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AGAINST RELIGION (WITHOUT “RELIGION”):
A NEW RATIONALIST REPLY TO
JOHN D. CAPUTO’S *ON RELIGION*

“What’s Love got to do with it?” —Tina Turner

“The Ego is Love-sick.” —Emmanuel Levinas

THE LATE-CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POET James Wright often reflected in his poetry upon a contradictory social characteristic of the human animal whose exceptional nature lies in its boundless capacity for love, as well as in the excessiveness of its demand for love from others. Wright once addressed this directly in a letter he wrote to the poet and novelist Leslie Silko a year before his death. In this letter, he comments in response to a passage from Silko’s previous letter where she talks about the death of a pet rooster which, Silko confesses, the family had loved in a ‘strange sort of way.’ I will quote this earlier passage from Silko’s letter, since it is important in understanding the brooding intensity of Wright’s response, an intensity that belongs in the context of this discussion.

He was a mean and dirty bird but we loved him in a strange sort of way. Our friends who had been pursued or jumped by this rooster find it difficult to appreciate our loss. I guess I am still surprised by the feeling I had for him—to realise that without wanting to, without any reason to, he had been dear to us. We are told that we should only love the good and the beautiful, and these are defined for us so narrowly. Monday I will be 31. Maybe it has taken me this long to discover that we are liable to love anything—like characters in old Greek stories who set eyes on an oak tree or a bucket and fall in love hopelessly, there are no limits to our love.¹

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In a letter written twelve days later from Verona, Italy, Wright responds with the following passage:

What you wrote about the improbability of loving this fierce little creature struck me very deep, because your words are so close to a passage from Spinoza's *Ethics*. The passage has given me some pain, but finally it is heartening and bracing, because it is, in my view, the clearest statement of the plain truth that I know. Spinoza says that the human being is a miraculous creature, and his miracle consists in his capacity for love. He can love anything, from an atom all the way to God. But it is just here, says Spinoza, that a tragic difficulty arises. For man must realize that his capacity for love gives him no right in demanding that anyone love him in return. Not anyone. Not even God. I have found that a hard thing to face, but there is something in it that goes beyond pain.²

What must have terrified Wright and motivated him to respond with such seriousness to Silko's anecdote about the death of their pet rooster was probably contained in her last remark: "There are no limits to our love." I will modify this phrase in order to read it the way Wright had most likely understood it: "There are no limits to our unconscious demand for the love of another. Nothing and no-one it seems, from an atom all the way to a God, can escape this insane demand."

In modern urban societies, in particular, the different expressions of this demand are linked to the social production of a "non-knowledge" that daily threatens the individual identity on all sides and can be inferred from the most common and everyday occurrences of anonymity, personal or collective forgetting, enmity, denial, oppression, and estrangement (or social alienation). These are the implicate forms of an unconscious order that conditions the most quotidian relationships, marking a social present for the individual whose identity is bordered on each side by a *threat of extinction*. "You are either for us," a certain group, class, or social cell might say, "or you don't exist. "You are nothing for us and, consequently, no-one." Silently and unremarkably, this *Either/Or* constitutes what I would call "the social present tense," and even represents a dominant factor of socialization, one which can be found at the heart of every extended family, every professional organization, every workplace, cocktail party; every school or university, organized religion, ethnic or political community. The very *existence* of the modern individual, an existence which can only be established from the standpoint of the recognition by others, is shaped by a continuous force of *nihilation* that effectively decides, in the case of each particular, the question "to be, or not to be" in the most decisive manner. In its extreme expressions, this

¹ Leslie Silko and James Wright, *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace*. Anne Wright, ed. (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1986), 41.

² *Ibid.*, 45-46.

force of *nihilation* must be brought into contact with the more collective expressions of social hatred (or enmity), political repression, and even with a certain genocidal desire that lies at the basis of most historical societies. Ironically, we have even come to discover that often the very principle that "gives" the individual her identity and binds this identity to a collective identification (one which is just as much *for* the group as it is *for* the individual), is the same principle that also underlies the strange and paradoxical logic that makes the hatred of strangers and the persecution of selected "others" with the threat of extinction and non-identity an inevitable consequence.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud first revealed how the antithetical attributes of love and hatred determine the essential "civilizing" character of modern societies, modern Christian societies in particular. The excessive demand that characterizes the first is what conditions and inflames the excessive cruelty that underscores the latter; therefore, we might understand that the demand that founds and conditions both notions is a kind of "discontent" that afflicts Christian civilization. This is because in the current arrangement of social interest, the profound intensity of love can only be defined against an equally profound intensity of hatred, just as a "blessing" only appears against the profile of a "curse." A society whose fundamental organizing principle and ethical injunction to "gather together"—*Come! (Viens!)*—is founded upon the absolute right to demand love from everyone (and equally the right to hate, to curse, and to annihilate the existence of all those who do not comply with this demand), is also a society whose notions of social existence, identity, recognition, prestige (or *fama*) are also predicated by the threats of anonymity, personal extinction, as well as the annihilation and social forgetting of what is "proper" to the name: the being-in-common it signifies for the one who bears it as a distinct "property." Again, we can all too easily find examples of these notions at every level, in every community, cultural institution, and social enclave of our current society. If we took the time to collate these examples, it would be fair to infer the presence of an organizing principle that governs the current arrangement of social interest that Freud called "the death drive" (*Todestrieb*). In view of this principle, we might take note of Freud's somewhat uncharacteristic emotional outcry in *Civilization and its Discontents* made in response to the Christian commandment "Love thy neighbor as thyself": *Why should we do this? Freud asked. What good is it to us? Above all, how can we do such a thing? How can it possibly be done?*

At the origin of Christianity we find the purest expression of the intense ambivalence that shapes and conditions the duality in the concept of love. The symbol of this ambivalence is a tree on which a man is strung up. In the different poetic representations of this symbol, there are sometimes two trees and two

men depicted. The tree upon which Christ was hung won him universal love, while the tree upon which Judas hung won him universal enmity. If the passion of Christ marks the transubstantiation of death, the curse of life, into the highest blessing, then the passion of Judas marks the transubstantiation of its blessing, birth, into the highest curse. The universal tree of Judas Iscariot and Jesus Christ marks the purest moral expressions of the ambivalence that shape human judgment. Hatred is bestowed upon the criminal as a class-subject whose death marks recognition on the part of a community of a form of love that remains "outside" possible incorporation (a form of loss, a denial or negation of the social demand to "come together"). This hatred is opposed to the demand for love from an individual whose gift of death marks a fundamental event of the community's own self-constitution which, in Hegelian language, underlies the conversion of the individual's *in-itself* into the *for-us*. Ultimately, however, I think this bi-polar or "two-tree theory" is a subterfuge and a compromise formation with regard to a fairly commonplace morality that asserted itself in the subsequent renderings of the meaning of this original symbol. If I were to speculate, I would say that the tree provided for Judas Iscariot to string himself up was a pure fiction, invented later on to satisfy the cruel taste of an audience who needed a little revenge to complete the morality tale. This subterfuge was placed there to conceal the fact that there is one tree, representing the family of the human being, and on this tree hangs a son who is loved by his father and who is mourned by his mother and, *at the same time*, a stranger and a criminal who is hated and despised, a murderer who is cast out and murdered by his society, despised by his father who turns his face away from him, forgotten by his mother, a man with no qualities (other than the name of criminal that is assigned to him by a society of strangers) and who, finally, is condemned to die absolutely alone. However, in place of a concept of Love that is capable of withstanding this extreme contradiction, what we have instead is a fairly moral notion that evacuates the concept of love in this religion and makes it once again a justification for social division, for war, and for genocide. The concept of love that we have inherited from this tradition is guilty of any number of these, historically, and in this regard its morality is no different than other religions founded on a deep sense of familialism and ethnocentrism. Thus, contemporary notions of love continue to be predicated upon the subjacent feelings of hatred and enmity, and current social divisions can easily be divided among those I love and who are close to me and my kind, and those others and strangers who I am justified in hating. On the other hand, in the original symbol, we have a glimpse of another kind of love, one that is infinitely divided within itself, contradictory, admitting within its heart a more profound sense of *ambivalence*. This is the love of a father for his son who, even despite that fact that he loves him, kills him.

The foregoing discussion serves as a manner of saying that when I recently read

John Caputo's *On Religion (without religion)*, I found a lot of talk about love, but very little discussion of the kind of love we have inherited from this tradition, of the kind of love that is bordered by hatred and social demand, and at its furthest border, by a threat of *nihilation*. In fact, employing what is called a phenomenological reduction (*epokē*), I would argue that Caputo "brackets" (or in Heidegger's usage, particularly in the *Seinsfrage*, "crosses out or through [*durchstreichen und durchkreuzung*]," or in Derrida's phrasing of this same technique, "places under erasure [*sous rature*]") both "Love" and "God" in the statement "the Love of God." The lines that have crossed through these words are invisible, but they are nevertheless there, and this gesture is made to indicate that when we read these words we should not immediately understand them by their ontic, historical significance, "because the Love of God cannot be defined—or contained—by religion. The Love of God is too important to leave to the religions or the theologians"; therefore, by means of the bracketing operation of its ontico-ontological senses, "then the name of God, and the Love of God, can stay clear of all the complications of human 'religion.'" (Here, I note that this last instance of the word religion is placed in quotation marks, see *On Religion*, 136-39.)³ Well, this is a neat trick, and it is certainly one way to talk about Religion

³ If I took the time to "deconstruct" Caputo's definition of "religion," I would not begin with the subtitle, "without religion," which is a false decoy that Caputo has left for those who might argue with him. Rather, my analysis would take up the passages concerning what he identifies as "New age religion." I will quote the following passages from *On Religion* where this attack on "new age religion" is most explicitly stated, often without defining explicitly what is defined as "New Age," as if this phrase has much meaning outside the decade of the 1970's in the culture of the United States. This makes me wonder if Caputo's adversary in what I would characterize as essentially a straw man argument is somewhat dated. Let me note that almost all the passages against what Caputo labels as "new age religion and popular psychology" are dismissal's of either the latter's lukewarm, "egotistic" quality, or against its "poppycock" and "bizarre excesses." In other words, its dismissal is either the cause of its lack of excess in regard to passion for the "torrents of Love," or in regard to its excess of passion for superstitious beliefs. In either case, it appears to lack the proper passion of excess in the "Love of God." Consider the following passages:

But there is no merit in loving moderately , up to a certain point, just so far, all the while watching out for number one (which is, alas, what we are often advised by a 'decadent' new age psychology). (4)

We live in a world where the most sophisticated and high-tech achievements co-habit not only with traditional religion but also with the most literal minded fundamentalisms, New-Age spiritualities, and the belief in all sorts of bizarre, hocus-pocus phenomena. (70)

Finally,

If God is a deed, not a thought, then that puts in perspective and gives us a way of sorting through the non-sense that is readily available in any Barnes and Noble store or on the Amazon.com web-site in which the love of God gets confused with New Age poppycock like the Celestine prophecy, celestial visitations by angels, channelings, sightings of Elvis, UFOs or God knows what! (136)

(without "religion"), one manner *how* to talk about Religion while avoiding 'religion(s).' But I wonder if it could be that simple, that is, if the reduction risks not complicating things enough, risks losing the name altogether? As Heidegger cautioned concerning this technique when he employed it on the word "Being" (*Sein*), it is inherently risky and should only be employed with the greatest of care (*Sorge*) and with the most rigorous sense of obligation to the name's essence, since in detaching the sense of the name from its significance, which is necessarily multiple, one risks sending the name itself off into nothingness and unthinkability, finally, into "non-sense." So this will be my question: whether the use of this technique opens the name to a more essential repetition of its meaning or whether it exposes the name to loss of meaning (to a "weak" or a "non-essential repetition") and should therefore be judged as a methodological failure. I will pose this question particularly as concerns the reduction or bracketing of one word in Caputo's text: "Love."

My thesis would be that in most of his representations of "Love"—and I now place this word in brackets in order to salvage the possibility of its return in a more essential repetition—what Caputo crosses-out is precisely the character of demand that functions as its support and, in a certain sense, its guarantee. It is only on the basis of this demand that any sense of an ethical obligation can be said to persist as what binds the subject to the object she loves as to a certain promise, as what allows her to speak of love with any certainty that it will be present from one moment to the next. Of course, there is a certain sense of demand or obligation in the background of Caputo's representation, and it functions as a motivation for the injunctions to feed the poor and hungry, clothe and house the homeless, to welcome the stranger and the refugee, to love justice. But then, these are the same kind of garden variety injunctions that one might hear in Sunday school, which means that, more often than not, they are said to make one feel good in saying them. They do not function as prescriptive phrases, as "phrases of obligation" (from a Lyotardian perspective). Let me offer the following examples. In *On Religion*, Caputo makes the following claim: "Lovers are people who exceed their duty, who look around for ways to do more than is required of them." (4) Well, I have to say that this sounds like the wisdom of someone who says to me "if you love your job, then you should do more than is

In these passages one might detect a certain strange brew of antagonism toward American "ego psychology" (or merely simple middle-class guilt and self-hatred), mixed with Enlightenment rationality and its suspicions of superstitious beliefs systems. But I would add, concerning the assertion that these should be disqualified as true religious phenomena, I find essentially no difference between a contemporary sighting of Elvis and the numerous sightings of the risen Christ that are detailed in the Gospels and in *Acts*, nor much difference between UFO sightings and stories of abduction and sexual trauma and the Annunciation. Both phenomena, strictly discursive, express the same degree of fantasy that define them as sincere expressions of religious sentiment on the part of those who really believe in their reality. Of course, I might also add here that Caputo's *On Religion* is readily available in any Barnes & Noble or on Amazon.com as well.

required of you." This is the universal maxim of a shop-boss or a foreman. What is missing is precisely the character of demand, and of a certain threat at bottom: If you want to keep your job, then you better show that you love your job by always doing more than is asked of you. The one who does not love their job is sooner or later fired. Likewise, the statement: "If you love your children, what would you not do for them?" Well, in response, I would say that you would not do a lot of things and I am not just thinking of the unethical things like bludgeoning one of their playmates for giving your child a bump on the head (although what parent hasn't enjoyed the fantasy of beating into a pulp the insolent little kid down the block who has learned the human art of cruelty a little too well). There's a lot of things I wouldn't do for my children, and then there are things that I have done even though I certainly didn't want to, but I was constrained to do because of a certain notion of "the Good" (as in the phrase "A Good Father" vs. "A Deadbeat Dad"). Children are especially cagey in this regard and sooner or later every parent is subjected to the following unconditional demand: "If you love me, then you will do anything for me." It is precisely at these crucial moments that the parent has to hold to her position as the one who phrases the demand into a certain theoretical maxim, one which should never be applied to concrete relationships; however, if the parent should acquiesce, should submit herself to the child's universal demand for the proof of love, then both will encounter the limit of love, that is to say its impossibility.

In his discussion of "the Good," moreover, and of the love for the Good in his earlier work, *Against Ethics*, Caputo admits at one point: "I have a maximally weak and non-constraining notion of the Good, one which reminds me of one of the most beautiful maxims of the medieval masters: *dilige, et vis quod fac*: Love, and do what you will." (41) When I read this, I was struck by an uncanny resemblance to a general sentiment I found in *On Religion* concerning the notion of "Love." I asked myself, could the same be said for Caputo's notion of Love, that it is "a maximally weak and non-constraining notion"? In turn, I wondered if Caputo was mixing up the two notions, mixing up or con-fusing "Love" and "the Good"? After all, what does one love in the Good? Or, what is "the Good" in "Love"? Even, is it always Good to Love? It is at this point I might recall one of the most beautiful maxims by a contemporary master—"What's love got to do with it?" (Tina Turner). In other words, what has love got to do with the Good, properly speaking? Of course, technically the Good is often posed as an object of Love. The Good is the love-object *sine qua non*; consequently, one loves to be in Love with the Good. But this is where things get confusing, and I must apologize to the reader. In trying to resolve this problem of attribution, I would prefer to turn to psychoanalysis, which I think is a lot more helpful here than Aquinas or Augustine, I must confess. As Saint Thomas argued, in loving God, we love the Good in ourselves. Only the English language affords us this purely accidental

little 'o' to mark the difference between God and the Good. This is fortuitous, since this little 'o' stands for an object that I love which stands in place of God in the above equation: to love the Go(o)d in ourselves. In this object, of course, we invest a lot. We love what is best in ourselves, but it is also at this moment that we share the same object as what God loves in us as well.

Here we find a potential contradiction and source of conflict, since it is well known that two people cannot love the same object, especially when the object in question is the same person, and so this conflict that must be shifted elsewhere. For Lacan, it is precisely the conflict with the love of God that is shifted over to the sexual relation. Let me clarify: two people cannot love themselves in the same object—this is strictly impossible—particularly when this object is mediated by the field of language, which divides this object up unequally. In "Lacanesque," as Žižek would say, this is why the formula for Love is "In You, I am in love with something (an object) that is more than you." Sometimes it is the other person that stands in for (or, in other terms, represents) the thing that I love, and other times, it is the thing that I love (her hair, his smile, her breasts, his sex, her money, his certainty, and perhaps even a certain moment or hour of the day we shared) that signifies my love for the other in his or her entire being. But then, this is the simplest explanation of why, from the psychoanalytic perspective, the sexual relation doesn't work. Sooner or later you wake up to discover this object has "vanished," and what you find in its place is a strange sort of residue of the thing that once occupied its place. *Certainly someone must be blamed for this crime, even a God, or maybe this object never existed in the first place? Maybe "he" lied? Maybe "she" is not the one? (The one who is "the Good" for me.) But then, why is he/she deceiving me?* And so on.

From the perspective of the psychoanalytic theory of Love, therefore, as opposed to the Thomist physical theory of Love, one can certainly say that the Good is the source of Love, but at the same time, it is also that strange quasi-object that lands on certain real objects and causes them to become interesting or attractive. The Good is the source of Love (in the sense of its *Quelle*), but it is also the aim of the drive. In the original division of the subject, at the moment that the ego is constituted as separated from the world of objects, Lacan says that something flies off, escapes, which causes the Ego to turn its attention to the world in search of it. This something could be said to be a little bit of "the Good" that the Ego has lost in foregoing its original primary narcissism. It is for this reason that the notion of the Good often returns later on as a source of anxiety, as a reminder of this loss and original division, and explains why an object that is suddenly found (or re-found) to locate the missing Good is always filled at the same time with ambivalence since it can suddenly turn its face away and repeat the original trauma of separation. This is also what gives the Good its magical vanishing

character, now you see it now you don't, and it is often the case that the minute that the Ego happens onto something good, it jumps at the chance to possess it or to swallow it down in one bite, of course at the risk of destroying the object that was its momentary support. All this is fairly rudimentary, and from a more traditional Freudian perspective, it is only guilt that intervenes to save the object from an immemorial murder, through the agency of the Super-Ego which commands or exhorts the Ego to try to find another way to "Love the Good" than by gobbling it up whole. As a result of this injunction, on the one hand, the Good comes to be identified with a particular class of objects that appear indestructible, or that appear outside the Ego's power to incorporate them, so that in this way the Good is preserved—as the endless reservoir of the Ego's own self-love. On the other hand, as Lacan argued, sometimes the persons that stand in for "the Good" are themselves endowed with a character of indestructibility like those victims described by Sade whose bodies become more glorious the more they are made to be filthy and defiled.

Following Wright's lead, perhaps this is where we should return to Spinoza again for some hint of an answer to this problem. In Proposition 38 of Part Three of *The Ethics*, he offers something of an explanation of how the act of loving the Good can take on either a sadistic or masochistic character. (By sadistic, I mean an action of hatred addressed toward another person, that is, toward the very 'well-being' of the other person, which is the object of annihilation in sadism; by masochism, I understand this hatred being directed toward an object, and to the body bound up with pleasure and pain as the primary object in masochism.) Hence, Spinoza writes:

PROPOSITION XXXVIII: If a man has begun to hate a beloved thing, so that his love of it is altogether destroyed, he will for this reason hate it more than he would have done had he never loved it, and his hatred will be greater in proportion to his previous love.

As Spinoza amplifies this proposition, because love is joy "which a man endeavors to preserve as much as possible"—by maintaining the beloved object's presence, and by affecting it with his joy as much as possible (that is, by loving it)—when love turns to hatred, these actions must be constrained by an incredible effort or will. According to this description, joy is not simply converted into sadness, but rather hatred, which reverses the previous relation to the beloved object *in a proportion greater than the original love*: the object must be made to be absent, by an act of will on the part of the lover (that is, the beloved cannot simply withdraw of his or her own will, or merely be absent, but must be sent off into nothingness). In other words, the previous affection of joy must be replaced by a greater affection of sadness inflicted on the beloved (that is, in

memory, the beloved is submitted to all sorts of phantasies and tortures that extract from the beloved a greater degree of enjoyment than even love had provided). Of course, anyone who has been involved in a divorce or break-up would never confess all the ways and manners in which the beloved is violated in the most grotesque of means, usually highly symbolic acts that are directed against the beloved's own sense of "well-being."

I recall the story of a man who, after his offer of engagement was interrupted by the news of a sexual affair, sent his token of love to the former beloved in a box of his own feces. In some ways this perfectly illustrates the actions that Spinoza describes above—not only because it is a highly symbolic act on many different levels, and concerns the symbolism of the ring in particular (which is infused with a kind of joy that is purported to be unparalleled and even transcends the joy of the sexual act), but because this act is pure and completely useless from a utilitarian point of view—as an expenditure or sacrifice. After all, he could have simply returned the ring and gotten his \$10,000 dollars back and put it down instead on a new car or some other object that would have afforded him some pleasure in compensation. Instead, he sacrificed the possibility of such an exchange, since the money itself was now defiled and had lost its function as Capital. In a highly symbolic gesture attesting to this fact, he fashioned a signifier that vividly illustrated his newfound affection and reduced the image of the beloved to a little pile of his own excrement bearing the token and the promise of his eternal hatred. Of course, at the end of this little love story, the beloved, upon receiving this token, immediately washed it off in the kitchen sink and took it to the jeweler, after which she sent a note to the man saying "Thank you very much for the new car. It is what I have always wanted." Her response was extremely significant, since for her the greatest pain she could possibly imagine was to demonstrate that, for her, his love was easily exchangeable (or was equivalent to her pleasure from commodities) and that she could associate his absence with the possibility of pleasure derived from other objects, particularly sexual ones. Thus, the man's letter was returned to him, in a certain sense, unopened (or opened inside-out, as Lacan would say, his own message was communicated back to him in reverse form), since it clearly did not have the affect that he intended for it to have, but quite the opposite; rather, it had the affect of binding her gesture to a certain eternal murder of the Good, which Spinoza defines as "anything that satisfies longing, whatever it may be" (*Ethics* III, Proposition 39, scholium), including, I might add here, the longing associated with annihilating the possibility of the joy for the beloved, of damaging her feeling of "well-being," and replacing it with an eternal sadness, which functioned as his highest Good and the object of longing on this occasion. (If anyone would argue that the Good cannot be an object of hatred, I would refer them again to Spinoza, since this is how I understand the statement "anything that satisfies longing, whatever it may

be.") Of course, as you might have anticipated, upon receiving the note the man returned to his beloved's house, knocked her unconscious and handcuffed her to the steering wheel of her new car, then turned the engine on and closed the garage door. One could only imagine the satisfaction that this act brought him, particularly when he fantasized about the neighbors and the police finding her bloated and asphyxiated body several days later, the sense of stupor concerning the means of the murder, the meaning of which only he could enjoy, in the irony that he had simply revised his original message merely by substituting the original signifiers. She was, in fact, wearing the ring after all, and her bloated and dead body was now the equivalent of its earlier symbolic representative.

As Lacan writes in the seminar *Encore*, in a little section dedicated to the mysteries of Love, "for Empedocles, God was the most ignorant of all beings because he had no knowledge of hatred. Later, Christians transformed this into torrents of love. Unfortunately, it doesn't work because to be without knowledge of hatred, is also to be without knowledge of love. If God does not know hatred, it is clear for Empedocles that he knows less than mortals." (FS 160) Returning to Spinoza's proposition, it is clear that hatred is borne out of love, and moreover, has greater intensity. If I have emphasized the symbolic character so much, it is to show the diversity of the Good that hatred can create. Hatred can fashion the Good "out of anything whatsoever"; whereas, I would argue that the capacity for imagining the Good as the ultimate object of Love appears somewhat impoverished by comparison, particularly the abstract Good that emerges to represent the Love of God. And yet, perhaps in defense of Caputo, there may be some benefit in imagining a notion of the Good as a "weak and non-constraining notion," after all, and perhaps the love of God *should* be weak and non-constraining in order to prevent hatred from entering into the world from the same source. However, if hatred can only be borne out of Love, then let us consider the intensity of hatred that would be borne from "the torrents of Love" introduced by Christianity. I remind you that Paul of Tarsus began his career by persecuting and crucifying Christians, that is, by truly hating them, and ended up inventing a Christian notion of Love that supposedly overcomes all hatred—except, interestingly enough, his hatred of "the Jewish Law." (Aside from this, the only problem I would like to point out is that not every Christian who followed Paul's ideology could experience the same conversion from hatred to love, and so one could say that the trouble with Pauline Christianity is precisely that they have "a weak and non-constraining notion of Love," unlike Paul.) Consequently, I agree with Caputo on this point: that this "weak and non-constraining notion of Love" he talks about could not belong to the Christian "religion," or maybe it is "all too Christian." I'm really not sure. Maybe, it would be better for us not to Love at all—not a God, not even an atom—certainly it might be better for those upon whom we often bestow our "torrents of

love," God help them, even if only to guarantee the other's love in return with an implacable demand and the threat of hatred and extinction. But here again, to recall Wright's earlier comment, the tragic difficulty arises. For as long as the opposite of love is hatred and not knowledge, then this tragic "Either/or" may be the only possibility for the other to exist in our insane demand for Love.

At this point, I return to my refrain and ask so what's love got to do with it? This time, however, I will ask what has love got to do with knowledge? This is because it is precisely when I am in love than I am not in knowledge. I could try and say my love in words, but words fail, and inevitably I begin talking nonsense. And perhaps this is precisely the point, that there is something unconscious that must be present for one to feel in love, something on the order of a "*je ne sais quoi*," and it is in this non-knowledge that one finds a certain "enjoyment" (for lack of a better word). It is in the direct relation between the experience of non-knowledge to the feeling of love that Christianity has played a fundamental role, which was later on transformed by bourgeois social relations, since whom I choose to love cannot be determined strictly by symbolic factors—by class, by kinship relations, by race or ethnicity—even though at bottom all these factors of the Symbolic determine the object of my choice in a manner that analysis might someday clarify with a computer generated equation resembling differential calculus. This seems very unlikely, however, since even if such knowledge was available we would probably want to know nothing about it, and instead, would prefer to remain blissfully ignorant, wanting to "enjoy" our unconscious and thus to retain our passivity in relation to the notion of Love—which "just happens" like rain, thunderbolts, and catastrophes! Perhaps this is a different way of understanding the maxim—"Love, and do what you will." In Love, one wills to go unconscious and, to become as stupid as God in such matters. And yet, God's non-knowledge of hatred cannot be passed off as simple ignorance, but rather a stronger sense of unconscious knowledge closer to denial or disavowal. In God we deny our own knowledge of hatred, which seems like erecting a God whose "goodness" only serves to reinforce this denial, a weak God, more stupid and, I might say, blissful than Man about the reality of the unconscious. The reason this notion of Love doesn't work for Man is because without a little hatred mixed in, love loses its salt, if we understand by hatred by the passions of fear, possession, jealousy, control, or domination, etc. *The degree of intensity that characterizes these emotions forms the reverse proof of the intensity associated with Love.*

What I find particularly interesting is Lacan's assertion that Christians transformed God's non-knowledge of hatred into torrents of Love. Lacan's proof for this assertion was the phenomena of the Christian mystics, whose torrents of love for God, a devotion that often surpasses simple phallic enjoyment of well-

being, comes off looking a lot like acts of self-hatred directed against their own bodies which are now seen as obstacles to God's love. But if loving the best in oneself is to enjoy in God's own perfect love, then the Christian mystics' manner of loving God "in a strange sort of way" is something that can't really be accounted for by the Thomist physical theory of Love, can it? Earlier on, the French philosopher and sociologist-writer Georges Bataille explored the mystical relation to Love, arguing that "more than any believer, Christian mystics crucify Jesus. The mystic's love requires God to risk himself, to shriek out in despair on the cross. The basic crime associated with the saints is erotic, related to the transports and tortured fevers that produce burning love in the monasteries and the convents." (*On Nietzsche*, 31) In one sense, the mystical suffering acts out the inherent contradiction in Christianity that I noted earlier—that God so loved the world that he tortured and murdered his beloved object. The mystic shares with God in this tragic action, crucifying the image of Jesus in her own flesh in order to experience the ecstatic nature of God's exorbitant loss in a frenzy of self-immolation and self-hatred, in order finally to attain a point that is "beyond pleasure and pain," which Bataille identifies as the "summit of desire." Recalling Spinoza's description of the conversion of the beloved object from love to hatred, the mystic exerts an incredible will to cause this object to become absent through an act of violence, and through this constraining action (the fantasy of crucifying her beloved object again and again) which enacts an intensity that is greater in proportion to the original feeling of love that had existed for Jesus before, a love now tinged with eroticism and the guilt associated with the sharing of responsibility for God's insane and senseless act. Although this intensity is defined by Spinoza as hatred, we need not imagine that there is only one emotional state that is contrary to love, and the intensity associated with vice also occupies a pole that is opposite to love, only in a different direction. In fact, in a parallel proposition to those I earlier cited where Spinoza argues that hatred is stronger in intensity than the love of the object it has supplanted, he admits that love can surpass hatred in intensity only on those occasions when the object of love was previously hated, given that the physical state of hatred remains present as a condition and is only acted upon and converted by a constraining act of will on the part of the subject, just as the physical relation of love remains latent in the act of hating the beloved. (*Ethics* III, Proposition 44) This seems like a perfect explanation for the mystical equation, when the previous hatred of the flesh in normal Christian morality becomes the support for the transformation of this object as expressing a new intensity of love by the constraining action that the mystic performs on her own body to experience "a summit of desire" that was previously unattainable, an orgasm not only of the flesh but of the soul (or mind) as well.⁴ In a very interesting passage, Bataille comments on the

⁴ In a very revealing note to this proposition, Spinoza raises the possibility of this desire in a manner

eschewing of this more primitive and orgiastic "summit of desire," and even its criminalization as a form of vice by modern Christian civilization. Nevertheless, it continues to persist in two special areas of social life: first, in the private sphere of the modern bourgeois individual especially pertaining to the experience of "Romantic Love" (this becomes Lacan's special area of investigation, which I shall return to below); and, secondly, in discursive representations whereby the destruction of the flesh effected by real drunken orgies and sacrifices take on an abstract and highly symbolic form of lyrical expression and meditational and confessional subjects dedicated to the mysteries of Love.

Concerning this second development, Bataille writes in *On Nietzsche*:

Clearly ... whether we are dealing with yogis, Buddhists, or Christian monks, there is no reality to the [utter ruin and expenditure that the mystic desires] ..., to such perfections associated with desire. With them, crime or the annihilation of existence is a representation. Their general compromise with regard to morality can easily be shown. Real license was rejected from the arena of the possible as being fraught with unpleasant consequences: orgies or sacrifices, for instance. But since there remains the desire for a summit with which these acts are connected, and since beings are still under the necessity of 'communicating' with their beyond, symbols (or fictions) have replaced reality. The sacrifice of the mass as representing the reality of the death of Jesus is simply a symbol of the infinite renewal of the church. Meditational subjects have taken the place of real orgies, drunkenness, and flesh and blood—the latter becoming objects of disapproval. In this way there still remained a summit connected with desire, while the various violations of existence that were connected with that summit no longer were compromising, since now they had become mental representations. (*On Nietzsche*, 32)

Perhaps there is a remainder of the "torrents of love" (and the desire for the summit) that can be found at the bottom of the phrase "prayers and tears" such as this phrase functions as a performative formula in Caputo's work. But, we

that perfectly describes the mystical conversion of sorrow into joy, but then dismisses it as absurd. He remains, in this regard, too much the rationalist. I will quote this note in full:

Notwithstanding the truth of this passage, no one will try and hate a thing or will wish to be affected with sorrow in order that he may rejoice the more, that is to say, no one will desire to inflict loss on himself in the hope of recovering the loss, or become ill in the hope of getting well, in as much as everyone will always try and preserve his being and remove sorrow from himself as much as possible. Moreover, if it can be imagined that it would be possible for us to desire to hate a person in order that we may love him afterwards the more, we must always desire to continue the hatred. For the love will be the greater as the hatred has been greater, and therefore we shall always desire that the hatred be more and more increased. Upon the same principle we shall desire that our sickness may continue and even increase in order that we may afterwards enjoy the greater pleasure when we get well, and therefore shall always desire sickness, which is absurd. (Proposition 44, scholium)

might ask, are these real prayers, or are these real tears, or rather just "mental representations"? After all, at the risk of provocation, one wonders what is at stake in Caputo's gesture of making such a scene as crying in public; even though the place where he chooses to make such a scene is highly discursive, rationalized and logically constructed, and is bound to the necessity of "communicating" something by means of these purely symbolic wails and these fictional tears. Nevertheless, following Bataille's argument, the desire for the summit remains, but has been given an abstract and devotional subject, which is "the Love of God."

As Caputo exclaims, "I take my stand with love, and with God, and I am driven by a passion for God." Moreover, in the final section of *Prayers and Tears* under the proposition "*I do not know what I Love when I Love my God,*" we find again, precisely, this "non-knowledge" characterized as a dark and secret passion.

To be in the secret does not mean you know anything. But not to know anything, *sans voir, sans avoir, sans savoir*, does not mean to drift despondently from day to day, in a cloud of unknowing and uncaring, but to dream—'hoping, sighing, dreaming'—of something unforeseeable, unpossessable, undreamt of, unknowable, of which the eye has not seen or the ear heard. To dream, perchance, to desire and to love. And what is that dream, desire, and love if not the love of God? If not the desire for God ("God as the other name for desire")? What is this passion for the impossible if not this passion for God, for 'my God,' even if one were rightly to pass for an atheist? When something unforeseeable and unknowable, unpossessable and impossible drives us mad, when the tout autre becomes the goal, without goal, the object without object, of a dream and desire that renounces its own momentum of appropriation, when the impossible is the object of our love and passion, is that what we mean by 'my God'? Is that not the name of God? Is that not a name that we would bend every effort to save, with or without religion? (332)

I must confess, in response to this passage, there is something in all these statements that passes all understanding, something of a love that seeks to go unconscious, "to dream, perchance, to slip off these mortal coils" which is perhaps a different way of understanding the statement, "to go with God." Rather than taking the time that a deconstruction of this passage might involve, I will simply come back to underline this character of "non-knowledge" that pertains to the Love of God that is particularly Christian. Again, this "non-knowledge" cannot be defined as simply ignorance or unconsciousness, because it is also the source of intensity, the source of a passion. To return to Spinoza, passions only characterize the relation between inadequate ideas and their objects, since adequate ideas express an active relation to their objects that Spinoza identifies with the act of thinking itself. Therefore, what constitutes a

passion is "the unthought," which can be formulated as that place or that occasion where *the Subject does not think to think*. And it is important to note that Spinoza admits that the Christian love of God expresses an inadequate idea concerning the other objects that he contains within him (first of all, it expresses an inadequate idea pertaining to the object of his own body, which Spinoza spends a great deal of time discussing in his discussion of prophetic representation of God's body in *The Theologico-Political Tractatus*). Earlier we have characterized "hatred" as an inadequate idea that is contained in the notion of the Christian God, an idea that is also a source of passion, as Spinoza attempts to clarify in *The Ethics*. However, from a psychoanalytic point of view, this particular form of non-knowledge and this source of passion cannot but be placed in relation to an object that is situated for the human being in the field of sexuality, in relation to which the subject emerges as subject, that is, is subjected to the signifier that will be the source of passion and non-knowledge, but of love and hatred as well. This is a fundamental perspective that could be defined as the materialist point of view its knowledge of this object attempts to clarify, even in making of it an adequate idea.⁵ That is to say, it is not a theology. This means that neither Freud nor Lacan went about celebrating this non-knowledge and turning it into an object of poetry. Rather, they were concerned about the future of this object that remains, in as much as this object remains stubbornly stuck in the Real, expressed in the form of an inadequate idea, an idea that holds the human being captivated. Of course, in response to this situation the character of Freud's pessimism is well known, a trait that is only highlighted in Lacanian

⁵ If I have spent a great deal of time discussing the psychoanalytic approach to the notions of "Love" and "the Good" it is, in part, to call attention to place in Caputo's own text where he *does not think to think*. I have often wondered how one can comment so much on Derrida's philosophy, particularly in *Prayers and Tears*, and have so little to say, if anything, on Derrida's critical relationship to the body of psychoanalytic theory from his early "Mystic Writing Pad" and even "*Différance*" to the more recent writings on Lacan. (There are, in fact, several pages of the nearly 400 page volume that comment on Derrida's reading of Freud's "Jewish science," in which there is even the announcement that "Freud is the Father of us all today" [269], but I also find it interesting that the section where Freud's ghost is allowed to say something in response to Yerushalmi ends with the statement that "there would be no future without repetition, without the death drive to kill off the proper name of the patri-archival authority" [273]). In general, I have always been mystified by this exclusion, for the most part, of the problems and concepts that Derrida has drawn from the psychoanalytic field which, in Caputo's texts, are sent off to the realm of unthinkability. Of course, Caputo is not alone in this, since this exclusion also pertains to a certain phenomenological tradition that has evolved in the discipline of the study of Continental Philosophy in the United States, and particularly in its professional societies such as *SPEP (The Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy)*, which is peculiarly and noticeably (I might even say "embarrassingly") resistant to the place of psychoanalysis in its reproduction of Derrida's oeuvre (the representation of which, in this respect, can be likened to a stool that has only two legs). Moreover, I find this exclusion highly significant and almost structurally determining of the institution of "deconstruction" in the United States today, which has evolved out of the early 1980's Heideggerianism and continues to shape the current reception of Derrida's total body of work, particularly in the academic field of "continental philosophy," which, in my view, might also be compared to a stool that has only two legs.

hysteria over what he called "the dark Christian God of sacrifice" that rules over this world and possibly the next one as well. My only concern is that we are not pessimistic enough and perhaps a "Return to Rationalism" is now more necessary than before; or, at least, a newly re-invigorated "Hermeneutics of Suspicion." Consequently I would say that only in approaching a knowledge of hatred that we might understand the function of love. For some reason, as Lacan seems to imply, it doesn't work the other way around—that by seeking a knowledge of love we can somehow come to understand hatred. And perhaps this is the basis for understanding the very different approaches toward knowledge between a psychoanalytic and a theological point of view, if only because from the perspective of psychoanalytic knowledge, "God is also the name of desire." And yet, this is not a cause for celebration, for weeping and dancing, but rather for "prayers and tears" of a very different kind. In fact, it is a cause for incredible pain and sorrow, because, as Levinas also once observed, "the Ego is Love-sick."

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