# **Conceiving *the* Miraculous**
## At the Limits of Deconstruction

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*Dedicated to Matt and Jim*
*In gratitude for their mentorship*

Abstract for M.Phil.F. thesis "Conceiving the Miraculous at the Limits of Deconstruction" (Lucas Moord)

With a view to Jacques Derrida's rearticulation of Plato's khoral myth I consider the possibility of non-oppositional difference within relational economy—a notion that Derrida seems quite resistant to. By framing a discussion in terms of Derrida's critical interaction with phenomenology, looking specifically to Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, I attempt to mark the context from which deconstruction emerges as a philosophical position. In a general sense, I deal with Derrida's conception of the relational space in-between persons, places and things, and the implications of his appropriation of khora for thinking about how we properly relate to one another.

CONTENTS

## *Introduction*

"*Philosophy is many things.*"[1] This particular philosophical exercise, while pointing in the direction of a certain constellation of texts named "deconstruction," seeks to give an account of the significance of Derrida's conception of *khora* for Christian thinking. Derrida's commentary and appropriation of *khora* lays bare a kind of locale, or site, of "the un-locatable site where philosophy takes root," and thus seems to represent something of the non-location of deconstruction *itself* as a philosophical position. But rather than attempting to do the very thing Derrida (and deconstruction, "if there is such a thing") resists, which is to insist on determining the borders and boundaries, and thus the center, of a deconstructive position, I want to draw attention to a cluster of themes marking a certain logic which has been stressed by Derrida from the beginning.[2] This

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[1] While philosophy, as Alvin Plantinga notes, is rightfully understood to be "a matter of systematizing, developing and deepening one's pre-philosophical opinions [...] it is also an arena for the articulation and interplay of commitments and allegiances fundamentally religious in nature; it is an expression of deep and fundamental perspectives, ways of viewing ourselves and the world and God." Following Plantinga's advice, this philosophical exercise is not an attempt to make room for Christian content within the terms and conditions of Derridian deconstruction, but rather (and in affirmation of religious starting points) to offer an account of differential *space* in terms of a Christian philosophy. In this way it is an exercise in cultivating the religious ground that has already been given, in the hope of offering a fruitful way to think about *how* to conceive the experience of *the* limit. See Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers." *Faith and Philosophy* 1.2 (1984): 253-271.

[2] In the "Preface to the 1990 Edition" of Derrida's dissertation (*The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Phenomenology*), we witness an ambivalent and almost embarrassed author reflecting on the "tone" of his early work. And yet in that same preface it seems we are tipped off to a deconstructive secret regarding a thread of continuity, as "a sort of law" or "necessity," that has always motivated what Derrida has "tried to prove." As he notes: "[*Since*] *then, even in its literal formation*, this law will not have stopped commanding everything I have tried to prove, as if a sort of idiosyncrasy was already negotiating in its own way a necessity that would always overtake it and that would have to be interminably reappropriated. What necessity? It is always a question of an originary complication of the origin, of an initial contamination of the simple [...] In fact the question that governs the whole trajectory is already: 'How can the originarity of a

"strange" logicality demarcates an originary law characterizing the conditions for the possibility of what the later Derrida, in terms of "a new discourse and a new politics," has been trying to put into practice, viz., "*the* impossible." In other words, the logic of *the* impossible underscores what has come to characterize Derrida's ethico-political turn, or what might be considered a return to the religious.[3] Vis-à-vis this religious *re*turn, Derrida's configuration of *the* impossible comes to the fore under the guise of various themes, e.g., the promise, justice, love, forgiveness, hospitality, friendship, the gift, etc. It is the purported impossibility of enacting such deeds that begs us to consider the implications and/or consequences of such thinking for Christian thought. In order to take into account the logic of *the* impossible for Christian philosophizing, my strategy will be to consider those peculiar figurative-sites which bear witness to what might be considered *the experience of the limit*: *khora*, death and the miraculous. Along the way I will be charting three figures of phenomenology (Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Hannah Arendt)[4] as reference points in order to orient myself through Derrida's construal of *khora* and his theoretical developments of *the* impossible.

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foundation be an a priori synthesis? How can everything start with a complication?'" See Jacques Derrida, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*. Trans. Marian Hobson. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003: xiv-xv.

[3] "This gradual shift of emphasis from metaphysics to ethics and politics results in one major conceptual event: the 'turn' from the question to the promise. If we must say that the basic problem of phenomenology is the problem of genesis, then now (after 1967) we must say that Derrida conceives genesis not in terms of the question, but in terms of the promise." See Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002: 211.

[4] Hannah Arendt could be characterized as doing a kind of phenomenology of public space (*der öffentliche Raum*), as that spacing in between myself and others, and therefore leaves room for us to put her in conversation with Derrida's configuration of khoral spacing. See Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002: 287.

Chapter one (Khoral Necessity) begins with Derrida's reinscription of Plato's mythical *khora* in *On the Name.*[5] Borrowing neo-Kantian language, *khora* represents what might be formalized as the "foundational direction"[6] of Derrida's thought and thus functions as a contextual backdrop to the problematic of *the* impossible. *Khora* is a representative figure of a structural necessity, where the origin is always already a textual effect of *différance*. In other words, *khora* characterizes the *necessary impossibility* of locating the originary sphere (as an originary synthesis) of meaning, a failure which, according to Derrida, comes to light in terms of Husserl's phenomenological method of reduction. In short, this first section circumscribes how khoral necessity and the problematic of *the* impossible are linked to Derrida's critique of phenomenology.

As a necessary limit condition *khora* is "provisionally" a neutral concept, and therefore represents a structurally careless, hopeless and loveless no-place. It is this hollow caricature of *khora* (in terms of a kind of necessary *nihil*) as a dry and barren, desert like, no man's land that I want to consider more closely. In order to find my way through this impossible terrain, chapter two (A Passion for Impossibility) charts the religious topography of *khora* in terms of the Heideggerian distinction between "revelation" and "revealability." In between these two ways of thinking about religion Derrida puts "dogmatic faith" to the test by looking to the desertification of *khora* (at the

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[5] Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*. Trans. David Wood. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. Hereafter cited as "ON."

[6] Temporal directionality is something that I will be referring to more explicitly at the conclusion of this exercise (pg. 71). Following a Reformed appropriation of temporal direction, the "foundational direction" of time or "foundational time" corresponds to the mysterious abundance of life, and the "transcendental direction" of time or "transcendental time" corresponds to the future to come. Throughout the following exercise I will be assuming this conceptual apparatus in order to think through the implications of *khora*.

limits of knowledge) as a way of opening up a promising space for religious life in the midst of global violence.

Given the religious topography of *khora* mapped out in chapter two, chapter three (The Miracle of Natality) seeks to think *the* limit otherwise by reclaiming a space for "possibility." It is with regard to Heidegger's analysis of "possibility" that Derrida exposes the aporetic structure that irrupts within the pages of *Being and Time*, perhaps undoing the entire existential analysis of "death" as Dasein's most *proper* possibility. Ironically, it is this aporetic explosion within the Heideggerian text that lays a kind of quasi foundation for a logic of *the* impossible. In order to assess the impact of Heidegger's analysis of "death" upon Derrida's notion of *the* impossible I take my cue from Hannah Arendt's formalization of "natality" (i.e., the miracle of birth), which offers a way to conceive the experience of *the* limit otherwise than necessary lack. By distinguishing between *lack* and *excess* I want to consider the possibility of non-oppositional difference within relational economy—a notion that Derrida seems resistant to. In other words, by distinguishing between a logic of lack and a logic of excess I want to affirm "foundational time" and the abundant nature of life, where a fundamental surplus opens up the possibilities, and thus the risks, of relationship.[7]

[7] In a general sense, this exercise is dealing with Derrida's conception of the relational space *in-between* persons, places and things, and the implications of his appropriation of *khora* for thinking about how we relate to one another.

## *I. Khoral Necessity*

### §1. Setting the "Textual Scene"

In regard to the strategic manner of a deconstructive commentary it has often been noted that Jacques Derrida gravitates to those marginal places in a text which tend to receive little attention, whether it be toward an obscure author or a peculiar passage that has been glossed over too quickly.[8] This tendency of reading and commentary is quite apparent in Derrida's encounter with Plato's *Timaeus*, where he lingers around what appears at first glance to be a rather insignificant myth on "*khora*." As Derrida will suggest, it is this short interlude on the mythic *khora* within the "mil-lieu" of the *Timaeus* that exposes a structural "necessity" always already at work within the "textual scene." For, in between the lines of the Greek text (where philosophy *proper* begins to take root) we find a structural gap or spacing made necessary by the very binary logic upon which Plato's cosmo-ontological work depends. It is this staging of the "textual scene" that interests Derrida most, for in his assessment, this "stage," due to its dizzying and double-binding effects, is often overlooked by commentators and appropriators of *khora*. One example being his critical analysis of Julia Kristeva, whose project of Semanalysis (as an attempt to articulate the "exteriority" internal to a given discourse) looks to Plato's

[8] In his description of the deconstructive operations of Derrida, Terry Eagleton has noted: "Derrida's own typical habit of reading is to seize on some apparently peripheral fragment in the work—a footnote, a recurrent minor term or image, a casual illusion—and work it tenaciously through to the point where it threatens to dismantle the oppositions which govern the text as a whole...deconstruction shows this by fastening on the 'symptomatic' points, the aporia or impasses of meaning, where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves." See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996: 116.

"*chora*" as a representative figure of that which engenders signifying practices.[9] In some respects Derrida's analysis of *khora* is directed right at Kristeva and thus serves as a warning toward such appropriations to take *khora* more seriously. This note of caution underscores what Derrida in his own tentative analysis will call, "the test of *khora*" (ON, 76).

Derrida opens his commentary by problematizing *how* one ought to define, and *who* ought to define, *that* which by definition exceeds definition. Is it the task of the philosopher? The mythologist? The theologian? According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, to whom Derrida assigns the opening quote of his essay, it is the mythologist's burden of finding "a logic other than the logic of the logos" (ON, 88/89). These opening lines attempt to set the scene for a "third genre" of logic beyond binaries that the logic of non-contradiction establishes. As Derrida's reading of *khora* will demonstrate, any attempt to get at this "third genus" results in the aporetic effects of *différance*.[10] Therefore, taking *khora* seriously requires taking serious what Derrida calls "the structure of the textual scene," and how such a structure affects any interpretation and appropriation of *khora*. Thus he begins his analysis by questioning the status of what is often taken as an appropriate reading of *khora*, viz., the mythos. As Derrida notes, within Plato's *Timaeus* propositions on the mythical are "ordered by a double motif": (1) "On the one hand, myth

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[9] Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

[10] In a general sense, *différance*, according to Derrida, "is a way of describing, more economically, the economy itself, the principle of economy." See Mark Dooley, *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*. State University of New York Press, 2003: 31. And as Caputo further comments, "*Khora*, like *différance*, is an economic expression—a shorthand, we would say in English—for the very economy of words, of social relations, of whatever is differentially constituted—and what is not?"

derives from play. Hence it will not be taken seriously" (thus the hierarchical opposition between the *seriousness* of Being and the *play* of becoming). (2)"But on the other hand, in the order of becoming, when one cannot lay claim to a firm and stable logos, when one must make do with the probable, myth is the done thing" (ON, 112). A crucial element to Derrida's thesis is to show the interwoven status of these two motifs, and how there is an oscillation between, what he will call, a logic of "exclusion" (i.e., *khora* as *neither* this *nor* that) on the one hand, and a logic of "participation" (i.e., *khora* as *both* this *and* that) on the other (ON, 89). In this way, there is a "double oscillation" (between a neither/nor logic and a both/and logic) at work when attempting to tease out khoral status, where, between this oscillating duality is the necessary third genre or genus—the bastard logic outside the binaries of Being/becoming, seriousness/play, logos/mythos, etc. So even though the mythologist may appear primed for the arduous task of assessing *khora*, Derrida sees it otherwise. In his telling of the tale, the logocentric tradition (from the binary logic of Plato to the speculative dialectic of Hegel) has already ordered, or placed, the mythos in terms of the logos. But as he would have it, *khora* necessarily evades mythic definition vis-à-vis metaphor and analogy. For, even though it is *like* a maternal receptacle, and can be referred to *as* such, it is "older" and prior to such an analogical descriptor.[11] In short, a description of *khora* appears to be, as Derrida states: "heterogeneous to myth, at least to mytho-logic, to this philosopho-mythememe which orders myth to its philosophical telos" (ON, 113).

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Accordingly, *khora* and *différance* "are simply 'indicators' of the process by which names are formed." Ibid., 45.

[11] See John D. Caputo, ed., *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000: 93-94.

For Derrida, a crucial aspect of the discourse concerning *khora* is the question of "proprietorship" within the lines of the Timaeus: "who is, after all, *holding* this discourse, who is *taking up* speech and who is *receiving* it" (ON, 115). Does Plato hold the rights to such a discourse? After all, even within the etchings of the *Timaeus* the khoral myth comes via "a series of mythic fictions embedded mutually in each other" (ON, 113). And stating further: "Each tale is the receptacle of another. There is nothing but receptacles of narrative receptacles, or narrative receptacles of receptacles" (ON, 117). This line is reminiscent of Derrida's configuration of "the endless chain of signification" in *Of Grammatology*,[12] and (following in the wake of Saussurean linguistics) impresses on his reading of the myth a kind of linguistic template describing the "code of repeatability."[13] In other words, Derrida's tentative remarks on the proprietorship of *khora* are, generally speaking, a reiteration of the "arbitrary" relation and "differential" character of signs within a text, understood as a kind of displacement of "real" authorial property. As Derrida notes,

> There has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc.[14]

A discourse on *khora*, therefore, is a discourse on the structural necessity of a pre-originary space beyond and before the author, creator or origin. Or put another way, *khora* is the necessary space which opens up the possibility of language, meaning and discourse. And yet access to such a space is only possible by way of a supplement, a

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[12] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
[13] Caputo 2000: 100.

repetition, a trace (or tear) always already impressed upon the "virginal" *khora*. Consequently, *khora* cannot be any*thing* at all, which is to say, it is "nothing that can be said ontologically" (ON, 99). Rather, in Derrida's reading, *khora* is nothing more than the structural necessity within the textual scene of writing. "[For] we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like 'real mother' name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence."[15] Another way of characterizing this necessity is "the law of anachronism" (ON, 94). As Derrida states:

> It is this structural law which seems to me never to have been approached as such by the whole history of interpretations of the Timaeus. It would be a matter of structure and not of some essence of the khora, since the question or essence no longer has any meaning with regard to it. Not having an essence, how could the khora be beyond its name? The khora is anachronistic; it "is" the anachrony within being, or better: the anachrony of being. It anachronizes being. (ON, 94)

This structural anachrony within being, which is *khora*, bears a resemblance to the differentiating and deferring character of Derrida's grammatological notion of *différance*. Accordingly, the *différance/khora* couple invokes "the relation of the interval or the spacing to what is lodged in it" (ON, 125). In short, the non-relationality of *khora* is the differential spacing which leaves the space *to be*, while simultaneously *being* displaced. We might then think of *khora* as the necessary displacement of being, or, phrased in a more postmodern parlance, as the structural necessity of our being displaced in the world. Derrida's construal of *khora* as non-relation (i.e., as a non-relation relation) suggests a kind of necessary duality or dialecticity between classical philosophical distinctions, e.g., question and answer, thesis and antithesis, positive and negative, etc. Which is not to say

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[14] Derrida 1997: 159.

that Derrida is simply reinstating a classical dialectic (or a logical synthesis), but rather, he is reiterating an originary dialecticity, i.e., a logicality of the *third*. We might understand this strange logicality as a confession that everything, every person, place and thing (*res*), is already *beyond* understanding, always *more than* words can express, and thus *too much* to explain away. In short, holding *what* things are in suspension, it is a matter of thinking otherwise the 'how' of this third term. That is to say, deconstruction takes interest in a radical questioning of the 'how' of "interconnectedness," the 'how' that is temporal economy. As Derrida notes:

> We are constantly trying to think the interconnectedness, albeit otherwise, of faith *and* knowledge, technoscience *and* religious belief, calculation *and* the sancto-sanct. In the process we have not ceased to encounter the alliance, holy or not, of the calculable and the incalculable.[16]

To think about the logicality of *the third* is to consider the status of the social nexus, the link between other others. In short, it is to consider how we are implicated within the dynamic landscape of temporal economy. Derrida follows a phenomenological trajectory by insisting on this third, this *how*, and thereby rehearses both Husserl and Heidegger's critique of "explicationism," as the oversimplified explications of *this* and *that*, and the easy calculations of *what* this and that thing is or possibly could be. For Derrida, though the *whatness* or quiddity of things is always a secret beyond full comprehension, how we encounter persons, places and things lies at the heart of the matter. For the *howness* of things is the experience, "the encounter" of the calculable and the incalculable, revelation and revealability, word and flesh. In other words, Derrida's construal of *khora* as "non-relation relation" represents a construal of temporal economy, and thereby the condition

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[15] Ibid.

[16] See Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002: 90.

for the possibility of encountering the other and experiencing a *real* gift, justice, love, a miracle, or even the realities of violence.

In order to get a better conceptual handle on Derrida's appropriation of *khora* in terms of the phenomenological context from which it emerges, in the next section we will take a step back prior to the linguistic turn in Derrida's thought. For as the early Derrida will attempt to make clear, *holding natural belief in suspension* in order to recover apodictic truth-meaning (by means of a phenomenological *epoché*) is a necessary condition for receiving any meaning whatsoever, and not merely a methodological activity "leading back" to originary truth.

### §2. The Origins of Khoral *Dis*placement: a methodological problem

Derrida's appropriation of *khora* is a reiteration of his earlier analyses of the problematic scheme of Husserlian phenomenology. Thus our first phenomenological reference point marks "early" Derrida's rendering of the "problem of genesis" in Husserl's method of reduction. As we noted above, *khora* seems to represent what might be called the "foundational direction" of Derrida's thought and therefore engages metaphysical and structural questions regarding the conditions of possibility. In other words, Derrida's construal of what we are calling khoral necessity is a foundationally directed question and corresponds to the early Derrida's (1954-67) critique of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method.

While there may be differing emphases within Derrida's reading of Husserlian phenomenology throughout his formative years, there is a continuous line of argumentation insisting that Husserl goes beyond the boundaries of a phenomenological limit by making a classical *decision*. This decision comes within the context of what

Derrida will refer to as "the problem of genesis and structure." For, with regard to a certain attitude concerning "time," the early Derrida's analysis of phenomenology will demonstrate how the entire project, as he states, "cries out to be overtaken in a way that will only be a prolongation or, inversely, for a radical explication that will be a veritable conversion" (PG, 5).

***"Reducing" Genesis to a Structure*:** In an essay entitled "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology"[17] Derrida suggests that when all is said and done Husserl falls to the speculative attitude of a classical dialectic, or a dogmatic metaphysics, where ultimately the flux of *genesis* is taken up and closed off by *structure*, in terms of Reason, or "an Idea in the Kantian sense." Though his hypothesis would throw the phenomenological project off balance, he opens his essay hesitantly, beginning "with a *precaution* and a *confession*" (WD, 154):

> Husserl has always indicated his aversion for debate, dilemma, and aporia, that is, for reflection in the alternative mode whereby the philosopher, at the end of his deliberations, seeks to reach a conclusion, that is, to close the question, to enclose his expectation or his concern in an opinion, a decision, a solution [...]. (WD, 154)

This speculative or dialectical attitude was the very "explicationism" that both the metaphysicians and the empirical sciences had often been guilty of, and Husserl's criticism of such endeavors would seemingly prove Derrida's hypothesis unwarranted.[18]

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[17] Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978. Hereafter cited as "WD."

[18] Following Pierre Hadot's rendering of ancient philosophy, I want to suggest that Husserl's turn from psychologism and logicism toward "transcendental idealism" might be regarded as a *therapeutic* attempt to regain a cosmic sensibility. With regard to the Stoic distinction between philosophy and discourse about philosophy Hadot notes: "Philosophy in antiquity was an exercise practiced at each instant," and "this exercise was situated not in the absolute space of exact science, but in the lived experience of the concrete, living, and perceiving subject." See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

Therefore, Derrida's hesitancies admit to a certain "aggression and an infidelity" (WD, 155) toward a project which emphatically desired a return to "*die Sachen selbst.*" For, as Derrida notes, it was clear that Husserl,

> ...by his rejection of system and speculative closure, and by virtue of the style of his thought, is attuned to the historicity of meaning and to the possibility of its becoming, and is also already respectful of that which remains open within structure. (WD, 155)

To thereby impose or impress upon phenomenology a debate outside of phenomenology, namely, the genesis/structure problem, was to ignore the original intentions of the project altogether. And though phenomenology "would be offended" by his claim, he would show that the problem *external* to phenomenology was "parallel" or analogous to a problem *internal* to phenomenology (WD, 161). Formalizing the genesis/structure problem in terms of an external problem acting as an internal catalyst for deepening and purifying the phenomenological method, Derrida states:

> Husserl, thus, ceaselessly attempts to reconcile the structuralist demand (which leads to the comprehensive description of a totality, of a form or a function organized according to an internal legality in which elements have meaning only in the solidarity of their correlation or their opposition), with the genetic demand (that is the search for the origin and foundation of the structure). (WD, 157)

For example, Husserl's early attempts in "*Philosophie der Arithmetik,*" in an effort to reconcile the mathematical objectivity of numbers with the constituting subjectivity that makes such objectivities possible, open the door to psychologism. And though the "psychological route" proved to be inadequate, Husserl was discontent with its

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Trans. Michael Chase. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995: 273. Though not without its weaknesses, Husserl likewise demonstrates a commitment to practice philosophy within the milieu of our everyday lived experience, and to take a critical distance from the theoretical abstractions and logical activities that have overestimated our grasp of the world.

alternative, namely, logical formalism, which was "preoccupied with the autonomy of logical ideality" at the expense of concrete life experience. Thus, as Derrida suggests, Husserl sought to do the impossible, that is, "to maintain simultaneously the normative autonomy of logical or mathematical ideality [...], and its original dependence in relation to a subjectivity in general; in general, but concretely" (WD, 158). Therefore, in Derrida's critical interpretation, the phenomenological attitude took root as a necessary response to these two wrongheaded positions, emerging in-between the problem of structure and genesis, and clearing a way for the transcendental sphere. The phenomenological attitude would open a new path for locating the site of originary constitution, and would do so according to "the Cartesian way" of suspending the debate between geneticist historico-psychologism on the one hand, and structural idealism on the other, in effect neutralizing the legitimacy of the problem. Via a methodological suspension (or *epoché*) of that which contaminates the "original unity" (i.e., the "common root" of activity and passivity, genesis and structure) Husserl would aim to uncover the "phenomenological space" of originary constitution (WD, 158/59).

As Derrida outlines, Husserl's reductive method took on two forms: (1) an eidetic reduction and (2) a transcendental reduction. In order to clear a path for locating the phenomenological "site" of constitution, the first phase would be to differentiate between the *empirical* on the one hand and the *eidetic* on the other, and in this way, the first eidetic phase was structural. By placing the "worldly" geneticist attitude in brackets, e.g., natural science, historico-empiricist, psycho-geneticist, etc, Husserl would be able to separate that which was contaminating transcendental purity. As Derrida would suggest:

> The protests made against this attitude perhaps have contaminated and indirectly have determined Husserl's own attitude; everything occurs as if at

> this point he considered every genesis as associative, causal, factual and worldly. (WD, 161)

For, when Husserl moves to the second phase in order to attain "the ultimate critical and phenomenological jurisdiction," he is primarily concerned with an articulation of "objectivity in general" and "consciousness in general" (WD, 161). According to Derrida, however, in this second phase "he has not yet taken the same step as concerns genesis" (WD, 162).

At this point Derrida seeks to make explicit a tension latent within the phenomenological project that comes to the fore when describing "the pure transcendentality of consciousness," and he frames this tension in terms of *closure* and *opening* (WD, 162). For, as Derrida contends, it is *the question* of a structural opening that Husserl's own correlating distinctions will foreshadow. Here we will highlight two sets of differentiations that Derrida references: (1) the distinction between *exact science* and *rigorous science*, and (2) the correlatives within the structure of intentionality itself, viz., noema-noesis and morphe-hyle.

*(1) Exact and "Anexact" Science:* As we noted earlier, the first phase of Husserl's project was to neutralize that which contaminates the eidetic sphere, namely, the geneticist-empiricism of psychologism. In this way his method was static and structural, thereby making it possible to locate those ideal objectivities likened to the mathematical essences of geometry. But in the transcendental phase Husserl realizes that the essences of pure consciousness are different than mathematical essences, and therefore he makes a distinction. As Derrida points out, this distinction foreshadows the differences between a *static* phenomenology and the necessity of a *genetic* phenomenology. In reference to the Husserlian distinction between exact science and rigorous science Derrida notes:

> Differing from mathematical essences, the essences of pure consciousness are not, and in principle cannot be, *exact*. The difference between *exactitude* and *rigor* recognized by Husserl is well known. An eidetic descriptive science, such as phenomenology, may be rigorous, but it is necessarily inexact—I would say, "anexact"—due to no failure on its part (WD, 162).

In other words, essences of the mathematical type are of a different kind than the essences of consciousness, the reason being that mathematical essences, though they may be infinitely developed, demarcate the possibility of closure, i.e., a *finite* totality. By definition an "exact science" is the investigation of a sphere that can be exhaustively determined, and while such a sphere may be infinitely developed, these changes are not to be characterized as "creative" developments.[19] In short, mathematical essences are "free" idealities that hold once and for all and for everyone, meaning, they are not constructs of the psychological subject.[20] In Husserl's later fragmentary essay entitled "The Origin of Geometry" he emphasized such a free domain, and sought a "reactivation" (*Reaktivierung*) of "ideal objectivities" likened to the mathematical essences of geometry, and would do so by way of a "regressive inquiry" (*Rückfrage*).[21] Put another way, the regressive inquiry presupposed a hidden sphere irreducible to the historico-factual, and thus such a sphere was free from any bound factual territory. But again, in order to avoid a static formalism, Husserl's eidetic-structural account of *a priori* essences needed a genetic account. That is, by differentiating between mathematical essences (i.e., finite totalities) on the one hand, and essences of consciousness (i.e., infinite totalities) on the other, Husserl had opened up a passage recognizing the necessity

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[19] Lawlor 2002: 28.

[20] See Jacques Derrida, *Edmund's Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989: 72 fn.70. It should be noted that for Husserl there is a difference between "creation" and "intention" of an object.

for a genetic phenomenology. For, following "the principle of all principles,"[22] it was from an originary concrete experience that such eidetic structures presented themselves. As Derrida notes:

> What Husserl seeks to underline by means of this comparison between an exact and a morphological science, and what we must retain here, is the principled, essential, and structural impossibility of closing a structural phenomenology. It is the infinite opening of what is experienced, which is designated at several moments of Husserlian analysis by reference to an Idea in the Kantian sense, that is, the irruption of the infinite into consciousness (WD, 162).

The distinction between exact and anexact science represents a commitment to life experience and the experiential excesses that gives a foundation to and the possibility for any reduction whatsoever. However, in resorting to "an Idea in the Kantian sense," which, as Derrida suggests, "permits the unification of the temporal flux in consciousness just as it unifies the object and the world by anticipation" (WD, 162), Husserl goes beyond "the principle of all principles." Phrased another way, Husserl gives a structural account of genesis by closing the necessary opening within an originary synthesis of meaning.

*(2) Noema and Hyle; the Two Poles of Opening:* The problem of, and the necessity for moving from a static or structural phenomenology to a genetic phenomenology is made more apparent in terms of the structure of "constitutive consciousness." Again, it is the distinctions *internal* to phenomenology that Derrida is calling attention to, for such

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[21] Ibid., 99.

[22] "Enough now of absurd theories. No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the principle of all principles: that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originarily (so to speak in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there." (Quoted from Ideas I§ 24, p. 44) See Dermot 2000: 127.

differentiations foreshadow the inevitable, that is, the need for Husserl to deepen his analysis of temporality. It is well understood that for Husserl the origin of meaning and the opening to phenomenality are to be understood in terms of the intentional ego. That is to say, "transcendental intentionality" is the site of an originary constitution of meaning. As Derrida points out, this structure is described "with four poles and two correlations: the noetico-noematic correlation [...] and the morphe-hyle correlation" (WD, 162). Here Derrida highlights a tension within the structure of consciousness, which, in his assessment, necessitates a methodological "conversion" and a "withdrawal" from transcendental idealism. As he notes, the intentional noema is characterized by Husserl as "non-*reell*," and as "the objectivity of the object, the meaning and the 'as such' of a thing for consciousness" (WD, 163). Hence, it is neither of the world nor of consciousness, but rather, it is the world *for* consciousness. This element of the intentional structure of consciousness is "irregional," and consequently, it "is simultaneously the origin and the undoing, the condition of possibility and a certain impossibility of every structure and every systematic structuralism" (WD, 163).

Another element of the intentional structure that Derrida highlights is the mysterious "hyle." The hyle, as Husserl articulated it, is the formless sensate material that is *reell*, i.e., ideal not real, but non-intentional. Accordingly, "it is the pole of pure passivity, of the nonintentionality without which consciousness could not receive anything other than itself" (WD, 163). Hyle, in short, is "primarily temporal matter" and "the possibility of genesis itself" (WD, 163). The structural openness or passivity of the hyle allows *time* and the *other* to appear, and as such is fundamentally necessary for constitutive consciousness.

These Husserlian distinctions (exact-inexact, noema-noesis, morphe-hyle) demarcate the "structural opening" within a static phenomenology and the necessity for Husserl to deepen his inquiry. For, in keeping the correlations of noesis-noema and morphe-hyle, Husserl continues to work within a constituted temporality, and has yet to establish the originary sphere. In other words, "the two poles of opening" (noema and hyle), within the structure of intentional consciousness, continue to be taken as necessary correlates, and therefore, the transcendental zone maintains an eidetic-structural affinity. In a static phenomenology we may have the reduction of time as a *thematization* of transcendental genesis, but what about the time of the reduction? What about transcendental genesis itself? As Derrida's commenting critique will suggest: "the necessity of this transition from the structural to the genetic is nothing less than the necessity of a break or a conversion" (WD, 164).

***The "Time" for Reduction:*** Husserl's emphasis on transcendental genesis from 1917 on was, in part, due to his recognition of "passive genesis." If there is to be an eidetic-transcendental reduction of time, there must also be a time *for* reduction, i.e., a Living experience grounding the intentional activity. As Derrida notes in *The Problem of Genesis*,[23]

> Now this passive genesis was presented by Husserl as the most originary moment of constitution, as the fundamental layer of any transcendental activity [...]. To be able to reintegrate the passive genesis into an eidetic and transcendental phenomenology, the reduction and the conception of intentionality had once more to be enlarged. (PGH, 4)

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[23] Derrida, Jacques. *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*. Trans. Marian Hobson. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003. Hereafter cited as "PGH."

In order to deepen the structure of intentionality beyond the constituted activity of a "purely egological" experience, Husserl needed to articulate a notion of passive ego participation, viz., intersubjectivity and history (PGH, 4). Husserl had yet to uncover the originary constituting site of intentionality, for, up to the point of an eidetic-transcendental reduction, the activity of the transcendental ego was always already constituted in a passive synthesis. Put another way, there was already a time and a history *for* the transcendental ego; not the objective history of *worldly* genesis, but the historical movement of *transcendental* genesis. Passive ego participation within a historico-teleological "unity," i.e., an infinite Idea, would reinstate an *active* intentional sense to Husserl's project.

Derrida outlines the "profound unity" of this genetic description of intentionality under three headings: the logical route, the egological route, and the historico-teleological route (WD, 164/165). All three routes elucidate a *regression* back toward an original synthesis of meaning, which, as the "infinite task" of unveiling Reason, is simultaneously a *progression* forward. The first route, as Derrida points out, sought to neutralize "the cultural layer of subjective-relative truths in the *Lebenswelt*" (WD, 165). This eidetic reduction would "reactivate" the "truth-meanings" that had become buried under the sedimentations of logic, grammar and culture. For example, in a fragmentary essay entitled "The Origin of Geometry"[24] Husserl gives warning to heed the "dangers of a scientific life," wherein, the transformation of "truth-meanings," i.e., those objective meanings which under-gird all historical and factual "sentence-meanings," have a tendency to be forgotten as they are "completely given over to the logical activities"

(OGI, 170). The inevitability of new, transformative, scientific developments therefore creates the dangerous possibility of losing touch with and forgetting those underlying, fundamental, a priori structures, i.e., *ideale Gegenständlichkeit*—the originary structures which substantiate objective truth-meanings. In order to unearth what had been buried under the cultural layers of logic and grammar, a *reactivation* needed to happen.

The second route, the egological route, is "latent" within the first route simply because phenomenology is primarily concerned with clarifying the possibility of cognition, that is, to show how cognition already achieves a "reaching of the object" in original givenness, "and doing so purely from the subjective sources of the intentional achievement of consciousness."[25] Therefore, as Derrida suggests, the logical route finds its "proper existence and life" in the egological, i.e., the "cogito-cogitarum" (WD, 165). The genetic description of the ego, "the ego existing for itself and 'continuously constituting [itself] as existing'," sets the trajectory for the third route (WD, 165).

The third route, the historico-teleological route, is an articulation of the "infinite task" for transcendental phenomenology of deepening the sense of intentionality, and of purifying the transcendental sphere, for, as Derrida notes, "phenomenology is only at its beginnings" (WD, 165). As previously stated, the ongoing task of uncovering apodictic truths, as a "regressive inquiry" toward an originary synthesis of meaning, is also a progression forward. This teleological motivation is the structural openness to the infinite possibilities of becoming. It is not, as Derrida suggests, "a static and determined value which would inform and enclose the genesis of Being and meaning" (WD, 167). It is the

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[24] See Jacque Derrida. *Edmund's Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction.* Trans. John P. Leavey. Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

meaning of becoming, the meaning of genesis itself, and "therefore, it is structurally genesis itself, as origin and becoming" (WD, 167). And yet, as Derrida suggests in *The Problem of Genesis*, "In our regression toward an originary synthesis, a new disappointment is awaiting us. To a historico-intentional analysis, teleology too appears as a unity of sense that is already constituted" (PGH, 4). Even though Husserl had intentions to uncover transcendental genesis, the reduction failed, for the transcendental reduction is a suspending of what is always already there. In short, Husserl's phenomenology of temporality uncovered a fundamental passivity that makes the reduction of *time* and *alterity* impossible.

> In spite of having ceaselessly referred to a deeper temporality [...], Husserl nevertheless ends by reducing temporality to an eidetic structure that has already been constituted by an originarity that is atemporal, obeying in this way an intrinsic rationalism and idealism" (PGH, 4-5).

Or simply put, Husserl decides.[26] He chooses *structure*, and the closure of synthesis, over *genesis* understood as a necessary opening. In thematizing the genesis of becoming under a teleological unity, Husserl's understands time as an originary synthesis of meaning, and in effect has closed the opening. According to Derrida such a decision marks the failure of phenomenology to hold to its own principles: "Instead of recognizing the indefinite as a limit inaccessible to any intuition, Husserl wants to render it immanent and present to the lived experience in concrete form" (PGH, 203, fn.89). For Derrida, time and alterity are necessarily irreducible to an originary synthesis of meaning, for a genetic description

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[25] See Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern, and Eduard Marbach. *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993: 71.

[26] As Lawlor notes: "In a word, for Derrida, Husserl's thought is contradictory. Yet Husserl's thought does not remain unbalanced and contradictory; Husserl *decides* for a structure, form, and essence. As we know form both "Genesis and Structure" and *Le*

is still always already within another time, i.e., the *other* time, the time of alterity.[27] The transcendental reduction can only ever make *thematic* the zone of originary constitution, for that originary sphere is always before and beyond any intuition.

In this way, Derrida has a double critique of Husserlian phenomenology.[28] The first critique is internal to the project and calls for accountability, while the second critique is external and calls for a conversion or a break from the project altogether.[29] The first critique insists that there is no original self-evidence for the Kantian Idea, i.e., the idea of an infinite totality of temporal experiences, thus, Husserl has overstepped the basic principles of phenomenology. The second critique suggests that, since this originary "unity" is beyond phenomenological evidence, i.e., beyond intuition, to suppose Reason will unveil itself fully in the future is to lapse into a speculative dialectic seeking to "realize" the movement of meaning.[30]

This first phenomenological site, in conclusion, was intended to demarcate Derrida's construal of khoral necessity in terms of what he found at the limits of the Husserl's phenomenological routes of reduction. It is important to note the affinity between Derrida's construal of *khora,* as structurally necessary, with the earlier rendering of the problem of genesis in Husserl's philosophy. As Derrida states, "It is always a question of

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*Probleme de la genese*, the Idea in the Kantian sense, the infinite idea, the infinite task of philosophy, ultimately tames genesis for Husserl." (Lawlor 2002, 81-82)

[27] As Derrida notes: "Temporality and alterity are syntheses always already constituted and irreducible as such. With them will be introduced the most important themes of passive synthesis and genesis, which will pose grave problems for Husserl: how can the constitution of a transcendental 'ego' or starting from a transcendental 'ego' be done passively?" See Derrida 2003: 186 fn. 45.

[28] Lawlor 2002: 24.

[29] See Derrida 1978: 164, and also Derrida 2003: 5.

an originary complication of the origin, of an initial contamination of the simple [...]. In fact the question that governs the whole trajectory is already: 'How can the originarity of a foundation be an *a priori* synthesis?'" (PGH, xiv-xv) Derrida's appropriation of *khora* rehearses this problem of genesis, understood as the necessary irreducibility of the originary sphere of meaning. This came to the fore in light of Husserl's formalization of the correlates of the intentional structure, and the problem of locating the originary sphere of constitution.

While the problem of genesis characterizes the formative years of Derrida's concerns, the congruency between his critique of phenomenology and his later commentary on *khora* is noteworthy; in both cases he is making explicit the limitations of the analytic regression toward the origin. But it is the linking of phenomenology's limitations to the ethical and political that marks Derrida's quasi-transcendental turn toward "the promise," the logical developments of "the impossible," and his formalization of a "religion with/out religion." In the following chapter I want to circumscribe how maintaining the rhythm of *khora* (i.e., the "backward steps" of the analytic regression) characterizes the religious posture of deconstruction: *the affirmation of a radically open future.*

I begin the chapter by looking at Derrida's rendering of religion as it comes to be contextualized in terms of Martin Heidegger's distinction between revelation and revealability. With Derrida's assessment of religion in view, I then want to look at Caputo's rendering of *khora* with regard to the theological turn in phenomenology, and how a deconstructive (or "minimalist") approach attempts to counter the violence of

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[30] Bernet notes: "...philosophy forms in Husserl's eyes 'an idea'. It is able to realized only in a style of relative, temporary validity, and in an infinite historical process—but in this way it is indeed able to be realized." See Bernet 1995: 77.

relational economy. I end the chapter by considering the import of Derrida's notion of pre-originary violence, and how such a notion would seem to thin out the significance of *real* experiences; in effect neutralizing the risk of possibility.

## *II. A Passion for Impossibility*

Following Derrida's turn in emphasis toward the problematic of the sign, the possibility of leading back and laying claim to a region of originary experience would necessarily presuppose a certain *name*,[31] thus indicating an even more fundamental experience, an experience that comes to pass via a more ancient, more archaic motivation, viz., a "yes" more ancient.[32] And it is such an originary motivation, according to Derrida, which suspends the very notion of an experience in general, i.e., a notion of experience that would attempt to suspend or bracket culturally determinate, concrete content. For, the socio-historical traces of language have always already left a contaminating mark on any claim to the experience of originary truth-meaning.[33] This archaic "*oui oui*," however, is not the word of a new deconstructive methodology, as yet another reduction to a more pronounced reading of possibility or actuality, but rather

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[31] As Dooley notes: "All names, thus, have a history, which means, in turn, that no name picks out a natural kind. Consequently, when you privilege a name by giving it a saving quality, radical hermeneutics urges you to undertake a careful genealogy or etymology of the name. It enjoins you take a closer look at the socio-linguistic cum historical matrix in which the said is contextualized. In so doing, you will notice that names do not fall from the sky, that, pace Heidegger, there are no names which attach to reality more precisely than others." See Dooley 2003: xvii.

[32] "The 'yes' precedes ontology, the positing of being, and egology, the positing of self, precedes any positing at all, because all positing and posing presuppose response. Yes, I am responding—to the call of Being, of God, of justice, of the gift, of hospitality, of the other, no matter by what name the other goes or comes." See Caputo 2000: 195.

[33] As noted above, for Husserl the aim of the reductive method was to make explicit the site of originary constitution, and this involved a series of reductions: eidetic, eidetic-transcendental, etc. The movement of uncovering the various cultural layers of meaning could be characterized as a decontamination or purification of the transcendental sphere, i.e., the structure of intentionality. The reductive method would thus bracket the "worldly" contents, that by intermixing, make it difficult to ascertain objective truth-meanings. In this section we want to highlight a similar suspicion Derrida has of the Heideggerian distinction between revelation and revealability.

would hold such a reading in tension with itself, and thus in suspension.[34] In short, the originarity of experience is always already a loaded term, an experience weighed down by the gravity of the logos. And it is the weight (*gravitas*) of Derrida's words that begs our attention, obligates our response and holds us in wonderment (or perhaps bewilderment). For, in Derrida's conception of a "religion with/out religion" he is not pointing to the experience of a *real* encounter, or any other *actual* experiences of reality, but rather to a fundamental resistance and interruption, as that which evades actualization and bedazzles our understanding of reality, viz., the impossible, the incalculable, the miraculous!

### §3. Undecidable: on *how* to think about religion

Following Heideggerian phenomenology, Derrida formalizes his reading of "religion" in terms of an originary motivation. And still following the trajectory of Heidegger's thought he also insists on the ubiquity of hermeneutics in terms of the implications of the *logos* for Dasein, i.e., the "hermeneutic situation" of Dasein. But Derrida resists Heidegger's methodological reduction of the onto-theological—a reduction calling for a more fundamental and more originary indication of Being.

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[34] According to Caputo, "*Oui, oui* is the amen that opens and closes every word and sentence, that punctuates and spaces them, that indeed gives rise to (*donner lieu*) language itself, from which language arises, and which constantly accompanies every event of language. Although this makes *yes* sound a little like Kant's transcendental *ich* accompanying every representation, it is better to think of *yes* as '*amen*,' which is itself like—if anything can be—God, like the infinite and creative affirmation of the world by God whose 'let there be' this or that is a performative utterance to end all performative utterances, or rather to start them all up, to start everything up, and to restart them, to lets things be, to affirm and sustain them." See John D.Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997: 256.

For Heidegger, revealability (*Offenbarkeit*) is more primordial than revelation (*Offenbarung*). As Derrida notes, "Heidegger said, this is his position, that there would be no revelation or *Offenbarung* without the prior structure of *Offenbarkeit*, without the possibility of revelation and the possibility of manifestation."[35] Heidegger's ontologico-existential analytic is a phenomenological inquiry into the meaning of Being, and thus the same aporias that Husserl witnessed with regard to genesis are made apparent here in Derrida's critique of Heidegger. While Husserl's phenomenological method was intended to elucidate the transcendental sphere, Heidegger's hermeneutical ontology, rather than suspending the historical and cultural sentence-meanings which conceal the truth-meaning of Being, proposes to dive right into the hermeneutical circle of historico-cultural content. While for both Husserl and Heidegger everyday experience is the bearer of meaning, there is a necessary distancing from, or bracketing off of the ontic that allows the Truth of truth and the Law of law to manifest itself truly. Where Husserl is interested in gaining transcendental access to apodictic truth (a teleological "task" in terms of an Idea in the Kantian sense)[36] Heidegger, by way of the "woodsman's path," retreats to the mystical forest of Being. For Heidegger the ontological meaning of Being is prior to and more originary than the ontic or onto-theological conceptions of Being. Thus the "revealability" of Being is *how* Being properly gives itself—free of all ontic associations.

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[35] See John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds. *God the Gift and Postmodernism.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999: 73.

[36] In terms of Husserl's appropriation of a Kantian Idea in order to think about the historico-teleological task of knowledge, Derrida suggests Husserl "remains the prisoner of a great classical tradition: one that reduces human finitude to an accident of history, to an 'essence of man' that understands temporality against the background of possible or actual eternity in which it has or could have participated." See Derrida 2003: 5.

From within the theoretical bounds of this formal distinction, i.e., between revelation and revealability, the fundamentals of Derrida's faith come to ambivalent expression. For, as Derrida hesitantly states, "Perhaps it is through *Offenbarung* that *Offenbarkeit* becomes thinkable, historically."[37] How can Heidegger privilege one hypothesis over the other? How can we for that matter decide between these two sources for thinking about religion? This is Derrida's "cross" and the cross we all must bear—it is this crossing or intersecting that characterizes *undecidability*. As he further confesses: "Since it is impossible for me to choose between these two hypotheses, my last hypothesis is that the question is not well posed, that we should displace the question, not to have an answer, but to think otherwise the possibility of these two possibilities."[38] Such a displacing of the question brings us full circle to Derrida's construal of *khora*, for *khora* represents not only Derrida's way "to think otherwise the possibility of these two possibilities," but also a way of thinking about *how* to think the *place* of religion.

### §4. Religious to *the* Limit: putting "dogmatic faith" in its place

In an important essay entitled "Faith and Knowledge"[39] Derrida puts khoral displacement to the test in an effort to put religion in its *proper* place. In thinking about how to think about the place of religion Derrida links "the question of *place*" to "the promise." For it is the strange status of this place non-place *khora*, which opens the possibility of a social network of exchange and interrelation, while simultaneously breaking the communitarian link in between other others. That is, the differential space in between us is what conditions the possibility of a radical singularity, and therefore the

[37] Caputo 1999: 73.
[38] Ibid.

link between other others is simultaneously a non-link, or what Derrida refers to as a "fiduciary link." This link non-link "would precede all determinate community, all positive religion, every onto-anthropo-theological horizon," and thus is "prior to any social or political determination, prior to all intersubjectivity" (AR, 55). At this juncture Derrida highlights a certain risk. For to think of a place or space that resists every projection of meaning, all anticipation, and any expectation or apperception, risks the possibility of a radical abstraction, cutting off the real significance of empirical existence and the historical reality that is temporal experience. For that reason, Derrida asks the question: "Should one save oneself by abstraction or save oneself from abstraction?" (AR, 42) But this risk, as considerable as it may be, is not without the possibility of promise. Perhaps "the abstraction of the desert can thereby open the way to everything from which it withdraws" (AR, 55). Perhaps, *khora*, as a theoretical desertification, might render possible precisely what it appears to threaten. This radical abstraction is a withdrawal, a retreat, but is also the condition for opening up possibility, for rendering anew. Here Derrida points out a fundamental duality, that is, a dialecticity between *opening* and *withdrawing*, repeating and retreating, which is a theoretical notion consistent with his early critique of an originary synthesis of meaning in Husserl. With regard to the linguistic turn in Derrida's thought the problem of genesis (as the always-already of the *arche* and the always-to-come of the *telos*) is complicated by the play of the logos. That is to say, the retreating effects of temporality are countered by the repeating effects of textuality. For that reason, the social link between others exists

[39] Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002. Hereafter cited as "AR."

virtually as a repetition, as a commitment, and therefore as "a pledge of faith." As Derrida notes:

> Here we are confronted by the overwhelming questions of the name and of everything "done in the name of": questions of the name or noun "religion," of the names of God, of whether the proper name belongs to the system of language or not, hence, of its translatability but also of its iterability (which is to say, of that which makes it a site of repeatability...), of its link to the performativity of calling in prayer..., of its bond to that which, in all performativity, as in all address and attestation, appeals to the faith of the other and deploys itself therefore in a pledge of faith. (AR, 46)

This fiduciary link between other others, as Derrida characterizes this space, marks the possibility of opening up what he calls a "universalizable culture of singularities" (AR, 56). And therefore, this khoral desertification, this retreat or withdrawal to the desert (as a kind of distancing from or suspending of reality) is not a simple abstraction, but rather that which conditions the possibility of thinking the *proper* place of religion, to move beyond dogmatic faith and toward a "reflective faith" as Kant proposed. This withdrawing or distancing is not simply the activity of an intentional ego, but the fundamental passivity of experiencing a structural limit, which, for Derrida, is the "general structure of experience" (AR, 56), i.e., the necessary condition for the possibility of experiencing the future, or anything other than my own ego.

Therefore, for Derrida, a khoral confession is where we must begin if there is to be any hope at all. For, it is the confession of finitude and frailty that opens the way for the coming of the other as radically singular. Within an economy characterized by the zealous movement of "globalatinization" (as that "strange alliance of Christianity, as the experience of the death of God, and teletechnoscientific capitalism") (AR, 51/52), Derrida wants to suspend the possibility of religion in its most "concrete" and "accessible" expressions with regard to the proper name, and thereby imagine the

possibility and implication of religion within the bounds of mere reason, viz., a religion without religion. We might suggest that such an *epoché* announces in a nutshell the test and the testimony of *khora*: the possibility of the limits of reason "at the limits of reason alone," and therefore what such limits leads to, viz., *the* impossible. So we find Derrida, a disciple of *the* impossible, situating his reflections within a discourse on the possible, and for that matter, the possibility of theoretical thought.[40] And it is at this critical juncture that the implications of *khora* come to the forefront, for even though khora is indicative of nothing, of utter neutrality and thus impossibility, there may be something to it. Or phrased another way, even though *khora* promises nothing, something of promise may come of it.

Here we stand at a difficult intersection within Derrida's essay. While on the one hand religious faith is that which puts knowledge back in its proper place, that is, down on its knees in the blindness of confession, on the other hand knowledge is that which tames a certain irresponsibility, a certain "dogmatic faith." Reflecting on Kant's distinction between a "reflecting faith" and a "dogmatic faith" Derrida states:

> Kant thus defines a "reflecting (*reflektierende*) faith," which is to say, a concept whose possibility might well open the space of our discussion. Because it does not depend essentially upon any historical revelation and thus agrees with the rationality of a purely practical reason, reflective faith favors good will beyond all knowledge. It is thus opposed to "dogmatic (*dogmatische*) faith." If it breaks with this "dogmatic faith," it is insofar as the latter claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge. (AR, 49)

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[40] In commenting on Derrida's appropriation of Kant's "ethical" religion, Smith notes: "Thus Derrida, the consummate 'postmodernist', lays claim to a filiation which is distinctly modern, making deconstruction a child of the Enlightenment." See Smith's "Re-Kanting Postmodernism?: Derrida's Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone." See James K.A. Smith, "Re-Kanting Postmodernism?: Derrida's Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone." *Faith and Philosophy* 17.4 (2000): 558.

Such a distinction, according to Derrida, is not simply "definitional, taxonomic or theoretical," but rather points to what might be understood as a certain relational aporia, "a place of conflict, if not war" (AR, 49). Keeping in mind a certain alliance that Derrida maintains with phenomenology we might suggest that this relational aporia is indicative of the interrelations of temporal economy and *how* economy is experienced. To tease out the implications of Derrida's appropriation of Kant's distinction between faith and knowledge, and more precisely between dogmatic faith and reflective faith, and to get a better sense of the relational aporia, we might ask two related questions: First, *what* motivates reflective faith? And second, *how* is reflective faith motivated? We might suggest that the former question hints toward a certain Kantian thesis on the implications of practical reason, where morality, in its purest form, while inextricably linked to Christian revelation, assumes ultimate "rational and philosophical responsibility" in recognizing the limits of knowledge (AR, 51). Thus, following Kant's thesis, "the Christian religion would be the only truly moral religion; a mission would thus be reserved for it and for it alone: that of liberating a 'reflective faith'" (AR, 50). The latter question however (*How* is reflective faith motivated?) suggests a Heideggerian strategy of suspending the onto-theological order of revelation, and thereby moving toward a recovery of a more originary posture. As Derrida notes:

> [Heidegger] insists, indeed, in *Sein und Zeit* upon the character of originary conscience (*Gewessen*), being-responsible-guilty-indebted (*Schuldigsein*) or attestation (*Bezeugung*) as both pre-moral (or pre-ethical, if "ethical" still refers to that meaning of ethos considered by Heidegger to be derivative, inadequate and of recent origin) and pre-religious. (AR, 51)

But, as Derrida suggests, even in Heidegger's resolve to distance himself from Christianity, in terms of a strategic resistance to ontotheology, he is already implicated as

it were in this violent scenario, and "with all the more violence in so far as it is too late, perhaps, for him to deny certain proto-Christian motifs in the ontological repetition and existential analytics" (AR, 51).

And so we find Derrida's reflections formalized in terms of both Kant and Heidegger, in between an onto-theological horizon that insists upon philosophical responsibility on the one hand and an account of originary meaning resistant to ontotheology on the other. In between these two figures, these two names, these two sources of religion ("because there are at least two") (AR, 100), Derrida brings the aporetic structure of religion to the fore. Is Kant's notion of "reflective faith" conditioned and opened upon a prior structure of possibility, a structure more originary and thus more fundamental than revelation, or rather, is revelation that which conditions this revealability? The oscillation between these two positions, these two names for the origin, point to the experience of "an infinite spiral of outbidding" (AR, 51). This violent scenario involving the world's religions characterizes Derrida's insistence that "the origin is duplicity itself, the one and the other" (AR, 55). In other words, this originary outbidding is the site of interruption and resistance—the resistance to any claim to *proper* meaning—where the relational link between other others is the making of war.

### §5. A Confessing Minimalist: Jack Caputo's "ankhoral religion"

In the midst of global violence and fundamentalist terror perhaps the hollowing out of concrete religious content can play a productive role. Perhaps a more "modest" approach and a more humble posture, which confesses to *the* limit, can "keep us safe." Perhaps the anonymity of *khora*, that is to say, "the thought...that behind it all there is nothing behind

it all, [i.e.,]...nothing we know of,"[41] is "good news" for philosophy and for religious faith. Perhaps this "lower limit condition" can give a proper place to faith life? As Jack Caputo notes, "Such undecidability, I will argue, is a way to define faith, not to undermine it, to situate faith within the limits of finitude, *différance* and undecidability within which belief must function."[42] Therefore, a good "minimalism," as Caputo suggests, "an austere but humble quasi-phenomenology of undecidability," as opposed to the hyper-givenness of "maximalism," just might keep our decisions safe and keep everyone else safe while we make decisions. Perhaps khoral anonymity, moreover, as the condition of undecidability, is "what makes decisions responsible."[43] For Caputo "the crucial thing" is that we remain faithful to *the* limit. For that reason, the most devout adherents of minimalism will confess, without limit, the truth that there is no secret truth. Following Derrida's reading of the gift, there is a "structural secrecy," a necessary non-knowing which by definition constitutes the gift. In order to keep the purity of the gift it must not enter into the economy of appropriation and exchange, i.e., of intention or memory. A pure gift remains exterior to the economy of knowledge and as such remains structurally secret: "The phenomenalization of the gift annuls the gift, and thus there is no phenomenality here, no phenomenology, no ontology (the gift is not 'present'—i.e., a present being)."[44] Following this logic, even if there was a Secret Truth, the "crucial thing" is that it not be *given*. As Caputo would insist, the best gift a Secret can give is to remain a secret, for otherwise, "If the Secret were given there would be a terrible fight, a

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[41] Dooley 2003: 16.
[42] Ibid., 8.
[43] Ibid., 16.
[44] See Jacques Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*. Trans. Giacomo Donis. Cambridge Polity Press, 2001: 34.

war to the death, over who would get to have it, administer it, interpret, protect it, speak of its name, rule in and rule out distortions of it."[45] The question of proprietorship, that is, of who holds the title, of who has "*proper*ty" rights, of who has a share in (the goods, the Good, the Gift) the *given*, if kept in question, just might keep us safe—or, at least a little more safe.

Caputo's distinction between *minimalism* and *maximalism* characterizes a configuration of the debate within what Dominique Janicaud has called the "theological turn of phenomenology."[46] According to Janicaud's account, such a turn toward transcendence (and what Caputo here is calling "maximalism") characterizes a turn away from phenomenology's intended object, viz., immanent phenomenality.[47] For, "The opening to the invisible, to *the* other, to pure givenness, or to an archi-revelation," is not strictly speaking within the methodological boundaries of mere phenomenology.[48] Janicaud carefully calls our attention to this methodological transgression which claims "to unfurl a givenness the more originary as it is radical" (Marion) while remaining phenomenological.[49] This reclaiming of phenomenological territory by Janicaud, as a reinforcing of the boundaries and limitations of a rigorous science, is a reminder to stay

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[45] Dooley 2003: 16.
[46] See Dominique Janicaud, et al. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": the French Debate*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
[47] As Smith points out, there are two senses of "immanence" in Husserl. In the first sense we have that which is immanent to the stream of experience (i.e., the intentional act, or, *noesis*) and correlatively that which is transcendent to the stream of consciousness (i.e., the intended object, or, *noema*). The second sense of "immanence" is that entire field of conscious experience which includes both *noema* and *noesis*. Transcendence, understood in view of this second sense of immanence is that which stands outside immanent phenomenality, e.g., God is not the object of Husserl's phenomenology. See James K.A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002: 63.
[48] Janicaud 2000: 17.

faithful to *the* limit, i.e., to take things "only insofar as they are given."[50] Following Janicaud's argument, orthodox phenomenology ought not to be concerned with the *excesses* of intuition over intention. As Caputo notes:

> Phenomenology itself seems to function no more easily in the absolute white light, the white ecstasy, of infinity than in the shadowy blackness of anonymity. Phenomenology is neither *blanche* nor *noire*, neither white hot nor burnt out black, but a phenomenology of color that depends upon the shadings and differentiations that help define determinate things and objects... [One] wonders how well it can function when pressed to the limits of experience, to either limit; that of infinite surges or flows, on the one hand, or that of the still, barely detectable rumblings of anonymity.[51]

By following Janicaud's lead Caputo stresses the need to remember where we stand as finite persons with limited access to the transcendent. To a certain extent I agree with Caputo's reminder. The minimalist approach to the transcendent is a way of remaining faithful to phenomenological principles and preserving the legitimacy of religious faith. That is to say, Caputo maintains a certain phenomenological posture which keeps knowledge in its place, i.e., *within* the boundaries of immanence. To go beyond the borders of the immanent is to exit the horizon of the *given* and to enter into the desert of non-knowledge. This place of non-knowing is not to be attributed to a methodological suspension of belief, but rather is a necessary condition for any belief whatsoever. For it characterizes the limit conditions of an immanent standpoint. But my suspicion is that by overemphasizing the conditions of immanence, Caputo's minimalist posture limits the possibility of encountering something new and unexpected, and thus tends to neutralize possibility altogether. We might get at this dynamic in terms of what Derrida calls "the alliance, holy or not, of the calculable and the incalculable" (AR, 90).

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[49] Ibid., 32.
[50] Dooley 2003: 2.

## §6. A Violent Concept: on the *dis*respect of calculation

For Derrida, though the *whatness* of things is always a secret beyond full comprehension, *how* we encounter persons, places and things is central to deconstruction. For the *howness* of things is the experience, "the encounter" of the calculable and the incalculable, revelation and revealability, word and flesh. In good Aristotelian fashion Derrida starts with the logos, the "sayings" and "customs," as the way in which temporal economy is encountered.[52] Which isn't to suggest that the mystery of the flesh is reducible to what we say about it, but rather, the flesh is always complicated by the word and vice versa, i.e., co-implicating and co-determining. Where Heidegger was concerned with finding an adequate methodological path (via "formal indication") for approaching the mystery of Being, Derrida would suggest that every conception is already a determination and a calculation, and thus necessarily (though "pre-ethically") violent, rather than sympathetic to the mystery of Being.[53] While I would want to keep Derrida's distinction between the calculable and the incalculable, I would argue that his construal of a theoretical concept is too thin and thus too simplistic. We might get at this

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[51] Ibid., 6.

[52] See Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995: 247-248. For Aristotle, the logos is not Being, but stems from its own movement of sayings and customs, and yet in Aristotle's investigations of the "sentence," "The logos thus proves to be a more original being than just-being. Its multiplicity points the way to the multiplicity of equiprimordial whences which prove to be irreducible to simplicity."

[53] In "Violence and Metaphysics" Derrida does account for a way of respecting alterity in terms of analogical appresentation in Husserl. As Jamie Smith notes, "The other is not given, presented, to the ego immediately, but rather obliquely indicated; it is not presented, but *ap*presented, even though in person." See Smith 2002: 49. Here Smith is interested in pointing out how Derrida, in his critique of Levinas, reads Husserl as preserving the separation between other others by insisting on the "non-phenomenality" of the other with regard to the "irreducibly mediate" quality of appearance.

oversimplification of the concept by following the implications of the argument that calculation, as structurally necessary, is *necessarily* violent.

As I understand it, calculation characterizes *the* how of the *logos*, i.e., *how* the *logos* always already contaminates the purity of an originary experience, e.g., the *arche*, *the* other, God, etc. And yet, simultaneously and paradoxically, language is that which reveals *the* other, for it is the carrier, the messenger, the "receptacle" of *the* other *as* other. This analogical representation of the other, following Husserl, respects the alterity of *the* other with regard to the mediated quality of the encounter. For my encounter with others is never immediate, that is, my encounter is never unmediated as a kind of *full* presentation of the other *as such*. In this sense there is a kind of "originary non-phenomenality" that conditions my encountering of the other. In short, language is *how* I encounter others *as* other-than-my-own-ego. In this way the other "lends itself to language," but in so doing gives itself over to violence, or at least makes itself to be an accomplice, "to acquiesce," to violence (WD, 125). This "original" and "pre-ethical" violence that Derrida notes in "Violence and Metaphysics"[54] characterizes the failure of the *logos* to fully deliver what it says, and the necessary betrayal (which is also the product) of every concept. Accordingly, the effects of calculation are "synthetic" promises or "virtual" claims which always fall short of the mark, and thus hollow out the weight of our words. Who would dare to put their confidence in a person that never holds to their word? And who would risk trusting a person that never makes good on their promises? And yet, our word is all we have to give. One can only bear witness to what they believe to be true, and give testimony to the matters at hand. As Derrida notes:

> The act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge ("I swear that I am telling the truth, not necessarily the 'objective truth', but the truth of what I believe to be the truth, I am telling you this truth, believe me, believe what I believe, there, where you will never be able to see or know the irreplaceable yet universalizable, exemplary place from which I speak to you; perhaps my testimony is false, but I am sincere and in good faith, it is not false <as> testimony). (AR, 98)

In other words, any and every calculation, even "concerning the most plausible, ordinary or everyday thing," is nothing more (and nothing less) than a testimony, as a "bearing witness" to. As Derrida suggests, "It amounts to saying: 'Believe what I say as one believes in a miracle'" (AR, 98). By definition, the incalculable, the miraculous, evades the hold and breaks the mold of all calculation; in effect hollowing out the receptacle of the *logos*. This hollow caricature of the *logos* is likened to the artificiality of a loose talker, whose words have lost their import to those near to him, and yet such is the condition of every testimony, every claim, every calculation, and thus the reason for faith (at the limits of knowledge).

But couldn't we argue that such a characterization of concepts in effect theoretically neutralizes the possibility of language? Isn't it fair to suggest that our words, in good or bad faith, mean more? Don't our words, in good or bad faith, carry more weight? Is the *logos* merely a *virtual* reiteration of an originary impossibility? And wouldn't the artificiality of the *logos*, as Derrida construes it, suggest that the structural violence of the calculation, when it comes down to it, is merely an artificial or synthetic violence, an abstract violence (or, perhaps, an abstraction of *real* violence)?[55] For, in terms of such a construal of concepts, the calculation, though absolutely necessary, is always already an

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[54] Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

impossibility. This impossibility is a relational aporia; insinuating not only the impossibility of accounting for justice, a real gift, but also the impossibility of accounting for real violence. The impossible calculation suspends the possible, in effect thinning out the significance of *real* experiences and neutralizing the risk of possibility.[56] Therefore, it seems fair to ask whether or not khoral space (i.e., the differential space of conception), as Derrida construes it, can account for the weightiness of our concepts, the possibility of concepts, or the real violence of concepts. And if the structural violence of calculation is merely an abstract violence, leaving a trail of synthetic scars and artificial tears, wouldn't we need to think otherwise the relational link between persons, places and things? Wouldn't we need to think otherwise the possibility of theoretical concepts? And wouldn't we need to think otherwise the conception of *space* and the *place* of conception? In asking such questions perhaps we find ourselves circling back to the beginning of Derrida's essay on the *place* of religious faith, where he begins by questioning the possibility and promise of radical abstraction. There he states, "Should one save oneself by abstraction or save oneself from abstraction?" (AR, 42) Such a question announces a khoral confession, and the promise that may possibly come from a radical desertification and hollowing out of the *logos*. But we might legitimately ask: What are we really risking by taking a chance on the most barren and the most abstract of all abstractions? What is so significant and carries such weight that would thereby

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[55] "Is it meaningful to speak of a preethical violence?" See Derrida 1978: 125.

[56] See James K.A. Smith, "A Principle of Incarnation if Derrida's (Theologische?) Jugendschriften." *Modern Theology* 18.2 (2002): 226. Smith asks: "Could we not conceive 'manifestation' in different terms, meaning by it not *full* presence, but *real* presence? And would not such a notion of real presence *retain the 'remainder'* and thus transcendence? Could we not thus evaluate 'manifestation' (Kundgabe) more positively?"

suggest we would be risking anything at all? As Derrida's question already seems to imply: Are we not risking the significance of *the real* to a hollow abstraction? Are we not thinning out the weightiness of *real* experiences, of love, friendship, civility, infidelity or hatred, to a kind of insubstantial *virtuality*?[57] Put another way, it seems fair to suggest that Derrida's question expresses the importance of what is on the line in taking such a risk, namely, the mystery of *whatness* itself. Though we might concede with Derrida that this mysterious *whatness* is beyond calculation, we want to resist a construal of the *howness*-of-relation that would hollow out the content of this interrelational link.

In this sense we are a taking distance from a full blown critique of deconstruction. For the question of *whatness* (What is it?) is the question of the limit and the mysterious, where the word becomes flesh and the flesh becomes word, and where originarity is always already undecidable. Following this logic, the word of revelation *may* breathe life into flesh, or it *may* be the betrayal and oversimplification of the flesh. The flesh *may* affirm the word, or it *may* resist and reject the calculating word. Though a conceptual grasp of the incalculable, i.e., full explication of *the real*, is always an impossibility, should we conclude that theoretical disclosure is always already impossible? While we may agree with Derrida that a theoretical concept will necessarily fall short of *fully* disclosing the singularity of the mysterious *whatness*, should this limitation necessitate the impossibility of *real* or even *true* disclosure? As Derrida would insist, the experience of the impossible is not simply to be understood as a *non*-experience. As he states:

> What I am interested in—and I often repeat that the deconstruction I try to practice is impossible, is *the* impossible—is precisely this experience of *the*

[57] Caputo would contest such a claim by insisting that Derrida's respect for alterity is a hyper-respect for reality. See John D. Caputo, "For the Love of the Things Themselves: Derrida's Hyper-Realism." *Social Semiotics* 11.1 (2001).

> impossible. This is not simply an impossible experience. The experience of *the* impossible. What happens in the experience of *the* impossible, which would not be simply a non-experience. That is what I try to do.[58]

The question of *the* possible finds impetus in terms of the conditions for possibility. The problematic of *the* impossible, therefore, is not to be understood merely as a "negative concept," but as "the experience of the desire for *the* impossible. That is, *the* impossible as the condition of desire."[59] For even though it is impossible to give and receive a gift outside of the economy of "reappropriation and self-destruction," i.e., of calculation, we still desire to give a *pure* gift, dream the dream of *pure* hospitality, and of a justice to-come.[60] Or phrased in terms of intersubjectivity, although I can only experience the other *as* other, i.e., via the *in*-adequate analogical mediation of language, we still (ought to?) desire to know the other as radically singular, on its own terms, and in its own right. So while language is that which respects the alterity of the other *as* other (i.e., *as* "transcendent," by definition, to my sphere of constitution), it is only in terms of my immanent sphere of constitution (my conscious production) that the other can appear, and does so analogically *as* other. Consequently, for Derrida there is a necessary *dis*respect that is prior to ethics and thus more originary than *absolute* alterity. This originary *dis*respect characterizes the impossible conditions for the possibility of encountering the other *as such*, i.e., radical singularity, a pure gift, pure hospitality, etc. Accordingly, the experience of this impossibility motivates the desire for (as the condition for the possibility of) ethics, for giving purely, etc. The experience of *the* impossible, therefore,

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[58] Caputo 1999: 72.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

is the experience of a fundamental lack of disclosure, and as such opens up (by hollowing out) an impossible space for possibility.

We conclude this section by noting that Derrida's description of a concept, as a necessary *dis*respect for the incalculable, is analogous to his construal of *khora*. For the khoral receptacle, like a *dis*respectful or *ir*reverent concept, characterizes the careless conditions of possibility. This originary non-phenomenality (or non-relationality) conditions the possibility of our encounter with others and constitutes for Derrida a kind of structural lack of relation (which isn't simply a non-relation, but following the logic of the "sans," a relation *without* relation).[61] But we might ask: Wouldn't such a rendering of *khora as* structural lack be too thin? It seems consistent to argue that such a construal of *khora*, as hollow *necessity* rather than pregnant *possibility*, might even move beyond the conditions of undecideability. In other words, it seems more consistent with the notion of the undecideable to do away with a construal of *khora* as *Ur*-necessity and toward one of originary possibility, where our conceptions of the incalculable have *real* bearing on our lives, for good or for ill. By making such claims I am not downplaying the limitations of conceptual knowledge, but thinking the limitations otherwise. In short, it seems more characteristic of our phenomenal experience to render khoral space as primed with possibility, ability, capacity and power, i.e., to have a *thicker* notion of khoral space.

In this final chapter I want to evaluate Derrida's logic of *the* impossible within the contextual framework of his reading of "possibility" in Heidegger. In this way, I hope to

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[61] As Caputo notes: "This is the logic of a 'quasi-negative predication' in which whatever is said must subject itself to the discipline of the *sans*, must stand up under, must survive a self-effacing, auto-deconstructing *sans*." See Caputo 1997: 62. The logic of the *sans*, "'X sans X', is not a simple negation, nullification, or destruction, but a certain

consider the implications of the Heideggerian notions of "death" and "futurity" on Derrida's understanding of the miraculous and the experience of the newness of life. In this context, I want to evaluate Hannah Arendt's notion of "natality" in juxtaposition to Heideggerian "mortality," and how "birth" functions as a root metaphor for the abundant character and the wellspring of agency. Maybe the miracle of birth can function as a way to think the "arrivant" and the order of the "gift" within the temporal economy of calculation and exchange. Maybe the miraculous is possible.

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reinscription of X, a certain reversal of the movement of X that still communicates with X." See Caputo 1997: 100.

## *III. The Miracle of Natality*

In this final chapter we want to think the experience of *the* limit otherwise than what appears to be a logic of lack in Derrida's rendering of khoral (or conceptual) space. While *the* impossible indicates that which necessarily evades comprehension, as it withdraws from phenomenal evidence, this is not to be understood simply as a non-experience. But rather, according to Derrida, *the impossible is the experience of the limit*, to the limit, and such a limitation characterizes a lack of phenomenal disclosure (understood in terms of phenomenology as a lack of "*full* presence"). This lack of full disclosure conditions the motive for faith and confession, and thus sounds the "ankhoral" affirmation: *I do not know, I must believe!*

While I would want to affirm epistemic limit conditions (such as the irreducibly mediate experience of the other), I would argue that just as a our theoretical concepts ought not necessarily be qualified as inherently violent (with regard to the structural, thus, "pre-ethical" failure of concepts to deliver the *absolute* other) so khoral economy ought not necessarily be qualified as a structurally careless mechanism, where "possibility" is understood as mere chance "event" or aleatory effect.[62] With regard to the possibility of giving a gift Derrida notes: "For there to be a gift event (we say event and not act), something must come about or happen, in an instant, in an instant that no doubt does not belong to the economy of time, in time without time [...]."[63] Construing temporal economy as the mechanistic outbidding between other others, where the gift and

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[62] "For *khora* in its impassivity would seem to leave the affirmative character of deconstruction in its passion for the impossible of justice spinning in the winds of chance—the only connection to *khora* being one of aleatory effect." See James H. Olthuis, *Religion With/out Religion: The Prayers and Tears of John D. Caputo*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002: 114.

justice are "spinning in the winds of chance," would seemingly close down the possibility to enact (by word or deed) justice, peace and mercy.[64] In other words, rendering *khora* as a hollow necessity wouldn't seem to leave room for incarnations of love,[65] the capacity to cultivate, or for that matter, even the capacity to control. In short, such a caricature of *khora* would neutralize what might be called "productive negativity."[66] By the concept of "productive negativity" we mean to elucidate a logic of *excess*, whereby the space in-between other others is a space of possibility, empowerment, and enactment, where (the so-called impossible) incarnation is made possible.[67] While it is only within the

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[63] Derrida 1995: 17.

[64] And yet, following the "double injunction" of *the* impossible: "*Know* still what giving *wants to say*, *know how to give*, know what you want and want to say when you give, know what you intend to give, know how the gift annuls itself, commit yourself even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance." See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994: 30.

[65] While Derrida renders "love" as that "infinite renunciation which somehow surrenders to the impossible," that is, "without memory," and thus without any intention or decision to love, such a "love" as absolute surrender would seem to have sadomasochistic tendencies. Is true love an infinite self-renunciation or an infinite self-abandoning love? And how might we think of the commandment "love your neighbor as yourself" within such a structure? Is the Creator's love, as infinite and all encompassing, rightly understood as a kind of regulative ideal for loving my neighbor? Or is there a difference between the Creator's love and creaturely love? How should we understand this difference? Is this "structural disproportion," as Derrida calls it, rightly understood as "guilt"? See Derrida 1995: 74. See also Derrida 1996: 51.

[66] We borrow this formulation from Julia Kristeva. See Kristeva 1984: 142. While Kristeva is interested in locating that which exceeds language as a way of accounting for breaks and ruptures of meaning, we are trying to think of *how* the impossible is made possible, i.e., *how* the impossible (a gift, love, a promise) is enacted within temporal economy. This wouldn't necessitate an absolute conceptual break, if that is in fact what Kristeva is suggesting, but rather, would still depend upon the phenomenological limits of calculation to be respected as incalculable.

[67] While theoretically it may not be necessary to "clear (phenomenological) space" for transcendence (Marion), as that which exceeds our horizons of intentionality, I would want to argue that a logic of *the* impossible tames the wild spaces between us by construing economy as a structural lack of *real* presence. It would seem that there needs

boundaries of the immanent that the transcendent can manifest itself, to concede that temporal economy by definition annuls such manifestation is to theoretically close down *the* possibility of the transcendent. By "productive negativity" we are not implying a hyper-givenness (*à la* Marion), where transcendence exceeds the conditions of immanence by giving itself utterly. The logic of productive negativity, as a logic of excess, is a way of affirming the *real* manifestation (by word and deed) of the incalculable, where the incalculable, though always-already within the limitations of an immanent standpoint, is indeed possible. In order to reclaim a space for "possibility," and to substantiate what we are here calling "productive negativity," we want to mark another phenomenological reference point. It is in regard to Heidegger's analysis of "possibility" (*die Möglichkeit*) that a more precise understanding of *the* impossible comes to the fore.

## §7. The "Death" of Possibility in Heidegger

In this section I want to map out how Heidegger's existential analysis of "death," formalized as Dasein's "ownmost-possibility," qualifies Derrida's theoretical development of *the* impossible.[68]

> Let us ask: what takes place, what comes to pass with the aporia? Is it possible to undergo or to experience the aporia, the aporia as such? (A, 32)

Such questions concerning *the* impossible are motivated by a "certain thinking" of *the* possible that Derrida finds within the pages of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. As Derrida

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to be a move toward excess in order to render a principle of incarnation. Compare Smith 2002: 166.

[68] In so doing we are taking seriously Habermas's view that Derrida follows the path of Heidegger's "*Ursprungsphilosophie*." See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998: 167, 179.

notes in *Aporias*,[69] the concept of *die Möglichkeit* carries two meanings for Heidegger. On the one hand it gives "the sense of the virtuality or of the imminence of the future," or what we expect to happen or take place in the future to come. While on the other hand, it gives "the sense of ability, of the possible as that of which I am capable, that for which I have the power, the ability, or the potentiality" (A, 62). Derrida rehearses Heidegger's characterization of Dasein as that entity whose essence is not to be understood as some substantial something that we can get our hands on (*als Vorhandenes*), but rather, "the essence of Dasein as entity is precisely the possibility, the being-possible (*das Möglichsein*)" (A, 63). For, as Heidegger asserts in *Being and Time*: "Higher than actuality stands possibility."[70] According to this "ontological law" Heidegger's existential analysis of death should be governed in terms of the "being-possible" of Dasein, but as Derrida's reading suggests, "death is possibility *par excellence*. Death exemplarily guides the existential analysis" (A, 63). At this point Derrida isolates two sets of statements regarding possibility, which, as he suggests, "supplement and engender each other, like two moments of a single aporetic sentence." As Derrida notes, the first set of statements characterize death as Dasein's most *proper* possibility. That is, in regard to death, Dasein awaits itself in its "ownmost potentiality-for-being." Or in other words, "I await myself, and nothing else; I myself await myself in myself; and this is the most identifiable and most identifying self-relation, i.e., the ego's memory or promise to itself" (A, 64). In order to achieve authenticity I must come face to face with the possibility of my *own*

[69] Derrida, Jacques. *Aporias*. Trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993.
[70] Heidegger 1962: 63.

demise, my *own* nothing, for, as Heidegger states: "Only in dying can I to some extent say absolutely, 'I am'!"[71]

> With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being... If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been fully assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one.[72]

Coming face to face with my nothing is, according to Heidegger, a moment of resolution and concentration that pulls me from the distraction of curiosity and the everyday chatter of *das Man*.[73] As Heidegger states: "The 'they' gives its approval, and aggravates the *temptation* to cover up from oneself one's ownmost Being-towards-death."[74] The explanations of death and dying that *the* public provides only conceal the authentic fate of Dasein and characterize for Heidegger the "constant fleeing in the face of death" of "falling.[75] This fleeing, as a falling from authenticity toward inauthenticity, is countered by Dasein's ability to bend toward itself, i.e., "Dasein stretches, bends toward its most proper being-able, offers to itself its most proper being-able [...]" (A, 66). What is crucial in Derrida's reading of Heidegger is the expression "most proper" (*eigensten*), for it highlights an aporetic supplement within Heidegger's claim. Namely, "Insofar as it is its most proper possibility, and precisely as such, death is also for Dasein, Heidegger ultimately says, the possibility of an impossibility" (A, 68). Quoting Heidegger:

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[71] Kisiel 1995: 387.
[72] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962: 294.
[73] As Kisiel notes: "Forerunning resoluteness accordingly becomes the ontico-ontological prefiguration for tracing out the structure of the original temporality of Dasein in BT, or, more simply put, of tracing out my lifetime owned and whole as I live it 'from the inside out.' A time issuing from the situation of existence itself, and not one imposed on it from without..." See Kisiel 1995: 436.
[74] Heidegger 1962: 297

> As a potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.[76]

This "nuclear proposition," according to Derrida, sets off an aporetic explosion within the unity of Heidegger's analysis. For if the issue of Dasein is "to be what it is, there where it is, there, being-there," then death (as being-there's most proper possibility) is Dasein's not-being-there. As Derrida notes:

> If death, the most proper possibility of Dasein, is the possibility of its impossibility, death becomes the most improper possibility and the most ex-propriating, the most inauthenticating one. From the most originary inside of its possibility, the proper of Dasein becomes from then on contaminated, parasited, and divided by the most improper. (A, 77)

In other words, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence becomes "threatened" as soon as Heidegger makes the claim that the most proper possibility of Dasein is ultimately its impossibility (A, 77). In short, "the most proper" in affect becomes "the least proper." But in what sense would Dasein experience this impossibility? What takes place, what comes to pass with the impossible? Is it possible to undergo or to experience the impossible, the impossible as such? How, asks Derrida, would the most proper possibility of Dasein, as impossibility, still appear as such without disappearing? Perhaps "death" is nothing other than the end, i.e., the "ruin" of the entire existential analytic, where the end of Dasein is "not the dying-properly but, and it is quite different, the end of the properly-dying" (A, 74). This aporia, according to Derrida, "threatens and makes possible" Heidegger's analysis of *the* limit, understood as a "determined closure" marking the boundary of what is proper to Dasein, i.e., the truth of Dasein. In other words, "The ultimate aporia is the impossibility of aporia *as such*" (A,

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[75] Ibid., 298.
[76] Ibid., 294.

78), for Dasein does not simply endure the possibility of its end, i.e., the possibility of its determined closure, but must also await the possibility of being "ultimately indeterminable, in other words without end" (A, 78).

> Death, as the possibility of the impossible as such, is a figure of the aporia in which "death" and death can replace—and this is a metonymy that carries the name beyond the name and beyond the name of the name—all that is only possible as impossible, if there is such a thing: love, the gift, the other, testimony, and so forth. (A, 79)

"Death" is the *name* of a secret. It sounds and signs the common name of the *proper* name, i.e., the secret name of an absolute singularity. This "hidden religion of awaiting" (understood as a structural secret), marks for Derrida *the* limits of experience and the logic of *the* impossible. In this way the problematic of "death" acts as a root metaphor in Derrida's theoretical development of *the* impossible, and thereby functions as a kind of ordering device for Derrida's rendering of *how* we experience that which lies beyond our conceptual grasp.

### §8. The "Birthing" of Possibility in Arendt

At this juncture I want to mark my final phenomenological reference point by looking to Hannah Arendt, whose notion of action offers a way to conceive the limits of conceptual knowledge otherwise than structural lack. Arendt's project proves helpful to this exercise on two fronts: (1) her interests in thinking through the implications of Heidegger's existential analysis of "death," and (2) her understanding of "agency" with regard to her configuration of the "*vita activa*."

Arendt's critique of Heidegger parallels what has been considered by some to be an exhausted topic in contemporary postmodern discourse, namely, "the philosophy of

subjectivity."[77] In other words her reading of Heidegger marks a deliberate move away from the kind of discourse on subjectivity that is haunted by the phantom of an absolute Self.[78] As Arendt notes in an essay entitled "Existenz Philosophy,"

> The most essential characteristic of this Self [for Heidegger] is its absolute egoism, its radical separation from all its fellows. The anticipation of death as existential was introduced to achieve this; for in death Man realizes the absolute *principium individuationis*. Death alone tears him from the context of his fellows, within which he becomes a public person and is hindered from being a Self.[79]

Such an atomistic rendering of identity leaves the Self "essentially discordant" with itself and with others, where ultimately such a narrow conception of self identity, according to Arendt, "can only serve to organize the Selves engaged in willing themselves into an Over-self, in order to make a transition from the fundamental guilt, grasped through resoluteness, to action."[80] One might hear echoes of Heidegger's political past in such a statement, and a firm resistance to any semblance of an egocentric withdrawal from the greater communitarian link. Quoting Arendt at length:

> Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others. One's fellow men are not [as in Heidegger] an element which, though structurally necessary, nevertheless destroys Existenz; but, on the contrary, Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common given world. In the concept of communication there lies embedded, though not fully developed, a new concept of humanity as the condition for man's Existenz. In any case, men move together within this 'surrounding' Being; and they hunt neither the phantom of the Self nor do they live in the arrogant illusion that they can be Being generally.[81]

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[77] See Gary B. Madison, ed., *Working Through Derrida*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993: 224.
[78] See Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, eds. *The Phenomenology Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002: 360.
[79] Ibid., 357. [my addition]
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 360. [my addition]

Taking Arendt's conception of "Existenz" as our cue, would it be fair to suggest that Derrida, compelled by a Heideggerian resolve to locate the being-there of the Self, is haunted by the phantom of an *absolute* egoism? Perhaps the Derridian strategy, in order to maintain a kind of humanitarian accountability, insists upon the aporetic conditions of possibility in order to subdue the sort of resoluteness that Heidegger was advocating. In other words, perhaps the impossibility of determining what is proper to the Self can quell the willpower of the Self, for "let us not forget that the analysis of *Being and Time* is also the great discourse on *Entschlossenheit*" [determination, resoluteness] (A, 74). If this is the case, wouldn't Heidegger's obsession with radical singularity function as a kind of *pharmakon* within Derrida's logic of *the* impossible, where such an egotistic resolve is simultaneously a poison and a cure, a source of fear and a source of hope? Although Heidegger's analysis of "death" attempts to establish a way of thinking proper to the self (which would also be a way of respecting the radical singularity of each and every self), the possibility of Dasein's comporting toward its proper end is ultimately something that Derrida is resistant to. As Habermas suggests, "Derrida stands closer to the anarchist wish to explode the continuum of history than to the authoritarian admonition to bend before destiny."[82] Perhaps Derrida's analysis of "aporia" within the context of *Being and Time* is just such an occasion to maintain a necessary resistance movement—maintained as it were in juxtaposition to a Heideggerian resolve toward authentic destiny.[83] But again, heeding Habermas, while "Derrida means to go beyond Heidegger," perhaps "he

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[82] Habermas 1998: 182.

[83] As Beardsworth notes: "National Socialism constitutes the possibility of collective 'authentic' temporalization, set in Promethean resistance to the disjointure of vulgar time: it is *das Volk* which gathers itself out of *das Man*." See Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996: 109.

goes back behind him."[84] In other words, by insisting on the ultimate displacement of that which is proper to Dasein, and by insisting that the "ultimate aporia" is finally the impossibility of experiencing the aporia *as such* (the impossibility of bending toward the proper end), Derrida's passion for the impossible is rightly understood as a kind of resistance movement affirming the aporetic explosion of *the* proper, e.g., truth, meaning, authenticity, destiny, etc. Where "properly-dying" was for Heidegger a call to determination, resolve, and the decision to take ownership (to own up to one's *own* demise), "the end of dying-properly" is the movement of resistance and undecidability, where that which is proper and thus "absolutely certain" is "absolutely indeterminate." In the end, for Derrida, resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) is brought to ruin by resistance, and so it is upon this aporetic foundation that the logic of the impossible stands. In this way we might charitably read Derrida's aporetic logic as a strategic attempt to avoid any semblance to a will to power. But in taking up such a strategy one wonders if Derrida has inadvertently thrown the baby out with the bathwater. That is, by insisting on a fundamental lack of full disclosure (in terms of an aporetic logic) has Derrida not theoretically abstracted the possibility of a real encounter with "the impossible" (e.g., love, the gift, the miraculous, the other, etc.)? In contrast to Heidegger's conception of mortality, the expectation of which prompts the resolve toward authenticity, Arendt envisions another motivating factor, viz., "natality."

While the limit situation of mortality is for Heidegger that which compels Dasein to own up to the brute fact of its own existence, thus demanding attention, action and thought, Arendt formulates her theory of action by drawing from a different source. In

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[84] Habermas 1998: 183.

Arendt's configuration of the "*vita activa*" in *The Human Condition*,[85] *word* and *deed* are those activities which disclose human personality, and are distinct from the mere necessity of *labor* and the utility of *work*. For "a life without speech and without action [...] is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be human life because it is no longer lived among men" (HC, 176). In short, it is by word and deed that we insert ourselves into the human world, understood as a kind of "second birth," thus confirming the "naked fact of our original physical appearance" (HC, 176). According to Arendt, a person's insertion into the world and participation among others is neither prompted by necessity, nor by utility, but rather, "its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative" (HC, 177). Thus action is not rightly understood to be a "forerunning resoluteness" toward one's own demise, but rather, "because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action" (HC, 177). An often quoted line by Arendt taken from Augustine's *The City of God* states, "that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody" (HC, 177). Arendt footnotes the Augustinian distinction between "the beginning which is man" (*initium*) and "the beginning of the world" (*principium*) in order to clarify her conception of "beginning" as the beginning of somebody, some unique person, and "not the beginning of something" (HC, 177). According to Arendt, "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting" (HC, 9). The fact of natality, the fact that each birthing is the beginning of a unique individual, characterizes the possibility of

[85] See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago and London: The University of

something new and unexpected coming into the world. As Young-Bruehl notes, "Hannah Arendt's concern for natality, which is equal to, and often greater than, her concern for mortality, emerged in her study of St. Augustine."[86]

In her dissertation entitled *Love and Saint Augustine*,[87] Arendt attempted to come to terms with what appeared to be a conceptual impasse in Augustine's notion of rightly ordered love (*caritas*). According to Arendt, the notion of love as desire (*appetitus*) is problematic for Augustine when considered within the context of the love command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." For Augustine, "the right love consists in the right object." Accordingly, "wrong mundane love" (*cupiditas*) desires to bind itself to things of the world, while "right love" (*caritas*) "seeks eternity and the absolute future" (LSA, 17). Both kinds of loves (*cupiditas* and *caritas*), while distinguished by their objects, have in common the desire (*appetitus*) to hold or possess their objects. As Arendt notes, according to Augustine "a thing is sought for its own sake if its possession puts desire to rest" (LSA, 32). Therefore the perishable things of this world and of this age are not to be loved for their own sake, but rather they are merely a means "for the sake of" the end. That is to say, rightly ordered love craves after the enjoyment of the everlasting, the Eternal. As Young-Bruehl notes, "For Augustine, Hannah Arendt claimed, Temporality and Being are opposites: Temporality must be overcome for man to Be. This tension was fundamental to Augustine's thought—and to Heidegger's."[88] Thus love rendered as desire or craving (fixed in the scheme of "use" and "enjoyment") when placed within the

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Chicago Press, 1958. Hereafter cited as "HC."

[86] See Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982: 495.

[87] See Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996. Hereafter cited as "LSA."

context of neighborly love, rightly breaks the bond of affection with the persons and things of God's creation, "for the sake of" the highest good, *Deo frui*. In this way, the extra-temporality of the "absolute future" (i.e., the "highest good") establishes a hierarchical order of love, directing and distinguishing between what is above us, what is below us and what is beside us. While what is above and below us properly fits into the use/enjoyment scheme, that which is beside us, self and neighbor, is neither to be used nor enjoyed (LSA, 40). In this way, love as desire ultimately renders neighborly love as a "secondary consideration," and thereby "results in a degradation of love, which contradicts the central place love occupies in Augustine's thought" (LSA, 43).

We might say that the first part of Arendt's dissertation poses this question: What is the "true relevance" of loving my neighbor if neighborly love is just a means toward the absolute future? Is such a conception adequate for the temporal order of the here and now? In order to account for neighborly love, as the command to love those who are "beside" us, a different conception of love is necessary. For our interests here it is important to note the similarity between an Augustinian notion of love as desire (as ordered and compelled by the absolute future), and a Heideggerian notion of authenticity and the expectation of being towards death. Both motifs, according to Arendt, rest upon an inadequate understanding of temporal *relations*, and therefore, in the end both motifs seem to diminish the relevance of a fundamental relationality. The second part of Arendt's dissertation looks to another conception of love in Augustine in order to offer a more adequate rendering of neighborly love, viz., the relation between Creator and creature.

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[88] Young-Bruehl 1982: 492.

According to Augustine, it is in the "camps and vast places of memory" that the creature comes to recognize his or her dependence on that which is prior, viz., the Creator (LSA, 49). In this way the desire for the absolute future is born of the "ultimate past," and can be reached via memory. Accordingly, "the dependence of desire (*appetitus*) upon the general wish to be happy thus implies a deeper more fundamental mode of human dependence than desire can ever detect when it acts in accord with its own phenomenological meaning" (LSA, 49). In other words, there is a more originary posture prior to desire, "in so far as desire refers back to the self and not only aims at the desired good" (LSA, 49). To recall this deeper mode of human dependence is the same as "confession"—to confess that, as creature, both my relation to the origin and the true meaning of my existence derive from outside of myself (LSA, 49). In this way, a creature's relation to its beginning establishes it as a conscious entity, that is, as one who self-consciously asks "Who am I?" and "From whence do I come?" And yet, as Arendt points out, "Desire also makes man dependant. He depends upon the desired object" (LSA, 51). Nevertheless this desire is ultimately motivated by the "inadequacy of life and is always determined by the future, from which he expects 'good' or 'evil' in hope or fear" (LSA, 51). In contrast to this notion of desire based love is the conception of love born from the question "Who made me?"

> To put it differently, the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or "natality," that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth. The decisive fact determining as desiring being was death or mortality, the fact that we shall leave the world in death. Fear of death and inadequacy of life are the springs of desire. In contrast, gratitude for life having been given at all is the spring of remembrance [...]. (LSA, 51-52)

Vis-à-vis this interpretive turn toward the Creator-creature context of love in Augustine (i.e., from "love as desire" to "love as relation") Arendt's distinction between mortality and natality comes to the fore.[89] The contrast between desire and relation parallels the contrast between death and birth, and therefore functions as the conceptual backdrop for Arendt's theory of action.[90]

But it is the way in which Arendt characterizes natality that has bearing on our interests here. For the newness of birth carries the "character of startling unexpectedness" and "therefore always appears in the guise of a *miracle*" (HC, 178). To have the capacity for action means "that the unexpected can be expected," and that the agent "is able to perform what is infinitely improbable" (HC, 178). In short, agency is coupled with *the* miraculous. It is by virtue of being born that each person is capable of bringing into the world something unique, without which "there is no new thing under sun," and the vicious cycles of necessity would never be undone (HC, 204); the sins of the fathers would leave an irreversible mark and in the end death would have the last word. It is the miracle of birth which opens the possibility to be agents of forgiveness, interrupting the vicious cycle of irreversibility; to be agents of promise, entering into covenant agreements in the face of unpredictability; and to be agents of narrative, naming the

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[89] As Young-Bruehl notes: "The contrast between natality and mortality emerged in Arendt's dissertation as she turned from considering love as craving to considering it as a relation to God." See Young-Bruehl 1982: 496.

[90] But even in this turn to the Creator-creature relation Arendt finds a parallel problematic. For, in the encounter with my neighbor I love love *itself*, thereby leaving neighborly love incomprehensible in its true relevance. As Ronald Beiner notes: "For Augustine, we are more 'at home' in the world than we ought to be; for Arendt, we are more estranged from the world than we ought to be. One might say that the entirety of Arendt's philosophical work merely elaborates the question she had posed directly to Augustine: 'Why should we make a desert of this world?'" See Larry May and Jerome

anonymous and giving meaning to the meaningless. In other words, while the "boundlessness of action," i.e., freedom, opens up inherent dangers and the risk of ruin, this "boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships, that is, its specific productivity [...]" (HC, 191).

It might be said that Arendt's characterization of "boundlessness of action" is equivalent to the notion of "productive negativity" mentioned earlier as a way of formulating a logic of excess. It is this capacity, or possibility, and the risks inherent in such a capacity that we are interested in bringing to the fore. For, it is the inherent risk involved in all modes of agency that Derrida's logic of the impossible seems to hallow out. In order to substantiate this critique, in the following section we will be looking to "the miraculous" in order to formulate a logic of excess.

### §9. The Miraculous "Arrivant"

In this final section we want to weave together the motifs of *khora*, miracle and possibility, by employing Arendt's rendering of birth as the spring of agency. For Derrida the question of *khora* is the question of conception, and *how* to conceive of the concept. Thus *khora* functions as the necessary conditioning of writing: as the law of anachrony, or the law of iterability, the law of originary dialecticity, the "yes, yes," the "One + n." Accordingly, this fundamental necessity, as the law of law, is Derrida's revision of the Husserlian principle of all principles.[91]

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Kohn, eds. *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996: 281.

[91] See John Llewelyn, *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002: 17. "Wherever we find [Derrida] using or mentioning principles we also find him busy demonstrating that what is allegedly a first principle is never really first. This is the revised version of Husserl's 'principle of all principles'. This is the law of all law."

> At the bottom without bottom of this crypt, the One + n incalculably engenders all these supplements. *It makes violence of itself, does violence to itself and keeps itself from the other.* [...] On the bottom without bottom of an always virgin impassibility, *chora* of tomorrow in languages we no longer know or do not yet speak. This place is unique, it is the One without name. It *makes way, perhaps*, but without the slightest generosity, neither divine nor human. (AR, 100)

*Khora* thereby represents Derrida's construal of an unavoidable impasse between the sign and the referent, between the other *as* other (as analogically appresented) and the other *as such* (as fully present). In this way *khora* is the model figure of absolute resistance, and thus prefigures the possibility of experiencing *the* impossible.

But is this caricature of *khora* the only way of conceiving the limits of knowledge? Might there be other notions of *the* limit that render the interconnectedness between other others, faith and knowledge, the calculable and the incalculable, otherwise than necessary lack? Or should we conclude that the limit, at the ends of knowledge, is always already a hollow encounter.

In order to think the limit otherwise than barren and neutral we want to reconsider the site of "impossibility," viz., the "container of the Uncontainable," from which the word becomes flesh and dwells among us. Biblical testimony bears witness to the miraculous conception beyond conception, characterizing the womb as a place of miracle, a place of promise. The Old Testament remembers Sarah laughing at the possibility of bearing and birthing such a promise (Genesis 18), a promise to be fulfilled through a dry and barren womb—a place of impossibility. The New Testament remembers the Virgin and the miraculous birth of the Christ child. In both testimonies the womb is the site of miracle, a place of promise and a place of possibility, where the impossible birth is made possible. But even if birth is remembered as a place of miracle and wonder there are no absolute guarantees. Possibility does not preclude the risks of loss but rather inscribes khoral

beginnings as utterly incalculable, where we encounter the possibility of birthings and abortions, conceptions and miscarriages, receptions and rejections—the risks of relation. In short, to be expecting, to be awaiting a new "arrivant," is to be pregnant with possibility.

In regard to the notion of "expectation" Derrida asks: "What is the event that most arrives? What is the *arrivant* that makes the event arrive?" (A, 33) For Derrida such questions arise within the context of the aporetic, and how to think about the aporia as such. Within this context of thinking about aporia, awaiting the new arrivant, or expecting a birth, shares a certain affinity to the Heideggerian structure of "being-towards-death." As Derrida notes, "Perhaps nothing ever comes to pass except on the line of a transgression, the death of some 'trespassing'" (A, 33). In order to recognize the arrivant as actually arriving, that person must cross a border, i.e., a "threshold separating two identifiable places, the proper and the foreign, the proper of the one and the proper of the other" (A, 34) By their crossing of a boundary dividing two different places we can rightly say that someone has arrived.

But it is the structure of expectation (my awaiting upon the arrival of this arrivant) that Derrida takes issue, for it is a question of *how* to make ready for the coming of the arrivant, i.e., it is a question of hospitality. The border line separating what is properly mine from what is properly someone else's conditions the possibility of hospitality. Without this line of differentiation and separation hospitality, the gift, love, etc, would be impossible, not to mention uneventful. It is *the* limit that marks the possibility of the "event" and the "arrivant," but in the same instant, that limitation marks the impossibility of the arrivant and of hospitality. For to cross the threshold, to trespass the boundary line

separating two different places, is the death of trespassing, i.e., it is the death of the "absolute arrivant" and the impossibility of hospitality.

Following this aporetic logic the question of birth is a reiteration of the question of death. In other words, future expectation directs the possibility of the new arrivant's coming into the world, and as such, the newness of birth would be "the death of some trespassing." Quoting Derrida:

> But if the new arrivant who arrives is new, one must expect—without waiting for him or her, without expecting it—that he does not cross a given threshold. Such an arrivant affects the very experience of the threshold, whose possibility he thus brings to light before one can even know whether there has been an invitation, a call, a nomination, or a promise (A, 33).

Accordingly, this "absolute arrivant" as an absolute surprise is "not someone or something that arrives, a subject, a person, an individual, or a living thing" (A, 34), but rather, this anonymous arrivant exceeds the order of any determinable figuration. Thus, as Derrida suggests, *the* limit "will always keep one from discriminating among the figure of the arrivant, the dead, and revenant (the ghost, he, she, or that which returns)" (A, 35).

The fundamental incalculability and unpredictability which condition the event of a new arrivant exceeds the order of expectation and anticipation, and thus precludes the knowledgeability of the interconnectedness of relationality. In this way, the coming of the new arrivant is likened to "the miraculous," for "a certain interruptive unraveling is the condition of the 'social bond', the very respiration of all 'community'" (AR, 99). This "absolute interruption" of miracle requires testimony and witness ("the ether of belief" and not knowledge) as the means of address, and thus the appeal to faith is the bond of relationality. It is the "absolute break" of "non-relation" which opens up the possibility of

a new arrivant, a new birth, i.e., "the messianic." As Derrida states, "the law of this untimeliness interrupts and makes history, it undoes all contemporaneity and opens the very space of faith" (AR, 99).

Although Derrida will insist that "there is no opposition, fundamentally, between the 'social bond' and 'social unraveling'" (AR, 99), the assertion that the miraculous arrivant qua arrivant necessarily breaks the bond of relationality would preclude the possibility of non-oppositional relationships between others. In order for the miraculous to happen there must be absolute rupture beyond the order of relational bonds, for the new arrivant by definition is the experience of non-relationship. But wouldn't Derrida's assertion of the limit as necessary non-relation go behind the order of the undecidable? Wouldn't a configuration of the miraculous arrivant as absolute break rule out the possibility of a fundamental relationality? And if that is the case, shouldn't the question of what is "at bottom" remain undecidable all-the-way-down, where a construal of the limits of knowledge (*khora*) would remain open to the possibility that "at bottom" we are fundamentally in relation "with" the new arrivant?

### *Conclusion: Cultivating the Space of Moral Agency*

By distinguishing between a logic of *lack* and a logic of *excess* I want to consider the possibility of non-oppositional difference within relational economy, where expecting the miracle of birth to happen is not an empty desire infinitely "to come" (thus infinitely deferred), but the anticipation of fulfilling the expectation and of being with the new arrivant—holding the little miracle in our arms. Thus a logic of excess appeals to the possibility of *the* limit understood as the "beside," the "alongside," or the "with" of relationality, where the miraculous is not only conceived in terms of future expectation,

but in gratitude and thankfulness for the abundant gift of new life and the miracle of birth.[92] In this way, a miracle is not to be understood as being in necessary opposition to relationality, as the absolute break of non-relation, but rather, the miracle of birth characterizes the new arrivant's fundamental connection *with* others, and the capacity to come *alongside* others. In contrast to this relational notion of spatial differentiation, the logic of the "sans" (as the non-relational "without" which conditions identity and difference) maintains a "receptacle" notion of space. As Derrida notes, "*Khora* marks a place apart, the spacing which keeps a dissymmetrical relation to all that which, 'in herself', beside or in addition to herself, seems to make a couple with her" (ON, 124). In short, *khora* is resistant to the order of coupling.[93] While the relational view of khoral space may indeed find its roots in Plato's *Timaeus*,[94] it seems that Derrida's appropriation of *khora* is more akin to a notion of space as "infinite receptacle." A critical distance

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[92] As Olthuis notes, "*With* talks of space-between (identities are maintained) and of connection-in-space (mutuality between the identities). *With* underlines the relational nature of life; it indicates connection between things, being, creature (identities), without fusion and without isolation." See James H. Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. Olthuis 2001: 47.

[93] With regard to this distinction between the *receptacle* notion of space and the *relational* notion of space Thomas F. Torrance writes, "The dominating concept in Greek thought was undoubtedly a *receptacle* or *container* notion of space that went back to the early Pythagoreans and Atomists [...]." See Thomas F. Torrance, *Space Time and Incarnation.* London: Oxford University Press, 1969: 4. According to Torrance, the receptacle/container notion takes on two different forms in the Greek world, "the finite receptacle and the infinite receptacle," and "both had to do primarily with space." Ibid., 56. Quoting Torrance at length: "In Aristotelian and Stoic thought this [view of space as a finite receptacle] inevitably carried with it the idea of a finite universe and a finite god. [...] When, on the other hand, space was thought of as an infinite receptacle, which we find in the teaching of Atomists and Pythagoreans alike, it was regarded as independent of what went on in it, and was often spoken of as 'the great void'. This tended either towards materialism and atheism or to a conception of a detached unknowable deity calling for mystical, non-rational communion." Ibid., 56-57 [my addition].

[94] Ibid., 58.

from Plato's rendering of *khora* is explicitly noted by Derrida himself: "If I am interested in the *khora*, I am trying to reach a structure which is not the *khora* as interpreted by Plato, but by myself against Plato."[95] We might understand this distancing away from Plato as a performative account of *khora*, where Derrida's strategy is to "go back behind and below the assured discourse of philosophy, which proceeds by oppositions of principle and counts on the origin as on a normal couple" (ON, 125/26). The rhythm of this performance ups the ante on the "analytic regression" (i.e., "the backward steps") toward the origin, for Derrida is not attempting to "discredit a discourse which would simply be interior to philosophy" (ON, 126), but to maintain the rhythm of the *Timaeus* by going below philosophical discourse: at the bottom without bottom.

> The bold strokes consist here in going back behind and below the origin, or also the birth, toward a necessity which is neither generative nor engendered and which carries philosophy, "precedes" (prior to the time that passes or the eternal time before history) and "receives" the effect, here the image of oppositions (intelligible and sensible): philosophy. This necessity (khora is its sur-name) seems so virginal that it does not even have the figure of a virgin any longer. (ON, 126)

In other words, properly speaking, "philosophy cannot speak philosophically" about that which necessarily conditions its possibility, for the difficulty in the performance lies in this very distinction of *truth* and *necessity*. Every truth-claim about the origin is predicated upon a preoriginary necessity which evades the ordering of truth. In this way, even distinguishing between lack and excess (as a way of rendering this necessary limit condition) would run up against this preoriginary necessity. And this is where we might push Derrida's construal of *khora* as a relation *without* relation, for the question of what is at bottom, if it is to remain undecidable all-the-way-down, must be open to the possibility of non-oppositional difference. In order to think the order of this possibility

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[95] Caputo 1999: 73.

one must be willing to remain open to the risks of a relational notion of spatial differentiation, where violence is a *possibility* rather than a *necessity*. To construe the limit as primordial lack is to preclude the incalculable possibilities of relationality.

A logic of lack, understood in terms of temporal economy, is an originary disjunction that conditions the unification of past, present and future. While the retrocipations of the past and the anticipations of the future constitute the meaning of the present, the *now* of the present never appears as such.[96] That is to say, the gap between past and future conditions the possibility of the *now*, while simultaneously making the *now* impossible, for, the present *now* is always already a temporal effect of past and future. Accordingly, this lack of full presence prefigures the possibility of being-with others as impossible, if, by the notion of being-with, we mean non-oppositional relationality. In short, for Derrida, it is the "without relation," the "lack of full presence," the "gap" between past and future, the "impossible now," that conditions the possibility of *how* we relate to others.

In contrast to this notion of differential spacing characterized by a logic of lack, a logic of excess indicates a *relational* notion of differentiation, where the space between other others is primed with possibility and risk.[97] By distinguishing between lack and excess we are reiterating both (1) the distinction between a *receptacle/container* notion of space and a *relational* notion of space, and (2) the difference between an experience

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[96] As Beardsworth notes, "this 'now' is the originary 'gap' in the continuity of time that allows for time in the first place, but equally troubles any attempt to 'unify it'." See Beardsworth 1996: 111.

[97] See James H. Olthuis *Knowing Other-wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997: 235-257. Entitled "Crossing the Threshold: Sojourning Together in the Wild Spaces of Love."

predicated upon empty *desire*[98] and the experience of being filled with *gratitude*. In this way, I understand Derrida's notion of khoral spacing, and the logic of the impossible based upon this originary lack, as fundamentally resistant to the possibility of non-oppositional difference. In contrast to this deconstructionist notion, I would argue that the space between other others is more fecund, and only a logic of excess appeals to the possibility of intentional response, without which our words would be empty and deeds mechanistic. We must account for intentional response, for we must give an account of, and are held accountable for, the intentional disregard of others. The capacity for moral agency, springing from the excesses of possibility, does not necessarily epitomize the desire of an absolute egoism (*à la* Heidegger), but rather, such a capacity accounts for the fruitless (though not harmless) laboring of such desire. The capacity for moral agency also accounts for the "singular situations" where turning away from the other, or turning the other away, may be the less violent and more adequate response.[99] In other words, it is the dynamism or "productive negativity" of differential space that keeps such possibilities open to dialogue and negotiation. As Arendt notes:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not departed company, where words are not empty and deeds are not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (HC, 53)

The capacity to cultivate creation by word and deed is a pedagogical, and as such, communal task that requires the willingness to be inclusive, coming alongside others,

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[98] As Derrida notes: "What I am interested in is the experience of the desire for the impossible. That is, the impossible as the condition of desire." See Caputo 1999: 72.
[99] As Fritsch rightly suggests, "political invention must be open to decide against openness: surely, there are singular situations where openness to the other is inadvisable, where reduction of violence is to be expected not from unconditional hospitality but from

walking *with* them.[100] In this way, our sojourneying with others is to be understood as a labor of love, whereby the abundance of creation may be realized in our midst.[101] Realizing this abundance surely requires the risks of relation. This possibility, ability, capacity and power characterize what we mean by a thicker or more fecund notion of khoral space, where, as agents of love and forgiveness, we can *realize* "the potential of

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(further) conditions, demands, and normative expectations placed on the other..." See Matthias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come." *Constellations* 9.4 (2002): 588.

[100] What I am referring to as "capacity" or "possibility" encompasses Arendt's distinction between power and force. As she notes: "Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. The word itself, its Greek equivalent *dynamis*, like the Latin *potentia* with its various modern derivatives or the German *Macht* (which derives from *mögen* and *möglich*, not from *machen*), indicates its 'potential' character. Power is always, as we should say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse." See Arendt 1958: 200. In other words, power becomes an engendering or cultivating capacity that can only happen in relation.

[101] It is important to note why for Arendt the Christian "love of neighbor" (understood as the absolute demand of ethical obligation) is in fundamental opposition to political life. Because the absolute demand of ethics is impossible to fulfill in this life, agency is proved impotent. It is in this framework that Arendt understands Christian love as a "suspension" of the political, where ethics and politics stand utterly opposed. I suspect, however, that Arendt's move to "natality" is more congenial to Christian love than she might suggest. As Breidenthal notes, "Her mistake arises from her assumption that for Augustine, and for the Christian tradition as a whole, Christian charity has no *surplus* to bring to the work of neighboring." See Thomas Breidenthal, "Jesus Is My Neighbor: Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation." *Modern Theology* 14.4 (1998): 499. In short, Arendt regards the ethical call to neighborly love to be predicated upon a fundamental lack, and in this way, it is *impossible*. While Arendt may underestimate the resources of the Christian tradition to authentically engage in political interaction, I would want to suggest that her account of "natality" (as the condition for political action) repeats the Christian testimony of abundance and surplus. "It would be truer to the Biblical witness—and to Augustine, for that matter—to regard the act of charity as a twofold movement—*away* from the kind of inauthentic political life that makes for Babel and *toward* the rich and authentic political life for which the Spirit has been poured out as a pledge." Ibid., 500. Regardless of Arendt's take on the Christian tradition's ability to interact politically, her conception of "natality" bears witness to her affirmation of the abundant nature of life. In short, there is a logic of excess underlying Arendt's conception of "natality."

what has been entrusted to us."[102] In contrast, a deconstructionist would insist, "We can only prepare for the incoming other, but we cannot invent it, cannot effect it, bring it about, by a cunning deconstructive agency. We are called upon, paradoxically, to prepare for the incalculable, to prepare without calculating in advance."[103] I would argue that such quasi-claims, in a sincere attempt to lead us to tolerance and open-mindedness, tend to theoretically neutralize the productive power of moral agency. In other words, while Derrida rightly insists upon the incalculability of the future, in terms of the mystery, risk and surprise that can interrupt everyday experience, I would argue that he overestimates the possibility of radical abstraction and the desertification of relational space (*khora*), and thereby underestimates the possibility of word and deed vis-à-vis moral agency. I would further argue that being structurally open to the other is not reason enough for deconstruction's normative bent toward justice, for, as alluded to above, there are singular situations where unconditional hospitality, understood as a radical openness to the future, could very well elicit more violence and brutality.

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[102] In thinking through the philosophical and theological implications of "temporal direction" within the context of the Reformational strand of Christian scholarship Ansell notes: "The talent we have been given must be invested rather than 'safely' buried underground. The continuity [i.e,. the self as the center of intention and origin of action] comes from realizing the potential of what has already been entrusted to us." [my addition, taken from a previous passage on pg. 72] As Ansell goes on, "change occurs not by unlocking already existing potential but by opening the present to a new future. Receiving the *pro/missio* of the future in hope should lead us not only to actively engage in innovation, but also to open ourselves to the risk and surprise of the unknown." In this way, "normatively speaking, foundational time is best pictured as movement out of God's gift of Life, while transcendental time is seen as movement towards the promise of the Eschaton." See Ronald A. Kuipers and Janet Catherina Wesselius, eds. *Philosophy as Responsibility: A Celebration of Hendrik Hart's Contribution to the Discipline*. Lanham, New York and Oxford: University Press of America, 2002: 72-73. For our interests here it is important to note the role of "foundational time" for thinking the possibility of agency. In terms of *khora*, it is the productive role of foundational time that Derrida resists.

In conclusion, I would want to suggest that deconstruction's fundamental openness to the future (predicated as it were upon a logic of lack) would need to be supplemented by a logic which affirmed the productive role of "foundational time,"[104] and thereby the possibility of moral agency. Deconstructive affirmation, understood in terms of "temporal direction," corresponds to "transcendental time," where the desire for justice is synonymous with radical futurity. But in terms of the foundational direction of time, the affirmative character of deconstruction is quickly replaced by a cold "no thanks" to *khora*. Gratitude is inconceivable in the desert. As I have attempted to demonstrate, such a caricature of the differential space between others would preclude the possibility of a new arrivant. In contrast, a logic of excess appeals not only to the possibility of being acquainted with the new and unexpected, but also the productive capacity of relationships, where the space between other others is pregnant with possibility; a space where the miraculous is conceivable. In other words, such a foundational fecundity characterizes the abundance of creation and the capacity to cultivate the *in-between* space of moral agency. Closing on an Arendtian note, and in the tenor of Biblical testimony, I would suggest that this cultivating and covenanting capacity (to incarnate love and forgiveness by word and deed) is "the miracle that saves the world."

> It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us."[105]

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[103] Caputo 1997: 76.
[104] See note 99 above.
[105] Arendt 1958: 247.

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