’s analysis of Heidegger, deconstruction takes the form of a passion for justice. Behind this sometimes painful “cutting away” of all that would exclude the defenseless and forsaken outcasts of society, Caputo exposes Heidegger’s nationalistic, patriotic, and linguistic excesses that need to be heard. By extracting the tall tales that mystify the writings of Heidegger, Caputo dislocates Heidegger from his story line, leaving us with a portrait that is otherwise than Heidegger. Deconstruction subdues strong and mighty identities in favor of meek and compassionate models. Caputo brings to the fore the disenfranchised, the poor, and those that are marginalized, in order to expose exclusivity and its resulting oppression. Caputo’s method of employing these deconstructive overtones are challenging, but effective ways to communicate the aspects which need to be disarmed in order to judge Heidegger’s writings. Caputo overtly criticizes Heidegger’s eschatological renditions by enlisting deconstructive measures. He claims that “deconstruction is not some stealthy, cunning agent of disruption, it is not an agent at all, is in a sense nothing at all, it is much more accurate to say that a deconstructive analysis shows that the net is already torn, is ‘always already’ split, all along and from the start” (AE 4). Caputo in his essay on *Spirit and Danger* writes:

There is - *es gibt* - and that is all. It gives because it gives. And that is all. It is our exposure to this groundless ground, to the loss of principles and of primordial assurances, of overarching stories and reassuring essences, that

constitutes the originary difficulty of life. Shall we not call that also the danger of the “postmodern” fix we are in, and can we not say, this time in English, that we need the spark, the nerve, the spirit, to come to grips with it? (ED 55)

The difficulties of life have been explained by grounding for a long time. Caputo is focusing on an affirmation of life that exists despite the lack of foundations. Existence itself is positive, is life for the sake of life, regardless of any ultimate meaning. Charles Scott elucidates that at the heart of ethics is affirmation.

Letting events be, *Gelassenheit*, is the crux of the matter. This is where Caputo and Heidegger part the ways. Caputo dislocates the *es gibt* that he sees as Heidegger’s need to drive out everything accidental into the resoluteness of destiny (AE 231). When we say “*es gibt*”, “it gives,” what is it that gives? Caputo prompts us regarding Nietzsche’s comments and caution about creating grammatical mirages. The statement “It is raining,” to what does the “it” refer? There is no “it” which gives (AE 223). “When we say ‘there is,’ ‘it is,’ we are conceding that nothing (we know of) is there, that no *thing* is there, that no one is there, behind or beneath or hovering over what is happening, no surpassing *arche* watching over everything. What happens is what happens” (AE 224). According to Caputo events have no meaning, thus echoing – without Caputo is aware of! – what Heidegger said already in the Winter-semester 1931-32 in his lecture on Vom Wesen der Wahrheit:

What there is to understand is not a meaning, but an event. “Meaning” only means: something understandable in some way is the case. What is being understood is never meaning itself; we do not understand something as meaning, but always something only ‘in the sense of’... Meaning is never the subject matter of understanding.⁴

⁴ “[...] was es zu verstehen gibt, ist nicht ein Sinn, sondern ein Geschehen. ‘Sinn’ sagt nur: es handelt sich um ein irgendwie Verstehbares. Was verstanden wird, ist nie selbst Sinn; wir verstehen nicht etwas als Sinn, sondern immer nur etwas ‘im Sinne von...’. Der Sinn ist nie das Thema des Verstehens” (GA 34, 1988, 338 p.; p. 18). – See also Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications,

According to Caputo, what happens is without why, there is no *telos* in sight. Such minimalism allows for play. “This minimalism is part of a corresponding maximalism in the sense that it allows for a maximum of pluralistic possibilities” (AE 221).

Caputo critiques Heidegger regarding *es gibt*: “My view has been to take a minimal view of *es gibt* in order to maximize obligation” (AE 228). This striking remark is brought about in part because “Heidegger has a way of seizing upon the sheer facticity of what is happening - that is what I love - and then of annulling or superseding it - that is what is dangerous” (AE 230). These extremes prompt Caputo’s engagement with Heidegger’s stance and the hazards that result. For him, the eschatological myths that Heidegger employs supersede factual life by meta-meanings that serve to reconcile the event, and he resists all such designations. Caputo’s necessity of exploring the notion of obligation, of an ethics of suffering depends on the fact that for him, Heidegger’s letting-be leads to annulling factual life by its non-involvement with others. Caputo receives his inspiration for the claim that the other has on us from Derrida’s quest for a level of giving prior to subjectivity. Heidegger’s interest in the *es gibt* and for the “it” that gives, i.e. *Ereignis*, translates into Derrida’s fascination with *différance*.

Différance gives without expectation of return - giving with no strings attached, because the I has been suspended in an “uncalculated giving” (PT 177). “So do not start falling all over *différance* with gratitude. *Différance* does not love you or even know you are there. *Différance* gives, but *différance* could care less” (PT 169). Giving in this context means that the ethnicity of ethics is housed in the other person, not in some general

1972), p. 28: “[...] a statement is always an event that neither the language (langue) nor the meaning can quite exhaust. It is certainly a strange event”.

law, and not with reciprocity in mind (PT 177). The whole issue of givenness and undecidability is that we can never be certain of what is given and what is not.

3.3 Jewgreek Economy

Another danger related to the subject of Heidegger and ethics is what Caputo calls *jewgreek* economy, a concept borrowed from Derrida. Caputo emphasizes the fatal flaw of an underlying pride brought about by a significant turning point in Heidegger's life, a masked purity that corrupts and scandalizes *jewgreek* justice. Caputo says that Heidegger misses and excludes the *jewgreek* economy. The term *jewgreek* arises from an understanding of the New Testament experience, the fact that the Christian Scriptures were written in Greek and yet emanated from the Jewish world. This *jewgreek* mixture is something that Heidegger excludes, and was considered a miscegenation of what is never pure line. The *jewgreek* economy represents all *others*, those not hailing from any pure origin, not stemming from any purity of language (DeH 209). Caputo indicates that this *jewgreek* economy stands against ethics because "it wants to avoid the pride of ethics" (DeH 211). "On the contrary, it exposes itself to the fragility of action (Arendt), to the frailty of judgment, to the anxiety of decision (Kierkegaard) in the midst of undecidability (Derrida), to a judgment which Lyotard says is "without criteria" (DeH 211). According to Caputo, underlying the glowing, dramatic texts of Heidegger deconstruction uncovers pride, exclusion, and favoritism that does injustice to the *other*. This lurking preference and partiality, a continual inclination of Heidegger's, is Caputo's constant concern.

3.4 Singularity vs. Generality

Caputo replaces Heidegger's 'phainesthetic' imagination with an ethical imagination - albeit with one that is "against ethics". Caputo's project extends an

understanding of the delicacy of ethics that is highlighted by Heidegger. Reference to Kierkegaard clarifies the relationship of ethics and religion and suggests that an ethical framework is not necessary for religion. For Kierkegaard, faith is contrary to ethics. Caputo following Derrida develops this thought further: “For the religious is the movement of exceeding and suspending ethics, of transgressing rule-governed universality vis-à-vis the *tout autre*, even as justice exceeds the law” (PT 189). Like many others, Caputo does not bother here with the important distinction between generality and universality brought forward for instance by the French mathematician and spiritual thinker Marcel LéGaut (1900-1990), for instance in *L’homme à la recherche de son humanité* (1972. See Boutin 1986, 738-39).

Caputo mentions Kierkegaard’s notion that religious conversion shatters all ethical continuity. Ethics is a contradiction to faith (RaH 33). Could it be that conversion or a change of life from the inside out surpasses any laws that are erected in the fine name of ethics?

The story of Abraham is the classic story used to illustrate faith and ethics and their incompatibility. Abraham, the ‘father’ of faith, is the biblical example of the prophetic idea of justice of which Derrida subscribes. Abraham in taking his son Isaac up the mountain to be sacrificed has suspended “ethics and consensus” (PT 199). Abraham responds to the Absolute unable to know of what he has been called to, and unable to give reasons for what he is doing. In this sense, ethics is opposed to faith. “So Abraham is beyond ethics, beyond duty qua duty, transcending both Kantianism and Hegelianism, in favor of the religious, which is the absolute relationship to the absolute, the singular relationship to singularity” (PT 200). Ethics has been sacrificed, and hence, the thought

that Derrida has been trying to communicate all along is that there is the possibility of religion without religion (PT 203). “Experience is always a matter of some faith” (PT 322).

Caputo points out that Derrida argues that weakening the distinction between the “wholly other” as God and “every other” is to “weaken the distinction between the universality of ethics and the singularity of the religious” and also to weaken Kierkegaard’s position (PT 210). “For if every other is infinitely other it would not be possible to distinguish the ethical as an order of generality that would then have to be sacrificed to the religious as an order of singularity” (PT 210). The notion of ethics is disturbed by the “inalterable alterity” of the “wholly other” (PT 212).

Ethics as we know it operates in terms of generality and sameness, normalization and determinacy. The ethical is concerned with general laws, absolutes, and truth as certainty. Derrida challenges ethics with singularity or otherness, transcendentality, indeterminacy, and faith as undecidability. Like Heidegger, Derrida seeks a more originary experience, the essence, or ideal, Caputo elaborates; but unlike Heidegger, he does not seek a teleological or eschatological destination. Derrida betrays the importance on Being that Heidegger stressed. Derrida is *destinerrant*, cut adrift (PT 291), “his destiny is to be without destination, destined to be cut off from truth, severed from the truth of a single destiny” (PT 307). Derrida has a passion for non-knowing, for unassured destinations and Caputo himself, continuing in Derridean fashion, emphasizes faith as this kind of absence. There is no hermeneutical secret with Derrida, and no truth to be generalized.

Caputo develops these particular points of Derrida towards a postmetaphysical rationality and the dissemination of ethics. In his critique of Caputo Marsh raises the question, “[I]s the claim ‘The truth is that there is no truth’ self-referentially consistent?” (OBI 18). Marsh sees contradiction between the pronouncement of deconstruction’s truth over against another truth. The content of deconstruction itself opposes the act of warranting deconstruction’s truth. This contradiction of terms seems to be based on a literal reading of Caputo, whereas it is a common ploy of Caputo’s writing to nuance a play on words, or even to play with words. Robert Bernasconi provides us with an understanding of the usage of language for this particular example: “‘The saying not-saying’ cannot be reduced to the assertion and negation of one and the same proposition in quick succession. It is an invitation to a certain kind of reading where we hear first the metaphysical at work throughout language and then in a second reading the silence, the concealment, that resounds in it” (Bernasconi 1985, 93).

Chapter 4

Religion and Ethics

‘Overcoming metaphysics’ in the area of theology does not take place by defining all thinking as basically objectifying in nature, and then distinguishing from this thinking the contingent act of believing existence itself. Rather, it takes place by understanding thinking otherwise than as subjectivistic and objectifying thinking in the sense of metaphysics and science—namely, as experiential thinking. (NFT 109)

4.1 Heidegger and Theology

The way in which Caputo presents ethics in conjunction with Heidegger does not leave one with the sense that an ethical framework is indispensable for religion. But the way he presents reference to obligation and to the *other* “against ethics” suggests potential assimilation within the praxis of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Caputo’s critique of Heidegger’s ethics is aligned against biblical justice and found lacking. Caputo wants to retain a theology of the cross, and he argues that the cross symbolizes an “ethics of compassion” (203 TPTC) which Heidegger never sees. He argues that Heidegger goes a different route, interpreting the New Testament as a battlefield, and that this attraction to militant faith caused Heidegger to be attracted to Nazism. According to Caputo, had Heidegger had only a little more care about suffering he might have avoided that tragedy, and also that his name was implicated with it. “For Heidegger, the name of God is the name of struggle (*Kampf*): to love God is to love difficulty (*Schwierigkeit*), burden (*onus*), and trouble (*molestia*)” (TTPC 219-220).

Caputo states that *Being and Time* was commonly misjudged as atheistic in nature, when in fact Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is strictly a study of ontology

previous to any determination regarding theism or atheism. Methodologically speaking, the project was to withdraw one's attention from the religious question of God and to pave the way for the question to be raised afterwards, according to Caputo. "Ontology precedes any possible theology" (HG 442).

Caputo emphasizes Heidegger's notion that theology is associated with phenomenology in the way that the ontological and the ontic are associated, that is, with great divide. Theology is thus linked with the other ontic positive sciences, and philosophy is primarily an ontological science. Heidegger's notion of theology is a science of faith rather than a science of God. But this is not to discount God's existence, rather, it is to move away from the metaphysical structures to the specific existing believer. Thus, instead of Heidegger's work seen as god-less or atheistic, it becomes quite useful for theology.

Caputo's rendition of the "mature" Heidegger after the Holocaust, is still involved with these religious modes of thought. The traditional dispute over theism and atheism are now overridden by "*Ereignis*" or event:

In Heidegger's later writings the distinction between the ontological and the ontic, which was the Archimedean point of the earlier writings, gives way to the distinction between the meditative thinking of the one who thinks on Being (or better *Ereignis*) and the calculative thinking of the one who manipulates beings. (HG 446)

At this point ontology no more lays the groundwork for theology. Theology falls prey to metaphysics. Metaphysics is concerned with cause and first cause, and as such is inadequate for Heidegger's divine God. The metaphysical God is something we have made for ourselves rather than allowing God to be God, as Meister Eckhart used to

exhort. Caputo insists that Heidegger is in no way rejecting the possibility of the divine, but is rejecting the metaphysical notion of God.

Caputo deals with Heidegger's talk of the gods and the holy as a different phase in religious understanding in which the "*Ge-stell*" and "*Ge-viert*" become crucial. *Ge-stell* is the essence of technology, "an event in Being itself" (HG 449). Being initiates a call to man and man must heed it and control the earth. Technical man's domination and manipulation over the earth characterize the current age of *Gestell*. The *Geviert*, or the "fourfold," is an opposite movement away from *Gestell*, a new world with reverence for the heavens, earth, gods and mortals. Both *Gestell* and *Geviert* are in *Ereignis*, which is the "origin and source of the historical movements of Being" (HG 449).

In the clearing of Being is the dimension of God and the Holy to be thought by mortals. The clearing is where the Holy can appear. One has to "know how to think the essence of the holy" (HG 452). As long as man is in a calculative state he is in no shape to think the essence of the holy. And lastly, *Ereignis* has to grant this manifestation, "the clearing which is made in Being itself" (HG 452). The Holy will not come without the preparation and readiness of man. But neither will it come without the movement of *Ereignis*, which, Caputo points out, is "*beyond the control of God and the gods*" (HG 455). The Event which makes possible the Holy to appear is an "'It' which gives the time and space for this appearance" (HG 456). Caputo points out the relevance of this departure on Heidegger's part from the theistic/atheistic stance. Instead, the move is to discover a more primal thinking. "It has to do with the clearing in which *both* God and man occur, the opening in which the historical world, and hence the divine intervention in

history, can be thought” (HG 457). For Caputo, there is a move to Greek mythology in Heidegger’s thinking, with *Ereignis* as a “radically secular (*saeculum*) notion” (HG 449).

Caputo summarizes Heidegger’s standpoint: “In a word: the paradigm of seeing, substance, cause and concept gives way to hearing, event, call and letting-be. Atheism and theism are replaced by concealment and un-concealment, absence and presence. The God of metaphysics is given up for the truly divine God” (HG 463). The divine is thought of in terms of an event which happens to us (*pace* Caputo’s obligation), in terms of a call (*pace* Caputo’s ‘other’), and the thinking found in faith is correspondingly not within a metaphysical paradigm of grounding.

4.2 Heidegger and The Divine

Caputo stresses that Heidegger’s roots were in the Catholic church. As a young man he was headed for the priesthood but ended up studying philosophy after he had begun theological studies. For some time however, Heidegger did teach Christian philosophy at Freiburg and wrote articles for a Catholic audience (DeH 170). Caputo locates Heidegger’s first “turning” in 1919 in a letter to Engelbert Krebs whereupon Heidegger explains his call to philosophy and reasons for breaking off with the Catholic tradition.

Heidegger remained interested in the Christian religion, although he turned to Protestantism for a while, its theology and its theologians until during the National Socialist years. Caputo celebrates Rudolf Bultmann’s usage of Heidegger’s thought within the Christian faith (HG 441, 444-45), but laments Heidegger missing the impact of Bultmann’s suggestion of grace needed in his schema of *Being and Time* (HG 445).

The next shift was precipitated by a combination of radical questioning seen as incompatible to religious faith, fervent interest in Nietzsche's writings and Heidegger's Nazi involvement. Heidegger then turned from Christianity's religion to a kind of Greek religion.

The third "shift" that Caputo isolates is "the move beyond voluntarism...toward the thought of Being, a new mythopoetic meditation upon the Holy and the gods" (DeH 178-79). In summary, the three movements are from Catholicism to Protestantism (1917-19), which included the early Freiburg period and the writing of *Being and Time*; the move from Christianity to a religion characterized by struggle and the prominence of a Greek god, Prometheus (1928-29); and lastly, the move toward a Greek mythopoetic religion (1936-38). Caputo prefers not to refer to the "later" Heidegger, and finds the designation "mature" Heidegger somehow better (HG 445). Throughout, Caputo points to continued Catholic influences that Heidegger returns to in the formulation of his thinking.⁵

Although Caputo alludes to the relationship of Heidegger's later writings to a certain Buddhism and Heidegger's involvement with Japanese students and Eastern thought, Caputo discounts Heidegger's thought from Zen Buddhism in the final analysis. He makes strong arguments between the two positions based on critical differences such as Bodhidharma's nondependence upon words as incompatible with Heidegger's saying that language is the home of Being (MEHT 216). Another important distinction is that Heidegger's epochal structure concerns itself with the past ages and ages to come, but not with eternity (HA 282). According to Caputo, Zen teaching stresses eternity, as does

Meister Eckhart, but Heidegger is more interested in time, mortality, and temporality.

“On this point Heidegger is radically Western and ‘worldly,’ and parts company with the mystics of both East and West”(MEHT 217).

For Caputo, Heidegger’s God is not the God of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The Christian tradition is built on metaphysics, and as Michael E. Zimmerman’s review of one of Caputo’s books points out, metaphysics does not heed the giving of *Ereignis* (Zimmerman 1988, 368). Furthermore, with Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis*, even “God...must be granted by the *Ereignis*”(Zimmerman 1988, 370). Caputo points out that Heidegger’s *Ereignis* is outside of the dominion of God and the gods. The appearance of the divine depends on the right historical moment, the *Kairos*, and for Heidegger, *Gestell* with its controlling stance is not the age where God can appear. Caputo emphasizes that this position departs from traditional Judeo-Christian thought which emphasizes that God is Lord over history and does not need to wait for conditions to be right. “The only *arche* which Heidegger allows is the *an-arche* of Being itself, the groundless ground, the child king who plays with history without why or wherefore” (HG 455).

Although we cannot fixate Heidegger totally within a specific religious tradition, Caputo does not find that lack inconsonant enough to discredit Heidegger’s thinking in reference to the Christian movement, in particular. He does insist however, that departing from these Christian teachings has been detrimental to Heidegger’s own personal choices, particularly with regard to Nazism.

In spite of Caputo’s delimitation of Heidegger’s ethics, he does take seriously Heidegger’s late contribution to thought and its significance for Christian theology.

⁵ I have elaborated on these points in an unpublished paper on “Faith and Reason in John D. Caputo’s

Within his own project, he furthers Heidegger's unique offering and enlarges it through his position regarding obligation. First, Caputo does develop philosophically the affective nature of the body. With the concept of otherness, he launches the impact of a sensory/auditory claim and response in order to portray the event character of Heidegger's notion of the divine. Secondly, Caputo, impacted by liberation theologies and a commitment to justice, does further notions of hospitality and compassion through obligation. Caputo's "love" is closely aligned with the Christian concept of *agapê*. He stresses, the notion of a disinterested love originating in Eckhart and further developed in Derrida's *différance* and accentuation of "the gift."

4.3 Overcoming Metaphysical Theology: The Possibilities

As long as the metaphysical horizon is sought after in regards to the theological tradition and ethics, Heidegger's thought will likely remain distant from Christian development. An overcoming of metaphysics in theology utilizes Heidegger's thinking for theology and emphasizes experiential thinking (NFT 109).

Negative theology is an option that provides the possibility for further development of Heidegger's thought. Mystics such as Meister Eckhart raise the question of Being as presence. Already Heidegger has pointed to the difficulty of a metaphysical ethics. The "idols of presence" (MRH 253) must go. Eckhart parts company with metaphysical theology when he states: "I pray God rid me of God"(MRH 256). "Being and nothing are functions of each other," and Eckhart recognizes that we do not grasp God at all, but instead let God grasp us (MHR 254). Overcoming metaphysics in

theology is to comprehend thinking as otherwise than as subjectivistic and objectifying thinking (NFT 109), to deal with the possibilities of a “nonmetaphysical God” (NFT 5).

Caputo maintains that Heidegger’s later thought continues to be useful for Christian theology. This position is not based on what Heidegger says in particular about the divine so much as on the particular contribution he makes to a kind of thinking of God. Caputo locates two areas in which we can find Heidegger’s thought of particular significance for theology. The first of these is that Heidegger’s notion of the history of Being is relevant to the Christian conception of God as the Lord of history throughout all of history. Heidegger’s history of Being helps asserting that God’s Word is revealed throughout each era of history, is specific to a certain era, is always a part of the scheme of history but is not to be fixed for all times as some enduring essence that is never changing (HG 460). Secondly, Caputo emphasizes Heidegger’s attempt to continue the strains of a non-metaphysical theology by non-objective language and emphasis on the faith experience. God in this framework is not the God of metaphysics, *causa sui*, or the ground of all things; God is not a thing at all. God is a voice, or a call, much like the way in which we are claimed through Heidegger’s relationship of Dasein and Being (HG 461). This breakthrough of thought now allows the theologian to articulate the structure of the life of faith, which is not metaphysical in nature. Caputo captures the sense of Heidegger’s thought which originates in Meister Eckhart when he writes: “We do not grasp God by our concepts, but rather we are seized by His presence, summoned by His call, overtaken by the event which happens to us” (HG 463).

These positions of Caputo go along with the move of American philosophy of religion to describe God in terms of *process* and in terms of *meaning* rather than being; as

an effort to overcome the restrictions of the metaphysical notion of God (Langan 1959, 152). Caputo is to be mentioned positively alongside those such as Robinson in furthering Heidegger's mature thought for theology, especially in the area of specifying the differences of faith and theology, and in the use of Heidegger's notion of history.

Chapter 5

Originary Ethics and Political Claim

The victim never comes to presence, never makes an appearance on the scene of the history of Being. (HeS 278)

5.1 “*Das Man* As Dwelling”

According to Thomas Langan, Heidegger’s phenomenology is in danger of excluding the other, more specifically the shoulds and oughts emanating from the other (Langan 1959, 231). This troubling critique demands historical, textual evidence. Formerly unpublished documents by Heidegger recently available in volume 16 of the *Gesamtausgabe* with the title *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges* (2000) address these issues.

Caputo’s chapter, “Heidegger’s Scandal” published in 1992 is a classic portrayal of political claim and is part of a collection of papers by various scholars on the political issues of Heidegger’s biography put forward by Victor Farías and Hugo Ott. Caputo begins by criticizing Farías’ study based on “biographical, journalistic, [and] anecdotal” material (HeS 265).⁶ Caputo insists on an analysis of Heidegger’s thought in order to understand and address Heidegger’s silence following the Holocaust.

While many would agree to a serious lack in Farías’ method, biographical references still remain some of the most adequate and specific sources from which to build a picture of Heidegger’s actual involvement with Nazism, although up until the publication of GA 16 there was a lack of pertinent sources dealing with day-to-day living

experiences such as letters, diary, and other memorabilia, essential for making an assessment on Heidegger's 'silence'. Questions regarding Heidegger's work and thought in connection to his biography is needed, as Heidegger himself acknowledges in a reply letter (dated Jan. 20, 1948) to Herbert Marcuse: "Your letter shows me how determined you are to honestly analyze and judge my work as well as my person, I also detect in your letter how difficult it would be to dialogue with people who since 1933 were no longer in Germany and who would judge the national socialist movement from its end".⁷ Marcuse, a philosopher and assistant of Heidegger, had written to him on August 28, 1947, expecting a statement that would "finally clear Heidegger of being identified with Nazism" (Safranski 1998, 421). The basis for a definitive clarification concerning Heidegger and Nazism can be found in this letter and other relevant documents published in volume 16 of the *Gesamtausgabe* which includes over seventy formerly unpublished and untranslated evidences of Heidegger's life's way, and particularly document #182: "Antrag auf die Wiederinstellung in die Lehrtätigkeit (Reintegrierung)" from November 4, 1945 (GA 16, 397-404). These documents include important statements specifically addressed to the criticisms made to Heidegger by friends, colleagues, students, and family concerning his silence.

Apart from these now publicly available biographical sources, Caputo's concern all along has been to stress that Heidegger's thought itself contains seedbeds that eventually led to his downfall with Nazism. Unfortunately, Caputo like so many others –

⁶HeS 265. - For affinity of style see Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger and "the jews."* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, pp. 55-57.

⁷ "Wenn ich Ihrem Brief entnehme, daß es Ihnen ernst ist mit einer richtigen Beurteilung meiner Arbeit und meiner Person, so zeigt mir gerade Ihr Schreiben, wie schwer ein Gespräch mit Menschen ist, die seit 1933

is unable to document this for instance in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). For Heidegger himself has said, "It is no less possible to be serious when one experiences the conscience in the ordinary way than not to be serious when one's understanding of it is more primordial" (BT 341). (See on that Boutin, *Relationalität*, p. 526-7 = §708) Boutin observes:

Heidegger confirmed this conception himself as he was not hesitant to promote in 1933 a thing he believed in but when he started to doubt his initial decision he distanced himself from it. But this concrete decision was used by some as reason to question his existential analysis and caused them to attack Heidegger's comprehension. (Boutin 1974, 526-27)

William J. Richardson also challenges Caputo's views and opens up areas for further research. For him, a proper understanding of Heidegger's understanding of human being is of critical importance, and he questions Caputo's limited view of *phainesthai*. He points out Caputo's tendency to pass judgment on Heidegger's ontology via ontic considerations and suggests options for a better understanding of Heidegger's ethics of otherness to be situated in both Heidegger's biography and thought.

Reading Lyotard and Derrida, coupled with the revelation of the documents of the '80's made clear to Caputo Heidegger's "Watergate". "Heidegger's Scandal" represents 'the turning' in Caputo as he became angry about his personal sense of betrayal by Heidegger. Whereas "Original Ethics" (1971) was his earlier attempt to clear Heidegger politically, "Heidegger's Scandal" (1992) reflects the change in his thinking. Caputo's text "Heidegger's Scandal" begins by dealing with some of Heidegger's few comments regarding the Holocaust that have attracted a lot of attention. On December 1, 1949, Heidegger in a public lecture in Bremen says: "Agriculture is now a motorized food

nicht mehr in Deutschland waren und die den Beginn der nationalsozialistischen Bewegung von ihrem Ende

industry- in essence, the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and the extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of atom bombs”⁸

Caputo recalls that Heidegger’s talk of essence in sameness here refers to the verbal understanding of *Wesen*, namely “as that coming to presence which governs the appearance of everything present (Anwesendes), which puts its stamp upon everything which is” (HeS 267). He then asks: “What is the essence of the “victim”- an unheard-of question, a question never asked by Heidegger himself - if the mass production of victims can be essentially the same as motorized agriculture?” (HeS 266). But what Caputo seems to be forgetting about Heidegger is that to be *for* suffering victims is to be *against* the technology bringing all these things.

Heidegger in many places not only emphasizes how Western metaphysics has been problematic to understanding our relation to nature but also that there needs to be a new relation between subject and object. His comment about agriculture as a mechanized food industry points out our tendency to treat nature as “standing-reserve [Bestand]” (BaW 298). Heidegger questions the metaphysical notion of Being as presence, and the rendering of things “present at hand”. He insists that the modern technological age needs to be examined so that we can learn to dwell poetically upon the earth.⁷

aus beurteilen” (GA 16, 430).

⁸ HeS 266. – “Ackerbau ist jetzt motorisierte Ernährungsindustrie, im Wesen das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Leichen in Gaskammern und Vernichtungslagern, das Selbe wie die Blockade und Aushungerung von Ländern, das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Wasserstoffbomben” (GA 79, 27).

⁷ For an excellent reading on Heidegger’s thoughts concerning Western philosophy’s understanding of nature and our relation to nature see *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger’s Environmental Ethics and the Metaphysics of Nature* by Bruce V. Foltz, Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press Int., 1995. For Foltz, Heidegger’s ethics attests to an ecological consciousness best derived from the poetic mode of being.

The next passage that Caputo examines is Heidegger's thoughts on dwelling and the housing shortage. Heidegger says:

The real plight of dwelling lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness [*Heimatlosigkeit*] consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight as *the* plight? Yet as soon as he *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. (HeS 270)

Caputo analyzes what he calls Heidegger's "valorization of authenticity" (HeS 270), of real, authentic need regarding shelter, how thought could become more necessary than shelter, and its correspondence with essence and essence's resulting "valorization". For Caputo, "thinking can distinguish the essence of homelessness and hunger in such a way that the authentic and essential thing would not be that people are actually homeless or hungry" (HeS 272).

Caputo's "valorization" is a term chosen by Caputo but never used positively by Heidegger. "Valorization", or how to value authenticity, is nothing more than mere values, and this is not Heidegger's way of thinking.⁹ Caputo's critique resides in onticity, whereas Heidegger's preoccupation was with fundamental ontology. Heidegger instead characterizes the basic structure of humankind, and emphasizes rather authentic human existence as opposed to *das Man* - dwelling inauthentically or impersonally: "In the vast majority of human relationships men are not authentic selves or individuals. They are the reflection of unreflective attitudes, the subjective facets of mass opinion and emotions" (Brown 1955, 85-86). Heidegger challenges the notion of *das Man* because he knows that failure to do so would mean ruin for society; the mere adherence of the one towards

⁹ For Caputo's elaboration on valorization as values, see page 235 of Richardson's "Heidegger's Fall". Caputo writes: "I think that the existential analytic proceeds from distinct, definite, historically datable

the voice of “the they” affects all the being-toward categories. Heidegger’s *das Man* interpretation of “the they” is a caring for the other. Others are not to be “pushed over” and to submit mindlessly to the status quo, but to recognize the lure of ordinary opinion, the public dimension as well as the private (BaW 199).

Caputo develops his argument by presenting the axiomatics of *Wesen* - essence- first of all as authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*), real need - he uses as an example Heidegger’s comments on dwelling -, and then as nearness, with reference to what he deems Heidegger’s indifference and the problem of scientific knowledge. Caputo criticizes Heidegger’s thinking as “anesthetized thinking” based on a certain *phainesthai*. “For where are we in truth to locate the distorted, the displaced, the terrifying? [...] Or to aim the question at Heidegger himself: is there not something deeply unsettling in a thinking that is anesthetized before unspeakable suffering, deaf to the cries of the victim?” (HeS 275). But could it not be said that Caputo dwells within the rumors about Heidegger’s ethics, resides in the currents of public opinion, and occupies the insubstantial streams of criticisms of “‘man’ in general, *Das Man*”? (Brown 1955, 86).

Caputo connects *Eigentlichkeit* with *Wesen* emphasizing responsibility - the obligation to respond to the call of the victim in order to highlight Heidegger’s deficiency in responsibility: “For nowhere in the call of Being is the cry of the victim to be heard, nowhere the plea for mercy, the summons for help” (HeS 277). According to Caputo, *Wesen* essence points out not the essence of dwelling but the cries of the other. Caputo indicates Heidegger’s lack: “Hungry and undernourished bodies do not figure in the account, do not come to presence; hunger is (west) not, it simply is (ist)” (HeS 277).

existentiell ideals to which Heidegger is attached and which then get ontological valorization. I don’t think

Caputo questions the “hierarchical impulse” of Heidegger - this “more essential essence of what is coming to presence” (HeS 272). “Neither do the victims figure in the endtime of the history of metaphysics, when they are gassed to death by motorized equipment” (HeS 278). In other words, what sort of essence takes priority over the victim? Would not Heidegger himself also want to ask what sort of essence takes priority over the victim? Again, Caputo misunderstands Heidegger’s notion of technique. Phainesthai is simply describing that technique is the metaphysics of our times. Technique - a new way of phainesthai - deals with blockades and atom bombs. Should we not ask, what is the kind of thinking behind that?

Secondly, Caputo seeks to understand Heidegger’s nearness. He questions the thinker’s prioritizing of Being over life which amounts, he thinks, to a “valorization” of things, and emphasizes the need to rethink the relationship between the ontological and the ontic. Finally, Caputo exposes Heidegger’s “phainesthetics” as the “self-showing of the *phainomenon*” (HeS 276), a way resulting in lack of guilt and not concerned with “what is really happening” (HeS 277), and he examines Heidegger’s ethos, the poetic mode of the fourfold. Within these axiomatics, Caputo defines the “valorization of the ‘call’ - which raises the question of responsibility, of responding to the call” (HeS 270). “What if one were to say that what essentially calls to us in homelessness is not the essence of dwelling but the cries of those who suffer from the lack of shelter?” (HeS 272).

The same infamous agriculture remark is criticized by Caputo in his recent book, *More Radical Hermeneutics* (2000), saying that Heidegger undergoes a shift from

that anybody has ever been to the ontological promised land.”

hermeneutics to mythologizing ways. With the emphasis on Being itself, Caputo contends, Heidegger's essentializing ways become the neutralizing of distinctions between agriculture and murder (MRH 170). Yet, according to Heidegger, this is precisely what metaphysics qua technique does; this is not what Heidegger thinks existentially. The sort of essence that takes priority over the victim is the essence put forward by technique - here in agriculture as motorized industry and the manufacturing of corpses. Heidegger is not silent with reference to the causes that produce victims.

What Caputo does with Heidegger's silence and the victim can also be applied to Caputo's own writings: just what does Caputo do with, for instance, the U.S. bombing in Cambodia? Why is Caputo silent on this? Is this a way to take an authentic stand, as it were, regarding the 'call' of the other, i.e. the 'cries' of the victims? Plato banned the poets from the 'ideal' republic because of mimesis (imitation). Caputo criticizes Heidegger's silence, but one might ask, is this critique only a proper abode for philosophy?

Doing philosophy is at the root of technology that is where we are situated now, indicates Heidegger when he states "Agriculture is now..." Heidegger is stating the situation we are now in – he does not agree or disagree, but he wants to prepare for the answer to the question: What can we do? But Caputo thinks it is wrong to speak in this way, and he wants to qualify things. Heidegger did not refrain from engagement with something dubious - atom bombs and gas chambers; the heavy vocabulary he uses has a different meaning, and the question remains, how can we talk about the situation we are in?

5.2 The Question of Silence: New Documents

Vol. 16 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA 16, 568-573) contains a letter dated September 19, 1960 to a student, Hans-Peter Hempel, who writes to Heidegger that he admires his philosophy but not his politics (Safranski 1998, 228). Hempel had sought clarification on issues that disturbed him, and Heidegger's letter begins by saying:

Your conflict remains unresolvable so long as you read, for instance, "The Essence of Reason" one morning and the same evening see reports and documentary film clips from the later years of the Hitler regime, so long as you are viewing National Socialism solely in retrospect from today and judging it with regard to what gradually came to light after 1934. At the beginning of the 1930s the class differences in our nation had become intolerable for any German with a sense of social responsibility, as had also Germany's economic throttling by the Treaty of Versailles. In 1932 there were 7 million unemployed, who, with their families, saw before them nothing but hardship and poverty. The confusion stemming from those circumstances, which today's generation can no longer imagine, also spread to the universities. (Safranski 1998, 228 = GA 16, 568)

Heidegger reminds Hempel that there will always be conflict so long as he reads "The Essence of Truth" in the morning and in the same evening watches Nazi films. There is an interpretive framework at work when dealing with history. Presuppositions do always exist in assessing the past. Are we yet able to see what present experience itself holds? Judgment implies interpretation, and with it, meaning, whereas Heidegger's thoughts on experience pinpoint that we experience reality prior to judgment - we find ourselves ever "thrown" into situations, and these situations "affect us" (WT 282). Present perspective does differ from another vantage point in history, as Heidegger reminds Hempel, "so long as you are viewing National Socialism solely in retrospect from today and judging it with regard to what gradually came to light after 1934." Heidegger maintains that Hempel will not be able to reconcile these differences so long as he looks at events in this way. Heidegger is indicating that the tenor of the time itself

was such that nobody knew what was happening with regards to Hitler. Heidegger himself was caught up in the hopes of the people having a better way. Speaking in this letter of his rectorship he writes, “I took the office in hope of finding that National Socialism would incorporate building up strength productively.”¹⁰ In the letter to Marcuse, mentioned previously in this chapter, Heidegger had written, “I expected from National Socialism a spiritual renewal of life as a whole, a unity of social diversities, and a salvation of the occidental way of life from the danger of communism.”¹¹

There is a way of understanding, of reading Heidegger necessary for interpreting ethics. The historical situation demanded something. Heidegger tells us what concerned him. Anyone with a “sense of social responsibility” (Safranski 1998, 228) would be concerned about class differences, the economic throttling brought on by the Versailles treaty, the seven million out of work. Heidegger saw the people as confused, lacking direction, unable to do much given the severe duress of their hardships. The first distress Heidegger’s letter mentions is class differences that were so prevalent in Germany, Heidegger was openly reacting to the Bourgeois mentality of his day, a sentiment Caputo virtually ignores. The outrage over existing class differences is a contrasting picture to the one Caputo has regularly crafted of Heidegger. For Caputo, as for Jean-François Lyotard, Heidegger is “anesthetized” by essence (HeS 277):

Thus, when Heidegger undertakes essential thinking (wesentliches Denken), to think on things in terms of what is coming to presence in them (wesen in the verbal sense), what he means is something phainesthetic. Presencing (wesen),

¹⁰ “Ich habe das Amt übernommen in der Hoffnung, daß der Nationalsozialismus alle aufbauenden und produktiven Kräfte anerkennen und in sich aufnehmen werde” (GA 16, 569).

¹¹ “Ich erwartete vom Nationalsozialismus eine geistige Erneuerung des ganzen Lebens, eine Aussöhnung sozialer Gegensätze und eine Rettung des abendländischen Daseins vor den Gefahren des Kommunismus” (GA 16, 430).

coming to presence, coming toward us and concerning us (An-wesen), means above all self-showing, shining with a primordial, gleaming radiance. (HeS 276-77)

According to Caputo, the notion of *phainesthai* is a “constriction of experience to ‘world and thing’”(HeS 277) in which real people and the marginalized do not count. But in this text, Heidegger clearly exposes the existing hierarchy of class differences and in unmistakable terminology declares it “intolerable.”

A second distress that Heidegger brings to our attention in the letter is economic hardship, Germany’s economic throttling by the Treaty of Versailles, it too was “unbearable”. The peace treaty had brought nothing but burden and misery - Hitler’s speech of May 17, 1933 had enumerated the unacceptable conditions along with the statement that “Germany contrary to the sacred conviction of the German people and their government was branded with the World War guilt” (Heiden 1944, 622). Safranski captures Heidegger’s experience of those times of debt, inoperable treaties and rapid change happening on all sides: “He regarded the party as a force of order amid the hardships of the economic slump and the chaos of the collapsing Weimar Republic, and above all as a bulwark against the danger of a communist revolution” (Safranski 1998, 227). And yet Caputo insists, “It is a world in which a wholly *other* kind of responsiveness and responsibility has been silenced, a responsibility to those who live and die, to those who are embodied, who suffer or are in pain, who grow old and infirm - above all, to innocent victims. The thinker leaves no room at all for the victim in the history of Being’s self-showing” (HeS 277). This particular critique by Caputo is misinformed: it is not “the thinker”, Heidegger, but the average culture of the time that leaves no room for the victim, and Heidegger would agree on this.

A juxtaposition of Heidegger's letter with Caputo's critique is necessary to see that Heidegger stresses not just responsibility, but "social" responsibility, a responsibility not concerned merely with 'world and things', but with real people and real lives. Heidegger does not downplay what is really happening around him - encompassing needs, shortages, suffering, oppression, economic burden, social humiliation, exploitation, political structures, verbal injustice, cultural despair. The question Caputo is fond of raising can be posed back to him: "What then of the appeal of the victim, the silent peal of the starving and homeless, or the still deadlier silence of the murdered? Do they not call for thought? [...] What must the victim do to gain a voice in the call of Being?" (HeS 279), and also in Caputo's emphasis on the 'call' of the other, the "victim"? What are we to do with these mute characters of today's technique qua metaphysics referred to by Heidegger? Day-to-day survival was foremost on every German mind in the early 1930's, and Heidegger's letter to Hempel shows no disdain for human affairs.

Heidegger writes that the confusion that those circumstances caused cannot be imagined by today's generation and it also affected the universities. In the same genre, Heidegger expresses to Jean-Michel Palmier in a letter dated January 10, 1969, his disillusionment that "The university remained rigid without insight into the world situation."¹²

Today's generation has great difficulties in understanding the world situation and condition in which the German universities found themselves, often different in different locations; the difficulty lies in correctly understanding the past if one has not lived through it. National socialism is judged by looking at 1937 back to 1933. The new regime in Germany at that time was recognized by the other states even the invitation to the Olympic games 1936 in Berlin did not raise any refusal, but seldom are these facts acknowledged. These remarks are not meant to blanch

¹² "Die Universität blieb starr und ohne Einblick in die Weltsituation" (GA 16, 697).

over nor are they meant to weaken, because the counting of these facts are not enough if real, valuable horizons are missing. To clarify this has to be left for a later history writer.¹³

Heidegger reiterates the complexity of understanding the times, not only for those living through it, but equally from those looking on, from abroad. The letter to Palmier further remembers that the hope in Hitler ended in bitter disappointment, and Heidegger's hope that the teaching staff of the university could be won over in helping Nazism develop into national socialism with intellectual potential as a result also did not materialize.

The letter dated January 20, 1948 to philosopher Herbert Marcuse was a reply from Heidegger to expunge himself from Nazism. Marcuse had been one of the first Heideggerians (Safranski 1998, 168). Heidegger had responded in succinct detail to his concerns, and I will quote only those passages that pertain to Caputo's accusations.

Caputo states:

This is a Greek world or, more accurately, a world of Greeks invented by Germans, a Germanico-Greek world of the innocence of becoming, of the lack of all guilt...Nothing or no one is guilty; there are no victims in the epochal play, no dead bodies, no spilled blood, no incinerated flesh, no death camps, or, at least, they are not essential, not what is really happening. (HeS 277)

Could we not say, for Caputo, as an American, there is no such thing as U.S.

bombing of Cambodia? What about Caputo's ontic concerns with reference

¹³ "Es ist für die heutige Generation sehr schwer, die Weltsituation und die Lage an den deutschen Universitäten, die zudem an verschiedenen Orten sehr verschieden war, wirklich im Nachvollzug sich zu vergegenwärtigen. Man beurteilt den Nationalsozialismus aus der Sicht von nach 1937 rückblickend auf 1933. Daß damals die neue Regierung in Deutschland sogleich von den anderen Staaten anerkannt wurde, ja sogar die Einladung zur Olympiade 1936 nach Berlin keine Ablehnung erfuhr, wird selten erwähnt. Mit diesen Bemerkungen soll nichts beschönigt oder obgeschwächt werden, denn mit der Aufzählung einzelner Fakten ist es ohnehin nicht getan, solange die sachgerechten Horizonte fehlen. Diese zu verdeutlichen, muß späteren Geschichtsschreibung vorbehalten bleiben" (GA 16, 698).

to this tragedy? Does he say anything about that? From the fact that he does not, should we then conclude that he has no sensitivity for the ‘other’?

What was really happening with Heidegger? In his letter to Marcuse, Heidegger rightly agrees with Marcuse “about a regime that murdered millions of Jews, that made terror the daily norm, that turned all that was spirit – freedom - and truth into the opposite meaning”¹⁴ and himself tells about the horrendous happenings of the holocaust when he states that: “... the bloody Nazi terror was kept secret from the German people.”¹⁵ Heidegger identifies with the people’s horror and presents himself as outraged over the barbarity of the Nazis in this letter. Critiques leveled against Heidegger state that he only cares for some people and not others, with the implication that the holocaust victims are excluded from his concern, whereas we find a different picture portrayed here.

“Nothing or no one is guilty” (HeS 277), Caputo says. Quoting Jaspers in his letter to Marcuse, Heidegger says, “the fact that we live is our guilt.”¹⁶ Caputo, as well as Safranski (Safranski 1998, 337-38), and others maintain that Heidegger admits no guilt. Of course Heidegger did seek to set the record straight on his involvements, in answer to questions posed, yet this should not be seen as the giving of excuses. Justification was the precondition for his replies.

“There are no victims in the epochal play...” (HeS 277), continues Caputo. Are there no victims? Could not even Heidegger himself be included as one of those victims? Hempel’s letter informs us that in the following years, because of the dispute between the

¹⁴ “über ein Regime, das Millionen von Juden umgebracht hat, das den Terror zum Normalzustand gemacht hat und alles was je wirklich mit dem Begriff Geist und Freiheit und Wahrheit verbunden war, in sein Gegenteil verkehrt hat” (GA 14, 431).

¹⁵ “...während der blutige Terror der Nazis vor dem deutschen Volk tatsächlich geheimgehalten worden ist” (GA 16, 431).

National Socialists and Heidegger, the Secret Service was sent after him. Heidegger enumerates the lies concerning him and Husserl, and accusations made about him that in his rectorate he was there not to build a university, but barracks (GA 16, 571). Was the thinker not under attack himself by the very group he abandoned? In this same letter, Heidegger defends himself in several regards; it was not his doing or fault that Prof. von Möllendorff lost his job, "The ministry demanded his dismissal, but I refused to give it, and instead resigned my office as rector."¹⁶ Heidegger had nothing to do whatsoever with the anti-Jew activities - he was always supportive, trying to help solve the conflict. He writes:

My first official function in April 1933 was my prohibition to hang the Jewish poster in the University, this fact was also never mentioned. Even today it is assumed I had ordered the burning of books in front of the university, when in reality I had just prohibited such burning. It is never mentioned that during my term of office I kept my Jewish colleagues of the medical and scientific faculty; none under my rectorship were dismissed, but they were dismissed under my successor.¹⁸

These examples are given to directly appeal the political claims of Caputo. A necessary evaluation of Heidegger's ethics includes not only textual evidence of his life's history, but also evaluation of his thought in order to probe the prevailing charge against Heidegger's lack of "otherness". In responding to critiques such as Caputo's that continually cast Heidegger as dull to the marginalized, William J. Richardson raises some valid concerns:

¹⁶ "Daß wir leben, ist unsere Schuld" (GA 16, 431).

¹⁶ "Das Ministerium verlangte seine Absetzung, was ich verweigerte und das Rektorat niederlegte." (GA 16, 570)

¹⁸ "Man verschweigt auch meine erste Amtshandlung im April 1933: das Verbot, das so genannte 'Judenplakat' in der Universität auszuhängen. Man behauptet heute noch, ich hätte die Bücherverbrennung vor der Universität veranlaßt, obgleich ich sie gerade verboten habe. Man verschweigt, daß ich während meiner Amtszeit die jüdischen Kollegen der medizinischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät gehalten

The issue is whether [Heidegger's] thought *excludes* the possibility of such concern, that is, concern for every human individual precisely in terms of her humanity. In the present case, the question is whether Heidegger's fundamental conception of human being (*Dasein*, *Mitsein*, *Mitdasein*, care, solicitude, etc. - in short, his entire anti-metaphysical humanism) *excludes the possibility* of developing an anthropology that accomodates the dignity of the individual as such, or at least some kind of "ethico-political emancipation." (Richardson 1995, 232)

Richardson does not minimize the concerns that Caputo has concerning Heidegger and the other, but locates more properly the starting place of the inquiry. More specifically with regard to Caputo's views, Richardson strongly insists: "What *is* at issue is the matter of 'phainesthetics'" (Richardson 1995, 232). He writes:

When Caputo speaks of 'a phainesthetic matter,' however, the term becomes pejorative and refers to the alleged "essentialist" use of *phainesthai* in Heidegger's later period as the shining forth of earth and sky, gods and mortals, etc., that is, in Caputo's reading, an indifference toward the suffering of real flesh and blood. (Richardson 1995, 233)

But as Richardson points out, Being as *phainesthai* is not merely a specifically Greek experience, as Caputo would insist, and Richardson locates other examples of *phainesthai* references from not only biblical sources but also within Church history in order to question the narrow understanding of *phainesthai* Caputo is bringing into Heidegger's thought. Richardson questions the "'essentialist' reading[s] of the later Heidegger"-including Caputo's dominated concerns (Richardson 1995, 233). These writers are caught up in ontic concerns with reference to their own projects, without specific regard to Heidegger's work on his own terms (Richardson 1995, 233-235). Heidegger's unique gifting of thought and personal choice of concentrating on ontological difference has no direct correlation to, and does not make him guilty of ontic phenomena such as murder

habe; keiner ist unter meinem Rektorat entlassen worden, sondern erst unter meinem Nachfolger" (GA 16, 570-71).

(Richardson 1995, 235). Richardson further locates other notions utilized by Heidegger such as solicitude and care that are overlooked by Caputo in his analysis. (Richardson 1995, 234-235)

5.3 Rhetorical Use in Heidegger

Caputo uses irony over against Heidegger, but not the way Heidegger uses it. This prevents him from seeing the proper irony in Heidegger. Caputo himself uses irony in his own philosophy, but is deaf and blind with regard to Heidegger's use of such.

It is possible to come to a wrong understanding of Caputo, as well as of Heidegger, if we take for granted the way in which things are said. One of Caputo's latest books, *Against Ethics* (1993), could be mistaken by some to think that Caputo has no ethics. One has to do not only with ideas and argumentation, but also with tone, and tone is at least as important as content. Jan Aler's paper about Heidegger and language "Heidegger's Conception of Language in *Being and Time*" refers to Heidegger's style: "He handles the most variegated figures of speech with greatest ease. Sometimes one suspects a kind of professional pleasure on his part - for instance, in his preference for the paradoxical connection of opposites in the oxymoron" (in Kockelmans 1972, 38). What is the relationship between the rhetorical tone and the historical circumstances when Heidegger blatantly states that agriculture is in essence "the same" or similar to the food industry, and gas chambers? The obvious disparity in terminology regarding "agriculture" and "gas chambers" betrays any sense of literal meaning, thus causing the reader to look further, whereas Caputo says that agriculture and murder are about the "neutralizing of distinctions". Just what does Heidegger mean with reference to "sameness"? How is agriculture 'like' gas chambers? Heidegger illustrates the techno-

situation *for* people not aware of technique as “the metaphysics of our times”, as he says. If one can hear Heidegger’s tone, he was verbalizing about the *Wesen* of the victim. In the “Letter On Humanism”, Heidegger elaborates on “sameness”: “For this reason essential thinkers always say the Same. But that does not mean the identical. Of course they say it only to him who undertakes to think back on them” (BaW 241). In “...Poetically Man Dwells...” Heidegger reiterates that “the same [...] is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say ‘the same’ if we think difference.” (PLT 218)

In his writing and speaking, Heidegger wants to give a picture of modern technology. He emphasizes the historical context in situating his remarks on the essence of technology. Returning to that same series of lectures in Bremen in 1949, Heidegger in “Einblick in das was ist” emphasizes the danger (*Gefahr*) of technology: “The historic, necessary opinion about technology is made clear to point out its rule and to bring to awareness the essence, artform and inner nature of technology.”¹⁹ Heidegger’s phainesthai includes viewing the context in which extermination camps, blockades and atom bombs are the deceptive, indeed destructive aspect of technology:

The power of technology does lie not only in its high frequency of machine production, but in the fact that it introduces itself to the human mind in a technical, productive fashion. The essence, artform of technology has its own disguise as it presents itself. This disguise is sometimes felt as people realize ever so slightly that technology might use people as instruments pulling them down, rather than people using technology for good, truly useful and helpful purposes. People not aware of the strange, often misunderstood real nature of technology

¹⁹ “Das in vielen Spielarten herrschende und geschichtlich notwendige Meinen über die Technik ist jetzt einzig deshalb genannt, damit deutlich werde, wie die Herrschaft des Wesens der Technik auch und gerade das menschliche Vorstellen über sie in sein Geraff einbestellt” (GA 79, 60).

admit that technology might be something more and different than just a stepping stone in the hands of people.²⁰

Heidegger's aim is to point out that human nature conforms to the overlooked Being of beings as it appears in the essence of technology. "In the end technology is never just a stepping stone for people, from its very beginning it has never been an instrument in human hands."²¹

Perhaps the real crisis is that we are not able to understand the "meaning within a context of meanings" (PTH 102), that we are unable to "undergo an experience with language" (OL 90-91). The agriculture remark brings about the irony of the project of ethics as a way of control and exploitation, whereas ethics is a saying against control and exploitation. Ethics is not just about topics but also about language. Language is not an instrument that man possesses besides many other things, as Heidegger keeps on repeating, for language is the "home of Being" as he says in the very beginning of the "Letter On Humanism" (BaW 193). With the continuing emphasis on science and technology however, language becomes objectifying in nature, whereas non-objectification is constantly explored by Heidegger in thinking, language, theology and ethics.

²⁰„Die Wesensgewalt der Technik beruht nicht zuerst in der Wirkung der Hochfrequenzmaschinen, sondern darin, daß sich die Technik dem menschlichen Vorstellen zunächst und zumeist nur technisch präsentiert. Das Wesen der Technik, das Ge-Stell, betreibt seine eigene Verstellung. Diesem Sichverstellen des Ge-Stells ist man auch dort preisgegeben, wo man zuweilen dunkel spürt und für einen Augenblick klar zugibt, daß sich die Technik der bloßen Verwendung als Mittel längst entzogen habe, daß vielmehr die Technik selber umgekehrt den Menschen als ihr Instrument hinter sich her ziehe, sei es, daß er unaugesetzt sich müht, die Technik nach ihrer Wirkung ins Heilsame und Nützliche zu wenden. Der Mensch ist dem rätselhaften Sichverbergen des Wesens der Technik auch dort noch preisgegeben, wo man eingesteht, daß die Technik am Ende doch mehr sei und anderes als ein Mittel in der Hand des Menschen" (GA 79, 61).

²¹„Allein, die Technik ist nicht am Ende erst kein bloßes Instrument mehr, sondern von ihrem Wesensanfang her niemals ein Mittel in der Hand des Menschen gewesen" (GA 79, 61).

In a letter dated March 11, 1964, with pointers for an upcoming theological discussion on “The Problem of a Nonobjectifying Thinking and Speaking in Today’s Theology” Heidegger writes: “An example of an outstanding nonobjectifying thinking and speaking is poetry” (ThR 66). To dwell, to dwell poetically, and to find our habitation in this world will not happen so long as we are in a calculating attitude. Heidegger stresses “the necessity of a dialogue between poetry and thinking”²² Why is poetizing important for an understanding of Heidegger and ethics?

What role does language, including silence, have to do with Heidegger’s ethics? Recent documentation revealing the scope of Heidegger’s encounters with Paul Celan give significance to the question, “What role, in the dialogue, does silence play?”²³ In the article “La responsabilité d’une pensée”, France-Lanord includes a letter that Heidegger writes to the Jewish-German poet, Paul Celan, on January 30, 1968. Heidegger writes: “I think that many things will one day be resolved in a discussion starting from non-speaking.”²⁴ France-Lanord elaborates: “Silence is not silence in the usual way but as the fact that something is not being said and is withheld in the word as the possibility of saying. It is secret, proper to the word.”²⁵ Our relation to poetizing is important because the question of Being is the forgotten mark of our epoch. The dialogue between poetry and thinking, between saying and not saying is needed today. France-Lanord emphasizes the connection of thought between Heidegger and Celan in that poetry shows that silence

²² “la nécessité d’un dialogue entre la poésie et la pensée” (France-Lanord 2002, 102).

²³ “Quel rôle, dans le dialogue, joua le silence?” (France-Lanord 2002, 99).

²⁴ “Je pense que maintes choses vont encore trouver à se résoudre un jour dans un entretien à partir de l’imparlé” (France-Lanord 2002, 102).

²⁵ “L’imparlé n’est pas le non-dit au sens habituel, mais ce qui, ne pouvant être dit, garde en retrait dans la parole sa possibilité même de dire. C’est le secret [*Geheimnis*] propre à la parole” (France-Lanord 2002, 103).

is an original form of word (France-Lanord 2002, 101). Poetry puts us in a changed rapport with the world, with the possibility of living and being human. Hope resides close to poetry, and that is most urgent at the threshold of this techno-scientific time (France-Lanord 2002, 99).

By letting that which is apart from us come to us on its own terms rather than on ours, we are in a listening mode whereby objectification ceases. An experience reaches us from beyond. When Heidegger is talking about thinking, he is referring to a zone of non-objectification whereby we encounter things as they present themselves to us. Whether we are thinking or not refers to whether we are open, receptive, or aware enough to be able to receive the things presented. This prior receptivity is impulse for the experience of Being. In silence and listening things come out to meet us. Originary ethics requires reflection and pause. Heidegger wants to bring a balance to an ethics of subjectivity by offering an ethics of non-objectification from which proceeds the understanding that we do not make things happen. We are always anxious to fix things, but awareness needs to be developed in order to hear the things themselves, not merely of our own making and our own choosing. Prior to thinking and action is originary ethics, which does not nullify thinking and action. It does, however, highlight how far we are from understanding our own experience. The overriding scandal of originary ethics is its poverty: “the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment” (BaW 239).

5.4 Authentic Hearing

Caputo’s turn of thinking on Heidegger comes after reading Derrida. In an interview with Carl Raschke, Caputo states, “With Derrida, I found my voice” (LoPh #

8). Caputo says he follows Derrida now, rather than Heidegger. But he does not remain loyal to Derrida's thinking on Heidegger, and he forgets about Derrida's continuing approach – albeit critical – of Heidegger. Derrida is aware of Heidegger's use of the phenomenological approach, he stresses the 'a' in *différance*, the impossibility of speaking *about* something. Caputo forgets that Derrida allows for a reading of Heidegger that remains open and focused on a certain hearing necessary for dealing with Heidegger. In "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology" Derrida addresses the inner ear of hearing or the "ear of the inside" that listens and understands. It is not only necessary that we hear sounds, but that we hear with a hearing not of the ear. He discusses the possibility that one can mishear with the ear, and "hear wrongly (mishear) insofar as he mishears the essential" (HEP 188). Not only does Derrida give a "discourse on the ear, but a discourse of the ear, and of the ear that speaks, of poetizing (*dichtende*) hearing" (HEP 209). "Heidegger's understanding can seem violent, his ear speaks and writes, but it claims to restore an originary sense against another violence, that of a deafness, of an *Überhören* that would have closed up the tympanum, buried the clarity of an early [*matinale*] resonance under layers of wax, archive, and reproduction" (HEP 205). Derrida expresses something of which some are oblivious: Heidegger's abrasiveness towards nonhearing is positive. With regard to the poetic, is Caputo able to follow Derrida's suggestion and to "lend an ear" (HEP 164) to Heidegger?

5.5 Neutralized Thinking

Good, evil, and neutrality does not go unnoticed in ethical critiques on Heidegger. Caputo and Richardson butt heads on this topic. Heidegger in *Being and Time*, discusses the existential rendering of conscience and the way conscience is usually

interpreted, or “vulgar” conscience. Vulgar conscience is phenomenologically conceived as “what ‘they’ know as conscience” (BT 335 II.2, 59/289). Heidegger opposes this understanding of the call of conscience because it is based on what is, or “present-at-hand” understandings which are objectifying in nature. He proposes instead that conscience as call or discourse also includes the possibility of hearing, of a call to someone and to something (BT 314), of finding oneself choosing, of resoluteness - all ontological in essence, rather than ontic. The call of conscience is itself silent discourse, but “manifests itself as the call of care” (BT 322). Heidegger analyzes the experience of consciousness, or the “*authentic* understanding which ‘follows’ the call” (BT 324) and guilt, or the will to have a conscience. Hearing authentically will enable us to obtain “what is called in the call” (BT 341).

Richardson proposes that ontological structure is already implicated in ontic phenomena (Richardson 1995, 252). Caputo disagrees, and ends up valuing ontics. “I think that the existential analytic proceeds from distinct, definite, historically datable existentiell ideals to which Heidegger is attached and which then get ontological valorization. I don’t think that anybody has ever been to the ontological promised land” (Richardson, 235). In “The Heart of Concealment,” a response to Richardson’s “Heidegger’s Fall”, Caputo says that Heidegger’s truth as *aletheia* lacks any sort of evil residing in concealment (*lethe*). Yet Richardson advocates that fallen *Dasein* has as its ontological ground errancy (Richardson 1995, 239). Caputo just cannot subscribe to Richardson’s position that “the ‘clearing’ precedes and makes possible the concrete good and evil that people do” (Dooley 2002, 146). Furthermore, Caputo contends that the

“whole register of evil is missing from the history of Being” (Dooley 2002, 146), in spite of the fact that Heidegger, for instance, in the “Letter On Humanism”, writes explicitly:

With healing, evil appears all the more in the lighting of Being. The essence of evil does not consist in the mere baseness of human action but rather in the malice of rage. Both of these, however, healing and raging, can essentially occur only in Being, insofar as Being itself is what is contested. In it is concealed the essential provenance of nihilation. (BaW 237)

Against Richardson’s position of regarding evil in Heidegger’s account of conscience, for Caputo, “justice and injustice, war and peace, murder and feeding people, are ontologically neutralized by thinking, bracketed by a phainesthetic reduction of good and evil” (Dooley 1995, 154). Caputo finds Heidegger’s obsession with technology to be offensive; that technology is his concern, not war. However, Heidegger is not reducing the distinction between good and evil but instead addressing mere instrumentality that results in both. Caputo misunderstands Heidegger’s position on technology when he negatively accentuates Heidegger’s emphasis on it. Moreover, Heidegger in *Die Gefahr* (GA 79, 59) urges that we use and control technology for the common good out of our good, moral ways. “Nobody can ignore this responsibility,” Heidegger states. But technology whether seen as neutral or not is still used as an instrument. Whether divine, devilish or neutral, technology is still just a stepping stone. Some do worship technology and are ruled by it, but in essence it is controlling us, our wills and actions.

The instrumentality resulting from the concepts of metaphysics such as the reduction of our understanding of nature to that of being as continual presence, and the reducing of being to “standing reserve” are Heidegger’s relentless critique of the modern age. If Heidegger was not upset by war, he would not care about making others aware of all these things. The practical approach of a metaphysical ethics is riddled with power

structures and political agendas that do injustice and harm to others. Originary ethics is a call to distance ourselves from structures long enough to think through the complexities in which we find ourselves. The “Letter On Humanism” reminds us that “Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself. Nor does it therefore ask in what way the essence of man belongs to the truth of Being” (BaW 203). The metaphysical tradition has perpetuated a more subtle violence, that of giving the illusion of human mastery and control which Heidegger dares to address, thus returning us to facticity, real life situations and their destinies. According to James Carey,

In deconstructing the history of ontology and restoring life to its original difficulty, Heidegger’s work takes on ethical significance. Unlike ordinary ethics, which perpetuates the oversights of traditional ontology, Heidegger’s original ethics is bound up with a radical questioning that seeks to remain in the difficulty of life. (Carey 1995, 25)

Does not Heidegger’s radical questioning provide us with a rectifying clue to the misunderstanding that the thought of Being is somehow connected to the neutralizing of distinctions that Caputo is voraciously attesting? In the “Letter On Humanism” Heidegger wrests thinking from “ism’s” and is doing anything but “neutralizing distinctions”; on the contrary, he emphasizes that the truth of Being, whether theistic or atheistic, is not the burning issue: “Not, however, because of an indifferent attitude, but out of respect for the boundaries that have been set for thinking...” (BaW 230).

Neutrality or indifference does not characterize Heidegger’s thought. Caputo contends that Heidegger’s thinking neutralizes murder and his “*Gelassenheit* is stone deaf to flesh” (Dooley 2002, 150). Continuing in the “Letter On Humanism”, Heidegger, in attempting to declare the high status of humans, is also directly denying any anthropocentrism or “elevating man to the center of beings” (BW 231). One has to hear

all the way through what Heidegger is saying without jumping to immediate conclusions. Thinking the truth of Being is set apart in Heidegger's thinking from thinking Being as concept. Heidegger wants to rescue things from the 'thing' concept. Stanley A. Rosen offers that the non-thingly-ness of things can only be assessed "in and through the determinations of languages: words and their relations..." (in Kockelmans 1972, 269). For John M. Anderson, "Now thinking which constructs a world of objects understands these objects; but meditative thinking begins with an awareness of the field within which these objects are, an awareness of the horizon rather than of the objects of ordinary understanding" (DT 24). The relation, as such, is what is to be heeded.

What does poetic dwelling have to do with an ethics of suffering? Does not Buddhist contemplation, for instance, have as its goal compassion? One's relation to meditative experience as in Mahayana Buddhism and the Dala Lama reveals that the whole point of the Bodhisattva path was to learn ways of generating the state of mind to naturally have compassion for every living being. Does Heidegger's originary ethics contain a grain of compassion? Does not a philosophy which salutes the "thinging" of the thing not advocate a different way of dwelling in the world which addresses the environmental issues facing humankind and non-humankind all around us? Perhaps it can be said that one can only care for "the other" when one properly cares also for everything else to which we relate on a daily basis. Heidegger's admonitions regarding "the they" symbolizes a caring for the other. Mere adherence to the voice of "the they" is countered by Heidegger's challenge.

Conclusion

Heidegger's originary ethics is spoken of disparagingly in nearly all critiques. Caputo emphasizes Heidegger's attempt to transcend metaphysical ethics and the misunderstanding on the part of others to take that into view. Caputo stresses in his earlier work that "original" ethics, as he calls it, had to do with the ontological relationship of Being and Dasein and was not to be construed with an ontic relationship of man to man. But Caputo thinks that Heidegger is more interested in jugs and bridges than in people, and he narrows in to launch his project with the "other." He emphasizes Heidegger's lack of hearing the "other" and offsets that deficiency by making place for the other. Newly released documents on Heidegger reveal critical data to offset Caputo's notion of an unconcerned Heidegger.

Heidegger's "original ethics," Caputo contends, is fraught with difficulties, as eschatological it remains in the metaphysics of truth, speaks only of a privileged people, and does not allow for pain. For Caputo, essence unfortunately translates into essentialism, wherein is found the nationalistic excess that could have led to Heidegger's response to Nazism. Originary ethics is an ethics of *ethos* or dwelling. This, too, becomes problematic for Caputo who tries to work out a phenomenology of suffering and an ethics for the oppressed.

Caputo's project of an ethics of dissemination, of alterity, of obligation, in short, the end of ethics has captivating appeal for the epoch in which we find ourselves. Caputo does not go far enough in outlining what we can expect, he does not address any sort of destination for such a project. We are left believing the best, and yet balking at what the

best is, if there is any best. There is no secure sense of what may take place.

Undecidability and trembling are not in the face of what to do with the events in which we are finding ourselves, so much as it is with the lack of identity in the face of these events.

Caputo's notion of justice, apart from lacking any criteria for just versus unjust, is linked up nebulously with a claim emanating from the other. This is a naïve assumption of justice and it gives violence the opportunity to emerge. In spite of the current drawbacks of ethical systems, the removal of ethics to enact a justice that is not well defined poses problems. But Caputo would tell us that singularity makes ethical systems with their generalizing standards more oppressive than the justice that is to come.

Derrida's influence on Caputo is pronounced. Justice is found in the singularity of the law. For Caputo, the Christian tradition and its reference to Jesus provides us with the best example of this. Kierkegaard also gives input to Caputo. Faith is ethics undoing, ethics is counter to faith. Caputo calls for an ethics of plurality and diversity; of tolerance which he draws from Augustine's word "Love God, and do what you will." What is lacking in Caputo's ethics of diversity is a notion of struggle more in keeping with factual existence. He chooses rather to focus on Heidegger's misguided notion of Eckhart's *Gelassenheit*, or "letting be."

An understanding of Heidegger and theology, Heidegger and the divine, and Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* give further insight into Caputo's ethics. Caputo aims to preserve a "theology of the cross" to offset Heidegger's alleged lack of compassion. Despite the many differences of Heidegger's thought with the Judaeo-Christian God, Caputo does not dismiss his thought altogether. Instead he utilizes Heidegger's history of Being to inform

theology and continues the development towards a non-metaphysical theology through Heidegger's notion of the divine.

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