

The Existence of Evil and the Insistence of God: Caputo's Poetics of the Event as a Discourse on Divine Intervention

Keith Putt

In a previous life, I led something of a Janus-Head existence. On the one hand, I taught Philosophy of Religion at a graduate institution, where I daily faced looking into all of the traditional abstract intellectual topics pertinent to an academic investigation of religion and theology. On the other hand, I periodically engaged in brief episodes of serving local churches where I came face to face with the more concrete existential issues that characterize practical Christian ministry. During one such episode, I found myself in a church in Austin, Texas auditing a Sunday morning conversation on the subject of prayer and divine intervention. Several faithful members of the church were basically agreeing with the orthodox view that God does, indeed, answer prayers of petition, that quite often God answers those prayers in precisely the desired manner the petitioner expects, and that one may always assume that God hears and responds to those who call upon God's name in faith. One older, saintly Texas Baptist stood there silently during the discussion until a lull in the dialogue prompted him to remark quite laconically: "You know the cemeteries are full of people who were prayed for." He stood there for a moment, then turned and walked away, leaving those of us who remained sharing in a subdued silence.

That episode occurred in 1998, and it has haunted me since. We all knew his situation. His beloved wife, who was a pillar of the church and the epitome of the godly Christian woman, had contracted cancer some years earlier and battled it valiantly, until being defeated by it mere months before the conversation. We could easily imagine what thoughts flooded his mind as he stood and listened to the somewhat esoteric theological discourse on how God is loving, attentive, powerful, and always yearning to bring healing and hope to the afflicted. He was wondering why God had not answered the numerous prayers he had offered up for his wife. He was wondering why God appeared to have acknowledged the prayers of others in the church during their experiences of suffering and need. He was wondering how his faith could withstand what seemed to be divine arbitrariness, or divine neglect, or, perhaps worst of all, divine favoritism. In point of fact, he actually confirmed to me later that the loss of his wife provoked a crisis of faith that he had never anticipated, a crisis that controverted a piety that he concluded had previously been naive and conventional. The whole affair had impugned his simplistic trust that God would and/or could enter human existence and be a "very present help in times of trouble."

Now in the interest of full disclosure, I must confess that I have been wondering all of the above since that Sunday morning. More specifically, I should say that the event reinforced a struggle with what had long intrigued and troubled me but not only me. The *soi-disant* "problem of evil and suffering," with its traditional Promethean task of developing a theodicy, that Miltonian temerity of believing that one can and should justify God's ways to human expectations, has long disquieted, both academically and existentially, the human passion for cosmic meaning. For theists who reject both the final option of atheism and the notion that God ever acts as *prima causa* of evil, the problem of pain and suffering often distills down to one issue: divine intervention. That distillate confounded the grieving Texas saint who believed that prayer often solicited God's intervention and that God had, indeed, on occasion, intervened therapeutically in response to pain and suffering. But why had God not done so with his wife? Why had God not done so in the countless other circumstances in which suffering and death operated unabated? Why had God supposedly done so on other occasions?

The routine justifications return: God could but chooses not to; God desires to but cannot. Or, perhaps, the problem ensues from an inappropriate language game, a basic category mistake whereby the concepts of intervention and nonintervention are forced into service through some analogy of proportionality allowing for talk about God (*theo*-logy) to mimic the subjective and agential idioms of personal language. What if one spoke of God not as a divine person acting otherwise than human agents, but as otherwise than a person? What if questions about God's intervention or nonintervention are simply *flatus vocis*, given that God has no entitative referent, not as a version of atheism but as an aversion to a reductionistic objectifying of God? Could the individual convinced that she or he has experienced the intervening presence of a comforting God find any spiritual sustenance in such a theological reinterpretation?

I raise the above questions primarily under the compelling influence of one of the most creative and provocative contemporary reappraisals of theology, specifically John Caputo's postsecular theopassionism of the event. By fusing Derridean deconstruction, Levinasian ethics, Jewish prophetic traditions, Jesus' kerygma of the kingdom of God, and Pauline perspectives on the weakness of God and the logic of the cross, Caputo has developed a quasi-systematic, not-so-quasi-biblical theology of the name of God as a cipher for the event of a disruptive and transforming call to justice, forgiveness, hospitality, healing, and love. He writes a theology from below that seeks to avoid the hyperboles of classical metaphysical theism, seeks to affirm the non-origin original goodness in existence without diminishing the reality of irredeemable evil and intractable suffering, and seeks to keep hope alive as a weak messianic expectancy of an impossible to come, an absolute future of promise and affirmation that shatters every horizon of expectation. By directing his radical devilish and spectral hermeneutics expressly to theology,ⁱ Caputo proclaims the name of God as containing the uncontainable event of promise and call that can never be reduced to an entity, to Being Itself, or to any exclusive transcendental signified. He insists that although there is no entitative God to intervene in reality in any literal manner, there is the hyper-realism of the summons from the event harbored in the name of God animating us to instantiate the love of God in actual acts of mercy and justice.

But how can Caputo's theology of a non-interventional, non-personal God affect those for whom God remains a possible agent in the process of addressing evil and suffering, one who, under various rubrics, promises some type of salvation from their effects? That is precisely the question that drives this essay. Once again I find myself in a Janus-Head moment. I want to face up to the saintly Texas Baptist who still expects God to be involved in the lives of human beings; however, I also want to face up to the devilish post-secular poet of the kingdom of God who translates the grace of God otherwise. By gazing in both directions simultaneously, I intend to explain Caputo's theology of the event as a response to evil and suffering and, thereafter, to suggest a way whereby that theology could be translated at least paraphrased into a confessional faith in divine providence as God's genuine participation in confronting suffering.

Caputo has overtly addressed the issue of evil and suffering throughout his radical hermeneutics, distinguishing it as a necessary topic for both religion and ethics. Initially, he identifies the reality of suffering as provoking two opposed interpretations of existence: the religious attitude of faith and hope in a loving and healing presence and the anti-religious, tragic, conclusion that suffering is never evil but merely another expression of the innocent play of cosmic forces.ⁱⁱ He admits to being seduced by the second interpretation as it is given classical articulation in Nietzsche's hermeneutics of suspicion. He confesses that the traditional Cartesian certainty established by the ersatz supremacy of Enlightenment rationality has been exposed as a naked emperor; the prince of reason, with all of its inviolate principles, has been dethroned, ripping open again the closed metaphysical systems that pretend to supply absolute knowledge and certainty. All of the grandiose structures

of thought that have offered truth, beauty, and the good may well only be the fragile and tentative grammatical creations of self-pitying, weak, and resentful creatures who deceive themselves into thinking that they are special in the universe. Nietzsche suggests that a time may well come when the creatures will become extinct and the cosmos will take no note of their ever having been. All of their petty concepts of good and evil, truth and knowledge will leave no trace on the play of forces that characterizes the innocence of becoming.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although Caputo never becomes deaf to the siren call of the tragic, he, nonetheless, admits that he refuses to sail his ship in that direction. He considers the view to be ethically bankrupt, an irresponsible postmodernism that fails to affirm the worth of those who suffer, who are oppressed, violated, excommunicated, and exterminated. According to Nietzsche's cosmology, the Nazis were but one more example of the will to power that always elicits critique from the weak. Caputo rejects the scandalous interpretation that Auschwitz was an expression of cosmic innocence. He opts, instead, for the religious attitude, the interpretation that depends upon a faith that in the midst of all the suffering and evil rampant in reality, there is the chance that a loving hand and a healing touch may also characterize existence. This faith leads to moral outrage against gratuitous suffering; it believes that a God hears the cries of the exploited and sides with wounded flesh. Such a hermeneutic (and that is what faith is, a hermeneutic) is not a metaphysical certainty *redivivus* that trusts that God intervenes on behalf of the sufferer. God, therefore, becomes the motivation for the protest against suffering and violence. Caputo considers the religious attitude to be both Catholic and Protestant: Catholic in that it responds to all who suffer universally and Protestant because it remains defiant against all sources of evil and oppression.^{iv}

Whereas Nietzsche desires to get beyond good and evil, Caputo concludes that we can never extricate ourselves from the factual tension of being stuck between (*zwischen*) them.^v He reads the human condition as one of having been thrown into the flux of an existence in which our flesh is exposed both to the warm affirmation of the heterogeneous joys of life and to the cold violence of disasters in all of their homogeneous virulence. And disasters are, indeed, virulent. Caputo concedes that pain and suffering often have instrumental value, that they are part of our pact with life and are unavoidable when striving for certain, greater goods.^{vi} Yet, such is not the case with what he terms disasters. These are those destructive and irredeemable excesses of evil and suffering that never follow a sane economy. Instead of no pain, no gain, disasters are all pain, no gain. For example, he insists that a child with congenital AIDS or an innocent victim of random violence is disaster personified.^{vii} Disasters remind us of our finite and fragile lives in the flux of reality, a flux that cannot be domesticated or diverted by ethical meta-narratives, which, in their attempt to absolve the absurdity of evil, aggravate it with facile rationalizations.

Caputo brazenly declares himself to be against ethics, if ethics means any speculative attempt to systematize abstract principles that ground or guide concrete morality. Disasters demand that we respond to the summons of obligation, not that we relax in the security of philosophical opinions. We live, think, and act from below, where obligations just happen, there is, *il y a* obligation.^{viii} The weak and singular cries of the oppressed, the wounded, the violated, those widows and orphans ground under by grounding principles or perpetually exploited by the extreme arrogance and narcissism of the Powers-That-Be provoke the event of obligation, the coming (*venir*) out or forth of unique necessities to respond, to console, and to protest against all evil and suffering. He holds tenaciously to the hyperbolic heteronomy implicit in the tenuous events of obligation; he listens responsibly to the poetics of obligation, which, avoiding any explanation as to *why* one should respond to the summons of the suffering other, is content to dictate *that* one should respond; Here I am, (*me voici*) *ohne warum*, without why.^{ix} Consequently, evil and suffering must be confronted by an ethics *sans* Ethics, motivated by the power of the powerless cries of those trapped within the abyss of disasters.

Even in his heteronomic reduction, by which he brackets the religious and examines suffering through a poetics of obligation, Caputo cannot avoid slipping in something of the hermeneutic of faith. He delineates obligation in the mode of the as if, as if it were a fact, or the trace of the Good, or *the whisper of the will of God in our ear* (emphasis added).^x He includes in his collection of lyrical-philosophical discourses several by Magdalena de la Cruz, who cannot deliberate on confronting disasters and healing wounded flesh without explicit references to Yeshua, Jesus, a certain Hebraic (not quite Christian) poet of obligation.^{xi} Here is the *mysterium tremendum* of a sacred anarchy that detests disasters and protests against dehumanizing suffering. Not surprisingly, therefore, Caputo cannot prop up the brackets of his impious *epoché* of faith for long and must reprise his earlier genealogy of religion in which the rebellion against suffering possibly signals a divine opposition and suggests the potential of a loving hand that reaches out to restore and comfort abused flesh.

When Caputo repeats his initial symbiosis of religion and suffering, he does so under what he terms a simple and old-fashioned rubric, the love of God, a rubric that becomes his working definition of religion.^{xii} The love of God, Augustine's *cor inquietum*, is the restless desire beyond desire for what confounds and disrupts the *status quo*, for what bestows the excessive grace of gift and forgiveness, of hospitality and transformation, for whatever impels one to do the truth (*facere veritatem*) by motivating those who love God to say *me voici* when the cries of others in distress are heard.^{xiii} To be sure, the love of God cannot be less than the obsession to acknowledge the least among us: the ones who suffer needlessly.^{xiv} If God privileges those victimized by disasters and judges those disasters as objects of the divine “no,” then how can loving God not include loving the ones whom Jesus called the least of these, the widow, the orphan, the leper, the blind, the lame, all the ones ignored and/or ill-treated by those who bow before the gods of worldly prestige, power, and privilege? And if this language sounds a bit too Christian, it does so by design, for, indeed, Caputo joins Magdalena de la Cruz as a disciple of Jesus. He considers Jesus to be not only a poet of obligation but a prophet of the impossible proclaiming the poetics of the kingdom of God, where love of God, love of neighbor, love of enemy, love of the loveless, and the radical uncertainty and ineffability of *metanoia*, that “miraculous” transformation of heart and mind that the “world” considers to be madness, define the hyper-reality of God’s influence in existence.^{xv}

Yet once again, Caputo finds himself in a Janus-Head dilemma. He cannot resist looking both in the direction of Jesus’ complaint against suffering and Dionysus’ consent to an innocent cosmos. In the radical uncertainty of the flux, is there a loving presence, albeit one often withdrawn, that points to a balm in Gilead? Or is there only the anonymity of the forces, the uncaring and impersonal *il y a* that promises no grace, no mercy, no love, that does not, nor cannot, even make a promise, has no intentionality whatsoever, leaving us to fend for ourselves in what Camus would call the absurdity of our relationship to the universe?^{xvi} Since Caputo cannot ignore Nietzsche and the tragic hermeneutic of the flux, he cannot avoid asking another religious question, one he steals from Derrida, who, in turn, appropriates it from Augustine: What do I love when I love my God? Caputo again refuses to embrace Nietzsche and to capitulate to existing beyond good and evil. He cannot convince himself that we do not remain between those two concepts, that we do not remain haunted by the specter of something good, something loving, something therapeutic, something(one?) that we desire beyond all desire, that we love with a passion for the impossible and that, perhaps, loves us in return. But what is that? Is that love a love for God? Does that love denote a belief in God? Could the object of the love go under a different name? Could one who intellectually denies the existence of a deity, that is, rightly passes for an atheist, also possess a love of God that provokes justice, forgiveness, mercy, and the doing of truth through response to suffering?^{xvii}

All of the above, wrapped up in the legislating question, What do I love when I love my God?, obliges Caputo to address his perspectives on evil and suffering as an honest-to-God, quasi-systematic, biblical theologian!

Caputo divulges that he has a weakness for theology and that the issue of God has been a life-long task.^{xviii} He concedes that no matter what topic captures his attention, inevitably he, directly or indirectly, ends up talking about God.^{xix} Yet, as stated above, he acquires his lexicon for comprehending and communicating his own personal answer to the theological question of what he loves when he loves his God from the Christian Scriptures. He makes no apology for the fact that his theology is confessedly Christian, declaring that he intentionally strives to reinscribe, or reinvent, or reaffirm (his) Christian beginnings within a framework (of) a Christianity of a certain sort, focused on the image of weakness in the New Testament and the death of Jesus on the Cross.^{xx} To be sure, he testifies that he is a philosophical theologian who is feeling about for the event that stirs within biblical religion, seeking what is unconditional in the conditional and historical actuality of Christianity.^{xxi}

Of course, Caputo admits that his adoption of biblical paradigms should be interpreted as only an existential exclusivism and not as a religious, philosophical, or theological one. He recognizes that his Christianity is a particular, historical, and cultural construction, that it did not spring forth from the head of Yahweh fully-formed like some Hebraic Athena. Furthermore, he recognizes that his adherence to the constructed traditions of Christianity cannot claim the authority of any special revelation he received at a burning bush or of any spiritual *phronesis* he inherited from a prophetic mantle. His Christian faith does not release him from the flux, does not transcend human language, culture, or the uncertainties of history. It is as intertwined within the textuality of existence as any other human endeavor. Consequently, if his Christian tradition(s) has been *constructed*, it most certainly can, and must, be *deconstructed*, which is why he professes that he desires to reinscribe it, reinvent it, or reaffirm it.

Caputo deconstructs Christian theology by decontaminating it, as much as possible, from the contagion of metaphysics, that is, by de-Hellenizing it, by reducing the influences of Athens on Jerusalem.^{xxii} He insists that the Being of Father Parmenides should not have been so easily fused (*confused*) with the God of Father Abraham, that the I AM spoken through Moses' burning bush was not the *logos* of Being-Itself, Self-Subsisting Being, the Ground of Being, the *prima causa* of Being, or the *causa finalis* of Being.^{xxiii} Such metaphysical translations of the name of God disassemble the theological poetics of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and depreciate the value of the divine alterity by confining God within the constricted conceptuality of abstract principles of reason and pretentious systems of totalized meaning. Such a metaphysical mistranslation results in the unholy matrimony of ontology and theology, into an ontotheology whereby talk of God cannot escape the homogeneity of conceptual idolatry, that is, the tendency to subsume God under the same vocabulary used to explain and define the world.

Of course, Caputo's censure of ontotheology microcosmically reveals his macrocosmic suspicion of metaphysics *per se*. It is a natural theological extension of his radical hermeneutics as an indictment of the deluded belief that reason can rise above the facticity of existence and imitate or participate in the Platonic Forms, or that some cosmic *logos* or divine revelation can reach down and pull us up out of the flux of reality by the miraculous hook of absolute knowledge or absolute certainty.^{xxiv} The security of First Principles, the satisfaction of Cartesian Certainties, and the power of comprehending those logical and ontological *Archai* that putatively establish the monarchy of Reason are all quite seductive. He insists, however, that they are simulacra at best and dissimulacra at worst. In lieu of the clear and distinct ideas of reason, we are condemned to interpretation, restricted to limping along uncertain paths, constantly discovering aporia that remind us of our destituteness, our wandering in the desert of non-knowing in which we cannot be sure who we are or where we are going for example, the aporia of evil and suffering.^{xxv}

One could consider the more humble rationality of Caputo's radical hermeneutics to be his gloss on Derrida's *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*. "There is nothing outside the text" is no aphorism of linguistic idealism, not some pithy precept postulating that there is no other to language. On the contrary, the idiom presumes that there *is* an objective reality beyond language but that no one can access that reality *without* the mediation of textuality.^{xxvi} In other words, no one can escape the contextuality of history, culture, language, and tradition all of which affect and limit every interpretation of reality. Consequently, metaphysical speculations on Being, or the Infinite, or the Absolute Spirit, or the *Causa Sui* may well promise an Archimidean point outside the flux from which we can survey the totality of meaning from Alpha to Omega and grasp the lever of the *Logos* with which we can move heaven and earth by the power of the intellect. All of these absolute metaphysical claims, however, emerge from within the relativity of our limited historical, linguistic, and cultural milieus. Simply put, no one can escape the reflexivity that haunts any claim to have transcended the restrictions of finite existence, since any such claim must be made by finite individuals, in finite circumstances, speaking a finite language, from within the limitations of finite traditions! Still, Caputo knows that he cannot totally quarantine his reinvented Christian theology away from metaphysics, because no one can wholly escape metaphysical speculation. In a manner of speaking, it is, as Derrida contends, one of the only language games in town.^{xxvii} Accordingly, Caputo sharpens Ockham's razor and whittles metaphysics down to a more minimal size.^{xxviii}

Caputo's de-Hellenizing of Christian theology definitely expresses a version of the death-of-God theology, explicitly the death of the ontotheological God of classical theism.^{xxix} The God of metaphysics has traditionally been characterized more as a version of Parmenidean Being than the God of Abraham. This God is Eternal, Simple, One, Immutable, Impassible, Omnipresent, Omniscient, and, most troubling for Caputo, Omnipotent. This God is the essence of Perfection, as in Aristotle's *nous noetikos*, the perfectly rational divine intellect that is so perfectly rational it can only contemplate itself, since everything else is deficient. This God can micro-manage both nature and history or predetermine every event, which, as we shall see, would prevent the advent of any genuine event and can never be surprised, take a risk, or display any semblance of weakness unless, of course, as a self-limiting subterfuge in order to exercise the divine power in a more powerful manner! Caputo joins Meister Eckhart in praying for God to rid him of this God, since *this* God of omnipotence and domination raises serious epistemological and ethical issues and, furthermore, is actually called into question by various theological perspectives in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.^{xxx}

Caputo affirms that the classical model of an omnipotent deity explicitly provokes the traditional problems of theodicy, the presumptuous proposition that human beings can and should justify God in the face of evil and suffering. The fundamental reason why one should attempt to get God off the hook for the desolation of disasters and the dissipation of suffering is predominately because of omnipotence.^{xxxi} If God is the omnipotent creator *ex nihilo*, then ultimately God is responsible for evil, and no logical attempt to diminish or exculpate that responsibility removes the scandal. Of course, Caputo discredits theodicy for reasons other than purely theological. His denunciation of theodicy relies primarily on his rejection of the onto-theological paradigm of an omnipotent deity who causes evil, and/or allows evil, and/or fails to intervene and remove evil from human existence. This last issue, the issue of divine intervention, figures as a preeminent theme in his alternative minimal theological metaphysics, given the priorities of faith, of the love of God, and of the religious *hermeneusis* as they relate to the event of obligation and to the necessity of protest and rebellion against oppression and violence. If faith believes that a loving God stands with the sufferer and provokes the human responsibility to alleviate suffering whenever possible, then does faith not expect no less from God? Does the believer not look for those moments of divine intervention when God directly involves the divine self in redemptive events of consolation and restoration? Does Caputo's religious paradigm, in contradistinction to Nietzsche's tragic one,

not demand the reality of divine intervention and the exercise of some type of divine therapeutic power? Or, as Caputo frames the question: In the name of God, cannot God help us?^{xxxii}

Here again, Caputo's Janus-Head posture re-emerges with a good dialectical response: Well, yes and no! Caputo answers no, if by divine help one means the intervention of some big guy in the sky, who insinuates himself (an appropriate divine pronoun for a strong classical theism!) into nature and history as an omnipotent *deus ex machina* in order change the course of mighty rivers and bend steel with his bare hands. Caputo rejects any detention of God within the limiting concepts of ontology, any attempt to comprehend God as a transcendent entity or personal agent who arbitrarily decides to fix the flux through miraculous acts of divine despotism. This strong theology of God as a *being* bears all of the epistemological difficulties of any metaphysical genuflection before the golden calf of a presumptive unity, any claim that somewhere up there is someone who can reach down and pull us out of the fiery furnace of contingency and calamity.^{xxxiii} He insists that we most assuredly should not continue to embrace an ontotheology of omnipotence, because "God is not a cosmic force, a worldly power, a physical or metaphysical energy or power source that supplies energy to the world . . . and who occasionally intervenes here and there with strategic course corrections, a tsunami averted here, a cancerous tumor there, a bloody war quieted over there."^{xxxiv} In other words, he determines that when it comes to the issue of evil and suffering, one must not talk about God as a metaphysical mechanic occasionally re-calibrating the machinery of reality. To do so perverts the authenticity of genuine faith and profanes the name of God.

In offering his alternative theology of the event and of divine weakness (a theology that, as stated above, depends so intimately on biblical paradigms of vocation, transformation, forgiveness, and the messianic), Caputo renounces any reduction of faith to magic or superstition. Believing in God does not remove one from the scientific and historical probabilities of the flux, nor does it establish the influx of some over-powering divine presence that enters the sensible world from some super-sensible, super-natural realm. Adopting a poetics of Scripture somewhat reminiscent of Bultmann's demythologizing hermeneutic, Caputo re-interprets miracles as creative symbols for the impossible possibility of regenerated hearts and renovated lives.^{xxxv} There is a hyper-reality to the effects of God's gracious call to justice; however, that hyper-reality does not entail the supernatural suspension or manipulation of natural laws nor the divine intrusion into history.^{xxxvi} Graceless, unliterary, and literalist orthodox metaphysical apologists and obscurantist fundamentalists may well objectify God, collapse primary and secondary causality, and consider God to be the ultimate laser show at Disneyworld, parting rivers, raising the dead, and removing leprosy.^{xxxvii} But in doing so, they profane and pervert genuine faith; they yield to the seduction of a strong theology, a theology of thaumaturgic power in which God could put an end to pornography, obesity, junk TV, computer spam, crime in the streets, and the ruining of the environment if God so chose to do so.^{xxxviii} Caputo considers all of this, at best, nonsensical naiveté and, at worst, a self-aggrandizing perspective on divine sovereignty. He scorns both a supernatural pseudo-physics, which has God magically intervening in nature, and a metaphysics of omnipotence, which has God abrogating physics altogether.^{xxxix}

The deadening literalism of a superstitious faith in the magical intervention of God simply cannot be a proper hermeneutic for deciphering God's protest against evil and suffering, since it is both insulting to God and pragmatically untenable. On the one hand, it is theologically insulting, because it demeans the love of God by reducing it to an economy of benefit, that is, as Meister Eckhart critically noted, one loves God for the same reason a farmer loves his milk cow.^{xl} On the other hand, the belief in God's miraculous interventions into situations of suffering, violence, and death are pragmatically problematic given their apparent arbitrariness and

suspicious absence. As a result, Caputo questions the disconnect between the metaphysics of an *omnipotens deus* with its doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the proliferation of evil and disasters.

The strong theology of divine power sounds good, but functionally makes little if any genuine difference. Since the omnipotent God does seem to be neither too quick nor too consistent in interrupting natural and moral processes that destroy, damage, and dehumanize wounded individuals, strong theologies must preoccupy themselves with theodicies, those efforts to account for why God *can* magically intrude and alleviate suffering but *does not*. Additionally, Caputo refuses to evade the pragmatic problematic even when it manifests itself in Scripture. He contends that one does not need to wait until the development of ontotheology before encountering the mystery of divine disregard for suffering. The almighty God of the Hebrew Scriptures can smite the wicked, part the waters, and come to the aid of just causes, while simultaneously turning a deaf ear to the cries of the oppressed and the abused. Indeed, in multiple biblical narratives, the downtrodden are regularly trodden down and their cries ignored.^{xli} In point of fact, the biblical record of God's responding magically to those in need is so poor, Caputo actually wonders why the issue is raised at all. Obviously at this point, the Pennsylvania Catholic echoes the Texas Baptist and cites the counterfactual to divine thaumaturgy: the cemeteries are full of people presumably denied the magic of divine intervention.

Now, one last decisive impediment to accepting divine intervention remains for Caputo, an impediment that, in effect, raises troubling moral questions about the issue of divine favoritism. Why do some individuals who pray for divine aid ostensibly receive it? Why do some people not end up in the cemeteries, because, they believe, God heals their cancer or cures their heart disease? Or why would God re-direct a hurricane away from Pat Robertson's Virginia compound, only to allow it to damage other people's property along the new track? Why does God hearken to the prayers for one child and respond with healing and not to another, especially when both sets of parents pray earnestly and faithfully for divine intervention? These questions haunt Caputo and lead him to confront a rather straightforward dilemma: either an intervening God plays favorites with people's lives, privileging one person or group over another, transforming grace into caprice, *or* there is no intervening God who loves some people more than others, who gives some people preferential revelation and guidance but not others, and who cherry-picks the beneficiaries of divine magic.^{xlii} Without hesitation, Caputo grabs the second horn. He quite frankly cannot accept that God would show partiality and ration out divine deliverance. Such a God is not only not a loving presence siding with the sufferer but is also not the source for the call, heard by those who live out a *hermeneusis* of faith, to protest against oppression and evil. Consequently, Caputo concludes that he can only love a God who intervenes in every instance of disaster or in none. Either God can and does effect mercy in every incident of misery, or God cannot/does not in any. Accordingly, the love of God must be non-interventive or else it is un-ethical by even the minimal human standards.

Yet, the potential immorality inherent in a strong metaphysical and magical theology of divine intervention not only indicts God's character as discriminatory and inequitable, but it also establishes the grounds for oppressive and violent acts to be perpetrated by humans against other humans. If God selectively intercedes in the lives of individuals or communities, then those individuals and communities can infer that they are special, chosen, the elect ones, whom God favors over others. They have the secret, the special revelation that gives them a certain status and prestige. They have God's ear and know God's thoughts; they are the insiders who have a dominating eminence. God speaks their language, enters their history, baptizes their culture, in other words, God loves them best! In this context, the outsiders are subordinate, of less worth, or, perhaps even more insidiously, they are the enemy, a threat, an obstacle or contagion to the will of God known and realized by the chosen few. One may then easily rationalize using violence against them, bringing whatever force necessary to bear on protecting God's word and truth from their heresies or infidelities. In other words, such a theology of

divine intervention not only fails to protest against evil, it actually results in promoting it; Hebrews killing Canaanites, Christians killing Muslims, Shiites killing Sunnis, Irish Catholics killing Protestants. Caputo finds all of this to be convincing evidence that the classical notions of the mystery of an intervening God reflects our own very unmysterious and all too human ethnocentrism and egocentrism, our own sexism, racism, and self-love writ large, in short, a gross human weakness that is being passed off as a Great Divine Attribute.^{xliii}

Caputo advocates replacing the traditional rouged metaphysical theology of divine omnipotence and magical intervention with a more minimal and, for him, more biblical theology of the weakness of God.^{xliv} He confirms that Christian theology has always been intellectually bipolar, obsessed on the one hand with the idea of divine authority and power, with God as the omnipotent impassible Being Itself who can out-think, out-achieve, and out-last all of creation, while unable, on the other hand, to dismiss the significant biblical expressions of a suffering God who accepts the risks of love and who protests against the injustice and violence of human persecution.^{xlv} For him, the latter polarity compels modifying theology from words (*logos*) about God (*theos*) to words about the name of God, reflections on the semiotic dynamics at work in the word God. For him, those dynamics center on the notion of event, specifically that the name of God harbors an event, designates a simmering potency, an interruptive and subversive but likewise possibly therapeutic and salvific perhaps, a perhaps that reveals the risk inherent in experience, that functions messianically and vocatively to call individuals into an affirmative but unexpected absolute future.^{xlvi} The event signals something that is always to come, the invention (*in-venire*), the in-coming, or the advent (*ad-venire*), the coming-to, of an absolute future that will never be present.^{xlvii} This messianic structure of the event places a demand on every present, issues an unconditional summons or call to humility and openness; that is to say, the messianic prohibits premature closure or the dogmatism of a Cartesian certainty, especially with reference to the event of God.^{xlviii}

Of course, Caputo emphasizes that the event always transcends any attempt to confine it conceptually within the strictures of a definition. To denominate is often to dominate, and the event cannot be so easily restrained by language. He argues that the event refers neither to an actual being or entity nor to being itself, but to an impulse or aspiration simmering within both the names of entities and the name of being. The uncontainable event contained in the name of God, for example, does not rest easily within the confines of the name of an entity, but stirs restlessly, endlessly, like an invitation or a call, and invocation (come) or a provocation, a solicitation or a promise, a praise or benediction.^{xlix} As a result, Caputo's theology of the event proposes God as a task or a deed, not as an entity or a metaphysical principle. God is the divine event that shatters every human construction that summons, demands, lures, and promises. For Caputo, then, theology is always responsive, always an answer to the summons and the demands coming from the event harbored in the name of God, always motivated by the transcendent other, the unknowable, the subversive and disruptive impossible possibility always to come.¹

Caputo does not equivocate when he testifies that the event astir in the name of God should not be considered as revelatory of a cosmic potentate micromanaging and manipulating reality, or as a transcendent warrior god casting lightning bolts like Zeus or killing babies in Jericho like Yahweh. Instead, the impossible God of love is a God who disrupts such grandiose theories of power, prestige, and brutality. The name of God harbors the power of a weak force, a force that does not plot but promises, that does not exploit but entices, that does not violate human freedom but vitiates destructive structures of power and oppression through the power of powerlessness and the seduction of divine suffering. Given his deconstructive interpretation of event as the incoming of the Other (*l'invention de l'autre*) out of a future that cannot be anticipated, programmed, or determined by the present, as what he also names the impossible shattering every horizon of expectation, it is not surprising that Caputo's theology of the event interprets God by seeking to bypass the usual categories of

power and control. He eludes any strong theology in order to think of God as a weak force, a God who opens the divine self to the risks and uncertainties of existence by manifesting Godself as a call that can be ignored, as a promise that may be rejected, and as a lover that may be scorned. God, as a loving event, cannot coerce love but cajoles and lures others to respond with reciprocal love and desire.^{li} God remains open to the possibility that God's love and desire will not be requited; consequently, the love of God remains excessive, unconditional, and without the certainty of a return on the divine investment.

Notwithstanding his renunciation of an entitative and interventive God, Caputo confesses that the more personal, agential, and interceding theological paradigms found in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures offer a better poetic expression of his phenomenology of the event as a theology of the weakness of God. The narratives of the covenant God of Israel and of the Father of Jesus of Nazareth should not be read as literal historical accounts but should be taken as a theopoetics of the powerless call to obligation, transformation, and the power of a sacred anarchical protest against evil and suffering. He finds no better biblical commentaries on an almost non-metaphysical, non-ontotheological theology of the eventful name of God than in Jesus' proclamation and personification of the Kingdom of God, in the Apostle Paul's theology of the weakness of God, and in that same apostle's subversive logic of the word of the cross (*logos tou staurou*).

Caputo considers Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God to be an instance of deconstruction, a prophetic indictment of the *status quo* for the redemptive and affirmative purpose of maintaining a genuine expectation of something new to come, of a new truth that can ensure justice, gift, forgiveness, hospitality and love, a new truth that can have actual socio-political implications for responding to widows and orphans, to the oppressed and disenfranchised, to those marginalized individuals who struggle with regressive tax laws, sexism, the violence of war, homosexual bigotry, or the traumas of abortion.^{lii} Such a kingdom contradicts the world, deconstructs its institutional arrogance, and articulates the divine "no" against its violence and its domination. Jesus reveals a non-sovereign divine kingdom that prophetically protests the profane order of the real world.^{liii} For that world, everything turns on power, on brute strength and coercion. Yet, the kingdom's powerful protest against the violence of the world precipitates from a position of weakness. According to Jesus, God's kingdom has no army; it owns no weapons cache; it does not seek to establish itself through force; it refuses to compromise and instrumentalize suffering and violence. He differentiates it from the world both by noting its unconditionality, that is, its un-economic nature regarding love, forgiveness, and obligation, and also by revealing its non-sovereign sovereignty, that is, that God's reign is not one of control, manipulation, and coercion. Divine power must be radically reinterpreted in the kingdom as the powerless power of risk, rejection, and violation. Here Caputo thinks that St. Paul's motif of the weakness of God properly glosses Jesus' poetics of the kingdom. Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians that, according to the worldly criteria of rationality and dominion, the kingdom of God appears to be foolish and weak. Indeed, he states it even more forcefully: God, Godself is foolish and weak!

St. Paul further clarifies the full extent of the idea of the weakness of God by epitomizing it in the centrality of the cross event. The violent death of the innocent Jesus evokes a different logic for Paul, requires a new language, or *logos*, for articulating the seditiously redemptive love of God. He calls this *logos* of the weak and foolish God, the *logos tou staurou* (1 Cor. 1:18), the mad logic, word, or message of the Cross which crosses out the world and in the process gets done in by the world.^{liv} St. Paul's *stauro*-logo-centrism, his *theologia crucis*, explicitly functions as a Christology, a *logos* about the *Logos*, about Jesus, whose poetics of the Kingdom of God and whose willingness to suffer death reveal the full depth of God's love and forgiveness.^{lv} Caputo endorses this Pauline logic of the cross and construes it as revealing a God whose redemptive prowess depends upon the power of powerlessness, the unconditional call of grace without sovereignty, without mandate and intimidation,

the powerless potency of the name of a God who can be strong-armed by the aggression of the world, denied, ignored, and even murdered, yet who in that weakness displays the power of forgiveness. The cross mediates a *non-coercive heteronomy*, a promise, address, or invitation from God as the Wholly Other whom human beings have the power to ignore.^{lvi}

Caputo claims that the revelation of the name of the promising and beckoning God on the cross is the perverse core of Christianity. The crucifixion is that singular occurrence where the weak force of the event, the uncertainty and impossibility of an undecidable faith in the transformative dynamic of the divine promise of peace, perverts the world's profane specifications for power, sovereignty, and divine authority. That divine provocation of peace and pardon is unconditional, given excessively and unilaterally regardless of human response and even to the point of death; however, given that the call may be ignored, silenced, and distorted by human evil, it is an unconditional call without sovereignty, without the absolute warrant that God can compel and constrain human obedience.^{lvii} Consequently, for Caputo, the weakness of God is the potency of the divine tenacity in relentlessly disrupting, soliciting, subverting, contradicting, and perverting the world's esteem for the economy of retribution, intolerance, and dominion. The cross event incarnates not an interventive God who causes magical phenomena, but an inviting God who calls for justice, mercy, and compassion. When one names God as the source of this call, then one names God as the source of an unconditional promise, a promise made without the sovereign power to coerce it,^{lviii} not of an unlimited power. Caputo chooses not to think of God as an omnipotent onto-theo-cosmo-logical power source for the universe, but as the unconditioned demand for beneficence that shocks the world with a promise that is not kept, as the heart of a heartless world.^{lix} This means, of course, that God's call comes as a weak force, as a vocative power, not power pure and simple but the powerless power of a provocation or a summons, a soliciting, seductive power; it comes as a call that may go ignored and unheeded by those to whom it is addressed. The weak force of God's call and promise, of the divine lure of creation toward justice and grace, reveals no *omnipotens deus* but an ironically divine and spiritual event of love and *pathos*.

Thus far in this essay, I have attempted to document that the problem of evil and suffering has been a primary motif throughout Caputo's radical hermeneutics. For the past twenty-five years, the issue has stimulated both his more general philosophical investigations into the tension between the religious and the tragic interpretations of the flux and also his more particular theological perspectives on how a postsecular, biblical poetics of the event impinges upon a hermeneutic of the name of God. Consequently, I have intended to establish the validity, if not the persuasiveness, of the argument that the essence, *s'il y en a*, of Caputo's radical, spectral, devilish hermeneutics includes an overt and covert concession to the philosophico-theologico-ethical inevitability of addressing the realities of evil, suffering, and disasters. My primary referent has been to trace the influence of these issues on his minimal metaphysical, maximal poetics of the theology of the weakness of God and how these issues conspire with certain rational and historical presuppositions to inform his hyper-realism of the divine as a non-personal, non-entitative, and non-interventive God.

I now want to turn to a critical attempt to revise Caputo's revisionist reading of the call of obligation, to re-examine that messianic summons of justice, Jesus' kingdom proclamation of love and forgiveness, and the Pauline theology of the cross as they relate to the faithful protest against every structure that promotes oppression and de-humanization and every act that violates and destroys individual lives. I aspire to repeat a classic confession of faith in an interventive God but to do so within the constraints of Caputo's convincing limitations. In other words, while I agree with his contentions that (1) too much of traditional theology has been a Hellenistic perversion of divine power and dominion, (2) too much strong theology has been conveniently adopted as divine vindication of human brutality, and (3) a magical reading of divine sovereignty

results in God's having an extremely poor track record regarding responding to the cries of the oppressed, I am not as sanguine as Caputo that one can so easily endorse biblical idioms for God while eliminating a more theologically-realistic belief in God as personal but not a person and as genuinely engaged in human existence but not as a coercive force. In other words, I ponder whether one can rightfully pass as a Caputoan Christian theist who believes that God does actively stand on the side of the sufferer, does intervene in some manner in human lives to offer healing and hope to those devastated by disasters, and who does all of this as a weak force who risks, who confronts limitations, and who cannot always achieve the divine redemptive intent, e.g., keep the cemeteries empty! That is to say, I wish to meditate on whether one can re-paraphrase Caputo's poetics of the event into a discourse on divine intervention.

Critically assessing Caputo's thought can often be frustrating since he inevitably anticipates potential objections and endeavors to mitigate them in advance. Not surprisingly, therefore, one finds another Janus Head aspect to his thought with respect to divine intervention. From one perspective, he identifies his rejection of an entitative, interventive God to be a methodological procedure through which to engage in a phenomenology of the event of the call. In his brief, but substantial, chapter on hermeneutical technique in *The Weakness of God*, Caputo admits to making a phenomenological reduction of the call away from inquiries about possible ontic or ontological foundations in order to remain open to the principle of principles whereby the event presents itself as itself in order to be described without any contaminating concerns about authority or causality.^{lx} Indeed, he considers the Kingdom of God, as a theological cipher of the event of the call, to present a phenomenal field within which to engage in imaginative variations on the name of God. The kingdom is not magic, nor is it an expression of some supersaturated phenomena. Instead, the ontological implications of the kingdom are placed within an *epoché* in order to allow the poetics of the kingdom to focus on its eventiveness, to allow it to function as a semantics of the love of God. Consequently, God is not considered to be a cause but a call, not a power-monger but a promise-maker, not a micro-managing sovereign but a messianic summons to the advent of the unexpected, *l'invention de l'autre*, the in-coming of the impossible Other beyond human ingenuity and control. In fine, Caputo terms this his *promissory reduction* and leaves the question of Being to confessional faiths, metaphysics, or psychology.

While facing in the direction of his *epoché* of the event, he concomitantly looks in the direction of a confessional faith in God as entity. He professes a love for determinate faiths, admits that they cannot, nor should not, be avoided, and acknowledges that such faiths are expressions of the flux, reminders that human beings do not subsist in a vacuum but live out of particular and different traditions.^{lxi} He humbly allocutes to his own immersion in the uncertainty of the flux. He has no special insight into or no miraculous revelation of the ontological nature of God, whether God is an entity or not, personal or not, interventive or not. He leaves that decision within the context of undecidability, that is, as a choice to be made by each existing individual *in actu exercitu*.^{lxii} He offers his promissory reduction only as a prolegomenon aimed at keeping that decision within the restless heart of non-knowing, disturbed by the risks of the flux, always a matter of the *hermeneusis* of faith not the result of a strong theology of absolute knowledge.^{lxiii}

Yet, at times, Caputo minimizes his magnanimity toward a tolerance of confessional theologies of divine intervention. On the one hand, he undeniably classifies such interpretations as examples of strong theology, other instances of the rouged and robust, magical and metaphysical misreadings of the name of God ensuing from the diverse doctrines of classical theism. Those who advance such misreadings merely trade in powerful and prestigious entities in the power corridors of being for the purpose of competing for the Big Money of the Templeton Prize.^{lxiv} They prostitute the name of God for the coin of coercion and constraint, making certain that they receive their thirty pieces of silver from the principalities and powers that demonize and dominate the

widows and the orphans. But of course, given Caputo's extended and fervent critique of strong ontotheology, the very fact that he considers any idea of an entitative and interventive God to be just such a theology implicitly reduces it to the naive, the fundamentalistic, or the superstitious. The idea of an interventive God apparently occupies the same cognitive space as alien abductions!^{lxv} Consequently, Caputo seems to claim that you can, indeed, hold such a view, but you should be ashamed of yourself if you do!

On the other hand, Caputo occasionally struggles with a bit of hypocrisy concerning his own commitment to undecidability and the impossible. Now admittedly, I am wary here, primarily because I do not wish to dismiss Caputo's thought by indicting him as two-faced through a *tu quoque* charge of performative contradiction. He acknowledges that this latter fallacy is how philosophers say, "Gotcha!" a rather simplistic disregard to be sure.^{lxvi} Even Derrida heaps disdain upon it by calling it a puerile weapon.^{lxvii} Most emphatically, I intend neither a smug gotcha nor a violent blow aimed at piercing the heart of Caputo's poetics of the kingdom. I simply, but not simplistically, want to hold Caputo's feet to the fires of the flux and undecidability in order to soften his stance against the belief that God may genuinely intervene against evil and suffering. He unceasingly reminds us that we cannot escape the flux, that all of our decisions remain anchored in undecidability, that we never terminate the endless translatability and substitutability of our idioms, that we must remain vigilant for the unexpected, the absolute future that cannot be programmed, and that we should never allow our horizons of expectations to foreclose the impossibility of the absolute surprise.^{lxviii} Yet, Caputo presupposes from the perspective of the horizons of his expectations that God cannot be an entity and cannot intimately engage in human existence. In prescribing his rejection of metaphysical theism, he proscribes the advent of a God who may relate to the world as a weak force, yet in some tangibly spiritual mode. Although he cloisters himself within the priory of his promissory reduction, he cannot fight the urge to peer over the brackets and come face to face with the world of ontological claims albeit *me*ontological claims of an apophatic nature. That is to say, in his minimal theological metaphysics, he confesses that God *is not* an entity, that God *is not* involved in reality, that God *is not* personally at work striving to rebel against evil and suffering.

Again, I do not wish my critique here to be misunderstood. It is nothing profound and nothing prohibitive. I am neither trying to convert Caputo, nor am I necessarily depreciating his interpretation. He has made a decision about these theological issues (undecidability demands that); he has chosen a particular *hermeneusis* of faith that I admittedly find valid and persuasive at multiple points; and he has respectfully and passionately re-interpreted a Christian, biblical call to obligation, healing, and love. I find nothing problematic about these moves—well, almost nothing! My critique, therefore, is actually quite unpretentious. Caputo writes, "Resolution is not the same as rigidity."^{lxix} I suggest only that he follow his wise apothegm and loosen up a bit. He should allow his resolved poetics of the event to be disturbed, haunted, interrupted, subverted, left a little unresolved with reference to a theology of an entitative, interventive God who is less like the *omnipotens deus* of strong theology and more like the weak force of the event, the unconditional but non-sovereign summons to protest oppression proclaimed by God within the interstices of the flux. At times, Caputo tends toward a rigidity in his theology of weakness, a rigidity driven by his commendable passion to redeem the Kingdom of God from the corruption of traditional ontotheology. One can assuredly attenuate the quasi-apodictic character of his interpretations by noting that they result from rhetorical flourishes employed as a prophetic voice crying in the wilderness making him something of a postsecular John the Baptist (Catholic)! Still, his prescriptions are not solely rhetorical hyperboles. He does, indeed, adopt a functional epistemological exclusivism regarding the non-entitative, non-interventive nature of God, an exclusivism I contend to be inconsistent with his radical hermeneutics of contingency.

In point of fact, Caputo's own theological vocabulary establishes the possibility of maintaining a more modest faith in a God who enters reality in order to respond to evil and suffering. Caputo readily subscribes to the interventive language of the Christian Scriptures and considers Jesus' God, who notes every fallen sparrow and counts every individual's hair, to be far superior to Aristotle's apathetic *nous noetikos* eternally thinking only itself. In addition, he also continues the poetic imagery of divine intervention in his own personal commentaries on the Scriptures.^{lxx} He considers the Kingdom of God to be a kingdom of singularities, an affirmation of the intimacy between God and all of the little nobodies (*ta me onta*) that populate the world.^{lxxi} He echoes Jesus' exhortation to all who seek the kingdom to be sensitive to the spirit of a loving God who offers the tender mercies of grace and comfort, who establishes the savioric "yes" of the perhaps, the open future of chance and renewal.^{lxxii} He exalts the classical language of theology, in which God is an inspiring spirit, like the spirit of Elohim who broods over the primordial deep before creation.^{lxxiii} He positions himself with the Bible-thumpers who believe that God cannot simply create the world and then throw the tools on the truck and drive off for a long weekend. Instead, God must be that sustaining spirit that continually desires to make all things new, to have things born again and again.^{lxxiv} He considers this divine intent to be the subversive and anarchic weak force of God, the *Agens movens* of the penumbra power of the powerless divine summons.^{lxxv}

Caputo characterizes the interruptive and gratuitous spirit of God as an expression of divine transcendence, not, of course, as the metaphysical paleonym denoting a supernatural beyond being that offers a magical solution to suffering and uncertainty. On the contrary, he decides to replace the paleonym with a neologism of his own, arguing that the essence of God's transcendence lies in God's insistence. God in-sists in the world, stands (*stare, stans*) in (*in*) the midst of reality as one withdrawn from the world's order of presence, prestige, and sovereignty in order to settle into those pockets of protest and contradiction to the world.^{lxxvi} God is no *hyperousios*, beyond or above Being, but is, instead, *mesousios*, in the middle of being, present as an absent companion to all those who suffer, are oppressed, ignored, alienated, violated, and despised.^{lxxvii} That means that God is an interested God, a God of *inter-esse*, between being, in the middle (*inter*) of being (*esse*), intimately involved in the world as a gentle and easily-scorned call to obligation and healing. God enters the world as withdrawn, as the powerless power leaving the world *etsi Deus non daretur*. Whereas suffering and disasters continue to occur as if God were not in the world protesting, as if talk of God were exhausted in a poetics projecting human ideals,^{lxxviii} as if the tension between the religious and the tragic is functionally a distinction without a difference, Caputo's terminology of faith suggests that the weak and non-coercive spirit of God may be prowling the streets as a *voyou*, a redemptive rogue in-sisting unconditionally without sovereignty within the contingencies and limitations of the flux.^{lxxix} Since evil exists, stands (*sistere, stare*) out (*ex*) in the world, not poetically or hyper-realistically, but in the facticity of torn flesh, diseased bodies, and violated psyches, then perhaps God in-sists in the world in some personal and productive manner, protesting, confronting, assaulting, and consoling disasters.

Of course, Caputo would classify the facticity of divine in-sistence as another bit of superstition, of magic, of fundamentalistically literal-minded naiveté. And it may well be. I remain faithful to undecidability and affirm that my decision is fragile and potentially fallacious. I only want to believe that Caputo feels the same about his translations of the name of God. Again, at times his rhetorical enthusiasm leads one to think that his theology is, at worst, methodological atheism and, at best, more a theory of God as voyeur than as *voyou*. The resulting options insinuate that either Nietzsche and Felix are correct and there is no one that gives a damn for the suffering of humanity, or there is someone there who merely observes from a distance, perhaps recording the events of evil much like the angels in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, who cannot interfere in the world and magically manipulate events, but whose task is to serve as cosmic *Extraskrivers*, sacred stenographers taking minutes of existence. In actuality, Caputo does distinguish the act of recording experiences of evil and suffering, specifically those phenomena of irreparable disasters that repudiate any possible redemption or restoration, as a

divine operation, an expression of a radical salvation history, and properly identifies it as the only possible response to irreparable and senseless evil.^{lxxx} He christens that salvation history the “dangerous memory of suffering.”^{lxxxi}

Yet, Daniel and Cassiel, Wenders' angels in the film, do have the weak power to intervene with sympathy and consolation. Unable to change the reality of suffering and death, they, nonetheless, do have the capacity of compassion to touch the wounded and to call them to a gentle solace. So, too, could God, even according to Caputo's own theological vernacular. God could in-sist in the world as the spirit of consolation and motivation, one who can, through the powerless power of love and mercy, extend the weak messianic invocation to individuals to do unto the least of these who suffer (Matt. 25:40). Admittedly, Caputo discredits speaking about God as being there in the world as just more strong theology. That ontotheological dialect confuses God and the world, reduces God to another object in the world, as a *da-sein*, a powerful supernatural entity being there alongside all other existing things, as the there where the magical force of Being Itself manifests itself.^{lxxxii} Yet, once again, his own terminology betrays a creative polysemy to the word there. He attests to the belief that in the face of disasters, we become aware of something out there, over there, in the place of the other that confronts us and overwhelms our own subjectivity.^{lxxxiii} He does not know with certainty if it is God, or the Good, or the Great Pumpkin. It may be nothing more than a poetic projection of the altruism gene. But, perhaps, it *is* God there, which is the only place a compassionate, suffering, loving, and merciful God could be. By his own admission, a healer is a healing presence, a help, someone who is *there* because being-there means being there for the other, for someone who calls out for help.^{lxxxiv} Likewise, he repeats the prophetic announcement of Levinas and asserts that the vow to be with you through this long night, to stay by your side, the promise, absolute and unconditional, “to be *there* [emphasis added] when you awake: *c'est le Messie ou salut*. . . . That is the weak force of God, not the strong force of magician [*sic*].”^{lxxxv} Subsequently, why could the in-sisting, inter-ested God of love, forgiveness, justice, and comfort not be there in some manner as a healing solicitation? Why could God not be solicited to come and be there wherever suffering and pain torment the oppressed?

I reiterate my gentle rebuke of Caputo: he should not fraternize so closely with the false dilemma fallacy. He writes as if one must either interpret God as an entity within the massive structures of metaphysical speculation *or* one must not interpret God as an entity at all. He concludes that either God intervenes in the world with the force and domination of Spielbergian special effects *or* God does not intervene in the world at all. He determines that God prohibits, impedes, or consoles *every* instance of evil and suffering *or* God does so in *none*. No necessity obtains, however, for such servility to the law of the excluded middle. There is a third to be sure. *Pace* Caputo, one need not reduce existing to exhausting; that is, to posit the existence of an entity is not simultaneously to offer a totaled account of that existence.^{lxxxvi} To posit such a divine entity may require a minimal metaphysics; however, even metaphysical speculation has long noted surely with disquieting chagrin that *individuum est ineffabile*, the singular, unique, particular individual can never be exhaustively subsumed under general and universal principles. One may talk about the individual, but one cannot capture in language the individual *in toto*. An alterity and ambiguity constantly obtain regarding the singular existent. Why should the divine singularity be any different? One can interpret the name of God as denominating a someone without dominating that someone through conceptual constraints. After all, Caputo allows for a minimal metaphysics, which, in turn, should allow for the possibility of a minimal faith in an entitative God without having that faith labeled with the epithet strong theology.

Furthermore, one need not reduce divine intervention to magic or nothing. One can certainly believe that God comes into the contingent, fragile structures of the flux with an intent to redeem evil and suffering, with a desire

to interdict and innovate instances of disasters, and as a loving presence that is there as a source of strength, consolation, and motivation to the good *without* assuming that such intervention results in magical demonstrations of overwhelming revocations of natural law and consistent history. Caputo almost identifies divine encounter with Sinaitic flamboyance the fearsome climatological phenomena of Yahweh riding the storms, the concussive consternation of earthquakes shattering the ersatz stability of grounded human perspectives, and the basso profundo of the *bath kol*, that heavenly voice of God accusing, demanding, and terrorizing people into submission. He seems to think that if God walks with an individual through the valley of the shadow of death, God must always be walking on water! But what about God's still, small voice? What about Jesus' imagery of the brooding mother hen? What about the ephemeral wind of the Spirit blowing gently from who knows where to who knows where a Spirit that can be grieved and wounded by human indifference?

Not surprisingly, Caputo allows for translating divine intervention into the idiom of the Spirit. He boldly declares that the event of the call *astir* in the name of God is not that of a fist that smashes, but of a Spirit who breathes, who inspires, and whose gentle breath urges us on.^{lxxxvii} He comments that the summons that beckons from the crucified Jesus demands that we make the weak call stronger than the power of the world by moving mountains through the love of neighbor and of enemy.^{lxxxviii} That is to say, we have the responsibility to breathe with the spirit of Jesus, to implement, to invent, to convert the poetics into a praxis.^{lxxxix} There it is; that is precisely how Caputo's poetics of the event can remain a discourse on divine intervention. God intervenes in the world as the Spirit of motivation and encouragement. The still, small voice of God lures us and cajoles us with the promise of the impossible to come.^{xc} The call can be ignored; the promise can be rejected; the exhortation to love, forgive, and achieve justice can be disobeyed. That is the weak force inherent in an insistent God, whose intervention consists of the *parole soufflée*, the "in-spirited" word, the inspiring word, the word of the *souffleur*, the prompter, the other voice that provokes us, invites us, pleads with us, beseeches us to respond to the widow and the orphan, to the lame and the blind, to the diseased and the oppressed.^{xci} That is how God intervenes to respond to evil and suffering God's Spirit seduces us to embody the powerless power of the good and of love. The Spirit of God prompts us to *facere veritatem*, to "doing the truth" as a response to the call of obligation, to embodying the weak force of divine intervention through the transformative power of loving God, loving neighbor, and loving enemies. God can only effect salvation as we heed the call, speak a *me voici* to the Other, decide to accept the obligation to re-create the world east of Eden. But we exist, and God insists, east of Eden presumably because the event of the call is weak, God's promissory "yes" to life has constantly been rejected by our "no," and, consequently, even God does not have the cosmic command and control to enforce a paradise.

To substitute divine intervention as *parole soufflée*, the event of the intervening word of God as a vocative, provocative, and evocative motivation to contravene the power of evil and suffering whenever possible, for the ontotheological slang of divine omnipotence, omniscience, and impassibility advances an alternative to the third bifurcation in Caputo's poetics of event. If an entitative and interventive God risks dependence upon the limitations of reality and humanity (predominately because God is incapable of being the *prima causa* for every attempt at abating oppression, violence, and the irreparable, since even God is entangled in the secondary causality of uncoerced response), then one should not be surprised that God does not heal every illness, restore every loss, control every weather pattern, impede every act of savagery, or resurrect every cemetery occupant. The risk of a reciprocal "no" to and rejection of the therapeutic call of God's Spirit constitutes the inability of God to repair all evil.

As I have argued in another essay, Caputo's propensity to mistake the fact that God does not intervene successfully in *every* instance of suffering as validation that God does not successfully intervene in *some* actually

runs contrary to his own deconstructive hermeneutical tradition.^{xcii} Derrida himself supplies a rebuttal to that bifurcation in *The Gift of Death*, where he discusses the sacrifice of Isaac as a symbol of the ethical inevitability of violence inherent in any act of kindness. He interprets Kierkegaard's interpretation of that Abrahamic narrative in *Fear and Trembling* as a literary expression of the ethical limitations and ironies under which all humans operate. Whenever I respond to the call of obligation and seek to show benevolence to someone in need, I cannot avoid ignoring the calls of obligation issued by others in distress and, therefore, neglecting to benefit them as well. Derrida captures this ethical irony in the phrase "*tout autre est tout autre* [*Every other (one) is every (bit) other*]"; every one else is completely or wholly other.^{xciii} He concedes that each time I act to alleviate suffering for one person, I am simultaneously *not* acting to alleviate suffering for someone else. Someone else suffers because I am addressing the suffering of another; consequently, I am complicit, albeit with the best of intentions, in the continuation of another person's misfortune. But since I cannot feed every hungry person, should I not feed those I can? Since I cannot fight every act of oppression, does that mean I should sit passively by while oppression rages? Should the realization that each time I assist another in need, I abrogate my responsibilities to another other in need paralyze me from any ethical intervention?

Of course not! Nor should God. By his own admission, Caputo considers God to be the name of a weak force, a limited, vulnerable event of promise and hope that cannot escape the contingencies of embodied situations. The call of God is a non-coercive lure, an appeal that implores not an authority that impels; as a result, one should not anticipate the will of such a God to be fulfilled in every case. God cannot heal every wound, but that does not necessarily mean that God cannot heal some or, at least, be involved in the curative process as a prompter impelling individuals to do the healing work of the Kingdom. Obviously, that would mean that God, too, is complicit in the inherent violence of intervention and that some minimal metaphysics of power to act must be presumed. Yet, Caputo surrenders to that inevitability regarding human responses to the poetics of obligation. He confirms that one cannot totally escape systems of power and violence when acting to reduce the brutality of those systems. One must exercise some semblance of power in the very act of responding, since every response is woven into the texture of the world (*polis*) and implicated in worldly power.^{xciv} Likewise, one uses that power to limit the beneficiary of the response, as per Derrida's *tout autre*. Resources I use to help one individual reduce the resources available to help another; consequently, I sacrifice one for the other. Still, Caputo defends the limitations of such action and capitulates to its potential conspiracy with evil. He claims that the conspiracy is no excuse not to act, not to do whatever we can.^{xcv}

What prevents the same perspective on the *tout autre* and the conspiracy of obligation from being applied theologically to the weak force in the name of God? Given Caputo's profound commentary on the event as the inviting, luring, and promising dynamic of a messianic call, given his decision to translate the divine name into a sacred, inspiring word of justice, forgiveness, and love that subverts the world unconditionally but without sovereignty, without an army of angels to coerce cooperation, or a supernatural compulsion to subdue consent, one should not expect an interventive God to escape similar constraints to what can and cannot be accomplished. In other words, one would only interpret God's poor record of intervening as evidence that God does not intervene at all only if one assumed a strong theology of divine power. Only if one presupposes that God can enter the flux of existence and preempt being restrained by the radical limitations of that flux would one be convinced that the continuation of evil and suffering signifies the non-intervention of God. One might say, then, that Caputo's third dilemma discloses the remnants of a tenacious ontotheology. But, if one gives up the latter, one can overcome the former Caputo's creative poetics of the event allows for a third, and better, way.

I conclude by repeating my *mea culpa* in anticipation of Caputo's rebuttal. My suggestion that God insists in the world, in a personal relationship with human beings, but not as a person protesting against and subverting

evil in a theologically-realistic manner, not as an *omnipotens deus* is a stronger, more robust theology, and, perhaps, not quite as minimally metaphysical as what Caputo espouses in his poetics of the event astir in the name of God. We both seem to love a similar God pragmatically; it is just that I am not as content in my faith to limit the divine intentionality to sabotage evil to the semantics of the middle voice, *und nichts ausserdem!* The call of justice or the sacred event of obligation encoded in the name of God is no quasi-Aristotelian “call calling itself,” or “event eventing itself.” On the contrary, they may both originate from the absent presence of a healing God, which Caputo allows but not really! Consequently, I will allocute to the charge of removing the brackets from the promissory reduction and re-importing a little divine being into the discussion of evil and suffering. In doing so, I will risk being called, to use one of Caputo's technical terms, a “wacko!” Nevertheless, in my defense, I offer this essay as my deposition, written in a Caputoan nomenclature, intended to be a possible paraphrasing of a weak, limited, interventive God, who may not be omnipotent but is not impotent, who may not be capable of wiping away every tear but is not so incompetent as not to dry some—a God who, like Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, weeps at cemeteries.

Notes

ⁱ John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 249. Hereafter cited as MRH; John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 47. Hereafter cited as AD.

ⁱⁱ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 272. Hereafter cited as RH.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pp. 283-85; John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 16, 64. Hereafter cited as AE; D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), pp. 1, 74. Hereafter cited as PT.

^{iv} RH, p. 280.

^v AE, p. 33.

^{vi} Ibid., p. 29.

^{vii} John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 243. Hereafter cited as WG.

^{viii} AE, pp. 237-38.

^{ix} See Ibid., pp. 53-62.

^x Ibid., p. 19.

^{xi} Ibid., pp. 146-50.

^{xii} John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-2. Hereafter cited as OR.

^{xiii} John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 134. Hereafter cited WWJD?; WG, p. 118.

^{xiv} OR, p. 123.

^{xv} John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 223. Hereafter cited as P&T; AD, pp. 61-62; WG, pp. 141-46.

^{xvi} P&T, pp. 167-69.

^{xvii} Ibid., pp. 265-66.

^{xviii} WG, p. 1; John D. Caputo, “In Search of a Sacred Anarchy: An Experiment in Danish Deconstruction,” in *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy after Postmodernity*, eds. Martin Beck Matušík and William L. McBride (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), p. 230. Hereafter cited as SA.

^{xix} AD, p. 143.

^{xx} Ibid., p. 73.

^{xxi} Ibid., p. 143.

^{xxii} WG, p. 94.

^{xxiii} P&T, p. 334.

^{xxiv} Ibid., pp. 291, 334; WWJD?, p. 40; OR, p. 11; MRH, p. 193.

^{xxv} See WWJD?, pp. 37-56.

xxvi MRH, p. 236.

xxvii Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 280-81. Hereafter cited as WD.

xxviii AE, p. 220.

xxix AD, p. 147.

xxx MRH, p. 257.

xxxi WG, p. 92.

xxxii Ibid., p. 88.

xxxiii MRH, p. 257.

xxxiv AD, p. 65.

xxxv P&T, pp. 187-88.

xxxvi WG, pp. 11-12.

xxxvii Ibid., p. 16.

xxxviii Ibid., p. 40.

xxxix Ibid., p. 112.

xl WG, p. 79.

xli Ibid., p. 77.

xlii P&T, p. 246; OR, p. 113; MRH, p. 240; AD, pp. 52-53, 130.

xliii OR, p. 114.

xliv WG, p. 33. Caputo adopts Kierkegaard's image of "rouged theology," the result of Christian theology's lust after social prestige, influence, and affirmation. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, eds. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 32.

xlvi WG, pp. 7-8.

xlvi WWJD?, p. 59; WG, p. 13; P&T, p. 95.

xlvii OR, pp. 7-8.

xlviii John D. Caputo, "Temporal Transcendence: The Very Idea of *à venir* in Derrida," in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 199.

xlix WG, p. 5.

¹ SA, p. 235; WG, pp. 6-7, 90.

^{li} WG, p. 88.

^{lii} WWJD?, pp. 63-80, 90-116.

^{liii} WG, pp. 13-17; WWJD?, p. 86.

^{liv} SA, p. 240.

^{lv} Cf. B. Keith Putt, "A What Do I Love When I Love My God? An Interview with John D. Caputo," in *Religion With/Out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*, ed. James H. Olthuis (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 167.

^{lvi} MRH, p. 186.

^{lvii} WG, pp. 17, 26; WWJD?, p. 82; SA, pp. 227-28; PT, p. 124.

^{lviii} WG, p. 90.

^{lix} Ibid., p. 13.

^{lx} WG, pp. 113-24.

^{lxi} P&T, p. 68; WWJD?, pp. 55-56.

^{lxii} WG, p. 10.

^{lxiii} Ibid., p. 40.

^{lxiv} Ibid., p. 122.

^{lxv} OR, pp. 8-9.

^{lxvi} Ibid., p. 128.

^{lxvii} Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism or The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah

^{lxviii} (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 1998), p. 68; Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

^{lxviii} P&T, pp. 76, 115, 338.

^{lxix} WWJD?, p. 54.

^{lxx} WG, p. 254.

^{lxxi} P&T, p. 140. Caputo has long loved this Pauline phrase, *ta me onta*, the "non-beings" that, according to a theology of weakness, God uses to confound the wise, the powerful, and those who have some ontological status and prestige. Cf. AE, pp. 55, 237; SA, p.

239; MRH, p. 218; OR, p. 124; John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 7, 183.

^{lxxii} WG, p. 180.

^{lxxiii} Ibid., pp. 93-94.

^{lxxiv} OR, p. 16.

^{lxxv} SA, p. 232. I borrow the phrase Apenumbra of power from Caputo's reading of Foucault and acknowledge taking the phrase out of its original context in order to make a theological point (AE, p. 214)!

^{lxxvi} WG, p. 45.

^{lxxvii} SA, p. 238.

^{lxxviii} OR, pp. 8-9.

^{lxxix} WG, p. 33.

^{lxxx} Ibid., pp. 253-54.

^{lxxxi} P&T, p. 123.

^{lxxxii} WG, p. 39.

^{lxxxiii} AE, p. 32.

^{lxxxiv} Ibid., p. 244.

^{lxxxv} WG, p. 251.

^{lxxxvi} AD, p. 56.

^{lxxxvii} WG, p. 38.

^{lxxxviii} WWJD?, p. 88.

^{lxxxix} Ibid., p. 95.

^{xc} WG, pp. 88, 91.

^{xci} Ibid., p. 13; AD, pp. 54-55; cf. also WD, p. 176.

^{xcii} See my "Risking Love and the Divine Perhaps: Postmodern Poetics of a Vulnerable God," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34 (Summer 2007): 193-214.

^{xciii} Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 68.

^{xciv} AE, pp. 173-74.

^{xcv} Ibid., p. 174.