

FROM THE MYTH OF BEING TO THE MYTH OF JUSTICE

THE PRAYERS AND TEARS OF JOHN CAPUTO

DO MITO DO SER AO MITO DA JUSTIÇA

As orações e as lágrimas de John Caputo

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Las oraciones y lágrimas de John Caputo

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Recibido: 03/07/2023

Aprobado: 24/10/2023

ABSTRACT

The present article wishes to examine John Caputo's notion of 'hyperbolic justice' considering his critique of Heideggerian philosophy. In *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), Caputo tries to deconstruct Martin Heidegger's account of Dasein's being as Sorge, as Being-towards-death in its existentiality, facticity and fallenness, not by rejecting that account but by showing that it is fissured by an absence, the absence of kardia (heart), of flesh, disablement, affliction. According to Caputo, Heidegger's aesthetics of Being, and his concern to overcome the oblivion of Being, left him scandalously oblivious to the cry of the suffering other. Against Heidegger, Caputo opposes what he calls the "prophetic imagination" of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard, and particularly Jacques Derrida. I will seek to examine the ways in which Caputo opposes to Heidegger Derrida's 'undeconstructibility of justice,' whilst also resorting to Levinas' 'hyperbolic justice'.

Keywords: ethics. John Caputo. deconstruction. justice. Heideggerian Phenomenology.

RESUMO

O presente artigo pretende examinar a noção de "justiça hiperbólica" de John Caputo considerando a sua crítica à filosofia heideggeriana. Em *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), Caputo tenta desconstruir a narrativa de Martin Heidegger em torno do ser do Dasein como Sorge, como ser-para-a-morte na sua existencialidade, facticidade e queda, não rejeitando esse relato, mas mostrando que ele é fissurado por uma ausência, a ausência de *kardia* (coração), da carne, da incapacidade e da aflição. Segundo Caputo, a estética do Ser de Heidegger e sua preocupação em superar o esquecimento do Ser deixaram-no escandalosamente alheio ao grito do outro sofredor. Contra Heidegger, Caputo opõe o que chama de "imaginação profética" de Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard e, particularmente, Jacques Derrida. Procurarei examinar o modo como Caputo se opõe a Heidegger a "indestrutibilidade da justiça" de Derrida, recorrendo no mesmo lance à "justiça hiperbólica" de Levinas.

Palabras-chave: John Caputo. desconstrução. ética. fenomenologia heideggeriana. justiça.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo desea examinar la noción de 'justicia hiperbólica' de John Caputo considerando su crítica a la filosofía heideggeriana. En *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), Caputo intenta deconstruir el relato de Martin Heidegger sobre el ser del Dasein como Sorge, como ser-hacia-la-muerte en su existencialidad, facticidad y caída, no rechazando ese relato sino mostrando que está fisurado por una ausencia, la ausencia de kardia (corazón), de carne, invalidez, aflicción. Según Caputo, la estética del ser de Heidegger, y su preocupación por superar el olvido del ser, lo dejó escandalosamente ajeno al grito del otro sufriente. Contra Heidegger, Caputo opone lo que él llama la "imaginación profética" de Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard y particularmente Jacques Derrida. Buscaré examinar las formas en que Caputo opone a Heidegger la 'desconstrucción de la justicia de Derrida', al mismo tiempo que recurre a la "justicia hiperbólica" de Levinas.

Palabras clave: John Caputo. desconstrucción. ética. fenomenología heideggeriana. justicia. ley.

1. Introduction: Hoping Against Hope or a Philosopher in Transit

I wonder now if what I once called the divine, the dark night and bottomless abyss of the Godhead, is not simply the anonymity of a nameless night, a darkness pure and simple, rather than the veil of a deeper, more divine dimension. I wonder if we do not all speak a lost language, a language that will have been lost when once the earth drops back into the sun and turns to ash. It is in this light, or lack of light, that I try to think through the experience of "obligation," as a light that burns gently in this nocturnal abyss, meekly protesting the endless and encompassing void (Caputo, 1999: 29).

An hybrid philosopher/theologian keen on producing impure thoughts, American thinker John D. Caputo (1940-) has always circulated between different intellectual arenas within the humanities, short-circuiting fixed and rigorous boundaries between philosophy and theology. His most celebrated books have attempted to persuade us that hermeneutics goes all the way down (*Radical Hermeneutics*), that Derrida is a thinker to be reckoned with by theology (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*), and that theology is best served by getting over its love affair with power and authority and embracing what Caputo calls, following St. Paul, *The Weakness of God*. He has also addressed wider-than-academic audiences in *On Religion and What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*

Caputo specializes in continental philosophy of religion, working on approaches to religion and theology in the light of contemporary phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction, as well as the presence in continental philosophy of radical religious and theological motifs. He has special interests in the "religion without religion" of Jacques Derrida. the "theological turn" taken in recent French phenomenology (Jean-Luc Marion). the critique of onto-theology. the question of post-modernism as "post-secularism." the dialogue of contemporary philosophy with St. Augustine. the recent interest shown by philosophers in St. Paul. the link between Kierkegaard and deconstruction. Heidegger's early theological writings on Paul and Augustine. "secular" and Paul and Augustine. "secular" and "death of God" theology (Altizer, Vattimo, Zizek).¹ medieval metaphysics and mysticism. His latest works

¹ That does not mean that within Caputo's body of work the word "God" is altogether absent. Quite on the contrary, in the most recent phase of his thought, one is able to find a theological thematization that, nevertheless, moves away from the ontotheological discourse of metaphysics (thus a kind of a "religion without religion", an impossible love for the "weakness of God"): "«Comment ne pas parler?» I cannot not talk about God. I cannot talk about anything else. No matter where I start, I always end up at God in some way or another [...] I don't think that the name of God will leave us alone – not for a while. We do not know how not to talk about God. I think that God is taunting us, haunting us. [...] I speak of the death of God in a God of metaphysics, and, in particular, the God of sovereignty and power and omnipotence. But then I move on because for me to speak of the death of God in any final sense would be to speak of "the death of desire" or "the death of love" or "the death of affirmation"' (Caputo, 2007: 143-145). Particularly significant towards a reflection on the role of theology in Caputo's oeuvre, see the following works: *Philosophy and Theology*. Nashville. Abingdon Press, 2006; "Apostles of the

include *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of Postmodern Pilgrim*, and *Truth: Philosophy in Transit*.

God, justice, unconditional forgiveness, unconditional hospitality, the democracy to come, the gift – these are the impossible names that shatter the orders of presence and law. The prayers and tears of John Caputo are a prayer for such a justice. As one of the leading American thinkers of our time whose challenging ideas have had a wide-ranging impact on hermeneutics, ethics, religion, and theology,² John Caputo's philosophy embodies a valuable tool to examine the notion of obligation without ethics and of responsibility without the support of ethical foundations.

It is thus our aim to examine the manifold ways in which Caputo successfully manages to question Heidegger's philosophy by resorting to Jacques Derrida's notion of the "undeconstructibility of justice" and of Emmanuel Lévinas' 'hyperbolic justice.'

2. In Praise of Devilish Hermeneutics: Overcoming Onto-theology

In *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), Caputo tries to deconstruct Martin Heidegger's account of Dasein's being as Sorge, as Being-towards-death in its existentiality, facticity and fallenness, not by rejecting that account but by showing that it is fissured by an absence, the absence of *kardia* (heart), of flesh, disablement, affliction. According to Caputo, Heidegger's aesthetics of Being, and his concern to overcome the oblivion of Being, left him scandalously oblivious to the cry of the suffering other. Against Heidegger, Caputo opposes what he calls the "prophetic imagination" of Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. Caputo opposes to Heidegger Derrida's "undeconstructibility of justice," and he praises Levinas' hyperbolic justice. Of these Jewish interpreters, who reexperience the prophetic tradition, Caputo writes: "I want at this point to identify the jewgreek³ imagination, this myth of justice, this prophetic or quasi-prophetic call for justice, for justice as mercy and compassion, issuing in particular from Derrida and Levinas in order to reinstate what has been so radically excluded by the myth of Being", thus emerging a myth of Abrahamic wandering rather than of geophilosophical homecoming, a myth of Justice rather than of Being.

Although acknowledging that Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic celebration of the "innocence of the becoming" remains an alternative to the prophetic call for justice, Caputo's prophetic voice insists that obligation is imposed upon us, by the suffering face of the other, standing here and now before us. For him, justice dwells among the chaos and singularity of action – what Hannah Arendt called the "frailty of action." Here the key text is the Derridean *Force de loi*, which speaks of an "idea of justice" as "an experience of the impossible," something that exists beyond all experience and therefore cannot be articulated, a call that summons us towards something to come, something temptingly impossible and unforeseeable. In distinguishing between "law" and "justice", he remarks that laws are essentially deconstructible, insofar as they do not fall from the sky but are woven from the fabric of *écriture*, whereas justice is undeconstructible.

Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion." in: John D. Caputo, and Michael J. Scanlon. eds. *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1999. 185-222; "What Do I Love When I Love My God? Deconstruction and Radical Orthodoxy." In: *Questioning God*. Edited by John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon. Bloomington and Indianapolis. Indiana University Press, 2001. 291-317; "God and Anonymity: Prolegomena to an Ankhoral Religion." In: *A Passion for the Impossible. John D. Caputo in focus*. Edited by Mark Dooley. Albany. State University of New York Press. 2003. 1-19; "The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event." Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 2006.

² For a comprehensive view of John Caputo's work, the following works are particularly poignant: James Olthuis. ed. (2002). *Religion with/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*. London and New York. Routledge; Mark Dooley. ed. (2003). *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in focus*. Albany. State University of New York Press; and Roy Martinez. ed. (1997). *The Very Idea of Radical Hermeneutics*. Atlantic Highlands, N. J. Humanities Press, as well as the stimulating article: Michael E. Zimmerman. "John D. Caputo: A Postmodern, Prophetic, Liberal American in Paris." In *Continental Philosophy Review*. 31. 1998. 195-214. Caputo promptly responded to that same piece. Cf. John D. Caputo. "An American and a Liberal: John D. Caputo's Response to Michael Zimmerman." In *Continental Philosophy Review*. 31. 1998. 215-220.

³ James Joyce's neologism can be found in his modernist masterpiece *Ulysses*, composed between 1914 and 1921. See the famous passage: "Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet" (Joyce, 1992: 622).

In his pivotal work *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987), Caputo argues that “hermeneutics has to do with keeping the difficulty of life very much alive and with keeping its distance from the easy assurances of metaphysics and the consolations of philosophy”. what he calls “radical hermeneutics” pushes itself to the brink and writes philosophy from the edge. The play of differences in Derrida’s “quasi-transcendental” conception of *différance*, by the “It gives” (*Es gibt*), according to Heidegger, sets the stage for a more merciless hermeneutics in which there are no guarantees that truth will emerge. In this cold and comfortless hermeneutics, we are left temporarily speechless, suffering from a Kierkegaardian ‘fear and trembling.’⁴

In fact, Caputo steadfastly abides by the Kierkegaardian suggestion that we are, from the very outset, ineluctably situated in the rush of existence, caught in the grip of factual life, exposed to the merciless vicissitudes of time and chance. As “poor existing individuals” we are always already embedded in socio-linguistic frameworks, webs of beliefs and practices that determine how we view the world and how we relate to the others with whom we share it. For Caputo, we must be prepared to face the worst, which means we must be prepared to go the distance with Nietzsche when he suggests that we are but clever animals making our way in the midst of an anonymous rumbling which is devoid of sense and meaning,⁵ in the scaring dance of the “innocence of becoming” (*Die Unschuld des Werdens*). In such radical hermeneutics, we are never quite sure as to who we are or whence we came. We are, as Derrida⁶ argues, always already lost (*destin-errant*), always already cut from the origin and forbidden access to the terminus ad quem (this will be the main topic of *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 2000).

But even though Derrida’s *différance* and Heidegger’s Ereignis point to the same “cold, hermeneutic truth”, “that there is no truth, no master name which holds things captive”, Caputo lucidly remarks that: “this same cold truth issues in different metaphors in Derrida and Heidegger. In Derrida, it takes an emancipatory form, in Heidegger, a meditative one. Derridean emancipation means celebration, actively joining in the dance and enjoying the play into which all things are put. Moreover, Derrida carries his deconstruction of metaphysics into the marketplace, into the agora, gives it an ethicopolitical cutting edge, makes of it a praxis of protest. [...] Derrida is good at disrupting the claims of the powers that be, at disputing their authority, at confounding their claims and putting them into play” (Caputo, 1987: 192). In this light, it comes as no surprise that Caputo, though long enamoured of the shining splendour of Heidegger’s talk of Being, begins to get suspicious of Heidegger’s “entire metaphors of proximity, of simple and immediate presence, a metaphors associating the proximity of Being with the values of neighbouring, shelter, house, service, guard, voice, and listening” (Derrida, 1982: 130).

In the imposing *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993), Caputo argues that Heidegger’s original posing of the Being-question (“what is the meaning of Being in its differentiation from beings, i.e., question about the ontological difference”) as formulated in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) was sabotaged in the 1930s by what he calls a “mythologizing” of Being under the aegis of Greek thought that allowed Heidegger’s seduction into the orbit of National Socialism. Caputo’s own project in the book is to demythologize that Greco-German myth by retracing very critically the evolution of Heidegger’s thinking of being from beginning to end. He insists that the initial experience of being must be not simply Greek but “jewishgreek” (as previously mentioned):

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of Caputo’s interpretation of Kierkegaard’s philosophy, Cf. John D. Caputo. (2007). *How To Read Kierkegaard*. London. Granta Books.

⁵ Caputo’s musings on this Nietzschean premise draw upon the seminal essay “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”, included in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870s*. Edited by Daniel Breazeale. Atlantic Highlands NJ. Humanities Press. 1979.

⁶ If one is to gain a deeper understanding of Caputo’s reading of Derrida’s philosophical endeavour, the following Caputoan works constitute vital material: *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1993; *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1997; “From the Deconstruction of Hermeneutics to the Hermeneutics of Deconstruction.” In: Hugh Silverman (ed.), *The Horizons of Continental Philosophy: Essays on Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty*. Edited by Hugh Silverman. The Hague. Martinus Nijhoff. 1988. 190-202; *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York. Fordham University Press. 1997; “The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida.” In *Styles of Piety: Practicing Philosophy After the Death of God*. Edited by S. Clark Buckler and Matthew Statler. New York. Fordham University Press. 2006. 193-204.

In formulating my confrontation with Heidegger with Heidegger in terms of Heidegger's exclusion of the "jewgreek" I use the expression Derrida has borrowed from James Joyce. The "jewgreek" is the miscegenated state of the one who is neither purely Greek nor purely Jewish, who is too philosophical to be a pure Jew and too biblical to be pure Greek, who is attached to both philosophers and prophets. That is the status that Derrida befits Levinas himself, whose project it was not to supersede philosophy but rather to shock philosophy into place by exposing it to something other than philosophy. Just so, demythologizing Heidegger seeks to expose the myth of Being to the shock of a jewgreek myth of justice, to oppose a jewgreek myth and a jewgreek imagination to a pure Greek myth. Demythologizing Heidegger means disrupting this Greco-German myth of Greek purity, the myth of Heidegger's aboriginal and incipient (anfänglich) Greeks, Heidegger's private Greeks, who fueled the flames of his private National Socialism (Caputo, 1993b: 6-7).

And he further stresses: "Over and against the Heideggerian myth of the purity of the beginning, jewgreek thinking embraces contamination, impurity, miscegenation, and dissemination, which are the categories or anticategories, the jewgreek existentialia of the myth of justice. Over and against the myth of a great incipient beginning, jewgreek thinking embraces the derivative, the non-originary, the secondary, and the repetitive. [...] Over and against the time and place of the First Beginning it puts the time immemorial of justice and the placelessness and homelessness of the outcast" (*ibid.*: 7).

3. Apostles of the Impossible or Loosening Philosophy's Tongue

In what follows, I will be concerned with unravelling Caputo's attempt to expose philosophy itself to its "other", to another voice, one that had its roots in the biblical tradition, where the God is "wholly other," and especially in the prophets, who call for justice. As Caputo himself so poignantly remarks, "If Radical Hermeneutics is a kind of Kierkegaard's *Repetition*, *Against Ethics* is a kind of postmodern Fear and Trembling", that is at once "impish, impudent, impious, perhaps even imprudent" (Caputo, 1999: 29). In fact, in this brilliant piece of philosophical-literary achievement which includes entries by pseudonymous authors, Caputo offers a vision of responsibility that reappropriates Heidegger's neo-mysticism in order to avoid all metaphysical soaring and deep grounding (whether Platonic, Thomistic, Hegelian, or Heideggerian mytho-poeticizing). seeks to shuttle undecidably and in the best jewgreek manner between Nietzsche/Dionysius and Abraham. appeals to the sheer, factual givenness of obligation (*es gibt* obligation, obligation happens). and stresses Biblical appeals for mercy and justice. Into the prophetic Biblical perspective, Caputo introduces the mystical idea that events happen without why.

In asserting that "obligation happens" without a deep metaphysical ground, and even without the mytho-poetic perigrination of Ereignis, Caputo draws on Heidegger's quasi-mystical talk of the groundless ground. And I dare say that this mute anonymity of the "groundless ground" ("There is – *es gibt* – and that is all. It gives because it gives. And that is all"), which Caputo describes as constituting the original difficulty of life, seems to bring him perilously close to the very pre-ethical space that he resists in Heidegger. In fact, the imperative of justice mandated by a Levinasian ethics of the Other and a Derridean "ethics of dissemination" does not preclude for Caputo the adoption of a certain Nietzschean stance, hearing the distant thunder of Nietzsche's cosmic dance. In *Against Ethics*, he willingly acknowledges: "And so I must confess that my impiety is Nietzschean. Nietzsche is for me a very great philosopher of disasters, the most disastrous – in a very precise sense – the most disastronomical of all modern writers. His is a philosophy of stars dancing in endless cosmic nights without a care for us care-filled beings below, of stars twinkling in a void indifferent to the fate of us mortals below" (Caputo, 1993a: 16).

For our author, the only way to resist the spectre of the mercilessness of this cold and tragic Nietzschean abyss is to bewilder Zarathustra's laughter with the tears of the suffering other. It is my contention that Derrida's work has been instrumental for Caputo in raising the issues of responsibility and justice. Now, and though it remains unquestionable that in his recent work on "hospitality, "cosmopolitanism," and "forgiveness", Derrida's ethical turn is nothing short of admirable, the fact is that deconstruction's detractors have alleged that Derrida's deep-seated obsession with semiotic themes (an issue best

dramatized by his controversial axiom *Il n'y a pas de hors text*) had functioned at the expense of more worldly and practical concerns (Martha Nussbaum reports, in this respect, that in Derrida's work, "the ethical vanishes more or less altogether," leaving her with "a certain hunger for blood," a craving she satisfies by blowing the dust off volumes by Aristotle and Henry James).⁷

To be sure, for Caputo, this appraisal misses the crucial point, since Derrida himself has insisted that deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness (what George Steiner has termed as a "counter-theology of absence")⁸ but an "openness towards the other." It comes as no surprise, then, that Caputo's argument in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* is that deconstruction embodies a kind of "prophetic politics", a radical messianic expectation for a democracy to come:

Derrida is dreaming of what is not and never will be present, what is structurally to come (*à-venir*). He is dreaming and praying over an "absolute" future sheltered by an absolute secret and absolved from whatever is presentable, programmable, or foreseeable. The prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida are not a matter of wishing, willing, or wanting some determinable, foreseeable object, a future present at which one can take conscious aim. Every determinable telos is still "present," has already been anticipated within the horizon of what presently prevails, of what is merely "possible." The future present has already happened, save actually bringing it about with a little effort, or even a lot. That is what he means by the "same," something we can imagine and foresee that we could bring about with a certain amount of luck and work. Dreaming and desiring, praying and weeping, on the other hand, are a passion for the beyond, *au-delà*, the *tout autre*, the impossible, the unimaginable, un-foreseeable, un-believable absolute surprise, which is absolved from the same (Caputo, 1997: 73).

As Caputo tells us time and again, Derrida's passion is not for "the possible," or for what is foreseeable and programmable, predictable, and calculable, but for what shatters the horizon of expectation, for "the impossible."⁹ In *The Force of Law*, a text which originated in the symposium on "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice" sponsored by the Cardoso Law School and the New School for Social Research, Derrida discusses at length the problem of deconstruction's relationship to the ethics and politics. One of his major points is that justice, as opposed to law, always pertains to the case at hand in its irreducible individuality. To count as just, it must transcend general maxims such as Kant's categorical imperative (nothing has filled Kant with awe than the starry skies above and the moral law within). Therefore, those who subsume the particular under the rubric of the general rule, he argues, can never do justice to the unique demands of the individual case: "[A]n act of justice," Derrida remarks, "must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups, and lives, the other or myself as »other«" (the problematic of "otherness" resurfaces here as a distinctly Levinasian inheritance). Law, conversely, "always seems to suppose the generality of a rule, a norm or a universal imperative" (Derrida, 1990: 949).

Sophocles' *Antigone* remains, in this respect, an enlightening literary masterpiece. For Caputo, Antigone is a figure of tombs and shrouds, a watcher of bodies, a guardian not of the Law, but of flesh, pain being her unrelenting shadow. For Hegel, Antigone in her role as Polyneices's sister represents the sole possible instance of what Derrida calls "une singularité singulière" – Antigone personifies the realm of

⁷ Cf. Martha Nussbaum (1992). *Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. NY/Oxford. Oxford University Press. 170.

⁸ The phrase is coined by Steiner in his "opus magnum" *Real Presences*. London. Faber and Faber. 140.

⁹ To further clarify what Caputo understands as the "impossible", I believe it would be fruitful to confront his definition in the book *A Passion for the Impossible*, where he writes that: "the impossible situation of hoping against hope, hoping when hope is impossible" (Caputo, 2003: 127) and also in the essay "Hope in hope, hoping against hope", Caputo argues similarly that: "Hope is always hope in hope, hope against hope, hoping like hell" (Caputo, 2002: 148). Therefore, we should not be surprised by Keith Putt's words in the essay "Faith, Hope, and Love: Radical Hermeneutics as a Pauline Philosophy of Religion": "Once one understands messianic hope as the affirmative repetition of *oui, oui*, as the passion for the impossible, and as the *l'invention de l'autre*, one discovers that hope has been a consistent, albeit not explicitly-named, theme throughout Caputo's philosophy of religion. First, the *oui, oui* is another name for repetition, for the kinetics of moving forward through the flux with faith and hope. If that is true, then all of the involved discussions on repetition in parts one and two of *Radical Hermeneutics* may be read as an extended preface to a Caputoan theory of hope. Second, if 'passion for the impossible' names an aspiration toward the secret of the promised future as *non-savoir*, then it functions as a translation of 'openness to the mystery,' which, of course, is the title of the concluding chapter to *Radical Hermeneutics* where the religious is explained as responding to the suffering other with the hope that there is a loving presence in the flux. Third, if *l'invention de l'autre* refers to the anticipation of a justice to come, to the willingness to accept the alterity and singularity of the *tout autre*, and to the duty without debt of responding to the call of obligation with a *me voici*, then obviously the ethical analyses in *Radical Hermeneutics* and *Against Ethics* have lying inchoate within them a certain interpretation of hope" (Putt, 2003: 246-247).

“divine law”, whereas Creon the realm of “human law”. Accordingly, Derrida states in *Glas*: “la loi humaine est la loi du jour parce qu’elle est connue, publique, visible, universelle: elle règle non pas la famille mais la cité, le gouvernement, la guerre. et elle est faite par l’homme. La loi humaine est la loi de l’homme. La loi divine est la loi de la femme, elle se cache, ne s’offre pas dans cette ouverture de manifestation (Offenbarkeit) qui produit l’homme. Elle est nocturne...” (Derrida, 1974: 161). Creon epitomizes the universal, Antigone the absolutely singular. However, as Caputo himself recognizes, the singular amounts to a failed project from the start. For even though justice is demanded here and now and cannot be deferred – it cannot pass over the individual for the sake of the universal, the fact remains that this absolute singularity is the dream of being without *différance*, of unveiling Being in its naked beauty, its immediate Being. We are always already too late for such unveilings: “The individual is always already in flight. The singular always already steals away, is always stolen, like the watches that Genet lightly lifts from our pockets” (Caputo, 1993b: 203).

Yet, on the other hand, the Hegelian desideratum of subsuming singularity under the rule of the universal is an impossibility as well: “The universal never quite fits, can never quite be fitted into the concrete. The individual situation is always more complicated, and it is never possible to anticipate, to have in advance, the idiosyncrasies of the particular, never possible to prepare the universal for the disruptiveness of the singular. The universal cannot fold its eagle wings around the individual and lift it up to its heavenly home” (*ibid.*: 203-204). He continues by admonishing us that “Deconstruction moves back and forth, traverses the terrain, explores the territory, between undeconstructible justice and deconstructible law, looking for the cracks and crevices in the wall of law through which the flowers of justice have begun to grow”, so that the “task of deconstruction is to keep the singular one in view, to keep traversing the space between the universal and the singular, between the law and justice, between the calculable and the incalculable, to keep the lines of communication open between them” (*ibid.*: 194).

Be that as it may, the desire for justice, of the absolutely singular (*tout autre*), is, for Caputo, an impossible desire, calling for something impossible:

[...] a just decision, which is never a merely programmed, calculated application of a rule, is always made in the element of undecidability, must always pass “through the ordeal of the undecidable,” in which our respect for the universal trembles before “the unique singularity of the unsubsumable example” (*FL*, 963). Every decision worthy of the name, every decision which “cuts,” which must give itself up to the “impossible decision,” is haunted by the ghost, by the aporia of undecidability. Finally, one must decide. one cannot deliberate forever. Justice cannot wait for all the results to come in. We are pressed by the urgency of the moment of decision, precipitated into action. “The instant of decision is madness, says Kierkegaard,” delivered over to “acting in the night of non-knowledge and non-rule” (*FL*, 967), always implicated in the “irruptive violence” that cuts off deliberation and acts in a moment of “precipitate urgency” (*FL*, 988) (the aporia of decision) (*ibid.*: 196).

This hyperbolic justice calls upon us, calling for and demanding a response (this unmistakable tone of supplication will be taken up in his depiction of the cries and tears of Jacques Derrida and, very much like the writings of his mentor, Caputo’s texts are also replete with rhetorical flourishes – including prayers, parables, pseudonymous discourses, witty jokes, wordplays, paradoxical turns of speech, amusing irony and passionate metaphor). Contrary to Heidegger’s mytho-poetical “phainesthetics” of Being’s play with the Greeks and the Germans – unmindful of the Biblical theme of moral obligation, Caputo embraces “the paradigm of biblical justice, of jewgreek justice” as “a paradigm of singularity where justice means what is owed to each and every one of us, even and above all the least and most humble. In the jewgreek paradigm, the power of justice is the power of powerlessness, and the rule of justice is the rule that holds sway just on behalf of those who have no power, who are overpowered by the powers of this world” (*ibid.*: 206).

4. Concluding Remarks: Zarathustra's Laughter or Radical Encounters for an Open Future

This article has tried to scrutinize John Caputo's Radical Hermeneutics - a long-standing and wide-ranging philosophical project that, simply put, signifies radical thinking without transcendental justification by attending to the ruptures and irregularities in existence before the metaphysics of presence has a chance to smooth them over. To do so (to loose philosophy's tongue, so to speak), Radical Hermeneutics forges a close link between hermeneutics and deconstruction (namely, as tested through the theoretical lenses of Jacques Derrida and E. Lévinas). It seems fair to state that, although Caputo's enterprise does favor a philosophical dimension (whilst also tackling pressing issues regarding political and socio-cultural dimensions, i.e. the question of Justice), it could also persuasively be argued that Caputo's thought, in fact, raises a fruitful discussion on what could be described as a kind of a tacit crypto-theology or, as the philosopher himself puts it, a theology without theology (or a 'weak theology') that poignantly puts forth the question of human existence from a spiritual stance.

When all is said and done, Caputo's radical hermeneutics invites the messianic as a structurally "open-ended hope" for the incoming of the *tout autre*, the hope that there is a loving presence in the flux and that Nietzsche's aesthetic celebration of the innocence of the becoming will be redeemed by the prophetic call of the suffering Other. Tears will fall but a certain Zarathustrian laughter will always haunt us during our sleep. Such is his take on radical encounter, a moving insistence on the future, on what is coming, and on the courage it takes to keep the "wounds of possibility" open:

There are encounters which we can reasonably foresee and for which it would be irresponsible not to plan, and there are encounters which we cannot foresee, which takes us by surprise, which leaves us wondering how such a thing was possible, how anything so impossible was possible. If our lives are made up entirely of the first sort, when the course of experience more or less confirms our horizons of expectation, then life will have largely passed us by. Nothing will have been encountered, not in the radical sense of an encounter, which shatters our horizons of expectation. If we want to become what we are, Nietzsche said, we must not determine in advance who or what we are. The rule that governs all our beliefs and practices is to keep their future open. The way to be faithful to our institutions, to conserve them, is not to be anxiously protective of them but to be lovingly unfaithful to them. We owe it to them to nurture what is genuinely happening there instead of conserving their present form. What matters finally is not the present form of what happens but what is going on in what happens, the events that are harbored there, events of some unforeseeable coming, which all creation groans to bring forth. What matters most are encounters with what we could not possibly have imagined, which instruct us about possibilities of our lives of which we were entirely innocent, and expose us to a risky and unforeseeable future, which is the only encounter worthy of the name (Caputo, 2008: 21).

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