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THE DANGERS OF DEALING WITH DERRIDA:
REVISITING THE CAPUTO-HÄGGLUND DEBATE ON THE
"RELIGIOUS" READING OF DECONSTRUCTION

On the surface, the [debate between John D. Caputo and Martin Hägglund in the Spring 2011 edition](#) of *The Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* seems to be a straightforward discussion between mutually opposing views on religion – on the one hand, Caputo, who claims an essentially “religious” reading of Derrida; and on the other hand, Hägglund, who finds instead a “radical atheism” at the heart of Derrida’s thought.

The force (and, at times, the rhetoric) with which the two disagree with each other further confirms the mutually-opposing-views theory of the debate. Unfortunately, I see nothing in the debate itself that suggests that the two actually disagree with each other when it comes to understanding the logic of Derrida’s work – so from whence comes the debate?

The debate comes, I maintain, not from differing interpretations of the logic of deconstruction, but from following Derrida in the first place. The debate therefore illustrates well the dangers – but also the benefits – of meaningfully engaging with Derrida. I would here like to use this debate as a way of exploring those dangers, and also the benefits. The question I will seek to answer is not “Who is right in this debate,” but rather “How did this debate happen in the first place?”.

In answering the latter question, I hope to move beyond merely exploring which of them has Derrida ‘right,’ to the underlying tension animating anyone who wants to interact meaningfully with Derrida’s work. To get caught up in the theism-atheism issue is to miss precisely what is at stake in this debate: the use (and perhaps necessary abuse) of deconstruction.

THEISM VS. ATHEISM

Before we can get at those stakes, though, we must highlight what seems to be the key issue of the debate, the issue that gets it underway in the first place: the question of the viability of the ‘religious’ understanding of Derrida.

Hägglund is to be commended for the clarity (and, for the most part, the charity) of his response to Caputo, and for the close attention he pays to the texts under discussion (his own, in [Radical Atheism](#), Caputo’s, and Derrida’s). As we shall see, this is not merely accidental, but is tied to the very essence of his argument, of his analysis of deconstruction.

By paying close attention to the context of the debate, Hägglund is able to clearly delineate the bounds in which he will use deconstruction: he is analyzing Caputo's use of Derrida to show that the former seriously misunderstands the logic of the latter. This not only provides the context in which deconstructive analysis is to be used or employed here, but implicitly suggests the context and purposes for which deconstruction is to be used or employed in general.

As such, we cannot pass over in silence the methodological assumption at work in the use of the term "atheism" to frame the debate. Hägglund begins his response by highlighting Caputo's (and Richard Kearney's) condemnation of "metaphysical" religion (126-127),¹ conceding that there is a certain "atheism" at work in their work as well. That Hägglund focuses his response on Caputo clearly illustrates that this debate is about the use and abuse of deconstruction, and not about the religious claims at work, since it is Kearney's writings that more closely mirrors Hägglund's own position on that topic (namely, that a certain atheistic moment is necessary at the heart of every action that claims to be 'religious').²

After briefly outlining Kearney and Caputo's responses to (i.e., agreements with) the "new atheism" of Dawkins and Hitchens, Hägglund quickly clarifies the object of his concern: the "opposition between two ways of relating to the future (one that generates 'war' by seeking to master or calculate time, the other that brings 'peace' by renouncing the attempt to program what will happen) [that] is central to Caputo's reading of Jacques Derrida" (127).

While this seems to abandon the question of atheism, we will see that it does not. Hägglund defines his use of the term atheism as the denial of the existence of absolute immunity (140). This is radicalized by him to include the denial also of the very desire for such immunity. As he puts it, "the radical atheism of deconstruction seeks to elucidate that what we desire and dream of is itself inhabited by autoimmunity" (140). Atheism, then, is the denial of purity, the denial that anything wholly good, wholly "immune from evil" (131), that is, from contamination by what is not it, exists. Hägglund's 'atheistic' claim is that everything is autoimmune, "that the good in its *actuality* is already violated by evil, already involved in its own destruction," and that this latter claim is necessitated by Derrida's understanding of time (131).

Before we move on to evaluate the relation between atheism and time, we must consider this definition of atheism. Clearly, if atheism is the necessity that nothing can be "purely" separated from its opposite, that the good is always already, in itself and not from without, violated by evil, then its opposite must be the claim that such purity does exist, that contamination is

¹ All in text citations in this paper will be to Caputo and Hägglund's papers in Volume 11 no. 2 of JCRT, unless otherwise noted.

² While there are obvious differences in what this means for Kearney and for Hägglund, that these differences are not the object of Hägglund's argument clearly shows that the main concern is not with the atheism question, but with the use of Derrida, for which Caputo is a more logical debate partner.

extrinsic, not intrinsic, and therefore that we can speak—at least theoretically or abstractly, if not in actuality—of pure dichotomies, pure distinctions in which each term in the distinction is unsullied by its opposite (129).

To speak of such purity in regards to traditional theism—with its predilection for ‘omni-’ attributes (omniscience, omnibenevolence, omnipotence, etc.)—makes some sense. But this is, of course, precisely why Caputo et. al. deny such theism in their attempt to revive the religious.

This debate is not really about atheism and theism, however, nor is it primarily about atheism and the “religious”. Rather, it is about purity, and the use of pure distinctions in deconstruction (hence, Hägglund’s objection to Caputo’s two types of relating to the future). Hägglund does an admirable job of tracing his condemnation of such ‘pure’ distinctions back to Derrida, and of showing Derrida’s insistence on the presence of ‘autoimmunity’ (one could also use language of necessary contamination, intertwining, etc.).

One could quibble with the precise nature of Hägglund’s reading of Derrida on some issues,³ but his overall point on this score seems undoubtedly true: the logic of deconstruction at work in Derrida is one that undermines sharp distinctions and dichotomies in favor of intertwining and autoimmunity. His “atheistic” reading of the logic of deconstruction seems incontestable—so incontestable, in fact, that I do not think Caputo could disagree with it.

THE LOGIC OF DECONSTRUCTION

But the debate is not over; it has not yet really begun. There is another methodological assumption at work in Hägglund’s response – the (seeming) reduction of deconstruction primarily to a “logic.” To see this at work, let us return to the connection between radical atheism and Derrida’s understanding of time, as this connection is explained by Hägglund. Radical atheism is the notion that the good is autoimmune, that is, self-destroying – the good immunizes itself against itself when it tries to immunize itself against evil, because good and evil are necessarily intertwined.

One cannot separate a ‘pure’ good from a ‘pure evil,’ because the good is always already conditioned by evil: “Even if all external threats are evaded, the good is therefore compromised from within, since the attack on its integrity is already operative within the good that is defended” (132).

To explain this matter, Hägglund appeals to Derrida’s notion of time, specifically that the present is auto-immune because it effaces itself in its very coming-to-be: “Given that the present ceases to be as soon as it comes to be, it attacks its own integrity from the beginning and makes it impossible for anything to be unscathed” (131). Everything is scathed by the scission

³ More precisely, I might disagree with what seems to be Hägglund’s univocal use of time, instead of accounting for the dual aspects of time (not only as moving from the present to the future but also the present’s being conditioned and made “out of joint” by the future) that Derrida discusses at length in *Specters of Marx*. I explore this duality, though not explicitly in relation to Hägglund, in much more detail in *Futurity in Phenomenology: Promise and Method in Husserl, Levinas and Derrida* (Fordham University Press, 2012).

between present and non-present, and specifically, it seems, between the present and the future, because what is now will cease to be, the future radically cuts off the present.

Hence, our desire to maintain something in the present is, in fact, a desire to project the present into the future; as such, it is necessarily opened up to a future that inevitably risks that it will not bring more of the same, but will bring instead rupture and destruction: “one cannot protect anything without committing it to a future that allows it to live on and by the same token exposes it to corruption” (132).

This opening is constitutive of experience in general. “In order to do anything, we must have faith in the future and in those on whom we depend, since we cannot *know* what will happen or what others will do to us. Consequently, the faith that sustains us, the trust that allows us to act, is necessarily open to being deceived and the credit granted to the other open to being ruinous” (132).

But the rupture described so far is only a *potential* rupture: the future *may* be other than the present. There is a *risk* of being separated from the past, but not a necessity. It is precisely this risk and potential, according to Hägglund, that opens the possibility of meaningful life in the present. This leads to Hägglund’s key notion of *survival*: taking the time to live by postponing death (133). Survival requires retaining the past, “to keep it in resistance to loss,” while simultaneously living on into a future that necessarily risks being separated from its past (133).

Hence, every present is characterized by a rupture—but this rupture opens up the possibility of meaningful life in the present: “If life were fully present in itself—if it were not haunted by past and future, by what has been and what may be—there would be no reason to care about life, since nothing could happen to it” (133).

While this understanding of survival offers a unique (and somewhat compelling) argument against certain religious readings of immortality—living forever would eliminate the risk of the future, and therefore would eliminate the meaningfulness of life itself in the present, and therefore would in fact be death rather than life (133)—we have already said that the point of this debate is *not* about the atheism-theism (and perhaps not even the atheism-religion) question, but rather about deconstruction itself.

And on this score, Hägglund’s argument requires a sharp distinction between logical structure, on the one hand, and content or context, on the other. As we have already discussed, the fact that the good can be challenged *from without* is not enough to threaten the purity of the good itself. Challenging purity by the appeal to autoimmunity requires an *intrinsic* contamination, not merely the possibility of an extrinsic one (130-131, 132). As such, the *possibility* that the future *might* be bad is itself not enough to convince us of the autoimmunity of the good—it might be enough to make belief in the notion of immortality self-referentially incoherent, but this hardly makes the very possibility of experience a *necessary* conflation of good and evil (or any pair of binary opposites).

The reason Hägglund is able to make the latter move is not because of the fact that the future *might* be bad, but rather because of the structural condition that underlies this fact: “the threat that is intrinsic to the structure of the promise does not only consist in that the promise may be broken, but can also consist in that the promise may be kept... This does not mean just that the promise is always already threatened [i.e., from without]; it also means that the promise is [intrinsically] *threatening*” (129-130n.13). It is only by appeal to this structural condition that Hägglund is able to make his claim regarding radical atheism and autoimmunity.⁴

But this structure can only be understood in opposition to the context in which, or the content by which, it operates. And this very opposition—central to Derrida’s distinction between messianicity (as a structure of experience) and messianisms (as historically situated phenomenon)—is problematized by Derrida himself, throughout his oeuvre (most notably in the notion of the messianic, as the intertwining of messianicity and messianisms).⁵

While I’m sure Hägglund would agree that this distinction cannot remain simple, I fear that it does so too often in his response to Caputo—and not necessarily as a fault of Hägglund. There is something in talking about Derrida—perhaps in reflecting on anyone’s work, but more explicitly in Derrida—that makes the use of such distinctions perhaps necessary, even as one problematizes them.

But we must not get ahead of ourselves. Let us remain with Hägglund’s account of the structure of openness, the “logic of survival,” as it applies to Derrida’s account of time. It is on this notion of time that Hägglund makes his first strong stand against Caputo’s “religious” reading of Derrida. Building on the Derridean distinction between faith (as a structure) and the religious (as the desire for the unscathed) that is at work in *Faith and Knowledge*, Hägglund challenges Caputo’s claim that *Radical Atheism* tries to suppress Derrida’s analysis of faith and that Hägglund attacks the very notion of religion itself (cf. 33 and 134), instead arguing that the notion of faith itself requires the “unconditional affirmation of survival” (134).

But this “unconditional” is not something that happens, or will happen, but is rather the “exposure to what happens” that is constitutive of survival, and a necessary condition, as we have already seen, for any experience, for “all responses to life” (135), since only this “exposure to what happens” can enable us to say “‘yes’ to the coming of the future” (134).

“But for the same reason, every affirmation is essentially compromised and threatened by negation, since the coming of the future also entails all the threats to which one may want to say “‘no’” (134-135). While this is true, it cannot be so only because of the “threat” of what might come in the future, in

⁴ Hence Hägglund’s repeated use of the term “the logic of,” applied to: “radical atheism” (129, 134), radical evil (131 ff.), “survival” (133), “the trace” (135), etc.

⁵ One could also look to Derrida’s early interactions with Husserl, where he repeatedly makes this point: cf. *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy* as well as *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*.

the next instant. It is not (only) that the future to come might not be pleasant that threatens us in the present, but rather that the (structural) to-come-ness of the future already problematizes, opens up, and conditions the present. This conditioning of the present entails that one's "commitment to the survival of someone or something" that alone opens the possibility of responsibility (135) is not a commitment I make, but is a commitment that I am, a commitment made on my behalf by another.⁶

Hägglund is not unaware of this argument – though he does not here draw out the full implications of its logic for its logic. Indeed, he says it is "Derrida's notion of 'the trace' [that] provides the logical infrastructure" for the constitutive nature of survival for experience in general (135). Hägglund is clear here that the temporality of the trace "should here not be conflated with the chronology of linear time" but is instead a "constitutive deferral and delay that is inherent in any temporal event" (135).

It is precisely this constitutive nature (of the trace, but also of autoimmunity and survival) that explains Derrida's notion of the unconditional: "The autoimmunity that follows from this tracing of time is what Derrida calls the structure of the event and he emphasizes that it is *unconditional*, in the sense that it is the condition for anything to happen" (136). The unconditional is unconditional precisely because it is the necessary condition for anything to happen.

While Hägglund emphasizes this (I think correct) understanding of the unconditional in order to challenge Caputo's use of the same term, doing so undercuts the very logic of autoimmunity that he explains so well. Where he takes Caputo to task for discussing the unconditional as "a 'promise' or a 'dream'" (136), Hägglund is quick to point out that his critique of Caputo centers on the fact that, on his reading of Caputo, the "unconditional and the conditional would thus belong to two different "orders'" (136).

The problem that Hägglund suggests here is that Caputo establishes a distinction between what actually happens (the conditional), on the one hand, and an unconditional promise that does not happen, but rather calls to us from somewhere beyond what happens, beyond the conditional. Such a distinction violates the radical atheism that undercuts the very possibility of such "pure" distinctions, the possibility of a "pure" beyond experience.

In Hägglund's words "Derrida is *not* claiming that something unconditional is promised; he is arguing that any promise is unconditionally exposed to being broken or betrayed" (137). Hägglund's emphasis here again on the possibility of being broken or betrayed I fear is unhelpful – it is not just that *I might* be wrong, that the promise *might* be broken, or that the promised *might* be terrible that underlies Derrida's notion of the unconditioned. Hägglund's position here seem too caught up in the possibility of external contamination – it is not just that the promise *might* be broken or terrible that structures the unconditional, but also the fact that *the unconditional is itself conditioned*.

⁶ Cf. Derrida's analysis of Hamlet in *Specters of Marx*.

I am not sure whether or not Häggglund would agree with this last point. While the logic of deconstruction that he so admirably (and clearly) lays out suggests that he would agree, or *must* agree, he seems to rely in this article on the notion of (logical) structure as what distinguishes the unconditioned from the conditioned/ “For the same reason, the unconditional does not belong to a different ‘order’ than the here and now. The unconditional is the spacing of time that is the *structure* of the here and now, the structure of what happens, of the event” (137).

This reliance, while perhaps contextual (i.e., operative primarily in this engagement with Caputo in response to Caputo’s perceived under-emphasis of this understanding of the term), is nonetheless problematic, and for a two-fold reason: first, it undercuts the very logic that Häggglund has so clearly embraced; and second, it misconstrues Caputo’s use of the term.

First things first, however. Emphasizing the structure of experience *vis-à-vis* the experience (of experience) is not unwarranted—Derrida himself repeatedly makes such a move, as Häggglund so helpfully points out—but it is unfinished. For while Derrida will distinguish between the structure and the content of the experience, he is also careful to point out that the structure can never be wholly separated from the content. This points lies at the center of *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*, and has “has not stopped imposing itself on [Derrida] from thence forward”⁷ – hence his use of “quasi-transcendentals” instead of mere “transcendentals”. To refer to another early work of Derrida: *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* – not even logical structures.

The conditioned nature of the unconditional is important here, not as a critique of Häggglund’s reading of Derrida, but of his reading of Caputo. That is not to say that he is not right in some of what he says about Caputo, but I fear that he misses the larger point of Caputo’s “religious” reading of Derrida, and so perhaps also the nature of their disagreement. The disagreement is not about the nature of the logic of deconstruction, but about what we can learn from the extra-logical conditions that have shaped that logic. The question that is at stake in the debate between Caputo and Häggglund, then, is not “What is the logic of deconstruction?”, but rather “Is deconstruction only a logic?”.

Answering the former question correctly—and we have already stipulated that we have no objection to Häggglund’s description of that logic—seems to indicate that one must answer the second question negatively. And it is in response to this latter question, I think, that one can most fruitfully read the difference between Caputo and Häggglund.

DECONSTRUCTION IN CONTEXT

If deconstruction problematizes the idea of a ‘pure’ logical structure, devoid of content or any other extra-logical factors, then we find ourselves forced, by deconstruction’s own logic, to question the extra-logical factors of that logic.

⁷ Cf. “Preface to the 1990 Edition” of *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy* (trans. Marian Hobson [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003]), xv.

We can think of this as the relationship between the structures of experience, on the one hand, and the experience (or content) of experience, on the other. This content of experience—even of the structures themselves—is conditioned by the context in which those experiences take place.

Indeed, this is precisely the distinction between Kantian transcendentals and Derridean quasi-transcendentals—for Kant, transcendentals are “pure,” devoid of content in and of themselves though they are always filled by content that remains extrinsic to those forms. That is to say, structures of experience, for Kant, operate by an *intrinsic* necessity to be put in contact with *extrinsic* factors: while *a priori* structures are always experienced with content-filled experience, we can (at least logically or theoretically) distinguish between those structures and that content, and can do so “purely”: there are (again, at least logically or theoretically) “pure” *a priori* structures, devoid of content, and “pure” content, devoid of structure.

But such purity is precisely what Hägglund (I think correctly) claims Derrida renders at least problematic, if not downright impossible. For Derrida, the very structures of experience themselves are never “pure,” but are inherited (and not just inhabited) in particular ways.⁸ So, when Hägglund claims that “Caputo and a number of other influential readers of Derrida have *misconstrued the logic* of the relation between the unconditional and the conditional” (137; emphasis added), he means to say that Caputo’s use of the language of the ‘unconditional’ is a logical problem, a violation of “the distinction between the conditional and the unconditional [that] is therefore a *logical distinction*” (138).

And, again, his later statement that “The messianic is therefore *not* an endless waiting for something that never comes, but *the structure of faith in the here and now*” (148) accuses Caputo of a logical error, a *metabasis eis allo genos*: taking something as being part of one category (i.e., of the experience of experience) that is, in fact, part of another category (the structure of experience).

Rather, one should perhaps say that the messianic is “a universal, formal *structure* upon which the very movement of justice, and hence of deconstruction, turns” (emphasis added). While this quote sounds as if it could have come from Hägglund, it in fact comes from Caputo,⁹ and suggests that the difference between Caputo and Hägglund, when it comes to the logic of deconstruction, is perhaps not as large as either of them seem to think. As such, Hägglund’s diagnosis of a category mistake is correct—but misapplied.

The problem is not in taking a logical structure to be an empirical reality; rather, the category mistake here is in employing a logical solution to an extra-logical problem. Hägglund’s attempt to counter Caputo’s misconstrual of the unconditional by claiming that “What is ‘called’ for by the unconditional is not something unconditional (e.g. unconditional love) but rather acts of engagement and performative commitments that are conditional responses to an unconditional exposure” (137) avoids the real

⁸ I discuss this in much more detail in Part 3 of *Futurity in Phenomenology*.

⁹ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religions without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 124.

point of disagreement between the two, since: a) Caputo would not, I think, disagree with this claim (as we will explore below), given that, b) while the (logical) distinction between “nonperformative exposure” and “imperative injunction (call or performative)” that Hägglund discusses in great detail (137-138) is correct, it does not speak to the issue at hand.

The difference between Hägglund and Caputo is not, precisely speaking, a logical difference, not a difference in the understanding of the logic of deconstruction. Caputo can affirm the logical distinction between the conditional and the unconditional while still speaking of a call or injunction in relation to the unconditional so long as he is not conflating the unconditional wholly with a call or injunction, but is stating instead that an “imperative injunction” is at work already *within* the “nonperformative exposure.”

The logic of deconstruction does not speak against this possibility, and perhaps even necessitates it, given its own logic of intercontamination and autoimmunity. If this possibility is granted, then we can understand Caputo as claiming precisely that the call to love, to justice, etc., is a call already within the “nonperformative exposure” itself, that is, within the very structure of (our) experience. As such, and despite how he might sound sometimes (and Hägglund does provide some seemingly damning quotations in his article), Caputo would not be claiming that the unconditional is something that we are called to live out—that, somehow, by the “grace of God,” we will be able to live unconditioned lives or unconditioned anything—but rather that our “unconditional exposure,” in Hägglund’s language, is not, itself, a pure and neutral exposure, but is instead an exposure that is always already inflected by certain tropes or themes (love, justice, democracy, etc.).

If this is true, then Caputo would not be arguing that the *logic* of deconstruction favors God over not-God, but rather that there is something in the extra-logical aspects of deconstruction that support—or could support—such a notion.

To truly examine the debate between Hägglund and Caputo, then, one must examine the extra-logical factors, the “context,” of deconstruction. This context is not simply the philosophical history by which deconstruction was arrived at as a philosophical movement, nor is it merely the historical and biographical factors that shaped the person of Jacques Derrida.

While it would include these things, and others that factored into the “construction” of deconstruction, it would also have to pay attention to the context in which the logic of deconstruction is to be *employed*, not just the context in which it was *constructed*. As such, for the debate to truly get at the point of real contention, it would have to evaluate Caputo’s arguments that:

- a) the logic of deconstruction ought to be deployed in religious contexts;
- b) we ought to use that logic in support of ‘good’ things over ‘bad’ things; and
- c) that Derrida would say that Justice, Democracy, etc., are ‘good’ things we ought to try to support.

The first of these three claims Hägglund would not seem to contest, at least insofar as it does not seem to be contradictory to the logic of deconstruction. Hägglund himself suggests that “what should be done cannot be settled on the basis of radical atheism” (150), that is, on the logic of exposure, but rather that our passion to do something—to do anything—requires that logic’s being always already operative. As such, he would seem to have no complaint against using a careful analysis of that logic in a variety of contexts.

That religious contexts could be included here would follow, as long as there is no objection on Hägglund’s part, to the idea of religion itself or in general. And, contrary to some of Caputo’s claims to the contrary, there does not seem to be, since he can claim that there are “any number of situations in which the given structure of a society makes religious discourse the most powerful tool for mobilizing a struggle against injustice” (149).

The second claim—that we ought to use the logic of deconstruction to support ‘good’ things rather than ‘bad’ things—is potentially contentious for two reasons. First, one could contend that deconstruction contains no such ‘oughts,’ but is rather neutral. Caputo accuses Hägglund of such ethical neutrality, a point that Hägglund refutes by stating that he does “not reduce the other or alterity to something ‘neutral’ (as Caputo claims). Indeed, I never speak of alterity or the other as ‘neutral’ but rather seek to analyze what follows from the constitutive undecidability of alterity” (142-3, n. 45).

However, if Hägglund wants to claim that the “constitutive undecidability of alterity,” as a logical structure of experience, is itself neither good nor bad but remains politically, ethically, and religiously neutral, then, while he may be right in his defense here, it hardly constitutes a compelling defense. Rather, it merely pushes the critique back one level—now it is not the other who is ‘neutralized,’ but alterity as a structure of experience. But if one reduces deconstruction to a logic, then one implicitly reduces the importance of the other to the structure of alterity, and if this latter is, in fact, neutral, then Caputo’s critique seems to hold (if not necessarily in the manner that Caputo seems to indicate initially).

We see this line of thinking emerge in Hägglund near the end of the article. There, he states “Whether a given struggle should be supported or resisted is a different question, which *cannot be answered through deconstructive analysis* and requires concrete political engagement. It is precisely *by not providing an ethical or political principle of any kind* that deconstruction politicizes our actions and insists on a responsibility from which one cannot be absolved” (149-150; emphasis added).

While on the surface Hägglund is right to claim that deconstructive analysis is neither ethical nor political, but instead makes us aware of the necessary conditions for them, by stating it this way he clearly indicates that that analysis itself—the logic of that analysis, of deconstruction—is ethically and politically neutral. Indeed, it is precisely “the priority of the good that informs [Caputo’s] fable of God” that Hägglund “takes issue with” (129).

This ‘taking-issue’ is not only, then, in the prevalence given to the good, but also in the presence of a simplistic distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ a

distinction that is inherently problematic, from the perspective of a deconstructive logic: “evil is intrinsic to the good that we desire. Evil is thus ‘radical’ for Derrida in the sense that it is at the root of the good as such” (131). Challenging this simplistic dichotomy between ‘good’ and bad,’ then, is the second reason one could contest the claim that we ought to use the logic of deconstruction to support ‘good’ things rather than ‘bad’ things.

Clearly, the logic of deconstruction undercuts such a simplistic dichotomy. The question, then, is whether the context of deconstruction (and of every life in general) requires such distinctions, whether or not experience itself requires distinctions, thereby establishing such distinctions as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for all the responses of life. In this regard, such distinctions would be co-equal with the logic of survival, which is also a necessary but not sufficient condition for life, as Hägglund analyzes it (135).

Such a claim about the necessity of distinctions—and perhaps specifically of the need for a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’—is implicitly operative in Hägglund’s later discussions of the secular and the religious and justice and violence. There, Hägglund is clear that the “notion of radical evil does not seek to justify violence or to reduce all forms of violence to the same” (146), that is, that deconstruction, even the logic of deconstruction, does not seek to do away with the notions of justice or of violence—or the distinction between them—but rather is meant to help us better understand the relationship between them: “The point of this argument is not to discredit calls for justice, but to recognize that these calls are always already inscribed in an economy of violence” (146).

While the necessity of this inscription surely problematizes our understanding of justice (or love or peace, etc.), it does not seem to do away with the distinction itself. To wit, “The point is not only that what I valorize as good can turn out to be bad, or that the deed I hold to be good can turn out to be evil. The point is also that even when I do good—even when I devote myself to someone in a loving or generous way—I necessarily do evil, since my very act of devotion is also an act of exclusion and sacrifice” (145).

The question, then, is whether this necessary intertwining—the co-contamination indicative of autoimmunity—renders the distinction between the two elements obsolete or not. According to Hägglund, it does not. He is adamant that “the temporal finitude of survival,” which is so important to his understanding of the logic of deconstruction, “always entails discrimination” (147). This discrimination is not only logical, but is also evaluatively inflected: “Whatever we do, we are inscribed in an economy of violence where matters are urgent precisely because everything we do makes a difference *for better or worse*” (147; emphasis added).

This evaluative necessity re-emerges implicitly every time we speak of the “struggle for justice” insofar as such a struggle requires the claim that justice is ‘better’ than injustice. So, while “the struggle for justice cannot aim at achieving a nonviolent peace,” do we not need some notion of ‘peace’ as distinct from ‘violence’ in order to motivate a struggle for justice and against violence? While the two sides of a distinction must be understood as intertwined or co-contaminated—autoimmune—we still must preserve the

distinction, for one thing cannot be intertwined with itself, and something can be autoimmune only when it maintains a distinction (in this case somewhat false) between itself and its other: taking itself to be other than itself, it attacks itself as a foreign invader.¹⁰ Paying such rigorous attention to analytic distinctions is important to Derrida, and is what motivates his desire to show more accurately the relationship between the relata.¹¹

Finally, then, let us revisit the third claim that Caputo makes in regard to deconstruction, namely that Derrida would think Justice, Democracy, etc. are 'good' rather than 'bad' things, which is not to say, as we have tried to show above, that one is absolutely good and the other absolutely bad, but merely that we can distinguish—though not 'purely'—between them and their opposite, and that, for whatever reason, we ought to prefer them to their opposite. It is this question of "reason" that Hägglund raises in response to Caputo, claiming that Caputo does not provide any reason for why we should think that it is better to be more open, rather than less open, to the future.

Since being 'open to the future' is how Caputo glosses the preference for Justice, Democracy, etc., as Hägglund ably shows, we must view it as a direct counter to Caputo when Hägglund claims explicitly that "Derrida never aligns any of these terms [gift, justice, hospitality] with the good" (130). Hägglund argues against Caputo's claim on two points, one logical, one extra-logical. However, it is telling that, in dealing with the extra-logical point, he answers it only by appeal to logic again, so in reality he argues against Caputo on this score only by appealing to logic—which, we have tried to show, is indicative of his argument to this point, and is so necessarily. But we cannot get ahead of ourselves.

First, Hägglund argues that the logic of deconstruction cannot abide the kind of simplistic dualism that seems to be operative in Caputo. "For Caputo to refute my argument, then, he would have to show that there is something in the very claim made upon us by the future that 'calls' us always to be more open rather than less, always to expose ourselves more rather than less.

Whatever such an unequivocal call may be—and however Caputo may claim to have heard it—it would by definition deny the undecidability of the future and the responsibility of deciding whether or not one should be more or less open" (144). Here, Hägglund opens the very argument I am trying to make—i.e., that Caputo gets outside the logical claims that Hägglund is making by appealing to the extra-logical factors in the logical structures themselves—but then tries to obviate them by appealing only to the logical factors.

¹⁰ Cf. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1-78 (cf. especially 73n.27); and "Autoimmunity: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in *Philosophy in a time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* ed. Giovanna Borradori (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 85-136.

¹¹ Hence, Derrida can refer to himself as an "analytic philosopher" in all seriousness; cf. Derrida, "Response to Moore," in *Arguing with Derrida* ed. Simon Glendinning (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 83-88; 83-84.

And he is not incorrect—such extra-logical factors do require the logical structures that they constitute in order to have sense themselves. As such, challenging the neutrality of those structures challenges the very conditions that make possible ethical action in the world, including the kind of ethical inflection that would be posited as the extra-logical factors structuring the logical structure, and so would seem to defeat their own possibility. This is similar, structurally speaking, to Hägglund’s argument against religious immortality earlier.

In a footnote, Hägglund then points to the evidence that Caputo gives in support of his claims: that Derrida said, in an interview, “one should only ever oppose events that one thinks will block the future or that bring death with them: events that would put an end to the possibility of the event” (144 n. 47; quoted from Caputo’s article, 39). Hägglund claims that this is merely “an imprecise remark by Derrida,” and one, further, that is contradicted by the logic of the passage in which it is found.

He states that “Derrida’s remark would thus mean that we should not oppose any political events that fall short of being absolutely violent, which includes all forms of political violence that actually takes place,” since only absolute violence could “put an end to the possibility of the event.” Of course, this neglects the inclusion, in the first part of the quote from Derrida, of the phrase “that bring death with them.” Clearly death brings an end to life. Of course, death is only experientially possible, if it is experientially possible, on the conditions of experience, which include “survival,” as Hägglund adroitly shows, and as we have already examined above.

But death is significant here precisely for its stark introduction of non-logical factors into the sphere of life. That is, in death we are reminded that logical structures are always the logical structures of *someone*, and as such become irrelevant upon that person’s death. This is not to say that death violates those logical structures, but rather that it is of another order than those structures.

While Hägglund is, understandably and probably correctly, concerned about the idea of two distinct orders in deconstructive logic (cf. 136 ff.), this does not cancel out the fact that there might be orders other than that of logic, even for deconstruction, that is, that deconstruction might be more than just a logic. Hägglund contends that “[w]hat Derrida is arguing in the interview, however, is that the coming of the event is *not* good in itself and that we should *not* ‘give up trying to prevent certain things from coming to pass (without which there would be no decision, no responsibility, ethics or politics)’” (144n.47), and therefore Caputo’s reading of the situation—as Derrida favoring being open to the future over not being open to the future—is incorrect.

Again, logically speaking, this may be true. But Derrida, like all of us, is not merely a logical animal (some of the rhetoric in the Caputo- Hägglund debate clearly reveals this to be true of them as well). To say Derrida’s remark is “imprecise” is, itself, “imprecise”—one should say, rather, that Derrida’s remark is *logically* imprecise; this does not mean, however, that it does not precisely reveal something of Derrida’s extra-logical commitments. Hence,

Hägglund's use of the logic of deconstruction, even in opposition to Derrida's own remarks, is not incorrect, though it is perhaps imprecisely applied.

That is, while the logic itself is sound, one would need a more thorough reflection on the context in which that logic was being deployed, to consider whether or not the use was warranted in this situation (which is, of course, distinct from considering whether or not the logic was well-used, or used correctly once it was employed).

When Hägglund ends his discussion of that quotation from Derrida by stating that "Caputo does not provide any reason for why we should make this inference [that keeping the future open is better than being closed to it]; he merely assumes it" (144n.47), this quote is as damning of Hägglund as it is of Caputo. For, surely, Caputo does give reasons for this assumption—the reasons he gives just appeal to extra-logical (i.e., contextual) factors that Hägglund infers are insignificant for the study of deconstruction. However, he "does not provide any reason for why we should make this inference; he merely assumes it." Or rather, the reasons that he gives for this inference already assume the prevalence of logic in terms of deconstruction.

REVISITING ANOTHER DEBATE

But one could embrace another prevalence for deconstruction, what we have here been calling the 'extra-logical' factors of deconstruction, its contextualizations, its context. It is precisely this claim that Caputo puts forward—not that the unconditional *is* a call, but that the unconditional (structure or opening) is itself (quasi-)conditioned by a call; that the logical structure of openness—the logic of survival, the logic of deconstruction—is not a *pure*structure, but is a structured structure, is a structure that not only structures experience but is structured by experience.

Some might argue that this is a conflation of categories, a category mistake as Aristotle already warns us against. Rather, given the logic of autoimmunity and intercontamination—the logic of deconstruction—we can see that this need not be a conflation of categories, but rather a recognition of the autoimmunity of the notion of 'pure' logical structures, 'pure' experiential content, 'pure' transcendentals, 'pure' experiences—purity itself.

The 'religious' reading of Derrida is not only a reading of Derrida according to certain theological tropes or themes, but is also a contextualized reading of Derrida that deconstructs those tropes and themes, moving beyond the notion of religion as "premised on the idea of 'the unscathed' (l'indemne), which [Derrida] glosses as the pure and the untouched, the sacred and the holy, the safe and sound" (129) toward another reading, not just of Derrida, but of religion.

Caputo's "religion without religion" is not (just) a religion without violence (such a thing would, indeed, be impossible for us finite creatures, as Hägglund repeatedly points out), but a religion that moves beyond the 'religious' yearning for the pure and the untouched to an acceptance that such purity is not possible for finite creatures—and perhaps, as Hägglund rather convincingly argues, not even desirable to be achieved by finite creatures.

But remaining in this acceptance, while perhaps adequate for the logic of deconstruction, is not sufficient for the context of deconstruction—neither for the philosophical and biographical context of its construction, as Caputo tries to argue, nor for the employment of deconstruction in religious contexts that Caputo (among others) seeks to enact. In this regard, it is not entirely accurate to say that “[a]ll of Caputo’s work on a supposedly deconstructive religion is structured around this opposition between a ‘good’ religion that welcomes others and a ‘bad’ religion that excludes others” (127)—but it is not entirely inaccurate, either.

Logically speaking, Caputo is aware that the logical structures of deconstruction neither welcome nor shun: *khôra* doesn’t care. The question is whether *khôra*’s not caring can be squared with the “‘the desire for the impossible’ that according to Caputo is ‘the common passion’ (111) of deconstruction and religion” (128).¹² Can Caputo say both that the logical structures of deconstruction do not care and yet still claim that deconstruction has a passionate desire for the impossible?

This question is one that Caputo has had to answer long before Martin Hägglund appeared on the philosophical scene. Over 20 years ago—long before the publication of *Radical Atheism* or *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*—someone else was taking Caputo to task for his use of deconstruction. However, on that occasion, James H. Olthuis played the role that Caputo now occupies in the debate with Hägglund, and Caputo played the role of Martin Hägglund.

In an exchange begun in 1990,¹³ Olthuis posed two possibilities to Caputo: “A Cold and Comfortless Hermeneutic or a Warm and Trembling Hermeneutic,” and wondered why Caputo felt the need to opt for the former over the latter. To move much too quickly through this debate (surely one debate per article is enough!), one could say that Olthuis wants to claim that, given the necessity of interpretation opened up by the analysis of undecidability at the heart of deconstruction, it is the case that every interpretation of that undecidability—every interpretation, that is to say, of the logical structure of openness, deferral, spacing, etc. at the heart of deconstruction—is precisely an *interpretation*, that is, a particular ‘take’ on that structure, taken up within a

¹² The citation in the quote refers to Caputo’s article in the debate in JCRT.

¹³ Cf. Olthuis, “A Cold and Comfortless Hermeneutic or a Warm and Trembling Hermeneutic: A Conversation with John D. Caputo,” *Christian Scholars Review* XIX:4 (1990), 345-362; the debate continued in Caputo, “Hermeneutics and Faith: A Response to Professor Olthuis,” and Olthuis, “Undecidability and the Impossibility of Faith: Continuing the Conversation with Professor Caputo,” in *Christian Scholars Review* XX (1991), 164-170 and 171-73, respectively; Olthuis, “The Test of *Khôra*: *grâce à Dieu*” and Caputo, “Hoping in hope, hoping against hope: a Response,” in Olthuis (ed.), *Religion With/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 110-119 and 120-149 (esp. 144-148), respectively; Caputo, “Olthuis’ Risk: A Heretical Tribute,” in Smith and Venema (eds.), *The Hermeneutics of Charity: Interpretation, Selfhood and Postmodern Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 41-51; and Olthuis, “Testing the Heart of *Khôra*: Anonymous or Amorous?” and Caputo, “The Chance of Love: A response to Olthuis” in Zlomislic and DeRoo, (eds.), *Cross and Khôra: Deconstruction and Christianity in the Work of John D. Caputo* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2010), 174-186 and 187-196, respectively.

stream or line of life and interpretation that conditions the reader in one direction or the other.

If this is so, then construing this structure as neutral and uncaring is no more nor less ‘purely true’ than is construing the structure as already ‘primed’ for love. This latter point is very different than equating the logical structure with love – rather, it suggests that something in our tradition causes us to understand that structure as predisposing (though not programming) us toward love, toward openness toward others, etc.

In response, Caputo carefully and consistently insists upon the neutrality of the logical structures of deconstruction. In his last exchange on the matter, he points out the difference that context makes: “I have more than once observed to myself that while my religious friends ask me why I am so dark, my secular friends ask me why I am so upbeat.”¹⁴

In that context, given that he is responding to a ‘religious’ friend, Caputo ceaselessly emphasizes the ‘coldness’ or ‘darkness,’ the fundamental neutrality, of the logic of deconstruction. In fact, even love – repeatedly cited by Hägglund as an example of Caputo’s missing the boat on deconstruction (cf. 129, 136-7, 140, etc.) – “is what it is because of its differential spacing from the odious, or amorphous, or amortizing,”¹⁵ which is to say, that it “is in virtue of *differance* that ‘God,’ ‘no God,’ ‘love,’ etc. get into play and we can discuss them, or live our lives with them uppermost in our minds, or whatever we are going to do with them.”¹⁶

In summarizing his response to Olthuis’ initial query about the two interpretations of hermeneutics, Caputo states: “the notion that things are deeply guided by God, as a loving force that steers all things mightily to the good, or as an amorous womb that keeps us safe against the cold [roughly Olthuis’ position], stands alongside the competing view that the cosmos is a vast cosmic stupidity that does not know we are here and could care less.”¹⁷

After emphasizing this (religious) neutrality that could, I think, have been taken from the pages of Hägglund himself, Caputo then asks: “then why not say that deconstruction is absolutely neutral instead of insisting that deconstruction is affirmation, *oui, oui*, indeed that deconstruction is a work of love...How can we square this neutrality with the affirmative character of deconstruction an affirmation of the undeconstructible?”¹⁸ Caputo’s answer to this question is telling for our discussion here, in that he beings by reminding us that “this affirmation transpires in and as deconstruction, not precisely in or as *khôra/differance*, which is only part, however irreducible a part, of deconstruction’s story.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Caputo, “The Chance of Love,” 187.

¹⁵ Ibid., 190.

¹⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁷ Ibid., 192.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The logical structures of deconstruction, Caputo here states, are only a part of deconstruction. The other part consists of “an archi-faith, a more indeterminate faith [*foi*], beyond any determinate belief [*croyance*], in something that has been *promised*” (*ibid.*). This promise, however, is not to be found in the logic of deconstruction, but in something external to that logic, namely “in words like ‘democracy,’ ‘justice,’ [elsewhere he would say ‘God’],”²⁰ promises that stir *within those words* and solicit us like events waiting to happen.”²¹

It is not the logic of deconstruction that commits deconstruction to affirmation, justice, openness to the other, etc., but rather the promise inherent in the words that are employed—indeed, that shape—the context in which deconstruction was constructed, and in which it is employed (at least by Caputo). Nothing guarantees that these promises will be kept, or will not emerge as threats or nightmares—this is a “structural matter” attributable to the logic laid out by deconstruction²²—but this does not eliminate the power they have, they ought to have, as promises of something better that can spur in us the passion to act today.

Caputo wraps up this response to Olthuis by agreeing that “*after* or in light of faith, we give *khôra/difference* a new meaning, in virtue of which it is redeemed by faith,” but this “faith always presupposes an older, more unredeemed *khôra/difference*.”²³ Hence, the ‘religious’ faith “in an amorous divine matrix is a construal, a religious hermeneutic that presupposes the undecidability that in turn elicits a decision—even as the Derridean decision in favor of an aleatory event or laicized grace is also a construal of *khôra/difference*.”²⁴

Without this logical structure as a precondition, Caputo claims (in move that is reminiscent of Hägglund’s argument against religious immortality) that the notion of *difference* as love would, in fact, render love impossible: “Unless there is an elemental chanciness in life, love loses its chance and we lose the chance of love.”²⁵

Returning to the current debate, in response to Hägglund (who must, we then infer, count as a ‘secular friend’), Caputo must be understood as emphasizing the upbeat, more positive side of deconstruction—but always only of the contextualization of deconstruction, not of its logic. On the point of logic, Caputo and Hägglund are in deep agreement. The disagreement arises in where and how that logic is to be employed. Caputo is arguing, then, not that the *logic* of deconstruction supports the unconditional over the conditional, but that the *context* of deconstruction (and/or the life of Derrida) supports certain tropes or promises over others.

²⁰ Cf. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), especially chapter 6, “Hyper-Realism and the Hermeneutics of the Call.”

²¹ Caputo, “The Chance of Love,” 192.

²² *Ibid.*, 193.

²³ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

To say that deconstruction favors, say, Justice, Democracy and the Impossible, is *not* to say that the logic of deconstruction favours those things, but rather that the context in which deconstruction was constructed—and, further, the (religious) context in which Caputo is employing the deconstructive logic—is ‘primed’ to favor certain things over others. Even as the logic causes us to question all our assumptions, the context has certain assumptions (e.g., violence against other people ought to be minimized, wherever possible) that necessarily shape the use of deconstruction.

Beyond this, though—and here I move beyond the explicit words of Caputo—the logic of deconstruction tells us that all contexts have to have certain assumptions AND that the logic has to have a context itself. This relation between logic and the extra-logical factors would, according to that very logic, mirror the relationship of every ‘inside’ to its ‘outside,’ a relationship that Derrida examines most explicitly in “The Ends of Man.”

There, he states that we always find ourselves inside particular contexts, and the wish to transcend, get beyond, or even shake up those contexts requires us to make a “strategic bet” between two styles of deconstruction, the first broadly Heideggerian, the second broadly ‘French’: either to “attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain...by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, that is, equally, in language” or “to decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference.”²⁶ This latter strategy, however, is doomed to fail, since “the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground,” though this does “not suffice to annul the necessity for a ‘change of terrain.’”²⁷

Both strategies, then, attempt to transcend one’s context—to change it but, arguably, even to understand and analyze it—by remaining rooted firmly within that context: the first begins from within that context, and can then only transcend it by getting to something ‘new,’ while the second starts with something ‘new,’ but can only conceive of this as transcending the context by noticing how the ‘new’ is always already caught up in that context. As such, one cannot choose one strategy or the other; instead, “a new writing must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction,”²⁸ and therefore must attempt multiple styles, multiple languages, levels, or ‘contexts’, at one time.

THE DANGER OF DANCING WITH DERRIDA

And here we see the danger of reading Derrida. On his own logic, one must always be employing several deconstructive ‘styles,’ not merely logic. One cannot leave logical distinctions ‘pure’; yet, one can also not abandon logical distinctions. As such, we must constantly use distinctions that are simultaneously being problematized or undercut. Further, this

²⁶ Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” Derrida, in *Margins of Philosophy* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 109-136; 135.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

problematization itself occurs both logically and extra- logically, that is, according to several different styles at once.

One can only seriously examine this (which philosophical rigor demands we do) by first questioning and deconstructing the very distinction between the logical and the extra-logical, even as we, simultaneously, deconstruct the distinctions within the logical (and the extra-logical?). This second-level deconstruction must abide by the logic of deconstruction—but must it also abide by the extra-logical factors of deconstruction? Is the logic of deconstruction any more “rigorously” deconstruction than are the extra- logical factors of deconstruction?

Hägglund seems to want to answer in the affirmative to the latter question, but is hesitant to do so for the former question. Caputo, on the contrary, happily affirms the former question—*oui oui* we can imagine him saying—while uncomfortably denying the latter. This is the real issue at the heart of the debate: whether deconstruction is primarily a logic, or a part of life, a way of living, thinking, or acting in the world.

This issue is not accidental and avoidable, but is, in fact, necessary to the heart of deconstruction itself. One can never get ‘purely’ to a ‘pure’ analysis of deconstruction. We always start in the middle, as Derrida was wont to say (or illustrate, as in the left-hand column of *Glas*), situated in a context not of our own making.

To return to our earlier terminology of temporality, the good and the promise, autoimmunity entails, not only that the structure of temporality that displaces and defers the present from the past and future entails that “the threat that is intrinsic to the structure of the promise does not only consist in that the promise may be broken, but can also consist in that the promise may be kept” (129-230n.13), but also that, because of that same temporality, we are not only the kind of being that can make promises, but rather we are the kind of being that is promised. “For a promise to be assumed, someone must be there who is sensitive to the promise, who is able to say ‘I am the promise...’”.²⁹ Not only do I have assumptions and a context, but I am assumed and contextualized.

In order to be rigorous, then, we must examine all of our contextual assumptions; yet, in order to examine those assumptions, we must employ assumptions (more than likely those same ones to be examined), which must then be examined on a meta-level, again via (likely those same) assumptions, which must then be examined on a higher meta-level by assumptions, *ad infinitum*. Assumptions, context, promising—however one wants to attempt to refer to this problematic—goes all the way down through the “bottomless chessboard,”³⁰ and we never find the solid ground on which to take a firm stand. Not even the solid ground of logical structures.

²⁹ Jacques Derrida and Richard Beardsworth, “Nietzsche and the Machine,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 7 (1994): 7-66; 30.

³⁰ Cf. “Differance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 1-28; 22.

Yet stand firm we must. For Derrida also does an admirable job of pointing out the need for such contextual analysis. Just because we cannot get back to a final, a-contextual truth, does not mean that we should not analyze concepts and rigorously pursue philosophical thought. Nor can we use the impossibility of “getting to the bottom” of an issue as an excuse for lazily staying on the surface, employing poorly defined (rather than clearly defined, even if obviously complex) terms.

Studying Derrida ought to only ramp up this rigor, given both the logic that his deconstructive thought bequeaths to us, and the biographical facts of his own personal desire for rigor. Ramping up this rigor, however, requires us, also, to pay attention, logically and philosophically, to what would otherwise seem extra-logical or extra-philosophical concerns. Yet, conversely, logical analysis of extra-logical factors can yield only so much insight into those factors themselves. As philosophers, then, we seem undeniably limited in what we can pursue philosophically. Such a move is only exacerbated when one studies someone like Derrida, who purposefully multiplies styles, beyond just the logical and philosophical. As such, purely philosophical readings of Derrida are doomed to miss (at least some of) the point.

At the same time, non-philosophical readings, too, are doomed to miss (at least some of) the point, given the philosophical context and underpinnings of Derrida’s work. Perhaps the best we can do, then, is to attempt for agreement on the logic of deconstruction, and then pay explicit attention to the contextualizations (both in its construction and its employment) of deconstruction, turning the logic of deconstruction loose on its contexts.

But are we also required to turn that context loose on the logic? And is philosophy the best method of attempting to do so? Everything in the Caputo-Häggglund debate turns on the answer to these two questions, and only when these are answered can we properly examine the viability of a ‘religious’ reading of Derrida, atheistic or otherwise.