**ESCHATOLOGY AND THE EVENT: THE MESSIANIC IN JOHN D. CAPUTO'S RADICAL THEOLOGY**

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this study I search for a non-essentialist conception of liberation by searching for a non-essentialist eschatology in the work of John D. Caputo and staging a critical encounter between it and the eschatology of South African black theology. I do this by following the shift from Caputo's primary engagement with Heidegger, to his primary engagement Derrida (radical hermeneutics), and then a shift in focus from Derrida to God (radical theology). Then I focus on the eschatological nature of this radical theology by emphasizing the messianic, and then reflect on how this occasions a deconstructive reading, not just of eschatology in general, but of the eschatology of South African black theology in particular. The result is an undermining of teleological conceptions of eschatology that reduce the complexity of life to one essential point that can be met with a definite future solution. This is a shift to eschatological thinking without a telos; an eschatology that abandons the search for 'the solution' in favor of eschatology as difficult glory.

## ISISHWANKATHELO

Koluphando, ndikhangela ingcamango ngenkululeko engathintelawanga sisiseko. Oku ndikwenza ngokukhangela ingcamango ngemihla yokugqibela kwingqiqo buThixo kaJohn D. Caputo; ndithi ndakugqiba ndiyimise lengcamango, ijongane nengcamango yemihla yokugqibela yengqiqo buThixo engqale kwinkululeko yabantu abamnyama baseMzantsi Afrika. Xa ndisenza oku, ndiqala ndiqwalasele impembelelo kaMartin Heidegger kuCaputo. Ndithi ndakugqiba, ndiqondisise ukuphuma kwakhe phantsi kwempembelelo kaHeidegger, ngokuthi ajike abephansti kwempembelelo kaJacques Derrida. Olutshintsho luvelisa lento athi xa eyibiza uCaputo, yi*Radical Hermeneutics* (uphando olugqoboza ngaphaya kwesiseko, lujongane nalonto yenza ukuba kubekho isiseko endaweni yokuqala). Ukususela apho, ndiqwalasela indlela i*Radical Hermeneutics* eyiphembelela ngayo ingqiqo buThixo yakhe (i*Radical Theology*). Ndiye ndiqaphele indlela ingqiqo buThixo kaCaputo eye igqobhoze ngayo ngaphaya kwesiseko seemfundiso ngemihla yokugqibela, nangokukodwa, iimfundiso ngexesha lesiphelo zengqiqo buThixo engqale ngqo kwinkululeko yabantu abamnyama baseMzantsi Afrika. Oku kusungula indlela yokucinga ngesiphelo engqamelana nokuntsokotha kobomi, endaweni yengqiqo engakuniki ngqalelo okokuntsokotha, isuke ibeke phambili imfezeko yexesha elizayo. Ngentetho evakalayo, ndiyasuka kwindlela yokucinga egxile kwisisombululo esinye sekamva, ndikhangele indlela yokucinga ngesiphelo eyazanayo nokuntsonkotha kobomi.

## OPSOMMING

In hierdie studie soek ek na 'n nie-essensialistiese verstaan van bevryding deur te soek na 'n nie-essensialistiese eskatologie in die werk van John D. Caputo en deur 'n kritiese ontmoeting tussen Caputo en die eskatologie van Suid-Afrikaanse swart teologie. Ek doen dit deur die verskuiwing van Caputo se primêre betrokkenheid by Heidegger, na sy primêre betrokkenheid Derrida (radikale hermeneutiek), en dan 'n fokusverskuiwing van Derrida na God (radikale teologie) te ondersoek. Verder fokus ek op die eskatologiese aard van hierdie radikale teologie deur 'n beklemtoning van die messiaanse, en besin hoe dit tot 'n dekonstruktiewe verstaan lei, nie net van eskatologie in die algemeen nie, maar van die eskatologie van Suid-Afrikaanse swart teologie in die besonder. Die gevolg is 'n bevraagtekening van teleologiese opvattings van eskatologie wat die kompleksiteit van die lewe reduseer tot een noodsaaklike punt wat 'n definitiewe toekomstige oplossing het. Dit is 'n verskuiwing na eskatologiese denke sonder 'n telos; 'n eskatologie wat die soeke na 'die oplossing' laat vaar ten gunste van eskatologie as 'n uitdagende heerlikheid.

# KEYWORDS

Circumfessional, Metaphysics of Presence, John D. Caputo, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, *différance*, Deconstruction, Weak Theology, Radical Theology, Eschatology, Quasi-eschatology, Messianic, Black Theology, Liberation

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# Contents

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

It has been almost three decades since South Africa became a democracy. When the ANC came into power in 1994, it was believed that the long-awaited era of liberation – the *end* of apartheid (not just the end of apartheid legislation, but also the end of apartheid's legacy, such as racism and poverty) – was finally dawning. I phrase it this way to suggest that there was, and in many ways, there continues to be, a discernible eschatological posture in relation to the unfolding history of South Africa – whether this be explicitly theological or more of a secularized theology (quasi-eschatological).[1] This is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it monolithic. Earlier, in the thick of the apartheid era, Steve Biko, as he was working out his own articulation of black consciousness in his most well known and most often cited essay [2] *Black Consciousness and the Quest for True Humanity*, depicts black consciousness as a Hegelian dialectic.[3] As a Hegelian dialectical gesture,[4] this move is a version of what I describe in this study (chapter 4) as a quasi-eschatological notion of history as development towards human progress. Even if one were to look further back in history the unfolding colonial project itself (colonialism) – which in South Africa later develops into Apartheid – is a different (anti-black) version of the quasi-eschatological notion of history as development toward human progress. In that version, colonialism is cast as the salvation of the heathens, and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth depicted as the millennium by the book of Revelation in the New Testament. These two examples, though by no means exhaustive, suffice to show that what we have in the history of South Africa leading up to the present are different and even conflicting eschatological visions – sometimes explicitly theological, and sometimes secularized. Even the present vision of a democratic South Africa itself is a vision of what South Africa should be, which is the goal (*telos*) that, ideally, such programs as the Reconstruction and Development Plan and the National Development Plan strive to actualize politically and economically. All

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[1] Throughout this study I use this expression to designate any thinking that is not explicitly theological but is clearly connected to eschatological thinking.

[2] G.J. Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair: Critical White Responses as a theological Problem – a South African Contribution" (PhD Thesis, Vrije Universiteit December 2019), 125.

[3] "The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the antithesis to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance – true humanity where power politics will have no place." B.S. Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 1978), 99

[4] J.N.J. Kritzinger cautions that one should not strictly categorise the moves that Biko is making here as Hegelian Dialectic, even though Biko makes this association: cited in Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair," 134-135.

of this is to say that it is legitimate, and even helpful to view South African history through an eschatological lens, in addition to other lenses.

Notwithstanding everything stated above, as soon as one adopts a particular eschatological lens, or more broadly, recognizes that the ways in which South African history has been interpreted has, at least in part, been eschatological, one is forced to take stock of the way in which South African history leading up to the present has tended to frustrate these hopes for the future. South African democracy is an unkept promise. Throughout the present democratic dispensation, many have pointed out that apartheid has not entirely ended but has evolved to take on more subtle forms. This observation is supported by moments of aggressive outburst, so to speak, such as the Marikana Massacre as well as the police brutality witnessed during the #feesmustfall nationwide protests.

Considering that South African reality does in fact lend itself to eschatological lenses, we need not – and arguably should not – simply abandon these eschatological frames of thinking. However, in order to take stock of the clear irreducible complexity of the South African reality, naïve, utopian, and even essentialist conceptions of the future of South Africa must be deconstructed. This is because South Africa is a nation deeply riddled with contradictions. On the one hand there is an egalitarian vision of a rainbow nation, and on the other the barely repressed vision of apartheid that visibly persists – as can be seen for example in racial segregation of living spaces and wealth, no longer regulated by apartheid laws but by financial regulation. South Africa is not moving toward one goal but is moving in both directions at once.

In this study I explore an eschatological lens that takes stock of the ambiguous nature of the present-day South Africa. I do this by exploring an eschatological alternative to essentialist conceptions of liberation by occasioning a critical encounter between a hermeneutics of facticity in the radical theology of John D. Caputo – particularly in his reflections on the messianic – and black theology, thus framing liberation as difficult glory.

## 1.2 John D. Caputo
Caputo is an American philosopher who grew up in the context of pre-Vatican II.[5] For his undergraduate education he went to a Catholic institution called LaSalle University (then a college), where he joined a religious order by the name of De LaSalle Brothers. This is the

[5] K.S. Moody, "John D. Caputo," in Christopher D. Rodkey (editor), Jordan E. Miller (editor), *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 95.

period in his life when he was exposed to scholasticism as well as the work of Martin Heidegger. He ended up parting with the order after obtaining his B.A. over a disagreement with them on his future. They wanted him to teach English and Religion in high school. Caputo, on the other hand, wanted to do graduate work on Heidegger's thought.

Caputo states that it was Heidegger's work that helped to "break the grip of dogmatic Catholicism" and to think of his Catholicism as historically contingent, rather than in essentialist terms.[6] What is of interest for me here is not only that this set Caputo on the path to the work which makes up the early portion of his corpus – in which his primary interlocutor was Heidegger – but also the main thrust of his entire corpus: the overcoming of metaphysics. Two years later (1964) he acquired his M.A. and four years after that (1969) his Doctorate, both in philosophy.

The early phase of Caputo's corpus is comprised of his first two books *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (1978) and *Heidegger and Aquinas* (1982).[7] In this phase, Heidegger was his main interlocutor, while Meister Eckhart and Thomas Aquinas were secondary interlocutors: they both provided the mystical horizon. At the end of *Heidegger and Aquinas* Caputo makes a very brief passing mention of Derrida, showing that he was aware of Derrida's work around the time of his second book, but his engagement with Derrida begins in his third book, *Radical Hermeneutics* (1987). This is also the beginning of a middle phase of Caputo's body of work, in which *Against Ethics* (1993), *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993) and *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997) were published. It is with *Prayers and Tears* that Caputo begins to chart his own different course from Derrida, where he turns to theology.[8] The difference here is that where Derrida rightly passes for an atheist, Caputo rightly passes for a Christian; and what he means by this is that his work is more directly and explicitly implicated by his religion (Christianity) than that of Derrida is by Derrida's Jewish religious background.[9]

It is at this point that the middle phase of Caputo transitions into the present-day Caputo, with his turn to radical theology. It is important however not to confuse Caputo's radical theology with that of death of God theology. Caputo's God is not dead but is mortal.[10] The specifics of what he means by that will become clearer as this study progress, particularly from the third

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[6] J.D. Caputo and G. Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 135.

[7] Moody, "John D. Caputo," 95.

[8] Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 136.

[9] Ibid., 136.

[10] J.D. Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos: A Theology of Difficult Glory* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2019), 4.

chapter onwards. This present phase of Caputo's corpus covers all of Caputo's books from *The Weakness of God* (2006) to *In Search of Radical Theology* (2020). Additionally, as of the writing of this dissertation, he has another book scheduled to be released in 2022 titled *Specters of God: An Anatomy of the Apophatic Imagination*. It is out of a critical encounter between Caputo's radical theology and the eschatology of South African black theology that a deconstructive reading of South African black eschatology will be approached.

## 1.3 Black Eschatology

The eschatology of South African black theology is difficult to pinpoint. In part this is because there is no monolithic South African black eschatology; and in part it is also because in the history of South African black theology, eschatology has not tended to be a point of explicit doctrinal focus. South African black theology – particularly in its most prominent works from the struggle against apartheid – has typically focused on theological anthropology, Christology, and biblical hermeneutics. To further complicate this, black theology has had something of a precarious existence in South Africa from 1994 to the present, to the extent that many have argued that it has no relevance after the end of Apartheid – I will return to this debate in chapter 5. However, this is not to say that eschatology has been absent from the conversation. At times a clear, explicit eschatological vision can be seen even as a different doctrinal loci are of primary concern. With Klippies Kritzinger's article titled *Black Eschatology and Christian Mission* (1987) and the fifth chapter of his Doctoral thesis titled *Black Theology – Challenge to Mission* (1988), we find a detailed survey of South African black theology that clearly draws out its eschatology, both explicit and implicit, from the inception of South African black theology in the late 1960s, through to 1988. What becomes clear is that typically in South African black theology before apartheid – and arguably in the present democratic dispensation – the figure of Biko looms large. As will be discussed in chapter 5, black consciousness, particularly as it is articulated by Biko, leaves an indelible mark on black theology. In this study, I focus on the dialectical nature of black consciousness. Given that dialectical thinking emerges out of modernity's secularization of Christian eschatology (as I argue in chapter 4), and that this feature of dialectical thought can also be clearly seen in Biko (as I argue in chapter 5), South African black eschatology, through Biko (though by no means only under the influence of Biko), is also implicated. In Biko's articulation of black consciousness and in black theology, this takes a discernibly eschatological posture (sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly) as a teleology. For the purposes of this study, this need not always be the case.

Rather, the argument of this study is predicated on the premise that this teleological undercurrent is typical to South African black theology.

## 1.4 Methodology

This study follows the development of John D. Caputo's anti-essentialist thought, first from his transition from primarily engaging the thought of Martin Heidegger to primarily engaging the thought of Jacques Derrida, right up to the shift in focus from Derrida to theology. In the first shift his radical hermeneutics emerges. The characteristic of the second shift is that radical hermeneutics emerges as both a poetics of obligation (an ethics without ethics) and religion without religion and moves through those into the accent of a radical theology. As I follow these shifts, my focus will be on how a clear deconstruction of eschatology is discernible within this anti-essentialist quality in Caputo's thought. I will stage a critical encounter between this deconstruction of eschatology and the eschatology of South African black theology – which can be summarized simultaneously as a quest for a true humanity and a quest for liberation. Although I will directly engage my context only in the final chapter of this study, it is actually because of my context that I engage Caputo as I do in the first place. This will become clearer in the motivation for this study. Concomitantly, this study is not primarily aimed at contributing to the study of the thought of Caputo, but rather to exploring the possibility of taking up non-essentialist conceptions of the hope for liberation in black theology.

## 1.5 Motivation

The research interests engaged in this study did not emerge in a vacuum but come from my religious and socio-political location. The motivation for this study is profoundly biographical, and although I will not go into too much detail here about the biographical, it is crucial that I note the influence of the following: my confessional background, my Xhosa roots, and my racial identity. The order that I have listed these in is not arbitrary as will become clear shortly. These three axes are not explicitly engaged from a biographical perspective in this study, and the first is not directly engaged at all, but it was grappling with the tension between these three in my life that led me to have an interest in the issues I am grappling with here. Of these three it is the first that so far has exerted the most influence in my life – vocationally, academically, and spiritually – so I will discuss it first.

## 1.6 Confessional Background

I was born, raised, and continue to be a member of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church. My entire undergraduate theological education was in an SDA institution. In addition to that, I have served for four years (2016-2019) in the SDA church as a pastor. This means that not only

were my theological interests germinated in the context of the SDA church in South Africa, but also that in the early stages of my theological journey (undergraduate through to honors) these interests were entirely conceived of and grappled with as SDA theological problems. This study marks the point in my journey where my interests have for the first time broken out of – though by no means a clean break, as I am still a member of the SDA church – and taken their first steps outside of SDA denominational theological concerns. The most significant reason for mentioning all of this here is that my encounter with my primary interlocutor in this study, John D. Caputo, in my undergraduate years occurred at a point in my theological journey when I was looking for the theological language, not to either exclusively affirm or exclusively reject my SDA background, but to struggle with it. The radical theology of Caputo – particularly in its overcoming of metaphysics – helped me to push back against aspects of my theological tradition, and to simultaneously affirm those aspects I took to be the most enlivening. It was in reading the theology of Caputo that I first began to think of my SDA theological tradition, not as absolute, but as historically and contextually contingent, while at the same time developing a depth dimension that allowed me to see that there are ways of thinking that I have developed only because of my situatedness in this particular confessional reality. Another way in which this point is important is because my interest in undermining essentialist thinking, even in liberation theologies as part of the struggle for liberation, comes from my struggle to overcome SDA theological essentialism. I approach everything, even liberation, this way because of my *circumfessional* relationship with my own church. This study is one attempt to extend this *circumfessional* posture at the points where ideology and theology meet. This ability to think this theological tradition as historical occasioned an openness to think through other aspects of my identity that my SDA tradition had repressed.

## 1.7 Xhosa Roots

A month before my first year of my undergraduate theological studies I was initiated into manhood. Existentially, I experienced that not only as an initiation into manhood, but also as the first formal or official recognition of myself as a part of not only the community of *amaXhosa*, but by extension as *umntu*, by which I mean not just a person, but an African person. Prior to that point, my Xhosa identity was merely an accident of birth, but I had little to no interest in actively embracing it. This was for the most part because of my SDA theological tradition. SDA theology strongly rejects ancestral veneration, and therefore there are many aspects of Xhosa culture – in particular *amasiko* (rituals) – that I have never participated in. In short, I was formed in a context where the theological totalism of my denomination was in

direct conflict with a big and unescapable part of my identity – my Xhosa roots. So, my initiation was the first time I actively embraced my Xhosa identity, and this created a cognitive dissonance due to my strong denominational commitments. It was only after reading Caputo in my undergraduate years that the grip of SDA theological totalism was loosened enough that I could begin to make sense of my newfound – three years prior – appreciation of my Xhosa roots. For the first time, I did not feel I had to choose between my confessional context and my roots. Caputo's development of a *circumfessional* theology took on new meaning for me. A publication that emerged out of this study offers an example of how I have been thinking through my Christianity, African roots, and my blackness.[11]

## 1.8 Blackness

As can be expected, my (re)turn to my Xhosa identity was simultaneously a (re)turn to my blackness. After reading my second Caputo book (*The Insistence of God*), in the final year of my undergraduate studies, I read the collection of Steve Biko's essays in *I Write What I Like*. This was just before the #Fallist movement. Reading Biko, and soon after witnessing the student protests, disillusioned me about what was gained in South Africa's transition to democracy, as well as the notion of a rainbow nation. Biko and black theology's quest for true humanity in which all people, regardless of race, can live together has constantly permeated my own thinking, as will be seen in the final chapter of this study. I see this anti-essentialist approach to eschatology as an attempt to contribute to this quest.

## 1.9 Significance

There is a twofold significance to this study. Firstly, putting Caputo's radical theology in conversation with eschatology is itself not something Caputo ever does, nor is it a common way of reading Caputo. Nevertheless, considering how radically messianic deconstruction *is*, there already is a discernible radical eschatology in Caputo's work. So, this study addresses a gap of insufficient engagement with eschatology in Caputo's theology.

The second significance of this study is the reframing of liberation as it is construed in South African black theology in non-essentialist terms. This explores a novel way of bringing theology into conversation with other liberation discourses, without black theology's reflection or any other discourses having to occupy the metaphysically grounding position. The argument for the non-existence of an essence to liberation makes all approaches to liberation valuable for the unique ways in which they construe liberation. If theology undermines its own essentialist

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[11] See S. Singata, "Justice for the Dead." *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 6 (2020), 319-345.

tendencies, it becomes possible for uniquely theological insights into the quest for liberation to be opened up to discourses that are not Christian; and this in and of itself makes pluriversal liberation discourse more achievable.

## 1.10 Structure

In chapter two I will discuss Heidegger's influence on the early Caputo. I will also observe how Caputo takes the anti-essentialist insights he gets from Heidegger, and turns them on Heidegger, and the deepening of this hermeneutic approach through his turn from Heidegger to Derrida, as the emergence of a radical hermeneutics. Here it will become clear that Heidegger was the one who led Caputo to an awareness of the flux, but that when Heidegger reaches the flux he turns to eschatology to turn away from it, while Derrida helps Caputo to embrace the flux through *différance*. In chapter 3, I will discuss *différance* more directly, with a focus on the way in which it leads Caputo to take up Derrida's religion without religion. I will also follow the turn away from a focus on Derrida to a focus on God, and from there sketch out the radical theology of Caputo. Engaging such themes as the impossible, event, hauntology, and the existence/insistence chiasm will set the stage for me to discuss more directly what I identify as the eschatological in Caputo – namely, the messianic. This I will discuss in chapter 3, with a keen focus on the way that this deconstructive gesture is a deconstruction of eschatology as teleological progression. I will end the chapter with an engagement of Vítor Westhelle, whose postcolonial eschatology will help me to stage a critical encounter between Caputo's explication of the messianic and eschatology in South African black theology. This will be the focus of chapter 5. There I will engage the quest for true humanity in Black Consciousness and black theology, not just as anthropology and Christology, but also as eschatology. The Caputian insights will help me read this quest in non-essentialist terms.

# Chapter 2: From Radical Hermeneutics to Radical Theology

In this chapter, I will be tracing a somewhat eschatological thread that runs through Caputo's corpus, from the early Caputo – whose major influence was Martin Heidegger – to the later Caputo (to the present day) – who is primarily influenced by Jacques Derrida. I will be arguing that Heidegger's "*transgressionary impulse*," which is an overcoming of metaphysics of presence, set the stage for Caputo's turn to deconstruction and to ethical-religious (and later, theological) concerns.[12] This is important for my eschatological engagement with Caputo's theology because it is when Caputo more directly engages religion (and theology) and its concern for the other, that we see Caputo take up (from Derrida) the structure of the Messianic (the 'to come'), which is the most explicitly eschatological theme in Caputo. For most of this chapter, I focus my discussion on *Heidegger and Aquinas* (1982) for two reasons: firstly, in this book not only do we see how Caputo engages Heidegger's step back – which in and of itself affords us the opportunity to see how Caputo made deconstructive moves before he fully turned away from Heidegger to Derrida – but in it we also see Caputo turn Heidegger's step back on Heidegger himself, effectively stepping out of Heidegger's shadow as it were; secondly we see Caputo very briefly, but significantly, mention Derrida for the first time in his corpus.

In section 2.1. I will follow Caputo's engagement with Heidegger's critique of Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism. Although I will rehearse this criticism, my interests for the purposes of this study will be on how this critique gives a way of rethinking presence. This is because what I will be identifying as Caputo's eschatology, by virtue of the fact that it is a weak messianic force, is prefigured in the early Caputo (before his turn to Derrida, and away from Heidegger) in the way in which Heidegger overcomes (metaphysics of) presence. Then from section 2.2, I will focus on the way that Caputo defends something in Aquinas from Heidegger, while at the same time bringing Heidegger's criticism on him in a different manner than Heidegger does. I note this as Caputo's own hermeneutics emerging as a demythologization of Heidegger, where, following Derrida, Caputo deconstructs the mythical-eschatological tendencies of Heideggerian hermeneutics. This will introduce the way in which eschatology is deconstructed in Caputo's radical theology – a point I will be prepared to discuss more fully in the fourth chapter.

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[12] See C.D. Ullrich, "On Caputo's Heidegger: A Prolegomenon of Transgressions to a Religion without Religion." *Open Theology* 6 (2020), 241-255.

## 2.1 The Influence of Heideggerian Hermeneutics in Caputo's Earlier Work

Heidegger's relationship with scholasticism can be said to have taken a turn in the period after his time in Marburg (1928), when he took up the task of overcoming the metaphysics of Western ontology. Caputo's interest in this point in Heidegger's corpus can be seen in his first two books, *The Mystical Element of Heidegger* and *Heidegger and Aquinas*. In this chapter I engage the latter. Caputo recapitulates Heidegger's thinking here as a critique of the naïve way in which Being (ontology) has been taken over – as if it were eternally present – without regard for the way in which it is grounded in concrete experience and is therefore historically contingent.[13] Heidegger sees this point of confusion as the way in which Scholasticism uses the ontological concepts of essence and existence. Scholasticism fails to see that these concepts are not objective reality, but that they emerge from the subjective experience of its predecessors (such as the Greeks); and because of this naïve presupposition, they fail to situate their ontology in temporality – the successive flow of different '*now*s' (the flux) – but rather situate it in a static, eternal now: a present that does not pass way. This attempt to situate Being outside of temporality is what Heidegger criticises as a metaphysics of presence and as onto-theo-logic. This has the effect of essentialising one mode of being, while ignoring the fact that there are beings which have different modes of being (ontologies).

The result is that to speak objectively about Being, scholasticism fails to think beyond essence and existence. They end up forcing every being into these categories. Consequently, the essence of any given being is understood as having to do with its 'what*ness*' or rather its nature understood as a 'what' (objective) rather than a 'who' or a 'self' (subjective); while its existence has to do with its being a thing or an object: the way in which it '*things*' or rather the way in which it exists as a thing (a what).[14] Again, this is metaphysics because of its essentialist tendencies: these concepts are used to categorise every being, without distinction, be they human or non-human. The radical nature of Heidegger's critique is that he brings attention to the fact that there are beings whose mode of being (Being) lies outside of these ontological concepts; and that in fact the very being from whom these very concepts where taken (*Dasein*) is not a 'what' but is a 'who' (not essence, but selfhood), and is not an 'it' but is an existing subject (not existence, but facticity or *Existenz*).[15] This is the radicality of the argument of

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[13] J.D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: And Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 72.
[14] Ibid., 78.
[15] Ibid., 78-79.

*Being and Time* (1927). This radical move is a hermeneutic circularity: it is out of a certain 'who' – *Dasein* – that the terms of understanding that 'who's' Being emerge, because that 'who's' mode of being (Being) is in fact care for its mode of being (Being).[16]

This turn from the objective to the subjective is an overcoming of metaphysics of presence. Note that in this overcoming of metaphysics, there is an implicit opening to otherness and temporality: to otherness because by virtue of the fact that there are no ontological categories that can be said to be essential, then it is possible for there to be different kinds of beings, and to temporality because Being is not an eternal static 'now' (metaphysics of presence), but there is more than one mode of being in the flow of time, or in history. This is a crucial point for the eschatological reading of Caputo's theology I am pursuing in this study. This is because it is ultimately this Heideggerian gesture of overcoming a metaphysics of presence that will lead Caputo away from Heidegger himself and lead him towards Derrida. Derridean deconstruction will give Caputo the ethical-religious language that Heideggerian ontology does not give, and with it the structure of the messianic (the 'to come') – which is where my more explicitly eschatological reading of Caputo will be focused (discussed in the chapter 4) – which in deconstruction is the opening to the other which is always to come. We will pick this up again below. First, we must turn to Caputo's thought on the later Heidegger (from the time of Heidegger's Nietzsche lecture of 1941 onwards), as it is out of Caputo's engagement with this part of Heidegger's corpus that radical hermeneutics emerges, and with it Caputo's parting ways with Heidegger and his turn to Derrida.

With the Nietzsche lectures of 1941, Heidegger's thinking shifts from what it was in *Being and Time*.[17] This later Heidegger thinks of the history of metaphysics, in which Being was conceived of in different ways, as emerging not from different human articulations of Being in the flow of time (the flux), but as emerging as a result of the forgetfulness or oblivion of Being.[18] This forgetfulness is not a human forgetfulness but is because of Being 'itself': Heidegger posits that Being withdraws, it conceals itself and is hidden; and as a result of this withdrawal, there are beings that emerge – this means that Being reveals itself by withdrawing and allowing beings to emerge; or the emergence of beings, which takes place in the hiddenness or oblivion of Being, is the unfolding of Being. So now, "instead of Dasein raising for itself

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[16] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing,1962), 32.

[17] Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 81-82.

[18] Ibid., 83

the question of Being as in *Being and Time*, Being now of its own initiative 'reveals' itself to Dasein".[19] The hermeneutical circularity I hinted at above is not abandoned here, but radicalized: Heidegger moves from the circularity within the relation between Being and beings, to a more radical circularity – the step back – of a relation between this difference between Being and beings, and that which gives this difference between Being and beings.[20] For the later Heidegger, as we will see shortly, each metaphysics is an epoch in which a particular articulation of Being (a particular articulation of the relation between Being and beings) prevails. Each epoch has its own oblivion of Being – where Being concealingly reveals itself in beings (where Being reveals itself as that which it is not, namely beings). However, now in addition to this first oblivion, there is a second more radical oblivion – not merely the hiddenness of Being behind beings, but the hiddenness of that which occasion (that which gives, or the 'it gives') the first sense of Being's hiddenness behind beings, which Heidegger calls the *Ereignis*. So, we can see that where the earlier Heidegger's (of *Being and Time*) criticism of Scholastic metaphysics was that essence and existence were treated as the objective and universal concepts that describe Being, the later Heidegger shifted to an even more radical critique of scholasticism which is a criticism not just of scholasticism but of Thomas Aquinas himself. It is at this radical juncture that Heidegger invokes eschatology, and it is at that point that Caputo's and Derrida's critique – demythologization or deconstruction – of Heidegger will advance my eschatological reading of Caputo. It would be premature to spell this out now without first briefly summarizing Heidegger's criticism of Aquinas, and Caputo's double gesture of both affirming Heidegger's criticism and negating it, as it is obvious that Caputo carries this Heideggerian move with him, even after he turns away from Heidegger.

### 2.2.1 Heidegger and Aquinas

What makes the Heidegger of 1941 (onwards) more radical in his critique of scholasticism is the fact that he does not merely charge scholasticism with a naïve pursuit of objectivity where its concepts (essence and existence) are too narrow, but that he now criticises these concepts as being a degeneration from the original Greek experience of presence.[21] The reason that this is an issue for him is that he held that the Greeks were the closest to the more radical oblivion – the *Ereignis*: the hiddenness of that which gives the distinction between Being and beings – which set the chain of epochs – of which, for Heidegger, the West was the end (*eschaton*) – in

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[19] Ullrich, "On Caputo's Heidegger," 245
[20] From this point of the chapter this shift will become clearer, culminating in Heidegger's eschatology, which I will discuss below.
[21] Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 93-94.

motion. He holds that their proximity to this beginning meant that even though they too did not think that which gives the distinction between Being and beings, something of that beginning was nevertheless retained, only to be gradually covered over or harden with each successive epoch. For Heidegger, as we will see shortly, there would be an end point (*eschaton*) in the chain of epochs where it will have over expanded itself, where this covering over will have reached its worst sense – the West. More on that below. First, I must summarize the epochs.

The first epoch is that of the early Greeks, before Plato and Aristotle. In this era, Being was understood according to three important Greek terms: φύσις, ἀλήθεια and λόγος. Of these three words, Caputo follows Heidegger's thought on φύσις and ἀλήθεια. According to Heidegger's reading, the word φύσις was used by the early Greek thinkers to connote the way in which Being emerges in and through beings.[22] What Heidegger emphasises in this word is the way in which the presence of Being is not yet a static 'now' but is something that 'emerges'; it *comes* into view. The word ἀλήθεια has the connotation of 'light', in the sense of clarity: Being emerges in the light, where light refers to clarity with which beings – out of which Being emerges – are disclosed. Basically, φύσις is the emergence of Being out of beings, while ἀλήθεια is the light dimension of this emergence process.[23] So in this first epoch, presence is not yet anything like the metaphysics of presence of the scholastics. Here, it is still this fluid process of emergence. This changes in the next epoch with Plato and Aristotle, where presence comes to be associated with the more final or static term οὐσία.

For Aristotle, the emphasis is no longer on emergence but on fulfilment or lying forth in a completed state.[24] In other words, Aristotle does not associate Being with the fluidity of the process of emergence, but with the static nature of the state that comes to be after the process is completed. Being still emerges, but it is only Being after the process of emergence is complete, not in the very process of emergence as with the early Greek thinkers. Though this is a more fixed state, it is not yet as fixed and static as the metaphysics of presence in scholastic thought. This is because by virtue of the fact that Aristotle's οὐσία still comes after the emergence of Being, it retains an echo of the early Greek experience of φύσις and ἀλήθεια, even if now it is distorted.

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[22] Ibid., 84.
[23] Ibid., 84.
[24] Ibid., 85.

What is crucial to note here is that in Aristotle – and this, for Caputo, is the boldness of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle – the sense of οὐσία has not yet congealed to substance (a thing or *thingness*), as it will in scholastic ontology; but rather it refers to ἐνέργεια – the work (process) of manifestation that has been brought to completion.[25] So for Heidegger, even in Aristotle, Being has not yet come to have a causal dimension of meaning. The difference between Aristotle and Plato, as is understood by Heidegger, is that they respectively make different emphases on essence and existence (and here I speak anachronistically): Aristotle emphasises existence, where Plato emphasises essence (hence the world of forms).[26] So in Aristotle and Plato the two concepts (essence and existence) that end up being the foundational concepts of all metaphysics in Western philosophy are principally developed.[27]

With Aquinas we reach an era where the sense of Being (οὐσία) is translated from the Greek ἐνέργεια, to the Latin *actualitas*; and this change alters something.[28] In this noting of *actualitas*, "Being is now understood in terms of making and being made, of causal work."[29] In other words the mode of being (Being) of a being is for it to have been made, completely, and to stand outside of its cause.[30] So where the Aristotelian notion of ἐνέργεια still carried an echo of the early Greek notion of Being as that which emerges – it retained this echo by seeing Being as that which emerges when the process of manifestation is complete, and therefore not outside of it – the Thomistic notion of *actualitas* ascribes Being to the thing that has emerged, outside of the process of manifestation. Being is not an unfolding (something fluid; something that moves) but Being is what is actual: something static (metaphysics of presence).

So now it can be said that the world consists of a being that makes (a creator or an actualizer) and a being that is made (that which is made to be actual).[31] For Heidegger, this translation from manifestation to actuality is a move away from the Greek experience of Being to a Roman experience of Being:

> The metaphysics of making which comes about in the Christian Middle Ages is assisted into birth by the Roman language. Rome is a world civilization of action (*actus, agere, actus, actualitas*): the conquerors of the world, the imperial power. And it is also the world civilization of making, of productive work, of the builders of

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[25] Ibid., 85-86.
[26] Ibid., 86.
[27] Ibid., 86.
[28] Ibid., 87.
[29] Ibid., 88.
[30] Ibid., 89.
[31] Ibid., 89.

roads and bridges. The shadow of this imperial-productive civilization reaches across the Christian Middle Ages and into the modern world…"so that it includes the political imperial element of Rome, the Christian element of the Roman Church, and the Romantic element as well." Thus the medieval Christian conception of Being in terms of making and what is made is articulated in a language which belongs to the people of making and doing. The "Roman Church" is not just an historical appellation. It points to an inner harmony between Christian metaphysics and the metaphysics of making, which come together in the conception of Being as *Wirklichkeit*. Our tradition then is more Roman than Greek; we are determined more by the builders of empires and roads than by those who let things be present in their presence.[32]

Note that in this quote, we see that this metaphysics of making (*actualitas*), which is a Christian metaphysics, has imperial elements. This is not unrelated to the fact that in this Thomistic ontology of *actualitas*, there is a predominance of the notion of causality, and this is seen not only as something picked up from the Roman empire, but also for the Roman Church (Catholicism). This is not insignificant considering the fact that Heidegger was a Catholic before he came up with this radical critique of scholasticism (he later converted to Protestantism). In any case, for my purposes here, this matters because *actualitas* has a bearing on medieval catholic theology: it is absorbed into the doctrine of God. Considering the fact that in this conception of Being, a being's Being persists when its presence persists ("the more what is present endures in its permanence, the more actual it is"), God, as the most enduring being, is the most actual being.[33] The God of Thomism is self-sufficient and self-sustaining, and therefore in this predominantly causal ontology, God is the "cause of causes".[34] This is Aquinas' cosmological argument, in which God is considered the first cause.[35]

### 2.2.2 Caputo on Aquinas

Heidegger charges Aquinas' metaphysics with onto-theo-logic and concomitantly, the oblivion of Being. It is precisely in the intricate way that Caputo engages this charge that we see a hint of Caputo reading Heidegger against Heidegger. Caputo disagrees with Heidegger's charge of onto-theo-logic but maintains that the charge of the oblivion of Being is correct, just not in the

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[32] Ibid., 89-90.
[33] Ibid., 90.
[34] Ibid., 90.
[35] Caputo, perhaps more so than Heidegger, does not regard Aristotle and Plato as being entirely innocent of this development of an ontology of causality. After all, Aquinas does get the notion of God as a first cause from his reading of Aristotle. To this effect, Caputo says that "[i]n the Greek conception ἰδέα is connected with ἀγαθόν, which has the role of cause, αἰτία, of the coming-to-be of a thing in accord with its ἰδέα then comes to predominate over ἀρχή so that in Aristotle the two tend to coalesce. At that point Being comes to mean that which is responsible for, effects, or brings about the constant. This is all brought out very clearly in the Scholastic conception of God." *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 90.

way Heidegger thought. To begin with, up to this point I have treated onto-theo-logic and metaphysics of presence as interchangeable, and this is correct as far as it goes – all onto-theo-logic is metaphysics of presence. At this point however, it is important to further clarify that although this important point of overlap exists, the two are not completely interchangeable – not all metaphysics of presence is onto-theo-logic. By way of definition, onto-theo-logic refers to the tendency of designating a particular characteristic of beings as their essence – as their Being – and then grounding those beings on that essence (Being). We see this conception of onto-theo-logic in Caputo discussion of Heidegger's critique of Hegel.[36] Caputo takes note of the fact that the main defence that those within the scholastic tradition have made of Aquinas against Heidegger is that the metaphysics of Aquinas is in fact not onto-theo-logic. Caputo indulges this rebuttal by opting to engage a prominent scholastic voice who is relatively unfamiliar with Heidegger, yet whose work can be brought into conversation with Heidegger's critique of Aquinas, especially because he too outlines something of an epochal conception of the history of metaphysics.[37] I am referring to the work of Etienne Gilson.

For Gilson there are four fundamental metaphysical traditions. Plato (the first tradition) prioritizes the characteristic of selfhood in Being, and this selfhood has to do not with what is actual but with the forms as a self-identical unity.[38] For example, whether or not people actualize justice in the world, justice itself is always justice – the Being of justice is not in actual justice, not in some actual case of justice, but in the world of forms. This can anachronistically be called an essence. With Aristotle (the second tradition) on the other hand, Being is in the act of being.[39] Aristotle tries to shift away from locating Being in a non-concrete non-actuality, but ultimately fails by lapsing back into the non-concrete in that he conceives of 'act' as a form – Being is not the concrete act itself, but in the form being acted out. Then the third tradition is identified much later with Avicenna, who conceptualises essence and existence – creatures have essence in that their existence was possible even before they came to exist, and their creation only added that existence; and so Being is conceived as essence.[40] In these three traditions, Being is always thought not in terms of essence and existence together but is instead reduced to essence. It is specifically onto-theo-logic, and not all metaphysics,

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[36] Ibid., 150.
[37] Ibid., 102.
[38] Ibid., 104.
[39] Ibid., 105-106.
[40] Ibid., 109.

that falls into this trap of reducing Being to one of its features, essence, and driving out existence. That is the 'onto-logic' in 'onto-theo-logic'.

The fourth tradition takes place in the metaphysics of Aquinas.[41] The significant shift is that Aquinas does not attempt to reduce Being to either essence or existence, but always keeps the focus on Being itself. For Aquinas a creature is *ens* (a being), Being is essence, and existence is *esse*. The essence (Being) of a creature (a being/*ens*) is in its finite participation in existence (*esse*). In other words, in the case of the creature, Being (essence) is found in the being's (*ens*) existence. On the other hand, the creator is a being whose essence (Being) is existence (*esse*) – that which creatures partially participate in – itself. In other words, the creator as a being (*ens*) does not participate in existence but is existence, meaning that in the creator, being (*ens*) and existence (*esse*) are one and the same. Concomitantly the creator's Being (*essence*) is the creator's being (*ens*), and that is synonymous with the creator's existence (*esse*). This means Aquinas holds that the creator, unlike the creature, does not participate in a finite manner in existence, but is instead the very existence in which creatures participate in a finite manner. With the metaphysics of Aquinas, the urge to reduce Being to essence is evaded as the distinctions melt away in God. The thought of Aquinas is indeed metaphysics, but contrary to Heidegger's charge, it is not onto-theo-logic. The difference between onto-theo-logic such as that of the first three traditions and the metaphysics of Aquinas is that onto-theo-logic is an essentialist metaphysics – it reduces Being to essence – while the metaphysics of Aquinas is an existential metaphysics.

The crucial insight that is emerging here in Caputo's application of Heideggerian hermeneutics is that where Heidegger conflates onto-theo-logic with metaphysics in his criticism of Aquinas, Caputo sees the distinction. Where Heidegger completely negates, Caputo retrieves by negating, showing that there is something in Aquinas that Heidegger's retrieval could not retrieve, that Caputo's could. This matters because we can already see the hint of a distinction between Heideggerian hermeneutics and Caputo's hermeneutics emerging. It is this difference that will lead Caputo down the path of turning away from – or rather demythologizing – Heidegger, and turning to Jewish thinkers such as Levinas and, more significantly, Derrida. I mention this here to point it out as this shift from Heidegger to Derrida is one of the foci of this chapter. However, I will be in a better position to address this more directly in the next section of this chapter. First, seeing that I have summarized the way in which Caputo retrieves

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[41] The following paragraph summarizes Ibid., 113-117.

something in Aquinas, I must briefly also summarize the way in which he, following Heidegger, also negates Aquinas, so that the step back or double gesture – the transgressionary impulse, or deconstruction – may come into view.

### 2.2.3 The Step Back

Metaphysics emerges in the difference between Being and beings. It is also at the same time this very difference.[42] Heidegger does not think metaphysics is radical enough, and so he takes the step back:

> The step back moves from the naïve acceptance of the difference between Being and beings to the origin of the difference, to that which makes the difference possible.[43]

For Caputo, contrary to Heidegger's charge, Aquinas does not in fact fall into the trap of taking one quality of a being and making it the essence of that being. Aquinas does in fact think the distinction between Being and beings. For Caputo, however, Aquinas does not escape the charge of the oblivion of Being because he stops at the level of the difference between Being and beings but does not think about that which gives this distinction, the *Ereignis*. Being able to think that which gives the distinction between Being and beings is to see that a particular metaphysical tradition is not ultimate or essential, but epochal. Although Heidegger was incorrect to accuse Aquinas of onto-theo-logic, by virtue of Aquinas' inability to think of his tradition as contingent – his metaphysics of presence – the oblivion of that which gives his tradition's conception of the difference between Being and beings (the *Ereignis*) persists. At this point, Caputo invokes the Heideggerian step back – just not where Heidegger does in his reading of Aquinas.

The step back is a twostep process which Heidegger calls the *Unter-Schied*, which translates to the "differentiating".[44] Metaphysics already takes the first step. This is the thinking of the difference (*Differenz*) between Being and beings that I discussed above. The second step is the more radical gesture. This is the thinking of that which gives the difference between Being and beings. The German phrase Heidegger uses to designate this second step is *auseinander-zueinander-tragen*. He shortens this to *Austrag*. So, if the first step – thinking the difference between Being and beings – is designated *Differenz*, then the second step – thinking that which occasions the difference between Being and beings – is designated *Austrag*. The first step

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[42] Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 149-150.
[43] Ibid., 150.
[44] Ibid., 151.

thinks the difference (*Differenz*), and the second step, as the more radical of the two, thinks the dif-ference (*Austrag*) which is the opening, or rather the occasioning, of the difference (*Differenz*).[45]

The *Ereignis* – the giving of the opening (*Austrag*) – does not give the dif-ference (causally), but is the giving itself (in the middle voice); it is the 'it gives'.[46] So, when Aquinas thinks of beings in terms of their very Being – their first cause (God) – that Being is construed as essential, Aquinas, cannot step behind it because it is the foundation, the ground – it is Being itself. The *Ereignis* on the other hand is not a being or Being; it is not the ground of Being, but the open. With the *Ereignis* we see that this step back undermines the essentialism of metaphysics. No longer is Being the ground or the first cause (Aquinas). Instead, the relation between Being and beings is radicalized. Now there is a circular relationship here between Being and beings rather than the liner one we find in Aquinas:

> The dif-ference not only holds Being and beings apart as ground and grounded; it also holds them together so that, while Being grounds beings, beings in turn ground Being. The coming-over and the arrival (coming-in) mutually determine one another and thus constitute a circle…[47]

The step back to that which gives the difference between Being and beings results in Being no longer being conceivable as essential while beings are conceived as contingent, but instead with the two being co-constitutive – metaphysics has been overcome. In this radical gesture lies the structure of the entire argument of this dissertation. The overcoming of metaphysics is not an ending of a metaphysical tradition but an awakening to it, a breaking of its spell.[48] What is overcome in the overcoming of metaphysics is not a particular metaphysical tradition, but the naivete of conceiving of that metaphysics as permanent (temporally essential) and foundational (spatially essential). This is the earliest appearance of a deconstructive gesture that will be further radicalized throughout Caputo's corpus. In the following chapter we will see it in the relationship between a name and an event as well as the relationship between confessional theology and radical theology; in chapter four we will see it in the relationship

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[45] Ibid., 152.
[46] Ibid., 168.
[47] Ibid., 153.
[48] "If the history of metaphysics is constituted by its oblivion of Being, then presumably the thinker who has escaped this oblivion has in some way escaped from the history of metaphysics….For such a thinker, the history of Being, as a history of withdrawal and oblivion, is at an end. This is to say, not that for him historical time ceases to flow, but rather that the withdrawal which is at work in each and every historical dispensation of Being no longer holds him captive. It is not that the development of metaphysics in historical time is over but only that the spell of metaphysics is broken." Ibid., 176-177.

between the messianic and messianism; in the final chapter we will explore it in the context of the relationship between South African black theology and liberation conceived as an event. In all these various chiasmic structures the existing structures (beings, names, confessional theologies, messianisms, black theology) are indispensable precisely because the events they harbour (Being, events, radical theology, the messianic, liberation, etc.) not only do not exist, but never can exist – they are always unconstructable, and therefore are undeconstructable. They are why those on the concrete side of the structure endlessly repeat themselves forward. They are not essences, but the displacement of essence with the 'to come' or the weak messianic force. Before I can discuss any of these, first, through Heidegger, we will move in the direction of eschatology; but the Heideggerian conception of this eschatology must be deconstructed, or demythologized. Therefore, I will now observe how Caputo's turn away from Heidegger to Derrida – the emergence of radical hermeneutics – does exactly that.

## 2.2 Radical Hermeneutics

### 2.2.1 Heidegger's 'mythical-eschatological' tendencies

Above I discussed the circular nature of Heidegger's hermeneutics in *Being and Time*, which the later Heidegger radicalizes to a circularity that occasions this Being/beings relation. In this subsection, I will point out how the overcoming of metaphysics discussed above is eschatology according to Heidegger.

In Aquinas' linear relation between Being and beings – where God, as the first cause grounds the Being of beings – as well as the failure to think that which gives this relation, there is a teleology, and one that is accused of only mimicking movement, while not actually moving – metaphysics of presence:

> But there is nothing eschatological in the Thomistic conception of *esse*, no thinking on its term and movement. Instead, as a "medieval" man, as one who belongs squarely in the middle of the tradition, in the midst of things…the "historical reduction" is impossible for him. Instead of thinking the tradition as a tradition, he remains embedded in it…[49]

For Caputo here, whatever is meant by eschatology in Heidegger is precluded by the inability to step back from a given metaphysical tradition to that which gives that tradition. In the sixth chapter of *Heidegger and Aquinas*, Caputo speaks more directly about what Heidegger refers

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[49] Ibid., 172-173.

to as the "eschatology of Being."[50] In keeping with his view that from the time of the early Greeks up to the present, that first experience of that which gives the distinction between Being and beings – the first sending of Being – has been covered over, Heidegger argues that the West – modernity – is the *eschaton*, the "outmost extreme into which the history of the decline of Being has run its course."[51] Although Heidegger is critical here of the West, he is still being Eurocentric – the West is the *eschaton*, and any hope for a new dispensation of the sending of Being can only occur at this end point. For Heidegger, the only hope is for that which gives being to send that first experience of Being to the end point in a new way, so that the beginning happens again in the end in a circular fashion. Later in *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo very clearly summarizes this in the following manner:

> The beginning would come again at the end, would overtake the end. And that is what we mean by eschatology: when we are driven into the end in such a way that the beginning can overtake it, so that the end turns itself around, reverses itself and becomes a concealment. Valedictory and commencement, taking leave and beginning anew, all in one. Then the whole accumulated wealth of the history of Being is collected together in one glimmering moment of reversal.[52]

For Heidegger, Being is in fact inherently eschatological. If we understand eschatology here as circularity, we will see that in fact this is the argument we have been following with the circularity of Being: the shift from a circular hermeneutics of the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, to the circularity between that which sends or gives each epoch of Being. Moreover, for him the particular epochs were not just a shift to a historical conception of circular Being, but rather that this historical circularity is inherently eschatological.[53] The giving of Being – the opening of the distinction between Being and beings – is circular because Being is not one essential tradition of Being that moves in a linear fashion to its fulfilment so that Being can be complete – this is the way in which the Heideggerian conception of Being undermines a Hegelian dialectic.[54] For Heidegger, Being is not teleological but eschatological. There is a clear distinction between the two:

> Eschato-logy is not teleo-logy. Teleology is metaphysics a rule-governed process in which the seeds of success are sown from the very beginning, in which the *rationes seminales* are planted at the start. Teleology insulates us from the contingencies of

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[50] Ibid., 186.
[51] Ibid., 185.
[52] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 163.
[53] Ibid., 164.
[54] Ibid., 161.

history, the dead ends and detours, just as in Constantin's complaint that Hegel's treatment of time was a fraud…In teleology the beginning is small, progress is steady, and the end is a great fulfilment and parousia…[55]

The sense in which teleology is metaphysics is that it still conceives of movement within a particular tradition of metaphysics, and as a result movement does not get outside of that tradition. Progress is the fulfilment of a given tradition. For Heidegger on the other hand, true movement is movement that begins when a tradition ends and a new one can begin; it is moving beyond any given tradition to the giving of traditions as such. Any movement that can only conceive of movement within its metaphysical tradition is a metaphysics of presence – teleological movement is metaphysics of presence because it is movement that still essentialises its tradition. The very fact that in a teleology the end was there in the beginning, not as the beginning but as a foreknown goal means that the new thing is not possible, whatever will come next was already seen. It flees from the original difficulty of life, which is that we are all moving in the darkness, with nothing but a prayer – a hope against hope, a radical faith without assurances – and that history is not progress. With respect to eschatology, in contrast to teleology:

> But eschatology is a play. In eschatology, the beginning is great, a tremendous burst of lightning, a flash illuminating the whole countryside. But it vanishes as quickly as lightning, and then its memory is dimmed and erased, until finally, through a series of transformations which no one could have predicted, there is only night…Then, in the dark night, there lies the possibility of another beginning, another sudden turn in which the lightning flashes again.[56]

There is no *telos* here, in fact there is a movement in the opposite direction – things are not progressing but diminishing for Heidegger. Additionally, we do not see what is coming, we cannot know beforehand what new epoch will come about. There is a groundlessness here. Even the tradition one stands in is placed in a more precarious position. In the place of the end as teleological arrival or fulfilment – *Parousia*, presence – in eschatology we hope for another flash of lightning in the dark, a sudden rupture for which we cannot prepare – which could come like a proverbial thief in the night, as it were. This hope for eschatology in the Heideggerian sense, does not in and of itself take us out of our tradition but awakens us to the possibility of beginning again. That which gives the difference between Being and beings is uninhabitable; and so, it is only in the

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[55] Ibid., 161.
[56] Ibid., 162.

distinction between Being and beings that we move and live and have our being. It is precisely at the point of this eschatology that Caputo sets out to demythologise Heidegger. Heidegger's nostalgia for the beginning, which for him is the epoch of the early Greeks, undermines the very sense of eschatology as circularity that Heidegger is developing here.[57]

Significantly it is Derrida's critique of Heidegger that Caputo follows here. For Derrida this talk of eschatology is still not radical enough and harbours its own more subtle metaphysics of presence.[58] Heidegger evokes darkness, and non-knowing only as "preparation to the coming dawn."[59] A circular eschatology also knows the end from the beginning, not in a linear manner, but in its circular manner: it knows that the end will in fact be a retrieval of the beginning. This is, for all intents and purposes, still a teleology. Following Derrida, Caputo questions Heidegger's standpoint: Heidegger assesses the giving of epochs and the covering over of Being from epoch to epoch as if he has some form of special revelation, as if he is not situated in his own context, and from there makes apocalyptic proclamations about the end.[60] Where is Heidegger situated when he is able to proclaim the West as the *eschaton*? How can he know this – as if he is receiving revelations from something outside of the flux? Derrida exposes Heidegger's project here as yet another grand narrative: it is not essentialist thinking that has been overcome in Heidegger, but instead essentialist thinking has shifted from being linear to being circular.

The benefit of Heideggerian thought is that through the *Ereignis*, the possibility of seeing the non-essentiality of a metaphysical schema is occasioned. Thinking the *Ereignis* is an awareness that all the narratives we construct about reality are not themselves reducible to reality – they are not essential. On a biographical note, this thinking helped Caputo see beyond his own Dogmatic Catholic tradition in his early 20's.[61] However, this awareness is unable to see itself as also but one more narrative that is not reducible to reality. The

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[57] Ibid., 170.
[58] Ibid., 165.
[59] Ibid., 165.
[60] "Apocalyptic utterances demand insight into the deep essence of what is going on, a power of deciphering which sweeps from end to end (where is it standing when it makes this sweep?), which has a hold on the *Wesen* in the verbal sense, of what has all along been coming to presence and now is coming to an end. It has the wherewithal to see that a primordial first possibility is spent, has exhausted itself, has made all of its moves and now has nowhere to go, which is not to say that it will not persist indefinitely. Apocalyptics presupposes hermeneutics, deep hermeneutics, with a hot line to the gods." Ibid., 166.
[61] Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 135.

*Ereignis* is still too strong a notion. This is why it allows Heidegger to make strong propositions about reality – that the West is the end where there is no light of Being, but where the lighting can (or will) flash again. Heidegger attempts to undermine essentialist thinking by approaching the abyss that our narratives about reality – history, theology, science, etc. – attempt to organize, schematize, and rationalize. However, when the dark abyss comes to views, Heidegger attempts to flee it at the *last* (*eschaton*) moment. This abyss Caputo called the flux.

## 2.2.2 The Flux

This Heideggerian hermeneutical approach which seeks to step behind metaphysical thinking, and to approach the flux is a hermeneutics of facticity.[62] Caputo explains this approach as follows:

> This hermeneutics of facticity then will follow the opposite course of "metaphysics" which, ever since its inception, and in accord with the inclination inscribed in factical life itself, has been making light of the difficulty of existence. Metaphysics…has all along been a Metaphysics of presence…But a hermeneutics of facticity, convinced that life is toil and trouble…would keep a watchful eye for the ruptures and the breaks and the irregularities in existence. This new hermeneutics would try not to make things look easy, to put the best face on existence, but rather to recapture the hardness of life before metaphysics showed us a fast way out the back door of the flux.[63]

Naming this original difficulty 'flux' connotes that it is moving – this is not a stagnant metaphysics of presence. However, as flux, this is not a singular, organised, rational movement – it is not a linear progression, or a dialectic, nor is it a circular movement. It is a chaotic flux. All meaning making helps us live in the flux, but cannot grasp some essential core of the flux, precisely because as flux – constant directionless movement – it has no essential core, or essential direction. Considering this description, Heidegger's invocation of eschatology, in the end, turns out to be another way of fleeing the flux – the original difficulty of life. It is precisely at the point where Heidegger invokes eschatology, as a way of fleeing the flux, that Derrida refuses to flee. Therefore, Derrida replaces Heidegger's *Ereignis* with *différance*. *Différance*, much like *Ereignis*, also 'names' – without naming (naming under erasure) – the flux, but at the point where Heidegger flees what he has named – by way of eschatology – Derrida re-inscribes everything in this flux, which is the meaning of Derrida's famous saying, "there is nothing outside the text."[64] This is not to say that there is no such thing as a meaning of life,

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[62] Moody, "John D. Caputo," 97.
[63] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 1.
[64] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974) ,158.

only that there is no meaning of life that is not inscribed in the flux – therefore there is no essential meaning. Caputo abandons hermeneutics of facticity conceived through the *Ereignis* in favour of a more radical hermeneutics of facticity conceived of through *différance*. All of Caputo's works from *Radical Hermeneutics* to the present reinscribe every system of meaning making into this flux – *différance* (this is what deconstruction is, as will become clear in the next chapter). We see him do this with ethics in *Against Ethics* – here the call of obligation to the other in ethics is not conceived of as (is not grounded by) metaphysical foundations, ultimate truth, or essentialism. Even in the absence of a metaphysical foundation – because of the flux – the call of obligation still calls. In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, he works this out in terms of religion – religion protests against the suffering of others, not on the ground of a metaphysical foundation, but from within the flux – and this culminates in a re-inscription of God in the flux. I will discuss this and *différance* more directly in the next chapter. For now, before I move to the final section of this chapter, it is important to point out that as a result of Caputo's undermining of Heidegger's eschatology by turning to the flux (*différance*) – following Derrida – we can anticipate that when eschatology is read through deconstruction, it will shift in register in a similar way. This will be the argument of chapter 4 below.

## 2.3 Conclusion: Heidegger Demythologized

The Derridean critique of Heidegger we have followed above was not the sole cause of Caputo disillusionment with the thought of Heidegger. Around the same time that Caputo was beginning to shift to Derrida, the major concern over the ties that Heidegger's thought had with Nazism were becoming more well known. These philosophical concerns were confirmed by literature that demonstrated Heidegger was involved with the Nazis.[65] To be clear, Heidegger's antisemitism was known amongst philosophers even by the time Caputo was publishing his own books on Heidegger, even causing divisions in opinions about Heidegger's work; however in the late 80's, after the publication of such books as Hugo Ott's *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (1988, just a year after the publication of *Radical Hermeneutics*), and especially Victor Farías's *Heidegger and Nazism* (1989), debate about Heidegger's antisemitism was invigorated. Reflecting on this period Caputo writes:

> I worked on Heidegger for twenty years, from the middle sixties when I first started graduate school to the middle eighties, and I am grateful to Heidegger for helping me break the grip of dogmatic Catholicism and leading me into the contemporary

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[65] Ibid., 108.

philosophical world…But I realized through Derrida that Heidegger was also telling another big story, a metanarrative about the beginning of the West. Then in the middle eighties, when it also became unmistakably clear how deeply entrenched his thinking was with National Socialism, the spell was broken. Heidegger casts a spell over people, and for me the spell was broken by Derrida.[66]

As can be seen here, Caputo's disillusionment with Heidegger hinges on two points: a residual eschatological essentialism in Heidegger – one that reads the West as the *eschaton* in which Being could renew itself – and the fact that Heidegger was not only involved with the Nazis, but that his thinking, which Caputo had been enamoured with, was itself "entrenched" in National Socialism. Due to these deep ties, shifting away from Heideggerian ways of thinking was a matter of urgency. The encounter with Derrida was sufficient to "break the spell" or to be critical of the Heideggerian project itself:

> It was only in the 1930s, in the period of Heidegger's active political engagement with National Socialism, that the twofold root of the tradition was pruned to a single root, to a single, simple incipience *(Anfang),* a Great Greek Beginning, from which everything Jewish and Christian, everything Roman, Latin, and Romance, was to be excluded as fallen, derivative, distortive, and inauthentic. It was in the now infamous rectorial address that the question of Being formulated in *Being and Time* became for the first time, publicly at least, an outright myth of Being structured around the inner spiritual relationship between Greeks and Germans. It cannot be forgotten that it was in the context of the National Socialist seizure of power that Heidegger narrowed down the beginnings of the West to a single "Origin"—*Anfang* and *Ursprung*—purely Greek, without Jewish or Christian contamination, and tied the future of the West to the German future, to the German capacity for thinking and questioning Being. The first form of the myth of Being is a political myth tied to a hellish ideology, fully equipped with robust and quite bellicose Greek gods and their German heirs, in which Heidegger undertook to produce a thought of Being that was *Judenrein,* thereby reproducing on the level of thinking what the Nazis were doing in the streets.[67]

Here Caputo brings attention to the fact that the later Heidegger's notion of the history of Being, as is discussed above, is silent about the Jews and regards the Christian as a distortion. There is a nested antisemitism even in this philosophical move. Hence that last line in which Caputo states that Heidegger was producing in philosophy what the Nazis were doing on the streets. Heidegger had now done the same thing that he earlier criticised scholasticism of: the naivete

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[66] Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 135.
[67] J.D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993),4.

of essentialism; he essentialised his own historical conception of Being.[68] Later, even when Caputo engages the messianic – which is eschatological – Caputo is careful to avoid any hint of essentialist tendencies, to the extent that he is critical of Derrida's phrasing of the question of the two messianic spaces (I discuss this in chapter 4).

From the mid 1980's to the early 1990's, we see Caputo's engagement with Heidegger wain as his engagement with Derrida increases. In this period, he publishes *Radical Hermeneutics* in 1987, and *Against Ethics* and *Demythologizing Heidegger* in 1993. In the final three chapters of *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo speaks more explicitly with his own voice for the first time in his corpus. In those chapters, we find him trying to puzzle out the ramifications of a Derridean deconstruction of Heidegger. *Against Ethics* and *Demythologizing Heidegger* are expansions and continuations of the arguments advanced in the final three chapters of *Radical Hermeneutics*.[69] The place where Caputo most successfully rearticulates and expands these insights in his middle phase is in *The Prayer and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997).[70] As I will discuss in the following chapter, it is with Derrida's *différance* that Caputo is able to take an even more radically hermeneutical posture than his engagement with Heidegger allowed.

In this chapter I have followed the way in which Caputo's radical hermeneutics emerges in his shift from Heidegger as a primary interlocular to Derrida. I have discussed how this way of undermining essentialist tendencies has clear eschatological significance – given that it is worked out on Heidegger's eschatological circle. In the following chapter I will discuss Caputo's thought with Derrida as his interlocutor, paying attention to the way *différance* deepens his insights about the flux. I will follow the way that this moves him to religious and then specifically theological concerns, so that in chapter 4 I can speak more directly to the messianic.

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[68] Ullrich, *Sovereignty and Event: The Political in John D. Caputo's Radical Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 109.
[69] Ibid., 136.
[70] Ibid., 136.

## Chapter 3: Deconstruction: God, *Différance* and Events

In the previous chapter, I followed the development of Caputo's radical hermeneutics, particularly at the point at which he turns from Heidegger to Derrida. I argued that Caputo's radical hermeneutics is aimed at overcoming metaphysics of presence by way of deconstruction, and that this is significant for this study on eschatology in Caputo's work; this is because a metaphysics of presence precludes the future, since it fixes everything to a static, enduring 'now,' while deconstruction exposes things to their future. In the light of this insight, before I can engage Caputo's theology eschatologically (the messianic), I must discuss the way in which Derridean deconstruction is operational in his radical theology, his shift from discussing Derrida to discussing God, and his distinct articulation of radical theology. To do this in a focused way, I will frame the discussion around *différance* and its relationship to events and God. More specifically, I will center this chapter around *différance*, and this is because deconstruction is all about *différance*.[71] Therefore for the first section of this chapter, I will try to slowly sketch out what *différance* 'is'. The objective is not to give an exhaustive introduction to deconstruction, but only to discuss it enough to follow the significance it has for Caputo's radical theology. Put differently, I will follow the way that, through his engagement with Derridian deconstruction, Caputo shifts from a focus on Derrida and religion *without* religion, to a focus on God and a weak theology (later he prefers to call it a radical theology). The shift from Derrida to God is not like the shift from Heidegger to Derrida: Caputo does not demythologize Derrida, but only shifts from Derrida's concerns to his own.

The second section of this chapter will serve the purpose of accounting for the shift in Caputo's focus from religion to theology. I will approach this by discussing Derrida's own *circumfessional* relationship to religion, and from there focusing on Caputo's interest in theology. This will set the stage for me – in the third section of the chapter – to focus on Caputo's later, more explicitly theological reflections on *différance* by discussing the event and God in his theology. It is out of this focus on the way Caputo reads *différance* and the name of 'God' closely together that a more radically materialist – as opposed to an essentialist – way of doing theology comes to view. I discuss this as the existence/insistence chiasm in Caputo's thought which takes various forms: the hauntological relationship between a name and an

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[71] J.D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 96.

event, as well as between confessional and radical theology. It is in the next chapter that I will pick this up more eschatologically – as the chiasm between concrete existing messianisms and the messianic.

### 3.1 *Différance*

Although Caputo briefly discusses *différance* in *Radical Hermeneutics*, it is in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* that he not only discusses it in detail, but he also addresses it within the context of a religious discourse of deconstruction. In this book, Caputo is making an argument that was considered controversial amongst deconstructionists at the time: that deconstruction does not just arbitrarily appropriate religious motifs for its non-religious deconstructive ends, but that there is something radically religious about deconstruction – though not any confessional, dogmatic kind of religion.[72] Caputo came to an awareness of this insight by coming across the expression 'religion without (*sans*) religion' which Derrida uses to describe his own religion which, he asserts, no one knew anything about, and as a result of which Derrida claims that his work is not being read well.[73] Caputo finds this rather intriguing for the following reasons: (1) Derrida does not simply say that he is an atheist, but that he rightly passes for one – this is a gesture of negation of religion, (2) the fact that Derrida rightly passes for an atheist does not preclude religion for him, but that he has a religion of which he speaks of as "my religion" – which is a radical affirmation of religion, or an affirmation of something as an affirmation of religion. Caputo then takes this biographical insight and does the hard work of going through Derrida's work, from his earliest more semiotic works to his later more political, ethical and religious works, and makes the novel claim that Derrida is misunderstood when it is assumed that the religious motifs he uses in his later works are inconsequential to deconstruction, and that instead they have always been there from the beginning of Derrida's body of work. *Prayers and Tears* emerges as the book in which Caputo argues out this point, and as a result Caputo's later work (weak/radical theology) is worked out of the insights of this book. By way of explaining this coinage (différance), two points must be discussed. Namely, (1) the Latin roots of the term and (2) the fact that *différance* is never spoken of in the active voice, but always in the middle voice.

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[72] Ullrich, *Sovereignty and Event*, 145.
[73] G. Bennington & Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 154.

### 3.1.1 Making sence of *Différance*

Derrida coins the word *différance* by turning to the Latin root of the word 'difference', *differre*, which has two connotations: to differ and to defer.[74] 'Differ' is the connotation that is usually thought of for both the French and the English words for 'difference', and it carries the sense of dissimilarity, or the distance between two different things that engenders otherness in their relationship to one another; this is a spatial difference.[75] 'Defer' is the sense that does not translate to both French and English, as they borrow this term. 'Defer' connotes "the action of putting off until later".[76] In other words, this is a temporal sense. The genius of Derrida's coinage, *différance*, is that it combines both these senses of 'difference' by going to the roots of the word 'difference' (Latin) and retrieving the semantic force of the word that is forgotten (the temporal sense) when a different nuance of the word is privileged (the spatial sense). This movement that I have just outlined is deconstruction: going to the roots of something and retrieving what is repressed, only to repeat it in a novel way (much like Kierkegaard's repetition forward). However, Derrida stops short of making *différance* a word or a concept that replaces the word and concept of difference. This brings us to the second aspect of Derrida's coinage, namely the middle voice.

Derrida opts to introduce *différance*, not in the active infinitive voice, as if it were an active verb (to cause difference), nor in the passive infinitive voice, as if it were a passive verb (to be made to be different), but in the middle voice, to connote neutrality.[77] Graphically, this sense can be seen in the fact that the way in which *différance* is a misspelling of difference leaves it ending with '-ance', and usually when a word ends with '-ance' it becomes neutral, neither active nor passive. An example that Derrida uses is the word 'resonance,' which is a not active like the word 'resonating'.[78] This neutrality means that *différance* is not caused or acted upon, nor is it a cause or an agent, but that it is a process that is always already taking place.

So, when we bring the two nuances that this word has together, and read them in the middle voice, we begin to see that through *différance* Derrida undermines a metaphysics of presence on both a spatial front and a temporal front: (1) *différance* 'is' the differential spacing that is always taking place which makes othering possible, and by so doing it also makes sameness possible (there can only be a 'same' because there is an 'other', and an 'other' only because

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[74] J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 7.
[75] Ibid., 8.
[76] Ibid., 8.
[77] Ibid., 9.
[78] Ibid., 9.

there is a 'same') – without the ongoing process (or play) of *différance* none of these can exist – 'it' renders presence (the same) as always already exposed to its other, thus preventing it from congealing into a metaphysics of presence (because there are different presences). Furthermore, (2) *différance*, as temporal deferral, exposes the present to the future to which meaning has been deferred thus preventing the present from being self-sufficient (where a self-sufficiency of the present is the temporal sense of a metaphysics of presence). It is crucial to emphasize here that all of these – the spatial/temporal opening – are not something that *différance* does – hence the middle voice. Rather *différance* as the flux is the reason that othering is possible and also the reason that the future is possible since othering and temporal openness are unintentional effects of *différance*. It is on account of this unintentionality that these effects are designated as the play of *différance*. This point is further clarified in the engagement with negative theology.

### 3.1.2 Caputo's Engagement with *Différance*

In *Prayers and Tears*, Caputo opens his engagement with *différance* by discussing its overlapping with negative theology. He notes that very early on, in Derrida's original presentation of the paper *Différance* (1968) one of the people in attendance remarked (concerning *différance*) that, "it…is the source of everything and one cannot know it: it is the God of negative theology…"; to which Derrida responded, "It is and it is not…", a response that reminds us of the double gesture we discussed in the previous chapter.[79] Derrida's response both negates and affirms. This is important because, firstly, deconstruction never merely negates, but (secondly) even where it does negate it is so that what is negated can give way to a more radical affirmation. When deconstruction negates metaphysics of presence, it is not in order to do away with presence, but rather to show that that which is present is radically tied both to that which is past – what in deconstruction is called the trace – and that it is tied to the future[80], and effectively always already open to otherness.

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[79] J.D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 2.

[80] The insight here is that for better or for worse the self is not insulated from the other. This is a transgression of the philosophical principle of noncontradiction – which can be traced back to Aristoteles's *Metaphysics* – which, if we limit it to the self here, stipulates that the self must be an undividable unity, always already identical to itself. Derrida deconstructs this logic by positing the temporal sense of *différance*: the moment that the present (time) becomes present (spatially) it does not abide, but immediately passes away and becomes the past; and that someone in the future will have to recall this past in order for it to have ever been present. Temporal succession constantly moves on and undermines the present as a metaphysics of presence, but that which remains of the present when it passes away (the memory of the present) is a trace. Presence (temporal and spatial) is never undividable but is always radically inscribed in the flux of temporal succession. For a fuller

This is precisely the movement that Caputo is following in Derrida's engagement with negative theology, as will become clear during this section. To fully appreciate the theological undertones of *différance* that Derrida's interlocutor pointed out in the quote above, it is necessary that we briefly read Caputo and Derrida together on *différance* as a misspelling. This will show both the negation (how *différance* is not the God of negative theology) and the affirmation (how *différance* retrieves something deeper and enlivening within negative theology, but not according to the order of presence). By following this line of thinking we will be able to appreciate the ways in which Caputo's early (1997) engagement of *différance* anticipates, as it were, Caputo's later (2006) idea of a weak God. This in turn will flesh out further the temporal aspects of *différance* which will enable us to discuss Caputo's eschatology more directly in the next chapter on the messianic.

### 3.1.3 *Différance* as Misspelling

Derrida introduces *différance* in the context of the opposition between speech and writing. In this opposition there is usually a preference for speech over writing: speech is taken to be the clearest form of language, and writing is taken to be a supplement which only becomes necessary in the absence of speech. *Différance*, as the spatial opening which makes both speech and writing possible, undermines this opposition. To appreciate this, we must pay attention to the fact that '*différance*' is a misspelling of the word 'difference'. The effect that this misspelling has is that when the word '*différance*' is spoken, it cannot be distinguished from the word 'difference' – the pronunciation of both is identical.[81] One would then have to clarify "*différance* with an 'a'". In the case of the word '*différance*', writing brings a clarity that speech would not, thus undermining the preference for speech over writing.[82]

Thus far I have been describing *differance* as if it is a word (I have mentioned its pronunciation and its spelling), but it is (if it is) in fact neither a word, nor a concept.[83] To appreciate this point, again we must pay attention to the fact that this 'word' 'is' a [mis]spelling – the 'a' (*différance*) is not pronounced, and as we have mentioned, that is the precise reason that this

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discussion of this insight, see Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 13-49. With respect to the spatial ramifications of this insight, particularly as it pertains to the identity of the self, selfhood is constituted in relation to others as I discussed above.
[81] Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 3.
[82] "In any event, the oral specifications that I will provide – when I say "with an *e*" or "with an *a*" – will refer uncircumventably to a *written text* that keeps watch over my discourse, to a text that I am holding in front of me, that I will read, and toward which I necessarily will attempt to direct your hands and your eyes. We will be able neither to do without the passage through a written text, nor to avoid the order of the disorder produced within it – and this, first of all, is what counts for me." Ibid., 4.
[83]Ibid., 3.

[mis]spelling has no distinct pronunciation, and sounds exactly like 'difference'. The silence of the 'a' – this is the phonetic (speech) nuance – coupled with the fact that another word (difference) is pronounced in its place as a direct result of that silent 'a', and the fact that it is a misspelling – this is the graphic (writing) nuance – on account of that silent 'a', means that *différance* is less than a word, whether that word is spoken or written. That in turn means that *differance* is less than a concept.

It is important for Derrida that the fact that *différance* eludes sensibility – knowing through the senses of hearing (associated with language as speech – the phonic) and seeing (associated with language as writing – the graphic) – also means that *differance* eludes intelligibility. It is in the way that *différance* eludes intelligibility – *différance* is not a concept – that *différance* begins to sound like the God of negative theology. This can be seen firstly in the fact that language about *différance* is self-erasing:

> What am I to do in order to speak of the *a* of *differance*? It goes without saying that it cannot be *exposed*. One can expose only that which at a certain moment can become *present*, manifest, that which can be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present. Now if *differance* [is] (and I also cross out the "is") what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never present as such. It is never offered to the present. Or to anyone. Reserving itself, not exposing itself, in regular fashion it exceeds the order of truth at a certain precise point, but without dissimulating itself as something, as a mysterious being, in the occult of a nonknowledge or in a hole with indeterminable borders (for example, in a topology of castration). In every exposition it would be exposed to disappearing as disappearance. It would risk appearing: disappearing.[84]

The 'being' of *differance* is a being without being; it is ~~being~~: differance [dis]appears in the silence of a misspelling, is spoken without being spoken (on account of its lack of a distinct pronunciation) because it does not have being, but has ~~being~~; and that ~~being~~ is by nature (if it has a nature) that which appears by disappearing, that for which appearance is disappearance. Caputo's close reading of Derrida focuses on the fact that this makes *différance* sound like the God of negative theology, and he holds that Derrida is aware of this. In fleshing out this point Caputo points out that what deconstruction and negative theology have in common is that they both speak where speech is impossible: negative theology speaks of God in a discursive measure that erases itself because God is too transcendent for any discursive measures to succeed in speaking about God; while deconstruction speaks of *différance*, a concept or a word

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84 Ibid., 5-6.

that is neither a concept nor a word.[85] In other words, both negative theology and deconstruction make use of self-erasing speech.

A crucial difference between the two however is the referent of the respective self-erasing discursive measures. As I have already mentioned in the case of negative theology, it is God who cannot be spoken of due to God's transcendence. It is God's exalted being that makes speaking about God impossible, even though it is necessary. So, the referent of negative theology is a superior presence, a hyperpresence. This is a language that erases itself to shield an essence. In the case of the referent of deconstruction, however, self-erasing discursive measures are employed for exactly the opposite reason they are used in negative theology: the referent of deconstruction is without being and transcendence. In other words, *différance* is not that which negative theology calls God precisely because of the fact that *différance* is less than being (while God is more than being), but not quite nothing – and this is why language cannot capture it. Or, to phrase it differently, *différance* is not a presence. The reasoning behind this accusation has to do with how God and *différance* function: God, in negative theology, is the unknowable source of all things, and *différance*, in deconstruction, is the unknowable 'source', so to speak, of all things. However, the reason *différance* is not the God of negative theology has to do with the above mentioned crucial difference between negative theology's God and *differance*: negative theology's God is the transcendent, exalted and hyper-present – this hyper presence should be understood as metaphysics of presence – source of all things, and is unknowable as a result of God's transcendence and exultance; however *differance*:

> is less than real, not quite real, never gets as far as being or entity or presence, which is why it is emblematized by insubstantial quasi-beings like ashes and ghosts which flutter between existence and nonexistence, or with humble *khôra*, say, rather than with the prestigious Platonic sun. *Differance* is but a quasi-transcendental anteriority, not a supereminent, transcendent ulteriority.[86]

*Differance* is not God – *YHWH*, *Allah* or God the Father.[87] Also, the sense in which *differance* is the source of all things is not in the same sense that God is the transcendent source of all things; it is not according to the order of the *arkhē*, as Derrida points out.[88] This brings us back to the middle voice that we discussed above. *Différance* in not the first cause, and truly speaking

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[85] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 2.
[86] Ibid., 2-3.
[87] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears,* 342-343.
[88] In the footnote, the translator notes: "The Greek *arkhē* combines the values of a founding principle and of government by a controlling principle…." Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 6.

is not 'the source', or even a source, of words and concepts. *Différance* is not "an origin nor a transcendental, but rather a *process* of time and change."[89] In other words, *différance* is not active, it is not an agent. Rather *différance* is a spatial opening which occasions the existence of words and concepts. Caputo writes: "The namelessness of *différance* does not consist in being an unnameable being but in pointing to the differential matrix that generates names and concepts, in which they are produced as effects."[90] Then a little later he writes:

> Lacking all ontological profundity, all mystical depth, all royal dignity, all principial honor, forever uncapitalized, *différance* stretches out laterally over the surface of our beliefs and practices as the chain of substitutability. *Différance* is not the trace left behind by the *deus absconditus* but the coded tracing within which are generated all names and concepts, all the relatively stable nominal unities, including the name of the unknown God, or G-d, or *Gottheit*, including even itself, the name *différance*.[91]

*Différance* was supposed to function as a mute indicator of the differential opening or spacing without which there can be no words or concepts. It must be less than a concept or a name, so that concepts and names can be. With respect to theology, by virtue of the fact that *différance is* a mute indicator of differential spacing which is indispensable for the emergence of words and concepts, it is responsible for:

> …the conditions which make possible our beliefs and our practices, our traditions and our institutions, and no less to make them impossible, which means to see to it that they do not effect closure, to keep them open so that something new or different may happen.[92]

*Différance* is not only the condition which makes structures (language, our beliefs, our traditions, practices, and most importantly for this study, theology, amongst other structures) possible or constructible, but it is also the condition that makes them *impossible* or deconstructable. *Différance* makes deconstruction possible. With the last part of this quote on the "impossible" we are approaching the notion of event which, in this study, I will be showing is crucial for Caputo's conception of God and the eschatological in Caputo. I will return to this at the end of this chapter when I discuss Caputo's theology of the event and the perhaps. Put differently, *différance* functions as the ground of all our structures, however it is an unstable ground, a "groundless ground".[93] Here, even Paul Tillich's God, who is not a being, but is the

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[89] Ullrich, *Sovereignty and Event*, 123.
[90] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 8.
[91] Ibid.*,* 9.
[92] Ibid., 12.
[93] Ibid, 12.

ground of Being, is not radical enough.[94]  What this means is that all structures are relatively stable, yet relatively unstable; there is always a risk of *un*-structuring. This is what prevents structures from being permanently fixed or closed. It opens them to the *absolute future*. Whatever present form a structure like theology, for example, takes, it can always take another form in the future. This means that theology as a structure, or as a language can always become something new. This accounts for why new theologies tend to be developed such that they are simultaneously in continuity and discontinuity with whatever was called theology before. This was the case when such approaches as Latin American liberation theology, black theology, African theology, feminist theology, or radical theology, to name but a few, emerged out of the theologies that preceded them. For all intents and purposes, these liberation and radical theologies are all a part of the ongoing process of deconstruction within theology.

The fact that *différance* is also connected to the openness for the coming of something new is directly relevant to this study's emphasis of eschatology. *Différance* has a messianic quality to it. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter on the messianic. At this point it is crucial to emphasize that *différance* occasions the conditions which make deconstruction possible.

The purpose of this section has not been to discuss *différance* in a detailed manner, but only enough to make sense of Caputo's shift from radical hermeneutics to radical theology – which is not an abandonment of radical hermeneutics, but rather to repeat it in a theological register. We have seen here that the movement of deconstruction, which is occasioned by *différance*, is a shift away from essentialist thinking, to thinking of the constructed nature – and therefore contingency – of any structures (beliefs, institutions, knowledge systems and so on). As we will see in the third section, it is on account of *différance* that there can be a weakening or radicalizing of theology. Before I go on to discuss this, I must first discuss Caputo's shift form Derrida to God.

## 3.2 From a Religion Without Religion to a Radical Theology
Derrida writes about his "religion about which nobody understands anything" and because of which he is being "read less and less well."[95]  He also famously writes "I rightly pass for an

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[94] Tillich's ground of being still functions as a transcendental condition. This means that it makes structures fixed, determinable and gives things no true unpredictable, unprogrammable future. *Differance*, on the other hand is a qusi-trandsendental condition. This means that differance "allow[s things] to slip loose, to twist free from their surrounding horizons, leak and run off, to exceed or overflow their margins." Ibid., 12-13.
[95] Ibid., 287-288.

atheist".[96] As will become clear shortly, what Derrida means here is important to understanding Caputo's shift from religion without religion to (weak) theology. Caputo focuses on Derrida's invocation of saint Augustine's question; "What do I love when I love my God."[97] Caputo follows the deconstructive twist that Derrida gives this question, arguing that it posits God not as the essentiality that is being loved and sought after, but that a search for God is in fact a search for something deep within God that can also be sought through other names. Phrasing it this way misleadingly implies that there is some essential thing harboured in the search for God that can only be conceived of as a search for God. However, for Derrida that which is loved and sought after when God is loved and sought after is unknowable; not because of a limitation that bars us from knowing it, while it is potentially knowable, but because there is no essential thing to know in the first place.[98] Or worded differently, the secret is that there is no secret.[99] At the point where in a confessional context one must confess their belief as belief in God, Derrida confesses that even as he loves God, he does not know what he loves when he loves God. This is not a confession, but a *circumfession*. Derrida's relationship to religion is not confessional; it is *circumfessional*. *Circumfession* plays on circumcision and confession.[100] Circumcision in and of itself plays with the image of the Jewish ritual of circumcision which Derrida himself, as a Jew, underwent. As circumcision is a way of connecting baby boys to a history, a tradition, a covenant, Derrida invokes this image to show that there is a sense in which he is always already connected to his Jewish roots. This is where the name 'God' comes from for him. At the same time, he turns the image of circumcision on its head in that he does not only bear the cut of belonging to Judaism, but he is also cut from Judaism. On this point Caputo writes:

> What he calls his religion is not his Judaism but a break with Judaism, a break that cannot be made clearly, in virtue of what he elsewhere called the impossibility of the pure cut.[101]

So, Derrida invokes the image of circumcision in a way that defies closure: it does not simply mean that he either is connected to Judaism, or cut from it, but rather the complexity of belonging and not belonging. Therefore, it is to the extent that he is not completely cut from his Jewish roots that he still addresses what he loves and desires,

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[96] Ibid., 288.
[97] Ibid., 286.
[98] Ibid., 287.
[99] Ibid., 101-110.
[100] Ibid., 184.
[101] Ibid., 283.

and yet does not know – the impossible – as 'God'; however, it is to the extent that he is cut from his Jewish roots that he does not know that what he loves and desires in his love and desire for God is essentially God:

> From the point of view of an orthodox Jewish theism, Derrida passes for an atheist, an atheist relative to that God, to the classical Jewish understanding of the name of God. But he by no means passes for an atheist about every God…[102]

Note that Caputo is pointing out here that it is not according to Derrida that Derrida is an atheist, but it is according to confessional religious traditions. However, Derrida himself is not willing to part with the name 'God'. Caputo here focuses on the way in which approaching God from a position of non-knowing allows God-talk to persist without being essentialised. Here God is not denied, but affirmed; however, this affirmation is not from above – God as the essential or ultimate truth – but from below:

> Derrida's is much more an Augustinian than a Thomistic God, *my* God, not, as in saint Thomas…what everybody calls God. The name of God is not the name of some "theological" being or object. "God" is given only in praying and weeping…we would say that "God" for him is given not in theological analysis but in religious experience, in a certain passion for the impossible.[103]

We see here that Derrida only speaks of God from below – in religious experiences of prayer and weeping. For Derrida these experiences are not moments of contact with the metaphysical ground of reality but are born out of a passion for the impossible. This notion of the impossible will be explicated in more detail in the next section of this chapter but based on how the impossible is linked to God in opposition to Thomistic metaphysics. Whatever Derrida means by God as a passion for the impossible is not universal or essential, nor is it a metaphysical ground. Derrida does not reject God, but relates to God as a historical contingency:

> For me even if I say God doesn't exist, I would immediately say the opposite. God exists to the extent that people believe in God. There has been a history, and there are religions. For me, religions are the proof that God exists, even if God doesn't exist. That's the question. Even if I were able to demonstrate, against all the canonical proofs of the existence of God, that God doesn't exist, it wouldn't demonstrate that God doesn't exist, because religions exist, because people believe in God…So that's enough. That's the existence of God for me. Not simply Christian God, Jewish God, the Islamic God – something exists which is named God differently, with different

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[102] Ibid., 288.
[103] Ibid., 288-289.

meanings, with different images, with different rights, rituals. But something happened, even if you follow Freud, as a neurosis. Perhaps it's a human neurosis, but human neuroses attest to the fact that something has produced this neurosis. That's God. God is the name of this pathogenic power that produces neurosis, psychosis, paranoia, wars, peace, love, and so on and so forth. Isn't that enough? God exists even if, and especially if, he doesn't exist, because how powerful this nonexistence should be to produce such extraordinary phenomena in what is called man. I never said this publicly up to now.[104]

Significantly for Derrida the existence of God does not refer to an essence but to a history. The word 'God' does not have an essence but has a history. Derrida shifts away from the search for an essence and turns everything back to the material reality of the existence of concrete, historical, confessional communities. This is an important point. In the next section we will see this same chiasmic structure in the relationship between a name and an event as well as the relationship between confessional theology and radical theology. In the previous chapter, we anticipated it in the context of the chiasm between Being and beings. In the next chapter we will encounter it as the chiasm between the messianic and concrete existing messianisms, then in the final chapter I will discuss it in the context of the chiasm between black theology and liberation. This chiasmic structure is a key part of this study. Before I can say more on that, however, it is important to note that there are clear differences between the way Derrida reflects on God here and the way Caputo speaks of God.[105] Both think of God, not as an existence but as a non-existence that affects that which exists. This is the point that is important in approaching an understanding of Caputo's reflections on God. Be that as it may, the significant difference between the two for my purposes here is their differing opinions about theology. Derrida tended to see theology as entirely metaphysical, preferring instead to focus on religious experience as a desire for the impossible. Caputo, who at some point shared this opinion, eventually comes to see theology differently.[106] In *Prayers and Tears* Caputo criticises Derrida for this unequivocal stand on theology.[107] For biographical reasons Derrida will not go beyond religion (without religion) to theology. For biographical reasons, this is precisely where Caputo takes deconstruction. Derrida rightly passes for an atheist, while Caputo rightly passes as a

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[104] J. Derrida in , *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, 39.

[105] For example, Caputo does not share Derrida's interest in Freud, and certainly does not pursue a Freudian articulation of the insistence/existence chiasm. When speaking of one of the differences between Derrida and himself, he writes: "One other difference between me and him is that I don't put the same stock that he does in psychoanalysis." See Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 136.

[106] Caputo states that it was Jeffrey Robbins who convinced him not to entirely associate theology with metaphysics of presence. See Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos*, 236.

[107] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 289.

Christian.[108] The shift from a focus on Derrida is not a departure from Derrida, but a repetition of Derridean deconstruction on different matters – Christian theology.

It is important to highlight the difference between Caputo's shift from Heidegger to Derrida, and Caputo's shift from Derrida to God. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the shift from Heidegger to Derrida was occasioned by several factors: a residual essentialism in Heidegger in the form of an eschatological nostalgia for the beginning, and his disillusionment with Heidegger on account of his involvement with the Nazis. As I discussed above, Heidegger's grip on Caputo, though liberating him from the ridged dogmatic Catholicism in which he was deeply rooted when he encountered Heidegger's work, did not give him the intellectual freedom to speak more directly to and explicitly from his own concerns.[109] It is when he began seriously engaging Derrida – in 1984 while finishing *Radical Hermeneutics* – that he began to write with his own voice.[110] So, Caputo's shift from Heidegger to Derrida was the most decisive shift away from grand narratives, and that occasioned his speaking from his own situatedness. Therefore, considering the fact Derrida gave Caputo his own voice, this later shift in focus away from Derrida to God was in fact a natural outgrowth of the way he had been reading Derrida. Caputo repeats Derridean deconstruction on concerns that are not Derrida's but Caputo's. Now I will speak more directly to Caputo's theology.

### 3.3 A Theology of the Event

*The Weakness of God* is the point in Caputo's corpus when a shift is most pronounced. Here, he focuses not on Derrida's earlier semiotic articulations of *différance* but on Derrida's later more ethico-politico-religious articulations.[111] So instead of focusing on how *différance* occasions the emergence of different words and meanings, the focus now is on how different beliefs also emerge from the differential spacing and flux of temporal succession (*différance*). So if we take the theological examples of atheism and theism, there is a sense in which these two different positions are respectively co-constitutive: it is because there is such a thing as theism that atheism makes sense, and vice versa; or it is because there is such a thing as 'the sacred' that 'the secular' makes sense (and vice versa).[112] This is also true of differing and even polemical political and ethical positions. The novelty of Caputo's approach is that he then takes

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[108] *After the Death of God*, 136.
[109] Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 135.
[110] Ibid., 135.
[111] Caputo, *The Weakness of God page,* 25.
[112] Ibid., 25.

these ways of thinking about *différance* and reads them together with God, thus effectively reading a minor voice (*différance*) with a major voice (God).[113] This is the experiment Caputo carries out in the entire length of the book *The Weakness of God*. This leads him to take such *major* tropes as God as a being or Being, God's sovereignty, God's transcendence, God as creator (the first cause), miracle narratives, the resurrection and the kingdom of God, to name but a few; and to read them not outside the play of *différance*, but within it. This plays out as a confrontation with the way in which God, in classical theology, is caught up in the metaphysics of presence. In other words, this is a confrontation with the way in which God in theology has tended to function as a way of sidestepping the original difficulty of life, the flux (*différance*). Caputo opts not to turn to God to evade the flux, but he does this in a way that does not reject the name of God, or declare it dead, assuming the name of 'God' is only meaningful as a metaphysics of presence. After all, for Caputo all meaning making – including theology – takes place in the flux (there is nothing outside the text). Caputo does not declare the name of God meaningless, or obsolete – Caputo's is not a death of God theology. Instead, it is that all the meaning that the name of God has is irreducibly within the flux of *différance* without remainder – the name of God does not signify a metaphysical transcendence, or any kind of essentiality, but it is the name of a particular on-going history. To make sense of what God means, we do not turn to something outside of the name of God, but to an effect that this name has had on concrete existing historical communities – what Derrida calls the impossible, as we saw above. With respect to God, all that exists is the name of God and its history in various communities. Or worded more carefully, the name of God is a site on which a cluster of histories of various communities intersect, clash, converge, diverge – flux. This name, the narratives, and ways of making meaning connected to it – this cluster of histories, and their complex relations – is all that exists. These histories cluster around the name of God because the name of God has a certain effect on various communities – God does not exist, God insists. The effect of the name of God – the insistence of God – is an experience of what Derrida calls the impossible. I will now elaborate more on this theme.

### 3.3.1 The Impossible

Above, when discussing the relationship between *différance* and the structures – languages, institutions, beliefs, and practices – that emerge as a result of the unending play of *différance*, I mentioned the 'impossible' as an effect of *différance*. Then again, I discussed Derrida's concern with religion as a concern with the impossible. Now we see in Caputo that this

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[113] Ibid., 24.

historical construction that is the name of God has emerged, and persists, as a name that names this experience. Where deconstruction is an experience of the impossible,[114] for Caputo theology is a hermeneutics of the experience of the impossible as an experience of God.[115] Two points about the impossible are important to keep in mind here: firstly, the impossible is what Caputo means by God, secondly, the impossible is radically futural. What in deconstruction is called the impossible should always be thought of in relation to the possible; and both the possible and the impossible should be thought of in temporal terms. The possible refers to the future, while the impossible refers to the absolute future. In order to draw a clear distinction between these two futures, Caputo calls the future which relates to the possible the "future present".[116] He then calls the future that relates to the impossible the "absolute future".[117] The future present is a programable future. This is the future that is a relatively predictable outgrowth of the present. It is according to this temporality that people make investments, plans, and promises. Accordingly, the word 'present,' in future present is the temporal sense of 'presence'. It refers to the way in which the future is a presence that will inevitably or probably come to pass. This is the future as an extension of the present – the future as presence. Obviously, this is an unavoidable and even necessary way to relate to the future. However, there is a more radical futurity imbedded within life to which, as I will be arguing in this study, eschatology is attuned to: the absolute future.

The absolute future is a future that cannot be predicted; a future that "shatters the horizons of our expectations". Speaking of the absolute future, Caputo writes:

> This is the sphere of the impossible, of something of whose possibility we just cannot conceive….So it is not simply or absolutely impossible, like "p and *not* -p," which would reduce it to incoherence, but what the French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls "the impossible," meaning something that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, that has never entered into the mind of human beings…[118]

It is striking that Caputo makes use of biblical language when speaking of the impossible. This is in keeping with the thesis of Caputo's *Prayer and Tears of Jacques Derrida*: that religion is not a discursive tool that can be dispensed with at will in deconstruction, but that deconstruction is radically religious, that it is a religion *without* (*sans*) religion or even a theology without

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[114] Ibid., 103.
[115] Ibid., 2.
[116] J. D. Caputo, *On Religion* (2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2019), 8.
[117] Ibid., 9.
[118] Ibid., 10-11.

theology – what Caputo will later call not theology but theopoetics. For Caputo, following Derrida, this absolute future – the impossible – is a radical sense of future that is a religious or theological category; it is a radical messianic 'to come' structure.[119] This futurity cannot depend on the present (presence) for any guarantees. This is not a future that is bound to happen or is probable. Possibility refers to inevitability and probability, where the future is a logical outcome of the present (presence). Impossibility reverses this: this is the sort of future that is not a logical outcome of the present. It is not predictable because it is a radical break with the present and with presence. It is the sort of future that the *Parousia* – the coming of Christ (the other) – is associated with in the New Testament when it is compared to the unforeseeable coming of a thief in the night.[120] Nothing about what the New Testament calls 'this *present age*' occasions the age to come: the age to come radically breaks with the present age; it is ushered in by God. Similarly in a nation with a high level of inequality and poverty like South Africa, imagining a radically different more just and egalitarian life pushes one to think beyond the inevitable and probable – the institutions and structures of which would undermine the possibility of a more just and egalitarian society, as they inevitably perpetuate this present order[121] – and to anticipate something radical and revolutionary, a paradigm shift that transgresses the bounds of logical necessity and probability (presence). We will reflect on the South African context more directly in the final chapter of this study. The point here is that for Caputo – and this is a central point in this study – what is meant by God is the impossible, and so there is something inherently eschatological about Caputo's God: Caputo's God is not present (presence) but is always deferred, always already coming, on the way. This is the notion of an event, of the name of God as the name of an event or of events, and it is to this that we turn now.

### 3.3.2 A Theology of the Event

Events are provisional effects of the movement of *différance*.[122] *Différance* destabilizes the present (presence) – it does not do away with it – by always exposing it to the past and the

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[119] Ibid., 9.
[120] Ibid., 8.
[121] Here I am implicitly referring to coloniality, which is the way in which present structures and institutions in South Africa perpetuate realities that colonialism initiated, and Apartheid normalized, even after almost three decades of life in a democratic South Africa. Although I can only make implicit reference to this here, in the next chapter on the messianic, and especially the final chapter of this study, I will speak to this more directly.
[122] J.D. Caputo, *In Search of Radical Theology: Expositions, Explorations, Exhortations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 210; K.S. Moody, *Radical Theology and Emerging Christianity: Deconstruction, Materialism and Religious Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 62

future, showing that the present does not contain all there is to a structure, but that a structure is what it is in the present in the light of a trace, a memory of the past that it is present as a remainder and reminder of, but also a future – or futures – that this memory calls for.[123] So an event has these two aspects (past and future). Caputo draws on Derrida and Deleuze to flesh out both.[124]

Derrida's sense of the event is the breaking in of something totally new (the wholly other), something that comes from without: "the breaking into our familiar world of something completely amazing, completely unexpected, which breaks up our horizons of expectations."[125] It is important to emphasise that Derrida's conception of event stresses the movement from the outside to the inside, an incoming, and that this corresponds to the futural as well as the past aspects of event – the messianic. For Deleuze event is described in the opposite direction, so to speak, as "the coming-out … or bursting out of something we did not see coming, something unforeseen, singular, irregular, even a bit odd."[126] A helpful image is that structures harbour or contain something – a memory – that exceeds them much like a glass overflowing. So, structures exist in the memory of something (event) that precedes them, but they are never able to contain it, and it bursts out, or breaks out, pressuring those structures to either change, fragment or even die.[127] Caputo opts not to decide between the two, but holds both senses of event together and develops a theology where God is not what is present – a being or agent – but 'is' that which provokes, disturbs or haunts what is present in the name of the possibility of the coming of something new and different, the other (the future, or messianic), and at the same time God 'is' that which bursts out of what is present, exceeding its boundaries, as a trace, a memory of a past immemorial, the memory of which constitutes what is present. The name of God is a historical construction that names an effect this name has on concrete historical communities – an *event*. As the name of an event, God is a name for a disturbance deep within theology that is older than theology and is older than [the name(s) and the concept(s) of] God. God is a historically conditioned name under which events happen. For Caputo 'God' is not essential for events but is instead one provisional effect of *différance* under which events promise/threaten to breakout or break-in.[128] The events that certain religious communities have interacted with through 'God' happen anywhere and everywhere under a plethora of other

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[123] Caputo, *In Search of Radical Theology*, 11.
[124] Moody, *Radical Theology and Emerging Christianity*, 62.
[125] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 109.
[126] Ibid., 109.
[127] Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 68.
[128] The promise/threat structure of event.

names and concepts. This in deconstruction is called translatability, and it is also an effect of *différance*. One of Caputo's favorite examples is the way in which the name of God can easily be substituted with the word 'justice'. The radical aspect of translatability is that *différance* cannot settle the question of which signifier is the translation, and which signifier is the translated. God could be an example of justice (amongst other things) and justice could equally be an example of God, or God could be a way in which certain communities have dealt with the provocations of justice, or justice could be a secularized theological concept. That risky radicality is never closed. There is a radical non-knowing. So, to respond to the call, not knowing whether you are responding to the call of God in the form of a call of justice, or to the call of justice in the form of a call of God, is what makes it an event. God is here somewhat negated, even as God – nay, 'something' happening within God – is affirmed. Therefore, different theologies keep on emerging, revising theologies that came before them: something older than God is breaking out of God, promising to either change the meaning of the word 'God', while simultaneously threatening to destroy God. Caputo's God is a mortal God, wounded by *différance*.[129] Having said that, wording it this way – something within God – may misleadingly makes it sound like we are referring to an essence. This is why it is helpful to remember the Derridean sense that the event harbored by the name of God is a 'to come', a perpetual deferral; where we would expect to find a grounding essence we find a 'to come', not because at some future point this name can have an essence (there is no secret), but because the perpetual deferral itself is what is important. However, the Deleuzian sense that this event transgresses the limits of the name 'God' must also be maintained.

Here we see both the temporal and the spatial effect of the flux of *différance* playing out on the name of God. This, however, should not lead us to collapse *différance* and event into one another. The two are related but are not identical. Event is an effect of *différance*. As has already been explained, *différance* is the condition that is always already endlessly at play (the flux of temporal succession and spatial differentiation). As I have explained, all present constructions – structures, units of meaning, words, beliefs, cultures, etc. – emerge from *différance*. This includes God. God, as a name and a history (or a cluster of histories) is an effect of *différance*, and so are the events harbored by this name. *Différance* is the reason that God – not as a being, but as a name, its histories, and meanings in the communities that value it – exists at all. *Différance* is also the reason that God is always at risk of becoming obsolete.

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[129] J.D. Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos: A Theology of Difficult Glory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 220-222.

There are also alternative names, beliefs, structure, histories, etc. that emerge and bring about paradigm shifts where they emerge, effecting changes so radical that they either completely alter or destroy the structures that came before. These alternative structures are not present, they are always deferred, always still to come; they are potentiality, they are simultaneously a promise and threat: a promise because what is coming could enhance what is, a threat because what is coming could destroy what is. And these alternative structures which have no presence are riddled with undecidability or unpredictability or unconditionality. What this means is that there is no guarantee that they will become present; they have no power or force or agency to make themselves present – they never harden into a metaphysics of presence. Even when something does come, by virtue of having come, it is no longer the event. Event is always deferred, so long as structures still have a future in which they could develop and become otherwise than they are or could meet their end. Another sense in which events are unconditional or riddled with undecidability.

It is important that Caputo's notion of event not be confused with Immanuel Kant's notion of an "idea".[130] The idea, in the Kantian sense, is an ideal towards which we strive, but always fall short of attaining because of our finitude.[131] Even though this ideal will never be actualized, it becomes an ethical prescription which compels us to act responsibly towards the other who is coming.[132] In that sense, the idea becomes a ground for ethics, a guarantee that we always know in some sense what the ethical thing is, even when we are unable to actualize it. However, the notion of event for Caputo, following Derrida (and Deleuze), does not provide an ethical prescription which, at the very least, functions as an ethical compass. This is precisely the sort of ethics that Caputo pushes back against in *Against Ethics*.[133] The event is a disturbance precisely because when it disturbs, there is no prescribed course of action, or ideal to strive towards; we might or might not act ethically – the event is a weak force, that lacks the power to enforce itself. When we choose to act ethically towards the other, however, we do that

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[130] C.D. Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below: A South African Christological Encounter with Radical Theology." *Black Theology: An International Journal* (2021), 5.

[131] Hägglund, *Radical Atheism*, 9.

[132] Ibid., 31.

[133] "From a deconstructive point of view, declining the good name of ethics is an operation aimed at appreciating that tenuous and delicate situation of judgement which is addressed by the name "undecidability." …A deconstruction is thus a less…reassuring undertaking than ethics or Originary Ethics, one in which sound principles of Saving Events do not at all figure. On the contrary, to speak of being against ethics and of deconstructing ethics is to own up to the lack of safety by which judging is everywhere beset. The thing that concerns me, and that I name under the not very protective cover of deconstruction, is the loss of the assurance, the lack of the safe passage, that ethics has always promised." J.D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 3-4.

precisely where we are abandoned by ethics (ethical assurances), and whatever comes of our actions is our responsibility, and ours alone.

### 3.3.3 A Radical Theology of Perhaps

As I mentioned above, Caputo makes a double gesture of negation and affirmation where what is negated is God – according to the order of (metaphysics of) presence and onto-theo-logic – and what is affirmed is 'something' that is not ontological that the name and concept(s) of God have historically preserved. However, if this 'something' is not a thing, or a being (presence) it 'is' a *may*-being. In *The Insistence of God* (2013) Caputo further refines this line of thought by speaking of God as God, *perhaps*.[134] 'Perhaps' here is meant to replace presence: where in classical theology God is a 'what' that can be spoken of ontologically, in weak theology God is a 'how' that can be spoken of hauntologically. Perhaps means chance, event means chance. God is not a being but a *may*-being, a perhaps, an event; the name of God names possibilities.

*May*-being (maybe) and perhaps here do not mean timidity or expedience when having to make a decision about whether or not to believe in God. Also, it does not refer to agnosticism. The problem with an agnostic perhaps for Caputo is that is still speaks of God according to the order of being and presence, even if all that will be said of God's being and presence is that we do not know or perhaps there is/not a God. In Caputo's theology, perhaps changes the terms of the discussion entirely away from God as a 'what'. This is a theology that ignores the question of whether or not God exists entirely; it ignores the 'what' questions when approaching God, and replaces them with 'how' questions: there is a shift in focus from the being of God to a way of being in the world (a how) that is provoked or called for through the name(s) and concept(s) of God, whether or not God actually exists as a presence. There are ways of being in the world that are radically different to any present mode of being, that are hoped for, and the word 'God' has tended to function as a way of imagining these possibilities, a way of anticipating them even as it is impossible to anticipate them.

An example of what I mean is the way in which those who live in an unjust society can hope for a society that is different to theirs. This hope betrays an even more radical hope, a faith that a different society is possible, but not in the sense that it is probable. This refers to the possibility of a reality that will completely alter the present reality, a reality that cannot be known beforehand because of how radically other it is from any present realty. This is the possibility not of the possible (the predictable or probable) but the possibility of the impossible,

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[134] J.D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 9.

where impossible means that which radically breaks with the present order, to a paradigm shift that changes the world as we know it. According to this telling, the logical (*logos*), even as we find it in theology (theos-*logos*) is attuned to the present (presence), what will inevitably come to be, or what will probably happen. However, Caputo's theology of perhaps is attuned to what is improbable, what breaks radically with what is present (the impossible). For this reason, Caputo cannot comfortably refer to what he is doing as theology. That is why he calls it weak theology, radical theology, and theopoetics.

### 3.3.4 Hauntology and the Chiastic Structure

Ontology is metaphysics, as I discussed it in the previous chapter, is concerned with the difference between Being and beings. Hauntology, on the other hand, is a term Derrida coined to refer to something that does not exist, but haunts (hence *haunt*-ology) or disturbs those things that exist.[135] This is precisely what we have been discussing as the insistence or provocation – the effect of the name of God on historical existing communities. It is not that there is an agent – God as a ghost like spirit – haunting, provoking or calling, but rather a provocation that happens in the middle voice in the event harboured by the name of God. For conceptual clarity, it is helpful to think of it in the following manner: an event is the way in which the flux of *différance* permeates a construction, occasioning endless linkages to other constructions (translatability) and also making it possible for that given construction to be in flux, to shift and change and have a future. The event harbored by the name 'God", as the effect of the play *différance* in that name, is not an essence, nor is it a being, but a provocation. The name 'God' – with the histories tied to it – names a particular provocation of things that exist:

> …in my vocabulary, the world is there, being is there, and there we are, there in the world, being right there along with the world. By "God," on the other hand, I do not mean a being who is there, an entity trapped in being, even as a super-being *up there*, up above the world, who physically powers and causes it…I mean a call that solicits and disturbs what is there, an event that adds a level of signification and meaning, of provocation and solicitation to what is there, that makes it impossible for the world for what is *there*, to settle solidly in place, to consolidate, to close in upon itself [136]

Seeing that the name 'God' names the disturbance itself – the way that the effect of *différance* is extended in the world as we know it through the name of God – rather than an agent who disturbs, God cannot be described ontologically (as an agent who disturbs), but hauntologically

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[135] For a clearer understanding of hauntology, see Jacques Derrida's, *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 9-10, 63, 202; Caputo's, *Prayers and Tears*, 118-122; Hägglund's, *Radical Atheism*, 139-141.

[136] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 39.

(as a disturbance that disturbs in the middle voice). Here we see the chiastic structure I referred to in the previous chapter (at the end of section 2.2.3) in a Derridean fashion. There, in a Heideggerian manner, we discussed the chiasmic structure as the relationship between *difference* (the difference between Being and beings) and *dif-ference* (that which occasions the difference between Being and beings). Now, in a Derridean and Deleuzian way we see it as a chiasm between a name and an event. A name, as I have already stated, is a concrete historical contingency. An event is the effect that this name has on communities, but this effect is also older than the name – it is because there is a history of effects that by way of historical contingency have clustered around this name that we still have this name. We would be unable to even conceive of events as we encounter them in the name of God if the name of God did not exist. The unique way in which the flux of *différance* has played itself out in the history of this name is only known because historical constructions – the name, the communities that value it, what the creeds come up with, etc. – preserve the trace of this particular play of *différance*. Here the event is not an essence that renders the name superfluous, but rather the event is a weak trace that needs the concrete historical constructs to preserve it. Hauntology is more precarious than ontology. So, there is a particular way in which the name of God repeats the flux in the world as we know it: by exposing the contingency in the way that we have currently constructed the world, haunting us with the possibility of a different way:

> Religious language is hyperbole. The name "God" is a hyperbolic response to the call of obligation, meant to magnify our expressions of outrage at injustice and oppression and to amplify our acts of solidarity with those who suffer and demand justice. But the religious response to suffering is always already exposed to and haunted by its opposite, the tragic hermeneutic, according to which injustice and oppression are not to be protested as an offence against life, having no need of redemption or redress.[137]

Here the religious interpretation (the name of 'God') of the flux is affirmed: it is seen as a way of preserving the trace of the provocation to oppose injustice and oppression by magnifying that provocation (constructing names such as the name of 'God', constructing creeds, and building communities around them). However, this trace is preserved without being essentialized – reality is not fundamentally just or unjust; reality is not fundamentally anything (it is the flux). The event – as but one effect of the fluxing play of *différance* – can easily be lost (it is a weak force), and this intensifies the need for the constructs that have emerged, historically contingent as they are, to preserve the event. The chiasm leaves those who hold on

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[137] Moody, "John D. Caputo," 99.

to the name of 'God' with more responsibility than does a metaphysics of presence – there is no essence, or transcendent ground to ensure that the call of justice preserved in the name of 'God" will never be lost, and therefore it is the responsibility of those connected with this name (the communities that value it, adhering to the creeds constructed around it) to bring it into existence. Without concrete existing creeds, and communities and names (God) the event is lost. The event is not an essence, and therefore cannot be known apart from concrete constructions. This plays itself out in Caputo articulation of radical theology. For Caputo, radical theology does not exist as a distinct creed over and against confessional theology but is the becoming radical of confessional theology.[138] He writes:

> I posit that there are midnight moments when confessional theologians toss and turn with the haunting thought that what they call a gift of grace is in fact an accident of birth - that, had they been born in another time and place, they would have entirely different things inside their heads than the things they defend in their daytime theologies. That radical confession is what I mean by confessional theologians becoming circum-fessional.[139]

Radical theology is never a present creed, or theology, but is always something happening to theology – it is confessional theology *becoming* radical. Radical theology is theology's own auto-deconstruction. It is theology's exposure to its future. This chiastic structure as I have discussed it between confessional theology and radical theology, as well as between the name and the event, will be helpful as I discuss the way the messianic deconstructs eschatology in the next chapter. In this chapter, we have discussed *différance* and observed that it occasions both spatial and temporal effects. We have seen how Caputo works out a radical theology by reading *différance* and God together, rendering God as non-essential, yet still affirming the name of 'God' – not through metaphysics but through a chiasmic structure. I am now better able to directly discuss eschatology.

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[138] Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 68.
[139] Ibid., 72.

# Chapter 4: The Messianic and Eschatology

The aim of this chapter is to read Caputo's articulation of the messianic as eschatology, and at that to frame it in a larger eschatological conversation. To do this, I will begin by briefly sketching out a history of eschatology in North Atlantic theology. This sketch will provide historical background, only in so far as it is relevant for reading Caputo eschatologically. This will in turn provide a backdrop against which to read what I am identifying as the eschatological in Caputo. It is important to clarify at this juncture that Caputo himself does not intend for his work to be read against the eschatological background I will be providing. This is largely because Caputo is not intentional about engaging eschatology. However, his work – particularly on the messianic – is a kind of eschatology, and there are hints in his corpus that he is aware of this; and in addition to that, through the messianic he pushes back against the eschatological conception of history as progress. After I have given my eschatological reading of Caputo's messianic, I will address the limits of this eschatology: it is a specifically North Atlantic eschatology. Even as I want to take up Caputo's critique of the metaphysics of presence in theology, particularly as Caputo's reflection on the messianic deepens this critique to the level of the eschatological, Caputo does not speak to the concerns I wish to address from my context. For this reason, in the final section of this chapter I will turn to an eschatology of the colonized as it is articulated by Vítor Westhelle. I will borrow from him the critique of the preoccupation of eschatologies of the West with the conception of eschatology as time (longitudinal eschatology) to the neglect of the spatial dimensions of eschatology (latitudinal eschatology). This will help me keep the eschatological insights I glean from Caputo even as it will help me move beyond Caputo's more Western oriented concerns. This will prepare me to discuss my South African context more directly in the next chapter.

## 4.1 History of Eschatology

To begin with I want to keep two general conceptions of eschatology in view. The first conceives of eschatology as an abrupt catastrophic break with the trajectories of human history, and the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. This was the predominant sense of eschatology in earlier Christianity. The second, which crystalized around the time of the Enlightenment through to early modernity, was a shift away from catastrophic eschatologies, toward more teleological notions of eschatology as "the goal of human striving and thus the goal of human

history."[140] This began as an emphasis on the kingdom of God becoming a spiritual reality in the hearts of believers, a view that was spread through global missionary activity and was later secularized in philosophy. In its more spiritualized forms, this took the form of an emphasis of a personal eschatology of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine that is a departure from the earlier notion of a resurrection of the dead. The differences between premodern eschatologies and these eschatologies of early modernity run deeper.

The premodern, catastrophic (apocalyptic) eschatologies were more pessimistic about the ability of humans to bring about a better world, and this is seen precisely in the fact that these eschatologies depicted redemption as something that would happen when God or the Messiah intervenes directly in human history and ends its present trajectory (the present age) thus beginning a messianic age (the age to come). So catastrophic apocalyptic notions such as the *Parousia*, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgement were emphasized as they were the means through which God would end history. This sense of eschatology also had a spatial sense, relating to a limit or edge or border. Some New Testament examples of this are Acts 1:8 and 13:47 which refer to the "*ends* (*eschatou*) of the world",[141] or Matthew 24:14 which connects the end of the age (time) with the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world (space) to all the nations. The teleological eschatologies of the Enlightenment (all the way through to modernity) on the other hand took the opposite position. They were optimistic about humanity and depicted humanity as progressing toward a state of moral and political perfection (*telos*). This made the elements of eschatology that emphasized a catastrophic disruption of history – the Parousia, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgement, to name but three – obsolete, and conveniently so considering how out of step they were with "the world of Newtonian science".[142] Additionally, these premodern catastrophic eschatologies were also rejected because they were understood to be "an expression of Jewish nationalistic views, bound up with Jewish nationalistic messianism that was waiting for a restoration of the kingdom of Israel."[143] This means that in the intellectual genealogy of any eschatology of

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[140] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," in Jerry L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 494.

[141] V. Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space: The Lost Dimension in Theology Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 56.

[142] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 493.

[143] Ibid., 494.

progress we find Christian supersessionism. This is not insignificant considering the fact that race or the racial scale can also be traced to this long history of Christian supersessionism.[144]

Enlightenment philosophers opted to secularize this more teleological conception of eschatology. We see this in Immanuel Kant's notion of a moral destiny of mankind (where eschatology was reduced to the moral future of humanity),[145] as well as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's secular version of a realized eschatology of sorts, which was concerned with freedom (autonomy). This freedom that was on its way (eschatology) is realized in the present in the incarnation of Christ.[146] A left wing school of thought within Hegelianism was critical of Hegel's realized eschatology, pointing to the fact that socially and politically there was no sign of the freedom of which Hegel spoke, and so they thought of this freedom as something that would come about in the future.[147] This is the kind of Hegelianism that Karl Marx, and by extension Marxism, is influence by. The quasi-eschatological nature of Marxism is something that Derrida discuses at length. The way in which Derrida – and, by extension, Caputo – are at one and the same time influenced by Marx and criticize the strong messianism (eschatology) of progress in Marx will be instructive on the nature of eschatology in Caputo, as will be seen in the second and third sections of this chapter. This tendency to secularize eschatology resulted in a decline in eschatological thinking in the nineteenth century.[148]

This quasi-eschatological[149] notion of history as progress toward human freedom took many forms which I will not be discussing here due to spatial limitations. It is not insignificant that in this sense eschatology as progress – either as whiteness, Europe, or the West at large – was at times explicitly and at other times implicitly posited as the *telos*, the goal towards which history was moving. Some examples of explicit cases of this are Kant's conception that whiteness is the goal to which humanity moves,[150] or the Western liberal notion that Western

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[144] "Indeed, supersessionist thinking is the womb in which whiteness will mature. Any attempt to address supersessionism must carefully attend to the formation of the racial scale and the advent of a new vision of Christian social space." W. J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 36.

[145] Jerry L. Walls, "Introduction", *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.

[146] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 495-496.

[147] Ibid., 496.

[148] Jerry L. Walls, "Introduction," 7-8;

[149] I use the term quasi-eschatology here to refer ideas that are not theological, but nevertheless retain secularized eschatological gestures.

[150] Explaining Kant's quasi-eschatology J. Kameron Carter writes: "Thus, whiteness is both "now and not yet." It is a present reality, and yet it is also still moving toward and awaiting its perfection. The teleological end, which is the consummation of all things within the economic, political, and aesthetic – in short, within the structural

democracy is a case of realized eschatology.[151] Additionally, we can see an awareness of the implicitly Eurocentric nature of Marxism in the search for alternatives to it, amongst other things, for the global South.[152] This privileging of whiteness, Europe, or the West in general is an eschatological example of what I have been describing throughout this study as a metaphysics of presence, as will be made more explicit in this chapter. These eschatologies of history as progress, in both their secular and overtly Christian forms, thrived in the nineteenth century in various ways globally: from the colonization of North America by the settlers, to the establishment of European colonial empires in Africa, Asia and Latin America, to the furtherance of global missionary endeavors.[153]

This very brief sketch given above only serves the purpose of very broadly painting an intellectual genealogy of the eschatological notion of history as progress. However, early in the twentieth century, there was a rediscovery of that earlier sense of eschatology, at least with respect to an eschatological pessimism about human progress. This rediscovery began with Johannes Weiss, who posited that according to the New Testament, the kingdom of God would not be brought about by human beings, but by God alone.[154] This claim was taken further by Albert Schweitzer in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906). This book undermined the Kantian and liberal portrayals of Jesus, which fit the above-mentioned striving of humanity towards its goal, by turning to the conception of eschatology as an abrupt break with the world and human efforts.[155] For the purposes of this study it is important to emphasize that the nation of South Africa emerged in history not only in this period, but through the colonial expansion – which is a part of a European quasi-eschatological project of human progress – that I have

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– reality called "whiteness," is on the one hand made present and available now in white people and in white "culture." And on the other hand, it is through these white people and culture that the full reality of whiteness will globally expand to "eschatologically" encompass all things and so bring the world to perfection." *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89.

[151] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 496. A striking example of the sort of this quasi-eschatology is F. Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), where Western liberal democracy is portrayed as the *eschaton*.

[152] Walter Mignolo states: "Nobody has access to an ultimate truth, and, consequently, no one person (or collective, church or government) from the right or from left, can offer a solution for the entire population of the planet. That is why abstract universals (Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism, and Islamism) run out of fashion and become the different content of the same fundamentalist and imperial logic." "Delinking: The Rhetoric of modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007), 458.

[153] J. Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 3-6.

[154] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 497; Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space*, 44.

[155] Jerry L. Walls, "Introduction," 9.

been discussing. The South African context out of which I read Caputo is deeply implicated in this Eurocentric eschatology.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that Schweitzer's book on the historical Jesus was published eight years before the first world war. Accordingly, during the war and shortly after it, this book and – for the interests of this study – the kind of eschatology it described as the eschatology of Jesus gained wide adherence, one which distances God's intervention in history – the kingdom of God – from human activity and human progress. The first world war, by and large, was taken as an indication of the error of the eschatological notion of history as progress and the European nationalism it propagated.[156]

This is the theological and political atmosphere out of which dialectical theology emerged. Karl Barth is perhaps its most famous proponent. Barth published the first edition of his commentary on the book of Romans in December of 1918, mere weeks after the end of the first world war. Barth's own theology, as was already clear in that first publication, but perhaps even more famously, in his 'NO!' to natural theology, emphasized a gap between any and everything human and God. The kingdom of God then, for Barth, could never come about through human progress. Barth viewed the *eschaton* (the end) not as some point in the future, but as eternity that continually judges human history.[157] He called this notion of eschatology as eternity "the Moment";[158] it is precisely this notion of a non-futural eschatology that Moltmann criticized Barth for. So, Barth's is a theology, and consequently an eschatology, from above. Rudolf Bultmann, who was also a dialectical theologian, had a more existential eschatology – an eschatology from below. For Bultmann, the moment, the judgement (the meaning) of history is something available to the individual in their present, but the individual must awaken it.[159] Although these dialectical theologians moved away from the notion of history as progress, they do not go back to the earlier more apocalyptic sense of Christian eschatology. So effectively what we find here is a further split within the second stream of eschatology: a split between the teleological sense of eschatology that was discussed above, and an axiological sense of eschatology, as seen in dialectical theology.[160]

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[156] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 497.
[157] Ibid., 497.
[158] K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 237, 249.
[159] Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space,* 50.
[160] Ibid., 59.

As I mentioned above, a problem with this broad and very brief outline of eschatology is that it is not a global picture of eschatology. It is in fact a picture of eschatology in the West. To refer to this as 'eschatology' without qualification – western eschatology – would itself be a metaphysics of presence. Though this sketch is unavoidable, as I am about to offer a reading of the eschatological in Caputo, who is a Western thinker, reflection on its contextual limitations is necessary. What is missing is an eschatology of the global South. In the middle of the twentieth century through to the period after the second world war, it is an apocalyptic sense of teleological eschatology that has tended to be operational in the struggle against colonization in the global South.[161] This is the period in which many former European colonies gained their independence.[162] The second world war weakened European colonial empires. Due to this and many other factors that cannot be discussed here, decolonization gained traction in this era.[163] Here decolonization is clearly a secularized version of the notion of history as progress, but with a key difference. Here, progress is not the natural outgrowth of Western civilization, but the result of the disruption of Western civilization. This is an undermining of the colonial assumption that the West is the end realized in history. Frantz Fanon is representative of this quasi-eschatological gesture in a secular sense. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon articulates decolonization not as a magical or supernatural occurrence, but as a historical process that requires careful observation of the movements of history, particularly as they can be seen to be leading to decolonization. He writes:

> Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them.[164]

The use of an illuminatory metaphor – "the grandiose glare of history's floodlights" – indicates a retention of Hegel's metaphysical schema of history as a dialectical progression. No matter how violent and chaotic[165] the process of decolonization must run its course. Fanon hastens to disabuse readers of any naïve and romantic views of the struggle for liberation. In the final chapter of the book, he demonstrates that the violence of decolonization will have severe consequences on both the colonized and the colonizers. However, even in this somber and

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[161] Ibid., 60.
[162] Ibid., 60.
[163] For a brief historical sketch of this process, see Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben, *Beyond Empire and Nation: Decolonizing Societies in Africa and Asia, 1930s-1970s* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), 25-26.
[164] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 28.
[165] Ibid., 24.

realistic picture that Fanon paints, there remains a sense of security in that however ugly and difficult the process, it does not proceed blindly, but in the abundant light ("history's floodlights"). Here history is still conceived of as progress, even as progress is not viewed romantically or naively.

The theological companion of this decolonial and postcolonial consciousness in the global South is Liberation theology. Vítor Westhelle describes eschatology in the liberation theologies of the global South as latitudinal eschatologies. Westhelle is referring to the shift from the North Atlantic's predominant view of eschatology in temporal terms, to the way that liberation theologies view eschatology in spatial terms. This is a shift from eschatology as the end times, to the last *things* – eschatology now refers to the edges or margins of the North Atlantic canons:

> Eschatology is a discourse on liminality, marginality, on that which is in ontological, ethical, and also epistemological sense different. Ontologically, because it addresses the question of an *Other* reality, ethically, because it pertains to a different moral code, as different as the Sermon on the Mount is from all our ethical systems and moral prescriptions; epistemologically, because eschatology is also about the liminality of our accepted epistemic régimes, that is, that there are other often suppressed "knowledges" beyond the commonly accepted noetic realm of academia.[166]

Striking overlaps between liberation eschatologies and *différance* are already coming to view here. Both destabilize any notions of a stable center, through an encounter with marginality. Precisely because they are reflections from the margins, the edge, the end (*eschaton*), liberation theologies are permeated by an eschatological mood – where the end is the border/margin.[167] The way in which eschatologies of the global South shift eschatology is already a deconstruction of eschatology; however there is still as sense of history as progress – an essentialism, a *telos*, a metaphysics of presence – that is harbored here, as can be seen in Westhelle's Judeo-Christian teleological orientation.

> With the dominance of a longitudinal interpretation of time as a continuum, the alternative option would be to postulate an unending progression that inevitably would lead to a cyclical view of time (and, as Nietzsche saw it unequally well, to a relinquishing of all responsibility). A cyclical view of time remains tempting, but is fundamentally incompatible with the Judeo-Christian messianic tradition.[168]

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166 Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space*, 73.
167 Ibid., 73.
168 Ibid., 74.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that a shift to a cyclical view of time would be a move away from essentialist teleological thinking – on the contrary, as was discussed above with Heidegger's cyclical eschatology, circular thinking is also metaphysical. What I am highlighting instead is that the need to analyze the movement of history as organized and intelligible – whether linearly, as in Judeo-Christian eschatologies, or cyclically – is still unable to see through a given metaphysical tradition. History is a construct that helps to make sense of the flux, but the flux itself is not sensible and should not be too closely associated with the narratives we construct to survive in it. It is here that the issue with essentialist eschatological thinking comes to view. In this chapter I will posit a third way of viewing history, but I am not yet at the position where I can make this argument more fully. Therefore, I will now pause my engagement with Weshelle and return to it towards the end of this chapter. From this point, I will return to Caputo.

The very brief sketch I have made in this section shows that the eschatological notion of history as progress is not exclusively operational on the leftwing or the rightwing of the political spectrum, nor is it operational exclusively in the global North or South. It is operational in all these contexts. As we discussed in chapter two, Caputo also does not view existence – and, consequently, time – as stasis (timeless eternity of the unmoved mover). All of these are a metaphysics of presence for Caputo. For Caputo, as is discussed above, time is conditioned by the flux – *différance*. Due to that, it is not just time, but space and time together: as I discussed in the previous chapter, *différance* is a spatial and temporal opening that makes spatial and temporal otherness possible. At this point I will proceed to my reading of the eschatological in Caputo. However, as will become clear towards the end of this chapter – considering my context (South Africa) – there are serious limitations to the eschatological in Caputo that make it such that I am unable to just transport Caputo's radical theology to South Africa. Even as I want to take up Caputo's critique of the metaphysics of presence in theology, particularly as Caputo's reflection on the messianic deepens this critique to the level of the eschatological, Caputo does not speak to the concerns I wish to address from my context in any straightforward way. For this reason, in the final section of this chapter I will draw on Westhelle's eschatological reading of *chora/khôra*. I will not be exhaustive in my engagement with Westhelle but will turn to him in order to deepen the post-structural concern with differences towards a post-colonial concern with inequalities.

## 4.2 The Messianic as Eschatology

Before I discuss what I am identifying as the eschatological in Caputo, I must first demonstrate that what Caputo calls the messianic is what eschatology looks like in his radical theology. This is precisely the point that I will be making in this section. Doing this will make it easier to see how Caputo deliberately pushes back against the common conception of eschatology in modernity as teleological progress.

In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, Caputo carefully follows the distinction Derrida, in two different editions of the essay *The Force of Law*, makes between concrete, determinate messianisms (particular messianic expectations or eschatology), and the messianic structure. There are different messianisms: "the Jewish, Christian…Islamic…neo-Hegelian, Marxist, [and] post-Marxist."[169] What interests Caputo is Derrida's radicalization of these messianisms. More accurately, Derrida pays attention to what they all have in common, namely, that they all promise that something is coming. They all differ on the content of that which is coming. Derrida's radical move is that he does not focus on any particular messianism, any particular content or dogma concerning what is coming – Derrida is not interested in whether a yet unknown Jewish Messiah, or the Christian messiah, Jesus, is the one whose coming is promised. What interests Caputo about Derrida is his focus on the 'to come' structure; he is interested in the structure of a promise (the messianic), and not the content of the promise. To frame this in more explicitly eschatological language, one would come closer to what Caputo – following Derrida – is doing if one were to say that the point of interest is not a particular eschatology but the eschatological – this is a shift from the content of an eschatology to what is getting itself done within any given eschatology.

Strictly speaking, the term 'eschatology' is problematic because it is a *logos*: it is a *logos* of the *eschaton*.[170] For that matter theology as a whole is a *logos*: Caputo calls it "the logos of our passion for God…."[171] The logical (*logos*), even as we find it in theology, is attuned to the present (presence), or to what is possible, and not to the impossible. The same is true of eschatology. Eschatology as I outlined it above is eschatology as *logos*, which Caputo calls "onto-eschato-theology" or "onto-theo-eschatology"[172] where there is certainty that what is

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[169] Caputo, *Prayer and Tears*, 117.
[170] "Both teleology and eschatology, however much they may differ, are guided by a logic: the *logos* of the *telos* toward which each moment strains in a rational process of ongoing development; the *logos* of the *eschaton*, of the extreme end point which things reach in which death and judgement rain down on us." Ibid., 96.
[171] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 101-112.
[172] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 96.

being expected will come (eschatology as progress) or that it is already here in God's eternity waiting to break into the present (Bultmann and Barth), or that it will come, not because of progress, but because of God's promises (Moltmann). These are all metaphysics of presences, and Caputo's shift from these messianisms to the messianic is a deconstruction of eschatology. Although the word 'eschatology' has all this metaphysical baggage, I opt not to drop it in this chapter. Instead in this study when I speak of the eschatological in Caputo, I am referring to the messianic. This is because the objective of this chapter is to read Caputo in a more explicitly eschatological manner in order to bring to the fore the way in which his theology deconstructs eschatology. What I am discussing here is in keeping with the above-mentioned shift from ontology to hauntology. A particular eschatology (a messianism) corresponds to a particular ontological conception of God, and so if Caputo shifts from seeing God ontologically (God does not exist) to seeing God hauntologically (God insists) this will have certain ramifications on the shape that the eschatological will take in his theology.

The decision to frame the messianic as the radical sense of eschatology in Caputo's radical theology is strengthened by Caputo's own awareness of this. Although Caputo does not attempt to write an eschatology there are hints that he – and even Derrida – took it for granted that what he calls the messianic is eschatological in some sense. If for Caputo, entrapment in ordinary time – the past-present, the present and the future-present (as will be made clear below) – is a temporal sense of what we have been discussing in this study as a metaphysics of presence, then Caputo's turn to messianic time here is the temporal sense of Caputo's ongoing project of overcoming of metaphysics of presence. What is important for this study is that (1) this move is not only an explicitly theological move, but that it is specifically an eschatological move and (2) Caputo is aware of this. He demonstrates this awareness by pointing out how Derrida develops the messianic as some kind of eschatology. To that effect, in the first endnote in the chapter on the messianic in *Prayers and Tears* he cites Derrida stating the following:

> The promise prohibits the gathering of Being in presence, being even its condition. The condition of the possibility and impossibility of eschatology, the ironic allegory of messianism….[173]

For some context, Caputo is here pointing out that Derrida takes the notion of the messianic from Walter Benjamin's notion of a weak messianic force. Derrida particularly follows the way that Benjamin explicates this weak messianic force as a promise of a coming justice for those who died in the past due to injustice, a promise that those of us who live in the present are "the

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[173] Ibid., 352.

ones who were to come in order to "redeem" the past, to preserve a memory of past suffering…."[174]This messianic time throws the past onto the present, thus preventing the present from closing in on itself; this is a present that is out of joint because it is haunted by the responsibility of preserving the dangerous memory of the dead – the present is haunted by the past. This is the sense in which, in the quote above, the promise – justice for the dead – "prohibits the gathering of Being in presence." This disjointedness of time is precisely the "condition of the possibility and impossibility of eschatology" referred to in the quote above. To be clear, Derrida in this quote is not calling the messianic eschatology, but rather for him the messianic is the promise – or what I called the radical 'to come' structure above – that makes eschatology possible and impossible. The messianic, therefore, occasions eschatology, even as it is perpetuated by eschatology. There is no eschatology without the messianic, but there can also be no conception of a messianic without eschatology. I will discuss this at length in the following section. First, I must emphasise that reference to impossibility in the quote in question recalls the discussion on the impossible in the previous chapter: as I stated there (in the section on the impossible), what in deconstruction is called the impossible should always be thought of in relation to the possible; and both the possible and the impossible should be thought of in temporal terms – though not exclusively in temporal terms. The possible refers to the future-present, while the impossible refers to the absolute future. This brings me to ordinary time and messianic time which I mentioned in passing above.

Caputo carefully follows the way in which Derrida further develops his conception of the messianic in *Spectres of Marx*. Caputo is attentive to the way in which Derrida, in this book, argues that there is a radical religious structure that Marx has not dispensed with, notwithstanding Marx's atheism. It is from this religious structure, Derrida argues, that Marx derives the abstract, dry messianic structure which we have just briefly discussed, according to which the messianic is conceptualised in the sense of a hauntology rather than an ontology.[175] Where ontology would denote presence – onto-theo-logic/metaphysics of presence – hauntology denotes the disturbance brought about by something that does not have presence – much in the way a ghost haunts the living (hence *haunt*-ology). So, where Marx in his critique of religion was diligent to point out that the spirits that religion preoccupied itself with do not exist, Derrida reads Marx against Marx by pointing out that the entire point is for them not to

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[174] Ibid., 352.
[175] Ibid., 118.

exist – not to have presence – so that they can disturb what exists.[176] The sort of eschatology that we have here then is not a definite point in the future of revolution or *Parousia*. Rather it is a poetics of the way in which the impossible – a future that breaks with the trajectory of the present, not being a natural outgrowth of the present – disturbs the present. The disturbance – hauntology – takes place in the distance between the possible and the impossible. In temporal terms, the possible is ordinary time, while the impossible is messianic time. Ordinary time refers to time as we experience it, the present. This present stretches backwards as the past-present, and stretches forward as the future-present.[177] The reason that the past is designated as past-present when thought of in terms of ordinary time is because the past was once the present, it is past time, past moments that are what they are as a result of the way people behaved, or the things that happened in moments that are now past – moments that were once the present. It is the past understood as a straight line that leads to the present. The future on the other hand, is associated with the present because this refers to the programable future, the predictable future that can be reasonably known because of the ways in which people behave, or the ways in which things transpire in the present. This refers to the way in which the present will become the future. This ordinary time of the present is the temporal sense of metaphysics of presence which I have been discussing throughout this study.

In deconstruction there is also an extraordinary time, a time that never congeals into the present (a metaphysics of presence), and this time has two aspects: past and future. Just as with ordinary time this extraordinary time stretches to the past – not as past-present, a past that was once present, but as a radical past that "is always already past, a past that was never present, never lived through".[178] Additionally, this extraordinary time stretches to the future, but not as future present, a predictable future that flows out of the present, but a radical futurity. It is important to emphasise here that this extraordinary time has no present, and this is precisely because it is not time according to the order of presence – a metaphysics of presence. This time is *tout autre*, wholly other. This is what differentiates it from ordinary time. Ordinary time, by virtue of its grounding in the present (presence), is an economy. These two aspects of ordinary time are associated with economy because they (past-present and future-present) take the shape they take as a direct result of the way things transpire in the present. As an example, one can act wisely in the present and be rewarded for it in the future[-present], or conversely act unwisely

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[176] Ibid., 119.
[177] Ibid., 77.
[178] Ibid.,77.

in the present and suffer for it in the future[-present]. Ordinary time has this economic or conditional quality to it.

Messianic time on the other hand is time that is out of joint. This refers to the way in which the present in deconstruction is always already divided. The moment the present becomes present, it immediately passes over into the past, and someone in the future must remember it for it to have been the present.[179] The present is not self-sufficient, and does not congeal in any metaphysical sense, but is radically dependent on the past and the future. Caputo focuses on the prophetic, and more particularly, on the messianic nature of this deconstructive insight: we who live in the present are responsible for those who are no more, and those not yet born.[180] The present is always already disturbed by the past and the future. This responsibility for the other (both past and future) is deconstruction's concern with justice. This concern is messianic by virtue of the fact that we in the present are the ones the dead are waiting for, who are to give justice to the dead, and it is our responsibility to ensure that those to come will be born into a just world. It is in connection with this messianic poetics of responsibility for the dead that Caputo draws on Johann Baptist Metz – a figure influential in liberation theology – and his notion of 'the dangerous memory of the dead'.[181] The dead are the ghosts that haunt the living. In Caputo's theology, this dangerous memory of the dead is connected with Walter Benjamin's notion of a weak messianic power. I will discuss this more fully below when I focus on Benjamin's influence on Caputo's eschatology.

The focus of this section has been to show that there is a connection between Caputo's articulation of the messianic with eschatology. If anything can be called eschatology in Caputo's theopoetics of the event, it is the messianic. I mentioned above that the messianic and eschatology are co-dependent: the messianic is the 'to come' or promise/threat structure that occasions eschatology, even as the messianic is inconceivable without any concrete eschatology. In the following section I discuss this in more detail.

### 4..3 Two Messianic Spaces

Caputo follows a conundrum that Derrida articulates in *Spectres of Marx*, regarding the nature of the messianic: Derrida is unable to decide whether the messianic is a universal, a priori structure inherent to Being, of which messianisms – Jewish, Christian, Islamic or Marxist, etc.

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[179] For a fuller discussion of this particular point is deconstruction, see Hägglund's, *Radical Atheism*, 13-49.
[180] Caputo, *Prayer and Tears*, 122-123.
[181] Ibid., 123.

– are concretizations which can be demythologized (in the Bultmannian sense); or whether the messianic only exists because concrete messianisms exist. Is the messianic abstracted out of messianisms?[182] To phrase this in simpler terms, between the messianic and concrete messianisms, which comes first and by extension occasions the existence of the other? The first possibility – that the messianic is universal (essential) and messianisms are historically contingent – is problematic. This is because deconstruction, as should already be clear in this study, undermines the notion of the existence of some universal which is essential, in relation to which the historically contingent can be stripped away and even discarded; and considering the fact that in Derrida's case, the historically contingent is Jewish, this would be a rather antisemitic move, similar to the Heideggerian pro-Greek antisemitic tendency which ultimately caused Caputo to turn away from Heidegger and to turn to Derrida, as I discussed in chapter 2. However, it is not that simple, as the ability to strip away the Jewish has its advantages:

> These questions lead to another formulation: Can one strip the biblical messianisms down to an "atheological heritage" of the biblical messianisms? Can one, by a word of "desertification" and denuding, by a deconstructive ascesis, remove a biblical surface from a messianic structure? The idea is to remove the "determinable" content from the messianic, so that we are not waiting for the liberator of Israel, since Egypt too deserves liberation, or for the second coming of Jesus, or for a classless society in which the state withers away. That is because deconstruction means to be an absolute (as opposed to determinable) responsibility, absolute hospitality… "the 'come' to the future that cannot be anticipated…"[183]

Or with South Africa in mind, this first atheological – quasi-atheistic – possibility would open the messianic so that both oppressor and the oppressed can be liberated. A determinable, ridged historically contingent messianic expectation narrows messianic expectation to the concerns of that religion, and this can already be seen in Christian theologies that are blind to concerns of justice that do not align to their theologies. On the other hand, however, it very well may be the case that were it not for the historically contingent messianisms we would have no conception of a messianic structure to begin with, and therefore we are never able to completely discard these messianisms even as we abstract the messianic from them.[184] After all:

> [w]hile millions of people over centuries have found a home in the historical religions, no one would be able to live in the rare air, the ether of the desert, of the messianic in general. The figure of "absolute hospitality" would then be as

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[182] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 134-135; Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 168-169.
[183] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 135.
[184] Ibid., 136.

inhospitable and unlivable as a desert…. The messianic in general…would then seem quite fragile and impoverished.[185]

Caputo is critical of Derrida's framing of the issue of these two messianic spaces, because it enters the debates about whether or not facts precede essences, which deconstruction – being anti-essentialist – has always undermined. Caputo's solution is to bring the two together by stating that the general messianic structure is the basis of all historical messianisms, however, that messianic structure is inconceivable without the historical messianisms.[186] This conundrum, this inability to decide between the two spaces is not a problem to be solved but is an animating problem in the order of the impossible – which I discussed in the previous chapter – because in deconstruction, the impossible is never a dead-end, but is a new beginning. This move is in keeping with the chiasmic relational structure we have been discussing throughout (name/event, confessional theology/radical theology). The messianic insists while messianisms exist.

Caputo's solution to this Derridean conundrum is instructive: here we see that Caputo's eschatology negates theology (by rendering it non-essential), while simultaneously affirming it (there are things that so far, we have only come to know theologically, even as they can be abstracted out of theology). To further explicate his solution to the conundrum, Caputo draws on Heidegger's notion of the formal indication.[187] Here the philosophical universal concept – which in this case refers to the notion of a universal, essential messianic structure, in relation to which the messianisms of the Abrahamic religions are concrete particularities – is replaced by a formal indication where the full understanding is never present, and principally not present in the philosophical concept, but where we must instead construct a philosophical concept that points behind itself, to a pre-philosophical origin.[188] Formal indications are:

…imperfect sketches or anticipatory foreshadowings of a prior and irreducible excess, an excess that can only be "engaged" or entered into existentially, not grasped conceptually.[189]

The pre-philosophical sources to which Heidegger turns are the (Christian) New Testament (for the experience of time it codifies) and the (Greek) Nicomachean Ethics (for the experience of the *polis* that it codifies).[190] So this Heideggerian move, particularly with respect to the New

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[185] Ibid., 136.
[186] Ibid., 137.
[187] Ibid., 139.
[188] Ibid., 139.
[189] Ibid., 140.
[190] Ibid., 139.

Testament, is a provisional philosophical sketch that tries to reconstruct an early Christian existential situation. This is the early Christian experience of time – an experience of time that anticipates the Parousia of Christ – particularly as we have it in Paul's writings to the Thessalonians. Discussing this, he writes:

> The central move that Heidegger makes that can help Derrida out is this. In a formal indication, the individual, the singularity, is not taken as an *instance* or example of the universal, does not become a subsumble case or *casus* that falls off the pedestal of Greek universality, a temporal specimen of an unchanging species. Rather, the singular is affirmed in all of its singularity, respected in all of the richness of its idiosyncratic *haecceitas*, this-ness.[191]

This harkens to the deconstructive notion that every other is the total other. Here there is no big Other, but a plethora of others. An implication of this deconstructive move is that we have a messianic structure without a messiah (a big Other). I will first discuss the messianic structure part of this phrase, then I will discuss the "without a messiah" part.

### 4.3.1 Messianic structure

In *Prayers and Tears*, Caputo does not fully discuss Heidegger's reading (*Destruktion*) of the New Testament (1 Thessalonians) notion of the early Christian experience of time. He only points out that there we find a shift of emphasis from "when" the Parousia will occur, to "how" those who are anticipating the Parousia should live in the present. It is later, in *The Weakness of God*, that Caputo discusses this in greater detail. There Caputo sketches out Heidegger's conception of time in Christian eschatology from Heidegger's first Freiburg lectures which took place in 1920-1921.[192] He notes that Heidegger's objective, particularly with respect to Christian theology, was to effect its *Destruktion*. To be clear, this does not mean that Heidegger sought to destroy Christian theology, but rather that he sought to read it in such a way as to retrieve "its founding life-experiences".[193]

Heidegger, following Franz Overbeck, was of the understanding that by the time that the documents that later become the New Testament were beginning to be written down, the Parousia began to be seen as less imminent than previously thought: early Christians would have seen no need to write anything since they believed that Christ would return at any moment, but as Christ's return continued to be delayed early Christians began to see a need to write, because they began to realise that there would be generations that would succeed them. Caputo

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[191] Ibid., 140.
[192] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 158.
[193] Ibid., 158.

notes that Heidegger pays attention to the way that Paul depicted the then present – with the apocalyptic expectation of an imminent Parousia of Christ – and assumes that this was the only way time was conceived of in the New Testament. This assumption is the point on which Caputo parts with Heidegger's reading of temporality and eschatology, as will be made clear below.

Heidegger pays attention to one of the two questions that Paul addresses in the epistle of 1 Thessalonians: the question about the time of the coming of Christ [the '*when*' question].[194] Caputo notes that Heidegger's analysis rested on Paul's emphasis on the 'how' instead of the 'when' that the community at Thessalonica was interested in:

> For Heidegger, the "when?" of the parousia in not a matter of an objectifying calculation, of spreading a calendar out on the table and making one's best assessment about the length of time between now and then. It is not a matter of determining a datable *when* in objective time, but of a transforming and transfiguring *how*, of how to live until then, an existential-phenomenological "when" in virtue of which the Thessalonians are not to worry about "times and seasons"… that is, not to try to predict the parousia as if one were forecasting the weather. It belongs to the very essence of the parousia: that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "there is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them….[195]

Heidegger reads the [Pauline] Christian conception of time existentially: Christians experienced time with a sense of readiness and militant apocalyptic anticipation of the interruption of the normal flow of time (the destruction of the present world). On this point, Caputo parts with Heidegger by turning not to how Paul construed time, but to Jesus.[196] Caputo makes this shift because the content of Paul's proclamation was different from that of Jesus' proclamation: Paul preached about Jesus while Jesus preached about the kingdom of God. At this point it should be noted that Caputo's understanding of Jesus is heavily influenced by John Dominic Crossan. This can be seen in the following:

> By shifting from the evolving faith-situation of the later Christian communities to the sayings and the figure of Jesus we break with the apocalypticism that Heidegger interprets – brilliantly and existentially – but that he simply assumes. Although it is clear that the later Christian communities held apocalyptic beliefs, it is not clear that

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[194] Ibid., 159.
[195] Ibid., 159-160.
[196] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 161

this was the case for Jesus himself, for in Jesus' own sayings the kingdom of God is upon us, within us, here and now, and the kingdom begins today.[197]

The footnote at the end of this passage I have just quoted references Crossan's book *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* (1991). Notwithstanding the fact that Caputo is doing [radical] theology, and not historical Jesus studies, his dependence on Crossan's construction of the historical Jesus is not a trivial point. To that effect, in *Cross and Cosmos* he writes:

> What then, reduced to its core, is the classical *theologia gloriae*? That, I have been saying, is to be found when theology takes the form of a strategy or an economy, which always goes hand in hand with some version of docetism, with the Gnostic principle, which in one form or another infects everything in classical theology. The crucial decision was made early in the tradition to insist, against the Gnostics, that *Jesus was a man of flesh and blood, a historical agent, datable and locatable….* Properly radicalized then, *the theology of the cross compels us to take this carnal man of flesh and blood…with the utmost seriousness. That would involve us in learning as much as we can about him before he was Christianized, before he is taken up into the theopoetics of the Anointed One* (my emphasis).[198]

I quote this for two reasons: (1) because it shows Caputo's consistent dependence on Crossan's historical Jesus; this is supported by the fact that the only footnote Caputo has for the passage quoted above references a chapter written by Crossan in a book that was edited by Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, titled *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (1999); and (2) the argument Caputo makes, influenced by Crossan, is that a Christology that neglects the historical Jesus is a form of Docetism. Perhaps more importantly, this holding on to the historical, carnal Jesus rather than a docetic spirit harkens back to Caputo's solution to Derrida's messianic conundrum: Caputo opts for a particular, concrete, dateable (historical) Jesus (formal indication), no matter how fragmentary and provisional any such (re)construction of Jesus is, over some universal, solid and timeless Christology – a metaphysics of presence.

For this study, my focus is not the way in which Crossan influences Caputo's Christology, but rather the way he influences Caputo's thoughts on eschatology. Crossan maintains, contrary to the consensus amongst most New Testament scholars, that Jesus was in fact not an apocalyptic prophet. Crossan draws a line between apocalypticism and messianism. According to this telling, the kingdom of God is not deferred to the end (*eschaton*) but is a reality we are invited to participate in in the present. So, when Caputo shifts from Paul as he is read by Heidegger to

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[197] Ibid., 161.
[198] Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos*, 163.

the synoptic Jesus – in the way that Crossan interprets him – he moves away "from the early Christian expectation of the day of the second coming of Jesus," to a notion of the kingdom being with us already in the invitation to live it out in the present.[199] The move that Caputo makes here comes close to realised eschatology:

> Jesus was not alarming us about something that was approaching that we cannot foresee and that may strike like a thief in the night. Rather, he was calming us with something that had *already happened* to us but that we do not appreciate (my emphasis).[200]

What Caputo means by saying that something has already happened is not to be confused with metaphysics of presence – the kingdom is not present ontologically, but hauntologically. What has already happened is that we are already disturbed in the present by the possibility of a way for the world to be that is different from the present. The kingdom of God undermines the present reality with the weak force of the possibility of a different world that does not grow or progress out of the possibilities of this present reality, but radically breaks with them – the possibility of the impossible. The fact that the way in which the kingdom is present is as a possibility indicates that realized eschatology is too strong a category to use to describe what Caputo is doing. In a messianism that takes the form of a realized eschatology it is the kingdom that is present, but in Caputo's radical theology it is the possibility of the kingdom that is present. Any moment in the present when people struggle for justice over and against this present unjust world could be (perhaps/may-being) a temporal rupture with the present reality.

This point also comes through in *Prayers and Tears* when Caputo relates Blanchot's telling of an old Rabbinic story about the Messiah being at the gates of Rome unrecognized, dressed in rags.[201] However, one man who recognized that this was the Messiah went up to him and asked him, "When will you come?" The irony here is that the messiah is already there yet he is being asked when he will come. So, there is a way for the messiah to be there in ordinary time, in the present, but only at the gates of Rome, at the margins of the empire as it were, where the outcasts are. That is where the messiah is in the present, not ontologically – this is not *ousia* or Parousia – but hauntologically, as that which disturbs the empire with the dangerous possibility of a different kingdom. Although Caputo speaks predominantly is temporal terms about the messianic, as we have seen thus far, here we are running up against an implicit spatial thinking – the messiah is there at the gates of Rome, neither inside nor outside (*khôra*) but right at the

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[199] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 161.
[200] Ibid., 161.
[201] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 79.

margins. This spatial opening in Caputo will be taken up further below as the entry point through which Westhelle's postcolonial eschatology will be drawn on in order to go beyond Caputo's more North Atlantic concerns, to a latitudinal interest which is more fitting for global South concerns, even as I retain Caputo's deconstruction of eschatology; and this in turn will help me turn to South African concerns in the next chapter.

It is important to emphasize that the messianic never congeals to presence. What this means is that the messiah never arrives, and therefore the messiah should not be thought of as a presence. This, however, does not mean that the messiah is not coming. The Messiah is always coming. Therefore, in this Rabbinic story the messiah is still asked "when are you coming?". The very question suggests that in this Jewish thought the messiah's being there is not his arrival – it is not presence.[202] On this point Caputo writes:

> The Messiah's "coming" can never actually correspond to an actual-historical appearance in ordinary time. Whatever appearance the Messiah does make must be carefully protected or sheltered by the discretion of a disguise, lest the infinite provocation, the discreet delicacy and lightness, of what is coming be destroyed by its exposure to ordinary time, by its absorption into the grossness of the order of presence.[203]

So, with this shift from the ontological (eschatology, or messianism) to the hauntological (the messianic), the messiah will never show up. Concomitantly, an ideal complete form of justice will never arrive. The notion of the perpetually deferred arrival of the messiah – the impossibility of an ideal justice – already hints at the notion of justice I will be pursuing in the next chapter: this will be an undermining of the notion of an ideal justice, without undermining the struggle for justice. This means that any actualization of justice will always inevitably be provisional and revisable and will also always run the risk of being unjust. In the case of South Africa, for example, the project of the new South Africa or the rainbow nation demonstrates exactly that. The messianic is never absorbed into ordinary time – not in the messianism of any religious group, or any political party or ideology – but rather shakes ordinary time and disturbs it with the dangerous memory of the dead, as well as a responsibility for those yet to come (yet to be born), or the future of our world.

The relationship between a philosophical concept (the messianic) in the Heideggerian sense that Caputo re-appropriates here, and the early (pre-philosophical) Christian existential

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[202] Caputo, *Prayer and Tears*, 79.
[203] Ibid., 79.

condition of waiting for the Parousia of Christ (Christian messianism) resembles the relationship between radical and confessional theology that the later Caputo discusses in *The Insistence of God*: in the same way that radical theology is always bound to confessional theology, even as it radicalizes it, the messianic (as a formal indication) is bound to the messianisms of the Abrahamic faiths, even as it radicalizes them. This messianic/messianism relation, when thought of in the context of an eschatological region of the radical/confession theological relation, becomes the relationship between eschatology and the radicalization of eschatology. Where an eschatology (*eschaton*-logos) takes the form of a universal philosophical concept (logos), a more radical eschatology would take the shape of a poetics. So, if we were splitting hairs, Caputo's – and Derrida's – messianic without messianism strictly speaking is not an eschatology, but is an eschatology *without* eschatology. It retrieves the enlivening experience of eschatology, without a dogmatic commitment to any particular eschatology or messianism. For Caputo, eschatology is no longer about the last things (hence it is without eschatology). Instead, the messiah, the kingdom of God, or justice must come in the present. At this point I turn to Walter Benjamin's influence on Caputo. It is here that the way in which Caputo and Derrida's messianic pushes back against the teleological eschatology of progress discussed above comes into view.

## 4.4 Weak Messianic Thought

As I have already mentioned, the term 'messianism' refers to, but is not limited to, the different messianic beliefs of the different Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, this term also refers to the ways in which certain thinkers make use of messianic thinking in philosophical and political and even economical contexts. For example, as already mentioned, Derrida counted Marxism as another form of messianism.[204] Derrida, influenced by Walter Benjamin, also comes to make use of messianic thinking in his works, and as a result formulates his own messianism which is then picked up by Caputo. Benjamin's ideas about the messianic do not emerge in a vacuum, however. They emerge as part of what Jürgen Moltmann refers to as the rebirth of messianic thinking in Judaism.[205] The well-known principal thinkers of this rebirth are Ernst Bloch, Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Jacob Taubes, and Karl Löwith. For Moltmann, eschatology as we know it would be unthinkable without the influence of these thinkers.[206] It does not fall into the scope of this study to flesh out the messianic thinking of all these figures. However, of these thinkers Walter Benjamin is

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[204] Ibid., 117.
[205] Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 29.
[206] Ibid., 30.

the one who influences Derrida's move to messianic thinking, and in turn both he and Derrida influence Caputo's use of the messianic in Caputo's radical theology.

### 4.4.1 Walter Benjamin

Some have interpreted Benjamin's critical engagement with historical materialism as a breaking away from this Marxist methodology. Benjamin's friend, and also one of the thinkers listed above as contributing to the revival of messianic thinking in Judaism, Gershom Scholem, thought that Benjamin's critique was in fact a "decisive break with historical materialism and a return to the metaphysical-theological concerns of his early thought."[207] However, this reading of Benjamin is demonstrably fallacious.[208]

Benjamin's main critique of historical materialism is that it tends to identify with expectations of revolution in the future, and as a result the past only features in so far as it is helpful in the construction of these future expectations.[209] So, historical materialism is effectively something of a secularized teleological eschatology, and concomitantly, it is a form of the conception of history as progress. This should not be surprising seeing that Marx, who came up with historical materialism, was heavily influenced by Hegel, and more specifically by the left wing of Hegelian thought that was critical of Hegel's realized eschatology – the notion that progress, which is defined as the acquisition of consciousness of freedom or autonomy, has already been acquired through the incarnation of Christ – and favoured instead the notion that this progress would only be attained in the future "through human labor and political revolution."[210]

For Benjamin however, history is not the teleological movement of progress. The emphasis for him is not the expectation of a revolutionary future, but a saving of the past.[211] In this way of thinking, the present and the past are bound to one another. This is because for Benjamin, there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present generation, where the past generations lay claim on the present, which in turn puts the present generation in the position of the messiah that the past generations have been waiting for.[212] Benjamin refers to this pact or agreement, this claim that the past has on the present, as a weak messianic power or force.[213]

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[207] Ronald Beiner, "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History." *Political Theory* 12 (1984), 423.
[208] Ibid., 423.
[209] Ibid., 424.
[210] Pannenberg, "Modernity, History, and Eschatology," 496.
[211] Beiner, "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History," 424.
[212] Walter Benjamin, "On the concept of history" in Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938 – 1940* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 389-390.
[213] Ibid., 390.

It is this notion of the messianic that influences Derrida, and by extension it is indispensable for what I am identifying as Caputo's radical/weak eschatology. This I will explicate below.

It is important to note that Benjamin's notion of a weak messianic power undermines the view of history as progress. Benjamin's ninth thesis in his *On the Concept of History* is instructional here, and I will quote it in full:

> There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.[214]

Four points stand out here and are important for the way in which I am reading Caputo's eschatology, as will become clear toward the end of this chapter, and the entirety of the next chapter: firstly there is the angel of history, whose face is always turned to the past; secondly, the nature of the past that the angel faces is one thing for "us" and another for the angel of history: for "us" – "us" here seems to refer to those who take a standard modern approach to historiography – history is organized, it is "a chain of events", and it is "eternal"[215] (note that this is a conception of history that is a metaphysics of presence), while for the angel of history the past is chaotic and tragic (it is a catastrophic, ongoing pile of wreckage upon wreckage); thirdly, the angel of history moves blindly towards – his back is turned to – the future, and fourthly, the angel moves to the future to which his back is turned, not because of the dialectical movement of history as progress, but precisely because history is not a dialectical movement (progress) but is instead a storm (chaos, catastrophe and wreckage upon wreckage).

### 4.4.2 Historiography as the dangerous memory of the dead

With respect to the first point, Caputo firstly reads the figure of the angel of history not as any particular agent (the messiah) but rather as a way of interpreting the past, as "the messianic view of history" as such.[216] Secondly, Caputo reads Benjamin's messianic view of history

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[214] Ibid., 392.
[215] Ibid., 396.
[216] Caputo, *Weakness of God*, 94.

which is turned to the past, as being turned to the past as the dead who, in the standard historical accounts (which are history as metaphysics of presence), are usually "sacrificed to the story of progress and imbedded in a tale told by the winners."[217]  The dead here are the victims of the injustices of the past. A relevant example of the dead for this study are those sacrificed to the story of progress that is the history of South Africa, particularly victims of colonialism, apartheid as well as those who have been killed by the New South Africa (Marikana) – what has been called, by some, the new apartheid.[218] Colonialism and apartheid both fit into explicitly Christian quasi- (realized) eschatologies of progress. Here I am drawing on the way that G. J. van Wyngaard, in his PhD Thesis, following Kameron Carter reads Immanuel Kant's ideas about the purpose of race eschatologically. He writes:

> This meaning is deeply tied to ideas about development and the ultimate goal of humanity. Following the analogy of Irenaeus, what Carter describes is a pseudo-theology of modernity where interpretations of the past and present are formed by convictions about the goal of humanity – what I would describe as quasi-eschatological – the idea that whiteness draws history to its ultimate end.[219]

What Van Wyngaard refers to as "development" and "the ultimate goal of humanity" is a Kantian conception of what I, following Caputo and Benjamin have been calling a teleological secularized eschatology of progress. So, if a critical encounter is staged between the eschatological in Caputo's thought and the problem of whiteness in South Africa, what I am identifying as an eschatology that undermines metaphysics of presence in Caputo will, in part, be articulated as an eschatology that undermines the conception history as progress, where whiteness is conceived as progress. It will also, however, be articulated as an eschatology that undermines metaphysics of presence (history as progress) even in liberation thought. I will return to this in the next chapter. Here it suffices to state that where whiteness as eschatology is synonymous with the angel of history turning its face to the future and effectively being an adherent to the notion of progress[220], then the fact that the angel's back is turned to the future and its face is turned to the past (a rejection of the notion of history as progress) is synonymous with the rejection of the theological problem of whiteness.

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[217] Ibid., 94.

[218] See S. Mpofu-Walsh's, *The New Apartheid: Apartheid Did Not Die, It Was Privatised* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021).

[219] Van Wyngaard, "In Search of repair," 35.

[220] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 95.

### 4.4.3 History as Ruined Time

With respect to the second point, for Caputo, Benjamin's tragic conception of history as "catastrophe" and as "wreckage upon wreckage" – which is a messianic view of history, a history viewed from the perspective of the victims – should be read as ruined time. For Caputo, the angel of history's (the messianic view of history) inability to raise the dead, even as it desires to do just that, means that the lives of the dead are "irredeemably ruined lives."[221] Later Caputo calls this ruined time:

> By ruined time I mean irreparable loss, and by that I mean irredeemable suffering, suffering lodged irremissibly in the past, suffering and loss beyond repair. The irremissible past is a time of ruin…a bad time that seared and scorched the souls of the dead – in Auschwitz or Belfast, in Kosovo of the West Bank, in the Auschwitzes, Kosovos, and Belfasts recorded in history and unrecorded, from time out of mind – and then slipped away forever, without repeal or compensation, without redemption or any possible remuneration.[222]

Earlier in *Against Ethics* (1993) Caputo refers to this notion of ruined time and irreparable loss as 'disasters.'[223] He gets this concept from Maurice Blanchot, who referred to it as "The disaster", in the singular.[224] Caputo opted to speak of disasters in the plural because Blanchot's singular disaster tends to sound abstract, whereas making it plural brings it closer to reality in which there is a plethora of concrete disasters. Then following the lead of Jean-Francois Lyotard he opts to attach a date and even names these disasters just as he does in the quote on ruined time and irreparable loss.[225] One of the disasters he names is apartheid South Africa. I make this connection to shows that when I use this concept of ruined time to read Caputo's eschatology from a South African context, I am not abstracting the concept away from the specific way in which Caputo himself uses it. If we think of apartheid and colonialism as ruined time, this means that there is a deep sense of things lost that is permanent.

### 4.4.4 A Blind Eschatology

With reference to the third and fourth points, Benjamin's depiction of the angel moving to the future in reverse, with his back turned to the future and his face turned to the past (to the dead), not only undermines the quasi-eschatological notion of progress, but it also functions as a more tragic articulation of Derrida's and Caputo's notion of the impossible – the messianic future as being unknowable and shattering the horizons of our expectations. To be sure, this is not a

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[221] Ibid., 95.
[222] Ibid., 242.
[223] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 28.
[224] Ibid., 28.
[225] Ibid., 28.

connection that Caputo, in his engagement with Benjamin, makes. However, it is a helpful connection to make. Benjamin's angel, by virtue of the fact that it does not see history as progress or by virtue of the fact that it has its back turned to the future, cannot anticipate what will come next. The future is unknowable to it. In other words, the notion that the future is not progress, but that it is chaos (a storm), and the notion of the unknowable future are bound together.

The notion of the unknowability of the future is central to Derrida's and Caputo's articulation of the messianic. This harkens back to the concern with the impossible in deconstruction as I discussed it in the previous chapter. There, following Caputo, I argued that the impossible refers to the absolute future, where 'absolute' connotes the distance between this kind of future and the present – this is not the future-present, a predictable and programable future that is ultimately the way that the present stretches itself out into the future (the temporal sense of a metaphysics of presence). In fact, the above-mentioned eschatology of progress – be it Christian, Hegelian, left wing (Marxism), right wing (the Kantian quasi-eschatology of race) – is the future-present, it is the temporal sense of metaphysics of presence in eschatology that this entire study seeks to deconstruct. It is not insignificant that this metaphysics of presence is deconstructed in the process of turning away from, or having our backs turned to, the future (progress), and facing the dead (ruined time and irreparable loss).

### 4.4.5 Caputo's Eschatology as Nihilism

With respect to the fourth point, Benjamin's tragic view of history – that history is catastrophe and wreckage, and the angel of history cannot raise the dead – corresponds to a certain cosmic nihilism in Caputo's own thinking. Caputo does not get this cosmic nihilism from Benjamin, but from Nietzsche. We can see this as early as *Against Ethics*:

> You and I stand on the surface of the little star and shout, "racism is unjust." The cosmos yawns and takes another spin. There is no cosmic record of our complaint. The cosmos feels no sorrow and has no heart on which to record our complaint. The stars pay us no heed. "Racism is unjust" is a bit of noise tinkling in the midst of "the great cosmic stupidity," a complaint lodged against an indifferent world, under stars twinkling in a void. The call of unjust suffering, of an absolutely innocent game that knows only greater or lesser discharges of energy, only self-accumulating and self-destructive forces, but does not know about the call of Justice.[226]

This is a line of thought we see throughout Caputo's corpus. We see it a bit later in *More Radical Hermeneutics* where Caputo hauntingly describes it as a horizon that we cannot escape,

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[226] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 17.

a "specter that perhaps history has no point at all, that undeserved suffering has no meaning, that the cosmos does not know we are here."[227] Later still in *The Insistence of God*, he comes back to this cosmic nihilism, and there frames it in the context of what scientists theorize about the universe coming to an end through entropic dissipation.[228] To be sure, what Caputo is undermining through this cosmic nihilism is not the meaning of suffering and the need for justice. Caputo is not arguing that because racism and all manner of suffering is cosmically meaningless, that it is meaningless all the way down. What Caputo argues against is meaning from above (the cosmos, God, Hegel's absolute etc.). For Caputo, the call against racism and all manner of suffering is meaningful, but from below (without cosmic or divine grounding), "[o]bligation is on its own and will have to fend for itself."[229] Caputo undermines the notion that any meaning of life can come from outside of life. This means that any possible justice in response to a call against racism or any injustice would not be an ideal justice – it can never raise the dead – but it is still justice. Caputo undermines the notion of an ideal justice without undermining the struggle for justice itself.

### 4.4.6 Nihilism of grace

Caputo's only criticism of Benjamin in *The Weakness of God* is that his view of history does not emphasize hope enough.[230] Although Caputo rejects the interpretation of history as progress, and even maintains something of a Nietzschean cosmic nihilism, Caputo's position is not pessimism. It is, as he calls it in *The Insistence of God*, a nihilism of grace. A theology of the event is not pessimism but is a theology of a certain kind of hope, it is a radical theology of an unconditional hope. Here hope is unconditional only when there are no assurances that everything will work out. When there is assurance that everything is progressing to perfection (*telos*) then there are reasonable expectations, not hope. Hope, on the other hand, is that which is only possible when there are no reasonable expectations and no assurances that we are moving towards the goal: in a situation that undermines the anticipation of favourable outcomes, favourable outcomes cannot be expected, but can only be hoped for. To put it differently, "hope is most authentically called for when everything is hopeless, according to the logic of the impossible."[231] Hope is only possible in the situation that undermines it; it is only possible when it is impossible. Again and again in Caputo we run up against the

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[227] J.D Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics: On Not Knowing Who We Are* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 243.
[228] Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 223-245.
[229] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 24.
[230] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 95-96.
[231] Ibid., 96.

impossible. We have already seen in the previous chapter that the impossible – the possibility of the impossible – is an event, and for Caputo the name of God is the name of an event, and so by that logic God is another name for the impossible. In this chapter we have already seen that the impossible is messianic – it is the *possibility* of the impossible, and because it is a potentiality it is not here, it has not been actualised, but is on the way (the 'to come'). The nuance that this brings to Caputo's weak eschatology (the messianic) is that the nature of a messianic anticipation of the impossible that is always to come (possible) is hope. As a theology of the event, Caputo's theology is always a hope for the coming of the event that promises/threatens to come in and under the name of God. This theology is, in its own way, a theology of hope: this is a radical theology of a risky or dangerous hope. It is from Derrida that Caputo finds the language to supplement Benjamin's weak messianic power with futurity that is not progress, but rather the future as hope.

### 4.4.7 Synthesis of Caputo's Eschatology

Caputo's theology has no systematic, argued out eschatology – Caputo does not have any dogmatic messianism. This is the main reason why I have not discussed what I am identifying as the eschatological in his corpus in any systematic manner. Instead, we find that through the notion of the messianic Caputo – following Derrida primarily, and Benjamin secondarily – makes a more radical move: he is not interested in dogmatic points of eschatology such as personal, historical, or cosmic eschatology.[232] This is not to say that Caputo's recourse to the messianic has no implications for more systematic approaches. Rather the focus for Caputo is not on what is happening in terms of dogmatic positions, but what those dogmatic positions harbour even as they cannot contain it. The focus is not whether there actually will be a resurrection at some point, but rather the event that is harboured by the belief in resurrection, namely the event of remembering the dead.[233] The focus is not whether or not Jesus or some other messiah will arrive in the future and bring the kingdom of God, but rather the present possibilities of the kingdom being lived out today. The focus is not a new heaven and a new earth or new creation (cosmic eschatology), but on the fact that this present cosmos is the only cosmos we have and is meaningful without reference to a second cosmos – without why (nihilism of grace). In other words what I am identifying as the eschatological in Caputo's

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[232] These are the different dogmatic points Moltmann engages extensively and systematically in his *The Coming of God*.

[233] Elsewhere, in an article that emerged out of this study, I discuss this at length. See S. Singata, "Justice for the Dead."

theology – the messianic – is a radical turn not to eschatology, but to the 'to come' or 'perhaps' – the hauntological – in eschatology.

As I have argued, Caputo's messianic undermines predominately western longitudinal eschatological conception of history as progress:

> The future for Derrida is the issue neither of a linear progression nor a circular repetition, but comes rather as an unforeseeable surprise, a promise and a threat…[234]

For Caputo, linearity and circularity are both attempts to escape the flux or *différance*. In deconstruction unforeseeable surprises, good (promise) or bad (threat), are an effect of *différance*. Caputo's approach is longitudinal only in so far as longitudinal describes an emphasis on temporality. However, at the point at which longitudinal designates linearity (teleology) or circularity, then Caputo parts ways with longitudinal eschatology. Both these are a metaphysics of presence, because they at worst downplay and at best incorporate into their temporal metanarrative what Caputo in *Radical Hermeneutics* calls the original difficulty of life – "the ruptures and the breaks and the irregularities in existence."[235] Caputo make a shifts from an expectation of a particular future arrival of justice – either in the coming of the messiah, or of some future revolution, or of an incremental actualization of a just human society, etc. – to the messianic as an expectation always already built into life that renders the present always already opened to the future, where what is coming is not unilaterally just or unjust – hence the promise/threat structure.

The messiah is always on the way but will never arrive. An ideal justice will never be present, yet nevertheless there must be struggles for justice. This deferral of the arrival of the messiah or justice is problematic when things are viewed from the perspective of the oppressed. Justice deferred is justice denied. Above I briefly mentioned that when Caputo addresses this issue his thinking about the messianic runs up against a spatial conception of the messianic. This can be seen in that although Caputo is adamant that he discusses a messianic without a messianism – the messiah will never arrive – he also talks about the messiah's being there (presence?), now in the present. We see this in his engagement with the rabbinic story I discussed above about the messiah who is *there* (space) yet he is still asked "when…?" (temporal). There is no indication that Caputo is doing this deliberately. Whether or not it is intentional, it is this spatial opening in Caputo's conception of the messianic that I wish to turn to in the final section of

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[234] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 175.
[235] Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 1.

this chapter. I will draw on Vítor Westhelle's notion of a latitudinal eschatology to engage this opening in Caputo.

## 4.5 Hermeneutical Interlude

So far in this chapter I have argued that Caputo's engagement with the messianic is a deconstruction of eschatological thinking – such as in eschatological attempts to escape the flux through faith in progress. However, the limitation with this argument is that it is primarily Western oriented. Before I can discuss the South African context more directly, there is need for an interlude in which I take stock of the deconstructive insights I wish to put into engagement with the eschatology of South African black theology. At this point I return to Westhelle to connect the deconstructive insights I have been following above with an eschatology of the global South through *chora/Khora*.

As I discussed above, Westhelle argues that liberation theology is shot through with an eschatological mood, where eschatology refers not to the end in purely temporal terms, but also in spatial terms – the borders, margins, or edges of Western canons to which the oppressed have been consigned. I hinted briefly at the connections between this conception of eschatology and *différance*. In this final section of the chapter, I will make this connection more explicit. To begin with, Westhelle also refers to a spatial sense of Benjamin's "weak messianic power":

> But the same eschatological experience takes place not only internationally, but also within the borders of a given nation with its displaced people. These crossings kindle the sparks of what Benjamin called "weak messianic power," intervening in and disturbing the usual order of things.[236]

In the passage that this citation is taken from, Westhelle does not explain how he thinks Benjamin's notion of weak messianic power – which, for Benjamin, refers to the claim that the dead (past generations) have on the living (present generation), as was discussed above – also relates to the crossing of boarders. Earlier in this chapter he does passingly refer to remembering the dead,[237] but there it is not Benjamin's notion of a weak messianic power that he engages, but Derrida's notion of a pure gift.[238] For the purposes of this study, it is not necessary to get at how Westhelle sees a connection. What matters for this study is that there are at least three points through which Westhelle's work can speak to what I have been

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[236] Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space*, 112-113.
[237] "Yet the little deaths and remnants of a gift that are not and will never be repaid. Little deaths are irretrievable losses." Ibid., 104.
[238] Ibid., 103.

describing as the eschatological in Caputo's work more directly: engagement with Derrida, *chora*/*khora* and now Benjamin's weak messianic force.

With respect to Derrida's notion of the gift, Westhelle makes an eschatological connection. Westhelle thinks that remembering the dead is a pure gift:

> The gift the dead receive in remembrance is a pure gift, because it cannot be repaid. Thus these, gift and death, are *eschata* par excellence.[239]

This point can be challenged from a Derridean standpoint,[240] but for my purposes here we need not split hairs. What interests me is that Westhelle connects remembering the dead with eschatology, and (as I have been discussing above) Caputo makes the same move. In the context of this quote, however, he sees remembering the dead as a Derridean pure gift. Caputo on the other hand does not make that connection. Instead, Caputo – and Derrida – connects remembering the dead with Benjamin's weak messianic power. Notwithstanding that difference, Westhelle's association of remembering the dead with eschatology, one that is not just temporal but also spatial, can offer a clue as to how he sees a weak messianic force as having a spatial component. This can then help with bolstering Caputo's messianic – which I have been calling his eschatology – by concretizing its spatial dimension. For Westhelle, remembering the dead is a spatial eschatology because it is *choratic*/*khoral*. *Chora*/*Khora* refers to a spatial fissure that involves both "danger and possibilities," or what Caputo would call promise/threat.[241] The danger (threat) and the possibilities (promise) are not two different things but are two parts of the same reality. The pure gift is something that must always be identified with the possibilities (the promise) and death must be identified with the danger (threat). This means that the pure gift and death are always already two sides of the same coin.[242] The danger/threat of death is an irreducible structural necessity for the possibility/promise of the gift:

> If the gift appears or signifies itself, if it exists or if it is presently *as gift*, as what it is, then it is not, it annuls itself. Let us go to the limit: The truth of the gift (…) suffices to annul the gift.[243]

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[239] Ibid., 104.
[240] The fact that those who give this gift to the dead are aware of the fact that they have given a gift that cannot be repaid is its own reward, and by virtue of that fact it undermines the gift.
[241] Ibid., 103.
[242] Ibid., 103.
[243] Jacques Derrida cited in ibid., 103-104.

For Derrida, a pure gift is a way of giving that escapes any economic exchange. Derrida posits that a pure gift is impossible because the gift is undermined by the very process of gift giving. The one who receives the gift incurs a debt of gratitude to the giver, even if this gratitude only takes the form of thanks. Gratitude and thanks then function as a payment for the gift thus undermining the gift and turning it into economic exchange. Even if the gift giver were to remain anonymous, her awareness of the fact that she gave a gift without expecting anything in return functions as compensation for the giving, thus turning the gift into economy. Every time there is an attempt to give a gift, the gift undermines itself. That which makes the gift possible also makes it impossible, the possibility of the gift is its impossibility – and here we see the theme of the impossible (the possibility of the impossible) again.

The annulment or undermining of the gift is life itself. Where there is life there is always economy because in life you reap what you sow, as it were. Nevertheless, life also has moments of temporal ruptures (for Caputo the messianic) and places where there are spatial fissures (for Westhelle) which are openings for the messiah or the gift (an event). The temporal point that Caputo's eschatology (the messianic) makes is that life is not locked into economy or economic time, but that events (ruptures) happen. This is the point that Westhelle is making with both time and space. For Caputo ruptures happen in the middle voice, and this is because the only true (pure) gift is the one that is not given by a particular agent, but one that gets itself given (*es gibt*). It is an event.

Also, for both Caputo and Westhelle this addresses the problem of irreparable loss and ruined time. We remember the dead even as remembering the dead will not repair what was lost. This means that in this remembrance there is a possibility for the gift. This is because if we remember even as we know that remembering will not rise to the level of being compensation for their suffering (irreparable loss), then our remembrance seeks to escape an economic exchange: the dead are remembered unconditionally. The reasons for remembering the dead victims of oppression do not lie in something outside of the suffering, not even in God's justice. We remember the oppressed who are dead because they were oppressed to the point of death. Remembering the dead is without external 'why' because it is its own why. One question remains: Where are these spaces where the gift of remembering the dead (a weak messianic power) is im/possible; or where are the fissures (space) where the ruptures (time) are possible? For Westhelle these spaces are *Chora/Khôra*.

'*Khôra*' is a Greek word that refers to a concrete place, location, or space.[244] However, when Derrida uses this word, it does not refer to a concrete place or location or space. It is not a concrete 'thing' at all. For that matter, *Khôra* is not a thing, it is "neither intelligible nor sensible, the discourse on which can be properly situated neither as logos nor mythos, certain or probable."[245] Rather, it is an opening, or a bottomless abyss out of which all concrete things emerge. This way of discussing *Khôra* should recall the discussion of *différance* in the previous chapter. In fact, this should make it difficult to distinguish between *Khôra* and *différance*. One of the points at which this is made clear is on the question of being. As we discussed in the previous chapter, *différance* is not a being or an entity, but less than that. Similarly, *Khôra*:

> …constitutes another way to be otherwise than Being, another kind of third thing, one moving in a fully opposite direction and submitting to different tropes. Rather than "hyperexistence" or supereminent being, *khôra* seems to drop below being, barely to be at all, to be if at all next to nothing. Derrida maintains that Plato has adopted two very heterogeneous ways of speaking about this quasibeing or shadowy realm called *khôra*, about which it is admittedly very hard to speak, but for reasons that are opposite to the "Good."[246]

In the previous chapter we saw that the reason that it is impossible to speak about *différance* is not because it is beyond being, or a hyper being – like the God of apophatic theology – but because it is less than being, it is not a concept or a thing, but is the differential spacing – and this spatial sense of *différance* already gives a point of connection between Caputo and Westhelle – out of which different concepts and structure emerge. Now we see that *Khôra* is exactly like that. This is why *Khôra* is a surname for *differance*, or as Caputo puts it, *Khôra* is a cousin of *differance*.[247] Caputo posits that Derrida utilises *Khôra* as an allegory for *différance*:[248] the (non-)function that *Khôra* plays in Plato's *Timaeus* is the exact same function that *différance* plays in Derrida's philosophy, and more importantly for this study, it is the same function that *différance* plays in Caputo's radical theology.[249] This means that Westhelle's deployment of *chora* (*Khôra*) to think through his notion of latitudinal eschatology occasions a critical encounter between Caputo and Westhelle. We do not have to choose between *chora* and *différance*, they are kin. More than that, *chora* (*Khôra*) is the surname of *différance*. The

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[244] Caputo, *Deconstruction in nutshell*, 85.
[245] Ibid., 87.
[246] Ibid., 93.
[247] Ibid., 96.
[248] Ibid., 97.
[249] For an extensive example of this in Caputo's theology see Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, (chapter 3-4).

question now is: what does this critical encounter between Caputo and Westhelle do to what I have been referring to as the eschatological (the messianic) in Caputo?

It is important to emphasize that Westhelle does not argue for an abandonment of a longitudinal approach to eschatology. On the contrary, he argues that the longitudinal and the latitudinal should be held together. The privileging of one aspect of eschatology is deconstructed through the reintroduction of the other repressed aspect. As we discussed in the previous chapter, part of the reason that *différance* is a misspelling is so that both the spatial and the temporal sense of deconstruction can be held together at once because the flux is at one and the same time both a differential space which occasions differences – what Westhelle calls limits and margins – and a temporal deferral that occasions temporal differences (the past, the present, and the future) – again, what Westhelle calls limits or margins. *Différance* should be understood as always already holding these two together so as to have the effect of a space-time opening.

Caputo's engagement with the messianic gives us this space-time conception in theory, but it is not yet connected to a particular concrete context. What reading Caputo and Westhelle together through this *Khôral/choratic* opening does to Caputo's radical theology is that it produces a shift from a theoretical topological sense of the other, to concretely thinking the colonized as the other in question. We have already seen in Caputo's retelling of the Rabbinic story I discussed above about the messiah at the gates of Rome amongst the sick, the poor, and the suffering, who is *there* – spatially – and yet is asked *when* he will come. Caputo interprets the messiah's being 'there' as follows:

> For the Messiah's being-there is not his coming…. Even if the Messiah is there…in the flesh, present in ordinary time, such a presence can never amount to a coming, for coming…does not belong to the order of presence…but to a messianic order. Even if the Messiah stands before us, even if we poke him in the ribs, it will still be necessary to say, to call and invoke, "*viens*, *viens*," for the coming of the Messiah is not a gross event, heavy and thick with presence.[250]

What is clear is that for Caputo the coming – where coming means the full or complete arrival, the full (metaphysics of) presence – of the Messiah must be avoided at all costs. Also, it cannot be the case that the messiah is not coming at all – the messiah is always on the way, but never arriving. Concomitantly, the messiah can never be fully present, but the messiah also can never

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[250] Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears*, 79.

be fully absent. Here Caputo comes very close to an inaugurated eschatology,[251] except that is still too strong an eschatology to describe what he is doing.[252] He speaks instead of a "being-there" that is not his coming. 'Being-*there*' betrays a spatial dimension to the messianic, even as Caputo exclusively pays attention to the temporal (messianic time). For him to continue, "[e]ven if the Messiah stands before us…" the "before us" connotes a spatial aspect of the messianic. To show that the spatial and the temporal belong together in Caputo's messianic (even as he over emphasises the temporal), in the next page he explains that what he means by the coming of the messiah is the coming of justice – and concomitantly, that the 'being-there' 'now' of the messiah is a justice that must happen now, today, even as we wait for justice to come. He writes:

> That call for doing justice is also signalled by the setting of the messiah's appearance – among beggers, among the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger – among those who demand justice now, for justice deferred is justice denied.[253]

Note that here 'now' corresponds to a 'where': wherever the oppressed are, the Messiah (justice) must be there now, whether or not it is the time of his coming. Even as the coming of the Messiah (justice) is future, it is drawn into the present by spaces of suffering, because suffering exerts a "demand" on the Messiah. The Messiah is asked when he will come because the time of his coming has not arrived, but the suffering on the margins (the gates of Rome) demands that he be there. This is a creative opening in Caputo's messianic to the shift proposed by Westhelle: the messianic is not just the 'when' – the expectation of a messianic future – but also where – on the margins where the oppressed are, now. Westhelle writes:

> The kingdom of God is topologically nearby, choratic, even if the faithful have not fully and resolutely stepped over into it.[254]

Similarly, as we have seen above, Caputo writes:

> Jesus was not alarming us about something that was approaching that we cannot foresee and that may strike like a thief in the night. Rather, he was calming us with something that had *already happened* to us but that *we do not appreciate* (my emphasis).[255]

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[251] In fact in the following page, he writes: "There is a way of waiting for the future that going on right now." Ibid., 80.
[252] What is inaugurated here is not the kingdom – the kingdom will never arrive, but will be forever coming – but instead inauguration is the demand placed upon us in the present by the anticipation of what is coming.
[253] Ibid., 80.
[254] Westhelle, *Eschatology and Space*, 78.
[255] Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 161.

One should not too hastily connect Westhelle's theological project with Caputo's. They have very different approaches to theology. However, his reference to the "*choratic*" is perhaps the strongest and clearest connection to deconstruction in Westhelle.

So, we return to the question: Where are these spaces where the gift of remembering the dead (a weak messianic power) is im/possible? A more direct answer is at the *eschata*, the edges and margins. The longer answer is what I pursue in the next chapter, where I will discuss the *eschata* in South Africa, in conversation with Black Consciousness and South African black theology's eschatological hope for liberation, which is conceived as the quest for true humanity.

# Chapter 5: South African Black Eschatology and the Messianic

In the previous chapter, I argued that the notion of a messianic without the messiah plays out as a denial and undermining of the notion of the existence or even the possibility of an ideal justice, but without undermining the struggle for justice. An ideal justice – the arrival of the messiah – is a teleological eschatology, and that is an eschatology according to the logic of a metaphysics of presence when justice will congeal in some ideal form in a future 'now'. In the notion of the messianic without the messiah, we have an eschatology that is non-teleological, where no one moment will ever contain all that justice can be, but where time is out of joint, where every moment might be or become the gate through which the messiah comes – and this includes past moments. I am now in a better position to stage a critical encounter between Caputian radical theology and the South African context.[256] I stage this encounter in the context of eschatology. I will engage South African black theology, and more specifically it's eschatological reflections. I will stage this encounter between South African black eschatology and Caputian eschatology (the messianic) in a contrapuntal manner.

South Africa is a country in contradiction, and this can be traced to the existence of two competing visions or mythologies about what South Africa is and should be.[257] One vison is of "a democratic, egalitarian… 'new South Africa'" – a post-apartheid South Africa. The other is of a new apartheid South Africa. These can also be read – with due caution – as two quasi-eschatologies: one where movement toward the future is a progression away from apartheid, and one where progression toward the future is 'progression' toward the new apartheid. Confusingly, South Africa is moving in both directions at once. Additionally, the people of South Africa do not neatly divide as two distinct groups, each ascribing to one of these two myths; these two myths are complexly and confusingly interwoven in the ways in which they play themselves out in present day South Africa. With the emergence of democracy, at many of the points where before there were racial laws to police the boundaries between racial groups, there are now financial regulations.[258] Additionally, to further complicate things, there is now a black elite presence where before there were only white people. This addition of black people among the bourgeois furthers the divisive trajectory of apartheid rather than undermining the trajectory, troublingly affirming not only the insight that both black exclusion

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[256] I am not the first to attempt this. See C.D. Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below: A South African Black Christological Encounter with Radical Theology." *Black Theology* 19 (2021), 53-70.

[257] Mpofu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021), 25.

[258] Ibid., 17.

and black inclusion benefit apartheid,[259] but also the realization that apartheid is highly adaptable and can even be democratic. The latter is one of the limitations of framing the deconstruction of eschatology I discussed above as a democracy to come that a critical encounter with the South African context is aimed at addressing.[260]

Both these visions promulgate movement toward contradictory futures; and to further complicate this, the nature of the contradiction is not a binary – it is not merely the black/while racial binary, but also clashes within as well as between racial groups on such lines as sexuality, gender, religion, culture, and political ideology, to name but a few. In each racial group respectively in all these areas – and more – there are clashes, however not just within each racial group vertically, but also horizontally in the complicated shared existence of all South Africans. South Africa is a complex system of sorts. As a result, even amongst black people there are the contradictory hopes of individualized wealth and prosperity – a capitalist dream – on the one hand, and the hopes for a more egalitarian socio-economic reality on the other.[261] To be sure, it is not that this contradictory situation was not the case before 1994. On the contrary, even in the past apartheid has never been monolithic, but has instead been incoherent and inconsistent, and this is undoubtably part of the reason it has been so adaptable, even in a democratic dispensation.[262] South Africa is not moving in a linear or teleological manner into the future, nor in any cyclical sense. South Africa is not moving forward or backwards or cyclically but as a flux – as a complex system moving in all those directions all at once, depending where, when and what one observes. Simplistic approaches that reduce the complexity to one thing are fleeing the flux, they are an attempt to escape the original difficulty of life into which South Africa is always already inscribed. Such essentialist readings are a version of what I have been discussing in this study as a metaphysics of presence, even if now they take the form of a politics of presence. History is not progress, it is struggle: a struggle between two broad national myths – one ambiguous and hardly repressed (apartheid) and one championed (the rainbow nation) – a plethora of struggles within and between these two myths, not to mention that even these two myths do not contain the complexity. This complexity is

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[259] "Inclusion is a one-way street and not a reciprocal right. In a world governed by the colonial matrix of power, he who includes and she who is welcomed to be included stand in codified power relations ." W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), XV.

[260] To be clear, the limitation here is with democracy, not deconstruction. it is precisely because democracy is limited that its deconstruction is possible.

[261] Mpofu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 19-20.

[262] Ibid., 15.

what *différance* means. Therefore, in this chapter I will be staging a critical encounter between the radical hermeneutics of Caputo's radical theology that I have been discussing in the previous chapters, as well as the insights that I glean from Black Consciousness and South African black theology. An eschatological view of South Africa's movement toward the future cannot have one organizing logic – a *logos* – around which to organize everything, as South Africa does not lend itself to such a reading. In this chapter I read South African black eschatology as liberation.[263] This is because the religio-political themes that Caputo deals with through the messianic – the messiah to come, justice to come, democracy to come – are best discussed in connection to the notion of a liberation to come which has been more significant in the South African context. Beginning with Biko's dialectic through to the eschatology of South African black theology, I will explore how the deconstruction of eschatology in Caputo's messianic as well as black theology's own insights help to make sense of a deconstruction already taking place within black theology. First, more must be said about the shift in emphasis to liberation.

The notion of a democracy to come that Caputo picks up from Derrida, emerges out of Derrida's attempt at bringing messianic eschatology to bear on secular political concerns.[264] So, 'democracy to come' is something of a political theology, however Derrida resists calling it that to avoid confusion with Carl Schmitt's notion of political theology.[265] However, it should be re-emphasised that given the Derridean undermining for all essentialism, the shift in emphasis from a theological point to a political one is not a repackaging of a doctrinal essence or logic (*logos*), but should be understood as an effect of the endless linkage (translatability) of ideas, beliefs and concepts that is an effect of *différance*. It is not an eschato-*logic*. The translation is not on the side of the messiah – which is why for Caputo we secretly hope that the messiah does not come – but on the side of the 'to come':

> Deconstruction is messianic all the way down but its Messiah is *tout autre*, a just one who shatters the stable horizons of expectation, transgressing the possible and conceivable, beyond the seeable and foreseeable, and who is therefore not the private property of some chosen people.[266]

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[263] "The whole of Black eschatology could be summed up in one word: *liberation*." J.N.J. Kritzinger, *Black Eschatology and Christian Mission*, 15.
[264] Ullrich, *Sovereignty and the Event*, 149.
[265] Ibid., 149.
[266] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 164.

The Messiah in deconstruction is *tout autre*, which means not one particular other – Jesus, Christianity, Marxism, black consciousness – but every other. In the context of our discussion here, this means that any given conception of justice is radically contextual – there is no one justice. Justice has no essence. Every given case of a struggle for justice is not a reconstruction of justice in a particular context based on an essence that functions as a blueprint, but a construction. The only common feature is a haunting void that provokes us to construct justice, or to deconstruct whatever we have all along been calling justice. Furthermore, Caputo writes:

> But, once again, Derrida is not announcing a regulative ideal, an horizon of foreseeability: for this democracy to come will *always* be to come. It will never be in place, and it would be the very height of injustice to announce that it has arrived, which is the kind of error made in the triumphalism of the new world order. For justice is always what has not arrived and, to the extent that it exists at all, it is to be found, like the Messiah on the *outskirts* of Rome, among the outsiders, the ones who have not "arrived."[267]

Here democracy, justice and the messiah are clearly interrelated concepts for Caputo, to the point that in this paragraph they are used somewhat interchangeably. Also, significantly, this eschatological anticipation – a democracy or a messiah or a justice to come – is connected to a spatial margin ("the Messiah on the *outskirts* of Rome"). This brings us back to Westhelle's spatial shift. Although democracy is definitely a relevant frame of thinking in South Africa, it does not go far enough in capturing the hope – against hope – of those at the periphery in the South African context. Therefore, in addition to this shift from the theological sense of the messianic to its political sense, there is need of an addition of liberation. It is a liberation to come that even before the end of apartheid has captured the hopes of black South Africans. Even the expression "freedom is coming tomorrow" – a quasi-eschatological expression in its own right – popularized by the movie *Sarafina*, when thought not in English but in any indigenous language, speaks to liberation more than to democracy. For example, in my mother tongue, the word for 'freedom' – *inkululeko* – is also the word for 'liberation'. This goes to the conceptual level too. However, we do not have a word for 'democracy', and as a result we usually just transcribe the English word (*idemokhrasi*).[268] Liberation is a more contextually

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[267] Ibid., 123.
[268] To be sure, democracy is not necessarily synonymous with freedom even in English, and I am not trying to imply that it is. However, in the transition from apartheid to democracy, freedom has tended to be conflated with democracy. I simply mean to undermine this tendency to conflate the two. The two are different concepts even though they can and should be brought into relation with one another. So, I invoke the Xhosa linguistic overlap with freedom and liberation rather than democracy to emphasize the distance between the two: the Xhosa language does not even have a name for democracy, yet has one for freedom and liberation.

organic concept while democracy is borrowed. We need not dismiss democracy, but liberation should permeate the way we think democratically. I will now move to discussing liberation from the perspective of black theology. I will begin by giving a brief sketch of the history of South African black theology, and for heuristic purposes will discuss Biko's dialectical conception of black consciousness thereafter – so as to make it clear that in this study I only discuss Biko in connection with black theology, and eschatology in particular.

## 5.1 Eschatology in South African Black Theology

South African black theology is generally held to have emerged in history as a recognizably distinct approach to theology somewhere between the late 1960s and early 1970s.[269] American black theology –  and most notably, James Cone – was an important interlocutor for South African black theology.[270] In this early period, the University Christian Movement (UCM), through the influence of Basil Moore, adopted black theology from the USA, giving it the status of being a project – the Black Theology Project (BTP) with a director assigned to it.[271] The South African context made it such that black theology took on a very distinct shape, with very distinct content in relation to its American predecessor. Already from its beginnings in South Africa, black theology was entangled with the Black Consciousness Movement – and this relationship continues to the present. This was firstly because the UCM which initiated South African black theology, was also the "incubator" for the ideas of black consciousness.[272] Secondly, as a result of the first point, in the development of his articulation of black consciousness Biko was not only influenced by Cone – whose book *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) he had read parts of – but also by friends who were deeply interested in and influenced by black theology.[273] All of this transpired in the period identified by Mokgethi B. G. Mothlabi as the first phase of South African Black Theology.[274] Some of the earliest publications of this phase can be found in *Essays on Black Theology* (1972). Importantly, even though South African black theology's content was distinct from USA black theology, as I

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Making this point with a Xhosa linguistic example (a language without a word for democracy) amplifies this more strongly than using a language that has this word.

[269] D.N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 94;

[270] M. Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa." *Religion and Theology* 16 (2009), 164-165.

[271] M. Motlhabi, *African Theology/Black Theology in South Africa: Looking Back, Moving On* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008), 22.

[272] Be that as it may, black consciousness itself grew out of the church; Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair," 126.

[273] Ibid., 130; Gibson, *Fanonian Practices: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Scottsville: KwaZulu Natal Press, 2011), 236 (footnote 3).

[274] M. Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa,", 164.

mentioned above, it still took the same approach as its American counterpart in this first phase.[275]

In what Mothlabi identifies as the second phase there was a shift from attempting to appropriate and adapt the American approach for a South African context, to the work of conscientizing black people – who were rightly understood to be predominantly religious, and at that, predominantly Christian – with a black liberative (black conscious) sensitivity to their Christian beliefs.[276] This is the period in which the South African Students Organization (SASO) rose to prominence.[277] SASO commissioned "research into Black Theology and its socio-religious significance," and, in close collaboration with the BTP of the UCM, sponsored several events for black theology, which included a campaign to conscientize black clergy to black theology:

> This was in order to encourage them to fight collectively against racism and discrimination in the church; to contextualize their religious services and preaching by taking account of the people's needs and struggles *here and now rather than orienting people solely toward the future, other-worldly kingdom*; and also to remain alert to the general socio-political and economic conditions in the country (my emphasis).[278]

As I will discuss in more detail below, in these early phases of South African black theology – as well as the subsequent phases – there was not much of a rigorous explicit attempt to constructively engage eschatology. Nevertheless, eschatology was not ignored, and was certainly not irrelevant. The line I have italicised in this quote above hints at what South African black theologians tended to do with eschatology, which was always already interwoven with Christian theology: they tended to downplay other worldly futurism in favour of more concrete goals realizable in this world.

The period leading up to and including the 16th of June 1976 Soweto uprising, as well as the subsequent political activity in Soweto and the rest of the country for the next seventeen months, cannot be ignored when trying to make sense of the development of South African

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[275] There is no consensus on the phases of black theology.
[276] Ibid., 166.
[277] SASO was formed in December 1968, and in July of 1969, when it was officially inaugurated, Steve Biko was elected as its president. See B. S. Biko, *I write what I Like*, 3-4.
[278] Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa," 166.

black theology.[279] Seeing that apartheid was not merely a political system, but was also deeply theological, the political struggle against apartheid of necessity had to be partnered with a theological resistance. Concomitantly, within a decade of the Soweto Uprising South African black theology entered its third phase.[280] Some notable publications emerged such as *Farewell to Innocence* (1978) by Allan Boesak, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers* (1983) by Takatso A. Mofokeng, *Black Experience and Black Theology* (1984) by Clement Mokoka, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (1989) by Itumeleng Mosala, and *Demons of Apartheid (*1989) by Cecil Ngcokovane.[281] In the middle of this period the *Kairos Document* (1985) emerged as a collective contextual theological critique of apartheid.

Motlhabi identifies the fourth phase as the era of the famed *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* as well as the establishment of the Institute of Contextual Theology (ICT).[282] It was in this period that a shift occurred, in which the focus of South African black theology – which hitherto was solely race – was broadened to include class and gender.[283] Motlhabi notes that the debate that occurred in this period almost resulted in a schism within black theology, but

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[279] On the 16th of June 1976, South African students in Soweto gathered and marched to the stadium in protest of the then mandate that Afrikaans be the language of instruction. At least, this was the catalyst to the protest, but simmering beneath the surface was anger and frustration of the ongoing oppression of black people due to apartheid. Before they could even reach the stadium, the police met them with live ammunition, and from the 16th to the 18th of June 1976, the police killed more than five hundred black people. D.N. Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa*, 96. This ignited a storm of protest all over South Africa, where it was not uncommon to find crowds of students fighting back against armed police officers with nothing but stones. Government buildings were burned, school boycotts were common, many funerals became protest gatherings, and many other such things happened. It was common for the police to also torture and kill people deeply involved in struggle. Just a little over a year later, in September 1977, the police detained and brutally beat Steve Biko, to the point where he was severely brain damaged. He died shortly after. For a synopsis of all that took place in this time; see D.N. Hopkins *Black Theology USA and South Africa*, 95-96.

[280] M. Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa," 168. This was the third phase at least for Motlhabi. There is no strict consensus on the phases of South African Black Theology. I do not strictly commit myself to Motlhabi's designation of a third phase here but draw on it because conveying this period as a third phase helps to articulate a shift that I think is at least in part undeniably tied to the shift in South African politics and the nature of the struggle for liberation after the Soweto uprising – which was followed by such events as the assassination of Steve Biko (1977) and the subsequent banning of black consciousness organizations. If indeed South African Black Theology does not emerge in a vacuum, but is deeply contextual and therefore moved by what is happening in its context, then the shifts taking place in South Africa in this period and this shift in South African Black Theology occurring in the same time must be related. An example that supports this can be seen in the fact that shortly after the assassination of Biko and the banning of black consciousness organizations "the resistance movement went into a temporary lull" (see Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa*, 96), while in the same period ("between the mid-1970s and the early 1980") Motlhabi also identifies a "lull" that takes place right at the beginning of what he calls the third phase of South African black theology (see "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa," 168).

[281] M. Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa," 169.

[282] Ibid., 169.

[283] Mothabi writes: "Hitherto class and Gender concerns…" See ibid.,170.

that in the end consensus was "that the struggle was one, even though multi-faceted."[284] By 1995 – about a year after the first democratic elections – this phase of black theology had seemingly run its course, and people's interests were moving in different directions. This ends the fourth phase and begins a fifth more ambiguous phase.

What Mothlabi identifies as the fifth phase, beginning where the fourth phase ends right up to the present, is a theological wilderness. This phase is constituted by theological ambiguity, where it is not clear whether or not black theology is experiencing another temporary lull in widespread appeal and activity, or whether it is ending or has ended. To that effect some have already declared it dead.[285] Mothlabi observes that this theological wilderness has at the very least the following two causes: firstly it is part of a wider decline in theology itself in public discourse and in academia, which is partly due to the closing of several theology departments in public universities in favour of the existence of religious studies departments; secondly, with the legal end of apartheid in South Africa, and the promulgation of the notion of a non-racial rainbow nation, a theology that makes race its focal point has lost public appeal, not to mention that the black theology critique was an easier case to make during apartheid – at least amongst black people – when the government of the day was clearly and unambiguously antiblack. In addition to this, it can also be added that black theology has not always had a notable presence in the curriculums of many private and even public theological departments and seminaries.[286]

This ambiguous phase notwithstanding, black theologians have continued to do black theology as can be seen in the works of such theologians as the late Vuyani Vellem and Tinyiko Maluleke – who has been prolific throughout this present period. Also, with the #fallist movements, the fact that the issue of antiblackness did not meet its end when South Africa became a democracy has gained public appeal nationwide. There is now a generation of theologians who have taken on black theology and are moving in several directions with it. Perhaps most notably, the decolonial turn has come to have a lot of appeal amongst university students in general, and for my purposes, theology students since then. It still stands to be seen whether this will have been the new paradigm that Mothlabi was hoping for. What is certain is that it was premature to pronounce (South African) black theology dead – just as it was

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[284] Ibid., 170.

[285] Most notable here is Alistair Kee's book *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (New York: Routledge 2006).

[286] See Sandiswa Lerato Kobe's "Black Theology of Liberation (Is it the) thing of the Past? A Theological Reflection on Black Students' Experiences." *Missionalia* 2 (2018), 288-303. Also, in my personal experience, in my undergraduate years, the term 'black theology' never once even came up in any of my classes, and the one-time liberation theology was mentioned, it was spoken of in passing, and at that with subtly negative connotations.

premature to pronounce apartheid and antiblackness dead. With this brief sketch of South African black theology, I am now in a better position to take a step back and discuss Biko's dialectic and eschatology.

### 5.1.1 Biko and Eschatology

Liberation in South Africa is multifaceted. Even as we have it in South African black theology and Biko's conception of black consciousness, the conception of liberation does not exclusively issue from theological sources. Although James Cone, a theological source, is an important influence, so is Frantz Fanon who early on was undoubtedly mediated to the South African scene through Cone and American black theology.[287] Furthermore, Cone's uncompromising critique of white liberalism, as well as Cone's contention that Christianity is not essentially oppressive and can in fact advance liberation, can be seen in Biko; the latter is significant given that it is the opposite of the tenor of African liberation discourse at the time.[288] I mention this for two reasons: firstly, to show that in the South African context when liberation is invoked, Biko, Fanon, as well as black theology are implicitly or explicitly invoked as well. This is due to the history of liberation in South Africa, which in this context is always ideological and theological (though not exclusively so[289]), even when one of these is only implicit. Secondly, both axes give liberation a particular way of relating with the future – with respect to the ideological this is typically thought of as a dialectical movement, and with respect to the theological this is eschatology. These two by no means divide neatly but can be analogously referred to as two different points on one spectrum: theology is always more or less ideological, and ideology is always more or less theological even when the theological is repressed; this is when it makes sense to call it quasi-theological. Therefore, the dialectical is always eschatological, whether implicitly or explicitly.

In Biko's dialectic of black consciousness a quasi-eschatology comes to view. I read Biko's black consciousness as a version of what I described in the previous chapter as the quasi-eschatological notion of history as progress toward human freedom. Perhaps the most obvious place to find this is in his essay *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity*. Of course, reading Biko eschatologically requires caution, as will become evident shortly. To

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[287] N.C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (2011), 44.
[288] Ibid., 45.
[289] Black consciousness is also undeniably existential.

begin with, Biko does not subscribe to a *Deus ex machina*.[290] Nevertheless, God and religion – and in Biko's case, religion is Christianity – have a concrete role in black consciousness. In Biko's thought Christianity – and at that, all concrete religions – are historical contingencies that emerge because there is always a need for them.[291] It is because Biko sees Christianity this way that his engagement with Christianity is somewhat instrumentalist. By this I mean, for Biko Christianity is not itself the universal truth or the ultimate religion; however, he does believe it to be but one vessel for universal truth:

> While I do not wish to question the basic truth at the heart of the Christian message, there is a strong case for a re-examination of Christianity. It has proved a very adaptable religion which does not seek to supplement existing orders but – like any universal truth – to find application within a particular situation.[292]

There is a "basic truth" or "universal truth" in Christianity, but Christianity as that which harbors it is itself somewhat contingent. Elsewhere he mentions in passing that throughout its history in the North Atlantic, Christianity has always been adaptable, but strangely was made more rigid when brought to what is now South Africa.[293] Biko does not spell out what he thinks is essential in Christianity, and what he thinks is contingent, however it is clear that he does not think that this essential quality is something that is necessarily essentially Christian. For Biko, before colonialism, African Traditional Religions played this function for all Africans.

To further demonstrate Biko's instrumentalist relation to Christianity, with respect to church attendance and membership, in a private correspondence he wrote:

> Where does the truth lie – with the Methodists or Anglicans, with the Catholics or Jews, with Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists? In my view the truth lies in my ability to incorporate my vertical relationship with God into the horizontal relationships with my fellow men; in my ability to pursue my ultimate purpose on earth which is to do good.[294]

At this level, Biko's instrumentality comes through at the level of church attendance/membership: he does not see the truth in accepting a particular creed or belonging

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[290] "Finally, I would like to remind the black ministry, and indeed all black people that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve people's problems on earth." S. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 65.

[291] He writes: "If one takes religion as nothing else but what it is – i.e. a social institution attempting to explain what cannot be scientifically known about the origin and destiny of man, then from the beginning we can see the necessity of religion. All societies and indeed all individuals, ancient or modern, young or old, identify themselves with a particular religion and when none is existent, they develop one (ibid.,59)."

[292] Ibid., 103.

[293] Ibid., 60.

[294] Ibid., 238.

to a particular church. In fact, later on he even speaks more directly about rejecting all denominationalism.[295] It is important to emphasize that this rejection is not only at the level of church attendance and membership, but also at the level of denominational creeds. On that note, his instrumentality takes a more radical turn when he expresses a rejection of the notion that Jesus was born of a virgin – though having no qualms with the historicity of Jesus – as well as when he writes. "My God – if I have to view Christ as such…."[296] It is best not to speculate about the details of Biko's theological beliefs, but from the above it is safe to say, in his own words, that he "[underplays] the role of Christ," but does not reject God and Christ. It is only in engagement with black theology that God and Christ have any attraction to Biko. Even here, at least with reference to Christ, it is still not clear whether Christianity is essential or contingent. With respect to God – and even here it is not clear whether Biko always thinks of God as distinct from Christ or not – Biko is not only not atheist,[297] but also not "completely agnostic."[298] Whatever the universal or basic truth that Biko sees in Christianity can be more clearly seen as synonymous with God than with Christ. That would explain why in *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity*, he says universal truth was also existent in African Traditional Religions before colonialism. He writes:

> African religion in its essence was not radically different from Christianity. We also believed in one God, we had our own community of saints through whom we related to our God, and we did not find it compatible with our way of life to worship God in isolation from the various aspects of our lives.[299]

It seems clear that the reality of God and the need to relate to God in concert with others is the only essential thing for Biko. Everything else – whether Jesus, whom Biko thinks did indeed exist, is God; being a member of or attending a church, etc. – is debatable. Biko is willing to work with everything else through the mediation of black theology. This relation to God in concert with others is not irrelevant to his humanism. As can be seen in the quote above where he rejects denominationalism; the truth does not exist as a creed, but in "my ability to incorporate my vertical relationship with God into the horizontal relationships with my fellow men; in my ability to pursue my ultimate purpose on earth which is to do good."[300] If for Biko interpersonal relations are the site of theological truth, it is no stretch to say that a quest for a

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[295] Ibid., 239.
[296] Ibid., 239.
[297] Ibid., 236.
[298] Ibid., 239.
[299] Ibid., 102.
[300] Ibid., 238.

true humanity is, for him, a site of theological truth. In fact, in this essay – which, for that matter, first appears in a theological context – he makes this connection:

> This is the important aspect of Black Consciousness, for quite a large proportion of black people in South Africa are Christians still swimming in a mire of confusion – the aftermath of the missionary approach. It is the duty therefore of all black priests and ministers of religion to save Christianity by adopting Black Theology's approach *and thereby once more uniting the black man with his God* (my emphasis).[301]

Note that it is not out of devotion to Christ, or Christianity that black consciousness must save Christianity, but rather it is because "quite a large proportion of black people in South Africa are Christians…." In other words, it is not Christianity that is essential, but the relation between God and black people. Christianity, saved as it is through black theology, is a means to that end. I call it a means to an end to stress not only instrumentality, but also to stress an implicit teleology. For that matter I have somewhat painstakingly been making the case that Biko's concern with Christianity is instrumental because instrumentality betrays not just a hope, but a goal (teleology).

What is the *telos*? Biko discusses black consciousness in relation with Christianity, African culture and history, and the economic conditions of black people.  In relation with each, he expresses the goal differently. As we have already discussed, with relation to Christianity, the goal is articulated theologically as the relation between black people and their God, and the means to this end is the saving of Christianity through the adoption of black theology. With respect to the denigration of African culture, he posits that this denigration has led to the young – who go through missionary education – undermining the old, and the perpetual juniority of the black. Here Biko posits the goal as being to "restore to the black man the great importance we used to give to human relations," or simply put, *ubuntu*.[302] The means to this end is the rejection of individualism, to reduce "the triumph of technology over man," and a materialistic orientation.[303] With respect to African history, the goal is discussed as black people's "coming into consciousness," and the means to this end is saving, or rewriting African history.[304] With respect to the economic concerns of capitalistic exploitation, Biko articulates the means to

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[301] Ibid., 104.
[302] Ibid., 106.
[303] Ibid., 106.
[304] Ibid., 105.

remedying this issue as being black economic solidarity expressed in black businesses giving back to black communities, and black people buying black.[305]

Note that in all these the goal is expressed at the level of the humanity of black people specifically. It is also important to note that in every instant, the means to the goal is never utopian futurism, but always achievable goals. These two points come to view in the way Biko closes this essay:

> While it may be relevant now to talk about black in relation to white, we must not make this our preoccupation, for it can be a negative exercise. As we proceed further towards the achievement of our goals let us talk more about ourselves and our struggle and less about whites.[306]

This language – "As we proceed further towards the achievement of our goals…" – is very grounded and pragmatic. In the very next paragraph, however, Biko's language becomes slightly more grandiose:

> We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on a distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood. In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face.[307]

It helps to read these two quotes in parallel, as there are ideas that correlate to each other in both. In the first Biko speaks of "goals" in the plural – these are the goals we discussed above – which corresponds to "a quest" (singular) in the second one. What is not immediately clear however is whether "the goals" and "a quest" are interchangeable, or whether the goals are subsumed into a greater quest. I suspect the latter for reasons that will become clear shortly. In the first quote, discussing the relation of black people and white people is not discouraged, but it is cautioned that this should not be given too much attention. Black solidarity should be the primary concern. In the second quotation, correspondingly, we find that black solidarity – which is not a bad way to summarize both the goals and the means discussed above – is itself a means to a further goal, and this further goal benefits not only black people, but South Africa ("In time we will be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible…") –

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[305] Ibid., 107.
[306] Ibid., 108.
[307] Ibid., 108.

namely, a more human face.[308] This further goal – true humanity – is only bestowed "in time," in a time that is not now, in a future. Black solidarity – black consciousness – is a means to this end. Expressed exclusively in terms of the theological means/end discussed above, the restoration of the relationship between black people and their God – the purpose of a Christianity liberated by black consciousness – is the theological sense of the quest for a true humanity. On this theological axis we can speak of a clear eschatology: with the restoration of the relationship between black people and their God, "in time," in a time that is not now, in a time to come, the path of black consciousness will yield a true humanity. In these theological (and eschatological) terms, this way of articulating black consciousness's service to a true humanity is strikingly similar to Paul's articulation of Christ's reign as being a means to God's reign – the *eschaton* – although this analogy is entirely my doing, and not Biko's:

> Then the end comes when he hands over the kingdom to his father...For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet…. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15.24-28 NRSV).

In this passage the reign of the Son is portrayed as penultimate and as a transition point to the reign of God. Similarly, at the end of this essay Biko presents black consciousness and its goals as penultimate, and a true humanity as the ultimate. Just as the Son reigns only to subject things, which then in the end are subjected to God, similarly black consciousness proceeds to achieve its goals only in the end to yield itself to a further goal, true humanity. Again, Biko does not make these biblical connections, and I make them not in order to too closely associate Biko's dialectic with the Pauline eschatology in this passage, but to show how Biko's dialectic very easily reads as an eschatology. Therefore, whatever we discuss as a quasi-eschatology in Biko is not another worldly utopianism.

My contention is that adopting an eschatological lens in reading Biko is helpful. A closer look at what Biko thinks about blackness, present humanity, and a true humanity that is still to be seen (to come) reveals this. Biko's hesitancy to focus too much on the black and white integration as we saw above, as well as Biko's sharp criticism of white liberals' push for integration in the present are important to note here. For Biko, integration can only be in the

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[308] In this particular context, Biko is specifically talking about South Africa; however, based on how he speaks about the gift of a more human face elsewhere, his concerns were clearly broader than nationalism – this gift is universal. See Ibid., 51.

future – it is 'to come' – because a true humanity is also future.[309] In reading Biko on this point, it is crucial to note that racial integration is not the goal but is a presupposition of what is in fact the goal – namely, a true humanity. If I read Biko eschatologically in this manner, then black consciousness is a quasi-inaugurated eschatology, which is on the way to a future realization – synthesis. It is this aspect of the dialectic that I will now critique as a metaphysics of presence in Biko.

The way I have read Biko's analysis of black consciousness in the terms of a dialectic – where black consciousness is penultimate, while the synthesis (true humanity) is what is ultimate – clearly agrees with Kritzinger's observation that Biko's dialectic overlaps with the way J. P. Sartre reads the dialectic of négritude:

> Négritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Négritude as antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who employ it well know it. They know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without breakdown. Thus Négritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal.[310]

Considering how influenced Biko is by Fanon, it is on this point –the penultimate position of black consciousness in the dialectic – that Biko departs from Fanon.[311] Here there is a difference in the way Kritzinger (and myself) read Biko's dialectic, from the way Gibson, who follows Fanon, reads it:

> I had been particularly taken with Fanon's understanding of race and class in his critique of Sartre's conception that netritude [sic] was a "minor term" in the dialectic. Fanon reacted to Sartre as if Sartre was another white leftist telling him to "grow up." But more seriously, it showed Sartre's failure to comprehend the dialectic of

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[309] As for whether integration is the best way to describe this is debatable, as integration still implies a racial logic. However, Biko does use this term. For example, in *Black Souls in White Skins*, he criticizes white liberals for, amongst other things, thinking of integration as a means rather than the goal. He then goes on to describe what he thinks of as a true integrations: "Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another. Out of this mutual respect for each other and complete freedom of self-determination there will obviously arise a genuine fusion of the life-styles of the various groups. This is true integration." Ibid., 22

[310] J. P. Sartre cited in J.N.J. Kritzinger, *Liberating Whiteness: Engaging with the Anti-Racist Dialectics of Steve Biko*, 4.

[311] Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair," 135n183.

negativity. Black Consciousness, Fanon insisted, was not "a passing stage" but instead had to be understood as an absolute.[312]

It is not only that Fanon disagrees with Sartre on the place that black consciousness occupies in the dialectic, but on the very nature of the dialectic itself. For Gibson, Sartre misunderstands the dialect by viewing it as a progression but failing to account for regression.[313] The synthesis – true humanity – is not conceived as a stasis, so that once reached the dialectic ends. Instead, the possibility of regression is ever present, meaning that the dialectic never stops. In Gibson's reading of Fanon's critique of Sartre, the concrete (black existence) is reduced to "a minor term in the dialectic," the concrete is subsumed into the ultimate – what I have been calling a metaphysics of presence.[314] In other words, Gibson's criticism of the movement of Sartre's dialectic is that it is a movement from above, grounded as it is on a future sublimation that subsumes all things – thesis (white supremacy) and antithesis (black consciousness) alike – into a synthesis that does not end. Gibson's conception of the way in which the dialectic moves is reminiscent of the way in which the eschatology of Heidegger, as was discussed in the second chapter of this study, moves – circularity rather than linearity. That alone should be a clue that with Gibson the critique of stasis has not yet gone as far as it can. After all, progression and regression alike presuppose the existence of some synthesis (which is still essentialist thinking). I will return to this shortly. First, more needs to be said about a movement from below as Gibson conceives of it, and how this relates to Biko's dialectic.

Gibson is convinced that Biko's view on the nature of the dialectic is that of Fanon. Curiously, however, he does not ground this reading on Biko's own explication of the dialectic, but on Biko's ideas about the importance of the liberation of the minds of the oppressed.[315] This is the 'consciousness' in 'black consciousness' and it refers to the self determination of blacks that results from the realization that they are on their own.[316] In this being on their own, there is black solidarity and a national consciousness (not to be confused with nationalism).[317] It is through this national consciousness, which is black consciousness and black solidarity, that blacks are able to enter the international stage. Note that Gibson's reading of Biko's conception of national consciousness (black consciousness) is grounded on the mind – on the existential

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[312] N.C. Gibson, "Black Consciousness after Biko: The Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa, 1977-1987," In A. Mngxitama (Editor), A. Alexander (Editor), N.C. Gibson (Editor), *Biko Lives: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 130.
[313] Ibid., 131.
[314] Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*, 113.
[315] Gibson, "Black Consciousness After Biko," 130.
[316] Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*, 49.
[317] Ibid., 48.

situation – of the black, meaning that it is from below. This means that black consciousness does not fall away even in this hoped for future, but grows into black solidarity, and then, with national consciousness in the synthesis (the *eschaton*), the blacks will have an international dimension. This is then the future in which a true humanity emerges because where blacks are absent from the international scene, true humanity is absent. Although true humanity is universal – it includes all races – black consciousness, and at that blackness, cannot at any point be dissolved, even in the synthesis. To that effect Gibson cites Biko's friend Barney Pityana:

> The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, Black Consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something; I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Black Consciousness does not hold itself as a lack. It is its own follower.[318]

At this stage the contradiction is clearly visible. Above, in my close reading of Biko's explanation of the dialectic of black consciousness, I argued that for Biko, black consciousness is penultimate, and will be subsumed into true humanity. Here, however, we have seen that Gibson, who is also reading Biko, concludes not only that the dialectic never ends, but that black consciousness must never be dissolved, not even in the synthesis. The question then is whether these two readings contradict each other because of differences of interpretation, or whether the contradiction is present in Biko too. Moving toward some explanation, I posit that Gibson is reading Biko through Fanon rather than reading Biko himself, and as a result the distinction between Biko's conception of the dialectic from Fanon's is unaccounted for. We can see this in that he centres his reading not on what Biko actually says about the dialectic, but about what Biko says about national consciousness. Biko's articulation of the dialectic does indeed present black consciousness as penultimate – as one of the goals – while presenting true humanity as the ultimate – the quest (singular) – as I have shown above; and it also says nothing of the possibility of regression. In this respect, Biko's dialectic does resemble Sartre's. However, Biko does not claim that the synthesis he has in mind will mean that race will cease to exist, and on this point with regard to the first point of contradiction this is itself a resolution. In fact, elsewhere, whenever he describes the future, he uses the expression 'non-racial'. This term for him seems to indicate not that the existence of racial difference is done away with,

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[318] Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*, 50.

and that all that will exist is a raceless new humanity, but that displacement – the pathological relations between the races – is what will end. For instance in one context he says :

> There will be a completely non-racial franchise. *Black and white will vote in our society* (my emphasis).[319]

It is not that race ceases to exist in the future true humanity, but that race ceases to be a means of discrimination and oppression. This point comes out more clearly earlier on when Biko responds to a question about a country in which black and white live together as equals:

> We see a completely non-racial society. We don't believe, for instance, in the so-called guarantees for minority rights, because guaranteeing minority rights implies the recognition of portions of the community on a race basis. We believe that in our country there shall be no minority, there shall be no majority, just people. And those people will have the same status before the law and they will have the same political rights before the law. So in a sense it will be a completely non-racial egalitarian society.[320]

Note that he does not say there shall be no race, only that race will not correspond with majority or minority status. In this envisioned non-racial future country, race is subjected to true humanity but is not dissolved. So, we need not read sublimation in the dialectic as the dissolving of black consciousness, but as its fulfilment: the consciousness that in struggle results in black solidarity in the synthesis results in non-racialism. Therefore, this black consciousness is the inauguration of true humanity. Likewise, if I may belabour my earlier Pauline analogy, when the son hands the kingdom to the father, the son does not cease to exist, but is himself subjected to God. Meaning that the subjection of all things under Christ in this present age is the inauguration of a process that ends with the subjection of Christ to the father in the *eschaton* – it is God *becoming* all in all. Reading black consciousness as an inaugurated eschatology is insightful here.

Nevertheless, this does not resolve the question about whether or not there can still be a regression after the synthesis. Additionally, Biko's reluctance to speak with too much detail about how he imagines the synthesis will look makes it difficult to speak conclusively one way or the other. That notwithstanding, there are hints that we can say something about. For example, in the BPC-SASO trial in May of 1976, when Biko begins to speak more directly

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[319] Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 171.
[320] Ibid., 170.

about the way in which the Black Consciousness Movement will go about achieving its goals, he says:

> The process in fact may well take over 20 years of dialogue between blacks and whites. We certainly don't envisage failure. We certainly don't have an alternative. We have analysed history. We believe that history moves in a particular logical direction, and in this particular instance the logical direction is that eventually any white society in this country is going to have to accommodate black thinking.[321]

Here we see that for Biko history is moving in the direction of progress, and although the possibility of regression is not explicitly denied, positively stating that the possibility is there for Biko would be to argue from silence. If anything, what Biko actually says is more optimistic about the future – hence he does not envisage failure. Optimism alone is not enough to preclude regression, but optimism couched in linear language as it is here suggests it; after all he speaks of *the logical direction of history* in the singular, with one definitive end point (accommodation of black thinking). In fact, a bit later on in the same page he says:

> …but inevitably the process drives towards what we believe history also drives to, an attainment of a situation where whites first have to listen.[322]

And a bit later still, he says:

> It is based as I say mainly on the fact that we believe we have interpreted history correctly, that the white man anyways is going to eventually accept the inevitable.[323]

Based on Biko's thought as it is reflected in his words here it is clear that he did not think there would be a regression. This is a clear metaphysics of presence. In any case, for my purposes here, at least, it is not necessary to choose between a linear and circular progression. Both a linear and a circular dialectical progression are centred on an essence: in the case of a linear progression, the essence takes the form of a goal to be reached; in a circular progression, the essence is the synthetic point that is reached, regressed away from, and circled back to. In both cases there is an essence, which is true humanity.[324] So, even if Biko did imagine a regression in a more circular sense, that would not be sufficiency to overcome a metaphysics of presence. The significance of essentialising the quest for true humanity is that the focus is shifted away from centralising political and economic gains, in favour of making questions of ontology,

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[321] Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 151.
[322] Ibid., 151.
[323] Ibid., 154
[324] Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair," 142.

anthropology, or existential reality central.[325] This is precisely what connects Biko's thought to the concerns of black theology. It is on this essence that I will stage an encounter with deconstruction. Before I can do that, first I need to say more about the eschatology of South African black theology.

### 5.1.2 Eschatology in South African Black Theology

So far, I have made the case that Biko's dialectical conception of black consciousness is implicitly eschatological – it is quasi-eschatological – and at that it is a quasi-eschatology of the quest for a hoped for future true humanity. In South African black theology, particularly in the first two phases as I discussed above, the quest for true humanity is taken up in explicitly theological terms.[326] This theme can still be seen in the doctrinal focus of two of the leading figures of black theology in the third phase, namely Simon Maimela and Takatso Mofokeng, who respectively addressed theological anthropology (Maimela) and Christology (Mofokeng).

As I mentioned above, for the most part South African black theology has not focused on eschatology. Having said that, eschatology is demonstrably not irrelevant. There are both implicit and explicit eschatological visions at play in South African black theology. For example, in the cases of Maimela and Mofokeng – as we will see shortly – the eschatological is often interwoven with the anthropological or the Christological respectively. This is as it should be, considering the fact that historically Christology itself is permeated with eschatology due to the fact that it comes out of Jewish messianic hope: Christology originates out of what was eschatology for second temple Judaism after all. From its beginnings, Christology is already eschatological. Concomitantly, eschatology comes out most clearly in Mofokeng, and not so much in Maimela. Nevertheless, in so far as the hope for liberation is a hope for the future for Maimela – which it is – eschatology is not absent.

Maimela's theological contribution can be read around two pillars: democratization of power and relational anthropology.[327] For Maimela behind the problem of apartheid lies an even

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[325] For this insight I am indebted to my supervisor, G.J. van Wyngaard, who helped me to see this connection in one of our conversations.

[326] Concepts like "human dignity", "humanity" and "Humanisation" are found throughout the essays of *Essays in Black Theology* and *Black Theology: The South African Voice*. Three essays are explicitly focused on "true humanity", making it clear that Biko's use should not be read in isolation, but a part of a broader conversation. The essay of D.E.H. Nxumalo, *Black Education and the Quest for true Humanity*, was only included in the 1972 publication and not in the more widely read 1974 republication. The title is an even more explicit overlap with Biko's most famous essay. The other essay with this explicit focus is by Manas Buthelezi, at this stage, the most respected theologically, titled *The Theological Meaning of True Humanity*. Van Wyngaard, "In Search of Repair",142.

[327] This is the way in which they are described in ibid., 154.

deeper problem of a disruption of the *imago dei*.[328] This refers to the image of God particularly – though for Maimela not exclusively – as we find it expressed in Genesis 1. Maimela pays attention to the fact that in the biblical text, when humans are made in the image of God, they are given dominion over the earth. The implication here is that unlike in other Mesopotamian contexts it is not just the ruling elite who are made in the image of God, but all human beings, and concomitantly all human beings rule the earth. Here power is distributed to all humans. This is his first pilar. The anthropocentricity of this notwithstanding, this is an egalitarian anthropology or ontology, and it speaks more directly to the concerns of black theology in the struggle against apartheid. His second – a relational anthropology – veers in the direction of African theology. It refers to the African concern with the sacredness of community. I would summarize this as *ubuntu*, which on the surface means that personhood is always relational, but at a deeper level, also refers to the relationship between the living and their ancestors.

My concern here is not to exhaustively engage Maimela, but only to point out that since for Maimela a return to the *imago dei* is the only way to reach the hope for future of liberation, then the implicit eschatology of Maimela's theology moves in reverse: we must go back to the beginnings (Genesis) of anthropology in order for the *end* of the unjust present world (apartheid) to end. Maimela's argument about an ideal beginning (*imago dei*) which is distorted in history, but will hopefully be returned to, is analogous – though by no means reducible – to Heidegger's eschatological circle which I discussed in the second chapter, where Being is covered over in the West as history continues, and the only hope is for that beginning to come again at the end. I point this out only to say in this study we have already seen that eschatology need not only move linearly into the future but can also move in reverse. Although Maimela does not work out an eschatological articulation of this move, it implicitly is eschatological. His hopes for the future (eschatology) are worked out in his anthropology. So, in Maimela, Biko's quest for a true humanity recovers something that is distorted or covered over by the apartheid.

Mofokeng on the other hand charts a different course and moves not backwards to an ideal beginning (creation), but forward to an ideal future (recreation) by way of a black Christology. For Mofokeng, the dehumanization – not just of black people, but of white people too, though in different ways – brought about by colonialism and antiblackness renders the *imago dei* insufficient.[329] This dehumanization relates to crucifixion, and the resurrection relates with

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[328] Ibid., 153.
[329] Van Wyngaard 174.

recreation. The Spirit creates new subjects – a pneumatic activation – in the midst of the struggle that forms a creative black community whose work humanizes the world: this is liberation.[330] The new humanity being created by the Spirit through this community in the present is already actualized in Christ. Effectively, for Mofokeng Biko's true humanity is already realised in Christ and is being actualized through liberation in the world. This is closer to Biko's own language that frames the quest for true humanity not as a backward movement to the creation, but as a forward progression. To that effect, speaking in explicitly eschatological terms, Mofokeng writes:

> The implications here are that Jesus Christ who created and liberates does not only do it today in the deep dungeon of inhumanity but *will do it in the future as the One who is coming in Glory*. Our new humanity which we are now realizing and having a joyous foretaste of, is coming with him. It is a sure object of our hope (my emphasis).[331]

This is representative – though by no means exhaustive – of the way in which eschatology is present in works of South African black theologians: it is not usually the doctrinal focus – Christology and anthropology are usually the focus – yet nevertheless their works are always permeated by eschatology. Kitzinger convincingly summarises the eschatology – explicit and implicit – in the vast South African black theological literature up to his time in the following manner:

> [Black theology] therefore holds on to hope and suffering with equal insistence, neither allowing the abject suffering of black people to choke their hope in the new world of justice nor allowing the assurance of God's future to blind their eyes to the cruel realities of South African society. This spirituality of suffering in hope and hope in suffering characterises the eschatology of black theologians…[332]

What Kritzinger is highlighting here is a dialectic of suffering (the cross) and hope (the resurrection) that permeates this eschatology that we already saw in Mofokeng: as its thesis the dialectic begins with the contemporary situation of suffering – this is the cross of Jesus and the oppressed who suffer with Jesus (the crossbearers) – and the resurrection features as an antithesis to this suffering, giving hope to those who are suffering that empowers them to

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[330] T. A. Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1983), 228.

[331] Ibid., 228.

[332] J.N.J. Kritzinger, "Black Theology – Challenge to Mission," (PhD. Thesis, Unisa: 1988), 251.

struggle for liberation which comes about as a new humanity; this is the synthesis.[333] Here engagement in the struggle and even the attainment of any form of liberation is penultimate; similar to the way that for Biko the goals of black consciousness are penultimate – while a new humanity and a new world are ultimate – equally a true humanity was seen by Biko to be ultimate (as seen in the discussion above). For Kritzinger, black eschatology is never a final chapter attached at the end of theological reflection about the last things but is "a mood of hope and struggle for the realisation of a new South Africa which pervades" all South African black theology.[334]

Both in my reading of Biko and my brief sketch of the eschatology of South African black theology, I have argued not only that the quest for a true humanity is eschatological in nature, but also that it is the essential point of black consciousness and black theology. With that, explicit connections to a metaphysics of presence can now be made. What I have been referring to as metaphysics of presence throughout this study refers to any conception of essentialism:

> This claim to the inescapable textuality of philosophy (and thought in general) is a reaction against what Jacques Derrida…calls the *metaphysics of presence* or logocentrism, or what he holds to be Western philosophy's paradoxical presupposition of a stable, selfsame, simple presence, or being at the heart – end and beginning of thought. These presupposed entities occur as "fundamental to principles or to the center [and] have always designed an invariable presence – *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendality, consciousness, God, man…," which express logocentrism's longing for presence at the center of thought.[335]

After God, man is also listed here as one of the expressions of "logocentrism's longing for presence at the centre of thought." That points to the fact that just as with theology, humanism too often falls to the trap of a metaphysics of presence. As I have already indicated, in Biko and South African black theology, true humanity is the essential core, and as a result falls into

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[333] At this point Kritzinger cites the following from Mofokeng: "The history of Jesus goes on in the struggle of the oppressed who rise to affirm themselves. He is present there among them even though submerged. The event of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth sustains the struggling community of the oppressed during their protracted hanging on the cross. It is a powerful event that does not only sustain but also drives this community forwards. It also constitutes the basis of their hope that the truth will triumph over the lie, that liberation will be a reality. The message of Jesus Christ's resurrection to them is that the God who raised Jesus is at work in their period of hanging on the cross, affirming black humanity and raising a new humanity and a new world in which human life will be possible for all." PhD, 252.

[334] J.N.J. Kritzinger, "Black Eschatology and Christian Mission," 15.

[335] Marie Chris B. Ramoya, "Elements of Deconstruction: Differance, Dissemination, Destinerrance, and Geocatastrophe." Φιλοσοφία 1 (2016), 69.

the category of what I have been discussing as a metaphysics of presence. With this connection I am now in the position to read deconstructively.

## 5.2 Overcoming of Metaphysics in South Africa Black Eschatology

In this section I will argue that there are openings for the overcoming of metaphysics already within black theology, and that there are auto-deconstructive moments in it. I will argue that black theology undermines a metaphysics of presence externally (in theology that is not black theology) and internally, but that the internal thrust can be pushed further. To make the case for the external, I will argue that the overcoming of the problem of whiteness is part of the process of overcoming of metaphysics. Then to make the case internally I will point to Itumeleng Mosala's critique of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology as an example of deconstructive openings already there in South African black theology.

### 5.2.1 Overcoming Whiteness

Whiteness itself is a metaphysics of presence, as will become clear shortly. The overcoming of whiteness, which is one of the most important contributions black theology makes to all theology, is the overcoming of a particular metaphysics, but not the overcoming of metaphysics as such. However, when the critical insights of black theology are deepened, an overcoming of metaphysics as such is approached. Firstly, I must make the case that whiteness is a metaphysics of presence.

American black theologian Willie Jennings' reflections in *The Christian Imagination* (2010) draw attention to a racial aesthetic in a way that brings to view how whiteness is a metaphysics of presence. Van Wyngaard summarizes it as follows:

> What Jennings draws our attention towards…is how this aesthetic hermeneutic allows a single scale onto which all of humanity could be mapped. This single point already hints towards the coming two aspects which I will discuss, since this aesthetic mapping implies that human bodies are disconnected from the space in which they exist in determining identity, and this aesthetic provides a universal interpretation applicable to the entire world, or more accurately, the world becomes a single space through such an aesthetic mapping of all of humanity: Europeans and Africans (and over time all people) can be described at the same time. To draw these points together in Jennings' own words: "Scale here refers to the possibility…of seeing and touching multiple peoples and their lands at once and thinking them together."[336]

Whiteness is not just a metaphysics of presence, but at that one where presence is colonizing. This happens through (1) the mapping of all peoples onto one map, organized in a hierarchy of

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[336] Van Wyngaard, In Search of Repair, 47.

races, and (2) the concomitant decontextualization of identities through a disconnection of bodies from spaces. About the first point, Joel Modiri makes the same connection – seeing the racial aesthetic as a metaphysics of presence – as can be seen in his PhD thesis where he writes:

> The singular location of racism within white culture recalls what was discussed above, namely how the entire edifice of colonialism and apartheid was built on a binary or dualism that not only separated whites from blacks but also established a hierarchy between them that privileges whites and devalues blacks[337]

Note that race functions as a singular ground – a metaphysical essentiality – on which colonialism and apartheid are constructed, and that this separates people. Or rather the separation is the essence, the ground. Programs can shift – from colonialism, to apartheid, to the new apartheid/democratic South Africa – and all that amounts to is different structures being built on the same ground. But the ground itself is left untouched. Furthermore, the principle of grounding itself is left untouched. This is metaphysics of presence, and Modiri says as much. In the footnote of this quote, he states:

> This resembles what Jacques Derrida…refers to as the "metaphysics of presence" in the way that it "installs hierarchies and orders of subordination in the various dualisms it encounters" and "privileges one side of an opposition, and ignores or marginalises the alternative terms of the opposition."[338]

So, the notion that race is a metaphysics of presence is not a novel one. Race is a metaphysics of *displacement* – and I phrase it thus to recall Westhelle's insistence on the importance of a spatial eschatology. This brings me to the second point – the decontextualization of identities through a disconnection of bodies from spaces.[339] The physical and spatial displacement of African bodies is indistinguishable from the invention of racial metaphysics out of which blackness was invented to be of no value while whiteness was invented to be of value. I bring all this up to note that any attempt to undermine this racial metaphysics is already the first step in the double step – double gesture/deconstruction – of stepping back behind metaphysics as such. All liberation theologies take this first step:

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[337] See J. Modiri, "The Jurisprudence of Steve Biko: A study in Race, Law and Power in the "Afterlife" of Colonial-Apartheid," (PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria October 2017), 135.

[338] Ibid., 135.

[339] Jennings makes a strong arguments that prior to and even after colonialism, indigenous peoples tend to connect their identity with the land. In *The Christian Imagination*, he writes about how when what we today call the third world was being colonized, a deep theological distortion occurred in which "the earth, the ground, spaces, and places are being removed as living organizers of identity and as facilitators of identity." *The Christian Imagination*, 39.

All liberation theologies have in some way or another killed God, a certain God, moving and shifting ways of thinking and practicing God. Black theology has killed the white God, Latinx theologies have killed the individualized borderless God; Queer theologies have killed the heterosexual God; Feminist theologies have killed the patriarchal God; Asian liberation theologies have killed the monolithic, monotheistic Imperial God; Indigenous theologies have killed the colonizer God; Disabled theologies have killed the able-body God; Eco-feminism theologies have killed the dualistic God detached from the earth; Palestinian theologies have killed the nationalist God of the state of Israel; Dalit theologies have killed the God of castes; Latin American theologies have killed the classless, upper-class God…the point to be made is that, while killing certain aspects of Western, neoplatonist, non-referential, ahistorical, self-enclosed God, these theologies persisted on keeping a certain form of God alive on the side of the poor.[340]

That the conception of God of North Atlantic theology has actually been killed at all is questionable; however it can be asserted that with the emergence not just of radical theologies, but also of liberation theologies, there are several theological contexts where this grip – the spell – of this metaphysical God has been loosened. Liberation theologies are moments where we catch a glimpse of auto-deconstruction already taking place within theology. Deconstruction is not something brought to theology from without. Put differently, a deconstructive reading of theology is a way of observing something already taking place within theology. The oppressive aspects of North Atlantic theology are negated, while the enlivening aspects of theology are affirmed. This is precisely the gesture that Caputo makes with his radical theology. It is why he cannot completely subscribe to a death of God theology – not everything about God is negated for Caputo, even as the God of metaphysics is dead. Bringing the focus to South African black theology, overcoming whiteness – negating certain aspects of colonial theology – without completely abandoning God is already a deconstruction. South African black theologies do not follow this deconstruction as far as they could however. The conception of God as an agent – even if reconsidered as an agent of liberation rather than imperial conquest – has undeniable historical and conceptual ties to the metaphysical conception of Being as *actualitas* that I discussed in the second chapter of this study. This is what lies behind the imperial-productive (the colonial) model of civilization that stretches from medieval scholastic philosophy through to modernity and the colonial project.[341] More

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[340] C. Carvalhaes, "Liberation Theology," in C. D. Rodkey (ed.), J. E. Miller (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 668.
[341] "The metaphysics of making which comes about in the Christian Middle Ages is assisted into birth by the Roman language. Rome is a world civilization of action (*actus, agere, actus, actualitas*): the conquerors of the world, the imperial power. And it is also the world civilization of making, of productive work, of the builders of

importantly for this study, this conception of God, by virtue of being a metaphysics of presence, still essentializes God: this God is not seen as a historical contingency or as a construct, and as a result there is a limit to the extent to which a theology with such a conception of God can see itself as not being absolute in any radical sense. Eschatologically – in keeping with my reading of liberation as eschatology in black theology – this runs the risk of conflating liberation with a Christian conception of salvation, which makes plurivocity unattainable. In order for liberation not to become a metaphysics, no conception of liberation can have an essence. Liberation does not have an essence; it has a history – and a multifaceted one at that.

At this point I will look at Mosala's critique of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology as an example in South African black theology of a moment when the deconstruction moves deeper than just critiquing whiteness.

## 5.2.2 Struggle Hermeneutics

Mosala's critique of the biblical hermeneutics of South African black theology helps to identify a metaphysics of presence in black theology from his own time, going back to the two phases of black theology before him. At the same time, because Mosala's critique of black theology is from within black theology and is (de)constructive, it is a brilliant example of an auto-deconstruction within black theology.

For Mosala, one of the most important implications of black theology's emergence within theology is that it has undermined "the myth of rational objectivity in theology" which has in fact functioned as a thinly veiled disguise for the assumption that whiteness is universal.[342] As is clear from the second chapter of this study, any notion of objectivity and universalism is a metaphysics of presence, and so importantly for this study, black theology's criticism of objective theology has far reaching implications towards what in this study I have been discussing as an overcoming of metaphysics. Mosala observes, however that black theology has tended to resist these implications by still holding on to some sense of universality or essentialism. Mosala hones in on the way this plays itself out in South African black theology in the notion of the biblical truth that God always sides with the oppressed.[343] He traces it back

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roads and bridges. The shadow of this imperial-productive civilization reaches across the Christian Middle Ages and into the modern world." Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 89.

[342] I.J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1989), 13.

[343] Ibid., 16.

to African American black theology, even in Cone's work, and observes that it is also found in "the most theoretically astute" theologians like Cornel West.[344] Importantly, two aspects of this essentialism come into view: (1) the essential nature of God's preferential option for the oppressed which is itself grounded on (2) the more foundational and essential notion of the absolute, universal, nonideological word of God. It is not the preferential option for the oppressed that Mosala takes issue with, but rather the deeply intrenched belief that this preferential option is grounded on a universal truth. For Mosala, the notion of a universal truth of the word of God is itself an ideological construct that is blind to the historically contingent nature of the bible itself.[345]

Mosala's critique is helpful in an overcoming of metaphysics in South African black theology. This comes through particularly in his methodology, which Gerald West summarizes well:

> But in terms of his preferred methods, Mosala uses a two-step methodology. First, he uses historical-critical tools (to identify and delimit the 'sources' that underlie the final canonical form of the text and then to historically locate these source texts within a particular time and place). Second, and most importantly, he then uses sociological resources (especially Marxist historical-materialist forms of analysis) to reconstruct the particular 'class' struggles within this historical context, locating each source layer within the particular 'class' struggles within this historical context, locating each source layer within a particular social sector.[346]

Through these steps Mosala shifts from a conception of the bible and its symbols as atemporal or ahistorical to them being historical. It is in this re-historicization of the bible that struggle – between the oppressors and the oppressed – re-emerges. Essentialist – metaphysical – readings of the bible cover up the struggle. In the face of the struggle, Mosala's next step is not to argue that we should seek to escape the struggle by adopting only those parts of the bible that affirm what we believe and rejecting the rest, but that we should situate ourselves in the struggle, and from within it pick sides.[347] In short, for the black theologians that Mosala criticises the preferential option for the oppressed is located outside of the struggle – outside of the text, as Derrida would say (and this is a fleeing of the flux, or the original difficulty of life). For Mosala, on the other hand, the preferential option for the oppressed is always located from within the struggle – there is nothing outside of the text.

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[344] Ibid., 14-16.
[345] Ibid., 18.
[346] G.O West, *The Stolen Bible: Form Imperialism to African Icon* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 334-335.
[347] Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 10-11.

The play of *différance* constitutes perpetual struggle: this is because everything – the good the bad and the grey – emerges out of *différance* and considering that mutually exclusive things emerge from *différance* their relation will always be struggle. Mosala's insights about struggle deconstruct essentialism without undermining the struggle. Liberation will always be located within the struggle. There will never be a point where there is a pure liberation because there has never been a pure liberation. Struggle hermeneutics and Caputo's radical hermeneutics read contrapuntally help us to frame things in terms of a radical struggle hermeneutics (where Caputo's radical hermeneutics amplifies the fact that Mosala's struggle hermeneutics goes all the way down) and a radical hermeneutics of struggle (where Mosala's struggle hermeneutics further complicates things by showing that it is not only hermeneutics all the way down, but that wherever hermeneutics is there is struggle).

In keeping with Westhelle's latitudinal emphasis that I invoked in the previous chapter, it is important to note that Mosala's struggle hermeneutic is a shift to a spatial orientation; it is a terrestrial conception of the preferential option for the oppressed – hence a *site* of struggle. Particularly because the site in question is a site of struggle, it is not an uncontested, clearly, and unambiguously demarcated site, it is a place that is no place, an ever-shifting groundless ground (*khora*). It gives no guarantees. For example, Mosala notes that in the text of the bible at times it is the oppressor that wins and that this is supported by the text.[348] In those cases, it is not the ideological direction of the text that informs – grounds – our reading. We are not reading logocentrically.[349] This is a radical hermeneutic in the Caputian sense, but one that is always already shot through with struggle in the sense that Mosala describes. This is the sort of gesture this study seeks to make in the context of eschatology and the future of South Africa.

So, to summarize the argument so far, South African black theology is already moving in the direction of overcoming a metaphysics of presence, but it could go further. The struggle hermeneutic of Mosala is an example of a moment in South African black theology where this thrust is deepened such that the critique is not just external to black theology, but internal to it; this is an example of a moment where black theology is overcoming not just the essentialising of whiteness, but its own essentialism too. Now I seek to bring this gesture to the eschatology of South African black theology, and will do this by reading the quest for true humanity – which I have already argued is eschatological – deconstructively.

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[348] Ibid., 11.
[349] For Derrida, this word is synonymous with a metaphysics of presence.

### 5.2.3 Deconstructing the Quest for a True Humanity

The quest for a true humanity is an essentialism – a metaphysics of presence – as in the quasi-eschatological in Biko's Dialectic, in Maimela's theological anthropology, and the more explicitly eschatological form it takes in Mofokeng's black Christology, to name but three examples. This is the essentialism that grounds black eschatology. Black eschatology is structured on a logocentrism of the category of the human. The quotation from Ramoya given above bears repeating here:

> This claim to the inescapable textuality of philosophy (and thought in general) is a reaction against what Jacques Derrida…calls the *metaphysics of presence* or logocentrism, or what he holds to be Western philosophy's paradoxical presupposition of a stable, selfsame, simple presence, or being at the heart – end and beginning of thought. These presupposed entities occur as "fundamental to principles or to the center [and] have always designed an invariable presence – *eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendality, consciousness, God, man…," which express logocentrism's longing for presence at the center of thought.[350]

In the eschatology of South African black theology, the logocentric longing for presence is organized around the true human, a state of being that *will* be actualised in the synthesis (the *eschaton*). This true humanity conceived as the *telos* is an idealised version of the category of the human. In a deconstructive reading of black eschatology, it is this centre that must be decentred. To approach this decentring, we must recall the point made in the second chapter. There, following Caputo, I argued that metaphysics of presence is the naïveté of being unable to see a metaphysical tradition as historically contingent and constructed, rather than as absolute, ultimate and universal. Organizing the discourse on liberation around this centre reduces the complexity of the problem of antiblackness to the level of Being; after all, true humanity is a mode of being. Thinking at the level of the category of the human – even when prefixed 'true' – assumes that there is some essential core to humanity, even if it is shifted away from any form of humanity currently present, to a *telos* we are progressing towards, and conceives of the category of the human as essential. However, there is no essential humanity, but rather intersecting 'human' histories. The category of the human is a historical contingency. So are all other conceptions of humanity – *ubuntu*, *Anthropos*, *ha-adam*, etc. There is no

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[350] Ramoya, "Elements of Deconstruction: Differance, Dissemination, Destinerrance, and Geocatastrophe," 69.

essence that all these can be reduced to. However, all these are the stories we have been telling ourselves about who we are. These narratives all exist together, at times clashing, and times not clashing – they have fluxed. 'Humanity' itself is a site of struggle; humanity itself is hermeneutics all the way down (radical hermeneutics). Presenting any notion of humanity as one essential, even one that is future, is an attempt to simplify the flux. How do we know that in the future the terms of our narratives about who and what we are will not be so altered that even the category of the (true) human will be obsolete? Due to the fact that there is no essential human core – but only a cluster of 'human' histories – the horizon might be so altered that the true humanity to come, might no longer be conceived of as 'human'. To a significant extent, this is already happening. There are already discourses that are trying to think existence outside of the category of the human. Some examples of these are black nihilism, afropessimism, and posthumanism.[351] We are not moving towards a synthesis; but instead, the flux is repeating itself forward.

Having said all of that, I am not proposing that the quest for true humanity be abandoned. Overcoming metaphysics is not abandoning it but weakening it, being awakened to it. It is the breaking of the spell of metaphysics, which means being able to think of one's radical contextual situatedness as such, and not as either being an absolute universal, or being reducible to one – having an essence. It is precisely the absence of an essence that makes these constructions all the more important – they are all we have. It is also what makes them deconstructable; they always have a future without some synthetic stasis to arrest them in presence. This is why traditions are renewable. This is why South African black theology has always been able to reinvent itself in the various phases I discussed above. It is also why black theology emerged as one way in which theology reinvents itself – at all.

In summary, black theology's insight that whiteness is not ultimate essential truth – which is an auto-deconstruction – when further followed is an opening to Caputo's insight, which undermines essentialism as such (the secret is that there is no secret), and turns to endless linking, clashing, and changing histories (there is nothing outside the text). I will now speak more directly to how to conceive liberation in this conceptual frame.

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[351] On Black Nihilism see Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); On Afropessimism see Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

## 5.3 Liberation Deconstructed

At this point I will more directly speak to the benefits of taking the deconstructive approach to liberation I have been working out in this chapter. This will be discussed through two points: (1) a deconstruction of eschatology occasions a more radically materialist eschatology; (2) a non-essentialist conception of liberation in black theology occasions a more pluriversal sense of liberation.

### 5.3.1 Materialist Eschatology

With respect to the first, it is helpful to recall Marx's famous critique of religion in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844):

> Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.[352]

Marx's critique here is not that religion is the problem, but that it is a way of surviving the problem – by giving a heart and a soul to a heartless and soulless condition. However, the condition itself is soulless and heartless, and giving it a soul and a heart is to flee that original difficulty. Essentially, Marx's critique problematizes religion's fleeing of material reality, harsh as material reality is. For Marx, liberation is only conceivable when the harshness of the material reality is faced head on. Connecting this with the discussion above, where Mosala removed the preferential option for the oppressed from what Marx's terms "the spiritual aroma" that is religion – in the form of a hermeneutics of trust in the bible as the word of God – this critical encounter with the hermeneutics of facticity of the radical theology of Caputo is done to the preferential option for the oppressed itself. In addition, the assurance that history is dialectically progressing towards a synthesis – true humanity – that I discussed in Biko, which is expressed theologically in black eschatology, still downplays the harshness of material reality in a similar way to religion for Marx. The key difference is that the assurances of the dialectic of black consciousness – and black eschatology – are grounded on a terrestrial *telos*, rather than a celestial one. However, the shift from a heavenly utopia to an earthly utopia conceived in terms of present-day political aspirations is not sufficient to evade this Marxist critique – and here I read Marx against Marx. In Biko's case, the harshness of material reality is downplayed precisely at the point history is cast in dialectical teleological terms, with true humanity as the *telos*. It is at this point that Biko with certainty speaks about the inevitability

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[352] K. Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', Marxists Internet Archive https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm (accessed 4 January 2022)

of progression. In the case of black theology, the harshness of material reality is downplayed precisely at the points at which the struggle is theologised. As an example, as we saw above with Mofokeng, this happens when definite points in the struggle are conceived of as Christ acting or fighting on behalf of the oppressed – which is still an invocation of a *deus ex machina*, and as a consequence still falls into what Marx criticizes as an opium of the masses – just a more refined, this-worldly version to that of apolitical theologies. The strength of a Caputian hermeneutics of facticity is that does not abandon theologizing but theologizes in an impious way. This is Caputo's impiety:

> Now I must tell you of my impiety. I am no Abraham, who was a hero, no Levinas, who is too pious, no Kierkegaard, whose point of view is too religious. Obligation happens. It is a fact, as it were, but it is not a necessary truth. Obligation calls, but its call is finite, a strictly earthbound communication, transpiring here below, not in transcendental space (if there is such a thing.) Obligation calls, and it calls for justice, but the caller in the call is not identifiable, decidable. I cannot make it out. I cannot say that the call is the Voice of God, or of Pure Practical Reason, or of a Social Contract "we" have all signed, or a trace of the Form of the Good stirring in our souls, or the trace of the Most High. I do not deny that these very beautiful hypotheses of ethics would make obligation safe, but my impiety is that I do not believe that obligation is safe.[353]

For my purposes here, the call of obligation is translatable to the call for liberation. Conceiving of liberation dialectically, with or without Christian metaphysics, makes obligation safe; it gives a heart to a heartless reality. Invoking true humanity, and/or God in this manner, even if it is for terrestrial concerns – such as the struggle for liberation from oppression – is still an opium of the masses precisely because it seeks to make obligation safe. This inclination to make the call for liberation safe by essentialising it, though understandable, does not take the harshness of the material reality of oppression as seriously as it can be taken. The hermeneutics of facticity in Caputo's radical theology offers a way of doing theology that takes this materialist emphasis of Marx's critique seriously, by invoking the name of God not as an agent who intervenes – from above or from below – but as also being in mortal danger. Due to the fact that by way of this Caputian approach, God is not a fighting agent who in any way reassures us in the struggle, but is the name we give the provocation of obligation that arises out of the struggle – without any external or metaphysical source – we are completely responsible for it, and we can either actualize it – which would be a birth of God – or we could fail to do so – and that would be the still birth of God (as opposed to the death of God). The call for liberation

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[353] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 15.

only registers on the side of the one who either responds or ignores it. Due to the fact that there is no divine caller, the call has no essence – any attempt to make sense of the call of obligation is already a response to the call, meaning that the way we make sense of the call or provocation – either as a call for justice, or a call for liberation, etc. – is already a response and not the essential nature of the call itself. The content of the call is irreducibly and perpetually deferred – it is radically to come. This is not because there is an essential nature that either already exists, or might potentially come to exist, but because the call is irreducibly a messianic openness to the future – it is a radical 'to come' structure. So, the call for liberation is a response to the radical openness to the future that in Judao-Christian traditions has tended to be thought through the notion of a coming messiah. This is the strength of this non-essentializing impious approach that Caputo takes. Essentialism in liberation discourses is undermined, not in order to essentialize some call of obligation to which these discourses are a response. Instead, the need for these liberation discourses is intensified because the call of obligation does not exist, it only insists, or provokes – a hauntology. The moment at which anyone becomes cognisant of the provocation, the response has already begun. We would not even know that we are provoked apart from the response – conceptions of liberation. This recalls the discussion on the messianic in the previous chapter: we would have never even thought of the messianic if there were no concrete messianism. Undermining the essentiality of conceptions of liberation intensifies the need for those conceptions. So the notion of a true humanity is one way to respond to the provocation (the call) not from above or without, but from below (within the struggle):

> It is not a question of introducing a solution from without, or from above. Life is healed only by life. There is nothing outside life that one can introduce as a remedy or solution to its sorrows, even as there is nothing outside life that grounds it or founds it or gives it a transcendent sense.[354]

Liberation too is radically terrestrial. This gives us a new way of doing black theology. With relation to the eschatology of Mofokeng discussed above, the history of Jesus does indeed go hand in hand with the struggle of the oppressed. Not as a powerful event that sustains or assures us that liberation will in fact become a reality – not as a sweet aroma of religion to mask the ugliness of the world (not as an opium of the peoples) – but by exposing how ugly the world really is. Even as we act out of a preferential option for the oppressed this preferential option

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[354] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 244.

offers us no guarantees that everything will turn out for the best just so long as we always act according to this ethical prescription. A preferential option for the oppressed, when thought in a Caputian sense, offers no metaphysical assurances; it is not a teleological eschatology; it is not even an eschatology according to the order of *logos*. It is instead an eschatology according to the order of a theopoetics or obligation where the value of a preferential option for the poor does not lie outside of it, in something that we can be sure will come to pass because of it, but rather from within it, in the form of the weak force of the unconditional claim this option makes on us. A preferential option for the oppressed must fend for itself, even as any vision of liberation it occasions is always provisional, fragmentary, and incomplete, always praying and weeping over a justice to come, always waiting for a messiah who promises and threatens to come, a messiah who is always on the way, but never arrives.

### 5.3.2 Pluriversality of Liberation

The problem with conceptions of liberation that let presence hold sway is that at certain critical junctures they can undermine liberation. An example of this is when liberation is construed too closely with the metaphysics of black theology. When this occurs, the actual historical points in the struggle for liberation where the oppressed fight against their oppression are interpreted as the way Jesus is fighting for liberation, whether or not those struggling in history know it. We have seen this with Mofokeng above. This is an essentialization of a Christian hermeneutics. This is problematic because at the point where liberation should be a liberation from (or a radical break with) any theological metaphysics – as is the case with decoloniality – essentializing a Christian hermeneutic of liberation undermines liberation. Even if liberation is construed within Christian thought and language, this must be primarily due to the fact that we are always already historically and contextually situated, and at that there is no way to express or even conceptualize liberation outside of that historical and contextual situatedness – just as we saw in the previous chapter when we discussed the messianic and messianisms. Liberation is not essentially Christian salvation, nor does it have any other essential form. No particular discourse has the hermeneutical key, not because of a deficiency that can or cannot be overcome, but because there is no hermeneutical key to liberation – the secret is that there is no secret. All liberation discourse is a supplement to liberation – filling up what is lacking, namely an ideal liberation.[355] This lack is not a problem to be solved, but rather the reason

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[355] Caputo discusses the sense of supplement that I am engaging here in detail in *Radical Hermeneutics*, 138-147.

pluriversal concrete attempts to enact liberation are even possible. This is a necessary problem – a problem not to be solved but embraced – because reality is far too complex, and peoples' contexts far too different for liberation to be reduced to one essential characteristic without undermining other important liberation movements (the spatial sense of *différance*) or future conceptions of liberations that will shatter our horizons of expectation (the temporal sense of *différance*).

This pluriversality opened by deconstruction has two benefits. Firstly, it saves the singularity of South African black theology: it is precisely because there is no universal essence to liberation but rather a pluriversal liberation that South African black theology's unique contribution to the conversation is necessary. Secondly, it is precisely because there is no universal essence to liberation but a pluriversal liberation that no particular conception will dominate the conversation so as to occupy the position of the essential sense of liberation. With respect to theology, this is the only way we can continue to do theology without reinscribing a colonial matrix where Christianity's metaphysical schemas are universalised. Christianity must be able to encounter its other without proceeding to subsume it into its own theoretical schemas. When there is no essence to liberation, true conversation can begin in which different approaches are genuinely open to learning from each other, because of the awareness that no discourse's particular conception is the ultimately true one. Liberation translates in all the available directions endlessly. Other discourses will be able to learn from South African black theology's unique history, and South African black theology can likewise learn from other discourses; and for the first time this can take place without the protection of some essential core of any particular discourse taking centre stage. This will leave all the liberation discourses in more radical openness to one another. There is no way of knowing what could come from such a radical openness. There is no telling what will become of liberation itself with such an openness.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the eschatology in South African black theology. I began with a reading of the dialectic of black consciousness as we find it in Biko – as a quest for a true humanity. I have argued that it is this notion, as we have it in Biko, that influences black eschatology. I have also pointed out how there is already a deconstruction taking place within black theology: firstly, through black theology's undermining of the universality and dominance of whiteness in theology, and secondly through theology's own self-criticism (Mosala was an example of this). Staging a critical encounter with Caputo's radical theology,

and particularly his conception of the messianic, allowed me to further probe this deconstruction, and to contribute to the conversation by (1) deepening black theology's own more materialist thrust, and (2) proposing that black theology abandon's essentialist readings of liberation, in order to occasion a more radical openness to other liberation discourses, while simultaneously insisting that black theology persists as a discourse so that its own, unique contribution to the struggle for liberation may be preserved.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

At this point, the limitations of this study are in full view. To begin with, this study is not an exhaustive engagement with Caputo's radical theology, or with deconstruction. None of the points in Caputo's corpus that are taken up here have been fleshed out fully. That was not the purpose of this study. For this study, the focus was on identifying the deconstruction of eschatology in Caputo's thought and following its development throughout his corpus. Future study that more extensively engages Caputo's thought in relation to eschatology is needed. This study demonstrates that there is a sufficiently identifiable and consistent deconstruction of eschatology in Caputo, even as Caputo himself has not focused on the topic of eschatology. Secondly, this study by no means captures all that can be said about South African black theology's eschatology. It does however bring to view a need for more direct engagement with eschatology in South African black theology. Also, future study on how South African black theology can think beyond the category of the human is needed. At this stage it is helpful to take stock of what this study does.

This study searches for a non-essentialist conception of liberation by searching for a non-essentialist eschatology and staging a critical encounter between it and the eschatology of South African black theology. The movements of the argument of this study can be summarized as a discussion (from chapter 1-3) of the shift from Caputo's primary engagement with Heidegger, to primary engagement with Derrida (radical hermeneutics), and then a shift in focus from Derrida to God (radical theology). Then in chapters 4 and 5 I focused on the eschatological nature of this radical theology by emphasizing the messianic, and then reflected on how this occasions a deconstructive reading, not just of eschatology in general, but of the eschatology of South African black theology in particular.

I began the study by discussing Caputo's fascination with the work of Heidegger which I traced it back to when Caputo was in his 20s (chapter 1). I took note of how Heidegger helped Caputo break the grip of a dogmatic version of pre-Vatican II Catholicism, leading Caputo to be influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity. Through a close reading of several parts of *Heidegger and Aquinas* in the second chapter, I took note of the beginning of Caputo's independence from Heidegger and argued that this independence was realized in *Radical Hermeneutics* when Caputo turned to Derrida to criticize Heidegger's eschatological circle. Here I argued that out of this reading of Heidegger with Derrida, Heidegger's hermeneutics of facticity was shown not to be radical enough for Caputo, as in the end it was also a grand narrative – one that makes use of eschatology to flee the flux. So even at this early-stage

Caputo's radical hermeneutics carried a clear critique of eschatological thinking. In the third chapter I focused more on Caputo's engagement with Derrida, paying attention not only to how Derrida's notion of *différance* gave Caputo a more radical conception of the flux, but also to how Derridean deconstruction allowed Caputo to engage his more ethico-religious concerns more directly. I then discussed Caputo's deepening engagement with religion as a shift in emphasis away from (but not a departure from) Derrida and religion without religion, to God and radical theology. I discussed the way that Caputo does theology in a non-essentialist way by inscribing God within *différance*, centering this around a discernable chiastic structure (ontology/hautology, name/event, existence/insistence, confessional/radical theology etc.). Then in the fourth chapter I focused my reading of this chiastic structure around messianism and the messianic, observing that the messianic is not the essence of messianism, but the event of messianisms. This not only helped me to argue that this approach renders the concrete (messianisms) all the more important, but also undermines teleological thinking – which, in effect, is a deconstruction of eschatological thinking. This has offered the resources to stage a critical encounter with the eschatology of South African black theology, particularly as we see it in the reflections on a liberation to come, in the fifth chapter. The fruits of this critical encounter are a more radically materialist way to speak of God, and to conceive of eschatology – an eschatology that does not flee the original difficulty of life but embraces it. This study provokes new questions about the future of life together in South Africa. We must rethink the way in which we conceive of the future; no longer thinking of history as a progression towards freedom, nor just simply a regression, but as a flux. This approach suggests that eschatological thinking that drives to some solution must be deconstructed. As per this approach, there is need for new theological language for hope that is sensitive to the flux; theological language for a hope that does not reduce the complexity of life to one essential point that can (will) be met with a definable future solution. This is a shift away from hope as teleology, to hope against hope – hope that abandons the search for 'the solution' in favor of endurance in the ongoing struggle for liberation.[356]

Merely proposing such an approach to eschatology more broadly, and black eschatology in particular, opens up several critical points that I have not been able to address here. Firstly, in connection with eschatology more broadly, there is need to bring the insights of this radical

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[356] "What is the solution? What should we do? How do we live without metaphysical schemes of political hope, freedom, and humanity? I would have to suggest that there are no solutions to the problem of antiblackness – there is only endurance….Endurance is a spiritual practice with entirely different aims." Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 172.

eschatology into conversation with more traditional eschatological notions – the resurrection, the Parousia, the judgement, the restoration of the cosmos etc. Secondly, in connection with the quest for liberation, the way in which this approach can give hope to people – particularly those who are struggling and suffering on the ground – needs more sustained attention. I mention this because liberation theologies typically employ language of hope that is predicated on strong metaphysical grounds. Drawing on a theology that is permeated by a hermeneutics of facticity for hope is a far more difficult undertaking. More work needs to be done in identifying the audience for whom such an approach. Lastly, and connected to the previous points, there is also a need to further think through how this radical theology relates to confessional theology – I am referring here to the way in which this radical theological approach functions as something taking place within confessional theology rather than an alternative to it. To further elucidate what I mean here, perhaps it is helpful to speak biographically, as I did in the beginning of this study. The experience of reading Caputo in conversation with Biko and black theology has made me aware that I must think theologically through the tensions between my confessional context (the SDA church), my Xhosa culture, and my blackness. It has made me aware of the danger of trying to essentialize any one of these. I have been thrown back onto all three with an acute awareness of the complicated ways in which they relate with one another.  This experience has challenged me to go down to the roots of my theological formation only to discover the way in which these three are tangled. This in turn is a challenge to take stock of the fact that my theological thinking is always already divided – all the way down. I find this to be a helpful vantage point to think about a future for South Africa, considering the fact that South Africa itself is a very diverse context – religiously and culturally. This alone hints at the possibility that there may be value in theological language about hope that more radically sees itself as part of a pluriversal conversation.

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