In this chapter, I focus on Caputo’s interpretation of Derrida to show how his attention to the event in religious and then theological terms helps liberate Derrida’s philosophy from a specific context of writing. Part of the significance of Derrida’s so-called religious turn, which is not really a turn, is an ability to read Derrida’s philosophy beyond a straightforward paradigm of writing, and more broadly in religious, ethical, and political ways. Here is the significance of the later Derrida, for better or worse, and we will see how Catherine Malabou understands this in the next chapter. It’s not that Derrida himself abandons writing, but that the Anglo-American reading of Derrida is able to loosen up a stricter understanding of Derrida’s relation to writing and language. And Caputo’s *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* is a crucial text for opening up our thinking about Derrida.

It seems a very long time ago now, but Caputo’s book, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, published in 1997, inaugurated a sea change in Anglo-American readings of Derrida. There had already been many readers asking questions about the relationship between Derrida and religion, and as discussed in Chapter 1, many of these questions concerned the connection between deconstruction and negative theology, following Derrida’s Jerusalem address, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.” In terms of philosophy of religion, theoretical religious studies, and postmodern theology, however, these relations invariably took the form of a kind of analogy. Derrida was asking similar questions to those of religion and theology, but he was not himself a religious philosopher or a theologian.
The work of Mark C. Taylor dominated the reception of Derrida in relation to religion in the 1980s and early 1990s. Taylor’s *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* provides an agenda for postmodern theology, with its themes of the death of God, the disappearance of the Self, the end of History, and the closure of the Book. For Taylor, deconstructive writing is a/theological, neither simply theological nor atheological, but in some ways neither and both. Deconstruction subverts theological systems and concepts, although at the same time “the survival of this parasitic discourse presupposes the continuing existence of its host.”

Theology is the site for Taylor that hosts deconstructive criticism, and deconstruction is a form of “writing that attempts to trace the border and retrace the margin,” which “can, therefore, be described as erring.” For Taylor, then, theology is a form of writing, and Derridean deconstruction is a second-order operation upon writing that traces and retraces the margin of writing, the texts of theology, philosophy, literature, and so on.

As another postmodern theologian, Charles E. Winquist, puts it in his 1986 *Epiphanies of Darkness*, “theology is writing,” which means that there is the possibility of a deconstructive theology just as there exists a deconstructive writing. Finally, Carl A. Raschke draws the ultimate conclusion of deconstructive theology when he states that “deconstruction, which must be considered the interior drive of twentieth-century theology rather than an alien agenda, is in the final analysis the death of God put into writing, the subsumption of the ‘Word’ by the ‘flesh,’ the deluge of immanence.”

For American postmodern theology, Derridean deconstruction instantiates the death of God in writing. This marginal form of theology is influenced by deconstruction along with the earlier American death of God theology, primarily in the form of Thomas J. J. Altizer’s theological writings.

Postmodern theology in the United States elaborates a form of death of God theology along the lines of hermeneutics and then deconstruction as a form of writing, and this is the dominant religio-theological reading of Derrida in the middle 1980s until the middle 1990s. Caputo’s book on *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* blows this understanding of deconstruction and theology apart, even if it has led to confusion about both Caputo’s and Derrida’s relation to religion and theology, and this situation eventually forced Caputo to develop his own understanding of radical theology in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

According to Taylor, by the middle of the 1990s, deconstruction had run its course, and Taylor then turned back to Hegel and forward to an interest in networks, technology, and virtual reality. Hegel’s philosophy is a better resource, for Taylor, to “think what poststructuralism leaves un-
thought by showing how nontotalizing structures, which nevertheless act as a whole, are beginning to emerge in the tangled networks and webs through which reality is virtualized and virtuality is realized.”

Post-structuralism, deconstruction, or the philosophy of difference, on the contrary, “cannot conceive of a structure that does not totalize and is not repressive,” while its insistence on difference “has issued in a politics of identity” in which “it is our differences that increasingly are tearing us apart.” Taylor’s break with Derrida and deconstruction concerns a number of philosophical issues, but it also breaks with a conception of writing in Taylor’s shift to thinking networks as non-totalizing holistic structures.

Prior to reading *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, Winquist had agreed with Taylor about the exhaustion of deconstruction as a cultural force. However, in his response to Caputo’s book on Derrida, Winquist claims that what is crucial to Caputo’s understanding of Derrida, and also Derrida’s understanding of religion, is the notion of *religion without religion*. Winquist says that “Derrida’s claim that he has been read less and less well over twenty years can be understood in the failure to understand his religion without religion.” Following Caputo, Winquist distinguishes between Jacques, the philosopher, and Jackie, which is Derrida’s actual given name. “Maybe saving the name of Jackie, a task accepted by Jack Caputo, is also a saving of the text that is more than a scholarly exercise sanctioned by professional philosophers,” Winquist suggests.

What Winquist hears in this work is a new Derrida, an understanding of Derrida’s faith as a form of deconstruction beyond writing. Derrida’s work is not limited to writing. According to Winquist, what Caputo “has the capacity to hear, when he reads Derrida, [is] that there is always something more or other than the text.” And it is the liberation of this “something more or other than the text” in Derrida’s work that Caputo’s book accomplishes for English-speaking readers who “have been misreading Derrida for twenty years.”

This liberation of Derrida’s religion without religion as something irreducible to writing marks the significance of Caputo’s text. Before turning to *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, I want to briefly consider Caputo’s earlier philosophy of religion, primarily his breakthrough work *Radical Hermeneutics*, published in 1987. Caputo’s early work was on Thomas Aquinas, Martin Heidegger, and Meister Eckhart, and his 1978 book *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* demonstrates the affinities of Heidegger’s philosophy with Eckhart. *Radical Hermeneutics*, however, is Caputo’s breakthrough book, where he begins to really philosophize in his own voice. And it is this growing influence of Derrida on his thought that enables him to do this.
In *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo sides with Heidegger and Derrida against Hans-Georg Gadamer, but he keeps the Gadamerian term hermeneutics. Caputo saves the name of hermeneutics in this book, but he radicalizes it. As he explains, here “Derrida is the turning point for radical hermeneutics, the point where hermeneutics is pushed to the brink.” Although Caputo turns toward Derrida, he maintains a productive tension between Derrida and Heidegger that he later gives up in *Prayers and Tears*. According to Caputo, “radical hermeneutics situates itself in the space which is opened up by the exchange between Heidegger and Derrida, an exchange which generates a more radical reading of Heidegger and another, more hermeneutic reading of Derrida.”

The juxtaposition of Derrida with Heidegger produces a “cold hermeneutics,” a shiver that also incorporates Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in restoring “the difficulty both to life and to intentionality.” This difficulty is the necessary precondition for the production of something new, or a repetition into the future.

In *Radical Hermeneutics*, surprisingly, it is Derrida who is too affirmative, too quick to leave behind this “shudder, this trembling,” in which Caputo “locate[s] a cold and comfortless hermeneutics which I think it is the special virtue of Heidegger and Kierkegaard to have expounded.” According to Caputo, Derrida, in his emphasis on undecidability, fails to fully open himself to the “mystery” that Eckhart and Heidegger enable us to experience. In the final chapter, Caputo invokes Levinas concerning the face of suffering with which we are encountered, and this experience of the face contributes to “the notion of a more chastened, postmetaphysical notion of religious faith.” Attention to suffering alerts us to “the vulnerability of human existence, its lack of defence against the play of the flux,” and thus leads us to a religious hermeneutic.

Religion is a protest against suffering, although Caputo strips religion of the transcendent power to eliminate suffering. There is a tragic element to human existence, but Caputo does not want this tragic consciousness to be the last word. He wants to dwell upon the importance of laughter as a response to this tragic situation, not as avoidance, but precisely as an affirmation of the difficulty of life. And it is this laughter, humor, and wit that Heidegger misses in his readings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Caputo affirms a vital significance to the human being. He says that the reason “why I refused to give up on the word hermeneutics” is because of his attempt to “find some way of confronting this question,” the question of what it means to be human in a world that does not always comfort or make sense. Later, Caputo does give up the word “hermeneutics,” or rather, he replaces the word “hermeneutics” with the word “theology,” so that radical hermeneutics becomes radical theology. And with this transi-
tion, the mutuality between Heidegger and Derrida that marks Radical Hermeneutics tips over into a full-throated affirmation of Derrida. The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida is an extraordinary re-reading of Derrida, but it is also a transitional book for Caputo in his becoming-theological, a process that culminates in The Weakness of God and The Insistence of God.

My claim is that Caputo reads Derrida at first more under the influence of a kind of writing, which is why he needs Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche to supplement Derrida’s philosophy with a more existential affirmation of life. But what he sees as he continues to read and think about Derrida is how this existential affirmation is already present in Derrida, even as it becomes more explicit in Derrida’s work in the 1990s. Caputo is the keenest reader and interpreter of Derrida in English who is sensitive to this shift and its implications.

In writing about Derrida’s prayers and tears, Caputo above all appeals to deconstruction as a passion. Passion is not simply writing, a linguistic effect, but more an affect or a force that attests to an otherness of language, writing, and speaking. As Caputo states, “deconstruction is a passion for transgression, a passion for trespassing the horizons of possibility, which Derrida calls, following Blanchot, the passion of the pas, the pas of passion.”

Deconstruction is “a passion and a prayer for the impossible,” for what seems impossible or absurd given current standards of logic and norms. We can reasonably expect what is possible, but there is something in deconstruction that desires what is not possible. What deconstruction addresses is what happens, which is both strictly speaking possible and impossible in terms of logical conditions of possibility. In his critical philosophy, Immanuel Kant investigates the conditions of possibility for our knowledge of an object. According to Derrida, these conditions of impossibility of knowing something are at the same time conditions of impossibility because our knowing always exceeds these very conditions that make it possible. Deconstruction attends to the impossibility of our knowing and desiring, not just their possibility.

The impossibility at the heart of the possible is a quasi-religious phenomenon. Our desire is for the impossible, for justice, which is not simply or fully possible given the state of the world and its possibilities. This desire for the impossible is never separated from our possible, worldly existence, but in fact it makes existence itself possible, which is a kind of logical paradox or aporia. Derrida coins the neologism différance to indicate this dynamic im/possibility at the heart of language and experience that animates deconstruction. Caputo makes it clear, however, that we should not think of différance as God, or try to baptize deconstruction as a form of negative
theology. Deconstruction, like negative theology, manifests a desire for the wholly other, the tout autre, but unlike negative theology, deconstruction understands that the tout autre is never found outside of our experience of ordinary others.\(^{20}\)

Caputo seizes on Derrida’s phrase in *The Gift of Death*, where Derrida claims that in certain respects Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger all “belong to this tradition that consists of proposing a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a thinking that ‘repeats’ the possibility of religion without religion.”\(^{21}\) Derrida both affirms and distances himself from this specific doublet of religion without religion, but Caputo takes it up and shows how deconstruction is also a religion without religion. For Caputo, deconstruction “repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious.”\(^{22}\) There is a religious structure of experience that deconstruction repeats. This religious structure is not that of this or that determinate religion, but attests to a religion without religion.

The passion of Derrida’s thinking and writing, his prayers and tears to which Caputo attends, marks deconstruction as a more-than-linguistic phenomenon, which does not mean that it is simply non-linguistic. Caputo attacks the stupid, reductionist readings of Derrida that proceed by taking literally the translation of Derrida’s offhand remark that “there is nothing outside the text” (*il n’y a pas de hors texte*), “as if there is nothing other than words and texts.”\(^{23}\) Caputo explains, correctly, that “while there is nothing which, for Derrida, would escape the constraints of textuality, it is no less true that everything that Derrida has written has been directed toward the other of language, toward the alterity by which language is claimed.”\(^{24}\)

In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, Caputo carefully unpacks many of Derrida’s texts from the 1990s, including “Circumfession,” *Aporias*, *Specters of Marx*, *The Gift of Death*, *Archive Fever*, and his famous Capri essay on “Faith and Knowledge,” to demonstrate where and how deconstruction becomes thoroughly entangled with religion. Caputo provocatively suggests that Derrida presents in these texts his own thinking of a religion without religion, which consists of a messianicity without messianism, a desire for the Messiah or the wholly other that never gets fulfilled. Caputo says that “Derrida too is trying to offer us a work of thought that thinks the structural possibility of the religious, of a certain radical messianic structure, without the dangerous liaisons of the particular religions, without the dogma, without the determinate messianic faiths that divide humanity into warring parties.”\(^{25}\) Caputo isolates, emphasizes, and mobilizes Derrida’s religion without religion that comes to the fore in these more recent texts.
Even though this religious reading of Derrida has become much more common, if not commonplace, we should not forget how groundbreaking it was for many English-speaking readers in 1997. Caputo reflects on the historical context of reading Derrida, saying that “in the 1960s différance makes a more Nietzschean than Levinasian impression upon us, différance looks like the free play of forces, not a way of making ready the coming of the tout autre; and one does not detect anything of the prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida or of his religion, about which nobody knew anything.”26 In the 1960s, we did not know how to read or to think Derrida’s religion, about which he only later becomes more expressive and more confessional. For Caputo, as for Derrida, religion is a passion for God, but the passion for God is translatable or substitutable with other passions, including a passion for justice, but also a secret for which there is no name.

Caputo concludes that

Derrida seems to say that “God” is the name of the absolute secret, a placeholder for the secret that there is no secret truth, the blank truth in virtue of which we are always already exposed to multiple interpretations. “God” is a name for the inexpungeable textuality of his life and work, the split in his life that severs him from truth, so that it is up to others to read him (who then know more than him), a limit structure.27

God is not a proper name or a master word, but a way to name this unnamable secret. This secret, that there is no ultimate or absolute secret but this lack of an ultimate secret does not thereby eliminate secrecy as such, is the source not only of thinking and writing, but of passion, of prayers and tears.

In Caputo’s thought, his reading of Derrida’s religion without religion becomes the hinge for Caputo’s own development of a radical theology, first explicitly expressed in The Weakness of God. In The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida, Caputo imagines the possibility of such a Derridean theology when he says: “I have in mind a point at which theology, opening itself to translatability, opens the wound of its own kenosis and suffers from its passion for the impossible.”28 This theology would no longer be able to save God or the name of God from translatability or change, and its desire for God would “fluctuate . . . undecidably with atheism,” while its faith “must be faith without faith, without the assurances of faith.”29 This promissory note gets cashed out in The Weakness of God.

In the Introduction to The Weakness of God, Caputo confesses his weakness for theology. Although he mostly avoids endorsing the term in his
previous work, after his move from Villanova University to Syracuse University in 2004, he comes to embrace a weak theology that in The Insistence of God becomes a radical theology. Caputo says that he “freely own[s] up here to a certain theological gesture, to a theological desire . . . which is undeniably a desire for God, for something astir in the name of God, a desire for something I know not what, for which I pray night and day.”

The desire for God is a desire for “something astir in the name of God,” which is an event. Caputo proposes that “the name of God is an event, or rather that it harbors an event, and that theology is the hermeneutics of that event, its task being to release what is happening in that name.” Here theology names the hermeneutics of the event that is sheltered within the name of God, and weak theology attends to this event. Weak theology releases the event that is contained in and by the name of God.

For Caputo, the name of God is not a literal name; “the name can never be taken with literal force.” The name of God is deconstructible and deconstructed, to allow for the event that it contains to be exposed. Weak theology deliteralizes the name of God, while at the same time it does not banish the name of God or prohibit it. Names are translatable, substitutable and deconstructible, but the event is undeconstructible. Why? Because it is not a thing; there is nothing substantial to deconstruct. The event is a happening, but it is not simply what happens in an obvious or literal way. As Caputo paraphrases Gilles Deleuze, the event is what is going on in what is happening. The event is a singularity, it is a difference that makes a difference, and it is a fundamental transformation or metamorphosis of a situation.

Caputo seizes on the significance of the concept of event for poststructuralism, mainly Derrida and Deleuze, and he develops first a hermeneutics and later a theology that would be responsive to and expressive of the event. The event is not just an event of writing, a linguistic event; it is no less a religious and theological event. Caputo says that “the event that is promised by a given name is what Derrida calls ‘the undeconstructible.’ The event is always undeconstructible because it is always promised or called for, always to come, whereas what actually arrives has arrived under present conditions and is always deconstructible.” What Caputo recognizes is that the name of justice in Derrida’s essay “Force of Law” is an event, and that is what makes it undeconstructible. The event is the messianic horizon of every action and being, but the event is also the surprising and unexpected aspect of experience that breaks with every horizon and exposes any action or being to what it is not and what it never expected.
Caputo contrasts his weak theology with a strong theology that holds fast to a literal name and understanding of God. “In a strong theology,” he writes, “God is the overarching governor of the universe, but in what follows I will endeavor to show that the weak force of God settles down below in the hidden interstices of being.” We have to be careful not to simply oppose weak to strong, as if they were opposites. Weakness is not lack of strength; it is nothing at all relative to strong theology. Or rather, it is only something insofar as it is a call or a promise, a provocation or a charge. From the standpoint of determinate religion, God or god is a strong force, a power to do something substantial in the world. Caputo is not invested in this traditional form of God. He is interested in thinking about God from the perspective of religion without religion, which means that God is not a thing, a person, or a power. God is that name that names for certain religious people something transformative, and it expresses an event, even while covering up the phenomenon of the event to a certain extent. Caputo is not interested in God as such; he is interested in the event that the name of God shelters. Just as Caputo liberates Derrida’s deconstruction from its textuality by demonstrating its religious passion, in *The Weakness of God*, Caputo applies deconstruction to theology in order to liberate the event from its secure place within what we sometimes call God.

In *The Weakness of God*, Caputo proposes a God without sovereignty, in line with my perspective in Chapter 3 that Derrida’s philosophy implies a political theology without sovereignty. God is without sovereignty, and God is without being in any traditional sense. When we read Caputo’s theology, the danger is to read it in conventional theological terms, whether we are atheists or believers, and think that God must be some sort of hyper-being. This is the whole point of Caputo’s appropriation of Derrida, however. It is absolutely not the case that deconstruction purifies God for us so that we can affirm a God beyond being in the way that Jean-Luc Marion does. No, God is not something, somewhere transcendent. God is not anything, but the word God names a call, a promise, that is the event of justice. The call of God as the event astir in the name of God keeps the world from closing in on itself, not because it is opened up by some transcendent other, but because it is an immanent dynamic of constitution and in-constitution that Derrida names *différance*, and then *khôra*.

Caputo spells out what he does not mean by “God” very clearly in *The Weakness of God*:

By “God,” on the other hand, I do not mean a being who is there, an entity trapped in being, even as a super-being *up there*, up above the
world, who physically powers and causes it, who made it and occasionally intervenes upon its day-to-day activities to tweak things for the better... That I consider an essentially magical view of the world... I mean a call that solicits and disturbs what is there, an event that adds a level of signification and meaning, of provocation and solicitation to what is there, that makes it impossible for the world, for what is there, to settle solidly in place, to consolidate, to close in on itself.³⁶

The name of God contains a promise, a call to fashion the world otherwise than it is, and an invitation to participate in this ongoing creation of signification and meaning.

The Weakness of God explores biblical narratives and themes with an eye to transforming them according to another “logic of sense” than the one that they have been given by strong theologies. Caputo asks the question about these influential texts: “What event do these stories harbor? What do these stories mean? Hermeneutics is all. All things flow in a river of meaning.”³⁷ In his book, he defamiliarizes these stories by reading them through Deleuze’s reflections on the paradoxes of Lewis Carroll in his book The Logic of Sense.³⁸ This alternative logic of sense takes place in what Jesus calls the kingdom of God, but the kingdom is not a literal spatial reference. The kingdom, as expressed by and through Jesus, “is the locus of divine transformation” where “things are remade, refashioned in accord with their origin and congenital goodness.”³⁹ Caputo distinguishes between miracle and magic, where magic refers to the literal coming back to life of Lazarus or Jesus, while a miracle is a theological term that “harbors an event of a deeply incarnate kind.”⁴⁰ Salvation and resurrection are not magical fantastical occurrences, but genuinely transformative experiences that testify to the event that Jesus released in his preaching of the kingdom of God.

Caputo argues that “salvation is situated, not in a heavenly pleasure but in the pain of the present, ‘the very instant of pain.’”⁴¹ Citing Levinas, Caputo says that messianic hope is not simply for the future, but for the future in the present, for the new beginning of what is taking place right now. The solitary ego imagines its own afterlife as an immortal existence into the indefinite time of the future. But that’s not what salvation and resurrection mean, at least not in terms of an event. We want to preserve our own being from the full consequences of the event, the fact that we are not who we are, and cannot fully close in on ourselves in a gesture of autoimmunity: “Neither time nor salvation, neither rebirth nor resurrection, is possible in the solitary ego.”⁴² For Caputo and for Levinas, messianic time refers to the coming of the other, which means the hope for more time and
for forgiveness because we are not just ourselves but are already other. The relief of suffering is not simply the end of suffering. It is “just this suffering for which nothing can compensate that constitutes the ‘torsion’ and ‘exigency’ of the moment” and what “gives it the force or energy to ‘unleash the future,’ to open up the future and make a new beginning possible.”

*The Weakness of God* elaborates a theology of the event. It does not refuse the name of God, but it refuses to be tethered to what this name ordinarily means. The weakness of the title is not a weakness that could be contrasted with strength on any linear continuum, but a twisting free from strong theology and strong religion. Weakening theology involves deconstructing theology, but deconstruction is not a negative procedure. Deconstruction is an affirmation, as Derrida claims and Caputo well knows, and it releases the event from its name without thereby abolishing the name.

Another way to speak of God is to say that God does not exist, but rather God *insists.* In *The Insistence of God,* Caputo develops a theology of “perhaps,” which is a term that Derrida often uses. The insistence on the word “perhaps” underlines the undecidability that is irreducible to religion, faith, and God for Caputo. He says that “something is calling, or rather something is getting itself called, in and under the name of God, of ‘God—perhaps,’ inasmuch as the caller in the call is structurally inaccessible, unidentifiable.” The event that Caputo associates with the name of God is a call to justice, ethical action, and responsibility. God is not a thing or a being who could exist; God is the inscrutable name that indicates the source of this call to responsible action. God’s call insists upon our lives.

Caputo explains that his faith “is placed in what is going on in the name (of) ‘God’ and of ‘theology,’ which is the insistence of the event, or the chance of the event, and the corresponding faith that God can happen anywhere.” His faith is not simply faith in any determinate person or concept of God, but “a deep and structural faith” in the possibility of an event that can transform us and make us better. The “perhaps,” however, is the fundamental acknowledgement that an event might not be good or make us good. It might be awful and terrible; it might constitute a disaster. Or we might ignore the call and cling to our comfortable habits and living and thinking. Following Derrida, Caputo affirms a radical hospitality, where hospitality “is a figure of the event” that signifies a welcoming of the other, while acknowledging that the in-coming of the other might not be a good thing.

Caputo spends less time in this book on biblical stories than he does in *The Weakness of God,* but he does draw out a contrast between Mary and
Martha as two orientations to the world and the possibility of an event. In Luke 10:38–42, Jesus visits the home of Martha and Mary, and praises Mary for devoting her attention to his teachings while implicitly chastising Martha for complaining that she is not getting any assistance with her domestic work. Caputo follows Meister Eckhart’s reversal of the traditional reading of this passage that favors Mary’s spiritual contemplation over Martha’s worldly action. For Caputo, “Martha is an emblem for me, a figure in whom all the dynamics of the event, of the insistence of the event, are contracted.” Martha is emblematic because Martha does not simply attend to the spiritual needs of Jesus and others but she is primarily focused on meeting material human and animal needs in her performance of hospitality.46

According to Caputo, radical theology affirms the insistence of God over the existence of God, pays attention to the radical demand of hospitality, and stays with the ambiguity of the “perhaps” all the way. Radical theology in this book names what Caputo calls “weak theology” in The Weakness of God and “radical hermeneutics” in Radical Hermeneutics. Radical theology is derived from more orthodox, traditional, and confessional theologies, but it distorts and deforms them by being more faithful to the insistence of the event and the irreducibility of the perhaps. “The confessional theologies are the only theologies that exist,” he writes, “while radical theology, which does not exist, insists or haunts the confessional theologies.”47

Radical theology breaks with the boundaries and authorities that circumscribe confessional theologies. Radical theology “reserves the right to ask any question, without regard to whether it fractures or divides the community or causes schismatic conflict and confessional breaks or engages in revisionist readings of classical scriptures.”48 Radical theology is radical all the way down to the roots, and it answers not to this or that particular institution or authority, but affirms a “hermeneutic universality” that strives “to talk to anyone, anywhere, anytime.”49

Caputo contrasts a species of postmodern theology or philosophy of religion derived from Kant that tries to limit the bounds of reason to make room for faith, with a more radical form of postmodern theology/philosophy of religion that is influenced by Hegel. The post-Kantian form of philosophy of religion is more epistemological and apologetic, striving to defend a realm of faith freed from the attacks of modernist rationalism, secularism, and atheism. This is a valid endeavor, but it ultimately tames postmodern philosophical and theological thinking because it contains it. The Kantian version of postmodernism is more of “an abridged postmodernism” that tempers the absolutism of religious believers and atheist nonbelievers alike.50 “In the version that descends from Hegel,” however, “postmodern theology is neither an epistemology nor an apologetics but a genuinely radical theology
which mounts a heartier critique of confessional two-worlds theory.” There remains a residue of implicit dualism in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophies of religion due to the distinction Kant makes between the noumenal (the thing in itself, which is transcendent) and the phenomenal (the thing as it appears to us, which is immanent) in his work.

Hegel overcomes what he perceives as a Kantian dualism, and Caputo affirms this aspect of Hegelian thought, despite his reservations about where Hegel ends up, which is an affirmation of absolute Spirit conceptualized in terms of the Concept or Notion, Begriff. Caputo explains that he affirms a heretical Hegelianism that disavows the teleology of philosophical Begriff and the progression of absolute Spirit that dominates Hegel’s philosophy. Caputo says that “what I am calling a theology of the insistence of the event is a heretical version of Hegel, a variant postmodern Hegelianism, a kind of hybrid or even headless Hegelianism without the Concept.” Caputo asserts that Hegel rather than Kant is the true father of radical theology, and he affirms Hegelianism in its heterodox form.

Later in the book Caputo distinguishes his Hegelianism, still strongly influenced by Derrida, from the Hegelianism of Catherine Malabou and Slavoj Žižek. He also offers some insightful engagements with the newer philosophy of Speculative Realism. One question about Hegel is just how orthodox Žižek’s and Malabou’s interpretations are, and if they are also heretical, how much they are similar to or divergent from that of Caputo. I think that they are closer than many readers would suspect. By way of a conclusion to this chapter, as well as a transition to the next chapter that will focus on Malabou’s relationship to Derrida, I want to focus in more closely on Caputo’s critique of Malabou’s understanding of Hegel.

In Chapter 6 of The Insistence of God, a short but incredibly profound engagement with the philosophy of Catherine Malabou and her reading of Hegel, Caputo drops a bomb. The chapter title, “Is There an Event in Hegel?” attests to the significance of Caputo’s reevaluation of Hegel in the middle of this book, which as we have seen is an affirmation and appropriation of Hegel for a radical theology of “perhaps.” This affirmation, however, can only go so far, and thus Caputo is forced to clarify and delimit his interpretation of Hegel in relation to those of Malabou and Žižek (he criticizes Žižek in a later chapter).

So the answer to the question of whether there is an event in Hegel is a kind of “perhaps,” which here for Caputo does not mean undecidable; it means yes, up to a point, but ultimately no, not a radical enough event of the sort elaborated by Derrida and affirmed by Caputo. And this chapter gets at the heart of what’s at stake between radical theology and contemporary Continental philosophy in relation to the readings of Hegel,
Caputo advocates a heretical Hegelianism, and he claims that Malabou’s Hegel is also heretical but she is perhaps not explicit enough about this heresy, insofar as she reads Hegel through Heidegger but fails to admit it. Caputo says that Malabou’s speculative hermeneutics concerns the plasticity of “the auto-transforming life of the Absolute in time.” The Absolute is another name for Spirit, which is the subject of Hegel’s philosophical narrative. And the stakes are to what extent Malabou can read a radical contingency or accident into the necessity of essential Spirit.

On the one hand, Caputo argues that there is contingency in Hegel’s dialectic of Spirit; it does not know how it will unfold in time. We cannot see what is to come. On the other hand, Caputo claims that at the end of the day, at dusk, we can see what has come, what has happened, and can declare a retroactive necessity. Caputo’s central “claim is this: nothing is going to happen that does not fulfill the destination of Spirit. If ‘eventually’ the Spirit can see these unforeseeables coming, this undoes the ‘event.’” Because Malabou’s argument depends on Hegel’s, Caputo can only go so far with Malabou. Malabou’s plasticity is tied to Hegel’s, and this limits the chance of the unforeseen event. An event can surprise us within a certain range or framework, but it cannot explode the framework itself. Caputo concludes that “there is no absolute errancy in Hegel, no absolute waste, no errancy that reaches as far as the absolute itself.”

I have to confess that I do not know whether or not this is a correct reading of Hegel, to the extent that it would supersede or render incorrect these important contemporary readings of Hegel by Malabou and Žižek, as well as that of Katrin Pahl in her important book *Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion*. I am not an expert or confident enough reader of Hegel to declare or decide that Caputo is right and Malabou is wrong, or vice versa. It’s possible that Malabou’s reading of Hegel is impossible (and it is certainly only possible via Heidegger), but I don’t think it simply conforms to the strictures of Caputo’s understanding and presentation of Hegel in his chapter.

Caputo lays out and endorses Derrida’s reservations about Malabou’s Hegel, and they are the same reservations that Derrida articulates in his Preface to Malabou’s book *The Future of Hegel*. Derrida’s Preface is called “A Time for Farewells.” Caputo focuses on Derrida’s question about the death of God, and how radical it is in Hegel’s philosophy. As Caputo says, “could God, unawares, step on an explosive? Could God be blown to bits without so much as knowing what hit him?” Such an event would be an accident, and Derrida suggests that Hegel’s philosophy cannot make room for an absolute accident that would explode Spirit itself. In his Preface,
Derrida says that Hegel could never subscribe to a history in which God or Spirit could accidentally blow up:

A God who would have, without ever seeing it come, let an infinite bomb explode in his hands, a God dead by some hopeless accident, hopeless of any salvation or redemption, without essentializing sublation, without any work of mourning and without any possible return or refund, would that be the condition of a future, if there must be such a thing called the future? In Hegel’s dialectic, according to Derrida and Caputo, there is no chance that God could be blown apart by an infinite bomb, and this is a delimitation of the event as well as a limit of plasticity in Hegel.

I want to make two points here in response to Caputo’s channeling of Derrida’s questioning of Malabou’s Hegel. First, my reading of Malabou and Malabou’s philosophy as she develops it after *The Future of Hegel*, partly in response to Derrida’s critique, suggests that plasticity is an event insofar as explosive plasticity is articulated along with the other two characteristics of plasticity, the ability to give form and the capacity to receive form. There is an event of plasticity in Malabou, and this becomes clear in her work on brain plasticity as well as her powerful readings of Freud in *The New Wounded* and Heidegger in *The Heidegger Change*. Just as Caputo suggests that there cannot be a thinking of accident without the notion of essence, so there cannot be the idea of force without form, and furthermore, we do not know what it means to have or think an event except in contrast to some sort of being or structure.

I think that Malabou suggests that for Hegel, Spirit is this errancy and waste, that it is not a circular process of Spirit becoming itself but an originary metamorphic change that we call Spirit afterward, in hindsight. It’s not that Spirit cannot die or that there is any limit to what can happen to Spirit by accident; it’s that whatever happens can only be affirmed or imagined to be Spirit essentially so long as there is subjectivity to think it. So the question is, can Spirit die? Of course it can, it does all the time, and this explosivity of and to Spirit constitutes Spirit; it “makes” Spirit in us, it makes us inspire and expire. Spirit is change, exchange, metamorphosis. Death is not something that occurs in the future, just as for Derrida the future is not simply the indefinite extension of the present. According to Caputo, in Hegel “the essential form does not mutate,” but in Malabou mutation is the “essence” of form. For Malabou, Derrida’s messianicity of the event threatens to swallow up form and induce a passivity into philosophy that she turns to Hegel and to brain plasticity to undo. Plasticity would be this forming of a future that we cannot fully form,
but we can take responsibility for participating in and shaping it. I don’t think there is a teleology inherent in plasticity, although I do struggle with the apparent teleology in Hegel at the level of his writings.

My second point is to emphasize just how explosive Caputo’s theology is here in this chapter and generally. According to Caputo,

for there to be a future for God, God would have to be exposed to the final and uttermost risk of death, where death would be something more than a moment in a metaphysical transition, more than the plasticity of transformability, but the possibility of extinction, of entropic dissipation, of a thermal equilibrium overtaking the divine fire, where there would be neither form nor transformation, where the logic of the dialectic would be exploded by the logic of death and utter irreversible extinction.\textsuperscript{61}

If there is an absolute and irreversible extinction as speculated by Ray Brassier in his provocative book \textit{Nihil Unbound}, there is not only no more God, but no more form, and therefore no extinction of form. Caputo does not deny Brassier’s challenge; he acknowledges the “logic of death and irreversible extinction.” This understanding operates dialectically in Caputo’s theology, to give rise to further forms of thought and practices of life for Mary, for Martha and for us.

Caputo says that Hegel and the theologians are on the same side in opposing this logic of death and irreversible extinction, and I want to underscore the radicality of this thought, this radical theological thought of the death of God at the heart of \textit{The Insistence of God}. This thought is explosive, and it breaks with most recognizable forms of theology. The question is whether this explosive theological thinking is, in fact, plastic, in Malabou’s sense, and also whether in some sense Malabou and Caputo are on the same “side.” Malabou is not a theologian. She does not want to hold onto the life of God, or save God from risk of death. Perhaps plasticity is incompatible with a weak theology of the event, at least from the viewpoint of conventional philosophy and confessional theology. But for “a new species of theologians,” it might not be possible or necessary—or even in the last instance accidental—to choose between plasticity and the event, between Caputo and Malabou, or between two futures of Derrida.