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To what extent is deconstruction essentially a deconstruction of Christianity, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests in his two-volume project on “The Deconstruction of Christianity”: *Dis-Enclosure* and *Adoration*? In a related sense, what is the connection between poststructuralism and postsecularism? Although Derrida endorses and embraces the term “deconstruction,” he keeps his distance from the word “postmodern.” At the same time, there are resonances of a kind of reflection on postmodernism in *The Post-Card*, where the prefix post refers to a kind of “beyond” in the sense of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Derrida writes that “to bind, therefore, is also to detach, to detach a representative, to send it on a mission, to liberate a missive in order to fulfill, at the destination, the destiny of what it represents. A post effect.”¹ This post effect refers to a detachment that is not beyond in any spatial sense or after in a linear temporal sense, but is in some uncanny way already at work in the process to which it refers. Postmodernity is a beyond (detachment) in and of (the binding that is) modernity. Poststructuralism is a beyond in and of structuralism.

In a related sense, we could say that postsecularism is a beyond in and of secularism. In his later work, Derrida explicitly engages with religious themes, prompting many readers to claim that there is some sort of a “turn” post-1989 that rivals Heidegger’s turn. I think that this language of a turn is overwrought, as suggested in the previous chapter, but I also think some of Derrida’s protests to the contrary, where he cites himself at length treating similar themes from the beginning of his career, are also
a little overdone. There is a shift in emphasis that emerges as what Catherine Malabou calls writing as a motor-scheme recedes, and Derrida’s engagements with religious, ethical, and political themes appear more direct, abstract and ungrounded.

A different, earlier account of a shift in Derrida’s philosophy is related by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the first translator of Of Grammatology into English in 1976. In A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Spivak says that in 1982 at a conference on Derrida’s works at Cerisy-la-Salle, he “described a moment in his own work” that “was a turn from ‘guarding the question’—insisting on the priority of an unanswerable question, the question of différence—to a ‘call to the wholly other’—that which must be differed-deferred so that we can posit ourselves, as it were.” There is a shift from the priority of keeping the question alive to that of supporting the other, answering the call of responsibility. This turn occurs earlier than the important 1989 essay “Force of Law” and the works that take up religious themes more directly in the 1990s, and it suggests that we should attend to multiple shifts within Derrida’s trajectory even as we look for lines of continuity.

I imagine that this turn to the other in the 1970s is also connected to Derrida’s statement near the beginning of his presentation at the conference on Religion at Capri in 1994 that was expanded and published as “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Derrida remarks: “No Muslim is among us, alas, even for this preliminary discussion, just at the moment when it is towards Islam, perhaps, that we ought to begin turning our attention. No representative of other cults either. Not a single woman!” Here his exclamation about the lack of women can be connected to his work on the question of phallogocentrism and its exclusion of women in the 1970s, including his analysis of Nietzsche’s apparent misogyny in Spurs.

Insofar as there exists a turn, or better an inflection point that can be traced to 1989, it involves the working out of a motor scheme of writing and beyond it, and then into a newer motor scheme that Malabou calls plasticity. This contrast will be developed further in Chapter 7, in terms of a more substantial engagement with Malabou’s interpretation of Derrida. The transition from writing to plasticity as an underlying motor scheme is less a conscious turn and more of an underlying context. Furthermore, it is not exclusively connected to religion, although it is also not entirely detached from it, insofar as religion is a constant theme of Derrida’s work, but most explicitly and intensively so in the 1990s, with works such as The Gift of Death, Spectres of Marx, and “Faith and Knowledge.” Furthermore, at the invitation of John D. Caputo, Derrida participated in three conferences—in 1997, 1999, and 2001—on Religion and Postmodernism.
held at Villanova University. Again, I want to contextualize this focus on religion, and the ways in which religion figures more and more explicitly in Derrida’s work, as a way to think about deconstruction after writing as a specific paradigm or motor scheme has receded.

So for the later Derrida, there is religion, a word that is “the clearest and most obscure,” and it has two sources, “the convergence of two experiences,” one of which is the fiduciary experience of belief, faith or credit, and the other is “the experience of the unscathed, of sacredness or of holiness.” Another way to think about this convergence is to acknowledge that we can never simply avoid or get beyond religion, even if there is always this beyond (a detachment over and above binding) in and of religion. Any simple opposition between the religious and the secular deconstructs. This insight problematizes the dialectical-historical interpretation of modernity as the triumph of secularism over religion and then the view that the return of religion in philosophy, culture, and politics somehow instantiates a postsecular viewpoint that dispenses with the modern secular. Postsecularism is a corollary to what is often called postmodernism: Modernism cannot maintain its separation and elevation from what is denigrated as not-modern, and secularism is unable to rigorously enforce a boundary between the religious practice of a private faith and the public expression of secular reason and law.

Derrida advances a thinking of deconstruction that he affirms as a form of justice because it renders unstable all determinate expressions of law even as it makes them possible. Our predominant common (European) culture, Derrida acknowledges, is “manifestly Christian, barely even Judaeo-Christian.” If our common culture is Christian, and Christianity as the universal form of religion dominates our “globalatinization,” then wouldn’t the primary task in a world ridden with religious conflict be the deconstruction of Christianity?

This becomes Jean-Luc Nancy’s project, to demonstrate how and why deconstruction involves the deconstruction of Christianity. In his 1995 essay “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” later republished in Dis-Enclosure, Jean-Luc Nancy identifies Christianity with the heart of the West. He declares that “Christianity is inseparable from the West.” Christianity is coextensive with the West as West insofar as both refer to “a certain process of Westernization consisting in a form of self-resorption or self-surpassing.” Nancy cites Marcel Gauchet’s book The Disenchantment of the World, in which Gauchet argues that Christianity is the religion that leads religion beyond religion.

Both Christianity and the West, which are essentially the same phenomenon, consist in a self-carrying to the limit, and then giving themselves up
in order to be true to “the depths of our tradition.” This movement is a kind of deconstruction, although Nancy also associates it with Hegelian Aufhebung—“letting go of the West and letting go of Christianity.” So it is the kenotic self-emptying or progressive self-overcoming of Christianity that issues in Western culture and thought, “a heart that risks being, if I dare say so, Christian.”

What is deconstruction, according to Nancy? He claims that deconstruction “is shot through with Christianity,” and it is only possible from within a Christian horizon. “To deconstruct,” Nancy says, invoking Heidegger’s term Destruktion, “means to take apart, to disassemble, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it hides.” Despite Heidegger’s distance from Christianity, Nancy concludes that deconstruction is a Christian operation. Deconstruction “is Christian because Christianity is, originally, deconstructive, because it relates immediately to its own origin as to a slack [jeu], an interval, some play, an opening in origin.”

This logic of Christian exceptionalism loosely follows not only Gauchet, but also René Girard’s claim that Christianity is the religion that exposes the workings of scapegoating and mimetic violence that drive most religions and cultures. For Girard, in his groundbreaking book Violence and the Sacred, human violence is caused by sacrificial desire that seizes on a scapegoat to sacrifice for the sake of the social body. Later Girard argues that Christianity takes this process to an extreme and exposes sacrificial violence by having Christ take on all sins and becoming the scapegoat for humanity. Christianity exposes and overcomes sacrificial violence for Girard, just as Christianity overcomes and leads beyond religion for Gauchet. In a similar and implicit way, the West overcomes ordinary non-Western culture and surpasses it in the theories of Girard, Gauchet, and Nancy. We participate in this self-surpassing by acknowledging, deconstructing, and letting go of it. Part of this acknowledgment would be the insistence that deconstruction, like the West, is essentially Christian, and is impossible without Christianity. Christianity is the exemplary, self-surpassing religion, and it is linked with the dominant world culture.

In this essay, which was originally presented in 1995, a year after the famous seminar at Capri, Nancy claims that we must think Christianity today, “that the Christian or Christianity is the thing itself that is to be thought” rather than avoided. Nancy affirms here the possibility of an atheism “that contemplates the reality of its Christian origins.” Although Derrida also acknowledges the centrality of Christianity to globalatination or Westernization in “Faith and Knowledge,” he is much more ambivalent about this process than Nancy, and does not go so far as to affirm...
it unreservedly, especially the teleology of Christianity’s surpassing and self-surpassing nature.

In his 2000 book on Nancy, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, Derrida reflects on Nancy’s extraordinary book *Corpus*, and on the issue of a deconstruction of Christianity more generally. Derrida acknowledges the Christian origin of the concept of deconstruction, from Luther’s *destructio* to Heidegger’s *Destruktion*. At the same time, Derrida distances himself from Nancy’s project, warning that “‘The Deconstruction of Christianity’ will no doubt be the test of a dechristianization of the world—no doubt as necessary and fatal as it is impossible . . . Dechristianization will be a Christian victory.”16 Neither Derrida nor Nancy believe in Christianity in any traditional manner, and they both acknowledge the complicity of deconstruction with Christianity, but whereas Nancy wants to affirm this in a more straightforward dialectical way, Derrida wants to undo it at the same time.

Part of the problem is the hyperbolic nature of Nancy’s task. Derrida claims that “a certain Christianity will always take charge of the most exacting, the most exact, and the most eschatological hyperbole of deconstruction, the overbid of ‘Hoc est enim corpus meum.’”17 Nancy’s hyperbolic project can always be outbid by a counter-Christian hyperbole that would subsume deconstruction into Christianity in a more conventional sense. Derrida advises Nancy that “a ‘deconstruction of Christianity,’ if it is ever possible, should therefore begin by untying itself from a Christian tradition of *destructio*.”18 The danger of the “almost impossible task” of deconstructing Christianity is that it is always at risk “of being exposed as mere Christian hyperbole.”19 How can this hyperbole be avoided? Can the danger be avoided, or is the threat of a Christian triumphalist victory necessarily imminent and always exceedingly possible?

I think that Nancy wagers that a stronger identification of deconstruction with Christianity would help undo Christianity and enable it to surpass itself, which is also means letting it go. But Derrida argues that this self-surpassing is at the same time indistinguishable from a Christian victory, which neither he nor Nancy desires. To be more specific, the victory that Nancy and Derrida desire to avoid is the victory of a triumphalist cultural and Western Christianity, what Kierkegaard calls Christendom, not Christianity as such, if there is such a thing.

Later in *On Touching*, Derrida turns to consider the work of Jean-Louis Chrétien, to show how close Chrétien’s work is to Nancy’s, and to acknowledge it as well as to attend to its deconstruction. Derrida exposes Chrétien’s “rather complex strategy, which some might call devious.”20 On the one hand, Chrétien modernizes and Christianizes Aristotle via Thomas

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Aquinas so that Aristotle can be oriented “toward a ‘modern’ Christian thinking of flesh.” And on the other hand, Chrétien makes use of Aristotle, Aquinas, and also John of the Cross “in order to go against or beyond another ‘modern’ thinking of flesh that is phenomenological in kind.”21 These translations are also transubstantiations of God’s hand and God’s heart by means of God’s Logos. Derrida says that Chrétien’s “anthropotheological thinking of flesh does not leave any spare room for a questioning of technics . . . nor of the animal, or rather animals, nor of the hominization process that produces what is termed the hand in ‘everyday’ language, nor of the possibility of prosthetics onto which spacing in general opens, and so forth.”22 That is, Chrétien makes room for a spacing, “but it is a finite place, which can be relieved, in the elevation of Logos and Incarnation.”23 The problem is that this Christian thinking of Incarnation resists any “irreducible finitude”; despite the rhetorical similarity to Nancy, Chrétien’s phenomenology “would never lend itself to thought in what Nancy terms ‘a finite thinking’ for ‘the sense of the world.’”24

Derrida worries whether Nancy can maintain the distance between his deconstruction of Christianity and Chrétien’s Christianization of phenomenology. Derrida is aware that a straightforward embrace of the deconstruction of Christianity is a ruse because it will end up in a Christian victory that ultimately overcomes deconstruction, rather than the reverse. The problem, however, is that a simple opposition to Christianity is also insufficient because it gets caught in a similar trap where Christianity sublates this opposition and also wins. As Jacques Lacan says, “religion will always triumph” over psychoanalysis, philosophy, and many other things.25 The problem is not Christianity as such, if such a thing exists, but the fact that Christianity as the absolute religion never loses. It always wins, even when it loses; when all is lost, it converts a loss into a gain, and a triumph over its pagan, Jewish and Islamic foes.

This is the Christianity that has become the modern West, as Walter Benjamin asserts in his unpublished fragment “Capitalism as Religion.” According to Benjamin, Max Weber did not take his thesis on Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism far enough: “The Christianity of the Reformation period did not favour the growth of capitalism; instead it transformed itself into capitalism.”26 Christianity thrives on its own self-overcoming and its ability to subsume any and all alternatives into Christianity. This is the standard philosophical critique of Hegelian dialectics, that it is able to incorporate any and all negativity and emerge victorious. Lacan generalizes this triumphant Christianity to religion; religion gets to win every time there is a conflict. Modern capitalism emerges out of and draws on this self-surpassing nature of Christianity because it, too, is able
to convert every loss into a gain, at least potentially. Every move against capitalism is appropriated within capitalism, so that it can never lose. Any specific person can lose or lose out; lose one’s shirt, house, or investments; go bankrupt—but capitalism itself cannot lose because it lives off this gradient of win and loss in a way that structurally replicates the way that Christianity lives off of the opposition between salvation and damnation.

In the work of John D. Caputo and Martin Hägglund, two influential interpreters of Derrida’s work on religion, we can see two alternative strategies to deal with Derrida’s complex relation towards religion. For Caputo, most explicitly in his book *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, the challenge is to conceive religion and Christianity in Derridean terms without this triumphalist strain that emerges in globalized capitalism and reactionary fundamentalism. Caputo offers a religion without religion, even though he and Derrida both know that you never have one without the other. Religion as the affirmation of the promise, the primordial act of faith that underlies any performance, is one of the two sources of religion in “Faith and Knowledge,” as we saw in the previous chapter.

In *Miracle and Machine*, which consists of a sustained reflection on “Faith and Knowledge,” Michael Naas points out that Derrida shows a distinct preference to this act of faith over and above the other source, the experience of the sacred or holy as unscathed and indemnified, which leads to the structure of auto-immunity. Naas asserts Derrida’s affirmation of faith as the fundamental social bond, but at the same time points out that Derrida wants to emphasize “the disruptive nature of this faith,” which is a faith that always retains a hidden or secret side. Caputo celebrates this secret faith of Derrida, this religion without religion that also means a Christianity without Christianism. Caputo says that “I would say that to save the name of faith, faith must be faith without faith, without the assurances of faith.”

Caputo does not collapse Derrida’s tension between religion and religion, miracle and machine, or the two sources of religion, but he wagers on and elaborates a positive and affirmative view of what such a deconstructed Christianity would look like. Caputo claims that “Derrida’s analysis of the gift makes possible another Christianity,” not the same Christianity reconfirmed and redressed in postmodern garb. He points out that for Derrida, “‘God’ is the name of the absolute secret, a placeholder for the secret that there is no secret truth.” God is not an object or a being but a potential event that resides in the structure of articulation as such, the secrecy that makes faith possible and that makes complete and certain belief impossible. Caputo later develops his vision of another Christianity in
the form of a weak, deconstructed theology in *The Weakness of God*, as I will discuss in Chapter 6.31

Caputo acknowledges Derrida’s atheism, but shows how it is still faithful. Derrida himself avows in an interview that “for my part, I believe in faith.” And then he follows up with the claim that “as soon as one pronounces the word ‘faith,’ the equivocation is there, disastrous and deserted.” We cannot avoid this equivocation or simply resolve it with an untroubled atheism or theism. “The religious,” Derrida says, “in its equivocal relation to faith . . . is the equivocation in which we are.”32

Derrida’s equivocation and Caputo’s affirmation are too much for Hägglund, however. In *Radical Atheism*, Hägglund argues that Derrida’s affirmation of life and the living in its temporal becoming leads to a critique of immortality as the absolute immunity of life withdrawn from any exposure to death. Hägglund is correct to claim that Derrida does not affirm traditional faith religion in a conventional, otherworldly sense. According to Hägglund, “the spacing of time makes X possible while making it impossible for X to be in itself. Such spacing is quite incompatible with the religious ideal of absolute immunity.”33 There is no such thing as absolute immunity because spacing exposes every phenomenon to something that potentially compromises it. Hägglund understands Derrida’s critique of the second source, the unscathed, which is incompatible with Derrida’s emphasis on the temporization and spacing of language and life.

The problem with Hägglund’s reading, however, is that it conflates Derrida’s critique of the unscathed in terms of auto-immunity with his entire conception of religion, which includes belief, trust, or faith. Hägglund neglects the equivocation and partial affirmation of faith in Derrida’s work, which leads Hägglund to view religion in entirely negative and atheistic terms, whereas Derrida himself is much more complex. In addition, Hägglund assimilates Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida to a very simplistic and traditional view of religion, and fails to recognize that Caputo is elaborating upon Derrida’s complex notion of faith.

Hägglund makes it clear that Derrida’s affirmation of *salut* as a greeting or welcoming of the other is not a desire for salvation in any traditional sense. He points out that Derrida’s “unconditional affirmation of life” involves saying “yes” to the survival of our finite temporal existence rather than hoping or yearning for some sort of religious infinity.34 Hägglund is surely right to emphasize Derrida’s focus on temporal finite existence rather than any sort of hope for immortality, and he offers a bracing corrective to some of the pious invocations of Derrida’s thought and its ability to be subsumed into a more traditional religious framework. Hägglund is warn-
ing readers about the same misuse of deconstruction that Derrida warns Nancy about in terms of Chrétien’s phenomenology in On Touching.

According to Hägglund, “what Derrida calls the impossible does not refer to something that is unattainable because of our human limitations, such as the kingdom of God. Derrida explicitly emphasizes that the impossible is not an inaccessible ideal; it is rather ‘what is most undeniably real.’” Hägglund points out that the spacing of time is what makes it possible for something to exist at all and at the same time makes it impossible for that something to be self-sufficient, or fully closed in on itself. This spacing of time is the time of life, and “it is quite incompatible with the religious ideal of absolute immunity.” I do not disagree with Hägglund here, but he misunderstands Caputo when he says that “Caputo’s notion of the impossible . . . is the opposite of Derrida’s.” Hägglund believes that Caputo figures Derrida’s notion of the impossible as an ideal kingdom of God, which is incorrect.

How does Hägglund misread Caputo? Again, as already stated above, Hägglund assimilates Caputo’s faithful reading of Derrida to only one of the two sources, the source of the unscathed and the autoimmune sacred. Hägglund argues that while Derrida distinguishes between faith and the unscathed, they “are usually conflated in the notion of religious faith, which is understood as the faith in an absolute Good that is safe from the corruption of evil.” But since Derrida critiques the possibility of any absolute immunity, Hägglund understands him to be entirely opposed to religion in both senses. And he assimilates Caputo to this stereotypical religious position, which is wrong. Caputo does not defend an indemnified sacred that is safe from deconstruction; he pursues a hopeful but risky path of a finite (but then deconstruction would also question the limits of any simple opposition between finite and infinite) faith. Hägglund claims that “Derrida undermines the religious ideal of absolute immunity, which informs both Caputo’s and Kearney’s reasoning.” But Caputo at least defends no such claim of absolute immunity, and does not endorse a God who is Good above and beyond all finite materiality.

Hägglund accuses religion of conflating faith with absolute immunity, and then assumes that because Caputo is defending or promoting religion that he is also committed to championing the absolutely unscathed source in the form of a pure God who is Good beyond being (which is closer to the position of Jean-Luc Marion than Caputo) rather than the finite source of religious belief. Derrida suggests that these two sources are in some way combined in what we call religion, and deconstruction attempts to tease them apart. Even if we cannot simply separate these two sources and cannot
do away with one and keep the other, we can still think them distinctly and articulate them in important ways. Caputo risks confusion by defending religious faith in passionate terms, although this is a religion without (absolute, unscathed, immune) religion and faith without (secure, certain, guaranteed) faith. Hägglund thinks that he is more faithful to Derrida’s atheism, but he gives up the equivocation that constantly pervades Derrida’s writings about religion, an equivocation “in which we are.”

For Caputo, Derrida’s equivocation and careful affirmation becomes a more robust affirmation of religion without religion. Derrida always stresses the contestation, the ambivalence and ambiguous nature of religion, while Caputo wagers on the unconditional celebration of what Derrida carefully and hesitantly suggests. Caputo imagines a radical, ethical, self-contesting faith beyond any surety of the immunity of the unscathed, and this is not a betrayal or distortion of Derrida but a step along the way to the development of a full-throated Derridean theology, as we will see in Chapter 6. Derrida always resisted the term “theology” and distanced himself from it, and so did Caputo up until The Weakness of God. Radical, nonconfessional and unorthodox theology, however, offers Caputo a way to express Derrida’s insights in more explicitly theological ways.

Although I think Hägglund misreads Caputo, I do not think that he literally misreads Derrida, even if he does betray the spirit of Derrida’s philosophy to which Caputo remains faithful. They develop alternative strategies to safeguard deconstruction for or from religious faith, and they work hard and well to defend the coherence and relevance of their respective positions. The problem with Hägglund’s literalist reading is that it falls into a trap, which is similar to the trap in which Shylock finds himself in Merchant of Venice.

To help flesh out Derrida’s complex attitude toward Christianity, I consider another essay by Derrida, one that is less commonly referenced when discussing his treatment of religion or the deconstruction of Christianity. In his essay “What Is a Relevant Translation?” Derrida discusses Shylock’s impossible situation in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice in a way that prefigures Hägglund’s literalistic interpretation. In this essay, presented in 1998, published in French in 1999, and then translated into English in 2001, Derrida translates the first half of a sentence written by Shakespeare and uttered by Portia: “When mercy seasons justice, then must the Jew be merciful.” Derrida focuses on the first phrase, which he translates into French as “Quand le pardon relève la justice. . .” Shylock holds fast to his oath to take a pound of flesh from near the heart of the merchant Antinio. His word is his bond, and he cannot forsake it. And yet, he is implored to be merciful as the doge of Venice has been and presumably will be mer-
ciful to him. Shylock eventually is forced to pardon Antonio and to convert to Christianity based on his stubborn insistence on the literal bond, and his lack of forgiveness ultimately leads to his death.

In his essay, Derrida focuses on the tension between a literal and a spiritual understanding of a word, an oath, a bond, and also a circumcision. Of course, he is not the first to treat this theme in *Merchant of Venice*, but it is interesting where Derrida ends up in the context of his own attitude toward religion and how it shows the limits of Hägglund’s straightforwardly atheistic reading. Derrida states that “this impossible translation, this conversion . . . between the original, literal flesh and the monetary sign is not unrelated to the Jew Shylock’s forced conversion to Christianity,” because the Jew is often associated with the body and the letter whereas the Christian is seen on the side of a spiritualization of both word and flesh. According to Derrida, the entire play proceeds as if the business of translation were first of all an Abrahamic matter between the Jew, the Christian, and the Muslim. And the relève, like the relevance I am prepared to discuss with you, will be precisely what happens to the flesh of the text, the body, the spoken body, and the translated body—when the letter is mourned to save the sense.

The Jew is forced to pardon in a repetition of his own pardon, which is also a threat of death, just as his oath threatened Antonio with death. And this pardon is also a conversion to Christianity, a seasoning of Jewish justice with Christian mercy. According to Derrida, this short sentence uttered by Portia—“When mercy seasons justice, then must the Jew be merciful”—“recapitulates the entire history of forgiveness, the entire history between the Jew and the Christian, the entire history of economics (merces, market, merchandise, merci, mercenary, wage, reward, literal or sublime) as a history of translation.” The Jew must be merciful, on pain of death. The Jew must forgive Christian violence, anti-Judaism and antisemitism, so that the Christian can forgive the Jew her own Jewishness and raise her up to the level of a Christian. Portia, a woman disguised as a man, admits that she has been paid as a “mercenary of gratitude, or mercy.” By mercifully commanding the Jew to be merciful, Portia “preconverts” Shylock to Christianity “by persuading him of the supposedly Christian interpretation that consists of interiorizing, spiritualizing, idealizing what among Jews (it is often said, at least, that this is a very powerful stereotype) will remain physical, external, liberal, devoted to a respect for the letter.”

According to Derrida, mercy in the play functions as a relève, a seasoning that makes justice more palatable and that also elevates it to a higher
level. \textit{Relève}, of course, is also Derrida’s translation of Hegel’s German term \textit{Aufhebung}, which is “a dialectical movement of interiorization, interiorizing memory (\textit{Erinnerung}) and sublimating spiritualization.”\(^{47}\) Mercy is viewed as a power of God that is available to humans to appropriate and use: “mercy resembles divine power at the moment when it elevates, preserves, and negates (\textit{relève}) justice.”\(^{48}\) For Derrida, mercy instantiates itself at the level of the divine, in a “genesis of the divine, of the holy or the sacred, but also the site of pure translation.”\(^{49}\) Here is one of the two sources of religion, the holy or sacred, but at the same time it is a translation, so it is also a machinic iteration or repetition, a machine for making gods. And it is also the site of the link between the theological and the political, which Derrida wants to deconstruct, as we will consider in the next chapter.

This intersection of divine and human power in mercy constitutes Western Christian sovereignty, and the grandeur of this gesture is also a ruse of mercy, a sham of forgiveness that tricks and abuses—and eventually kills—Shylock. Derrida exposes and criticizes this Christian ruse of mercy in his essay. At the same time, Derrida has little mercy or sympathy for Shylock’s victimization. He states that “I am not about to praise Shylock when he raises a hue and cry for his pound of flesh and insists on the literalness of the bond.”\(^{50}\) Why not defend Shylock? Why doesn’t Derrida want to hold to the literality of the word, the oath, the bond or the body?

Derrida recognizes and expresses “the evil that can be through the Christian ruse as a discourse of mercy,” but he still condemns Shylock’s victimization. He says at the end of the article: “I insist on the Christian dimension” of translation.\(^{51}\) Why? Because otherwise, you are simply caught in its trap, which is where Hägglund ends up, because he is just a little too faithful to the letter of Derrida’s work. Derrida insists on the spiritualization of interpretation, but then twists it into a work of mourning. Perhaps Caputo’s own spiritualization of deconstruction fails to mourn Christianity explicitly enough, despite his emphasis on the tears of Derrida. So how do we survive Christianity? We mourn it, we let it die, and this is a relief (\textit{relève}), in a sense.

At the end of his essay, Derrida suggests that we think relevance as memory and as mourning. He argues that translation guarantees \textit{two} survivals, referring to Walter Benjamin: “by elevating the signifier to its meaning or value, all the while preserving the mournful and debt-laden memory of the singular body, the first body, the unique body that the translation thus elevates, preserves, and negates.”\(^{52}\) The translation thus preserves both the original literal word and the spiritualized double in a work of memory that is also a “travail of mourning.” \textit{Relève} is not just an elevation for Derrida; he gives the Hegelian \textit{Aufhebung} a twist in its translation into French.
Relève is a relief that raises the body but also loses it, and in both losing and preserving it mourns rather than simply affirms and celebrates this spiritualization. The meaning of a translation is its relevance, and “the very concept, the very value of meaning, the meaning of meaning, the value of the preserved value originates in the mournful experience of translation, of its very possibility.” Derrida calls our attention to this travail, the work of mourning that haunts language in its iterability and translation.

Derrida claims that by simply opposing this relève, “Shylock delivers himself into the grasp of the Christian strategy, bound hand and foot.” You cannot fight Christianity directly, because you will always lose. Nancy wants to press deconstruction into Christianity to such an extent that Christianity will give itself up, surpass itself, which is what Christianity’s essence has been from the beginning. But Derrida worries that this would be yet another Christian victory. And Hägglund wants to preserve the purity of his atheistic interpretation of Derrida uncontaminated by religion, which exhibits naïveté toward Derrida’s complex thematic of auto-immunity as well as a betrayal of the “spirit” of deconstruction.

We can see how Derrida’s reading of Merchant of Venice converges with Gil Anidjar’s analysis of Christianity in Blood: A Critique of Christianity. In this book, Anidjar makes a striking connection between the economic circulation of capitalism in the modern world with the circulation of blood as discovered by William Harvey in 1628. Blood is more than a metaphor; it is a complex, multifaceted material reality that spreads across our entire existence. Anidjar’s book is a political theology because he traces the origin of this preoccupation with blood to Christianity, in particular the purity of blood. This obsession with the purity of Christ’s—and then Christians’—blood eventually funds an entire racial economy. “Blood makes and marks difference,” Anidjar writes, “an allegedly universal difference inscribed between bloods.” He paraphrases Schmitt later in the same paragraph by asserting that “all significant concepts of the modern world are liquidated theological concepts.” These concepts are liquidated, or liquefied, rather than simply secularized, which means that they still carry meaning and infect their bearers.

Everything begins with the blood of Christ. The sharing of Christ’s blood in the communion ritual fuses a community together, a community that participates in the blood of Christ. According to Anidjar, “Christianity simultaneously invented the community of substance as the community of blood.” During the early history of Christianity, from the fourth to the eleventh century, it was considered a sin to shed blood, any blood, even of non-Christians. What changed is that around the late 1000s and early 1100s, during the so-called Papal Revolution, the Church

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declared that Christians should not kill other Christians rather than other humans. Urban II preached a crusade against Islam, claiming that “Christian blood, redeemed by the blood of Christ, has been shed” by infidels. Anidjar relies on the work of Tomáš Mastnak, who says that from now on, “the church, which had long ‘considered the shedding of blood as a source of pollution, now encouraged the shedding of blood—non-Christian blood—as a means of purification.’”

Later on, in the 1449 Statutes on the Purity of Blood issued by the Spanish Inquisition, we can see “the institutionalized perception whereby Christians were deemed hematologically distinct from converts, the latter having failed to achieve Christianization by reason of their tainted blood.” Christian states such as Spain are called “vampire states” because they search out and destroy people whose blood is impure and non-Christian. The preoccupation with race and racism as represented by skin color is seen by Anidjar as an “intensification” of blood, where blood contains and carries the essence of race.

The origin of a certain ancient type of racism emerges with the origin of Christianity, which configures Jewish identity in ethnic terms in contrast with Christian universalism. But this racial identity is not based on the notion of blood. Anidjar argues that in the Hebrew Bible, “there is no difference between bloods,” and the Israelite or Jewish community is based on a sharing of “flesh and bone.” With the origins of Christianity in Paul, attention is paid to the flesh and blood of Christ, which become associated with the Eucharist ritual. Here blood enters the picture, although it is not yet associated with what we call race.

In the modern world, the significance of race emerges in connection with a purity of blood. Anidjar argues that “the earliest evidence appears to point to the Spanish and Portuguese empires, where purity of blood served in ‘the forging of cleansed Spanish identity that referred both to national unity and to the overseas empire.’” In colonial Latin America, this idea of a purity of blood gradually became divorced from its religious significance and became a solely racial idea around 1700. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out in an article on religion, conquest, and race in the modern world that is broadly compatible with Anidjar’s study, “the Christian polemics and the discourse and practices surrounding the concept of the ‘purity of the blood’ are, in a manner of speaking, the anteroom to the modern racist discourse and practices that would be initiated with the arrival of Columbus in the Américas.”

For Anidjar, the implicit racial significance of religious difference between Christians on the one hand, and Jews and Muslims on the other, develops into the modern idea of peoples who are racially distinguished.
by their blood. Even if Anidjar exaggerates the significance of blood in the modern world, or his book downplays other elements, his examination is incredibly revealing, and it shows a deep connection between Christianity and contemporary racism and capitalism. Blood is a material reality as well as an object of political theology. Blood flows, out, during moments of exceptional violence, but our blood still matters even when it is less obvious or visible.

In his book, Anidjar reflects briefly on Shakespeare’s play. He writes that “if Merchant of Venice teaches us so much about economic theology, it is first of all because it takes us to sea—war and commerce—while signalling to us that along with, and in the realm of, money, our minds are ‘tossing on the ocean,’ and merchants are ‘like signors and rich burgchers on the flood.’”66 We are adrift on these flows, and the most important liquid will turn out to be blood, and the equivocation between money and Christian blood. Shylock is figured in the play as “the economic enemy whose association with blood and money is ultimately interrupted because and by way of blood, and more precisely, because and by way of Christian blood.”67 Anidjar offers a critique of the play that is similar to that of Derrida, although Derrida does not single out the theme of blood in Merchant of Venice.

For Derrida, the phrase delivered by Portia, “When mercy seasons justice, then must the Jew be merciful,” is the most significant line of the play. For Anidjar, however, the key is Portia’s judgment:

Take then thy bond. Take thou they pound of flesh.
But in cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the law of Venice confiscate
Unto the state of Venice.68

Shylock protests that in forbidding him his bond, the state of Venice is depriving him of his life, and this becomes prophecy. Anidjar draws attention to the circulation of life, money, and blood in the play and in our political-theological economy.

Shylock cannot shed a drop of Christian blood, even though he has claim to a pound of Antonio’s flesh. This trap illustrates how Christianity functions because, as a Jew, Shylock is screwed no matter what he does. Derrida wants to avoid triggering the trap by opposing it directly; he wants to carefully explain it and if possible disengage it with as little bloodshed as possible. Anidjar risks a more direct critique of Christianity by focusing on its identification with blood and other liquids, including money. Anidjar renders Christian blood visible in its sacrificial, racial, and genocidal violence.
Whether or not one is Christian, there will be blood, which means that straightforward resistance is ultimately futile. You have to mourn Christianity, let it survive by dying (which it has always already done, by means of the Cross) and let it die by surviving, which it inevitably will, in its infinite translation. We will not survive, even if we want to, as ourselves. We have time, but not too much time, not all the time, and in certain respects we have no time. Space is available, and the “khôra of tomorrow . . . makes way perhaps,” but without the slightest generosity, neither human nor divine.”69 This is Good News, and we should mourn it, even if we should mourn as if not mourning—“for the whole frame of the world is passing away” (1 Cor 7: 30–31). This is the end of the world, but Derrida loves us and he is smiling.70 Whew!