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## Caputo &amp; Raschke - Loosening Philosophy's Tongue - JCRT 3.2

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*More than any contemporary American philosopher, John D. ('Jack') Caputo has been instrumental in making both the name Jacques Derrida and the slippery term 'deconstruction' household words. His three biennial conferences on 'postmodernism' at Villanova University in Pennsylvania since the mid-1990s have not only drawn leading international figures, including Derrida, but also provided an opportunity for countless scholars to comprehend the players and issues connected to the movement itself. In this lively conversation with JCRT senior editor Carl A. Raschke, Caputo talks about his own project and style, particularly his effort to show us how Derrida is not only an illustrious philosopher, but a religious thinker as well. In that regard Caputo charts a trajectory for postmodernist thought that has only been dimly thought to the present. And he distinguishes his reading of Derrida decisively from that of Mark C. Taylor, whom JCRT interviewed in this spot a year ago.*

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3. **Raschke:** You, along with Richard Rorty, have generally been credited with making the work of Jacques Derrida both accessible and respectable within the American philosophical community. Can you offer some brief autobiographical perspective on how you came to Derrida and by what trajectories?
4. **Caputo:** I got to know Jacques Derrida in the most commonplace of ways ' the way we academics meet almost everyone we know outside our own institutions 'by rubbing elbows with him at academic conferences. I attended a summer conference in Italy years ago in which he led some very illuminating seminars on *Glas*. Then I remember giving a paper "on" him, as he sat in the audience listening, at a conference in Chicago twenty years ago, which was published under the title *Deconstruction and Philosophy*. I remember being quite terrified about giving that paper. I was afraid he would say I had everything wrong, and then what would I do? Fortunately, he was very gracious with me then, as he always is.
5. One of the things that impresses me about Derrida, that impresses everyone who gets to know him, is that he is an extraordinarily decent man, kind and appreciative of the work that others are doing, and disarmingly modest about his own importance. I knew him well enough to prevail upon him to come to Villanova in 1994 to help us launch our new doctoral program, and we have had frequent contact with each other ever since then in connection with the "Religion and Postmodernism" conferences. Although we are very different personally, and have extraordinarily different backgrounds, we see eye to eye about quite a lot of things. That is why I joke about a "game of Jacks," about sorting out whose voice is whose when I write. In the end, what he says about the deconstructibility of the structures we cannot help but erect is the only way that religious communities can avoid violence.
6. At the same time, *deconstruction itself is structured like a religion* ' it lives and breathes a religious and messianic air; like religion it turns on a faith, a hope, even a prayer for the possibility of the impossible. I took up his work most seriously just as I was becoming disillusioned with Heidegger and had heard all that I could bear about the "history of Being." Before it

was published, I sent him the manuscript of *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, because I was concerned about “coopting” him for religion, about domesticating deconstruction, and worried about whether I was respecting the difference between deconstruction and religion. Thankfully, he liked the manuscript a lot, and he said that I read him the way he “loves to be read.” One could interpret that narcissistically, of course, because I read him sympathetically. But I think he meant that I read him “affirmatively,” that I singled out the “*viens, oui, oui*,” which he himself takes to be central to his work and which lays to rest the usual academic and journalistic stereotypes of “deconstruction” which is, in the end, a misleading term to characterize his thought as some kind of nihilism.

7. **Raschke:** In two places in your writing, I believe, you refer to Derrida as the one who “loosened my tongue.” This statement can probably be taken at face value or as a deeper, ‘Derridonymic’ tropism of some sort. Given the context of your career, I am wondering if you can elaborate on that statement a bit - philosophically as much as autobiographically.
8. **Caputo:** Here you touch upon something close to my heart. If you were to go back to my first books, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* and *Heidegger and Aquinas*, you would see that they conform perfectly to academic protocol, to the best manners of the university (not to mention my doctoral dissertation, which I earnestly attempted to make as boring as possible, with the understanding that this was the mark of seriousness). Nonetheless, in the background, even in those days, I nurtured a closet love of Kierkegaard. As a young Catholic college student in the pre-Vatican II days, indeed as a member of a religious order (the “Brothers of the Christian Schools”), I would read Kierkegaard secretly at night, after the lights went out, with a flashlight (that’s a joke). Kierkegaard was my secret hero’passionate, Protestant and provocatively funny’ while during the day and with all due decorum I studied Thomas Aquinas, who was of course angelically calm, cool and Catholic.
9. When I turned to Heidegger, and to his links with medieval mysticism, what I found was more solemn humorlessness, which lay behind his misunderstanding of the comic genius of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Heidegger was incapable of getting a joke. Then I discovered Derrida, a philosopher who said the most deadly serious things with humor, with a joke or a pun, for which he had a serious theory. The Hegel/aigle/eagle of *savoir absolue* soaring over our poor empirical heads; *sa, s’a, S(t.) A(ugustine)*. Outrageous. Outrageously funny. Here was a philosopher writing astute and searching criticisms of Hegel, while also making fun of him, while also respecting him. Kierkegaard *encore*. Derrida loosened my tongue, that is to say, he gave me the nerve to write like Kierkegaard. That means to write as clearly as I could in American English while all the while allowing what I said to be inwardly disturbed by an auto-deconstructing humor which allows my text to put itself in question and not to take itself too seriously.
10. With Derrida, I found my voice, which is of course an import, a corporation, Danish American Deconstruction, Inc. That is why there is marked difference in style in everything I wrote from *Radical Hermeneutics* on. But this, to be sure, could never be just a matter of style; it goes to the substance of what I want to say, to the very stuff of the tragic-comic structure of our lives, in virtue of which we are or should be laughing through our tears. Like the story that Kierkegaard tells of the fellow who was invited to dinner and says he will be there ‘if he lives that long’ and then the host laughs, and he laughs, too. Except that he is not kidding. Well, he is not *just* kidding. Laughter helps us heal the wound of our mortality.

11. **Raschke:** Let's explore the Kierkegaard connection. You, of course, share similar intellectual antecedents with Mark C. Taylor, who started his career as a Kierkegaard scholar, but became captivated with Derrida. You and Taylor have gone in different directions. Taylor saw in Derrida the inspiration for what he dubbed "a/theology." You on the other hand came to identify him as "Saint Jacques," as the great postmodern "desert father" whose "prayers" and propitiations serve to humble philosophy before the *tout autre*. Where Taylor follows Derrida along the trajectory of Thomas J.J. Altizer into the sphere of total immanence, you pursue the "tracings" of Augustine and Levinas to the site of total otherness. You end up on a mountain in the desert (Mount Moriah), whereas Taylor ends up in a city looking out at the mountains - i.e., Las Vegas. Is that the difference between a Presbyterian and an Augustinian? WWJD? What would Jacques do?
12. **Caputo:** Your question is right on the mark, if you will pardon the pun. You are absolutely right to say that Mark Taylor and I share a common lineage but that we have taken it in quite different directions, and you might well say, as you do, that this is a difference between immanence and the wholly other. In *Erring* Mark pretty much opened up the whole field of "religion and postmodernism," which has become a prosperous academic "industry," if you will, and we are all permanently in his debt for that. A lot of wonderful work has ensued in the aftermath of that book. But I like to think *Erring* belongs to the "first generation" of this dialogue. In *Prayers and Tears* I was politely but insistently trying to say that *Erring* is not the final word, or even the best one, about the relation of Derrida and religion, that there is a religious motif in deconstruction that is much more recognizably religious, even more traditional ' for example, there is a genuine "prayer" ' than Mark is prepared to admit.
13. *Erring* proceeds from a more Nietzschean conception of deconstruction as the free play of signifiers leading to other signifiers without respite. That is a 1970s reading of Derrida, which does not take account of a more powerful and Levinasian tendency in his work that is also linked to Kierkegaardian singularity, to his Abraham face to face with the wholly other. I am referring to the affirmation of the coming of the other in deconstruction, the possibility of *the impossible*, the Jewish and messianic motif of the justice to come, the gift to come, the forgiveness to come that has become dominant in the last fifteen years. Were Mark to go back to Derrida today ' which he is not going to do, because he has his own work to do, his own trajectory ' I feel he would have to say something different. Of course, I think he would have to write *Prayers and Tears*. I myself think that Mark does not rigorously observe the slash in "a/theology," that he allows God to dissolve without remainder into the glorious neon and electronic apocalypse of the postmodern city and the internet. He remains for me still too attached to Altizer and he misses a more radically "a/theological" element in deconstruction, one more delicately poised upon the undecidable fluctuation between *theos* and *atheos*.
14. Without getting into a long discourse, let me say that the heart of deconstruction, if it has a heart, is the Augustinian *cor inquietum*, the restless heart of Augustinian desire. But this heart is reinscribed in deconstruction as a certain faith and hope in the coming of something radically unforeseeable, something so unforeseeable that, to the extent that their object is determined and identified, which is what happens in the traditional confessions, faith and hope are actually compromised. From that point of view, and this will not make the advocates of Radical Orthodoxy happy, the faith and hope, the prayers and tears, in *Circumfession* are actually purer, more unknowing, less assured, constituting a more austere faith, more of a hope against hope, than in the *Confessions*.

15. To be a little impudent, let us say that we are always already “hoping sighing dreaming” about an absolute future with a kind of quasi-atheistic, Jewish-Kierkegaardian quasi-Augustinian desire. That for me is more radically “a/theological.” That is the condition of faith, the condition of what Climacus calls the condition.
16. **Raschke:** You make a powerful point, and articulate effectively what might be called the nagging disquiet within, if not the aporia that bifurcates, postmodernist thought. I really appreciate what you say, because I myself tried to speak against the “a/theological” tide in the early 1980s as not the way to go with Derrida. *Prayers and Tears* has had sufficient impact to provoke new readings, of course, but it bothers me there are so many out there who made up their minds in the Eighties about Derrida and won’t pay attention to him now. I find myself even blaming Derrida at times for the Derrideans. Following that thread, can you say more about what you call the “Levinasian” thread in Derrida? Where do you spot it exactly, and where do you see it leading us? In your most recent writings you seem to see it taking us on a journey to the desert, or at least up Mount Moriah. Can you give us a little sketch.
17. **Caputo:** As I argued in *Against Ethics*, the philosophy of difference has two sides: in the first, difference is taken as *diversitas*, the production of polymorphic, polyvalent diversity, the play of differences, a certain “heteromorphic” excess, which is the Nietzschean side that is passed along to us through Bataille. But difference also has the sense of *alter*, of the other one, that one there before me, who confronts me and lays claim to me, which is not a heteromorphic but a heteronomic difference. This latter is the sense of the *tout autre*, the wholly other, which comes into continental philosophy from religious sources, from Kierkegaard and Levinas, two “Jewgreek” thinkers whose writings draws upon both biblical and philosophical resources.
18. To oversimplify matters, we might say that the first sense of difference tends toward literature and aesthetics, while the second leads us to the ethico-religious and political, which is what we see in the serious interest that many religious thinkers today show in Derrida, whereas literature departments have moved on to cultural studies. At the start, Derrida was quickly and mistakenly typecast as a neo-Nietzschean, which is too simple. Of course he has this side; he loves the invention of the other, the production of new and unforeseeable differences, of “innumerable genders,” e.g, as he says in “Choreographies.” But “invention” also has the sense for him of the “in-coming,” *\_in-venien\_s*, what breaks in upon me and shatters my horizons of expectation. This was always there for anyone who had the eyes to see, e.g., in “Violence and Metaphysics” (which was not simply a criticism of Levinas, as was widely assumed), but by the 1990s it was unmistakable to anyone who could read at all.
19. For example, the first analysis of the “gift,” in the late 1970s in *Given Time*, which took the form of a commentary on a short tale by Baudelaire, argued that the literary text is a gift without return that is not to be returned to the author’s intention but allowed to disseminate itself in endlessly new renderings. But in 1992, in *The Gift of Death*, the gift referred to the unconditional responsibility I owe to the *tout autre* who lays claim to me, and the text that was commented upon was *Fear and Trembling*. But for many readers (or non-readers, for they had not kept reading), this all came too late. As you rightly say, they had made up their minds; they thought they already had Derrida’s number. This was especially true in the United States where Derrida was taken up by literary theorists rather than by philosophers. To see this side of Derrida you need to follow closely the argument of Husserl’s *Fifth Cartesian Mediation*, a text which had of course had been studied very carefully by Levinas.

20. For Husserl, the structural inaccessibility of the “other” (*alter*) ego is not a lack or defect, but rather constitutes in a positive and affirmative way the alterity of the other; complete accessibility would ruin the phenomenon. Here the non-appearing of the other constitutes its very appearance, constitutes the irreducible transcendence of the other, the “secret” of the other, as Derrida would say. So, after delimiting Levinas’s notion of the *tout autre* in “Violence and Metaphysics” ‘it cannot be simply and absolutely *tout autre*’ Derrida later on associates himself with this phrase (Husserl himself had spoken of the *ganz anderer*) and in fact generalizes it: *tout autre est tout autre*, everything in its singularity, human or non-human, is wholly other. This avoids the anthropocentrism of Levinas’s formula, but it also reminds me of the medieval idea of transcendental alterity: *omne ens qua ens est aliud*, every entity as such is singularly itself and different from every other entity.
21. Here there is a certain convergence of diversity and alterity, for this formula affirms the sheer multiplicity of things in their maximum plurality and, at the same time, it affirms each thing in its alterity. Where does this lead? Well, for those of us who have an ear for such things, we can hear in this the echo of the God who has numbered every hair on our head, who has counted every tear, who does not allow the press of the ninety-nine to outweigh the infinite value of the one hundredth. So it does not lead only into the desert, although we cannot avoid the desert, but I also see it as an opening to what is called in the New Testament the “Kingdom of God.”
22. **Raschke:** The suggestion that the “postmodern turn”, with Derrida riding shotgun, may actually be in the direction of “the Kingdom of God” will probably sound quite incendiary among our fashionable “a/theological” and “secular theological” colleagues. But it all quite coheres if one has the “eyes to see and the ears to listen.” At the same time, I am not necessarily as convinced as you are that it is as explicit in Derrida, even the later Derrida, as you make it out, but it is certainly implicit. Of course, you know Derrida the man very well, and the heart these days may have its reasons that reason, even “deconstructive reason”, does not know.
23. At the same time, this move has been implicit in the religious and theological readings of Derrida all along. That seems to be why so many of our younger Protestant evangelical theologians, along with Catholic Augustinian types, such as hung out at the last Villanova conference, have been drawn of late into the repertoire of Derridean-style discourse. In my own essay “A-dieu to Derrida” - an obvious play on the latter’s “Adieu to Levinas” - I point out that the “a” of this “adieu” - and I am talking about the Derrida prior to his own sort of “turning” - may be far more consequential than the “a” of difference. Such a Levinasian turn, which may be a turning far beyond where Levinas himself would have turned, is only in its beginnings.
24. My next question for you, therefore, is this: how do we speak, philosophically as well as theologically, with this new acknowledgement of the presence of “the Kingdom”? Do we now speak parabolically, as in the Gospels? Or do we go on writing? Both are appropriate modes of syntax for the desert. Or do we find a more urbane strategy of Rorty’s ‘conversation’? Or do we like Abraham trek up the slopes of Moriah, or like Jesus on the way to Golgotha, in silence?
25. **Caputo:** Let me say at once that I agree with you about the extent to which any Kingdom talk is implicit rather than explicit in Derrida. I would take this to have a strictly virtual presence in Derrida, and to be but one of many virtualities and directions in which deconstruction could be and is taken. I am not trying to appropriate Derrida or take possession of him, to

plant the flag of religion on his shores and claim deconstruction for religion. Deconstruction is less a set of theories and more a style of thinking, one that is 'for those of us who have the ears to hear, who are interested in this' deeply resonant with motifs that we also find in the scriptures. But the dialogue of Derrida with Rorty, who is a completely secular figure (if that is what he is) is just as possible. Or Lacan, etc.

26. Of course I particularly enjoy the insouciance, the impudence, the downright scandal, and I admit that I am giving myself pleasure when I say that he is a religious thinker, that it all reminds me of the Kingdom of God, that he is a quasi-atheistic Jewish Augustine. These are goads, provocations, meant to scandalize both secularist thinkers on the one hand and Christian conservatives on other hand, two eminently goad-worthy groups, I would add. In a certain way, it is a risky strategy, one that is not calculated to win a large following, since it sets out to alienate everyone! The hope is that it comes close to getting Derrida right, to being sensitive to the complexity of his thought, and to making him more interesting to people of good will on both sides, without hoping to reach the extremists on both sides. The acidic contempt for religion on the part of some secularist philosophers, and the intractable antagonism and fear of fundamentalists to interpretive free play'those are beyond reach.
27. As to how we shall speak, there's not much chance that academics will follow the way of silence, which is a style whose merits are lost on the various rank and tenure committees that we all have to contend with. Nor is there much chance that academics will be capable of creating brilliant parables to add to the stock of the New Testament stories. We shall in all likelihood continue to write books for one another, occasionally trying to reach out to a wider audience, as I did in *On Religion*, but perhaps these books will not be so boring. After you get tenure and promotion, you should try not to be so boring; before that, it is more or less required. Perhaps we will be able to invent new objects for study. The traditional "departments" are growing weaker in our colleges and universities and "programs" that implicate many disciplines are growing stronger. While I think that a rigorous training in a particular discipline is a good "boot camp" it is like doing push ups and running laps in order to train for a game' I also think that it does not end there; that is not the game. The reading and the writing of unclassifiable texts'that is the game, and that is also more interesting.
28. That is the effect I hope to produce when I say (and I believe this, I am not *just* trying to produce a provocation), "deconstruction, the democracy to come, the gift, hospitality, forgiveness' yes, that is all like the Kingdom of God. Derrida talking about his circumcision'that sounds like the New Testament." Shock, scandal, outrage, disbelief, red faces' on both sides; tweedy academics and black suited pastors fainting dead away (actually, today, these wardrobes are more likely to be reversed). And then, perhaps, this is the risk, later on, reflection. Reflection both about the Scriptures and about what is called deconstruction or "what is called thinking," as Heidegger says; reflection both about religious institutions and about any institution or structure at all.
29. So it would produce new hybrid analyses that would nonetheless be very pointed, analyses that, on the one hand, perhaps, would succeed in giving religion a new hearing (which is fitting, seeing that it has never ceased to have a hearing outside academic walls), but, on the other hand, would also make us take a new look at the social and institutional structures around us. Our social institutions do not often resemble the Kingdom of God, even as the churches do not often resemble the democracy to come. It would infuse Kingdom motifs into secular structures and at the same time demand that the Kingdom find a way to be embodied

in the *kosmos*, the “present age,” the world of business and politics. It would be a way both to pitch the tents of the Kingdom in the world and also not to conform to the world, which is the double bind we are all under. So if all this were to succeed, the effects would be felt in ethics, politics, religion, the seminary and the academy, on many fronts, all of which would become more porous to one another, and more open-ended and revisable in themselves.

30. **Raschke:** If I may venture a “religious” annotation here, I will say amen. But as an African-American Pentecostal pastor, who had a major impact on my thinking, once said, “if you’re going to have Kingdom men and women, you [as a preacher] have got to make them stop thinking like kings.” Foucault somewhere talks about regicide, separating from the body the head of the “king”, as the historical “sign” that brings to a close the self-referential (or what Heidegger would term “subjectist”) reflexivity that charts the history of Western philosophy. In a semiotic sense, the king is the political arche-presence, the transcendental signified, the anchoring representation of all “rationality”, the “what” that one really loves when they love their God (I am alluding here to what you and Derrida do with Augustine’s celebrated line). Along these lines I am intrigued by your referencing the “democracy” that is “to come”, and its signification with respect to the “Kingdom.”
31. Perhaps the follow-up question, then, would be how to “write”, which is what you say we should be doing, in the anticipation of a “democratic” Kingdom without kings. If deconstruction is at heart a “style”, then it is a style that should be infecting all our other styles, including the style of writing. It should be infecting JCRT, which I am not sure it is even beginning to do. That is a far cry from the *skandalon* of Jesus, let alone its still awaited (*invienens*) *parousia*. If we academics are only a scandal to ourselves, then we do not create much scandal. We are only creating “palace scandals,” titillating ourselves within earshot of the king, who remains ensconced on his throne. Now and then we announce that the “king is dead” (thanatotheology), which we don’t really know, so we can try to run the palace for a while. What is the style of writing in your estimation when writing is no longer in the “royal” (academic) style?
32. **Caputo:** You are right. To speak of a “Kingdom” offends our democratic ears and sounds like the very opposite of a democracy, and your African-American preacher is right: the leaders of the churches behave like kings, and indeed Roman Catholic cardinals are spoken of as “princes of the church,” which is also how they dress. There is a wonderful text near the end of the famous “Diff’rance” essay in which Derrida stresses the poverty of the word, or non-word, *diff’rance*. He says this word is de-capitated, that it is not only defaced and scarred by a misspelling but that it is deprived of a head, without a capital letter ‘I am glossing this text a little. He goes on to say that *diff’rance* does not “reign” over anything, that it lacks “authority,” that it “subverts every Kingdom”, and that it is “dreaded” by everything that desires a Kingdom, past or future. So, there could be no “Kingdom of diff’rance” ‘except in a completely ironic sense. For what would prevent us speaking of a “Kingdom *without* Kingdom?” That would be, it seems to me, a paradigmatic Derridean gesture, although it is not one that he makes. There could be a Kingdom of *diff’rance* only where there is no royal purple, not a king or a prince in sight, a Kingdom without kings and royalty, without a prince, *principium*, or *arche*. So were there to be such a Kingdom, which could only be what he would call ‘were he to say this, which he never does’ a “Kingdom to come,” it would be an “an-archic” Kingdom, where what “reigns,” what hold sways, is what is an-archical, the out-of-power, out of luck, outcast and outlaw, the outsider.
33. That is what I am calling in the book I am working on right now a “sacred anarchy,” a “hier-

an-archy," where what is valorized is precisely what is out of power. We maintain a tension between what is valorized, what has power, what is sacred, and, at the same time, what is out of power, outlawed and outcast. So the "power" here is precisely the power of powerlessness, which is the structure of the "other" in Levinas, who comes to me from on high just in virtue of the fact that he is laid low; the other's claim on me arises from his destitution. That is how such a Kingdom, such a holding sway, could work its way into deconstruction. But is not all this very much like the *basileia*, the Kingdom in the New Testament, which is a most unlikely, a highly ironic Kingdom?

34. Here is a "Kingdom" in which the favor falls on the lame and the leper, the poor and the outsiders, where, as the story of the wedding feast tells us, the ones who are "in" the Kingdom are precisely those who are "out." When the soldiers dress up Jesus in purple and crown him with thorns, when they mock his Kingdom, is that not exactly right? From the point of view of the world, the Kingdom of God is an irony, an object of scorn, a joke. So, my hypothesis is that the "democracy to come" and the "Kingdom to come," look very much alike on important points. But your question demands one more concession. The talk of a "Kingdom" to come, even an inverted, perverted and anarchic Kingdom, would be strategic since what would finally be envisaged is a radical community of equals, where no one is privileged. Derrida, incidentally, would be willing to say the same thing about the word "democracy:" in the radically unforeseeable future of the "democracy to come," the "to come" is more important than the "democracy," because in an absolute future, the future is radically unforeseeable and we cannot be sure we would want to call it democracy.
35. As to how to break out of the palace, how to produce the effects of democracy on a wider scale, I do not know that I have anything to add to the obvious. I myself feel free to write in a style that gives scandal to academic protocol, to the A.P.A. or to the A.A.R., but as you say this is "in house" scandal and such provocation is miniscule. If *Prayers and Tears* could get on to Oprah's list, would that make a difference? Are we prepared to say that is what we want?
36. The "Jesus Seminar" people write in a traditional style but they have very good marketing skills and they have gone a long way to alerting a wider public to the radical results of historical Jesus research. They have even gotten on to television. That might be one example. Also, it is hard to imagine a book that has been more widely assimilated into the general culture than Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*' all sorts of people speak of "paradigm shifts" without even knowing where this phrase comes from but that is a book written in a more or less conventional academic style and not a very long book at that (perhaps that is the secret!). Kuhn's book offers a radical and transforming way to think, not only about scientific change, but about any kind of transformation at all, so that anyone who can read understands that Kuhn is describing a process that goes on everywhere. His discourse on "revolution" is very much in an "establishment" style, but what he says is enormously provocative.
37. Derrida himself is also the source of an enormous provocation but he writes for the most part in a way that almost no one can understand without extensive preparation and careful study. So he is easily misunderstood. For example, instead of being counted as an advocate of "democracy," he has recently been included on a list of misguided intellectuals like Heidegger who fall for totalitarian regimes. I do not know what the law is here but if I had to venture a hypothesis I would be inclined to point to William James, who wrote a lucid, witty, scintillating American English that made the language dance and became a public figure of considerable importance. Rorty is a little bit like that today; he is a brilliant writer who has perfect pitch for

the rhythms of American English and has a wide audience. Kierkegaard did the same thing with Danish, but there are few people in the world who can read Danish, so he has depended upon translators. That raises the question of the “monolingualism” of the world today, where everything must be in English.

38. My hypothesis would be that we do not need to write in an *avant-garde* style. But we do need to cross over disciplinary barriers and to write in a way that can be understood ‘unlike the way we train our doctoral students to write, in analytic or continental programs’ and in a way that can in fact make the language dance! It also helps if the language in which you dance is English.
39. **Raschke:** Shifting back to Derrida, I’d like to move to the question of the relationship between deconstruction and religion, and where Derrida is really going as he increasingly takes up the “religious” issue. Is he talking about religion in a broad, concrete sense, or more about the “paradox” which generates the possibility of faith (in Kierkegaard’s sense)?
40. If we read Derrida as Derrida, what do we really do with the “study of religion”? Don’t we really have to deconstruct it in a radical way and perhaps get back to the question of faith, which is independent of the vast formalities of the phenomenon? You have spoken of a “religion without religion.” How can we move in that direction - theoretically - without running aground on mere heuristics?
41. **Caputo:** Let me distinguish in what you say between religion and the study of religion. First, religion. In an important way, deconstruction is all about religion because it is all about faith. The deconstructibility of the present is a function of the structure of hope and expectation, of the possibility of the impossible, of the very idea of the “to come.” Derrida says that the least bad definition of deconstruction, deconstruction in a nutshell, if you will, is the experience of the impossible. Here “experience” does not mean the ordinary course of experience of things in “now-time,” in a kind of smooth Husserlian flow of objects presented in perceptual intuition, given in a continuous series of present moments, which are adequately prepared for by protention. That, we might say, is the definition of “secular” (un-eventful) experience.
42. Experience for Derrida means being taken by surprise by something completely unforeseeable, something that in a certain way blind-sides us, comes out of nowhere, which is what he means by the “event.” By “the impossible” he means the event, what is not possible relative to our horizon of expectation, what we did not see coming. The only thing that is truly “coming,” in this sense, what is truly “to come,” is what we did not see coming. If you see something coming, if you can anticipate it, then to a certain extent it is already present and it has already happened. That is the “future present” as opposed to the “absolute future.” So the relationship to the future cannot be one of seeing or knowledge but strictly of faith and non-knowing. As I said earlier, “knowledge” would actually compromise the faith. To the extent that we know what we want or expect or hope for, then the faith would be more determinate, more content-ful, more “credible,” much less a “pure” faith. Derrida takes the notion of faith and hope very far, farther really than in a confessional faith where the object of faith is relatively determinate.
43. This expectant hope in the impossible draws upon deep religious resources and has a distinct and unmistakable religious flavor. With God nothing is impossible, the name of God is the name of the possibility of the impossible. But Derrida is *not* religious in a conventional sense ‘which is alright, since we already have a lot of conventional religion! When I speak of

“religion without religion” I mean deconstruction is a religion without conventional religion. It is at most “structured like” a religion, like a prophetic religion, since the hope and expectation are always ethical and political, turning on a promise of justice and democracy.

44. If we simply bracket this word religion we might say that deconstruction is an important form of “post-secular” thinking, thinking that has become critical of the various Enlightenment critiques, enlightened about the Enlightenment. In that way deconstruction avoids a reductionistic critique of religion and allows religious structures to resurface, to assume their rightful place in experience. Or rather, since Derrida dislikes the periodization that the family of “post-” words implies, we might speak of deconstruction as “para-secular” thinking, thinking that runs alongside mainstream secular thinking, that occasionally intersects with it but then drives off the road to wander in an open field, and then again intersects with the main highway later on, and so on. Derrida might prefer that image. “Para-” suggests that it takes up with something marginal like Jesus dining with sinners! or subsidiary, not officially sanctioned by the secular and academic enlightenment. Then it operates from this marginal position to disturb the business as usual of the secular enlightenment in a discourse and a style that those of us who have a religious tradition find congenial and instantly recognize.
45. But it is not just style, or a heuristics, because I really do believe that what is going on in deconstruction in this more prophetic mode in a very substantive way disturbs the distinction between theism and atheism. Derrida rightly passes for an atheist but what is called for in deconstruction is what is called in religion “the love of God” ‘ in spirit and in truth, loving God in a way that is not orthodox but orthopractical. Perhaps, if our secular colleagues listen to Derrida they will get an earful of religious discourse, all they need, without even knowing it, and it, the religion, will be very painless for them, even if Derrida is a pain to them in other ways. Or perhaps they sense the danger of a painless contamination by religion and this is what worries them and is part of the Enlightenment hostility to him.
46. That is how I see the relation of deconstruction and religion. As to the “study of” religion, religious studies, the most important effect of deconstruction is to relativize the particular confessions as so many instances or cases of this structure of hope and expectation. The religions of the book turn on this “pure messianic” as so many ways to determine this “pure faith,” to give it content and historical actuality, but one concedes, methodologically, that there are various turns possible here and no one has taken the final turn. Now since this relativization is really the opening move of “religious studies,” deconstruction should be a welcome guest in most religious studies departments, because it provides them with an affirmative and important meta-theory of religion.
47. But if we distinguish religious studies from theology ‘ an old religious war! ‘ and if we say that theology is defined by the repudiation of confessional relativization, then deconstruction may look more like a poison/remedy, a gift/Gift, a promise/threat, a monster instead of a Messiah. But even then I think that theology, if it is not to become doctrinaire and indoctrinating, requires this deconstructive opening. All this is complicated by the fact that the “pure messianic” depends upon the memory of the Messiah, or the memory of the hope in the coming of the Messiah, that is preserved in the concrete religious traditions.
48. The study of the ancient texts is lovingly cultivated in these traditions, and without them the very texts that Derrida analyzes, maybe the very idea of religion, might not have been preserved.

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