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Religion as Response

Derrida's Responsibility to the Question of the Question

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy, The University of Auckland, 2016.
Abstract: Jacques Derrida’s fullest treatment of religion comes in his 1994/5 paper “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” In it he states, “The question of religion is first of all the question of the question. Of the origins and borders of the question—as of the response.” In this thesis I explore Derrida’s metonymic use of the to and fro of question and response as a means for thinking through what is taking place in the event of religion. Starting with “Faith and Knowledge” I explore Derrida’s approach and the way it engages with four thinkers who influence his exploration of religion as response: Heidegger, Kant, Levinas and Kierkegaard. The thesis reveals that, rather than approaching religion as a site to be excavated and examined as if we might get to its bottom, Derrida’s interests lie in the event of religion that would exceed thematisation. As such, he attempts a way to speak of religion without ever saying what religion is, for when it comes to religion everything tends to drop out of sight as soon as knowledge is framed in terms of mastery. For Derrida, knowledge is not opposed to faith, but rather something that is infused with faith as it participates in the fiduciary opening that performativity affords. This faith-filled reasoning opens itself over a chasm that would offer no grounding site upon which to demonstrably build. Void of any structure of authority, this ‘mystical foundation’ complicates all oppositional logic, revealing that within every response is an element of belief. This is the structure of the performative event that every response responds to. Thus, the thesis offers a commentary on, what Derrida calls, ‘the promise’ (following Heidegger), which in turn becomes a framework with which to explore what is going on within religion.
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Introduction: Situating the Question of Religion

If there is a question of religion, it ought no longer to be a “question-of-religion.” Nor simply a response to this question. We shall see why and wherein the question of religion is first of all the question of the question. Of the origins and borders of the question—as of the response. “The thing” tends thus to drop out of sight as soon as one believes oneself able to master it under the title of a discipline, a knowledge or a philosophy. And yet, despite the impossible task, a demand is addressed to us….¹

Derrida’s claim that “the question of religion is first of all the question of the question” provides a point of departure for our inquiry, which considers religion as a certain metonymy for thinking through what is taking place in the to and fro of question and response. This phrase comes from Derrida’s 1994/5 paper “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone” where, in his typically playful writing style, Derrida frames this section as itself being a response to a question from Maurizio Ferraris regarding the theme for their upcoming conference at Capri. The theme of religion comes to Derrida in an automatic, spontaneous manner, to which he asks, “Why? From where did this come to me, and yes, mechanically?”² It is as if this topic has interrupted his flow of thought, being dictated to him from somewhere beyond him calling forth a response. Within the very manner of the topic of religion coming to Derrida is mediated a message of what is going on within the name of religion: that the question of religion structurally creates a deconstructive lever to explore the question of the question which becomes framed as response: religion as response. Before the theme has been chosen what Derrida is articulating is that religion is already at work such that any exposition on religion would not start at a given point nor end at a given point but rather already be at play regardless of any announced closure that would be placed upon it.

This interruption that Derrida experiences marks a wider hermeneutic gesture at play in his work, a gesture that speaks to the site of ‘the question’ and ‘the response,’ which may

² Ibid.
be framed by asking: from where does a question come? Do I stumble upon a question or does a question impress itself upon me? Is it dictated to me from somewhere beyond myself, and if so how can I assume that it is my question? This hermeneutical questioning is what Heidegger has in mind when he articulates his notion of presuppositional apprehension:

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual interpretation, one likes to appeal to what ‘stands there’, then one finds that what ‘stands there’ in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undisputed assumption of the person who does the interpreting.\(^3\)

To substitute ‘interpretation’ for ‘question’ shows the issue—an issue generally framed by the hermeneutic circle whereby the circle’s meaning is understood by the parts and the parts’ meaning by the circle as a whole in an ongoing to and fro. Heidegger’s remarks suggest that the question is never devoid of the subject posing the question. The subject’s presuppositional apprehension might collectively make up the whole in this schema with the parts being the various questions and responses which are understood in virtue of the subject’s experience in the world. This highlights the inevitable intrusion of oneself within the question. Was this question then dictated to me by my presuppositional apprehension framing my experience which itself sits within a larger hermeneutic circle of being in the world? Would this then include not only a question contaminated by one’s presuppositional apprehension, but the response as well? If we follow the hermeneutic circle motif the question would in turn frame the response and therefore the response would be implicit within the question. This follows the Procrustean bed syndrome motif that just as Procrustes would stretch or shorten his victims fitting them to the size of his hostel beds, so too the response is fitted to the frame of the question (and vice versa) with its prejudiced backdrop.

To bring this to Derrida’s “mechanical” stumbling upon the theme of religion, we might ask: is this response authentically his? This would be to assume that what is of principal importance within both question and response is its authentic origination within the individual. Such an assumption would mark a trait of the Heideggerian existential tradition which begins with self and appropriates being in the world through the rubric of self. The

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question that I pose in turn must come under scrutiny from myself, and so too the response. This scrutiny will always remain at a distance from any self-contained closure, for the self becomes deeply embedded within the question which in turn informs the self. This movement signals a double self-reflexive spiralling of self probing self and question probing question resembling something of a *mise en abyme*. Here the mirrored self heightens the fleetingness of the question whilst still keeping it in view. In this vision the subject remains on the side of the question; on the side of the why. However, beyond the sense that there is a Procrustean bed syndrome running through the fabric of life, what if the subject’s privilege is displaced? Or even more than this, what if the notion of *privilege* is displaced and, along with it, the spiral of outbidding that might wage war at the source of all things, at the source of the question where origin against origin would be more a picture of presuppositional apprehension against apprehension, my god against your god wherein such a binary logic may afford only one victor. This displacement of privilege would then prize open the hermeneutic circle where the priority of the question is dislodged by a faithful response to that which the question within oneself could not foresee coming.

This Derridean interruption of the Heideggerian existential-hermeneutic posits a more radical post-Heideggerian experience regarding the question and response. Its radicality arises in the greater risk of opening oneself to the incoming of that which exceeds the self and of that which comes to encounter the self with a selfhood that is always under construction and deconstruction. Here horizons are breached by the incalculable incoming of the other as wholly other which in turn creates a space for a more comfortable hosting of Procrustes’ guests outside of the parameters of a one-size-fits-all bed frame. This would be a movement from an egology of authenticity to an alterity of responsibility in exposing oneself to the unappropriable. I am responsible in that I bring myself to the response as a decision; I am irresponsible in that I myself am never a self-assured, self-affected self in coming to the response with fullness of clarity and neither is my decision to respond in this way and not that. Here a madness of decision cannot be guided and comforted by some self-affirming ground. This dual responsibility and irresponsibility would in turn deconstruct both the binary logic of self/not-self and of responsible decision/irresponsible decision within a threading trace of fissures and ruptures in excess of any self-contained circle of knowing. It is something of this feeling that Derrida is hinting towards in his coming to the theme of religion, a feeling that he has expressed on numerous occasions such as his experience of coming to write *Of Grammatology*:
I actually had the feeling that something very unique for me took place. I had the impression that an interpretive edge, a lever, appeared to me. It’s not as though I created it myself. I never have the feeling, even when I’m happy with a text I write; I never have the feeling that it’s me. This is why I have a feeling both of responsibility and irresponsibility when I write a text… as though I had transcribed something that had imposed itself on me. In Of Grammatology I had this feeling in an even stronger way… happened not by me but to me… that was very powerful.4

This imposition eliciting transcription, like his machine-like response to Maurizio Ferraris, is a response that, elsewhere he states, is always responding to an occasion.5 This occasioning would mark an intrusion or contamination of the egology of the question which would in turn prohibit the answer from being an assumed, self-contained whole. Elsewhere Derrida speaks of the process of improvising a response concerning a title for a conference lecture.6 The improvising response would carry an image of a musician who, rather than arriving to perform a piece that has already been prescribed, must know his instrument well enough to improvise to the promptings that the other musicians occasion. The thought within this would be that all prescription comes from an inscription within the trace. Derrida states:

There is no first yes, the yes is already a response… There would thus be, in the beginning, no first word. The call is called only from the response. The response comes ahead of or comes to encounter the call, which, before the response, is first only in order to await the response that makes it come.7

The question of religion will turn on this inscription of the yes as a deconstructing of the “question-of-religion” which would disallow a neat, systematised response to this question. As quoted above, Derrida states in “Faith and Knowledge,” that at the moment when one believes mastery of this question is attainable, “the Thing” that we name religion drops out of sight. This section in “Faith and Knowledge,” and indeed Derrida’s wider corpus on religion, opens up Derrida’s engagement with four thinkers who influence his exploration

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of religion as response: Heidegger, Kant, Levinas and Kierkegaard. One who is familiar with Derrida will know that there are a myriad of thinkers and approaches that have influenced him, but that such influence is not taken as being contained within the names of these thinkers nor their doctrines as self-contained wholes. Such a thought would leave unchecked the untranslatability of the proper name.\(^8\) This too would concern the name of religion.\(^9\) As such the task of tracing religion’s ‘origins’ is open and endless. It will become clear over the course of this study, however, why these four thinkers are particularly important with regard to this topic.

For the purposes of this inquiry, Heidegger provides our starting point, for it is Heidegger’s question of being that seeks to unearth the question of the question which then becomes reframed in his late work by the Zusage (the promise or pledge) (Chapter 1). This transition is a movement from activity to receptivity; from an asking to a listening (to the promise). The most explicit exposition on religion in “Faith and Knowledge” comes in Derrida’s engagement with Kant’s Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone where rational religion, according to Derrida, might be seen as a performative response to an originary faith, a response that is between believing and knowing (Chapter 2). The Levinasian/Kierkegaardian line that Derrida follows is the movement from the primacy of the question to its redoubling within the response, a movement elicited by the incoming of the other and the other’s address that, particularly in the case of Kierkegaard, makes an appeal beyond the general to the singular. This would be an appeal that equates to a certain madness of decision in our responding to the other as in the double bind of Abraham and Isaac explored in Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling—a double bind that Derrida himself would attest to in his framing of his texts, and life, as occasioned responses (Chapters 3 and 4).\(^10\) The first two chapters on Heidegger and Kant turn on the dual pressing of boundaries and privileges. The economy of the individual persists with the primacy of the question. The second two chapters on Levinas and Kierkegaard turn on the incoming of the other and the undecidability in response that such an address affords. The first two thinkers help to compose a metaphysical lineage in Derrida with their ‘death of God/the absolute’ philosophies, and the latter two thinkers compose a more ethical lineage in Derrida with respect to the responsibility that the other calls us to beyond our egocentrism.

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\(^8\) Derrida, Of Grammatology, 99.
\(^10\) This double bind would be a metonymic framing of the aporia of living as dual witness and sacrifice whereby responsibility to one implies the irresponsibility of sacrifice to another (life/death).
Before embarking on our study, some brief orienting remarks are in order. First, Derrida’s approach to religion will not amount to a deconstruction that would seek out its overcoming as an annihilation. Such a move would be an impossibility for deconstruction, as if one could detach religion from the text through which it is so heavily threaded. This will be a point explored in the following chapter through Derrida’s neologism “mondialatinisation”: the Latinization/Christianization of the West which is becoming a global phenomenon whereby we don’t move beyond religion but rather through it, not as something that we might have chosen but as something that has already chosen us. Religion would be another way to address Derrida’s Blanchotian notion of the step/not beyond—that our stepping beyond is an impossibility in that we reinscribe the trace within where we step, and thus that which we seek to move beyond is contaminated within the very walk to get there. As a result, what follows will be a study on sacrifice, on the sacrifice of religion not as a destructive sacrifice—as if annihilation is still an option—but as a deconstructive sacrifice. Indeed, Derrida will say in “Faith and Knowledge” that religion as response holds the ambiguity of an ellipsis: “the ellipsis of sacrifice”11—the response holding within it a certain sacrifice of that which we do not know, of that which is obscured from view, of a certain religion sacrificed on behalf of religion. This Derrida will explore with regards to the sacrificing of life made on behalf of a life more than life—Abraham’s promise of progeny is sacrificed not in spite of the promise but on behalf of the promise. The sacrifice happens from within, which is why for Derrida a reading of religion will always be a self-deconstruction from within religion: a sacrifice of sacrifice, a life/death dance where sacrifice is sacrificed for the step/not beyond of sacrifice, where deconstruction amounts to construction from within this deconstructive gesture and vice versa, where Abraham would receive Isaac back but not as before—as a gift received outside of the circular economy of debt and restitution. This theme will frame a reading which seeks out the question’s sacrifice, the sacrifice of my own interrogative question’s in order to be led to respond to the interruptive address from Derrida, Heidegger, Kant, Levinas, Kierkegaard and the trace that feeds into, and is constantly disrupting, such a clear reading and responding.

Second, one does not embark on such an exploration in order to find its end in a response which would meet its ground—that would stroke its ‘why’ into a sweet doze. As the final chapter will explore, such a movement would lead to the aporia “between believing one

knows and knowing one believes, the alternative is not a game.”\(^{12}\) Here is a sort of reverse-parenting trick of Derrida’s, where to believe one knows and to know what one believes would amount to the end of the playful movement of the trace, to a death by the imposition of grounds that house the founding why as a way to position all our questions within a system, within a return to the veiling of metaphysical domination.\(^{13}\) So rather than the parent that denounces game-playing as that which would stunt a maturing towards adulthood as the acquisition of knowledge (such a temptation indeed\(^{14}\)), the game would be our way of access to approaching the question of the question within the play of signifiers marking the game of writing.\(^{15}\) This would amount to the impossibility of knowing without belief—as if the two could be separated—and thus to the rendering of the question open. It is this gameplay that would sacrifice the question on behalf of the question. Derrida is beckoning to allow for a little child-like game-playing, a little child-like faith that might bleed the boundaries of appropriate rule-playing and dethrone our god-like phantasms. This would play beyond the bounds of binary logic which would try to assess what is religion from that which is not religion, as if the very identity of religion could ever be detached from the text, from the differing/deferring signification that amounts to no closure and no self-contained origin.

Another way to speak of this is via parasitism as in through a Hegelian logic of recognition in and through the other. The thing is caught between seeking out independence and the ongoing dependence that it requires from the other in order to attempt a vision of itself as itself. Identity is met with the difference of the other and the unending deference that such an encounter entails. In other words, one cannot speak of religion as though it were a self-contained entity; in doing so we discover that it exists embedded within a myriad of mirrored rooms in the trace of religion’s history. Just as you think you have religion cornered, that image deflects you onwards to a reflection on the opposite wall and so on and so forth.

Derrida’s point from writing is that if one were to follow these reflections back, as if retracing our steps from one signifier leading to another, we would not reach a stable identity at its root. What unfolds is an undecidability at the origin which may be likened to Derrida’s early assertions concerning writing of there being no transcendentally signified—never present

\(^{12}\) Ibid., §35.

\(^{13}\) He states that such a position “would be to begin by no longer understanding anything at all.” Ibid.

\(^{14}\) The temptation is “to believe not only in what one knows, but in what knowledge is.” Ibid., §31.

outside this play of signifiers. This would be the case of the question, which is why the question must be placed in question as a self-deconstruction.

Third, the sacrifice of religion raises the question of whether we are speaking of religion or religions, of the concept of religion or of religion today in all its variants. Can one be disconnected from the other? This would speak to the form and content of religion as a sort of chicken/egg quandary of provenance which Derrida explores under other guises, as in, for example, the quandary of provenance between revelation and revealability that we will explore in the following chapter. To simplify such a battle for provenance, one may suggest that the question of which comes first, the form or the content, may be likened to the question of identity between essence and existence. To choose one over the other is to play into this binary logic that knowledge leans into. What Derrida will appeal to is a double origin of religion—what he will call ‘the two sources of religion’—carrying within it a double movement of openness and closure as an interweaving play of construction and deconstruction. As the one attempts to contain religion within an unscathed boundary line of in/out demarcation, the other is always already in the process of destabilisation in the opening of faithful responsiveness. One is not prioritised over the other; they are interlaced, each supplementary to the other, keeping the gameplay of signifiers alive. Placing this paradigm within language use, Derrida will show that both performatives (prescriptive that perform reality) and constatives (descriptive that describe reality) are grounded by an ungrounded originary performative before all knowledge that would, as Michael Naas states, “open the domain of religion without being reduced to it.”

Constatives mark an either/or of trueness or falseness wherein knowledge delimits with a ‘no’; performatives enact a promise that cannot be verified either way, wherein faith opens up with a ‘yes.’ The former would be the keeping safe/saved of religion; the latter would be the fiduciary act that keeps religion open. This too would act as a metonym for the question.

Fourth, “Faith and Knowledge” plays into the game of religion that attempts a way to speak of religion without ever saying what religion is. Derrida’s approach to religion would be as to a thing that “tends thus to drop out of sight as soon as one believes oneself able to

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master it under the title of a discipline, a knowledge or a philosophy.”

As soon as religion attempts to hedge itself in in a bid to save itself it would find the backdoor opened to the threat of the other’s welcome. Derrida’s refusal, or rather differing/deferral, of defining ‘religion’ would be the mediated message within “Faith and Knowledge” for such a move of definition would give in to the thing-itself-inducing temptation to know.21 The very layout of the essay contains a preface (from Capri, an island off the coast of Italy) and post-scriptum (from Laguna Beach, California) with, as Naas suggests, no body to speak of.22 This is a calculated move of incalculability, something like the pre- and post-facing of God that Abraham experiences in Exodus 33: “and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (vv. 22-3). The pre-facing of God would be obscured yet felt in a flurry; the post-facing would offer enough of a glimpse from behind to warrant some reflection; yet the presence of God would always be approached as in absentia within the trace. Could this be the case in “Faith and Knowledge” where Derrida sets up the preface as a responding improvisation to Gianni Vattimo’s prompting—itself carrying within it the mediated message of religion as response—and the post-scriptum containing a more sustained treatment in retrospect? For, as will become clear, religion is not something to be apprehended as a certain site that one might colonially seize upon, rather it is of the order of the event that cannot be reduced to any appropriating containment. The pre- and post- facing signifiers would offer an opportunity to respond, to take part in this game without ever assuming the game will produce a winner. Rather than choosing to play we are already drawn into the game, we cannot not play, we are drawn into responding to that which exceeds us in following Derrida’s reading of religion whereby “religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all.”23

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21 Ibid., §31.
22 Naas suggests one way to read the 52 aphorisms in “Faith and Knowledge” is as the number of a deck of cards which would allude to the game of religion (Miracle and Machine, 44-46)—perhaps returning Derrida to his early years in Algiers sitting around the dining room table with his mother and aunts as they would play poker. See Benoît Peeters, Derrida: A Biography, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 16.
1. Heidegger: first of all the question of the question

It is only fitting that Heidegger help facilitate Derrida’s investigation on the question when it is Heidegger who seeks to think beyond the metaphysics of presence by pursuing anew the question of Being framed as the Being of the question.¹ This questioning then becomes what, Leonard Lawlor argues, largely guides Derrida’s 60’s texts.² The metaphysics of presence may be framed as a longing for a grounding ground as that which might reveal an origin which would help manifest a directive thrust for the course of history. According to Heidegger metaphysics is “…at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.”³ As such this metaphysical longing, which Heidegger argues has been present since Plato, surfaces both ontologically as grounding or common ground and theologically as self-causing supreme ground or cause which in turn instigates every cause in its wake.⁴ Being thought outside of this rubric of ontotheology (the ontological and theological search for grounds) has since the Greeks become overlooked or forgotten in the West’s philosophical history according to Heidegger. As such he wants to explore the Being of the question as ungrounded outside of the rubric of the ontological question “what is x?” which, because we bring ourselves to the process of questioning Being, becomes determined anthropomorphically from within our place in the world. This determination of Being in turn creates the parameters of the question and presents the question’s closure by requiring an answer that would seek to account for Being as presence. This is again the circular hermeneutic motif whereby the formulation of the question implies the parameters of the answer it provokes. Therefore the answers or ‘naming’ of metaphysics is not Being as such but rather the constitution of Being by beings. There is a certain unavoidability to this position, in the sense that we cannot simply step outside of ourselves, which leads Heidegger

¹ See Heidegger, Being and Time, 1.
⁴ Ibid., 70–72.
to explore Being through that entity for whom Being is a concern for it, namely Dasein. The task for Dasein is to come to the question of Being without simply establishing a closure to the question by appropriating Being through a metaphysical presencing. However what Derrida will argue is that within Heidegger’s own thought there is a metaphysical thread running through which he fails to notice. This thread may be characterised as Heidegger’s own longing for origin through the priority of the question.

There is a sense in which Heidegger attempts to move beyond metaphysics without recognising the metaphysical gesture within this move. Derrida states in Of Grammatology that “…one does not leave the epoch whose closure one can outline.” One cannot point out the boundary lines to the history of metaphysics in order to navigate beyond their waters to a place where thinking, beyond philosophy, abounds. This is the idea that in wanting to go beyond the metaphysical we lay out our claim in communicable language which evidently houses the ‘beyond’ within that which would reinscribe it within the metaphysical (thus expressing the step/not beyond). As Kevin Hart states, “The very question ‘What is beyond metaphysics?’ repeats the instituting question of philosophy, ‘What is …?’”, and so the question turns out to manifest the problem.” This does not mean that we simply cease to speak—for such an apophatic move would merely reverse the order of presence to (hyper)presence—but we speak knowing that our language is always already under a process of contamination from within itself which is why Derrida states, “I am profoundly convinced against Wittgenstein… that ‘what we cannot speak about we must (not) pass over in silence.’” For Derrida, Heidegger’s priority of the question, even in its abyssal state, highlights the priority of the subject (at least in the early Heidegger) which still echoes a certain Enlightenment search for grounds via the autonomous questioner in the vein of Kant par excellence. This prioritising of the subject reflects a presenced site from within the

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1 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 12; Naas argues, “Derrida demonstrated that even in philosophy the nets and snares we use to pursue our game, the signs we follow to pursue the objects of our chase, are always in some way complicit with, and are always in part determined by, what they seek.” Michael Naas, “Derrida’s Flair (For the Animals to Follow . . .),” Research in Phenomenology 40, no. 2 (2010): 219–20.
6 This question manifests the problem by placing a structure in the form of the question ‘what is x?’ onto that which is structurally impossible, namely the designation of that which might be thought beyond metaphysics. This is why messianicity for Derrida is always to come; it never arrives. For if it arrived it would be constituted within the ‘what is x?’ housed within the closure. The step of the ‘what is x?’ produces what it forbids—the metaphysical, of whose closure it cannot outline. (I will explore the theme of messianicity further below in chapter 4).
9 See Peeters, Derrida, 162.
subject which disavows the rupturing of one’s horizon by any intrusion or contamination of the other. Such a rupturing would put in question both the subject and the question. I say “early Heidegger” regarding the priority of the question for, as Derrida will show, there is a shift in Heidegger’s thought from the priority of us questioning Being to Being calling to us. Here the nearness of Being (rather than its actualisation or determination) occurs in the appropriating event which is the nearness of Being through language.\(^\text{10}\) Language always works in excess of signification—this Heidegger begins to express through the *sous rature* (“under erasure”) crossing out ‘Being’—and as such it opens up Being as ungrounded abyss.\(^\text{11}\) Further to this, Heidegger postulates a primordial sense of language that first speaks language to us and forms language within us from which we hear and then take up.\(^\text{12}\) This is a move from speaking, or questioning first, to listening to the clearing that Being makes through language. This shift may be characterised as one from activity—from the prioritisation of *Dasein* questioning Being—to receptivity—to the prioritisation of a listening which calls forth a response. Here this shift is made by Heidegger inverting the question (*Frägen*) by listening to the pledge (*Zusage*) put to us by language first speaking Being before any language is formed in us. It is here that, within Heidegger’s turn to the *Zusage*, Derrida finds a new way to read Heidegger’s early work.\(^\text{13}\) Derrida states:

> Having upheld the irreducible privilege of the questioning attitude, throughout an almost thirty-year course of inquiry, having written that questioning (*Frägen*) was the piety of thinking, Heidegger had at least to complicate this axiom. First by recalling that piety should from the start have been understood as the docility of listening, the question being thus, before anything else, a receptive modality, an attentiveness that relies on what gives itself to be heard rather than, prior to, the enterprising, inquisitorial activity of a request or an inquest. Secondly, by insisting henceforth on a more originary dimension of thought, the *Zusage*, this confident acceptance, this assent to the proffered word (*Zuspruch*) without which no question is possible, a yes


\(^\text{11}\) For this reason Heidegger later goes on to prioritise the opening of poetic language beyond the rigid confines of a more rigorous one to one corollary system (the difference between thinker and philosopher); however this will in itself create a dual opposition that Derrida critiques which I will address below.


in short, a sort of pre-engagement supposed by every language and by every speech (Sprache).\(^{14}\)

One of the fullest treatments on the question in Derrida’s corpus comes in his 1987 book *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Here Derrida unpacks the shift in Heidegger’s thought from an activity in the priority of the question through the “piety of thinking”\(^{15}\) to a receptivity enacted whereby thought becomes a listening to language first speaking as a promise.\(^{16}\) Derrida notes in another context that it was Paul de Man who, taking Heidegger’s formula *Die Sprache spricht* (language speaks), made a playful adaptation and sharpened it to *Die Sprache ver-spricht* (language promises/pledges itself) as another way to render Heidegger’s *Zusage*.\(^{17}\) Here every communicative act is constituted by this promise as an affirmation, a *yes* before any oppositional *yes/no*.\(^{18}\) In “Faith and Knowledge” Derrida notes that the *Zusage*’s usage “finds a striking formulation relatively late” in Heidegger’s *Das Wesen der Sprache* (1958) and thus it is a “thirty-year course of inquiry” from *Sein und Zeit* in 1927 where the question is privileged (see the quote above).\(^{19}\) However Derrida shows that the *Zusage* would be implicitly embedded from within *Sein und Zeit* arguing that “the reader …and the signatory who takes him as witness are already situated in this element of faith from the moment that Heidegger says ‘we’ to justify the choice of ‘exemplary’ being that is Dasein.”\(^{20}\) Therefore the whole project of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* was inaugurated by *Dasein* being opened up to the question of Being which would already carry within it the *Zusage* enacting what would later be a change in the path of thought. This change occurs Derrida shows by the movement from the piety of thought to the *Zusage*’s breakdown of duality veiled in privilege. This breakdown is opened by the promise of language eliciting an originary faith that would rupture any claims to certainty and would open up the aporia before and beyond dual oppositions. Our response to the promise, as to language, is that which we take up acquiescently in a tacit *yes*-engagement that we cannot not participate in.\(^{21}\) Derrida states, “…before the word, there is this sometimes wordless word which we name the

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\(^{14}\) Derrida, “A Number of Yes,” 237.


\(^{16}\) Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 9, 131.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 94

\(^{19}\) See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §48.

\(^{20}\) Ibid; and as we will see, the experience of witnessing converges the two sources of religion.

‘yes.’ A sort of pre-originary pledge [gage] which precedes any other engagement in language or action.”22 He suggests that the ultimate temptation is to push against this pledge opting for a knowledge that is “free, structurally of belief or of faith…”23 but what he will continue to highlight in “Faith and Knowledge” is that faith and reason are not in opposition but rather are both developing from a common source which, in §29, he calls “the testimonial pledge of every performative.”24

Derrida’s discussion on performativity offers another lens with which to gage the idea of the promise. By interacting with J. L. Austin’s linguistic work Derrida argues that all language, whether containing constative use (having descriptive truth value) or performative use (performed truth and thus not expressing truth values in binary categories but rather containing the proposition “believe me”)25 is grounded performatively in faith (i.e. every constative conceals within it performative use).26 The performativity of the archi-originary promise is—contrary to every performative utterance promised in the first person present—that which according to Derrida,

…will have always escaped this demand for presence. It is older than I am or than we are. On the contrary, it renders possible every present discourse on presence. Even if I decide to be silent, even if I decide to promise nothing… this silence still remains a modality of speech: a memory of promise and a promise of memory.27

We respond to the other’s “believe what I say as one believes in a miracle,” either through commission or omission, with the Zusage being the pre-originary propellant to this

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22 Derrida, Of Spirit, 130; in “A Number of Yes” Derrida puts it like this, “It is the question that matters less than a certain yes, the yes, that resounds in it always in order to come before it… a yes that opens the question and always lets itself be presupposed by it, a yes that affirms prior to, before or beyond any possible question.” “A Number of Yes,” 233.


24 Michael Polanyi working from within the field of science has shown that this idea of the pledge is cut through all our forms of knowledge with no intelligence being able to operate outside of what he calls a “fiduciary framework.” Thus the classic division that is often made today between a scientific knowledge and a knowledge based on faith is for him entirely debunk. All knowledge is personal in that we participate in what we long to know and create the parameters by which this knowing may occur. He states, following Augustine, that “you cannot expose an error by interpreting it from the premises which lead to it, but only from premises which are believed to be true.” Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 267.


structure. This testimonial pledge contained within every “believe me” requires faith even in the act of perjury for you are still asking the other to believe you. This would be the basis of responsibility that the promise opens up, for responsibility leads to faith both in the one making the promise and in the one responding to the promise—a faith beyond all absolute knowing, a faith inscribed throughout. Derrida’s point is to argue that all language performs a certain truth-value carried by faith for even constatives that describe a certain reality must rest on a faith that this description is grounded. For example, the proposition ‘this ink is black’ may evidently be constative however within the way in which language differs/defers in the play of signifiers how might one know what ‘ink’ is? or ‘black?’ or ‘is’ is? for this very questioning within the ‘what is x?’ formulation reiterates the problem of how one answers, or escapes, this instituting question of philosophy that I have addressed above. Simply put, the question cannot be founded upon some transcendental ground. As such, that which might appear within a neat binary logic of true or false is pushed into an unknowing where the archia trembles and the only response we have to such trembling is one which has no guarantee of who or what we are responding to. This performative event would be synonymous with ‘the mystical foundation of authority’ as an authority that is neither just nor unjust because there is nothing previous to found it. It thus sits anterior to any oppositional logic. As Derrida states in “Force of Law,” “a performative cannot be just, in the sense of justice, except by grounding itself.” And again in “Faith and Knowledge”:

...the foundation of the law—law of the law, institution of the institution, origin of the constitution—is a ‘performative’ event that cannot belong to the set that it founds, inaugurates or justifies. Such an event is unjustifiable within the logic of what it will have opened. It is the decision of the other in the undecidable.

It is thus an ungrounding ground of performativity pushing us out, or calling us out, within this trace-like movement always characterised by faith from faith to faith and in faith.

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29 Following Husserl, this “believe me” highlights the relationship that one has with an alter ego where no direct access is available beyond Husserl’s idea of “analogical apperception.” Naas makes this connection, Miracle and Machine, 98.
32 Ibid., 256.
There is an irony in Heidegger’s Zusage in that, as Naas notes, it becomes the very precursor to Derrida’s appeal to the founding affirmation of originary faith which would resist oppositional categorisation; an opening that would remain missed in Heidegger’s own reading of his Zusage.\(^{34}\) As such there is a string of hierarchies or privileges evident in Heidegger’s work that Derrida deconstructs through appealing to the very lever coming from such work. Most notably, Derrida speaks to the irony of Heidegger’s Zusage in that, in spite of this originary faith at the origin, Heidegger retains a strict dualism between philosophy expressed in knowledge and religion expressed in faith/belief. If these two were ever to combine, Heidegger believes it would be as absurd as a “squared circle.”\(^{35}\) For him this would amount to shutting up shop if faith were to ever call him.\(^{36}\) It is important to note that Derrida is not wanting to simply invert such privileging, as in the most obvious case of writing to speech, but rather to see privilege ruptured by the differing/deferring undecidability of any grounding origin. The response is not now placed over the question but is rather dissimulated within the call of this ‘archi-originary promise.’\(^{37}\)

The interspersion of faith with knowledge seems to be the key Heideggerian transposition Derrida is making in Of Spirit and “Faith and Knowledge” affecting both the question and the question’s relationship to Derrida’s ‘religion.’ This transposition may be outlined by pointing to the way in which Heidegger aligns faith with a form of dogmatism as a deferring of thought to authority figures or to ontotheology. As such there is a division that Heidegger makes between a Platonic-Christian tradition, as holding a faith which is really a deference to ontotheology, and a Graeco-poetic tradition as a thinking that is more originary than ontotheology.\(^{38}\) Derrida’s early formulations around religion and particularly the name of God were marked by this strict Heideggerian vision such that the language of “theology” in Of Grammatology marks a closure synonymous with Heidegger’s ontotheology.\(^{39}\) Heidegger, as Derrida contends, never seems to move beyond this division whereas for Derrida it is through Heidegger’s Zusage that he is able to make this transposition which is effectively a deconstruction of borders and privileging schemes by the dethronement of the

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\(^{34}\) See Naas, Miracle and Machine, 329.


\(^{36}\) Derrida, Of Spirit, 2, 115 (n. 4).


question. Simply put, faith for Heidegger shuts down thinking, whereas for Derrida faith is the very constitution of thinking, for the experience of responding to another’s testimony is always made in faith. This duality in Heidegger between thinking and belief brings us back to Derrida’s critique of Heidegger that “…one does not leave the epoch whose closure one can outline.” 40 Heidegger’s conception of faith is here delimited on the side of metaphysics, squeezed into an ontotheological box. He is thus seeking to create a closure within which he might evade in order to leave room for the task of thinking through the poetic. This is the sort of history, written by the victors to reinforce their position, which is under deconstruction from within via the Zusage.

An example of Heidegger’s Graeco-poetic tradition being read over and against a Platonic-Christian reading comes in his rendering of the word Geist (spirit) in Of Spirit. According to Derrida, spirit in Heidegger is the “unquestioned possibility of the question” 41 awakened in a movement from resignation to responsibility by returning to the question of Being anew. 42 This reawakening is read from the Graeco-poetic tradition where ‘spirit’ is viewed as a gathering (Versammlung) and a returning. 43 Here Heidegger’s privileging of the Greek and German languages from within this Graeco-poetic tradition comes in Heidegger’s reading of spirit as ‘fire’ through the Austrian poet Georg Trakl. 44 This reading, according to Derrida, inadvertently misses this pyro-tradition coming from the Hebrew word ruah signifying a fire and a purging. 45 It is as if Heidegger has bracketed out the latter tradition, writing it off as an ontotheological contamination of the poetic rendering of spirit in order to return to a purity that might afford a gathering (unity) and returning towards home (Heimat). But, as Caputo contends, this fire is not an illumination by means of a revealing that Heidegger has unveiled but rather a burning to cinders which instigates a scattering rather than gathering. 46 Spirit as the unquestioned possibility of the question does not skirt faith by means of a gathered unity but rather contains faith within it as this fire is always already in the process of scattering ashes as the trace of that which we cannot put back together. For Heidegger spirit is being depicted as a revenant offering an image of return where what has been forgotten or concealed within the question of Being might loop itself back in a Graeco-

40 Derrida, Of Grammatology, 12.
41 Derrida, Of Spirit, 10.
42 Ibid., 67.
43 Ibid., 76-80.
44 Ibid., 76-82. Derrida states, “…the gestures made to snatch Trakl away from the Christian thinking of Geist seem to me laborious, violent, sometimes simply caricatural, and all in all not very convincing.” (108).
45 Ibid., 100-1.
46 See Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 103.
poetic Odyssean return of homecoming. What Derrida is suggesting is that spirit, if taking the route of revenant as return, would not be a Procrustean return but a receiving anew as something totally unforeseen, akin to Abraham’s receiving Isaac back in faith. As such this image of spirit would speak to the flames of dispersion and the scattered ash evoking Abraham’s journey of faith to Moriah (and Canaan) as the going out with no homecoming in view.

Heidegger’s attempts to skirt both ontotheology and the appeal to faith is in view in *Of Spirit*. Derrida closes his study with a mock conversation between Heidegger and a Christian theologian where the theologian outlines how close the two are in thought, despite Heidegger’s attempts to get around this Judeo-Christian tradition in his thinking. Derrida argues that the origin-heterogeneous that he locates in Heidegger’s Trakl—that which would be other to the origin as an always already bifurcating source—resides in a certain spirit or essence of Christianity to which we are responding. This takes up an ongoing point of Derrida’s in “Faith and Knowledge” that the language of religion, no longer simply a ruse of ontotheology, is not something to move beyond—or something that we can move beyond—but something to move through. This becomes apparent, Derrida notes, in the proliferation of religion through globalisation (or mondialatinisation as he prefers to phrase it). This neologism/portmanteau carries within it the French word ‘monde’ (world) as a nod to the Heideggerian existential analytic of being-in-the-world as a dwelling rather than simply on a globe, and ‘Latin’ as the proliferation of ‘religion’ being a Roman and European phenomenon embedded within the Western psyche of Christianity. Thus this “worldwidization,” as Naas calls it, is the becoming-world-wide of religion as Christianity and its proliferated language Latin, which today may be associated with Anglo-American. We thus cannot think

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47 See chapter 4.
51 A point which Heidegger seems to ignore. See “Faith and Knowledge,” §15; Gianni Vattimo goes so far as to say that, “To take away the Bible is to take away meaning.” Gianni Vattimo, “Toward a Nonreligious Christianity,” in *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 36.
53 Ibid., 58. It is interesting to note that Derrida marks the circulation of religion as a mondialatinised phenomenon “that has been to Rome and taken a detour to the United States” which would be the very sites
Latin/European without going through the rubric of religion and vice versa.\textsuperscript{54} There is no closure to outline. For this reason the entire first section of “Faith and Knowledge” (§§1-26) is written in italics in order to illustrate this saturated phenomenon of Latinization within our worlding through language. Naas states, reiterating the Procrustean dilemma via religion, “To ask the question of what religion is by using the term religion is thus perhaps already to have provided a kind of response.”\textsuperscript{55} There is hence an unavoidable violence within \textit{mondialatinisation} on multiple fronts: a violence in the West’s Judeo-Christian imposition which today masquerades in capitalistic and politico-military force, and a violence in the West’s possession of the language of “religion” as a Latinisation masquerading as a universalisation.\textsuperscript{56} This latter violence Derrida addresses in the very coming together of the conference participants at Capri who are all of European (and not to mention male) origin. How might they respond to the international publishing demands of a conference on the question of religion when they cannot not speak Latin?\textsuperscript{57} Such authorisation precipitated by this hegemonic violence that the West credits itself with in the \textit{name of religion} carries with it the continued effects of a colonial mindset in the evangelical mandate of spreading this name of religion both explicitly and implicitly: explicitly when speaking on matters of religion as if universally; implicitly when religion seeps into a logic of expansion and aggrandizement under the myth of election.\textsuperscript{58} This election, as a structural symptom of religion, would assert a certain chosen-ness to bringing the “good news” of religion with the underlying fictive privilege that we stand on the side of “God” and therefore our actions are sanctioned by God.\textsuperscript{59} Such hegemony in the \textit{name of religion} begs Derrida to ask “what if religio remained untranslatable?”\textsuperscript{60} Religion’s untranslatability would denounce a certain Western imposition on the way in which the response is manifested in the world, for as Derrida suggests “Religion is the response”\textsuperscript{61} and thus the way in which this response is manifested will correlate to whether or not one can place a site of religion at the archē. Derrida’s religion as

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\textsuperscript{54} This is a rubric which, Derrida will show, houses a Kantian thesis: the indissoluble connection between pure morality and Christianity. See pages 33-4 below.

\textsuperscript{55} Naas, \textit{Miracle and Machine}, 48.


\textsuperscript{57} See Ibid., §4.

\textsuperscript{58} Derrida argues that the Jewish picture of exemplarism is what operates in every modern nationalism. See “Abraham, the Other,” 12.

\textsuperscript{59} This sort of thinking would be particularly characteristic of the neo-liberalism perpetuated in America’s self-affirming “one nation under God” roots which would infer on the likes of Russian communism that which would sit outside of God’s election and thus being in need of a forceful (evangelical) reappropriation. Bob Dylan’s “With God on Our Side,” written at the height of the Cold War, exemplifies this point.

\textsuperscript{60} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §§30-1.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., §29.
an untranslatable differing/deferring quasi-religion would thus attempt to move from my God who comes to fight my battles to a ‘my God why have you forsaken me?’ For that which I thought I knew—with the sort of knowing that Derrida wishes to displace (as the meaning-what-you-say and saying-what-you-mean)—is that which I do not know and therefore can only respond to in faith.

This trembling of the archia nevertheless does not bracket *mondialatinisation* from implementing this ongoing violence. The point of Derrida’s reading of religion is not to escape this violence or to assume it will be raptured in a progressive teleology leading to the wolf and the lamb dwelling together in perfect harmony. Rapture is always already ruptured in Derrida’s religion. This lure of both telos and origin framed in holistic purity present for Derrida two temptations: Hegel’s teleological temptation of the world becoming Absolute Spirit and Heidegger’s archaeological temptation exposed by his duality between thinking and belief, between the pre-Socratic-poetic and the Platonic-Christian-metaphysical. The former temptation carries within it a universality that ‘religion’ itself as *mondialatinisation* would perpetuate; the latter turns on the thinking of epochality in Heidegger as the temptation to bracket the pre-Socratic-poetic from the Platonic-Christian-metaphysical. This archaeological temptation would be one of the four guiding threads that Derrida highlights in Heidegger’s texts which he believes are “left hanging, uncertain, still in movement…” 63

Each thread points to a privileging as an archaeological temptation which structures opposition and hierarchy: 1) the privilege of the question over a call addressed to us beckoning a response, 2) the privilege of a non-contaminated pre-technological age over technology, 3) the privilege of the human over the non-human animal, 64 and 4) the privilege of the pre-Socratic-poetic over the Platonic-Christian-metaphysical. The point that Derrida is making is that these threads are “uncertain” because they have no clear origin to found any distinct bifurcating break that would distinguish any this from that. They are “still in movement,” yet to come because they remain within the deconstructible and as such their other’s bracketing would be a constructed closure built around a certain myth of purity that would keep its other out (as for example the pre-Socratic-poetic attempting to keep the Platonic-Christian-metaphysical outside of itself). What Derrida will repeatedly show is that the one is contaminated by the other and vice versa from the origin for it has a heterogeneous

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62 Ibid., §18. An example of the latter temptation comes in Voltaire’s pitting an originary, purified Christianity against a later contaminated one. (§26).
structure which in turn implies that the one cannot not think the other and vice versa.\textsuperscript{65} This heterogeneous structure disavows the one outranking the other in terms of heritage rights. Religion would carry within it this structure of outranking in virtue of its mode of election\textsuperscript{66} such that, even in Heidegger’s attempts to bracket out any residue of religion in his thought, this very bracketing would contain within it the structure of a religious response sure of its call, sure of its election. Countering this, the heterogeneous structure would express within it a response that we could not foresee, an election that is put in question—“Did I hear right?”—where election and deracination, possession and dispossession are placed in a tension of unknowing. Derrida states:

\begin{quote}
…anyone responding to the call must continue to doubt, to ask himself whether he has heard right…. The possibility of an originary misunderstanding in destination is not an evil, it is the structure, perhaps the very vocation of any call worthy of that name, of all nomination, of all response and responsibility.”\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

This destinerrant election would tremble at the archia and in its wake elicit a response of fear and trembling destabilising any claims to the throne. It is for this reason that Derrida will speak of religion as first of all the question of the question—as of the response; and it is from this vision that Derrida will speak of religion in “Faith and Knowledge” within this heterogeneous structure as having two sources.

Derrida expresses his two sources of religion by turning to the aporia of language as manifesting a closure and opening that causes a dual conflict resulting in an impasse (‘community’ and ‘hospitality’ being two recurring Derridean examples of this impasse). Derrida identifies these two sources within the Latin religio: 1) relegere coming from legere meaning to harvest or gather, and 2) religare coming from ligare meaning to tie or bind.\textsuperscript{68} The former carries within it the gathering or containment of religion as in a closure—wanting to keep religion safe and sound; the latter carries within it the idea of a link held by a witnessing which calls for a blind confidence or belief in the other’s address (as with the performative event). Derrida uses the language of sacramentum (an oath in the purposes of keeping a certain religion safe and sound) and testimonium whereby the sacrament (oath) is

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\textsuperscript{65} It is for this reason that the person who thinks they can outrun religion by negation is merely thinking its opposite and is thus still within its grip. This sort of atheism, as a[n ontotheological] theism in reverse, would be strongly critiqued by people like Nancy and Caputo. This is why one does not move beyond religion but through it.\textsuperscript{66} Mentioned above as an outflow of mondialatinisation.\textsuperscript{67} Derrida, “Abraham, the Other,” 34.\textsuperscript{68} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §33-4.
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responded to testimonially as a belief in the oath or promise which resists an original founding (as with the law in “Force of Law”). The oath cannot rest on something outside of itself, it self-substantiates itself from within itself. Derrida further reveals this dual aporia at the source by appealing to the French word salut opening “Faith and Knowledge” with the question of salvation (salut) with regard to matters of religion: “…can a discourse on religion be dissociated from a discourse on salvation: which is to say on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed…” Salvation (as an expression of election) expresses the closure/keeping out contained within the salut by the attempt to keep religion immune from the contaminating outside that might jeopardise its salvation. Here the one source—the salut as salvation—meets an impasse in the opening of its other—the salut as welcome. How can one welcome that which represents the outside whilst trying to remain safe from the contamination of the outside? How can one attempt to construct one’s own salvation when the bordering up of that which you seek to remain safe from is the very thing that has become utilised within this construction?

What Derrida seeks to show within religion is that its protection comes in the very welcoming of and incorporation of that to which it seeks to protect itself from. Religion will always manifest itself parasitically feeding on the thing from which it seeks to distance itself. Here the sources mingle without a mastery gained, without an either/or duality obtained; here they mingle as “the redoubling of a wave that appropriates even that to which, enfolding itself, it seems to be opposed.” Here autoimmunity, as this appropriation of oppositional forces, becomes Derrida’s metaphor for the life of religion. The organism responds antagonistically against itself utilising the very thing that it wishes to destroy as its mode of destruction albeit unbeknownst to the organism in the process of its own de(con)struction.

An example of this occurs in religion’s utilisation of tele-technoscience on the one hand

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69 Ibid., §29; Derrida, “Force of Law,” 239–43.
71 Naas, Miracle and Machine, 50-1.
72 An example of this might be seen in Saint Paul’s relation to sin when he states, “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). The thing that Paul does not want to do (that he attempts to keep safe/saved from) is the very thing that he keep on doing because it is contained within his knowledge of the Mosaic Law, the very nature of which structures his response as a form of inception (see 7:7-11).
74 He describes an example of this autoimmunity in “Faith and Knowledge” by speaking of the ‘immunity’ within ‘community’: Community as com-mon auto-immunity: no community <is possible> that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival. This self-contesting attestation keeps the auto-immune community alive, which is to say, open to something other and more than itself…. Ibid., §40.
through digital culture, tele-evangelism and so forth and its condemnation of it on the other. The medium subverts the message. Derrida highlights this always already hypocrisy by way of the Pope’s respect for life (against abortion and euthanasia) being mediated through the use of teletechnoscientific digitalisation (the means of the self-protection of life holding within it the capacity for its own self-destruction). This theme of autoimmune contamination can be found in Derrida as early on as *Of Grammatology* with the reader’s referential imposition on the text contaminating the author’s original intentions (the origin of which is already a hetero-affected-origin). Autoimmunity is another way of framing Derrida’s ‘always already’ expression, for the myth that an inside may be walled up/contained from the outside is always already under a movement of incision from that said outside (of which there is none according to Derrida: “nothing outside of the text”). This is the direction that Derrida is edging, *between believing one knows and knowing one believes*: faith—a fiduciary opening with a *yes*—and knowledge—a guarding delimitation with a *no*—as two sides to an aporetic coin always flipping. Knowledge, like Derrida’s conception of law, works from the foreseeable, the programmatic, the calculable from within the system that is built up in repetition; faith, like Derrida’s conception of justice, announces the incoming of alterity as the new, unique, hetero-affected event that ushers in a revaluation of knowledge by that which is incalculable and unforeseeable. The two sources work on Derrida’s “n + One” iterable equation whereby there is a repetition (*iter*) by knowledge and an alterity (*itara*) by faith. Iterability resists the omni-archê and postulates that in the beginning was the supplement: *n + One*. This would be a nice summation of deconstruction away from ontotheological monism, always supplemented by an excess of incalculability whereby an *other* steps into the order of the same. The two sources become the source of their own sourcelessness: *sous rature*.

This expression of keeping safe/saved in Heidegger comes in his use of the German word *heilig* (holy, sacred) which would reside on the side of *legere* as a gathering (*Versammlung*) that he holds in resistance to a Christian contamination of the poetic. This

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77 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158; and see for example, “Differance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible.” (Page 143).
78 See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §50
79 See Ibid., §27 (n. 16).
would be the privileging of revealability (Offenbarkeit) over revelation (Offenbarung) in virtue of the former’s proximity to the archē. The latter is the physical manifestation or historical content of revealability; the former is the structural form of revelation sitting anterior to the Judeo-Christian tradition according to Heidegger. As such, revelation for Heidegger becomes a bastardised parasite of revealability. This reading becomes in Derrida’s view an attempt at the protection (salut) of heilig as a gathering which relegates faith to a thing of religion (far removed from philosophy) as if all faith presupposes a certain dogmatism attached to it. To this Derrida responds with the redoubling heterogeneous origin as a “faith without dogma which makes its way through the risks of absolute night, [which] cannot be contained in any traditional opposition….” Revelation and revealability would thus need to be thought in terms of an archive neither able to claim the site of the archē—as of an immemorial archive that would not be reappropriable within a schema of form and content. The living memory of the origin (which one keeps safe within one’s ways and means of knowing) would be contaminated by the archive as the trace of that which exceeds memory—as the trace of an origin that would refuse reappropriation from within a single living memory. The safe and sound salut that Heidegger envisions would thus always be open to the welcoming salut which would act as a contamination from within its own salvation. This picture of autoimmunity describes the destabilising effects of the heterogeneous structure on the four guiding threads of epochality that Derrida locates in Heidegger’s work. Heidegger wants to keep the four legs to his archaeological throne in a salvific closure—the legere of religion—protected from the other. All four threads follow Heidegger’s use of Geist in his work placing a spirit on the throne, however this Geist would be a ghost turning Heidegger’s own metaphysical ontology into a hauntology. Here Heidegger’s ontos is haunted by the remains (the cinders) in the wake of ruah rupturing any collected rapture.

On revealability and revelation in Heidegger see Being and Time, §7.


Ibid., §§24-5 this would be the placeless place of chora (see the conclusion below). For a helpful take on Derrida’s reading of the aporia between revelation and revealability by Caputo see Naas, Miracle and Machine, 365-7, footnote 15.

The question, technology’s essence as being nothing technological, the human animal and the pre-Socratic-poetic.

The source debate for Derrida is both fascinating and yet void in that, for him, “nothing gets decided at the source.” The source is a phantasm of truth with a capital T, of the anchoring of meaning to that which might provide a platform for programmability, for calculability, for certainty. This is the temptation to eat of the fruit of the tree and know with a god-like knowing. The single source is the lure of ontotheology towards a transcendental signified. But, in Derrida’s terminology, the source may be another name for the secret—the secret that there is no secret. Derrida states, “Religion figures their [the two sources] ellipse because it both comprehends the two foci but also sometimes shrouds their irreducible duality in silence, in a manner that is precisely secret and reticent.” This would be a picture of the promise beyond memory, beyond recovery. Here there is no founding beyond the promise that is bestowed which we receive and respond to, no demonstration of language without the prior acquisition of language, no demonstration of life—no response—without the prior acquisition of a promise of life.

Whilst Heidegger attempts to keep a healthy arm’s length from any contaminating religion in his philosophy, Kant attempts to keep a healthy arm’s length from revelation in his positing of rational religion. Kant wants to keep the rational form of religion safe from the material form expressed in historical Christianity, he wants to keep the “revealable” (by reason alone) safe from the “revealed” (by general revelation). However, as we shall see, the indecisive oscillation that occurs between the two would present for Derrida “the chance of every responsible decision and of another ‘reflecting faith.’” This would be a reflective faith that, no longer simply sitting within Kant’s parerga bordering upon rational religion, would have a radically fiduciary form akin to the performative event. Here the origins and borders of Kant’s religion opening up would be a way to think the origins and borders of the question. Derrida thus seeks to show that the holding at arm’s length that both Heidegger and Kant attempt is as futile as trying to keep back the incoming tides. Although even this image is inadequate. It is not as if the contamination were imminent; rather it is a ‘present perfect continuous,’ an always already complete submersion within the waters.

85 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §34.
86 Derrida states that the logic of secrecy “is never better kept than in being exposed” as for example in the case of Poe’s “Porloined Letter” wherein the letter is hid in plain sight. Derrida, The Gift of Death, 39.
87 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §34.
88 Ibid., §25.
89 Ibid., §16.
2. Kant: of the origins and borders of the question

Derrida gives a nod towards Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* in the subtitle to “Faith and Knowledge”, but, as is the case with Derrida, this nod of *respect* to Kant is precisely that which must propel him to (what on a surface reading would appear as) a certain disrespectful reading. For, with regard to respect, the “knowing whether” one is acting out of respect for, or out of conformity to, the law in one’s response becomes an aporetic double bind for Derrida. ¹ He states, “We are committed to deforming them [the traditional titles within his title], dragging them elsewhere while developing if not their negative or their unconscious, at least the logic of what they might have let speak about religion independently of the meanings they wanted to say.” ² This for Derrida would be the most respectful response to Kant’s religious vision. His ‘dragging elsewhere’ of Kant’s *Religion* turns on the deconstructive play that Derrida is making of the origins (rational religion) and borders (pure reason) in Kant’s religion. This epoché within Kant’s thinking religion within the limits of reason alone is disrupted in a similar way to the epochality in Heidegger’s thinking. As it relates to Kant’s thinking this is a disruption within the relationship of faith to reason which in turn affects Derrida’s reading of Kant’s distinction between rational and material religion.

In the first half of “Faith and Knowledge” (the half presented at Capri) Kant is the figure who Derrida spends his most extended reflections on. ³ Derrida’s thinking reveals a certain debt to Kant with regard to a speculative knowledge which creates space for faith. Both thinkers in their own way reveal speculativity in their readings of the limitations of metaphysics as an enclosure which cannot be abandoned. Kant’s speculative knowledge may be likened to Derrida’s “if such a thing exists” of the unconditional or undeconstructible (such as justice, the gift, the secret, hospitality, forgiveness, etc.). The difference, it may be

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³ See especially Ibid., §§11–17. Naas makes the argument that, as far as the two chief allusions to thinkers in his title goes, it appears that Derrida’s sympathies lie more closely with Kant’s religious vision than with Hegel’s (Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 310); more closely with Kant’s denial of “knowledge in order to make room for faith” than with Hegel’s teleological temptation of Absolute knowledge. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Unabridged edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), 29 (Preface to the second addition, B xxx.).
argued, rests on the origins and borders: whereas Kant envisages a movement from the
material to the rational, this for Derrida is an impossibility as, for example, his thesis on
mondiallatinisation in “Faith and Knowledge” expresses. This is why Derrida’s “if such a
thing exists” expression is, in the vein of his messianicity, being led beyond the neat
systematising programmability that the Enlightenment period produced where nothing,
including religion, is exempt from the deconstructive unravelling that the call elicits. As
Caputo suggests, “On Kant’s idea of reason, reason imposes conditions; on Derrida’s idea of
reason, reason exposes everything conditioned, including reason itself, to the unconditional.”

In his *Religion* Kant is interested in moving beyond the material form of religion
expressed historically through beliefs, customs and factionalism (religion’s clothes which
change in season) to the rational form of religion (the bare body of religion) expressed
universally in the moral law. Rational religion in this sense may be seen as a parent growing
a child to the point where the child may live autonomously, no longer in need of the parent’s
assistance. Therefore undergirding the true material religion is the movement towards rational
religion expressed as pure morality, a point which for Kant emphasises that Christianity is the
only true religion in its concern for humanity becoming morally better by an emphasis on
action over merely belief. Here Kant makes a distinction between moral religion
(Christianity) and the religion of the cult (every other group that sets itself up as a ‘religion’)
with the distinction between the two being made in the way action is directed between God
and humanity. For Christianity the motivation for action lies in humanity’s movement
towards progressively becoming morally better by aligning the will to duty. Within this view
is Kant’s notion of ‘radical evil’ as that which sees humanity as being innately corrupted by
“a wickedness of the will” and thus in need of an alignment with the moral law. For the
religion of the cult on the other hand the motivation for action lies in God’s favour being
bestowed upon humanity irrespective of anything humanity does. The cult in Kant’s view is
set up as the object of desire that provides a certain happiness and flourishing whereby the
remaining action on the part of humanity is mere worship. This would amount to a distinction
between idolatry and iconology whereby the cult as idol would reflect a certain Feuerbachian
projection as wish fulfilment, whereas Christianity as icon would express the material form of

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5 Another way to view is that the material reveals the phenomenal, the rational reveals the thing itself.
6 As for example the Book of James’ idea of faith without works being dead (James 2:14–26).
7 See Book 1’s “On the Radical Evil in Human Nature” in Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason
evil is an extended theme of analysis for Derrida in “Faith and Knowledge.” I will speak more to this below.
religion being that which draws us beyond it towards the rational as a child outgrowing the
authoritative dictation of its parents. For the cult, the overcoming of radical evil by moral
improvement is an incapability and thus all improvement is ascribed to God leaving only the
remission of sins to humanity.⁸ This for Kant is an anathema to religion for it rests on a
knowledge of what God has done on the part of humanity and thus purports a dogmatic faith
that would override the speculative by the lure of the cult. On the side of moral religion is
reflective, or reflecting, faith as Kant states, “It is not essential, and hence not necessary, for
everyone to know what God does or has done for his salvation;’ but it is essential to know
what man himself must do in order to become worthy of this assistance.”⁹ We are the ones
who must work towards our own undressing, we cannot expect God to do the work for God
may only be approached speculatively.¹⁰

In Kant’s Religion reflective faith sits within the first of the four parerga.¹¹ These four
parerga are the areas within religion that are revelatory or supernatural, not sitting within pure
reason but bordering upon it. Kant states, “Reason, conscious of her inability to satisfy her
moral need, extends herself to high-flown ideas capable of supplying this lack, without,
however, appropriating these ideas as an extension of her domain.”¹² As such these parerga
supply reason’s lack, or effectively act as a supplement to reason. Where reason cannot
explain these parerga, this becomes the place of reflective faith affording a reason that is
speculative.¹³ It is from this principle of reflective faith located in the first parerga that
Derrida exclaims its relevance to his work as “a concept whose possibility might well open
the space of our discussion.”¹⁴ This opening is afforded by the supplementarity of pure reason
by the revelatory nature of the four parerga.¹⁵ What this revelation or supernaturalism reveals
is a lack within reason itself to provide the means for acquiring the moral law based on
understanding within an experiential logic of cause and effect. Hence the need for “works of
grace” (the first of the four parerga) to supplementarily allow for a faith that is reflective
which might suspend our rational judgments concerning the progress towards the morally

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⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This distinction that Kant makes evidently leaves much open for critique as it may be just as easily, and
possibly more so, reversed as one could imagine Luther sola gratia rolling in its grave.

¹¹ Para- (“alongside/parallel”) + erga (“works”) and thus acting as a subsidiary or supplementary work.

¹² Kant, Religion, 47-8.

¹³ Ibid., 48.


¹⁵ This theme of the supplement within Derrida’s work goes right back to its most extended treatment in Of
Grammatology where Derrida explores Rousseau's suspicion of writing as a dangerous supplement to speech.
See “…That Dangerous Supplement…” in Of Grammatology, 141-64.
good. Here the borders start to bleed as the supplement contaminates the purity of presence within Kant’s religion. This myth of purity acts from the longing to contain religion within reason alone, and yet the supplement is that which pushes beyond the bounds of the natural which cannot be explained or ascertained rationally and therefore must be allowed to coexist reflectively/speculatively whilst making up for reason’s lack. It is this supplementarity of the parerga that Derrida will latch onto affording a deconstruction from within.

This supplementarity of revelation to reason in Kant’s thought is further expressed in one of his late essays, “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy,” to which Derrida responds with his “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy.” Concerning matters of philosophy Kant is addressing the superiority of tone expressed by the mystagogues as those espousing unmediated revelatory experience based on individual acts which they place above the moral law which, according to Kant, is that which binds universally. The issue for Kant is not revelation per se—with the parerga being made the exception in Religion—but of the distinction between general and special revelation. Kant affirms general revelation as the supplement to reason’s lack by which every human may comprehend the moral law from within, however special revelation cannot be assessed from within a universal standard of reason and therefore must be rejected. Kant is thus setting up a restricted economy for the parameters of religion, defining a closure as a safeguard to keep rational religion safe/unscathed from these mystagogues. To speak outside of this closure is to speak with the name of ‘philosophy’ acting as a ‘cryptonym’: as a name that encrypts within it a mystery. The mystagogues hold within this crypt a certain mystery or secret of philosophy which has been crypted away within language allowing them to hold a certain gnostic tone not privy to all. This mystical cryptology according to Kant announces what might be heard as the death of philosophy by the dissolution of a neutral tone. With no universally-recognised, grounding system to philosophy it is thrown to whoever would stake a claim within the naming of philosophy by possessing the “right” ear to listen to these secret mysteries. But this death of philosophy heard through a Derridean ear resembles the death or end of the book proper in Of Grammatology in the sense that the borders and parameters are not meted out by

16 Kant, Religion, 48-9.
18 See Kant, Religion, 135.
20 Ibid., 127-8.
21 Ibid., 123-5.
those in authorship/“authority” as much as the author would like them to be. From this reading, Kant would place himself as the author(ity) of philosophy par excellence and thus his attempts at a universalising of revelation would really be a reversing of this superior tone with the mystagogues being made imposters to the naming of philosophy that crypts away something else entirely. Thus a ‘knowledge police’ is established to which Derrida inquires, by whom? In whose authority? What foundation gets to decide on the enclosure of an interior and the exclusion of an exterior for as Derrida makes numerous references to, the foundation is precisely that which is mystical in its unfoundedness. In “Faith and Knowledge” he states:

Wherever this foundation founds in foundering, wherever it steals away under the ground of what it founds, at the very instant when, losing itself thus in the desert, it loses the very trace of itself and the memory of a secret…. This is the secret of which for Derrida is no secret, no transcendental signified, no grounding for philosophy such that in the beginning alongside the logos was the supplement. As Derrida states at the end of “Faith and Knowledge,” faith is encrypted within ontotheology like an Iberian Marrano unable to recall the memory of the secret. If such a thing exists it has been forgotten, lost within the very trace of itself.

Derrida is then turning the charge of crypting back on Kant, arguing that it is in fact he who is the cryptophile by his “fetishizing adoration of the Thing itself.” Kant’s attempts to demarcate the fetish of material religion from the thing-itself of rational religion in turn becomes his own structural fetish. For Kant the rational is encrypted within the material whilst not being contaminated by it; for Derrida it is the rational which encrypts a metaphysics of presence. Here Derrida in a sense turns Kant’s critique of the religion of the

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26 Ibid., §51.

27 Ibid., §39.

cult, as setting up an object of desire for happiness and flourishing, on Kant. Kant’s religion is a lover of what the thing-itself as fetish encrypts, namely the pure, non-contaminated site of Kant’s reason as presence, becoming more greatly presenced in the illuminating light of the Aufklärung. This for Kant would amount to reason’s ability to emancipate humanity from its self-incurred immaturity leading towards an intellectual autonomy. Within this autonomous spirit comes a priority to question, as everything is above board being brought into the light, such that the garb of the material may be shaken off in view of the unveiling of the rational. The time of mystery and encryption is dissolving and in its stead is a longing for unity within an ahistorical and universal metaphysics brought in line by the moral law. Within this unveiling Kant calls for a treaty for perpetual peace wherein all parties might agree to the binding terms of philosophy. Such a call for negotiations must have no hidden clauses, nothing veiled, for such concealment would destroy the treaty. There is to be nothing apocalyptic in the vein of the (special) revelatory experience of the mystagogues for this destruction of the treaty would, as mentioned earlier, mark the destruction of philosophy. However it is from the double sense of ‘apocalypse’ as ‘disclosure’ and ‘destruction’ that Derrida takes his cue.²⁹ Derrida reads Kant’s parerga of general revelation as that which affords the deconstructibility of the treaty/covenant from an authorial/superior position, for the process of authorial disclosure is that which would destroy it (this would be another expression of the process of autoimmunity). In other words Kant wants defining grounds for this treaty but the supplementation by revelation is a disruption from the outset. In Kant’s vision, the tone of the treaty comes from whom? The questioner, the enlightened one, the one who is able to disclose this tone. Peter Fenves notes, “The possibility that an announcement hides certain unspoken clauses lies in its tone”³⁰ as Derrida is so well known for showing: to speak in a way as to assume that one knows what is being said is to lose sight of the cryptonym, of what is being harboured within the name. This would be to lose sight of the endless signification within Derrida’s idea of différance and the “always already” dynamics of deconstruction rupturing any unified tonality, any meaning-what-I-say-and-saying-what-I-mean. Such an assumption of tonal unity infers destination and thus death for Derrida.³¹ As such it is here that the treaty must be proto-ascribed as a promise away from pure presence affecting a totalised unity or teleology equalling death.

²⁹ See Fenves, Introduction to Raising the Tone of Philosophy, 3.
³⁰ Ibid.
Attempting to avoid Kant’s overtly metaphysical tone resounding from the Thing itself, Derrida argues that all language resounding from the promise has an apocalyptic tone, for “as soon as one no longer knows who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic.”\(^{32}\) Here the apocalyptic, as the condition of all discourse, is the transcendental structure of polytonality and destinerance, of a receiving and sending in faith, of “no self-presentation or assured destination.”\(^{33}\) This would be the structural trace of the archi-originary-promise. Derrida explores the apocalyptic genre as an example of this structuring through its polytonality and destinerance, its dissimulated sendership and receivership. This genre is polytonal in that it is written by a duplicitous and plural narrative voice as the example of John’s Revelation reveals.\(^ {34}\) Here the narrative comes from who knows where, from the voice of another. There is duplicity in authorship coming via the resurrected Jesus, through a messenger and then through John whereby there is a testifying to a testimony within a testimony as in a response responding to a promise from who knows where.\(^ {35}\) This polytonality is then destinerant in that it is not only received in faith—has John heard right from the messenger? Has the messenger heard right from the resurrected Jesus (if he is who he says he is)?—but then sent in faith.\(^ {36}\) For who will receive this message? And will it be received as John intended? Even he cannot know for he cannot be sure whether he has heard right. It is here that a picture, something like Chinese whispers, is put forward whereby the message is not—cannot—be regurgitated, but rather only reappropriated and reinterpreted such that its original message, as that which itself differs/defers, cannot be retrieved. This is the dual responsibility/irresponsibility that one has coming to a message, we are called to respond faithfully and yet every response will contain within it an irresponsibility by its reappropriation and reinterpretation as a somewhat dispossessive possession of the message. Derrida’s point is that any original message is always already lost, dissimulated at the outset, which then gets us away from the temptation of an archaeological excavation in order to possess a transcendental fixture.\(^ {37}\) Here the authorial position, the centre, the economy of the same tears away both self as the centre of authorship—as, for example, an authorship coming from John—and the authority in receivership. Derrida makes the point that apocalyptic

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 156.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 157.  
\(^{34}\) See Ibid., 153, 157.  
\(^{35}\) See Ibid., 153-8.  
\(^{36}\) See also Derrida’s *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* on this notion of destinerance.  
\(^{37}\) The example can be given more widely for how scripture is approached by those that seek out an inerrant message. Here inerrancy stands in for the view that there is one unified message of scripture sedimented beneath layers of transitive and textual interpretation whereby an archaeological dig might unearth the pure unadulterated message of God to humanity.
literature increased in the rise of state censorship as in John’s Revelation on Patmos as a voice from the margins (the borders)—against “the postal police or the monopoly of posts”\(^{38}\)—ready to contaminate the Empire. And as Derrida expresses, that which is other, that which is uncontainable and unprogrammable, becomes for us the mystagogue.\(^{39}\) In other words, the promise’s apocalyptic tone as mystagogical is precisely what Kant cannot tolerate because it cannot be possessed—polytonal and desterrant. Its tone is the scapegoat that we must push out, for within this other is revealed something of myself that I wish to keep a distance from and cover over. Within this schema, I am the one who rests on the side of truth not the mystagogue, but, as this scapegoating exercise would suggest, the very falsehood that I push away within the mystagogue would be that which I cannot bear to contain within myself.

Derrida alludes to the theme of apocalyptic light influencing the light of the Enlightenment, a revelation it seems that Kant was not privy to.\(^{40}\) Here Derrida notes that “every apocalyptic eschatology is promised in the name of light”\(^{41}\) with light acting as a metonym for full illumination and revelation as in the closing of John’s Revelation (the dominating text within the Western apocalyptic corpus) which speaks of no more night, no more concealment but rather full illumination via the glory of the Lord God as the light.\(^{42}\) The *logos* has become the light—as in John’s Gospel (chapter 1)—which in the Enlightenment tradition becomes allied with reason. It is in view of such rational (*mondial latinised*) illumination that Kant believes any rung-climbing towards a superior and “overlordly tone” will be flattened.\(^{43}\) Such a levelling spirit from Kant’s call for a consensus or treaty is that which might highlight the whole playing field with a spotlight illuminating the moral law residing within every human being placed there by the *logos* of the Christian religion. Derrida notes that we today have inherited this notion of rational illumination just as we have inherited this notion of God being that light which might help facilitate such illumination (for only the Christian God is the moral God in Kant’s philosophy). Derrida states:

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39 Ibid., 142.
40 Ibid., 148
41 Ibid., 147.
42 (This raises a side note on the connection of God eschatologically to full illumination. This will play into our discourse on the death of God. What does Derrida say of eschatology?) Eschatology for Derrida is not as a closure but as a coming that is always to come. See Ibid., 153.
43 Ibid., 148

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The unconditional universality of the categorical imperative is evangelical. The moral law inscribes itself at the bottom of our hearts like a memory of the Passion. When it addresses us, it either speaks the idiom of the Christian—or is silent.44

Here is the mondialatinisation thesis which for Derrida is chiefly Kantian and chiefly laid out in, what Derrida calls, “the kenotic horizon of the death of God” which results in “anthropological re-immanentization.”45 If rational religion is the aim by aligning the will to duty and not conformity then we must, according to Kant, suspend God as a mysterium tremendum (as a figure who would evoke a dual feeling of awe between awesomeness—fascination—and awfulness—terror) for such a figure would, if fully revealed, be experienced as the ultimate wrathful figure resulting in a morality made in submission. We thus suspend God in order for him to become “not so alive as to terrify, not so dead as to cause the abandonment of hope.”46 Suspended between life and death, this God becomes a spectral God that might create space for authentic moral action (anthropological re-immanentization) via reflective faith breaking with the dogmatists. The irony of this is that such suspension is made in the name of rational religion which continues to be housed within the materiality of Christianity revealing a tautology something like, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge [such as the Christian God], in order to make room for faith,”47 albeit as a faith enacted through reason being housed within the Christian tradition.

The outcome of Kant’s apocalyptic light of full illumination comes in God’s suspension and with it the suspension of our self-incurred immaturity leaving us to figure things out yet still within the rubric of this Western Christianisation or mondialatinisation. In the wake of the spectral God our mondialatinisation fills the gaps whereby “God” becomes a placeholder, or metonym, for that which is on the side of the light, which in turn will be filled from within the logic of our own story. In Kant’s outworking this becomes filled by that which is deemed to be on the side of pure morality. The moral law becomes the space that fills the void that God has left. This law, Derrida argues, then instigates “an infinite spiral of outbidding”48; an outbidding to assume the place within the placeholder, to veil the fetish with a universal structure. It is here that pure morality and Christianity become wedded, resembling a similar structure/content paradigm to Heidegger’s revealability/revelation

46 See Miller, Kantian Transpositions, 15.
47 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 29.
thesis. Just as Heidegger privileges revealability as that which instigates revelation and as that which is subsequently filled in by revelation, so too the moral law as rational religion is that which instigates Christianity as material religion and as that which is subsequently filled in by Christianity. Both place the origin over the trace, whereas for Derrida the trace is at the origin. Derrida puts it like this, “If there is no Christianity without pure morality, it is because Christian revelation teaches us something essential about the very idea of morality.”50 Here is a hyperbolic outbidding with mondialatinisation at the helm. Morality now either speaks in the language of those on the side of God who may hear and understand it, or, outside of this understanding, it is meaningless. This form of morality would then crypt within itself its own mondialatinised criteria as that which stands for “universal” goodness and truth (and this would then extend to that which in Western society might be deemed normal, appropriate, acceptable, etc.). Such qualifiers are given credence in virtue of the majority guised as the universal. This would be perhaps a Pauline induced universalism where the place of election and blessing extends from the people of Israel to the people of faith to then those who, in the vein of Kantian ethics, reflect a goodness and truth that might be calculated from within what is labelled normal, appropriate and acceptable sealed with the stamp of the moral law. Such a powerful logic creates within its own inner workings a logic of power.51 This power created in the wake of God’s suspension contains within its spectrality an ontotheological fetish that amasses this power. One way to read this fetishization is by going through Freudian psychoanalysis and seeing this powerful ghost as the ghost of repressed desire.

In “Faith and Knowledge” Derrida, in recalling a couple of walks with Maurizio Ferraris in Naples near Capri and Vesuvius, is reminded of Wilhelm Jensen’s novella Gradiva and its subsequent analysis by Freud.51 In this novella Gradiva is a bas-relief sculpture of a woman in the ruins of Pompeii that comes to life as a phantasmal figure for the young archaeologist Norbert Hanold. This delusion of Gradiva would be an idealized stand-in for Norbert’s repressed desire for his childhood friend Zoë. In Freud’s reading, Gradiva, as this delusional figure, becomes a psychoanalytic synecdoche for his notion of repressed desire; of the desire for life (Zoë) being sublimated for that which would come to represent

49 Ibid.
50 An example of this, Derrida notes, is the strange alliance existing between Christianity and tele-technoscientific capitalism as a picture of mondialatinisation. See Ibid.
life beyond life (Gradiva). In this section where Derrida mentions Gradiva, he calls her “the ghost of light.” The ongoing language of “light” in “Faith and Knowledge” and its allusions to the light of the Enlightenment would lead one to suggest that Gradiva’s placement in “Faith and Knowledge” as the ghost of light would be as the ghost of the Enlightenment’s illumination which, as I have mentioned, is a dual light coming from the glory of the Lord God (as in the end of John’s Revelation) and its mondial latinised alignment with reason leading to rational maturity. The God who illuminates with rational light is now spectral, and our longing to know with full rational illumination is suspended by reflective faith. Gradiva would be the ghost of this light, the spectre of this light as the spectre of God. God dies (or is kenotically suspended) and his ghost, as Gradiva, carries within it the sublimated desire for what God once stood in for: the securing of meaning, and being on the side of God as truth. One way to read this is that Gradiva as “the ghost of light” is as Kant’s phantasm of rational religion with the moral law acting as the object of desire that would doubly stand in for God whilst acting as that thing which would place us on the side of God; i.e. on the side of meaning-making and truth. And, as I have mentioned, this repressed desire would reveal Kant the cryptophiliac inscribing within the moral law a metaphysics of presence. Just as Zoë is the one who is able to reveal to Norbert his sublimated desire for her through Gradiva, in this equation, if we were to apply it to Kant, Zoë would be rational religion and Gradiva, material religion. Derrida takes this crypting one step further where Gradiva would be rational religion and Zoë would be a metaphysics of presence becoming that which would ward off nihilism by our temptation to know. Our desire to know as God does through a rational maturity is then placed into a moralistic gospel wherein to be made right with God would be our accessway to a metaphysical comfort. This longing for a metaphysical balm would be all the more exacerbated by humanity’s experience of guilt accrued by Kant’s notion of radical evil and its subsequent intensification by the insatiability of the moral law.

For Kant radical evil is an innate corruption at the root of humanity which sits contrary to the moral law as a perversion of the will. It chiefly works itself out through the interests of self-love being chosen over the moral law. From this evil a debt accrues that is original, “prior to all the good a man may do.” God’s suspension provides a platform for humanity to align the will to the moral law as duty and not conformity, for conformity would be to act fearfully from self-interest as an outworking of radical evil. In “Faith and

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53 See Kant, *Religion*, Book One, Section III “Man is Evil by Nature.”
54 Ibid., 66.
Knowledge” when Derrida says, “The moral law inscribes itself at the bottom of our hearts like a memory of the Passion.”55 One way to read this is to see the Passion’s memory, of Christ dying on behalf of the debt that has been accrued from our corrupted will, as the memory of our debt to Christ which is now played out through aligning the will to the moral law. From such a reading it is understandable that Derrida would state later in this section that the law “programmes an infinite spiral of outbidding.”56 This would be the attempt to outbid the gift that Christ’s death attains in order to outdo the debt accrued. This in many ways resonates with Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity as a slave morality; an outbidding enslaved to the infinite debt of the moral law that is never satisfied for, as Derrida argues, the economy of debt haunts all duty.57 The expansion of mondialatinisation and the violence that ensues would be the outworking of the attempts at outbidding. Derrida suggests that this thesis of mondialatinisation which carries within it a growing one to one corollary between Christianity and pure morality is precisely the thesis with which Nietzsche conducts “an inexpiable war against Kant.”58

The memory of the Passion, of this good gift (Eu-charist) meant to free humanity from the weight of the debt of a corrupted will, is precisely the memory that keeps humanity bound to its debt. Christianity’s introduction of the notion of infinitude in relation to God is now, in his suspension, experiencing this infinitude in terms of lack.59 God essentially leaves us to figure it out for ourselves (anthropological re-immanentization). Here the infinite goodness of the gift is that which, in our finitude, would institute a responsibility of infinite restitution. This would be why Derrida imagines the only way to get out of the burden of this debt and guilt is to efface the origin of the gift as infinite goodness. Whereas Kant wants to suspend God as mysterium tremendum in order for humanity to step out of fear-filled divine mimicry, Derrida hopes to suspend the memory of the gift in order to create an opening for our response outside of the circular economy of restituting return. For as soon as this debt becomes programmed, its only ease is found by structurally being housing within a religion that is translatable, providing a why and how to the burden of this guilt.60 Such an economy of

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56 Ibid.
57 See Derrida, “Passions,” 9, footnote 3 (pages 134–6).
60 Caputo would speak of the forgetting or suspending of the gift by way of Angelus Silesius’ notion of the rose being without why. John D. Caputo, Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 24–30. The rose does not need (or have) a why; it simply is. From this comes the nihilism
return then reinstitutes a slave-morality with a new figure taking the form that the shadow of God has left. Therefore in order for this expectation of return to be effaced, the good gift must forget itself in an act of self-renunciation as the gift is not something that must be forgotten from the recipient alone but also from within the very gift itself, a lost memory, a trace forgotten to itself and thus only operating on a level of belief. It is from this thesis of the gift effaced that the revelatory mystery founding apocalyptic language, as in the case of John’s Revelation, would allow for a deconstructive lever to establish a response made in faith rather than programmed to a gift that has a unitary tone and secure destination.

Derrida’s response to the calculability of the law as a finitude exacerbated by infinitude is for the law to yield to the infinite precedence of the completely other. This would be our entrance point to Levinas. For Levinas the face eludes thematisation and opens one up to the experience of justice. Justice is always in excess to law, pushing beyond law and unable to be grounded by law (just as faith is to religion). Law always comes as a response to justice attempting to house it within a program yet justice acts within singularity, beyond programmability, always out of reach, to come. Kant wants to ground moral action within the law, which would be a way to ground our response to debt, but Derrida, following Levinas, argues that before the law is this experience with the other as an infinite call of justice founded in the originary look that calls us into responsibility. Another way to articulate this is that for Kant reason begins within the faculties (within a certain economy of the same) whereas for Derrida, following Levinas, “Reason itself is a receiving... a welcome inasmuch as it welcomes the idea of infinity—and the welcome is rational.” Reason here is placed within the law of hospitality and the infinity of the other, within the promise and the

of grace (or the gift) as a nihil-nothingness in the vein of this “without-whyness” not needing restitution via explanation and calculability. This would be the self-renouncement of a why and how in order to experience this nothingness as a gift: “doing things for nothing [no return] while still earning a living wage.” (page 30)

On this form of the gift being given see Jacques Derrida, Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16–7. This thesis of the self-renouncement of the gift would allow a reading of the Eu-charist that would see within Christ’s movement outside the walls of Jerusalem, away from the power schemes of the Romans and the knowledge-towers of the Jews, a self-renouncement that might provide a fresh reading of the kenotic horizon of the death of God as a kenosis away from the will to know and the will to power (both creating the makeup of ontotheology). See Chapter 4 below on this.

Derrida, Adieu, 10.


Derrida experiences this originary look with regard to humanity’s responsibility towards animals when he retells the experience of being seen nude coming out of the shower by his cat. Here the sovereignty of humanity above the animal is displaced. See Derrida, The Animal That Therefore I Am, 3–11.

Derrida, Adieu, 26.
response to the call as yes. Rather than the strict bifurcation between this and that which Kantian reason would afford, reason is here received performatively through the other as a faithful reason received, before the course of law, in the vocative call springing forth from the mystical foundation of authority. It is thus not the law which places us in debt, or obligation, in Derrida’s reading; it is the other. This originary look, beyond the relation to an object, in the personal gaze of the other is that which would enact a debt felt in one’s inability to respond to every other other, for to respond to one other is to sacrifice our response/s to all others. This for Levinas is the birth of the question enacted by the third (every other other). Derrida argues that this originary look is the secret of responsibility repressed within the other and within the history of western responsibility which is itself tied to a history of religion. This would be a way to think Derrida’s words that “religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all” for this responsibility would institute the originary obligation which, in our longing to know becoming housed within a certain programmability of law, would manifest itself structurally in religion.

So then would justice, in response to the other, enact an infinite spiral of outbidding as Derrida suggests the law will do? Justice would contain within it an infinite spiral, but this spiral would not be as a means of outbidding. The infinite spiral within justice would be another way to suggest the Derridean adage of “the possibility of the impossible” in a similar way to the gift’s impossible possibility outside of the debt of restitution. This infinite spiral would be the obligation to the other experiencing the always already intrusion of the third which would thus create a bifurcating response of both fidelity and betrayal at the outset. This would not be a pitting of fidelity against betrayal, as Kant would suggest with duty pitted against conformity, but a recognition that both are housed within the same response. Justice would thus not be on the side of outbidding or undoing but rather on the side of unbidding or undoing in that, just as the originary look of the animal displaces the western philosophical

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66 It is the yes of the other that contains within it an infinite pre-originary welcome as Levinas states, “It is not I, it is the other that can say yes.” Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 93 quoted in Adieu, 23.
67 As for example a certain division between the will acting in duty on the side of the spirit of the law remaining separate from the will acting in conformity on the side of the letter of the law. (See Saint Paul’s word in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 regarding the law for this division). Derrida alludes to this division in “Passions,” 27 (footnote 14, page 142). “For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” (3:6), whereas for Derrida life and death (as sacrifice) come from within the same response.
68 As in, the knowledge of the law is that which would bring about the knowledge of debt (see footnote 72 from the previous chapter).
69 See Derrida, The Gift of Death, 93.
70 See Derrida, Adieu, 56.
72 Ibid., 5.
lineage of the sovereign over the beast,\textsuperscript{73} so this look of the other would enact the undoing of sovereignty within the economy of the same which would be the undoing of the outbidding hunger that the law produces within a \textit{mondialatinised} duty claiming “with God on my side.”\textsuperscript{74} The bifurcating heterogeneous origin would no longer be read as duty attempting to outbid conformity but rather the redoubling of duty and conformity within an autoimmune movement. It avoids outbidding because it recognises the source and supplement together in the beginning, not one attempting to outdo the other, not one attempting to keep the other at bay in order to stay on the restituting capital of debt. This would be Derrida’s reading of radical evil as the autoimmune experience which in “Faith and Knowledge” he states “both destroys and institutes the religious.”\textsuperscript{75} This view is drawing from Levinas when he states, “The will essentially violable harbors \textit{betrayal} in its own essence.”\textsuperscript{76} There is no pure altruism; self-interest would be within every response. Even Kant would acknowledge this recognising that our idea of duty cannot be taken from beyond the level of experience such that we are never quite sure whether we have acted from duty or not as “…we everywhere come across the dear self, which is always turning up.”\textsuperscript{77} He is therefore not interested in placing emphasis on moral examples that might lead us back to a proto-morality and in this regard even Jesus is exemplary yet not proto-exemplary.\textsuperscript{78} Even Jesus is subject to moral principles mediated \textit{a priori} by pure reason. As such imitation isn’t enough; we must go to the source that would allow for a strict division to be made between the actions of the will.\textsuperscript{79} Whereas for Derrida both movements of the will would be contained within every decision. This he addresses in “Passions: An Oblique Offering” exploring the aporetic double bind between the will’s acting in duty/conformity within every response to another. Derrida’s “Passions” turns on the question of “knowing whether…?” one is acting out of duty or conformity.\textsuperscript{80} This question is prompted by a request made by David Wood for Derrida to speak at a conference where his work will be the topic of discussion. The question

\textsuperscript{73} On this see Naas, “Derrida’s Flair,” 225.
\textsuperscript{74} This would be the motif running through Dylan’s “With God on Our Side” (see footnote 92 above) as an exemplarism leading back to its roots in Israel’s election. See “Abraham, the Other,” 12.
\textsuperscript{75} Here Derrida likens this movement within radical evil to that of ontotheology as the process of constructing metaphysically will turn on its own self-deconstruction from within these constructed metaphysical categories. Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §51.
\textsuperscript{76} See Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 229 quoted in \textit{Adieu}, 138, footnote 23.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{79} This again raises the chicken/egg quandary of provenance whereby the content (or materiality) of religion is trumped by its form (or rationality) which grounds it.
\textsuperscript{80} Derrida, “Passions,” 8–11.
of “knowing whether…?” then turns on how he will respond to Wood’s invitational address for to politely say yes to a friend would contain within it a certain impoliteness as the order of duties would cease to be friendly at the level of automatic response.81 Rules break down at the level of relationality; they might house justice but this justice will always be beyond law’s structuring constantly pushing it beyond itself. The prescription of rules within relational engagement with another would always be a betrayal to this other as a singular individual being reduced to that which is deemed normative universally. However rather than Kant’s notion of a phenomenal limit to the distinction of knowing whether…, for Derrida the contamination of duty would be the very structure of this concept.82 He states:

The simple concepts of alterity and of singularity constitute the concept of duty as much as that of responsibility. As a result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty are condemned a priori to paradox, scandal, and aporia.83

For Derrida, duty’s structural contamination from the outset and outworking at the level of every response denounces any grounding to the concept of duty such that all we can do is witness within the movement of the trace. Derrida expresses this witnessing by alluding to himself as the sacrificial passion on the altar at the conference bound by the aporia of responsibility. There are twelve participants at the conference witnessing to Derrida’s work but he is, as Kant’s Christ, not proto-exemplar of deconstruction, not the authority or law of deconstruction, not the messianic finally arrived. He can bear testimonial witness, nothing more. Just as Jesus witnesses to the Father (as to a Kantian moral law), Derrida, as the oblique offering, is witness to God as “‘nameable-unnameable,’ present-absent witness of every oath or of every possible pledge.”84 This would be a way to think God beyond founding; a way to keep the gift secret. Derrida states, “we testify to a secret that is without content, without a content separable from its performative experience, from its performative tracing.”85 Kant wants to penetrate behind secret motives yet we cannot unearth pure motives. There is a certain mystery crypted away within every decision. Here we might think of passion as an enacting of the Eu-charist as a good-gift that, beyond attempting to find its goodness in the site of the gift, speaks a Eucharistic blessing in the very giving-thanks contained within every performative act as an affirmative yes. The trace affords a grace to

81 Ibid.
82 Miller, Kantian Transpositions, 57. See Derrida, “Passions,” 141-2, footnote 12.
84 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §29; I will address the theme of sacrificial witnessing more extensively in the following chapter.
respond without fear of being outside of the moral law. This would be a way to think of the Passion not as a reminder of the guilt accrued which only the moral law enacting a spiral of outbidding might appease, but rather as the passion of testimonial witness within the trace that would seek to forget itself in a bid to offset the law’s outbidding.  

Therefore to Kant’s apocalyptic illumination marking the Old Enlightenment Derrida envisages the coming of a new apocalyptic Enlightenment. Here it is a light not in the illumination of the Lumières but rather as a nocturnal light in the vein of a mystical/revelatory foundation. The foundation that we long to resurface for its authoritative force is, as has been mentioned, mystical in its unfoundedness, existing within the parerga supplementing the body—revelation no longer bordering reason but contained within it for within every rational act would be belief contained in mystery. This mystical foundation diffuses any claims to authoritative force wherein revelation and reason heterogeneously redouble upon one another with no outbidding to be had for both work in the service of the other having nothing more to claim than an originary faith. Derrida states, “Even if time and prudence, the patience of knowledge and the mastery of conditions were hypothetically unlimited, the decision would be structurally finite, however late it came—a decision of urgency and precipitation, acting in the night of nonknowledge and nonrule.” Here the pledge of faith as the shadow of light is that which shadows by this madness of decision, of every decision. Such a pledge Derrida believes instigates a new order beyond the Old Enlightenment, beyond the “the remnant of the Aufklärung which still slumbered in the privilege of the question.” The prominent critique coming from the Aufklärung begins in the autonomous individual as in the vein of Kant’s three famous Critiques (thus always reverting to the economy of the same); Derrida’s New Enlightenment places the response anterior to the question thus disrupting the economy of the same by the invocation or interruption of the other. Kant’s autonomy presents itself in the autonomous will which is good in and of itself, whereas Derrida wants to think will and freedom outside of this schema of autonomy instead thinking through not the dissolution of self-law but rather both the always already intrusion in self-law by the other and the response that such an intrusion demands of us. So where the Old Enlightenment demands a treaty with no hidden clauses,

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86 See ibid., 22-31.  
90 Derrida, Of Spirit, 131.  
the New Enlightenment asks about the tone of its message which will inevitably carry within it a plurality of clauses all differing/deferring. This would then raise the question concerning which clauses have been written into this treaty, and upon whose authority? Light in Derrida’s schema becomes no longer a way of being the privileged one, the one christened to colonise the mystagogue who has missed the light, rather light in its nocturnality and its implicated production of creating shadows refuses such a spirit of colonisation opting for a stewarding or hosting which sits in the aporetic tension of hostility (hostage to) and hospitality (host of) that such an opening affords. The former asserts a lording over as a will to know (the self), the latter asserts a standing under in order to understand with an understanding exposed to a desire or passion to know (the other). Such ‘standing under’ can be expressed through Levinas’ metaphor of subjection to the other countering a Hegelian struggle for self-preservation. It is here that we move to Derrida’s engagement with Levinas.
3. Levinas: as of the response

Of the six sections in “Faith and Knowledge” where Derrida explicitly refers to Levinas’ work, four address the distinction that Levinas makes between the sacred and the holy.¹ This distinction, in its simplest form, may be understood as one between the sacred, as a housing of traditional metaphysics (which Levinas calls ontology), and the holy as a movement beyond such ontological presencing towards the Infinite accessed in the face to face encounter of the other (what Levinas calls metaphysics). Just as traditional “metaphysics” is viewed as a bastardisation of metaphysics in the Levinasian sense as ethical responsibility to the other, so too Levinas refers to religion with the traditional “sacred” as an idolatrous bastardisation of the sacred in the sense of a holiness that is invoked by the pledge to the other.² As Kant’s moral law precedes material religion, in a similar fashion Levinas speaks of the injunction of responsibility preceding the ontological and idolatrous form of religion. There is a “latent birth of religion in the other, prior to emotions or voices, prior to ‘religious experience’ which speaks of revelation in terms of the disclosure of being…”³ It is this injunction of unlimited responsibility which the originary look occasions that helps inform Derrida’s idea of the archi-originary promise as the ability to respond to the other before and beyond ontology, before and beyond the question.

For Levinas the material form of (monotheistic) religion is that which helps us understand human subjectivity.⁴ However, unlike Kant, he is not interested in maturing beyond material religion per se but rather in highlighting the traditional form of the sacred housed in pagan and Graeco-Christian ontology and exposing how it acts as an idol and obstacle to true religion being expressed through his idea of the holy.⁵ Levinas wants to get around the way in which the transcendent God becomes thematised immanently by subjectivity’s conditioning of transcendence through creating meaning and intelligibility from

¹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §§18, 32, 40, 49.
³ Ibid., 168.
⁵ Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 154.
various experiential manifestations (theophany). Such subjective conditioning is incompatible according to Levinas. Therefore, in order to get around this thematisation, Levinas, borrowing from Descartes, speaks of the idea of the Infinite coming via an unequalled passivity that remains unassumable to consciousness. This passivity is experienced as a received trauma beyond an idea that can be structured and thematised. “It signifies with a signifyingness from the first older than its exhibition… more ancient than the rememberable thought which representation retains in its presence.” Within this trauma grows a desire for the Good, for the Infinite, as a desire that does not close itself in by reaching the desired but rather as a desire infinitely unexhausted. This for Levinas is the idea of the holy with the received trauma acting as the ethical injunction of being beyond being, or otherwise than being, one-for-the-other.

It is in this move that Levinas states, “Transcendence is ethics” and “first philosophy.” One way in which Levinas refers to this received trauma is as the primordial dative (whereby something is given “to …”) which institutes the giving over of the subject as hostage in a responsibility that exceeds and precedes the subject’s freedom. This Levinasian hostaging he speaks of as being “pledged” over to the other, a theme that informs Derrida’s notion of the pledge alongside Heidegger’s Zusage. It is the primordial dative which enacts this process of pledging, of being given over to the unconditional yes enacted already as a response, and in turn draws the subject into this pledging as a promise within the trace of the Infinite.

As Levinas states, “The subject as a hostage has been neither the experience nor the proof of the Infinite, but a witness borne of the Infinite, a modality of this glory, a testimony that no disclosure has preceded.” This testimony in the moment of the face-to-face is what Levinas calls ‘the saying’ as an opening to the other in ethical relation which avoids an ontological closure, for the Infinite cannot be stated as such: “Saying opens me to the other before saying what is said, before the said

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6 Philosophy being for Levinas not just the knowledge of immanence, but immanence itself. See Ibid., 158–9.
7 Ibid., 160.
8 Ibid., 161.
9 Ibid., 163-4.
10 Ibid., 165.
11 Ibid. The history of Western philosophy for Levinas can be understood as the destruction of transcendence as a bringing of everything into that which would be calculable and intelligible. Since God’s death this sense of transcendence has been recovered through the alterity of the wholly other. See Ibid., 154.
12 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 304.
14 Ibid., 167.
16 Ibid., 24.
uttered in this sincerity forms a screen between me and the other.” 

For Levinas it is the saying which testifies to his idea of the Infinite as it creates an opening to the holy before its veiling in appropriation via the said. This would be a way to think of the Passion testifying without being closed in referentially becoming housed within a particular testament. Levinas refers to the saying as a pure testimony and “a martyr’s truth which does not depend on any disclosure or any ‘religious’ experience; it is an obedience that precedes the hearing of any order.” 

Just as a martyr testifies to a message through sacrifice there is both an offering of a message and its sacrificial offering up, there is the mediating of a message in its dissolution, both life and death which might well present one way to think through the process of deconstruction. This theme of testimony might well open our discussion on Derrida’s reading of Levinas as well as continue our discussion on the passion from the previous chapter. For Derrida this theme speaks to the testimony elicited within martyrdom and sacrifice as a passion leading to the autoimmune movement within religion and the institution of the question. Derrida speaks to this theme of testimonial martyrdom in “Faith and Knowledge” as the indemnification of life through a dual process of respect for life on the one hand and the sacrificing of life for that which exceeds it on the other. He connects this dual life and life more than life with the two values of sacer (‘sacred’) and sanctus (‘holy’) in Levinas: “respect of life in the discourses of religion as such concerns ‘human life’ only in so far as it bears witness, in some manner, to the infinite transcendence of that which is worth more than it (divinity, the sacrosanctness of the law).” Respect for human life as expressed in the ‘Thou shalt not kill’ is therefore suspended in the instance of the law being transgressed. As such the witnessing to the Infinite, in Derrida’s view, carries within it a measure of sacrifice in the name of life greater than life. We are willing to endorse one thing whilst the message used to endorse it is announced through a medium that

18 Ibid., 170.
19 Ibid., 170.
20 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §40. In a similar vein to Norbert’s sublimation of Zoë for Gradiva, ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 This torahic prohibition is for Levinas the origin of ethical responsibility in the face to face encounter. See Derrida, Adieu, 147, footnote 94.
23 See, for example, Achan’s sin of taking some of the spoils of battle in the conquest of Canaan in the Book of Joshua 7 which resulted in him and his whole family and possessions being stoned by the people of Israel. This could be seen today through right wing cries for harsher sentences of capital punishment for those that would breach the impositions of a certain mondialatinised criteria.
would bring about its negation. This is the process of autoimmunity as the attempts at self-protection create an aporetic bifurcation between sacrificial self-destruction and institution of the community. Here Derrida speaks of community as “com-mon auto-immunity”25 with the guarding (munis) of life within the community being made by way of an opening (munus) to that which might bring about its destruction.26 Derrida plants the Levinasian schematic of the sacred and the holy within this autoimmune system which is replicated in other Derridean formulations such as justice and law or faith and religion. The holy in this instance might represent the undeconstructible “to come” with the sacred as the systemising of this “to come” which both institutes the “to come” (as in the force which law applies to justice) and destroys it in its formulation (as in the law’s systematisation and universalisation of justice which destroys its singularity). Thus the holy, as bearing witness to the Infinite, carries within it an inevitable violence by its autoimmune relationship with the sacred as the said—the idol, the epoch whose closure one would program an outline.

The holy and the sacred inflect each other rather than standing apart as two distinct movements, a point that leads us to Derrida’s early critique of Levinas in “Violence and Metaphysics” which concerns Levinas’ work on the experience of the other outlined in Totality and Infinity. Levinas wants to think of the experience of the other as outside of the rubric of systematisation, outside the violence that appropriating the other within the economy of the same affords. Here the violence of light still flickers from the remnants of the Enlightenment insofar as that which is illuminated is given to myself by myself within a circular economy of tautology or egology.27 Ontology here becomes an expression of a philosophy of power with the being of the question veiling within it the attempts at power plays which the recovering and accreditation of an archê on one’s site of truth might institute.28 The way out of such violence for Levinas is to avoid framing the other within an appropriating economy of the same; to avoid the saying becoming reduced to the said. This becomes Levinas’ critique against Husserl’s analogical apperception: “To make the other an alter ego… is to neutralize its absolute alterity.”29 This is to reduce the infinitude of alterity to one’s own finitude which is to say, to reduce metaphysics, as first philosophy, to ontology as

26 For a helpful unpacking of Derrida’s notion of community see Caputo’s chapter on “Community Without Community” in Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 106–24. This “com-mon auto-immunity” is also explored in Derrida’s portmanteau “hospitality” between an opening without reserve (as munificent hospitality) and a closure in defence (as municipal hostility).
29 Ibid., 153
violence, or to turn the holy into the sacred—an idolatrous form of the Infinite made in my image. This absolute transcendence of the other marked at the origin of being’s alterity he calls the trace of “illeity.” Levinas wants to avoid all violence and totalitarian imposition. However, the equivocal nature of language in one’s relation to the other leaves only the category of the vocative—the call. This invocation would be the only nonviolent language outside of the predicative verb “to be” and therefore what is left is speechlessness for as soon as the “to be” is articulated, appropriation ensues. As Derrida states, “there is no phrase which is indeterminate, that is, which does not pass through the violence of the concept.” Embedded within Levinas’ attempt to avoid any conceptualisation is the longing for a purity of peace that carries within it its own implicit violence evocative of the sort of policing inherent within Kant’s fetishizing cryptophilia. For within the cessation of language out of a fear of appropriation rests certain assumptions contained within language. And thus the other as infinitely other, as infinitely beyond the realm of violence, would become another synonym for death. Derrida believes that Levinas has misread Husserl for “the other as transcendental other can never be given to me in an original way and in person, but only through analogical appresentation... [otherwise] the other would cease to be the other.” Therefore the other, in order to retain absolute alterity, must be to me an ego, being the same within difference. Elsewhere Derrida likens the other as guest to a ghost having a spectrality that would exceed thematisation. From such a reading, to begin to speak, to assert the “to be,” becomes itself both a faithful and violent gesture, both a responsible and irresponsible gesture. This is the bifurcating instruction (respect for) and destruction (sacrificing) of every relation with the other.

32 Ibid., 141, 184.
33 Ibid., 185.
34 An example of such violence is Levinas’ placing of sound above light/sight in the relation to the other for sight, in his view, carries within it an abstracting conceptualisation/objectification of the other. This oppositional logic is for Derrida a continuation of the Western tradition of speech as presence being privileged over writing. See Ibid., 124-7. See also pages 160-1 on phenomenality as a presupposition of violence with the sign being the original contaminant.
36 Ibid., 154. And see pages 155-9.
37 Ibid., 159.
38 See Derrida, Adieu, 111-2. In Spectres Derrida connects this discourse on ghosts as being “in the name of justice” as a respect for every other outside of this time. See Spectres, xix.
“Violence and Metaphysics” opens with a reflection on the preoccupation with the question in Western philosophy. Here Derrida articulates the Procrustean motif of the hermeneutical circle within the community of the question that want to think its possibility:

Thus, the question is always enclosed; it never appears immediately as such, but only through the hermetism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question. The purity of the question can only be indicated or recalled through the difference of a hermeneutical effort.

The first sentence of this quote points to the possibility of uncovering the question as being a veiled myth submerged within a circular hermeneutical effort leading back to the Greeks, whereby the answer determines the question and so on. This is a possibility conceived on the basis of attaining the source. “The difference of a hermeneutical effort” is the difference between philosophy “as a power and adventure of the question” and “as a determined event.” The latter difference is what Levinas is moving towards as an attempt to sit outside of the rubric of Greek philosophy opting for the other’s absolute alterity. Levinas wants to think an-other way to the origin of philosophy, to respond to the other outside of the Greek source where the journey always returns me to myself within a circular economy. He states, “To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we would prefer to oppose the story of Abraham leaving his country forever for an as yet unknown land, and forbidding his servant to take back even his son to the point of departure.” The latter is an address that calls for a responding movement without return, the former is framed within a question that has already begun to be determined by the answer. However, in Derrida’s reading, Levinas misses the implicit violence contained within all relation. The question would not be outdone by the response, just as writing does not outdo speech whilst ineluctably giving in to its own logic, for the response contains within itself its own internal question. Here the perceived polarities

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39 As in, for example, Socrates’ maieutics or Kant’s a priori faculties.
41 Ibid.
44 Levinas elsewhere states that consciousness is the urgency of a destination leading to the Other and not an eternal return to self.” From the second of the “Four Talmudic Readings” quoted in Adieu, 2.
45 In Adieu Derrida speaks to Levinas’ concept of peaceful beginnings (contra Kant’s notion of radical evil which starts with war and then moves to peace as an institution of the will) where he looks at the aporia of hospitality always infused with the trace of hostility and argues that the originality of the archē is interrupted by “the pre-originarity of anarchy” (pages 88-90); the closest we might get to a Derridean “purity” would come in his often expressed “if such a thing exists” quip which is really more a way of warding off this myth than announcing its arrival.
of absolute alterity and absolute sameness, both of which equate to death in Derrida’s reading, would become thought through a relation to the other that holds within it the life/death or question/response testimonial of autoimmunity.46

The question/response, which itself becomes a responsive questioning and a responsibility imposed upon the ego by the other, is carried within Derrida’s notion, borrowed from James Joyce, of jewgreek as greekjew where extremes meet and oppositional logic is dismantled.47 Here Derrida takes Levinas’ notion of the founding response to the originary look (“here I am”—as the “the first and only possible response to the call by the other”)48 and points to this moment of responsibility containing within it a certain egology: the “here I am” sits within an analogical appreciation of the other such that the ego is not completely dislodged from the response but is rather doubly destroyed and instituted in it.49

In other words, whilst not being a full neutralisation of the ego (as a Hebraic hostage) nor a full actualisation of the ego (as a Greek host) in this response, it carries the possibility of both: jewgreek as greekjew.50 Such an egology would be constantly redoubling where, in the movement towards the Greek horizon of knowing as a “horizon of peace,”51 the Greek origin is displaced by the other’s address which makes the subject’s I in the “here I am” hostage to this call of no return.52 This Hebraic phrase, spoken by various figures in the Tanakh,53 expresses the response to the archi-originary pledge which establishes an obligation towards the other within a response which responds before the location of a site for oneself. It sits

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46 A helpful way to think of this life/death aporia is where Derrida states, “I live my death in writing.” The idea being that within the life that he breathes into the text is left a trace of himself as death. See Jacques Derrida, Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 33.

47 Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 192; on the spiral of outbidding occurring within the two historical traditions of Judeo-Christian and Greek becoming deconstructed in the messianic and ḥārā see Naas, Miracle and Machine, 152-96.


49 Egology not as a full neutralisation of the other as in a Heideggerian “ontology” (see Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 120) but as in the relation with the other as the same with difference.

50 Caputo nicely summarises this sentiment, “In hospitality I must welcome the other while retaining mastery of the house; just so, the community must retain its identity while making the stranger at home. If a community is too welcoming, it loses its identity; if it keeps its identity, it becomes unwelcoming. Thus the impossible, the paralysis [or aporia] of community, is that it must limit itself, remain a community while remaining open, forbidding the luxury of collecting itself into a unity.” Derrida and Caputo, Deconstruction in a Nutshell, 113.


52 This for Derrida he notes is Levinas’ “second philosophical theme” that he highlights at the end of his funeral speech. Adieu, 12.

53 Levinas highlights particularly the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:8 (see Otherwise than Being, 141-2) and we might mention Abraham’s response to the call to sacrifice his son in Genesis 22:1, 11 which will become an ongoing theme in this chapter and the next.
beyond any unity of the *cogito*’s apperception.54 Derrida’s “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” is in many ways an extended commentary on the obligation contained within the Levinasian “here I am.” Here the question that I began exploring in the previous chapter, regarding the way one’s response to the other might breach the circular economy of debt and restitution, comes into view again.

Derrida opens “At This Very Moment” with the phrase “he will have obligated” ("Il aura obligé") as the running slogan for this essay which alludes to the obligation contained within the call of being pledged or hostage to the other.55 Derrida is exploring the debt that he has to Levinas’ work. How can he write on Levinas without rendering it as a homage that would play into the trap of the circling “rendez-vous”?56 How might Derrida receive this gift without knowing so and be given this gift without Levinas knowing so? Simon Critchley points out that the beginning response to this question resides within the opening phrase “he will have obligated.”57 The pronoun “he” in this phrase (“il”), at first thought to be referring to Levinas, is in fact the pronoun of the trace of illeity (the wholly other).58 Rather than returning a debt to “Emmanuel Levinas” within an economy of the same (i.e. writing a commentary that seeks to give Levinas’ work back to Levinas), Derrida is placing in question the proper name and instead exploring how he might respond to ‘il’ (the wholly other as every other). This placing in question of the proper name speaks to the idea that within Levinas’ work as the ‘said’ (ontological appropriation) is the excess of his work as the ‘saying’ (the event of obligation as an event of justice) which would contain within it the trace of the other beyond the proper name Emmanuel Levinas. Thus even Levinas is not privy to the excess of his work but only to its appropriation in the said (he doesn’t have a monopoly on his work; he has no access to any *auto-* prefixing in this “incredible logic”).59 This obligation to respond to ‘il’ is given as an ethical performative with a performativity “that cannot belong to the set that it founds.”60 I am thus obligated to the trace of the other as a memory that is unfounded; as a memory beyond or before memory. Here, as I have

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55 On this hosting see Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 167.
56 Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 146.
58 On the third person pronoun “he” in relation to the trace see Levinas, “Meaning and Sense,” 103-4; on the illeity of the third see Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 104, 165 and *Adieu*, 90.
59 On this incredible logic of the saying see Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 147.
60 See again Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §22; Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 173.
mentioned above, reason is received through the originary incoming of the other such that through this interruption the subject receives subjectivity.\(^{61}\) This leads to the other investing the subject’s freedom (positively) rather than dissolving it (negatively).\(^{62}\) It is not an impingement on the subject (as in a Hegelian master-slave dialectical reading) but rather it is the gift of the other: “Must it not have already taken place [this giving of the other], before everything, so that its very question may arise, which renders the question obsolete in advance?”\(^{63}\) Another way that Derrida puts this, alluding to Levinas, is that within the experience of being hosted to the other, the subject’s question is then turned on the subject being placed *in question*.\(^{64}\) This questioning of the subject would be another way to view Levinas’ idea of the primordial dative.

So this obligation is within the experience of the promise (the performative event) which then calls to the undeconstructible *to come*. The latter comes in the future anterior tense within the phrase “he ‘will have’ (*aura*) obligated” expressing “a performative whose essence cannot be resumed in presence” and thus anticipating a time to come.\(^{65}\) This would be of the order of messianic time that Derrida states is “out of joint” outside of the present as differing/deferring.\(^{66}\) Derrida connects this performativity with the undeconstructible when he speaks of the performative as a ‘hypercritical faith’ that is “without dogma and without religion, irreducible to any and all religious or implicitly theocratic institutions…. the awaiting without horizon of a messianicity without messianism.”\(^{67}\) This “out of joint” time is expressed in “At This Very Moment” by time’s bifurcation in the response “here I am.”

There are two repetitive moments being expressed “at this very moment” in *Otherwise than Being* with the second moment being not the same as the first, being experienced as an interruption by itself saying something wholly other.\(^{68}\) Time exacerbates the instability of the second moment in its erasure of the first by *différance* rupturing the immediacy myth. This is an experience of iterability, of the subject being bound to the wholly other “at which moment…?” whereby the “here I am” response is effaced auto-affectively such that the *I* becomes hostage to who in this moment?\(^{69}\) It is a performative obligation both *from* who

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\(^{63}\) Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 147-8.

\(^{64}\) Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 111-2; *Adieu*, 56.

\(^{65}\) See Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 173-6.


\(^{67}\) Derrida, *Rogues*, 153.

\(^{68}\) See Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 157.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 157-8.
knows where and to who knows where: promise and come. Critchley highlights that the second “at this very moment” which interrupts the first is an interruption of the ontological said by the ethical saying.\textsuperscript{70} To put this in Levinasian terms, our inclination is to house the saying within the said, to turn the holy into the sacred, to make the other tangibly appropriable in order to exact a figure to our arrears. But the future anterior temporality of the trace of the other evading metaphysical presencing obscures a restitution known and secured. Hence the notion of an offering that is ‘oblique’ for it testimonially witnesses to the other holding neither arché nor telos. Our offering/obligation is both witness and call, for a witness does not just point to what has been but, in its offering up, imagines what it could be.\textsuperscript{71} This messianic longing is contained within the idea of the holy as the face of the other ethically calling us into a justice and gift that longs for the undeconstructible. The messianic to come is another way of rendering Levinas’ notion of our desire for the Infinite as a desire that, rather than being in search of its telos, is infinitely unexhausted. Thus to be placed in this debt and experience it—not as lack but as excess—is to engage in the holy, for this subjection to the other is infinite but this subjection would be as gift.

The relation this has to religion becomes clear in “At This Very Moment” when Derrida offers the metaphor of a single thread with a series of knots where interruptions have occurred that have subsequently been bound. This thread has both a binding expressed repetitively (iter) and an unbinding by interruptive alterity (itara): the former being an expression of the said and the latter of the saying. To this metaphor he gives the neologism sériature as a series or thread that is constantly being interrupted and thus placed under erasure.\textsuperscript{72} One’s obligation is in a constant state of being both bound and unbound. This binding obligation to the other (ob-ligature) is precisely that which is unbound (interrupted) by a new binding, contaminated by a new interruptive supplement. This ob-ligature would dually be binding (the source of relegere as a gathering for enclosure) and unbinding (the source of religare as a fiduciary action)\textsuperscript{73} as an obligation that, in Derrida’s words, “opens up

\textsuperscript{70} Critchley, \textit{The Ethics of Deconstruction}, 124.

\textsuperscript{71} This is helpfully expressed in Derrida’s framing of obligation, via Levinas, through the adieu which he states “challenges the primordial and ultimate character of the question of being.” (Derrida, \textit{The Gift of Death}, 48.)


\textsuperscript{73} On these two sources see Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §§32-4.
religion within the very unbinding.” This already sérieature is that which opens religion for it is the structure of responsibility within which religion plays out. This binding/unbinding is the life/more than life contained within the Levinasian sacred/holy that is always redoubling upon itself. I am bound to the wholly other, but if I return to you (il) your work as an act of fidelity (as an attempt at an accurate commentary of your work) then what I really offer is an act of betrayal by playing into the circular return of bringing you your own (for what I really bring to you is a shadow of your own within the said). Fidelity would need to go beyond mere commentary (reconstruction) and speak to the iterable interruptions that provoke a deconstructive reading that is both laced with ontological appropriation and that never quite arrives. The previous bind is sacrificed in virtue of the new form of the thread containing a new break that must be knotted together. Just at the moment when one thinks they are operating in fidelity to the other, a break occurs which calls for a certain betrayal to the previous fidelity in virtue of this new incoming of the other. We could say that the saying betrays the said faithfully. This would be the bifurcating always already response of both fidelity and betrayal to the other as a life/death autoimmunity growing an Infinite trace always in excess.

This theme of testifying to the Infinite in our ethical response to the other might well help us further draw out the religious element of this picture. In “At This Very Moment” Derrida plays with the notion of the proper name and its excess by using the initials EL to evoke both the acronym for Emmanuel Levinas and the Hebrew word for God.

He [the il of “he will have obligated”] is not the subject-author-singer-proprietor of the work; it is a “he” without authority. One can just as well say that he/it is the Pronoun leaving its presignature sealed under the name of the author, for example, EL, or

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74 Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 168.
76 The latter half of “At This Very Moment” speaks to this deconstructive reading which is too complex to fully tease out here. Albeit to say that for Derrida this deconstructive reading of Levinas’ work calls for a certain ingratitude by offering a faulty response. Derrida attempts this by reading Levinas’ initials EL (as in “El will have oblige”) as a homonym for Elle, the third person pronoun “she” in French. What Derrida argues is that the pronoun il for the wholly other being placed in the masculine pronoun is a privileging of ethical difference (within the masculine) over sexual difference (within the feminine). The feminine becomes encrypted within the wholly other, suppressed by the masculine voice of the il (“At This Very Moment,” 183). Through the feminine voice Derrida evades a tonal unity of the wholly other speaking in the masculine. This he expresses in a dialogue between the feminine and the masculine reminiscent of the Song of Songs. Ibid., 151-3. See also Critchley, The Ethics of Deconstruction, 119–20.
77 Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 152, 186.
conversely that EL is but a pronoun replacing the singular forename, the seal that
comes before whatever can carry a name."78

Within EL (Emmanuel Levinas) is a trace of EL (God) as a trace of the wholly other. In
Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas Derrida recalls a conversation with Levinas where he described
his work as not principally concerning ethics but rather as concerning an ethics beyond ethics
in his idea of the holy, the holiness of the holy.79 This holiness of the holy is expressed
through the face of the other as the trace of God.80 For Levinas, God’s remoteness within
transcendence given passively through ethical responsibility enacts this stepping within the
trace of God through testifying to the Infinite in one’s relation to the other.81 Beyond the
economy of the said in its calculations, the saying “here I am” as “the religious discourse that
precedes all religious discourse”82 might speak to this testimonial. As Levinas states:

To be in the image of God does not mean to be an icon of God, but to find oneself in
his trace… To go toward Him is not to follow this trace which is not a sign; it is to go
toward the others who stand in the trace of illeity… situated beyond the calculations
and reciprocities of economy and of the world…83

To move beyond calculations and reciprocities, as I have noted, the gift must be crypted or
secreted away from both giver and receiver. An ethics beyond ethics in the holiness of the
holy would be veiled, cut off by a curtain as a distancing from the glory of the Infinite—the
said veiling in sacred appropriation the incoming of the other as saying. This would be the
distance in obliging, the distance in the incitement of desire which has no desired end.84 What
then is veiled behind this curtain? A secret crypted away from which we cannot speak. In The
Gift of Death Derrida speaks of God as this history of secrecy, apart from the ontotheological
appropriation of God, as the possibility of secret keeping. This is likened to Kierkegaard’s
subjectivity as an invisible interiority which manifests “as soon as there is secrecy and secret
witnessing within me.”85 This secret behind the veil would be for Derrida another way to
speak of the trace.

78 Ibid., 175.
79 See Ibid., 4.
81 See Ibid., 165-6; Derrida, “At This Very Moment,” 175.
82 Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 170.
...when there is no longer even any sense in making decisions about some secret behind the surface of a textual manifestation... when it is the call of this secret, however, which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds us to the other, then the secret impassions us. Even if there is none, even if it does not exist, hidden behind anything whatever. Even if the secret is no secret, even if there has never been a secret, a single secret.  

Within the holy of holies is an empty sanctuary: ‘untenanted’ as Tacitus would record it on Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus’ entry in 63 BCE. Rather than being drawn to a desired end within the holy of holies, the curtain’s tear and subsequent dissemination of this holiness is the dissemination of a secret, an invisible interiority that might subject one to the other as to the most high. This disseminating invisible interiority, a Pauline motif no doubt, but one that must go further in the way of secrecy being drawn out by Derrida in relation to the Marrano. The Marranos were Iberian Jews forced to convert to Roman Catholicism during the rise of the Spanish Inquisition (also referred to as crypto-Jews). Naas calls the Marrano of Derrida’s evocation a “Marrano of Marranos” in that the secret which the Marrano encrypts is not just concealed from the Roman Catholics, but also from oneself. As such it is a faithfulness to a secret that one has not chosen but in whose trace one remains.

In “Abraham, the Other” Derrida connects the loss of this Marrano secret with the loss of a certain privileged exemplarity which would in turn provide a faithfulness to the other’s singularity as wholly other. In this essay he situates himself in the place of the Marrano providing a commentary on his often quoted phrase from “Circumfession” of being “the last and the least of the Jews.” The Marrano of Marranos—the one who would forget his election, the one who would break dogmatism with place and bond, the one who would have interrupted the religion of the safe/unscathed built up by a certain autonomous hubris that denies any room for obligation to the other nations—this one would be the most

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87 Recorded in Book V of The Histories by Tacitus.
88 Which in this sense could connote something like a Derridean circumcision as a tear that rips open the self-enclosure of the same. See Caputo, Prayers and Tears, 262-3.
90 1 Corinthians 6:19.
93 Derrida, “Abraham, the Other,” 12-3.
perjurious Jew. To this Derrida adds the superlative antinomy that “the least is the paradoxical condition of the most, a certain experience of perjury is the painful and originary enduring of faithfulness.” The least would be the last Jew remaining. The most perjurious would be the most faithful as a prophet like Micaiah that would speak against the four hundred false prophets who returned the king’s words into his own mouth. And as with the Marrano who is the filthy, contaminated one (the word “Marrano” signifying swine and being derived from Arabic mahrâm meaning “prohibited, forbidden”) Derrida would be contaminated by the secret of a religion, a religion which he is not privy to that would raise the aporetic undecidability between election and deracination, between safety and obligation. This undecidability would then open a religion of responsibility where the borders are down and I am faithfully drawn into being pledged over to the stranger of whom I do not know and who may be hostile towards me. What has been suspended is the secret of one’s election; the suspension being the secret contaminant that would hear a call from who knows where, a receiving and sending in faith that might deracinate the Jew, that might send Abraham packing. This would be the madness of decision as the madness of one’s election. Such suspension of certainty suspends also a dogmatism of privilege with its violence of overlordliness which would be the sort of religious violence latent in every community.

Obligation’s opening through undecidability, through the disavowal of the “God on my side” motif, of Abraham’s promise which he is never quite sure if he has heard right, is a promise that is continually binding/unbinding, always to come. This double bind between betrayal and fidelity represents an ongoing theme in Derrida’s engagement with Levinas, of the tension between violence and peace that this thread of knots—this sériature—contains. In Adieu Derrida calls Sinai a metonym for this frontier between war and peace. The delimitation with a no that comes by placing law on the side of this and not that is the institution of violence which will occur in all appresentation. (This would be the violence inscribed in language that appropriates a certain “when-I-say-this-I-mean-this” within it). Through the law the promise is raised to a level of phenomenality carrying within it the

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95 This religion which is a religion kept even from oneself: “My religion about which nobody understands anything.” Ibid., 154.
96 Derrida, “Abraham, the Other,” 14.
98 See Derrida, “Abraham, the Other,” 23, 31.
99 Ibid., 12.
100 This tension, as I have explored, may come under other names such as hostility and hospitality, binding and unbinding, ontology and metaphysics, sacred and holy, said and saying, et cetera.
101 Derrida, Adieu, 64.
presupposition of violence. But this phenomenality of address towards the other is not possible without an elementary promise enacted in faith. Regarding the institution of the law at Sinai we might find an elementary promise in Genesis 12:1-3 as the promise of land, offspring and blessing. In a similar aporetic, chicken/egg bind regarding the law, Derrida, following Levinas, asks what comes first, the giving of the law at Sinai or the structuring of the law preceding the event. As should be familiar now in Derrida’s reading, neither is secure, form and content redouble, with the one not outdoing the other, and vice versa. If the opposite were the case the question of promise which Abraham responds to would be answered in the law at Sinai—a homecoming to come waiting on the other side of these mountains in the land of promise (as a Heideggerian Heimat); the law being a hedge of our salvation with a God-on-our-side, site-of-truth status of exemplarity. The outcome of this logic is that the law is known which would therefore make our place known: end of deferral, beginning of auto-nomy—beginning of violence and of death. But this promise, even once within the land of promise, would further differ/defer itself and therefore, in order to liberate from the violence of tonal unity and the security of postal destination, one must keep the promise open, always to come—let the Talmudists continue their work; let the diaspora continue out. As Derrida would state, “the best liberation from violence is a certain putting into question, which makes the search for an archia tremble”—the archia here being a promise sedimentised and metaphysicalised in the law at Sinai. For example when the promise does not become palpable for the people of Israel they resort to substituting it (as the saying) through constructing a golden calf.

The hedging that comes from a certain idolatry of knowledge which closes out the other nations finds a deconstructive lever in the law beyond, or without, law. As in Matthew 5-7, that which is beyond law—to extend this metonym—results in a foolishness (1 Corinthians 1), a subversion of all forms of knowledge and power (this I will explore in the following chapter): the law as teacher transposed into the law as witness, as a witnessing to that which we do not know, that which is wholly other. What Derrida’s appeal to the promise will show is that the promise of election would not be one of exemplarism but of substitution

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104 Derrida, Adieu, 65-70. This being a motif that could well go back to Saint Paul (see Galatians 3:17-8).
106 See Exodus 32. This event is interestingly followed in chapter 33 by Moses’ experience of the trace of God in the cleft of the rock (see Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 169). The implication being that in wanting the saying, a reduction is then made to the said. The saying cannot be appropriated, it cannot be taught; it can only be witnessed to as that which is beyond, just out of reach of appropriation.
as of faith-filled response—a hostaging that hospitality affords. This would be a response to a call that retains within it polytonal destinariance. Did Abraham hear right? Who can know? The site would assume the call has been heard and the response would in turn become systematised to this call with an ensuing right/wrong oppositional logic; the event of the call would remain obscured behind white noise as within the play of the structure. Sinai in this picture would be within a structural messianicity that, Derrida states, “belongs to a historicity without a particular and empirically determinable incarnation”—the event exceeding the site, in excess of the site.

This responding in faith beyond any determination of the promise will be explored in the following chapter with regard to Levinas’ notion of the third in the story of Abraham’s binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. The third is every other other that presents me with an obligation whilst I am obligated to an other; this represents the origin of all choice affecting responsibility. This is a responsibility to choose between the other or the other other (the third) where the first other presents a response to be addressed, the other other now presents a question as choice: which other will you be obligated to in this moment? This becomes the hostaging that the subject/host is placed in via the question/address of the third. In The Gift of Death Derrida explores this choice affecting responsibility in Abraham’s call by God (as the other) to sacrifice his son Isaac (the other other, or the third alongside Sarah and Eliezer). Abraham presents himself before God’s address by responding, “Here I am” (to the spiritual) which implicitly holds within it a renouncement or betrayal of every other other in its response (the ethical). Derrida states, “I cannot respond to the call, the request, the obligation, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others.” This betrayal of every other other in the moment of obligation furthers the double bind of fidelity and betrayal, responsibility and irresponsibility, sacrifice and life at the heart of religion. This aporetic response in every encounter becomes another way to think of the heterogeneous origin of religion with its autoimmune resurging as a wave such that in the very distancing from betrayal this response is made in an act of betrayal. The double bind experienced in the encounter of the third which constitutes a decision for the subject is the

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107 See Derrida, Adieu, 70, 145-6, footnote 71. And a reading of election in the Hebrew sense as being bestowed blessing on behalf of blessing the surrounding nations (Genesis 12:2-3) would fundamentally constitute this substitution and not exemplarism.
109 Derrida, Adieu, 67.
110 Ibid., 56.
111 Genesis 22:1, 11.
madness of every decision as a performativity responding in faith to the other. This will be the focus of the following chapter.
4. Kierkegaard: a demand is addressed to us

One might wonder how Kierkegaard could emerge in a study principally exploring Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge” where neither Kierkegaard’s name nor work are once mentioned. A Derridean response would be to speak of the effacement of both the name and the work such that the bleeding of Derrida and “Faith and Knowledge” inevitably includes an implicit Kierkegaardian contaminant. This intrusion is most explicit in Derrida’s allusions to ‘madness’\(^1\) and a ‘maddening instability’\(^2\) which relate to the instant of \textit{decision} being a madness, a Kierkegaardian theme that Derrida evokes throughout his writing in various places.\(^3\) This undecidable decision-making gets a more sustained treatment in “Force of Law”\(^4\) as it relates to the mystical foundation of authority which situates undecidability within the very possibility of every decision,\(^5\) a motif emerging again in “Faith and Knowledge.”\(^6\) This madness of decision-making regarding the question of religion—its aporetic stalemate—would be a source of “fear and trembling”\(^7\) for Derrida. It is highlighted when a demand is addressed to us by the wholly other which requires a response, the quintessential illustration of which being explored in the double bind of Abraham’s call by God to bind his son Isaac, which would in turn constitute Abraham’s own binding.\(^8\) God’s binding address would arouse a certain secret-keeping in the figure of Abraham who, like Derrida, would be a Marrano of Marranos, bound to keep a secret which even he is not in on, bound to a solitude beyond the comfort of that which would be deemed universally normative. Such a madness in the response to the address gets its fullest treatment by Derrida in \textit{The Gift of Death} as a continuation of themes opened by Kierkegaard in \textit{Fear and

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\(^1\) Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §§15, 37, 50.

\(^2\) Ibid., §15.


\(^5\) Ibid., 239, 240, 242.

\(^6\) Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §22.

\(^7\) See Ibid., §§1, 13, 31.

\(^8\) Derrida makes a specific connection between this Kierkegaardian “madness” of decision-making and with the binding of Isaac in “Dialanguages,” 147-8.
Trembling. The Gift of Death follows Derrida’s religiously-housed philosophy—his “religion without religion” which he cannot not abandon—which continues this thread that we have been following of the archi-originary pledge that precedes our call/question and that places us in the trace of performative obligation towards that which we do not know eliciting a faith beyond faith.

As early as 1963 Derrida opens “Cogito and the History of Madness” with the phrase “the instant of decision is madness” citing Kierkegaard yet offering no reference for this particular statement.9 Of the various places that Derrida cites or alludes to this phrase over the course of his writing, never once does he offer a sustained treatment on its content, nor draw the reader to its direct source.10 It is as if Derrida is summoning up the memory of this phrase in a trace-like recollection drawn from the reading of his youth.11 The phrase itself comes from Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus in Philosophical Fragments: “…the moment of decision is foolishness, for if the decision is posited then the learner becomes untruth, but precisely this makes a beginning in the moment necessary.”12 Here he is opposing a certain Socratic model of knowing which seeks to resolve the paradox of truth through a circular learning that affirms the truth is not introduced but rather recollected. Socrates suggests in the Meno that what one already knows as truth one cannot seek out (for it has already come to them), and what one does not know as truth one cannot seek out (for how could one find the truth if they did not know what they were seeking and if they found it how would they then register it as truth).13 As such, truth according to Socrates is not posited as being ‘out there’ to be sought, but rather ‘in here’ to be recalled as an originary truth located within the individual. For Kierkegaard this circular reasoning nullifies the moment of decision by making it merely the moment of occasion as recollection14; an occasion that for Kierkegaard is marred by sin characterised as untruth.15 Therefore “if the decision is posited then the

11 Derrida starts reading Kierkegaard in Algiers as a young man; see Peeters, Derrida, 33; see also the timeline in Jacques Derrida, 328 where from 1948–49 (age 18-19) it states: “‘Awed’ reading of Kierkegaard and Heidegger.” He would later state, “But it is Kierkegaard to whom I have been the most faithful.” See Derrida, “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” 40.
13 See Ibid., 9.
14 Ibid., 13.
15 We are outside of this occasioning of the decision by sin characterised as untruth until the fullness of time as in Galatians 4:4 (see Ibid., 18). This fullness would relate to the salvific work of God through his son which,
learner becomes untruth” in the sense that the decision for Kierkegaard would be unfounded within the marring of sin and, as such, any position that did not face the foolishness of paradox would be more a siding with the normative grounds of the crowd than finding within oneself a direct passageway to truth. The moment of decision is folly in its resistance to overcoming paradox which then is experienced as an offense to one’s understanding.16 Both the language of foolishness and offense/scandal is enough to elicit the translator’s reference to the foolish scandal of the cross that Saint Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 1:22-3: “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block [or scandal; skandalon] to Jews and folly [moria] to Gentiles.” For Paul the cross is folly because it resists and inverts the power structures existing in the Roman Empire, and it is scandalous in that it offends the Jewish powers that have systematised the religious institution and scrupulously predicted the form of the messiah to come. The cross is imbued with scandal and foolishness as a coming of that which was entirely unforeseeable outside of the rubric of expectation. As such this unforeseeability is met with paradox and offense.17 Kierkegaard’s rendition of this idiom speaks to the Socratic model of knowable and foreseeable truth through the form of circular learning reminiscent of the Odyssean return to that which one has always already known.18 Kierkegaard is therefore using the language of ‘madness/foolishness’ in an ironic sense reminiscent of Paul’s usage in that the madness of decision is deemed foolish by the Greeks/Gentiles but is rather a higher wisdom.19 This is a wisdom on the plain of the spiritual as a foolishness that might shame the wise—the paradox being in fact the passion of thought.20

16 Kierkegaard states, “The expression of offense is that the moment is foolishness, the paradox is foolishness—which is the paradox’s claim that the understanding is the absurd but which now resounds as an echo from the offense.” Ibid., 52.
17 Caputo argues that this scandal and offense is heightened by Paul connecting the cross with the logos in verse 18, the utter irony of which being that the cross is the very renunciation of power and knowledge. See The Folly of God, 95.
18 See Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 9.
19 See Bennington, “A Moment of Madness,” 114-5. Bennington thinks that Derrida has missed the irony in Kierkegaard’s rendition and thus reads this foolishness and scandal as in fact a certain foolishness and scandal (as if from the more Socratic/Hellenistic lens), see pages 119-20. This it seems is untenable given the myriad of usages that Derrida employs in his writing which would counteract such a claim. This should become clear in this chapter.
20 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 37. Kierkegaard later states in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript, “Take the paradox away from the thinker—and you have a professor. A professor has at his disposal a whole line of thinkers from Greece to modern times; it appears as if the professor stood above all of them. Well, many thanks—he is, of course, the infinitely inferior.” Quoted in Philosophical Fragments, 287, footnote 3.
In Derrida’s writing this madness would be the outcome of the aporetic double bind contained within the deconstructible which might only cry “perhaps” in the “to-come” of the undeconstructible.

21 This bind would relate the madness of decision to what Montaigne refers to as ‘the mystical foundation of authority’ which Derrida unpacks in “Force of Law” exploring the relationship of law to justice and in “Faith and Knowledge” exploring religion through his concept of messianicity.

22 In “Force of Law” Derrida essentially asks what are laws founded upon. The relationship of the law to justice is that the law needs justice to keep it just and justice needs the law to give it force, but is there an originary just law that institutes all subsequent laws and gives them grounds for their force? Montaigne would say that “laws remain respected not because they are just but because they are laws. That is the mystical basis of their authority. They have no other.”

23 Montaigne holds a constructivist reading of historical institutions seeing within their construction nothing more than conscientious laws born and upheld by custom.

24 Therefore the authority of laws is not something invested naturally by God but rather invested by the authority granted them by those in power which then extends out to the majority. This would be an authority which grows from humanity becoming accustomed to such laws and then built on humanity’s forgetfulness regarding the law’s original constructedness: a dangerous logic characterised in the most simple of words, “we’ve always done it this way.”

Blaise Pascal in the following century would follow a similar sentiment stating that “Nothing, according to reason alone, is just itself; all changes with time. Custom creates the whole of equity, for the simple reason that it is accepted. It is the mystical foundation of its authority; whoever carries it back to first principles destroys it.”

25 This last line in many regards pre-empts Derrida in that a going back to first principles, or origins, would reveal their unfoundedness, their mystical foundation, which would in turn destroy them in their constructedness. This would be a de(con)struction of all law which for Derrida, in the service of justice, would be the double bind of justice’s impossible experience, bound doubly in that it is both the experience of what we cannot experience—that which is always to-come—and

21 See Derrida, “Force of Law,” 256-7 on justice as the undeconstructible; see Derrida, Given Time, 9 on the gift as the undeconstructible.


yet the only possibility of justice must come through this impossibility. Another way to say this is that law is prescribed from a grounding/constructing of singular instances of justice and thus is calculable (and thus deconstructible), whereas justice is an ungrounding ground, neither just nor unjust but mystical—preceding opposition—and thus incalculable (and thus undeconstructible). Justice would concern itself with the singular, law would concern itself with adapting the singular in service of the general, normative, universal. This would be the aporia between singularity and universality, between justice and law; an aporia explored more fully in The Gift of Death through the single individual’s action beyond normative grounds which, in the response to the individual, would sacrifice the rest making a justice that is not universalisable and therefore always restricted by the sedimentation of law.

What the mystical foundation of authority highlights is that our decision-making cannot therefore defer itself onto that which might warrant authority as the “right” decision, for the mystical is that which precedes the oppositional logic of right/wrong, just/unjust and so forth. It is mystical; it is mysterious or secretive. It is for Derrida the secret of that which we cannot know—like the Marrano—but that which we are called to respond to in faith with the performative yes. The moment of decision never has all the facts; if we wait for them all to come through in order to gain a certain mastery over a situation in our decision-making then we will be infinitely waiting. This aporia, Derrida calls, “The Urgency that Obstructs the Horizon of Knowledge” which is where he connects the maddening decision with this mystical foundation opening one up to a decision-making that would occur “in the night of nonknowledge and nonrule.” This is decision-making made in the nocturnal light of Derrida’s New Enlightenment (see the chapter 2 above) which contains a reason that is always infused with faith allowing for no previous guarantee of a certain knowledge-grounding authority; in short: no transcendental signified. Which is why Derrida states that deconstruction is both “mad about and from this desire for justice.” The madness of decision is that which is driven by this desire for justice which is why Derrida says in Points: “A madness must watch over thinking” for ‘thinking’ in this adage would be cold and calculated; law-like, needing a little justice to help (blindly) steer its course.Outside of cold calculation we are secreted away from any guarantee, left to entertain all decision-making

26 See Derrida, “Force of Law,” 244.
27 Ibid., 255-8.
28 Ibid., 255.
29 Ibid., 254. Italics mine.
faithfully, which would also mean a little foolishly and in fear and trembling as Kierkegaard states regarding the madness of Abraham’s decision:

The paradox of faith… on the one hand… contains the expression of extreme egoism (doing this dreadful deed for his own sake) and on the other the expression of the most absolute devotion (doing it for God’s sake). Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for in that case it would be cancelled.\(^{31}\) Faith is this paradox, and the single individual is quite unable to make himself intelligible to anyone.\(^{32}\)

Fear and trembling would be the outcome of the paradox of decision made in an act of faith. Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* is in many regards an exposition of this maddening instability, a phrase taking its cue from Paul’s words in Philippians 2:12, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Kierkegaard claims that in wanting one’s salvation secure, the temptation is to merge one’s salvation with the ethical/universal for this would provide justification for one’s actions and thus a ground to work from (a foundation of authority)\(^{33}\); beyond this justification is the paradox of faith whereby the ethical is teleologically suspended in virtue of a higher wisdom/folly concealed from the individual.\(^{34}\) Here the foundation of one’s salvation is not grounded and in turn one is left in the strength of the absurd to rise above the crowd, to stop deferring salvific authority onto another and to work out one’s salvation solitarily in fear and trembling. This salvation would remain such a mysterious secret that even Abraham is kept from it having to journey out in quiet solitude, forbidden to speak.\(^{35}\)

In *The Gift of Death* Derrida picks up Paul’s language of presence to absence in Philippians 2:12 and thinks of this in relation to God—that Paul’s *adieu* to the Philippians is characteristically followed through to God’s absence, hiddenness and secrecy.\(^{36}\) This absence, or withdrawal, would mark a turn towards thinking through the death of God which in its wake precipitates such a maddening instability. The mystery of the mystical foundation would be hidden within a God who bids us *adieu* leaving us in absolute solitude to fear and

\(^{31}\) [Or in Pascal’s rendition, “whoever carries it back to first principles destroys it.”]
\(^{32}\) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 84.
\(^{33}\) Such as, for example, the Danish Church.
\(^{34}\) See Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 62-79.
\(^{35}\) The silence of the individual being alluded to by Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous author Johannes de Silentio. On this see Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 58-9.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 56-7. On the *adieu* see footnote 71 in the previous chapter.
tremble. Here one must now work out one’s salvation (*heilig: relegere*) through the paradox of faith (belief: *religare*). God, in Derrida’s rendition, now becomes the invisible interiority of secrecy (see pages 55-6). Earlier in Philippians Paul speaks of Christ’s kenosis: “…though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (2:6-7). This instigates Christ’s eventual absencing for it is through this kenotic incarnation that the spirit is disseminated beyond a strict homogeneity towards a secrecy as heterogeneity.

Derrida states, “If the other were to share his reasons with us by explaining them to us, if he were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he wouldn’t be other, we would share a type of homogeneity.” This divestment as heterogeneity would be the divestment of the truth of metaphysics disseminated into us as an invisible interiority in God’s absence. The “kenotic horizon of the death of God” is that which, from within Christianity, autoimmunely assumes it has trumped violence by the self-emptying of metaphysical imposition in order to make room for faith. This trumping of metaphysical violence is guised in the Church’s “appeal to universal fraternization” which would amount to an Abraham refusing to sacrifice Isaac in favour of the greater call of humanity/the ethical/universal. This would be a universal homogenisation which avoids the madness of decision for the comfort of peace held back at home with Sarah and the residing crowd. In this view Abraham might refuse to sacrifice Isaac in light of everything being out on the table; nothing is hidden now that the lights of the Enlightenment have boomed after God’s overarching figure has stepped out of their way. But this figure does not leave, a new one merely steps into its place. God’s throne is filled to keep the demons at bay. This universal fraternization contains within it the inability to envisage what was always madness, for even in the refusal to sacrifice Isaac lies a refusal to envisage a crypted madness always performatively assumed by faith as a response to our mystical foundation.

In “Faith and Knowledge” when Derrida speaks of the “*infinite spiral of outbidding*” that the law programs (see pages 34-7), he underpins this programmability by referring to a “maddening instability” that this spiral moves out from. This outbidding constantly assumes a new hierarchy to assert a logic of grounds that would forget the madness of every decision that such grounds rests upon. This forgetfulness then purports the universal as law which becomes a way to operate mechanically, automatically. Like a well-

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37 Here as a somewhat trace/absence representation of God which Levinas appeals to. See Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” 169 and *Adieu*, 63.
38 See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 57 on this homogeneity.
40 See also Ibid., §50.
41 Ibid., §15.
oiled machine this train takes its course, pre-programmed with stops and destination times scheduled into its journey. Everyone on board knows the program and rides with the comfort that this solid machine will not deviate from the tracks. This machine crypts the mystical as a “doubly mechanical form. ‘Mechanical’ would have to be understood here in a meaning that is rather ‘mystical.” It remains immune because of its own doubling within itself. Here the mechanical covers the mystical as a forgetfulness of this machine containing “the mystical immunity of a secret.” It is in a sense automagical. And thus this kenotic death of God and the rise of human fraternity in its wake would reinstitute the illusion of peace and the veiling of madness in every decision.

This figment of peace—the ontological violence that is presumed to be farewell along with the exit of God (as mystery)—would, in the decision to stay home with Sarah and the others, assume the cessation of violence and the coming of peace on earth. But the cessation of violence is always made in the name of violence as in the case of the pax romana. Kant’s treaty for perpetual peace as we have seen would demonstrate this violent gesture too as he demarcates the appropriate tone for engaging in philosophy. To take one sacrifice down in the name of peace would be to erect another. The case of infanticide today seems so ludicrous that Derrida gives an example of how the public would react were a father to sacrifice his son at Montmartre, and yet every day thousands die, sacrificed by a “smooth functioning society” that Derrida states, “not only allows these sacrifices, it organises them.” Since the founding authority of law precedes the oppositional logic of whether a decision is just or unjust but is itself, according to Derrida, a “violence without ground,” that is not to say that it is nothing but violence but rather that the possibility of violence is always laced within this mystical foundation such that the aporetic double bind opens one up to the incoming of that which might be ‘hostipitable’; door open, hands tied. This violence is all the more exacerbated by the automagicality of tele-technoscience becoming a machine of (radical) evil:

Because this evil is to be domesticated and because one increasingly uses artifacts and prostheses of which one is totally ignorant, in a growing disproportion between

42 Ibid., §37.
43 Ibid., §40.
44 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 22. This theme of peace inscribed in the name of violence goes right back to Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics,” 145-6, 160-1. And the opposite is true in that one does not override the other but rather both redouble upon one another, as Derrida states, “War itself retains the testimonial trace of a pacific welcoming of the face.” Derrida, Adieu, 88.
45 Derrida, The Gift of Death, 86.
knowledge and know-how, the space of such technical experience tends to become more animistic, magical, mystical.\textsuperscript{47}

The mystery that retains justice’s incalculability can then become reappropriated in the service of “the most perverse calculation.”\textsuperscript{48} This is always the possibility of its undecidability which is why Derrida states that one must always add “perhaps” to this justice.\textsuperscript{49} It could go either way as incalculability offers no comforting repose. This madness of decision within justice concerns Kierkegaard’s advocacy towards the single individual as it might raise a fear of people using this incalculability as a licence to do as they please. This is precisely why he appeals to “fear and trembling” as the sign that one is not simply masking one’s self-governing, unbridled behaviour with the allure of individual obligation.\textsuperscript{50} The incalculable will always be appropriated by the calculable and such appropriation will always be contaminated by violence and sacrifice. Derrida is suggesting that one cannot avoid this maddening instability for avoidance would merely be a feigning, or authority-deferral, by the moment of occasion/application. This division goes back to Derrida’s early work on Saussurean linguistics in that the undecidable, the madness of decision, is another way to describe the division of the letter and of the signifier.\textsuperscript{51} Every choice will always carry within it betrayal and infidelity for it will always open up an infinite number of other choices that could have been made in that moment, but one cannot wait to decide in a posturing of mastery which choice is greatest, one must choose faithfully in the moment with a desire for justice residing in an expectation which is always in excess of calculability. This is why the choice is always a faith-filled choice, because the horizon of knowledge is always obstructed from view. And this is why faith is not a defect of knowledge, but is rather that which infuses knowledge with activity.

This would be our entrance point, through Kierkegaard, to look at the way in which this maddening instability, built on the mystical foundation, would inform a reading on religion. Derrida argues that this faith-infused knowledge, as a faith residing in the performativity of the promise, is that which “alone permits a ‘rational’ discourse on religion.”\textsuperscript{52} This would be a discourse on Derrida’s messianic order in light of this maddening incalculability. The out-of-joint evasion of presence of the messianic would

\textsuperscript{47} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §45.
\textsuperscript{48} Derrida, “Force of Law,” 257.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 89.
\textsuperscript{51} See for example Derrida, “Dialanguages,” 147.
\textsuperscript{52} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §22.
precipitate the incalculability of a structural messiah who never comes (contained within the performativistic), as opposed to the historical messianisms being calculably rational, law-abiding messiahs. The former, Derrida states, “belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that ‘founds’ all relation to the other in testimony.”53 We could say that something of the unforeseeability within Derrida’s structural messianicity would be laced with the madness and offense of Kierkegaard’s reading of Paul’s 1 Corinthians 1:22-3 as a metonymic messianism of the messianic. Here “God on our side” exemplarity is denounced with this image of Christ as the scapegoat leaving the city of (Jewish) knowing and (Roman) power (see page 63) as the Passover lamb renouncing all forms of power and knowledge just as Derrida, by becoming the oblique offering (see pages 41-2), would renounce both authority over his work (archê) and complete translatability of his work (telos).54 The scandal and folly of this messianic image, outside of the rubric of calculation and expectation from both Jews and Greeks, would be an interruption only approachable through faith and witness.55 This would be an interruption that might tip the perch of oppositional favouring towards something like Derrida’s vision of the jewgreek as greekjew sitting in faith-filled excess to traditional opposition such as between reason (as, for example, Kant) and mysticism (those overlordly mystagogues).56 Derrida says in The Gift of Death that “Paradox, scandal, and aporia are themselves nothing other than sacrifice, the exposure of conceptual thinking to its limit, to its death and finitude.”57 Here the paradox of faith is met with the scandal of offence resulting in an aporia that may only be broached in faith, for the expectation of that which we thought we saw coming has met its limit and must now be crucified in order to become opened up to the excess of our calculations.

Derrida’s reading of this paradox of faith beyond the limitations of conceptual thinking may be seen as a teasing out of the two characters that Kierkegaard juxtaposes in

53 Ibid.
54 On the weakness of disarmament in the opening to the other see Derrida, “I Have a Taste for the Secret,” 62-4.
55 This chapter of radical inversion in 1 Corinthians would be premised by Paul’s referencing of the prophet Isaiah in 1:19: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” This destruction that destroys the wise is that which would arouse Luther’s protest, Heidegger’s Destraktion and Derrida’s deconstruction.
56 See Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 22; In “Force of Law” Derrida states, “one can recognize in it [the ‘idea of justice’], even accuse in it a madness, and perhaps another kind of mysticism” (page 254). This justice might reflect another mysticism in its paralleling another mystagogical individual act (of madness) above the generality of the moral law. However this mysticism is of “another kind” in that it avoids any apophatic and overlordly schemas.
57 Derrida, The Gift of Death, 69; here he premises this section with another reference to Kierkegaard: “The instant of decision is madness.” (page 66).
Fear and Trembling: the knight of resignation and the knight of faith. Kierkegaard’s tragic heroes (or knights of resignation) would each sacrifice themselves on behalf of the universal.\textsuperscript{58} Whilst containing the allure of heroism this resignation would be a substitute for faith in that it seeks to remain in control of the situation by giving in to the temptation of the general/ethical (to be explainable and translatable) as an expression of the temptation to know, ground, \textit{et cetera}.\textsuperscript{59} The tragic hero resigns, or defers, decision onto the universal, or the teacher,\textsuperscript{60} which would be a much more comfortable journey than the knight of faith’s solitary walk into the unknown. The former would be an economy of the same with the teacher’s instruction indebting me; resignation as an \textit{incurvatus in se} walling oneself in from the unknown, putting up guards (\textit{munis}) in the hopes of a clearer repose.\textsuperscript{61} Salvation (\textit{relegere}) without faith (\textit{religare}): watchword for the worst violence. Here the \textit{pax romana} would be the example for every colonial salvation expressing protection distributed in violence. The limitations of conceptual thinking within this salvation are adhered to by housing one’s own expectations within the calculations of the ethical/universal (the coloniser).

The movement from the knight of resignation to the knight of faith would be one from mastery to testimonial witness.\textsuperscript{62} Rather than sacrificing himself on behalf of the universal, this knight sacrifices himself on behalf of the absolute whose address he must respond to in complete isolation. This would be a martyrdom of unintelligibility where no praise is due, no applause waits on the other side of this decision. Even if this knight longs for intelligibility he is unable to place his journey into a palatable system for consumption, for the absolute’s intentions are kept silent from him: no translation, not even unto himself; forbidden from an autobiography as auto-justification.\textsuperscript{63} De Silentio cannot understand Abraham’s actions and is even less willing to attempt to make such an understanding. He too must remain silent. Partnership would be unthinkable; only admiration is left.\textsuperscript{64} There is no comfort but only despair within this solitude. And thus Kierkegaard states that Abraham, as this Marrano of

\textsuperscript{58} Such as Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus. Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 68.
\textsuperscript{60} The teacher would take the place of decision and present a moment of occasion. See Kierkegaard, \textit{Philosophical Fragments}, 14-8 (the decision’s positing drawing the learner into untruth, 52). The knight of faith can only be a witness, never a teacher according to Kierkegaard. \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 96.
\textsuperscript{61} Kierkegaard, Ibid., 57; Kierkegaard gives the example of a young man who loves a princess yet, in not being able to have her love, he resigns himself to this fate being made through his decision turning the princess into a fabricated eternal love of his choosing whereby “what the princess does cannot disturb him.” Ibid. 50. See pages 46-52 for the extended account.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{63} Derrida, \textit{The Gift of Death}, 62.
\textsuperscript{64} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 84, 137.
Marranos, “speaks no human language… he speaks a divine tongue – he ‘speaks with tongues.” Abraham speaks in a secret language, a deep groaning which no one can understand, not even himself, kept both from him and from all as a language of divine alterity, a Pentecostal experience of dissemination towards secrecy as heterogeneity. Derrida’s religion too would speak to this glossolalic experience as he states in his “Circumfession,” regarding his mother’s inquiries into whether he still held a belief in God:

…she must have known that the constancy of God in my life is called by other names… the omnipresence of what I call God in my absolved, absolutely private language being neither that of an eyewitness nor that of a voice doing anything other than talking to me without saying anything… but the secret I am excluded from…

God, as this secret, as Kierkegaard’s absolute, is what Derrida refers to in *The Gift of Death* as the *tout autre est tout autre*: “every other (one) as every (bit) other.” This demarcation, as a continuation of his Levinasian appraisal via Husserl’s analogical appresentation of being the same within absolute difference (see page 48), would carry the idea that everyone is secreted away from everyone else and therefore every approach must be one made in faith. This would be why Derrida equates this infinite alterity (generally denoted as God) to everyone else.

God, as wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the wholly other. And since each of us, every one else, each other is infinitely other…then what can be said about Abraham’s relation to God can be said about my relation without relation to every other (one) as every (bit) other.

The blindness that Abraham faces on the three day journey to Moriah is the blindness that is experienced in our encounter with the *tout autre*. God’s secreting from Abraham provides for a totally unforeseeable journey offering no balm either on the journey or at its end. This journey of faith makes for blind eyes obscured from seeing by the tears of mourning. Eyes imbued with passion, rather than the crystallisation of sight at what lies on the horizon of the journey. Abraham’s tears would be shed both over the loss of his son Isaac and impassioned with the longing for his son to be received back anew. As Kierkegaard

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65 Ibid., 140.
68 Ibid. see also pages 83, 87 and Derrida, “*Sauf le nom,*” 74-6.
states, “Faith is a passion,” that being not only Isaac’s sacrificial passion but Abraham’s as well. His bind—that which propels him in faith with nothing to cling to—is also his passion. This knight steps into an economy of difference by handing himself over, within undecidability, to the decision of the wholly other. So there is a deference within this schema—there cannot not be within the play of signifiers—but this would not be deferring as to the greatest “example” that would hold a security which I could graft onto putting me at ease on the side of God. This would be a deference onto the tout autre as a responsibility that exceeds all control resting in the secret of unknowing which is beyond me calling towards me. Whilst this sounds like the most irresponsible move, both the universal and the ethical present a case of deference yet the latter would refute any deference denying its mystical foundation, denying that there is a certain irresponsibility in placing faith in the most calculable and utilitarian of decisions. Within Kierkegaard’s distinction between the two knights, resignation gives up wish but not ethical duty (‘morality’ in the Kantian sense), whereas faith gives up both. Thus, in the case of Abraham’s faith, Isaac’s sacrifice may be seen as the sacrificing of the ethical and normative ideals of responsibility. In the case of resignation, Isaac would be dead to Abraham before the three day journey, whereas in faith Isaac would not die until the very moment on mount Moriah. As such, deference to the ethical resigns the promise; deference to the absolute faithfully retains the promise. In the case of the latter, the promise, in which you hope, is given up from within the promise, for it is the promise that invests this faith without dogma that allows for the promise to be sacrificed in the name of the promise. In other words, as in Abraham’s case, Isaac (the promise of a child birthing a great nation) is sacrificed in the name of this very promise. In Derrida’s reading, this maddening instability, whereby the promise is handed over in faith, would create a space for the gift to come about: “There would be a gift only at the instant

70 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 79.
71 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §22; Derrida, “Dialanguages,” 149. As Levinas states, “It is not I, it is the other that can say yes.” Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 93 quoted in Adieu, 23. This yes of the other being an infinite pre-originary welcome.
72 Agamemnon and Jephthah each give up their daughters and Brutus gives up his two sons on behalf of their ethical duty.
when the *paradoxical* instant (in the sense in which Kierkegaard says of the paradoxical instant of decision that is madness) tears time apart.”

We are still left with the madness that the third affords whereby every choice of fidelity we make carries within it an infinite betrayal of every other choice that could be made in that moment. Just as Sinai would be Derrida’s metonym for the frontier between war and peace, between deracination and election, we might say that Moriah, as the moment of *moria* (foolishness), would be the metonym for this dual bind of both violence and peace, betrayal and fidelity. Abraham has a promise of election, yet he is called to offer it up, to deracinate it from within the promise. Violence and peace come both from within the same decision with the choice of one not withholding its other: fidelity to God, betrayal to the rest. Moriah would then become the chief site of Jewish election (see 2 Chronicles 3:1) with Solomon’s temple being the outworking of the law: chief site of safety; the salut of salvation (retained within animal sacrifice). But it would also become the site of deracination with the offering up of the promise through sacrifice: Abraham’s offering up the promise of a great nation in order to bless, be on behalf of, the other nations; Jesus’ offering up the promise of messianic fulfilment (as they had perceived it) as the renouncement of power and knowledge in order to bless, be on behalf of, the other nations. To return to a quote from the introduction: religion as a response is “the ellipsis of sacrifice.”

Religion contains within it the ambiguity of sacrifice whereby the response opens up both fidelity and betrayal within every decision: “Every one [is] being sacrificed to everyone else in this land of Moriah that is our habitat every second of every day.” Which is why for Derrida radical evil is not something we attempt to outrun or outbid, for it is, within the same decision, both the destruction and institution of religion. The one sacrificed in the name of the other—the ethical in the name of the absolute, the absolute in the name of the ethical—is not destroyed by the other but is rather incorporated and repressed within it. Not an annihilation but a cremation that would be crypted within the trace. One redoubles within the other, as Derrida states, “…history never effaces what it buries; it always keeps within itself the secret of whatever it encrypts, when the *paradoxical* instant (in the sense in which Kierkegaard says of the paradoxical instant of decision that is madness) tears time apart.”

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75 Derrida, *Given Time*, 9. On Kierkegaard’s reading of the return of Isaac as gift see *Fear and Trembling*, 38, 44-5; Derrida finds that Kierkegaard Christianizes this story carrying it through to Matthew 6:22-3 whereby sacrifice/renunciation on earth equals treasures in heaven. This circular economy of the gift within calculation would in turn destroy its very value. *The Gift of Death*, 95-9, 106–113.

76 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §41.

77 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 70.


the secret of its secret.”80 This would be the autoimmunity of religion. Like Kierkegaard’s knight who must forget what has been in order to make the journey completely in faith with no system to fall back on, every journey is every bit new, just as every interruption of the other is ever bit new, bound to the thread of knots beginning again rather than looping back to the start. “’Religion’ can only begin and begin again.”81

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80 Ibid., 23.
Conclusion: between believing one knows and knowing one believes

If there is a question of religion, it ought no longer to be a “question-of-religion.” Nor simply a response to this question. We shall see why and wherein the question of religion is first of all the question of the question. Of the origins and borders of the question—as of the response. “The thing” tends thus to drop out of sight as soon as one believes oneself able to master it under the title of a discipline, a knowledge or a philosophy. And yet, despite the impossible task, a demand is addressed to us…!

We return to our opening quote, but not as before. A demand is addressed to these male, European participants at Capri given by several European publishers expecting an exigent response to the question of religion. This presents an impossible task for Derrida, not just because of the violence of mondialatinisation (see page 19), perpetuated all the more by both European participants and publishers, but also impossible in that such a task “would demand the construction of new Libraries of France and of the universe”—in short: a new Babel. How could this unfathomable task be delivered in just a few pages on religion? How could the event of religion be translated into a site for religion? Both impossible tasks are violent and yet, in spite of this reservation, in spite of the reticence that this impossibility affords, we cannot not respond. The question then becomes, how does one respond by keeping religion open, by keeping the game alive, by keeping the site of religion nomadic? Derrida concludes this section with this phrase: “Faith and knowledge: between believing one knows and knowing one believes, the alternative is not a game.” Religion could not hark back to a naked, edenic peace freed from the clothing of structural religion’s shameful entrapment—no nakedness under clothing, only skin-coloured clothes. There would be no site beyond us or before us that would offer us rest. Between knowledge and belief is, for Derrida, not a place to obtain but rather a place that is always already differing/deferring as a placeless place reflective of what is going on in the event of religion. Religion must always reside in a between, but a between that is between betweens. Between the promise of land and the land of promise we are to journey within what Derrida calls “the desert in the desert”: chora (or

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
This name from Plato’s *Timaeus* speaks to a space between two places, an interval belonging to a third genus. It is a placelessness between the fiduciary promise (*ligare*) and the promise safe/uncathed (*legere*). It is the *between* captured in the heterogeneity of the two sources dispelling oppositional logic (sensible/intelligible, *logos/mythos*) and the aporia between all form and content (such as between revealability and revelation). Derrida closes this section (§35) by laying out the playing field of religion, a field scattered with fifty-two crypts (the fifty-two sections of “Faith and Knowledge”), “dispersed in a non-identified field, a field that is nonetheless already approaching, like a *desert* about which one isn’t sure if it is sterile or not.”

The game of religion is being played out on this desert-like site that is really no site at all but, rather, “the place of absolute exteriority.” As a siteless site it is never presented *as such*, but comes from what is exterior to it in “an utterly faceless other.” This connection between exteriority and the other is brought up as early as “Violence and Metaphysics” when Derrida argues that space, following Levinas, is the site of the same, whereas exteriority is nonspatial, as a relation with the mystery of the other. *Chora* is that site which draws us beyond the economy of the same and into the economy of difference where the other interrupts us with the demand for a response. One way that Plato’s *Timaeus* appropriates *chora* is by referring to it as a receptacle between two places that receives without giving, like a nurse or midwife. In Derrida’s reading *chora* would not be a receptacle *per se*, but the receptacle of another as the reception or receiving of another. It would be of the order of a rational hospitality, of a reason received in welcoming the infinity of the other, allowing for a passage to the totally other (*tout autre*). In this sense, *chora* as that which opens a receiving of the *tout autre*, as that which allows for a response towards the *tout autre*, is that which opens the relation of *chora* to God and religion. *Chora* disavows appropriating the *tout autre*.

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4 Ibid., §25.
6 Here space is thought in *différance,* just as time is thought in *différance* through the messianic; two names given to the play of duplicity within the two sources of religion: *chora* and the messianic (Derrida, “*Faith and Knowledge,*” §20). These two hold a chiasmic relationship in Derrida’s thinking on religion as a new way to think through the spatio-temporal order of the world. Beyond Kant’s religion of the Old Enlightenment, Derrida states that *chora* comes “as in a dream” (Derrida, “*Khôru,*” 90), nocturnal, in the night of nonknowledge and nonrule of Derrida’s New Enlightenment (see pages 42-3).
7 Derrida, “*Faith and Knowledge,*” §35. Italics mine.
8 Ibid., §23.
9 Ibid., §24.
11 Derrida, “*Khôra,*” 92, 95.
12 Ibid., 117.
within an economy of the same, for the other’s receiving is unnameable, unappropriable and therefore of the order of the testimonial pledge. This comes in virtue of *chora*’s incapability of naming.\(^ {14}\) It is the “first name prior to all naming” unable to reappropriate itself or the other into a translatable name. It speaks to the wholly other as unnameable, untranslatable name whereby only the testimonial act of bearing witness is possible.\(^ {15}\) Witnessing to the *tut autre* therefore becomes an impossible possibility, a maddening faith converging the two sources of religion in this experience of witnessing.\(^ {16}\) This “‘nameable-unnameable,’ present-absent witness of every oath or of every possible pledge” would be one way that Derrida approaches the name of God.\(^ {17}\) “God” is the name given to this experience of absolute exteriority with the *tut autre* (see page 72), the name of the event of witnessing, of being pledged to the other: “I promise the truth. Believe …as one believes in a miracle.”\(^ {18}\)

*Chora* is this experience of the miracle in every performative act with the other. This place of mystery is the place of bifurcation, being immemorial, within the trace, retaining a secret. The unnameable *chora* speaks to what is going on in Derrida’s “*Sauf le nom* (Post-Scriptum)” where everything tends to drop out of sight save the name. Here he speaks of “God” as the name of a “bottomless collapse, of this endless *desertification* of language”\(^ {19}\) as the trace inscribed within the *event*. This *desertification* of God may be likened to a kenotic experience, of the secret disseminated (see page 67).\(^ {20}\)

Everything secret is played out here [*khôra*]. For this dislocation displaces and disorganises all our onto-topological prejudices, in particular the objective science of space. *Khôra* is over there but more “here” than any “here.”\(^ {21}\)

*Chora* would be this playing field, this non-identified field as a desert between knowledge and belief, between the name secured and the name destinerrant, “the very space of deconstruction” occurring in the Tower of Babel narrative between its construction (a certain universal translation) and its deconstruction (a refusal to be imposed by the violence of the name).\(^ {22}\) In this *between* Derrida envisages “a universalizable culture of singularities, a culture in which the abstract possibility of the impossible translation could nevertheless be

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\(^ {14}\) Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 89.
\(^ {15}\) Ibid., 90.
\(^ {16}\) Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §49.
\(^ {17}\) Ibid., §29.
\(^ {18}\) Ibid., §§29, 37, 49.
\(^ {19}\) Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 55-6. Italics mine.
\(^ {20}\) On this desertification as a self-emptying see Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 44-5.
\(^ {21}\) Ibid., “*Sauf le nom*,” 56.
\(^ {22}\) Ibid., 80.
Such announcement is the madness of the undecidable in every decision, the madness that calls us into responsibility as a response to the secret of unknowing beyond me, calling me.\textsuperscript{24} What is going on in Derrida’s religion is an event of responsibility which swerves between commitment and dissidence, conversion and apostasy, both machine-like and miraculous.

To assume that the name of God and the use of religious language in Derrida’s work is itself enough to warrant calling Derrida a “religious” thinker is to miss what is going on within his philosophy. Unless, that is, we read these quotation marks around religious, in a similar sense to Derrida’s reading of the quotation marks that Heidegger places around spirit, as signifying two pairs of pegs that are holding in suspension a curtain veiling us from what lies within.\textsuperscript{25} As the veil tears (as the quotation marks lift) we are not opened up to something that would raise the charge of cryptophilia on Derrida, something like a site of religion; rather, we are opened to a “religion without religion” as “a nondogmatic doublet of dogma” which would be a religion of sacrifice deconstructively self-deconstructing from within itself.\textsuperscript{26} It thus remains something other to what we think religion to be, something other to our colonising methods, preferring instead to play in the place of absolute exteriority. Colonial methods on the side of appropriation will always assume that mastery is imminent, if not already here, and thus Derrida’s unveiling of a certain dogmatic religion is, in a sense, to unveil those assumptions of already being an unveiled-religion, or of being an unveiled-religion to come—those assumptions that continue to wield “faith” as a fighting word. This Derridean unveiling unveils a veil; a veil something like the mystical foundation that keeps the secret crypted, apocalyptic. To attempt an excavation of religion through a form of dogmatic faith would be to fear this mystery of the unknown. What Derrida’s religion pushes towards through his metaphor of autoimmunity is that our tools of excavation become implicit in the collapse of the ground around which we dig. What is unknown, what is a bottom without bottom, is not something to be feared, as like the mysterium tremendum God, rather it is the very mystery that complicates all opposition and produces a survival which always carries within it this dual processional of life/death, testimony/sacrifice. This survival is for Derrida, “an unconditional affirmation of life….“ He states, “Deconstruction is always

\textsuperscript{23} Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” §22.
\textsuperscript{24} See Derrida, The Gift of Death, 62.
\textsuperscript{25} See Derrida, Of Spirit, 31-4.
\textsuperscript{26} On Derrida’s notion of a “religion without religion” see Derrida, The Gift of Death, 50-1.
on the side of the yes, on the side of the affirmation of life.”27 This yes is the promise that we respond to, the promise that allows for any response, and the promise that will always elicit a response. To this yes we say adieu as both a welcoming in faith to that which addresses us and as a sending away to God, a farewell evoking the come. From who knows where, to who knows where, within the same testimonial response resides a dual affirmation: promise and come.

27 Derrida, Learning to Live Finally, 51–2.
Bibliography

Works by Jacques Derrida


Other Works


