

JOHN D. CAPUTO  
Villanova University

LOVE AMONG THE DECONSTRUCTIBLES:  
A RESPONSE TO GREGG LAMBERT

**M**Y POINT IN *On Religion* was to use love to explain the possibilities for religion, of a religion with or without religion, now that the reductionist accounts of religion—of the sort we find in psychoanalysis, e.g.—have been laid to rest. Gregg Lambert on the other hand seems still stuck in reductionism. He has produced a critique of love that is so cynical as not only to make *On Religion* unrecognizable but also to make psychoanalysis look sick, as if there were no room for love in a psychoanalytic account of mental health.<sup>1</sup> But beyond all that, his view is so dark that he risks reducing theory and critique to a pointless self-destructive consuming of one's own substance of no use to anyone. Might not Lambert's text set the analyst herself to wondering, whence all this "resistance" to what deconstruction affirms, to Derrida's idea that "deconstruction never proceeds without love,"<sup>2</sup> not to mention all this resistance to love itself? But if there is a fine line between irony and cynicism, and if love builds up, as Kierkegaard says, following St. Paul, then perhaps this is Lambert's way of being ironically constructive, indirectly communicative. On that assumption, allow me first to thank him for his spirited commentary and then, on the principle that no good deed should go unpunished, or, alternately, that his love for me places a demand on me that I love him in return, allow me to offer a response.

### I. The Unconditional

Everything in deconstruction is inscribed in *différance*, woven from its elemental

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<sup>1</sup> For a much more sensible account of love in psychoanalysis, see Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) and, in psychotherapy, see James Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). For a powerful feminist approach, see Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Points...Interviews, 1974-94*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 83.

spacing, inscribed in a differential matrix, caught up in an inescapable condition that is older than time and wider than space. This archi-desert time/space is the condition of nature or history, time or eternity, of Europe or philosophy or science, even as it is older than love or hate.<sup>3</sup> *Différance* describes the irreducible condition of our lives, the inescapable circumstance of living always already under these conditions of archi-spacing. Then are we condemned to conditionality? Is there nothing other for us to do than to trade one condition for another in an endless game of shadows like Plato's cavernous prisoners? What of the unconditional? That for Derrida is such stuff as dreams are made of, the stuff of prayers and tears. "You have spent your life inviting calling promising, hoping sighing dreaming," he says in one of his most revealing texts.<sup>4</sup> The unconditional is the stuff of a "promise" that has been held out to us nomads in this desert space. The unconditional is what never actually comes but is always coming, something that is "structurally" to come, like a Messiah whom we always expect but who in fact never appears.<sup>5</sup> For the cold truth—I speak of a "cold hermeneutics"<sup>6</sup>—is that what does in fact come can only come under these conditions, as on a frigid desert night.

But make no mistake. Derrida is not against the unconditional, nor is he against prayers and tears. On the contrary Derrida prays all the time,<sup>7</sup> just as he always treasured the white tallith he was given as a youngster, which he caresses every night.<sup>8</sup> It has been my great delight, the chief consolation of my philosophy, my personal *Schadenfreude*, to scandalize both the pious and the impious, both the Christian right and secularizing deconstructors with these images. Evidently I have also scandalized Gregg Lambert with this shameless "gesture of making such a scene as crying in public," which is almost as bad as publicly exposing one's circumcision, like one of those naughty old Cynics of old. But the scandal is Derrida's, of course, not mine. Or his before mine, or Augustine's before his or mine. It is a time honored bit of shamelessness. Whether Gregg Lambert likes it or not—Heidegger was also put off by Augustine's tears, which he considered *weiblich!*—Derrida is a man of prayers and tears, who loves only writers who

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Khora," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 126.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases" in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 314.

<sup>5</sup> *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 187-206.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, "Circumfession," 38-40, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 44-45. For an account of Derrida's "prayer," see John D. Caputo, "Tears Beyond Being: Derrida's Experience of Prayer," *Théologie négative*, ed. Marco M. Olivetti (Padua: CEDAM, 2002), 861-880.

weep, a womanly man, and deconstruction is a prayer—*viens, oui, oui*—for the coming of something unconditional. He prays like a rabbi at the Weeping Wall praying for the coming of the Messiah, like a “Jewish saint,” as Cixous impishly says,<sup>9</sup> like Saint Jacques, as I said, trying to be devilish, praying for *the* impossible.<sup>10</sup> I just do not know how to soften the blow of this bad news for Lambert. I pray it will not reduce him to tears and I pray his forgiveness.

Of everything that *is* we would say it is conditioned. Of the *unconditional* we would say, not that it “is,” which is to say too much, but that it “comes” or even that it “calls.” If this is our inescapable condition, it is not our tragic fate, which is a too Greek and fatalistic way to think, while deconstruction is a more upbeat, messianic and Jewish science, or at least a Jewgreek quasi-transcendental slightly messianic unscientific postscript, which is why I myself think it also has a little Danish blood. Hence, in deconstruction we always need good soldiers to stand constant guard, day and night, like Socrates at his post, lest something existent present itself off as unconditional, or lest the unconditional, *s’il y en a*, would claim to have actually come. The unconditional is like good conscience: the one dead give away that it is an imposter is that it claims to be the real thing.<sup>11</sup> “Deconstruction” is, if it “is,” *s’il y en a*, precisely a prayer and a tear for the coming of—Derrida has various names—the absolute surprise, hospitality, the gift, forgiveness, the democracy to come, etc.<sup>12</sup> These are all promises for which their empirical and extant counterparts, the things that actually answer to that name at present, are no match.

The affirmation of the unconditional, the experience of the impossible, is what deconstruction is all about, its least bad definition, as Derrida says. The love of the impossible goes hand in hand with, in fact depends upon and is nourished by the impossibility of love, so that “deconstruction never proceeds without

<sup>9</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Portrait of Jacques Derrida As A Young Jewish Saint* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 134ff.

<sup>11</sup> Here is the makings of a politics in deconstruction. If someone were to say, this *is* democracy, or this *is* freedom or justice, the promise of freedom and democracy has been kept right here—let’s say, just to choose a random example—in the good old USA, then that would be a real threat. The rest of the world would be put in consummate danger by a self-righteous sovereign state acting unilaterally in its own interests without regard to the world community on the grounds that it thinks it is sovereignly right, the Good and the True itself come down to earth. That is the very definition of the “rogue” state that it claims to oppose, as Derrida has recently argued in *Voyous*. Jacques Derrida, *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison* (Galilée, 2003). For a commentary, see John D. Caputo, “Without Sovereignty, Without Being: Unconditionality, the Coming God and Derrida’s Democracy to Come,” *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 4.3 (August, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Like unconditional forgiveness, in which, for example, someone is forgiven not because he or she has met the classical conditions which merit forgiveness—saying you are sorry and will make amends, etc.—but simply forgiven, unconditionally. After all, is forgiveness merited or it a *gift*? But surely that is impossible? Impossible indeed.

love." Deconstruction is a "work of love," as we say in Danish Deconstruction. It is the love of the things themselves, which always slip away, as I have said, not an anti-realism so much as a hyper-realism.<sup>13</sup> Love accordingly "deserves" deconstruction because love is so worthy and so much worth it, and it deserves it because existing love, which is deconstructible, is a trickster, a strategist, self-serving, "treacherous."<sup>14</sup> Think of a Jewish Socrates at his post, watching out for anything that presents itself as a promise kept, when everyone knows the Messiah is still to come. Always. Deconstruction is infinite vigilance, infinite questioning in the name of what is coming, infinite suspicion based upon the faith that the only one who or the only thing which is above suspicion is not here yet.

## II. Deconstruction as Love

So what then of love, which Lambert lambastes?

Derrida answers this question by going back to Meister Eckhart, who complained that some people love God the way they love their cow—for its milk. Love, he said, is "without why," by which he meant that it wells up out of itself and spills out over in an "*ebullitio*," which we would call nowadays an expenditure without reserve and which he called "*Gelassenheit*." By that Eckhart means letting go of oneself and letting God be God, while for Derrida it means letting the other be as other.<sup>15</sup> In the longest insert in the Galilée edition of *Sauf le nom*, which had been earlier published in an English translation entitled "Postscriptum," Derrida elaborates upon the Eckhartian idea of *Gelassenheit* as follows:

But why not recognize there love itself, that is, this infinite renunciation which in a certain way *surrenders to the impossible*? To surrender to the other, and this is the impossible, would amount to giving oneself over in going toward to the other, to coming toward the other but without crossing the threshold, and to respecting, to loving even the invisibility that keeps the other inaccessible.<sup>16</sup>

To love means to surrender, "*se rend à*," to give oneself back to the other, without moving in on the other and taking the other over. Derrida rejects the classical model of love as union or fusion, which goes back to the myth of Aristophanes in

<sup>13</sup> John D. Caputo, "For the Love of the Things Themselves: Derrida's Hyper-Realism," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 1.3 (July, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Amy Laura Hall, *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), chapter 5, for a comparison of *Gelassenheit* in Heidegger and Meister Eckhart.

the *Symposium*, in which love between the sexes is the desire for the reunion of the severed halves of an original hermaphrodite (*Symposium*, 189b ff). He adopts the Levinasian notion of asymmetry, which resituates love within the infinite distance or radical inaccessibility—what Levinas called the “transcendence” or “transaescendence”—of the other. The other is the shore I can never reach, the recess to which I never have naked access, which is why the other is always and irreducibly a font of unforeseeability and surprise. So to love the other on this model requires always to respect that distance, which means that love is not the desire to have the other for oneself or to get something back from the other in return, but the unconditional affirmation of the other, which is what Levinas is calling “desire.” That distance, Derrida says, “is not an obstacle but the condition of love.”<sup>17</sup> It does not frustrate love but nourishes love with enough change and novelty for a lifetime. That is why Kierkegaard’s Judge William says that for lovers a lifetime spent together is never threatened with boredom, which is the *radix malorum* for the aesthete. Love on this Levinasian-Derridean accounting is not possession but affirmation, letting the other be precisely in his or her alterity, *tout autre*. Love means going over to the other, which breaks egological solitude, without trespassing or crossing the other’s threshold, which would break the other. To say “come” to the other, then, *pace* Lambert, is precisely *not* to be confused with “let us gather together” (a Heideggerianism of which Derrida is repeatedly critical) in a circle of the same; it is to affirm the incoming of the other, *l’invention de l’autre*, who continually breaks up and traumatizes the circle of the same.

Derrida continues (we are still in the inserted passage):

To give oneself up (*se rendre*) and to surrender one’s weapons (*rendre les armes*) without defeat, without memory or plan of war: so that this renunciation not be another ruse of seduction or an added stratagem of jealousy. And everything would remain intact—love, too, a love without jealousy that would allow the other to be.<sup>18</sup>

As I said in commentary:

To love is to give oneself to the other in such a way that this would really be giving and not taking, a gift, a way of letting the other remain other, that is, be loved, rather than a stratagem, a ruse of jealousy, a way of winning, *eine vergiftete Gift*. Then it would turn out that the passion for the impossible would be love.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable,” in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 49.

Love means to give but—remember *différance*—giving can be a very clever way of taking, a ruse, a stratagem. Even the Lord God, blessed be his name, boasted/confessed that he was a jealous God and wanted Israel to love no one else but him. So Derrida demands that our love be better than God's, for it must be without jealousy. Love can be a very clever way to possess, to make demands, to build up credit. Just like a good banker who happily extends credit—beware of bankers bearing gifts—so that he can some day collect on his IOUs, the lover can also at a strategic moment demand payment on all his I-Love-Us. Love is a very clever way to seduce and it is no accident that among Kierkegaard's masterpieces are to be numbered both the brilliant "Diary of a Seducer" and the magisterial *Works of Love*. Love follows the cunning logic of the gift: as soon as it makes itself visible, it begins to put the beloved in its debt and makes the lover look good, that is to say, to annul itself. *Die Gift vergiftet*. (Upon the treacheries of the gift I have expanded at length.)<sup>20</sup>

But if Derrida subjects the classical idea of love to a Levinasian crucible, he also subjects this Levinasian model to the further crucible of what he calls a certain "negative theology," one all his own, which moves him beyond Levinasian humanism. Love is the affirmation of the other, of the wholly other (*tout autre*) where every other is wholly other (*tout autre est tout autre*). Not only is the other person wholly other, for all the well known reasons that Levinas gives and that go back to Husserl's *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, but everything, each thing, in its idiomatic, idiosyncratic singularity is wholly other—Derrida's cat, for example, or Silko's mean and dirty rooster, in Lambert's text. Or this rose that Angelus Silesius says is without why. That is to go back to something like the Scotist theory of *haecceitas*, the unique and absolutely singular form of this-ness, that made each thing the singular thing that it is, a notion that was taken up by Gerard Manley Hopkins, for whom the poem was a way to sing, to single out, the singularity of things, a way to love the singular in its unrepeatability. To love for Derrida is to love every different thing in its difference, where it makes no difference how different it is. This singular idea Derrida puts thus (we are still in the insert on *Gelassenheit*):

The other is God or no matter whom, more precisely, no matter what singularity, as soon as any other is totally other (*tout autre est tout autre*). For the more difficult, indeed the impossible, resides there: there where the other loses its name or can change it, to become no matter what other. Passible and impassible, the *Gelassenheit* exerts itself in us, it is exerted on this indifference by some other. It plays at and plays with indifference, without playing.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 160ff; *Nutshell*, 140-51.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 74.

The name of God—and God is love—is the paradigmatic name of what we love, of what we desire with a desire beyond desire, and beyond that it is the name of what desires us and demands everything of us. That is why the name of God for Derrida is a name we must save or keep safe—*sauf le nom*. But the name of God is, like every name, caught up in *khora*, in a khoral play, which means that it is endlessly translatable or substitutable. The other is any other, God or someone or something else. Love means to love the other as other, any other, any wholly other, *n'importe*, going under any name whatsoever. There is no master name for Derrida, no name above every other name, at the sound of which every knee should bend, even as there is no name that cannot be responsible for the worst violence. How much blood has been spilled in the name of “God” or “love,” of “justice” or “democracy,” which are among our best names, which means names filled with the greatest promise and, by a direct proportion, with the greatest threat? The name of God is caught up in what Derrida calls the problem of “exemplarism,” that any name can serve as an example of any other, God, for example, and we are in the end unsure what is a translation of what. We do not know whether the name of God is but an example of love or whether love is but an example of what we mean by God. God is the *tout autre* exemplarily, where every other is wholly other.

So we must love the other without deploying love as a cunning way to love ourselves. That is not to say that we should not love ourselves, or not love the other in ourselves, for as Thomas Aquinas has shown, the love of the self is the condition of possibility (and impossibility) of loving the other. If we do not love ourselves nothing else will matter to us, including the other. There is no one narcissism, Derrida says:

What is called non-narcissism is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other. I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance. The relation to the other—even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation—must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible, for example. Love is narcissistic.<sup>22</sup>

If we ourselves count for nothing, then nothing else will count at all, including the other. Taking up this passage from Aquinas, Julia Kristeva points out that in her experience the patients who are the most beyond her reach, the ones whose situation is almost entirely helpless and hopeless, are those who do not love themselves. She cannot give them a reason to care; nothing matters to them,

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<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Points*, 199.

including the other.<sup>23</sup> That of course is the point Aristotle was making when he said that every agent acts for its own good, even if that good is the good of the other.

So we must love the other and respect the distance of the other, which means to love the other without trying to reappropriate the other for ourselves, without deploying love as a cunning strategy in a war we are waging with the other. We must constantly fear the strategies of love, but we must not fear to take the risk of love, which means both to make ourselves vulnerable to rejection and to risk reappropriating the other. We must love the other in ourselves and so love ourselves. We must love the other not ourselves and love ourselves not the other and love the other as we love ourselves. But of course that is all quite impossible, a paralyzing impossibility.

Still, like it or not, that is the axiomatics of love. That aporia, that impasse, that "double bind," as Derrida calls it, that paralyzing impossibility of love, is what makes the event of love possible, if it is possible, *s'il y en a*, an event meaning that something is really happening. That aporia does not defeat but defines love. After all, when we go where we have gone many times before and where we know full well that and how it is possible to get there, that is not "going" anywhere, not in any robust sense. We are really on the move, really underway, just when where we want to go is impossible, when it is impossible to take a single step forward. That is why Derrida is so fond of the verse from Angelus Silesius, "Go where you cannot go," which is for Derrida the law of love, the lawless law of loving the other, of *the* impossible, of going to the impossible place. Citing another insert in the *Galilée* edition, Derrida writes:

Go (*Rends-toi*) there where you cannot go, to the impossible, that is at bottom the only way of going or coming. To go there where it is possible, that is not to surrender (*se rendre*), rather, it is to be there already and to be paralyzed in the indecision of the non-event.<sup>24</sup>

It is only when you set out for the place that you cannot reach that you are really on the move, and only when you love the other with a love that respects the distance of the other that you love. Anything less is like the movements of a clever mime who makes a dazzling display of motion all the while remaining steadily in place. As I said in *Prayers and Tears*, "The only event, the only e-

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<sup>23</sup> Julia Kristeva, "*Ratio diligendi*, or the Triumph of One's Own: Thomas Aquinas, Natural Love and Love of Self," in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia, 1987), 170-87.

<sup>24</sup> Derrida, *On the Name*, 75.



venting, or in-venting, is to go to the impossible."<sup>25</sup>

### III. Love's Double Bind

I do not disagree with a good deal of the suspicion Lambert casts upon love so much as I think that his suspicion lacks a frame, two of them, actually, the first its context in deconstruction, which Derrida calls the double bind, and the second its context in *On Religion* or my general project.

Without the "double movement,"<sup>26</sup> everything would be iron fate, blind necessity, a *simple* bind, the *simple* impossibility of love not *the* impossible, not love as *this impossible*. Deconstruction is the love of the impossible, not the love of necessity, *amor fati*.<sup>27</sup> So Lambert's analysis lacks and needs a context. Given this context, given the double bind, we can say Gregg Lambert details how love is dangerous business. I have never doubted that love is a trickster or that deconstruction needs soldiers, keeping a vigil through the night, watching over anything that dares present itself as love, that dares to say, *me voici*, that's me, I am love (or democracy, etc.). Lambert provides a useful inventory of love's stratagems and ruses, of the variety of things that pass themselves off as love, of conditioned, empirical and extant counterparts of something unconditional.

Lambert has a flare—shall we say he loves this, and if so, what dark desire lies behind this love?—for coldly, mercilessly showing how a discourse on love can be a handbook for a seducer, how with every eulogy to love we put a manual in the hands of a trickster, somewhat like those old moral theology treatises on sexual morality which forbid us to do things we did not even know we could do or had not even thought of doing. If we want to keep the name of love safe we must be as merciless as Lambert about its dangers, pitiless, coldly rationalistic and cruel, even loveless, in our critique of love's ruses. I have never doubted that. In general I get myself into more trouble for my doubts than for my hymns to love. I do not doubt the need for a cold hermeneutics of love. Love is capable of every trick in the book of love, in all the books that have been written about love, ever since St. Augustine distinguished between being genuinely in love and being in love with love. Loving the other is a work which takes everything out of us, not an afternoon in the park; it is a risk that exposes us to the worst pain,

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<sup>25</sup> Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 50.

<sup>26</sup> Because we have at one and the same time an infinite, incalculable responsibility *and* conditioned calculable contextual responsibilities, what is required is a "double movement." Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: 'The Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" trans. Mary Quantaince, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 120.

even as it is capable of a hoax that can cheat others and use them for our own ends. As Spinoza reminds us, when love's cunning purpose is frustrated, it turns inside out into the deepest hate. Love and hate hover in an unsettling proximity and transmutability. Who hates religion more than someone who has been passionately religious and renounced it? Where is there more bitter animosity than in what we call an "ugly divorce"? The fuel of passion that fires love all too easily becomes the fuel of hate. *Die Gift vergiftet*. Like everything important, love is ambiguous, dangerous, risky, and bracing, like a swift ride down a steep slope.

None of that undoes love, of course. It simply spells out its impossible axiomatics, its conditions of im/possibility, the double bind of love.

To love someone is to demand that one be loved in return by others. True, but half true, only half of the double bind: to *know* that loving others inevitably places a demand upon the other for reciprocation *and* to love the other without demand. It is not a question of choosing between them but of settling into the aporia and "negotiating" the difference, as Derrida says. That aporia is the axiomatics of love, which poses the same impossible situation as the gift:

On the contrary, it is a matter—desire beyond desire—of responding faithfully but also as rigorously as possible both to the injunction or the order of the gift ("give" [*donne*]) as well as to the injunction or order of meaning (presence, science, knowledge): *Know* still what giving *wants to say*, *know how to give*, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself [*engage-toi*] even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance.<sup>28</sup>

There never is anything simply outside of knowledge and economy, never a "simple, ineffable exteriority"<sup>29</sup> to the circle. The idea never is to simply step outside them but rather, by virtue of the double injunction, to learn to move within and interrupt knowledge and economy, to loosen them up in order both to give beyond economy and to give economy its chance. Love—and know what loving is up to. Know that—and love. Do not simply denounce all economies or dissolve them with acidic self-destructive criticism, but "give economy its chance," for the only thing that exists is an economy and everything depends upon keeping economies as open-ended and hospitable as possible, of making things happen within an economy, which is the only place anything happens. That is why there is nothing wrong with being loved in return; no one will get anywhere without it. Infants who are not loved into childhood, and children who

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 30. See Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 169-73.

are not loved into adulthood, and lovers who do not sustain each other with love, are forever wounded and end up wounding others. Indeed love is fecund without procreation, as Irigaray shows, mutually engendering life in the lovers themselves.<sup>30</sup> The thing is to love and to risk the consequences, to know the risks of love, what Levinas calls the “beautiful risk,” to make oneself vulnerable to rejection, to know love’s hidden demands for return. Know that love demands a return, but do not love *in order to be loved in return*, that is, in order to build up credit, even if you *know* that is impossible and that you inevitably will do just that! Know all that, then love, give, leap to the order of making the truth happen as an event, which is otherwise than knowledge, on another plane than knowledge, which Derrida calls the passion of non-knowledge.

Know that love is always already inhabited by the possibility of hate, by the structural possibility of turning into its opposite, or of becoming a rote repetition and simply withering away. That structural possibility is constitutive of it, part of its salt. That is why love is a repetition, *oui, oui*, and why we will never really know if we love until after we are dead, and then it is too late, which is why also love is a risk. When lovers say, I do, who knows if they do or what they are going to do, or how ugly all this can get.

Know that love is structurally inhabited by the possibility of loving our own just in order to hate the other. That is why Derrida speaks of a community *without* community and resists metaphors of “gathering” unities, as I have explained at some length.<sup>31</sup> Indeed that is why Derrida, Levinas, and the New Testament all frame love in terms of loving the other (Levinas), loving the unlovable (Derrida), and loving your enemy and hating your father and mother, for even hypocrites love their own (New Testament), which is quite the opposite of the “familialism and ethnocentrism” of which Lambert complains. The “family values” of the New Testament would surprise the Christian Right, while Badiou thinks that St. Paul is the founder of universalism! Know all that you can about that risk, then love. The point of maximum intensity is only reached at *the* impossible. How to forgive the unforgivable? How to hope when all is hopeless? How to love the unlovable?

For Derrida, something is stirring in love, in the *name* of love, something provocative, something profoundly promising. But there is nothing that binds us without the possibility of substitution to the name of love. Given the radical unforeseeability of what is to come and given the sea of translatability in which it

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Given Time, I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 30.

<sup>30</sup> See her critique of Levinas in Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 185ff.

<sup>31</sup> Caputo, *Nutshell*, 106-24.

is swept up, what is named or coming under the name of love may not bear the name of “love” at all, because it is essentially to come. It is in that sense that one could ask, “what’s love got to do with it?” What we now call “love” or “democracy,” what Derrida calls the “given concept of democracy” or of love, are at best old names of predecessor states for something to come. It is always a matter of negotiating between these given concepts, Derrida says, and something “structured like a promise.” We do not need “love,” not that name, or “justice” or “democracy” or “God,” all of which are badly bruised; they are, Derrida says, our “least lousy” words. On the other hand, we do not get to invent our own language but must meditate upon the old names we have been given, which have their own histories and resonances. There is no untranslatable word, not God or love, not justice or democracy. “What’s important in ‘democracy to come,’” Derrida says—or, let us add, in the “love to come”—“is not ‘democracy,’ but ‘to come.’”<sup>32</sup> The promise of the “to come” is more important than the names of God or love, of democracy or justice. The crucial deconstructive operation lies in the very idea of the “to come,” in keeping the future open.

Far from denying these ruses of love, I have been perfectly clear, very decisive, about the undecidability by which all things are beset. *On Religion* itself is a text intended for a general audience which tries to show the possibilities for religion in a high tech, post-secular world, to show the possibilities for religion in a world that has gotten past the grim reductionism of modernist critiques of religion, not to heap as much suspicion upon religion as possible. It tries to defuse the very idea that there is or could be “one true religion.” That other, more suspicious side of me is, alas, all too easy to document, by the way. I have an ample supply of critics who will readily rush forward to testify that I have wandered off the reservation of true religion. My critics are far more likely to complain that I have consigned things to a khoral abyss, exposed us to monsters, and have left us all exposed to the wolves than that my eyes have been misted over by singing a song to love.<sup>33</sup> So I am grateful to Gregg Lambert for having criticized me in the opposite direction. I can use this critique to counter my other critics who think I am a nihilist and then hope that I can thereby engage the two camps in a debate in which they nullify each other while I stand by innocently, hands folded in prayer, looking up to heaven.

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<sup>32</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Politics and Friendship,” in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 182 and 178-82 *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> See the critiques by Dudiak, Kuipers, Cudney, Smith and Olthuis (and my replies) in *Religion With/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). See the critiques by Ayres, Kearney and Westphal (and my replies), and also Dooley’s interview with Derrida on my interpretation of the religious element in his work in *Prayers and Tears, in A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, ed. Mark Dooley (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

#### IV. Remarks in Return

Allow me to conclude by offering several critical remarks of my own about Lambert's analysis of Christianity, of psychoanalysis, of Rationalism, and finally of just what it is that those of us who are loosely clustered under this idea of "theory" are trying to do. Here is where we get into the second missing context, the overall point of what I am doing, not only in *On Religion*—whose main lines never appear in Lambert's critique—but of what I am doing in general.

*Christianity.* While *On Religion* is filled with examples from the Christian and more generally biblical religion, it is a mistake to underestimate the dedication of my book to Derrida, and hence the extent to which the standpoint adopted in this book, in my work generally, is deconstructive and has a de-centering effect on Christianity. Thus, several times Lambert criticizes the classical doctrine of the atonement as God's demand for the cruel death of his son or "the dark Christian God of sacrifice." I suppose he means to associate me with that view, without perhaps realizing that, like a good deal of progressive Christian theology, I am critical of atonement theology and take the death of Jesus to be prophetic, not sacrificial, even as I take the properly divine action in regard to sin to be unconditional forgiveness, not to require a bloody atoning sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> Again, in a footnote, he compares my criticisms of popular religious phenomena and sightings of Elvis with "the numerous sightings of the risen Christ that are detailed in the gospels and in the Acts of Apostles," implying that while I am critical of one I accept the other as an historical record. Such a criticism presupposes a scriptural theology of the New Testament that prevails somewhere in rural Alabama, perhaps, but is no part of contemporary historical critical literature or of anything that I have ever written about the New Testament<sup>35</sup> (although my analysis of "The Apostle" intended to get at what is heartfelt in fundamentalist religion). What I was referring to in *On Religion* was the corruption of religion as an amusement to be marketed, in which religion becomes still another commodity in a world where everything is for sale, not unlike the way that Badiou laments the corruption of art, science, love and politics by culture, technology, sexuality and management, respectively, a point not unrelated to Lambert's own work on the university.<sup>36</sup> My account of religion,

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<sup>34</sup> John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 243-44; "Hoping in Hope, Hoping against Hope," in *Religion Without Religion*, ed. J. Olthuis, 134-38; "The Time of Giving, the Time of Forgiving," in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*, eds. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Byonton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 117-47.

<sup>35</sup> Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, chapters 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12-13; Gregg Lambert, *Report to the Academy* (Aurora, CO.: The Davies Group, 2001).

he fails to note, turns on what Derrida makes of Augustine's phrase *facere veritatem*, the truth beyond knowledge of the event, the upshot of which would be to relativize the conventional truth (*veritas*) as *adequatio* of the Christian faith and to produce an unorthodox idea of what Augustine calls "true religion" that would make both Augustine and my evangelical friends (*s'il y en a*) quite unhappy. The emphasis on love as ortho-praxis in *On Religion* is meant to relativize the differences between believers and non-believers, not just among the several religious faiths themselves. That is why I have been chastised for associating my book with Augustine at all, or even with Christianity, which is a more pertinent criticism of my work than Lambert's, especially if one takes Augustine or Christianity *ad literam*. In short, Lambert exercises a great deal of dialectical effort on a fixed point to which I have no particular objection while showing considerable resistance to what is happening in deconstruction as a whole, in *On Religion* itself, and in the overall trajectory of my own use of deconstruction in religious theory. Is this what they call tilting at whirlwinds?

*Psychoanalysis.* One can only wonder about the status of psychoanalysis in Lambert's paper. Quite apart from failing, very one-sidedly, to mention the very productive role played by love in other psychoanalytic theories, psychoanalysis itself, *s'il y en a*, is treated with such unchecked authority in this text, especially for a soldier on watch, that one wonders whether it is not made into some sort of Fundamental Ontology. Are we to believe that the analyst is the Doctor of Love, that he occupies the position of perspicacity, of analytic clarity, clear-sightedly exposing the inner workings of the dark and hidden unconscious of love? That the analyst understands the workings of the symbolic order without being suckered into these games the unconscious plays, unlike all those psychoanalysts whom Lacan has excommunicated from the Circle of Truth? Is the good analyst a master hermeneut, a master of suspicion, a decoder of encrypted writing? Does he always get his man, like a good detective, and always deliver the truth, like a good postman, *le facteur de la vérité*, seeing to it that the letter always arrives at its destination? Happily, we were disabused of that dogmatic portrait of the analyst long ago in Derrida's essay of the same name<sup>37</sup> even as it was dismantled, *avant la lettre*, in Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal, a point that is also argued in *On Religion*<sup>38</sup> *On Religion* begins by asking what we can make of religion *after* we have been disabused of such dogmatic 19th century reductions of religion.

If psychoanalysis is hardly up to the task of Objective Science or *savoir absolue*, then is the analyst not in the same situation as the rest of us, where nothing escapes the sway of the symbolic order understood as the play of traces, so that

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Le facteur de la vérité," in *The Post Card*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 411ff.

<sup>38</sup> Caputo, *On Religion*, ch. 2, generally; see 59-60.

the only thing the analyst sees with Cold Analytic Rational Clarity is what I have elsewhere called a cold hermeneutics, viz., the inevitability of endless substitution and representation, the inescapability of endless interpretation and endless translatability? The position of the analyst, on this view, is not to occupy a metalanguage that oversees everything but rather a position of vigilance, of keeping such Socratic watch as he or she can over the wiles of the unconscious, while admitting that like Socrates he knows only that he does not know. In that case, Lacan too would also have to agree that the letter never arrives at its destination, which means that he has only half an idea of what desire is or what it desires.

Now the latter seems to me a more viable way of staging the confrontation of Derrida and Lacan, and if it is, then it is perfectly clear that psychoanalysis is but one word about desire, a useful word to the wise, to be sure, but it is far from (pur-loined from) the final word of Truth. Psychoanalytic offerings belong to the endless chain of translations of desire that begin with the *cor inquietum* in Augustine's *Confessiones* and stretch up to Levinasian desire, to the prayers and tears of *Circonfession*, to Irigaray on love and beyond, all of which are, in their own way, also and just as much, words to the wise. Theological desire, desiring theologically, as our good friend Charles Winquist used to say, is a way to exert a certain pressure on the most ordinary things, the pressure of thought and desire, until they reverberate with the divine.<sup>39</sup> Desire, which is haunted by the specters of many ghosts and filled with many spirits, holy and unholy, is the undecidably complex stuff and salt of life. We do not know who we are or what we desire; we are cut and circum-cut from the truth, and *that* is who we are. Being tossed about by a desire that does not understand itself, that wants to know but knows there is a truth that does not have to do with knowing, that is the passion of our lives and that is the condition of our unconditional desire. That is my project, which I have sometimes called a "radical hermeneutics." In this project, psychoanalysis is one more voice I am happy to add to the chorus, but not the Master's voice.

Vis-à-vis the khoral desert of *différance*, psychoanalysis is a strictly local hermeneutic, more like what Husserl called a regional ontology. Within certain limits, certain versions of psychoanalysis are phenomenologically suggestive and of use to theology, as the work of the Winquist and others testifies. But judged by the standards of rigorous rational and scientific inquiry, of measurable, testable, repeatable, experimentally confirmable results, it is a very suspect character indeed. This material is read mainly by French and Franco-American philosophers, not by scientists. I have always found Nietzsche, whom I have

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) *passim*. See also his comments on Tillich in *The Surface of the Deep* (Aurora, CO.: The Davies Group, 2003), 221-23.

repeatedly discussed, in *On Religion* and elsewhere, a much more persuasive, haunting and troubling master of suspicion than Freud, and his critique of language and the ego a much more credible critique of consciousness than the speculations of psychoanalysis, many of which are far flung and fantastic. So while psychoanalysis has its good days, I am, like Foucault, deeply suspicious of psychoanalytic “knowledge,” and so to invest it with the authority of Pure Rationalism seems to me an exceedingly odd even comic use to make of such a highly imaginative venture. If anything, I would say the opposite—psychoanalysis ought to help us see that human life is not programmable, not an objective problem to be solved, but an undecidable that requires a non-objectifying way to think.<sup>40</sup>

Given what *différance* means, I do not say psychoanalysis is a regional ontology as opposed to some other one that wins the palms of being the “transcendental” ontology or the “fundamental” one, which are Husserlian and Heideggerian ways to delimit the authority of psychoanalysis. Rather, I say there is no fundamental one, just as there is nothing outside the (con)text. That goes for *différance* itself, which is not the subject matter of some sort of Archi-Grammatological Science. *Différance* is the name of a confession or a circumfession, that is, an operation of textuality in virtue of which we confess that there can be no fundamental or transcendental ontology, neither phenomenological nor psychoanalytic, but only a multiplicity of discursive strategies that *mutatis mutandis* differ with the demands of the irreducible plurality of subject matters under study. That is the sense in which I defend a “weak and nonconstraining notion” of the good, or of love, or the true, or of whatever else we need. It is in the same sense that I speak of a “felicitous nominalism.”<sup>41</sup> A genuine confrontation of Derrida and Lacan, in my view, would begin with the assumption that the “unconscious” is the name, or one of the names, since there is no master name, for our confession, or circumfession, that we do not know who we are, that we are all destinerrant, floating adrift on an endless sea, “severed from truth.”<sup>42</sup> It would steer clear of the phantasy (which perhaps deserves analysis!) that the subject can be spread out on a couch under the Omniscient Gaze of the Doctor, who is going to put on display all the damage being done by The Unconscious, as if there were one, as if there were *one*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> I have discussed the role of the analyst in connection with Foucault’s critique of psychoanalytic “knowledge” in *More Radical Hermeneutics*, ch. 1. The subtitle of the book, “On Not Knowing Who We Are,” is taken from that essay.

<sup>41</sup> Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics*, 6-7, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Derrida, “Circumfession,” 314.

<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, “love,” like every nominal unity of meaning, especially the more interesting ones, dwells among the undecidables. It cannot be reduced to a single stable decontextualized sense or



If Derrida's notion of undecidability means anything, it means that textual operations cannot be mastered by massive interpretation machines, overrun by powerful supervening semantic translation mechanisms, whose function is to unmask, decode, and disambiguate *x* and tell us that, exposed baldly in the clear light of the day, *x* is "nothing other than" *y*, that the hopes and fears of human beings are *nothing other than* a disguised figure of economics or a hidden desire for our mommy, or that loving is nothing other than a disguised form of hate or demanding to be loved in return. If undecidability means anything, it means that there is no capitalized Rationality or Rationalism or Reductionism that can get to the bottom of a concept and exhaustively expose or unmask it, one of the points of *On Religion*. There is no Detective Dupin, Hegelian or Marxist or Lacanian, no Cold Rational Science, metaphysical, economic or psychoanalytic, that can solve the mystery and crack the secret code of our lives.

*Rationalism*. That raises the question of reason and rationalism. I do think it is possible to make room for a moment of unlimited "rationalism" in a deconstructive analysis of love, or indeed of anything else, but such a rationalism is not the opposite of love or passion, nor the reduction or resolution of love *into* an intellectual operation, as Lambert seems to imagine, but a filter for love, a conditioning of love's passion *by* an intellectual operation. My "rationalism" would be a collaborator in love's non-knowledge. The "passion of non-knowledge" which I cite in Derrida is not a matter of being stuck in the unconscious nor is it a matter of mysticism—Derrida has spent quite a great deal of time fending off the latter confusion. It is not a wild passion—which is not the same thing as mysticism, as anyone knows who reads Meister Eckhart (a Master, *magister*, holder of a scholastic chair at Paris)—that needs to be clarified and dissolved by knowledge. For Derrida, the passion of non-knowledge represents a shift into another mode than knowledge, into something otherwise than knowledge, which is what Derrida calls the happening of the event. The passion of non-knowledge is not a mystical dark night but giving, *in actu exercitu*, or forgiving, or offering hospitality, while *knowing* full well the circle of re-appropriation that these figures trace. *Know* all this about the gift, *know* as much as you can, from sociology and psychoanalysis, from philosophy and literature,

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disambiguated. The name of "love" is not unambiguously, decidedly this or that, good or bad. It is endlessly translatable, recontextualizable. It is the name of one of the better angels of our nature even as it is *also* the name in which the worst violence is committed. It is both of these things at once, not simply one or the other, and it does not admit of some higher synthetic unity in which these opposites are reconciled, but only of a double bind to be negotiated. It resists any *Aufhebung* and remains a seducer, a cunning strategist, while we must learn to discern the spirits, to negotiate what is happening in the concrete context. Indeed, borrowing a tactic from Kierkegaard's indirect communication, we might say that that love is least likely to be an imposter that does not presume to call itself love, that knows how much duplicity is concealed in this name. Knowing how much is needed to meet the demands of this name, it in all modesty declines the honor of calling itself love and takes great pains to conceal itself and appear incognito.

*know* everything, if you possibly can (which you cannot), and *then leap/love/give*.<sup>44</sup> That is to make the truth in the order of the event, which is otherwise than knowledge. Commenting on the expression “the passion of non-knowledge,” Derrida says:

It is not a non-knowing installed in the form of “I don’t want to know.” I am all for knowledge [laughter], for science, for analysis...So this non-knowing...it is not the limit...of a knowledge...It is in some way a structural non-knowing, which is heterogeneous, foreign to knowledge. It’s not just the unknown that could be known and that I give up trying to know...it is a more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret.<sup>45</sup>

The moment of decision is a madness, he says Kierkegaard says (actually he is quoting from memory and I cannot find anyone who can actually find such a text in Kierkegaard).<sup>46</sup> That means, it is a transition to a different order in which one responds to the urgent need to act in the midst of the undecidability, *knowing full well* the limited possibilities, *knowing as much as possible* about the impossibility of what is required. One should be all for knowledge, know as much as possible about the circles in which love and the gift travel, know without limit all that you can about the limits of the gift, know all its wiles and ways and traps, which you never can fully know, and then knowing all that, and more than that, knowing more than you can ever know, give, or forgive, or love.<sup>47</sup>

*What are we doing?* This leads me to my final remark. It is important to say something about the staging of this exchange. For in just the same way that Gregg Lambert’s invocation of “a return to Rationalism” is made not without a certain irony and a touch of rhetoric, it is also true that there is nothing in *On Religion* that is not touched by a sustained irony and rhetoric, although there is more to it than a rhetorical exercise (I hope), which is perhaps more easily grasped if it is read in connection with *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* and *More Radical Hermeneutics*. In *On Religion*, I make a plea for religion in a post-industrial and post-secular world, in a book series intended for a literate audience not familiar with the texts or the terms of art of continental philosophy. The book is, as was intended, frequently the subject of parish reading groups and it is used in introductory courses. It is seasoned with discussions of popular films like “Star Wars” and Robert Duval’s “The Apostle” and many passages were

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<sup>44</sup> Derrida, *Given Time*, 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Derrida, *Points*, 201. Note the mistranslation of “passion” as “position.”

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, “The Force of Law,” 26.

<sup>47</sup> That is why Derrida calls not for the abolition of the Enlightenment, but for a new Enlightenment, one that is enlightened about Enlightenment, critical of its critique, suspicious of its suspicions, demythologizing about its rationalistic myths, and which asks for the reason for its so called “Principle of Reason.” See Caputo, *Nutshell*, 49-60; *On Religion*, 60-66.

rewritten several times at the editor's request in order to remove the technical language and to state things accessibly and straightforwardly and not to sound like a paper being read at EHESS. Obviously, when I said that religion is the love of God, that religion is for lovers, and that the opposite of a religious person is a "pusillanimous curmudgeon," there was a certain amount of tongue in cheek ribbing going on. Gregg Lambert gives me an opposing elbow in the rib for this, a Lam-basting, shall we say, which I understand. So, as Gregg said to me in an email, we have here the question of how two ironists communicate—upon which Kierkegaard long meditated. For me, the serious and substantive underlying issue—and this was a point of a discussion we had following the presentation of his paper at a session of the American Academy of Religion in 2003—is to find a language in which we can express not only what we are criticizing but also what we affirm, how to do both together.

For me, and I think manifestly for Derrida, the work of deconstruction is a work of affirmation, a work undertaken in the name of something undeconstructible, something promised, something I know not what—the name of love or of God, of justice or of democracy, of the gift or hospitality, where these names are all at once endlessly provocative and endlessly suspect. They can undergo endless translation and they can go under many other names, so that in the end we do not know what is substituting for what, what is a translation of what.<sup>48</sup> But if we must not lack the audacity to suspect and the impiousness to question any name, we must also not lack the courage to affirm and to love, the courage to be, as Tillich puts it. That means, to put our money on *something*, to risk affirming something *sous rature*, under the sign of the *sans*, and then to hope that it works, even though it may not, does not, indeed, by the very terms of deconstruction, cannot always work. We will not find a safe word. Deconstruction is the theory that there is no perfect word, that no word is perfectly safe, and that life is a roll of the dice. Pace the great man, God does indeed play dice with the world. But deconstruction is also the theory that we must put our faith in something—*il faut croire*<sup>49</sup>—even though we know it is eminently deconstructible. *Sauf le nom*—that is the name of an impossible task. No name is safe. *There is no non-ironic way to express the faith of deconstruction*, no expression of a deconstructive faith that does not preserve an ironic distance between itself and the name in which it puts its

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<sup>48</sup> For those of us who work in the theory of religious discourse, or a theory of theological language, the name of "God" is the name of a bottomless provocation. What name resonates more deeply in our unconscious, what name evokes more love or desire, more fear or anxiety? What name more "deserves" deconstruction? The great advantage that theology has over metaphysics, in my view, is that its discourse is drawn more directly from an experiential base, whereas the discourse of metaphysics, *eidos, ousia, esse, substantia, essentia, existentia, Sein*, etc. are theoretical constructions without a resonance in factual life.

faith.<sup>50</sup> But deconstruction is also the theory that such limiting and ironizing conditions are no excuse for inaction or indecision or lack of faith but rather that they supply the very conditions of the “urgency”<sup>51</sup> of faith and decision. Undecidability is the condition of possibility of a decision, one with real teeth in it. *Know* everything that is afoot in the gift, *know* how the gift is surreptitiously converted into economy, *know* how much the gift is inclined to produce the circle of debt, *know* all of this—and then *give*. Don’t give *up*, give! For the gift does not belong to the order of truth as knowledge but to the order of the event, of doing or making the truth, *facere veritatem*, and the same thing that is said of “give” can be said of “love.”

But I am led to wonder where Lambert’s analysis leads, what its upshot is, in short what Lambert *affirms*. Deconstruction is affirmation, not cynicism. If we stretched Lambert out on the analyst’s couch and exposed him to the Omniscient Doctor, would we not have to ask him about all this resistance that is being put up to what deconstruction *affirms*. I see that he is vigilant. I do not see what he is trying to save (even while knowing that nothing is safe). Socrates, Kierkegaard, Derrida all kept up a watch, but always in the name of what they loved, even if it is a nameless name. I see no merit in giving this kind of aid and comfort to those whom Derrida calls “the knights of good conscience,”<sup>52</sup> the self-appointed defenders of the world against deconstruction, who complain that deconstruction is a pointless cynical unmasking that consumes its own substance, that believes nothing and destroys what it was supposed to be opening up, in which all values have become valueless. Of course it is endless questioning and suspicion; its right to ask any question never stops. But it is not *only* that, for it is *more*—not “in the end” (for deconstruction does not end) and not “over and beyond that” (for we cannot gain the high ground and look down on questioning from above). But it is *also* and simultaneously affirmation, the affirmation of the undeconstructible, faith in the promise, a prayer and a tear for what is coming, even as it is a risk, a leap, a roll of the dice in a game in which we do not know what the stakes are or who we ourselves are (like that poker game interrupted by Derrida’s birth!). That is why I am interested in the desire that is at stir in religious discourse and practices, in what religion affirms or theology desires, and it is also why my more orthodox friends are worried about my religion. Given the enormous resources of deconstruction as the right to ask any question, Derrida

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<sup>49</sup> “Croyez-vous?” and “Il faut croire” are the first and last sentences of *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> See John D. Caputo, “Either/Or, Undecidability, and Two Concepts of Irony: Kierkegaard and Derrida,” in *The New Kierkegaard*, ed. Elsebet Jørgensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 14-41.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, “Force of Law,” 26-27.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 67.

has repeatedly warned not only his critics but also his admirers not to mistake deconstruction for nihilism because, while it is not “positive,” deconstruction is *affirmation*:

Deconstruction ... is not negative, even though it has often been interpreted as such despite all sorts of warnings. For me, it always accompanies an affirmative exigency, I would even say that it never proceeds without love ...<sup>53</sup>

Deconstruction is *yes*, a second yes. It is not autonomous self-affirmation, but a yes that comes second, in response to the first yes, to what Derrida calls the “promise,” the address, which stirs restlessly in language, in certain very provocative words, however badly that promise is betrayed, however badly those words are bruised. Words like “democracy” or “gift” or “hospitality.”

Or “love.” Love is a promise and deconstruction is yes.

“I would even say that it never proceeds without love.”

*JOHN D. CAPUTO*, who is the David R. Cook Professor at Villanova University, will retire from Villanova where he has taught since 1968, and in fall 2004 will assume the position of the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Humanities at Syracuse University, where he will teach graduate courses in philosophy and religion. His most recent publication is *On Religion* (2001) and he is currently preparing a book to be entitled *Sacred Anarchy: Fragments of a Weak Theology*.

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<sup>53</sup> Derrida, *Points...Interviews*, 1974-94, 83.