Radical Neo-Enlightenment

Radical Neo-Enlightenment:

Passionate Reason, Open Faith, Thoughtful Change

By

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For my army of guardian angels

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INTRODUCTION: BOTHERING

Perhaps reflecting the somewhat relaxed *zeitgeist* of the age but also befitting a book that necessarily surpasses philosophical formalities, maybe the ultimate existential question *"Why be?"* can be more casually rendered: *"Why bother?"* But even this more informal rendering does not really soften the blow—and perhaps even accentuates it, now in the form of a complaint or protest rather than an eloquent lamentation. It's a more informal but paradoxically all-the-more dynamic and dramatic expression of the crisis of existing. A daunting and disturbing question, operating on at least three critical levels: existentially, metaphysically, and ethically.

Existentially: we are born, we live, we die—so why bother? If Pascal was right about his age—that "All is vanity"—then how much truer is this truth today? Consciously and/or unconsciously, we now feel the full blow of the undeniable meaninglessness in existence (which doesn't automatically preclude the co-possibility of meaning and meaningfulness). Little wonder, then, that there is a skyrocketing demand for pharmaceutical and recreational drugs, growing rates of depression and suicide, and so on.

Of course, there are those of us who attempt to rationalize vanity, or, perhaps more accurately, situate it within a metaphysical framework which—you would think—would soften its blow, or even annul it. But this doesn't work either. *If* many/most/all metaphysical perspectives may be ultimately reduced to the religious/spiritual and the atheistic, then neither of these offer much comfort for the thoughtful. This is perhaps more obvious with atheism: why bother if/when we live in an indifferent, godless universe? Why care in a careless cosmos? But religion doesn't fare any better: can today's thinking believer honestly confirm with absolute certainty that the divine "exists" and has the kind of "essence" (loving, good, just, etc.) that suppresses and surpasses vanity's onslaught? (Unquestioning believers, on the other hand, find that their fundamentalism provides them with the fodder to bother.) After all, hope is just as much a teaser as it is a comforter—maybe more so.

There is, of course, a third position: agnosticism—the suspension of any metaphysical assumption. But subscribing to unknowing, which is undoubtedly a simultaneously brave and humble (and therefore maybe the

noblest) disposition, does little/nothing to alleviate vanity's onslaught. Just because the agnostic is profoundly aware of their unknowing, such knowledge doesn't necessarily assuage vanity's assault—and perhaps even aggravates it. The agnostic is just as much captive to it as the believer and the unbeliever. And so, why should the unknower bother?

We come, then, to the ethical. Does the ethical compel us to care? If ethics is a "code of conduct," a "set of rules" by which we may live our lives and make our decisions, then I'm unsure whether it can keep vanity at bay: can ethics explain *why* I should be good? Can it explain why I must strive to be a good person in a human world hell-bent on being evil? And speaking of evil: vanity assails not only the do-gooder, but also the evil-doer—why bother doing evil? Doing evil is often just as difficult as—and sometimes harder than—doing good (so I hear). And so, why bother being un/ethical?

Why We Bother

At least two-ish further life-dimensions and drivers/imperatives that are typically excluded by the serious and somber philosophy industry must also be summoned and re-figured when determining whether and why we should bother: the ecological-ethical and the aesthetic-hedonistic. I propose that, combined with the categories already mentioned (for we [always] act according to a messy, rhizomatic mix of forces), the ecological-ethical and the aesthetic-hedonistic may not necessarily eradicate vanity, but they can at least offer *resistance* to it, perhaps even overcoming it occasionally.

I employ the phrase "the ecological-ethical" in a somewhat/very crude empirical-materialist-pragmatic sense: we find ourselves "thrown" into corporeal existence, living amongst other creatures and entities we encounter and who encounter us, and with whom we are required to interact in various ways. The eco-ethical recognizes the radically relational nature of existence: that we humans, other creatures, the things we manufacture, and our environs all co-exist, and that the way we humans behave toward ourselves and others affects our selves and others. The eco-ethical implores that we humans should think and act in ways that allow *all of us* to flourish. This means, on the one hand, limiting the violence that is unavoidable precisely due to our interconnected materiality (e.g., when I walk, I annihilate/injure countless creatures), and, on the other hand, deploying violence as a last resort against those who seek to destroy others—human and otherwise (Manolopoulos 2009: 119; also refer to McDaniel 1990: 66; Wallace 1996: 165).

In other words, the sheer brute fact that we exist among other beings on this good Earth means that we must finally learn to get along. "Radical neo-

Enlightenment" is all about this finally-learning-to-get-along, driven by an ever-opening, ever-sharpening, ever-deepening Reason. ("Reason" is capitalized in this volume, as it once was and should be, signaling my deep respect, my reverence, my *love* for it.) Of course, an eco-ethical awareness is not the only motivation—or motivation enough—to bother: indeed, the task is so overwhelming that it is unlikely that any one single motive would be enough to propel us beyond paralysis, dissuasion, and not-bothering.

The other existential category I mention is that of "the aesthetic-hedonistic"—one may immediately object that this category is *antithetical* to the "eco-ethical." Such an objection only has traction according to a hierarchically dualistic logic whose puritanism rejects beauty and pleasure (I shall speak more of hedonism in due course). These forces should not only be cherished for their own sake, but also as legitimate motivators to bother, as resistors to vanity. But, today, the philosophical discrimination against the hedonistic (in particular) and the aesthetic (to a lesser extent) no longer holds—at least according to radical neo-Enlightenment, which loves beauty and joy. Beauty and pleasure: ways in which we resist and occasionally overcome vanity.

And so, embarking on this book was not simply motivated by some kind of response and responsibility to contribute to this Reason-informed getting-along—in other words, changing the world for the better—but/and also by the pleasure I derive from thinking and writing, the joy I derive from thinking and writing about passionate Reason, open faith, and thoughtful Change—things that are both pleasing and bothersome. Now, you may/will have noted that I have capitalized the word "change": why so? I employ this crucial term in both its capitalized and non-capitalized forms to reflect the fact that I myself cannot categorically pre-determine whether any requisite transformation—if any—will need to be "small-c" change like reform or "capital-C" Change like revolution; I explain in due course that an international network of thinkers is required in order to undertake the challenging task of determining whether any transformation is required, and if so, what kind. Of course, radical neo-Enlightenment is driven by the very reasonable assumption (given the empirical and rational-ethical evidence) that change/Change is necessary/preferable/desirable. I further elucidate this supposition as I proceed, particularly in the Sixth Chapter, which is tellingly titled "What—If Anything—Is To Be Done."

Let's return to the point I made about the pleasure I have derived from writing this bothersome book—but why should *you* read a book that will bother you? After all, we ordinarily (and often sensibly) try to avoid things that are bothersome. But when it comes to thinking, the opposite should hold. When engaging in philosophy, we should (only) read books that

bother us. That's why one reads Nietzsche. The history of philosophy clearly shows that the best philosophers are botherers. Gadflies, provocateurs. To think is to bother—first oneself, then others. But why should thoughtful books bother us? Because thinking—and the truth to which it leads—is bothersome, even hurtful. "The truth hurts" is as profound as it's flippant. And this book certainly hurts. It is intended to wound the ignorance that is bliss but ultimately deceptive, defective, and catastrophic. The truth hurts, it disturbs; so, like some kind of epistemic sadists, we lovers of truth *want* to be bothered, wounded by truth. Wisdom is self-inflicted irritation. Cogitation as agitation.

Two truths to bothering, then—and paradoxically interrelated: "to bother" means not only to care, but to disturb. To irritate because we care; to care because we are irritated. And we may take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion: *if* the transformation that we may require is revolutionary action, then revolution is the ultimate act of bothering.

This Bothersome Book's Style, Structure, and Substance

You will have already begun to notice the style of this work, which is doubtlessly (and surprisingly) bothersome to conventional philosophers: it is *too* clear, *too* accessible, *too* informal, *too* practical, *too* alive—and "worst" of all: *way too passionate*. Very bothersome for "scholarly" philosophy. The text's style will bother both Continental and analytic philosophers. For analyticists, it is not precise enough, it doesn't define enough, it doesn't cite enough. (A certain kudos to Jean-Luc Marion's *The Erotic Phenomenon* [2006] for the bothersome lack of any citations whatsoever.) Irritating for Continentalists, too: the book isn't obscure or convoluted. It leaves behind the abominable technicality, the jargonism of academic philosophy, and aims instead for an elegant, accessible form. A book for the multitude as well as the "intellectual elite."

Given the work's accessibility and its sweeping scope, it is necessarily marked by some degree of simplification and generalization. But this simplicity and generality does not undermine the work's nuance and rigor—like any other philosophical work, persuasion, compellingness, and self-evidence are the aims of this work's game. *Radical Neo-Enlightenment* strives for enough nuance and sophistication to ensure that the simplifications and generalizations don't devolve into anything excessively gross or reductive. But I have resisted the postmodern tendency of undertaking almost-endless nuancing—"the night of a thousand qualifications," to quote a quip from my friend and occasional philosophical combatant, N. N. (Nick) Trakakis. (As I explain shortly, the chapter titled

"Old Theology vs New Theology" is an analysis of one of our debates.) Nuancing is crucial, but a thinking that is *overly* sensitive paradoxically becomes paralyzed by it.

One could also perhaps assume that the ambition of this book entails a certainty and a confidence that may be construed as bordering on arrogance. To be sure, a degree of Reason-driven certitude marks the work, but this must not be confused with the epistemic arrogance that—frankly—sickens us radical neo-Enlightenmentalists. For, as I emphasize throughout the work, radical neo-Enlightenment is as humble as it is confident, thus avoiding what are construed to be the errors and excesses of previous Enlightenmental impulses. That's why you will discover a lexicon of epistemic humility deployed throughout this text: "if," "perhaps," "maybe," and so on— which is, to be sure, bothersome for the arrogant, for the dogmatic.

Also essential here is the utilization of a vocabulary of approximation—"somewhat," "somehow," "some kind of," etc.—particularly necessary when discussing phenomena and possibilities like "Reason," "faith," and "Change."[1] Furthermore, as you may/will have already noted, the forward slash is also indispensable here: in various contexts, it can denote different things (sometimes simultaneously), such as synonymity and undecidability, but the slash itself can also indicate the inexpressible truth/s situated between two approximations.

One last note on style—or at least of the ambience its style intends: given the sobriety of the subject-matter, one would anticipate that the mood of this text is somber. But even though the subjects are treated seriously, the treatment is also imbued with a certain playfulness: we are/may need to

[1] Charles Taylor proposes that "'reason' does not have a single, unambiguous meaning" (2007: 226). Certainly, there are deviations and disfigurations of rationality. Taylor astutely often refers to "instrumental" "disengaged" Reason—which differs quite radically from the passionate Reason advanced by radical neo-Enlightenment. Of course, the task of "defining" the most rational rationality is not completed by differentiating these logics: passionate Reason is expansive, complex, and complicated, but we do not thereby abandon the task of attempting to identify and articulate its core meaning/s—though quite "indirectly": by discussing its functions, limits, etc.

become "playful revolutionaries."[2] Likewise, the work is imbued with a certain neo-Nietzschean joy—what could be more joyous news than the thought of Change that transforms humanity and thus saves the Earth? And the present work's advancement of a certain kind of hedonism reinforces the fact that radical neo-Enlightenment enjoys enjoyment. And given our recognition of things like human erring—even and especially when it comes to the most noblest causes (e.g., the Russian Revolution)—there is also a healthy stylistic dose of that which traverses the space between sobriety and play: irony.[3]

Play, joy, irony—all bothersome to the solemn.

And what of this book's structure and substance? This monograph is a "multigraph": it is a heavily re-worked consolidation of published and unpublished articles, presentations, and an exposition of a dialogue with Trakakis (original sources are cited in the Acknowledgments).[4] I have attempted to structure the volume in a very straightforward way (which is annoying for the convoluted philosophy industry). I begin with a criticism of conventional philosophy or "philosophistry" (Chapter One), followed by an outline of a "passionate Reason" which turns/returns philosophy to itself (Chapter Two). The third chapter presents a sketch of a theology, divinity, and biblical hermeneutics (a hermeneutics applicable to any revered religious text) that accords with this passionate rationality. I then dissect a

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[2] I borrow this phrase from Taylor (2007: 53). Peter Quigley concisely expresses the bothersome ethico-political significance of play: "Play is not to be understood in the sense of irresponsibility, but in the sense of dissent from the seriousness of those who claim to possess the truth that can be structured and enforced" (1995: 186). (Playfulness is also a key theme in my *If Creation is a Gift*, e.g., 46, 130-132, 135-138, 145, etc.) We confirm with Quigley the ethico-political force of play, but the second half of the remark nevertheless requires correction: as I explain in due course, we can possess *enough* of the truth to structure it and enforce it, thereby successfully redressing the multiplying and intensifying crises facing humanity and the Earth. This structuring and enforcement of truth—this is precisely the task of radical neo-Enlightenment and the possible/probable Change it thinks and works towards. In the present context, then, irony may perhaps be indicating the recognition that we do not possess "The Truth" but "enough truth(s)/Truth."

[3] And, yes, it has not escaped my notice that radical neo-Enlightenment's acronym, RNE, sounds like "irony"—a most fortuitous coincidence.

[4] Taylor's instructions to his readers therefore approximately apply to this work: "I ask the reader who picks up this book not to think of it as a continuous story-and-argument, but rather as a set of interlocking essays, which shed light on each other, and offer a context of relevance for each other. I hope the general thrust of my thesis will emerge from this sketchy treatment, and will suggest to others further ways of developing, applying, modifying, and transposing the argument" (2007: ix).

dialogue between Trakakis and myself, a dissection that further articulates a passionately rational faith in contrast to conventional belief and theology (Chapter Four). I explore the nexus between Christianity and communism (Chapter Five, which concludes the second part of the work). I then turn to the question, possibility, and possible necessity of revolution, and fundamental tasks/steps needed in order to achieve radical global transformation (Chapter Six). I conclude the third part of the work by offering a tentative blueprint of the kind of society that is required if humanity is to save itself and a crippled Creation (Chapter Seven). The three parts correspond with the three elements in the book's sub-title: "passionate Reason," "open faith," "thoughtful Change"—hopefully many of the nuances of these six common but complicated words will be delineated as I proceed.

To be sure, such "division" is somewhat contrived: each part is substantially interrelated, just as philosophy, theology, and social transformation are more related than hyper-analyticists are willing to concede. So there is some thematic overlap and a certain degree of repetition, but this cannot be avoided—nor should it: I wholeheartedly agree with Slavoj Žižek in his insistence that, today, thinking should aim not so much on the discovery of "Absolutely New Ideas/Questions" but to repeat "with a twist" older ones—but I go further than Žižek: not only to repeat the questions but to answer them with a certain degree of authority, authored/authorized by rationality. What are these "old" and yet timeless/timefull questions, the ones that really count? What is Reason? What is true faith? How to change the world? And so on. I, for one, can no longer dwell on ethico-politically insignificant/less-significant matters. Radical neo-Enlightenment engages with the things that really matter, that matter the most (right now).

On the way to answering these questions (obviously not definitively but somewhat comprehensively), this book strips philosophy of its sophistry, of its life-irrelevant accretions, by going back/forward to its radical roots, drives, and ambitions. A stripped-back, "back-to-basics" philosophy which "paradoxically" allows it to have a future and even *be* the future. This work therefore dispenses with traditional philosophy's conventional problems, its fixation with tedious technical debates, including "idealism 'versus' realism," "free will 'versus' determinism," "paradox 'versus' dialectic," etc.—as if we must categorically choose one side over the other; as if they do not (at least subterraneously) inhabit each other and are not ultimately interrelated in certain ways; as if dwelling in these pedantic debates will help ourselves and the Earth. This book dispenses with hyper-Cartesian doubt ("Do I exist?," "Am I really writing these words?," etc.); it dispenses

with the hyper-skepticism (and its relative: ultra-cynicism), which is philosophistry's exemplary stance and symptom. Nor does this volume bother with the "analyticism versus Continentalism" divide: although any reader will be able to ascertain that my sympathies lie with the more dynamic and ultimately more life-relevant Continentalist current, radical neo-Enlightenment certainly seeks to surpass its obscureness, self-indulgence, and melodramaticism. Furthermore, this book exceeds the "theism versus atheism" polemic—instead, it shows how the two *can and should* be united in the process of radical neo-Enlightenment and its (anticipated) transformational ambition.

Such an unwillingness to engage in philosophy's inane traditional debates—bothersome to scholars in the extreme. But this doesn't bother us radical neo-Enlightenmentalists. Indeed, it would be obscene *in the extreme*, if, in an age of multiplying and intensifying crises and catastrophes, we remain involved in these ultimately frivolous debates. Such an indulgence bothers my bothersome Marxian conscience, which insistently recalls me to the fact that philosophy should not only interpret the world but also change/Change it. (Of course, if/when change/Change occurs, there would possibly/probably be time for intellectual indulgences; after all, philosophical and theological mind-games could perhaps be enjoyed in a more recreational, carefree society—but it is obscene for today's thinkers to be engaging in them, doing nothing to undo the world's undoing.)

The name of Marx generates a further thought, one that shall be developed in due course: if the communist—or *neo*-communist—is ultimately some kind of lover (a lover of freedom, justice, equity, and so on), then perhaps we discover the ultimate thwart to vanity: love itself.

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I am also extremely grateful to the following journals and websites (listed alphabetically) for allowing me to re-publish tracts and incorporate re-worked passages from various articles and op-ed pieces written over the past few years (I also include works that more indirectly inform the text), with the papers' titles and publication details following the source and title,

followed by the (primary/general) location of their incorporation in the present work (section and chapter headings) in square brackets:

- *Agora-Dialogue*, "The Thinking Person's God-dess," 2013, formerly at http://agora-dialogue.com/?p=55282 ["The Thinking Believer's Divinity" in "Divine Thinking and Cutting Reading"];
- *Australian Rationalist*, "Revolutionary Reason," 2013, 89: 28-29; http://search.informit.com.au/fullText;dn=455783665961706;res=IELHSS
  ["Of Reason's Grounds, Ambitions, and Dynamics" in "Becoming Philosophy" and "Its Neo-Secularity" in "Blueprint of The Blueprint"];
- *Consortium News*, "Jesus's Provocative Political Protest," January 11, 2013; http://consortiumnews.com/2013/01/11/jesuss-provocative-political-protest/ ["A Passionate Jesus" and "From Overturning Tables to Sharing Them" in "Christian Communism—*Really!*"];
- *FORMA: Journal of Comparative Studies: Art, Literature and Thought*, "For a More Destructive Deconstruction: Slaying Monster-Traditions," 2013, 7: 73-85;
  http://www.upf.edu/forma/_pdf/vol07/forma_vol07_manolopoulos.pdf ["An Example: Deconstructive Philosophistry" in "Overcoming Philosophistry"];
- *Forum Philosophicum*, "Today's Truly Philosophical Philosopher of Religion," 16.2 (2011): 39-58 ["The Thinking Believer's Divinity" in "Divine Thinking and Cutting Reading"];
- *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, "Religious Diversity Within the Limits of Radical Neo-Enlightenment," 2013, 12: 23-31; http://irdialogue.org/journal/religious-diversity-within-the-limits-of-radical-neo-enlightenment-by-mark-manolopoulos/ ["Its Neo-Secularity" in "Blueprint of The Blueprint"];
- *Philosophers for Change*, "Revolutionary Philosophy and Philosophers: A Plea and a Program," February 3, 2015; http://philosophersforchange.org/2015/02/03/revolutionary-philosophy-and-philosophers-a-plea-and-a-program/; ["'Time is Needed'—Even If/When We Don't Have Time" and "Advocating and Implementing the Blueprint—Peacefully/Otherwise" in "What—If Anything—Is To Be Done"];
- *Political Theology*, "A Loving Attack on Caputo's 'Caputolism' and his Refusal of Communism," 2013, 14.3: 378-389 ["Resisting Theosophistry: Reading Caputo Against "Caputolism" in "Christian Communism—*Really!*"];

- *Postmodern Openings*, "Caputo in a Nutshell: Two Introductory (and Slightly Critical) Lectures," 2013, 4.2: 21-43; http://postmodernopenings.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/3_Mark-MANOLOPOULOS_PO-Vol-4-No-2.pdf ["Resisting Theosophistry: Reading Caputo Against "Caputolism" in "Christian Communism—*Really!*"];
- *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, "The Dirty Hands and Pure Hearts of Revolutionary Leaders: Love and Hate in Jesus and Che Guevara," 2015, 13: 89-103; ["Violent Love" in "What—If Anything—Is To Be Done"];
- *Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of Bible, Theology and Philosophy*, "Reading Scripture With a Scalpel," 2012, 13: 7-25; http://www.airiti.com/ceps/ec_en/ecjnlarticleView.aspx?jnlcattype=0&jnlptype=0&jnltype=0&jnliid=3778&issueiid=148967&atliid=2691678 ["A Ruthlessly Thoughtful Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture With a Scalpel" in "Divine Thinking and Cutting Reading"];
- *The Church and Postmodern Culture / The Other Journal*, "Thinking Believers: Nick Trakakis 'Cross'-Examines Mark Manolopoulos" (3 Parts), 2010; http://churchandpomo.typepad.com/conversation/2010/05/trakakis-manolopoulos-part-1.html (replace "1" with "2" and "3" to locate Parts 2 & 3) ["Old Theology vs New A/Theology"]; and "Why We Revolutionary Believers Love Existentialism," May 7, 2013; http://theotherjournal.com/churchandpomo/2013/05/07/why-we-revolutionary-believers-love-existentialism/ ["Correcting the Wise Solomon: Intimations of Neo-Existentialism" in "Overcoming Philosophistry"];
- *ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] News / The Drum*, "There's a Reason They Call It 'Falling' in Love," April 17, 2015; http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-17/manolopoulos-theres-a-reason-they-call-it-falling-in-love/6400176 ["Violent Love" in "What—If Anything—Is To Be Done"].

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PASSIONATE REASON

CHAPTER ONE

OVERCOMING PHILOSOPHISTRY

Could we, today, imagine Nietzsche submitting a paper or manuscript to a publisher? Could we imagine his work being accepted? Of course not. Why not? What does the impossibility of imagining such a scenario say about the contemporary state of philosophy and philosophers? Many things, almost all of them critical. Philosophy, in both its analytic and Continental guises, has predominantly failed, betraying itself and the world. Its treason exhibits itself with the deafening silence generated by the following question: which philosopher today even partially traverses—let alone sets forth from/returns to—philosophy's original site and meaning, *love/r of wisdom*? In other words, which philosopher today loves wisdom? Surprisingly (or not), philosophy has remained almost totally silent on the question of love.[1]

To be sure, I, too, am guilty of thus far remaining rather silent on love.[2] The present work shall not significantly redress this lack, though it traverses the question according to a number of trajectories, perhaps a key mode appearing to be surprising and peculiar (even offensive): love's violences. But the traversal remains rather inadequate, for two basic reasons(/excuses?). First of all, I do not presently have the ability to singlehandedly undertake such a daunting conceptual task (i.e., *What is*

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[1] One could/should cite various recent attempts, such as Alain Badiou's rigorous and accessible *In Praise of Love* (2012), which is recalled in due course, or Marion's brilliant but imposing *Erotic Phenomenon* (2006). (Of course, the latter work is quite problematic in several ways. To begin with, I wonder whether a chronic dogmatist like Marion (Ward 1998; Manolopoulos 2002) could speak truly of true love. Then there are other disturbing questions, such as his homophobia (Pearl 2017). One could perhaps object—as a reviewer did in relation to one of my articles which insisted against dogmatism—that my own position is "rather paradoxically dogmatic in its rejection of dogma": without buying into this sophistry, we note that the key word here, "paradoxically," is telling: a paradox is a rational "contradiction," as in "dogmatically rejecting dogmatism.")

[2] Although I concluded my *If Creation is a Gift* by way of an "After Thought" which proposes that gifting shares a radical affinity with loving, that hardly makes up for my own failure to thus far think love in a sustained way.

love?). Furthermore and perhaps more "importantly"—at least in terms of the imperative for urgently-required pragmatic thinking (perhaps the very definition of "wisdom")— we must ask ourselves whether we can really afford to devote our time to sustained theoretical reflections on love rather than produce concrete solutions to the Earth's plight. Shouldn't we first survive and transfigure a disfigured and disfiguring global society before fully delving into love's mysteries, paradoxes, and abysses? And in any case, isn't turning first to the plight of the Earth itself an act of love?—perhaps/probably the presently most loving act of love?

Obviously, philosophy's failure and betrayal is not just contemporary: philosophy—what I am calling "philosophistry"—has perhaps/probably been unfaithful to itself from its very beginnings, and certainly throughout its history/histories. Gilles Deleuze's criticism in this regard is starkly true: "the history of philosophy plays a patently repressive role in philosophy" (1990: 5). And Jacques Lacan also appears to be critical of philosophy's history, particularly its inability to speak to the masses (which is rather ironic, given that Lacan's own work is rather impenetrable): "for a long time now philosophy has had absolutely nothing to say that speaks to everybody" (1974). Philosophy: self-repressed and mute. Of course, its originary (and continuing) unfaithfulness *may* be unsurprising *if* we concur with the Derridean contention that (every?) "origin" is differentiated or "divided": in this context, philosophy is simultaneously faithful and unfaithful to itself. However, what *is* surprising is the *extent* of its disloyalty: philosophistry's betrayal is today so endemic that one can barely recognize it *as philosophy*. (Like a cheating "lover": the beloved is now barely recognizable as the beloved.)

Any honest thinker would accede that contemporary philosophy betrays itself predictably, repeatedly (like Peter's repetitious denial of Jesus). My criticism shall, however, be brief, for at least two interrelated reasons: any sustained attack may give the misleading impression that there is absolutely no place or time for self-indulgent philosophizing (as I previously noted, such a pursuit would probably be allowed in a transformed/transformational society), and any extended polemic would distract me from my immediate task: outlining a path for philosophy's restoration and glorification rather than protractedly repudiating it.

Why, then, do I construe contemporary philosophy as a betrayer, as a failure? Whenever I read philosophistry today—eternal optimist and/or fool that I am—I almost never fail to be disappointed. For today's philosophy is life-irrelevant, paltry, tedious, uninspiring. Rarely do I ever come across a philosopher and think, "Aha! A lover of wisdom." The vast majority come across as lovers of pedantry, sophistry, "cleverness"—but

where are the lovers of wisdom? Perhaps elsewhere—if at all. And this failure and betrayal is deepened institutionally. Structural philosophistry shares many of the characteristics of—dare I say it?—organized religion: rigid, dogmatic, bureaucratic, clerical, cold, pedantic, lacking com/passion, lacking solidarity, divided, in schism. And the camps' mutual contempt is both embarrassing and telling: alternating between snipes and snobbery, they pharisaically point out the sins in each other's eye but arrogantly fail to notice the titanic redwood lodged in their own.

Of course, we must also take into account the corporatization of universities as a factor in the degradation of philosophy departments—which should be safe-havens for wisdom's lovers. Instead, the philosophy department—if a tertiary institution happens to have one—is now just another company "division" governed according to the brutal logic of The Corporation. Students are now definitively cast as consumers: not only are pupils force-fed the drudge that is philosophistry, they must *pay for it*. And teachers are now reduced to being disseminators of this drudgery *and* induced into being administrators and number-crunchers—and worst of all: producers who churn out passionless "research" to boost the university's "productivity." In this global shopping mall which was once *an Earth*, there is no demand for lovers of wisdom, no desire for those that cannot be "valued" or priced—*the priceless is now worthless*. There is no demand for such lovers—and, hence, according to capitalism's brutal logic, no supply. Society, then, plays its role in philosophistry's betrayal and failure, but—to repeat—philosophers cannot lay *all* the blame with it: philosophy has been betraying itself and the world.

Betrayals all around.[3]

[3] The contempt for philosophy is particularly felt in a land like Australia (my birthplace and home). To begin with, the tough and dry "Australian materialist" analyticism—which domineers the country's philosophical landscape like the scorching southern sun—perhaps attempts to be as accessible and practical as possible, reflecting a pragmatic, down-to-Earth ethos. And yet, for much/most of the population, philosophy possesses little/no value—indeed and on the contrary, when I remark that I am a philosopher (often in a hesitant way), the response is often either derogatory (e.g., "Oh, you're a bullshit artist . . ."), or befuddled ("What's philosophy?")—or worse: disinterested, apathetic. (Hence, my hesitation when I am asked what I "do.") This is less a criticism of Australian society (though a criticism of Australian anti-intellectualism, nonetheless) than of philosophistry: the disdain and derision—and worse: indifference—it receives today should also be attributed to its own behavior (i.e., elitist, hyper-technical, irrelevant, etc.).

An Example: Deconstructive Philosophistry

Let us briefly consider how the philosophical phenomenon of deconstruction is implicated in ethico-politically impotent philosophistry. Deconstruction is certainly an unsettling force, upsetting almost everyone who experiences it, given its uncompromising questioning of our received notions, hierarchical dualisms, traditions, structures. It caused a bit of a stir in academia for a number of decades: but is academia a true measure of its radicality? That the word "deconstruction" has made its way into popular culture and dinner party conversation doesn't really signal its ethico-political subversiveness either, does it? In its existing configurations, deconstruction isn't as threatening as the conservative backlash would suggest, *but* nor is it perhaps as impotent as Leftist criticism asserts. Even deconstruction's latest guise, brilliantly refigured by Martin Hägglund (2008) as a cold-hearted descriptivism (which certainly chills us passionate destroyers-and-creators) is not really dangerous, precisely because it "returns" deconstruction to the more-or-less apolitical task of description.

Given that Jacques Derrida was the "daddy of deconstruction," it is little surprise that this epistemic current may be ultimately construed as quite a conservative intellectual movement: not only does his dense, obscure, and convoluted writing style conceal its radical import, but he himself inhibited its radicality. Consider the revealing statement uttered during a 1994 roundtable discussion between Derrida and a number of Villanova University academics, of which *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (1997) was the result. (What makes this text fascinating, apart from the fact that it is an the exceptionally accessible work, is that deconstruction's subversive core rears its head in the very same work, a point to which I'll return). During the exchange, when speaking of his involvement in the establishment of the International College of Philosophy and the desire to inaugurate something new while maintaining elements of older institutions, Derrida declared: "So, you see, I am a very conservative person" (1997: 8). Like all good Derrideans (or perhaps more accurately: *neo*-Derrideans), I must first preface my analysis with multiple provisos. To begin with, Derrida was French, and the French (and not *just* the French) love to shock, so perhaps this comment shouldn't be taken too seriously. After all, Derrida was playful, a stirrer, which is characteristic of the greatest thinkers. (Nietzsche immediately comes to mind, despite his mis/portrayal as "austere.") But let us nevertheless follow Derrida's example of reading closely, faithfully; let us do to/with him what he did to/with others, i.e., take him at his word. Let us therefore tentatively assume that Derrida was

indeed "a very conservative person." Furthermore, Derrida refers to *himself*, to his personhood, perhaps/probably in contradistinction to his philosophy or to his explication of a thinking he calls "deconstruction" (though one wonders whether/how to differentiate a person from their thinking). In other words, Derrida may have been a very conservative person (we could note here that he was married, a parent, an academic, etc.—features which don't necessarily entail conservatism but certainly aren't suggestive of a rebel), while deconstruction is not conservative—or at least "not very conservative." (Once again, Nietzsche—radical thinker and perhaps/probably somewhat conservative person—comes to mind.) Derrida may be said to embody the "both-and" of the deconstructive logic he advances: simultaneously a conservative person and a radical thinker—or probably more accurately: "one and the same" person may be both conservative *and* radical, i.e., that, in certain aspects, one is conservative, and in others, radical. Differentiated, "divided" (this word is problematic if/when it implies an "Original Unity"), multiple. Furthermore, we may propose that Derrida was a thinker who realized that what he was fundamentally doing was *describing* rather than—or more so than—prescribing or prescribing something radical.

And yet, even when taking all these factors into account (hyperbole, distinguishing between the man and his thought, the multiplicity in subjectivity, deconstruction-as-description), we are indeed "surprised" by such a declaration/confession, as John D. Caputo rightly notes (1997: 37). I propose that we are surprised—even shocked—precisely because the harbinger of such a radical philosophy might/would be expected to be a radical or at least unconservative or at least only relatively conservative. But to be *very* conservative?—yes, quite/very surprising, even shocking (perhaps a reaction Derrida purposely sought, considering he was a very cheeky thinker). Then again, even though Derrida was quite the revolutionary thinker, he never really came across as a revolutionary, as someone who wanted to destroy the System and create something new/newish—and we could even question whether he sought radical reform. To be sure, like any thoughtful individual, Derrida was drawn to Marxism (as demonstrated by 1994's *Specters of Marx*), but I wonder whether/to what extent he shared the Marxian drive for revolution. Nonetheless, we desirers of a transformed-transforming society can't help but be at least a little bit surprised by Derrida's declaration/confession of his conservatism, perhaps even shocked. Most certainly and at the very least: disappointed.

Caputo provides his own excellent commentary or exposition of Derrida's conservatism—a commentary with its own problems. Let us

begin with the following introductory remark: "Derrida was trying to persuade us that deconstruction is on our side, that it means to be good news, and that it *does not leave behind a path of destruction and smoldering embers* [emphasis added, given that I return to this point]" (1997: 37). This remark immediately prompts a number of questions. On *whose* side ("exactly") is deconstruction? Given the particular context of the text, is it on the side of Villanova's academics? But whose side are *they* on? We may offer the reasonable assumption that some of them might be radicals, others conservatives, and still others both or neither. Certainly an ambiguous situation. What *is* clear is that they all belong to an institution, which begs the question: is the University conservative or radical? Perhaps/probably Villanova is *ultimately* on the side of the status quo; it doesn't appear to be a den of revolutionary stirring. *If* Villanova University conserves the world more than it conspires to transform it, then Caputo's statement implies that deconstruction is ultimately a conservative force. Is this an implication that Caputo would endorse? My contention is that any thoroughgoing or radicalized deconstruction (*if* deconstruction requires radicalization) would not be on the side of ultimately conservative institutions and their members. So Caputo's remark about deconstruction being on "our side"—especially in the context of the academic Establishment—is ambiguous and somewhat problematic.

But more fundamental ambiguities abound. Caputo explains that deconstruction is/has "good news." This contention would be extremely contentious for the likes of Hägglund and other cold-hearted descriptionists. But I think—or at least desire—that deconstruction *is*/*has* good news. But does it? *If* it is/has any good news, what is it? And if so, for whom is it good news? For powerful conservatives or for powerless radicals?—or both?—or neither?

The ambiguity doesn't end there. Caputo goes on to explain that Derrida has a nuanced approach to "tradition"—which is, one may fairly say, the very stuff of conservatism, conservatism's home and vehicle. But, according to Caputo (1997: 37), what Derrida purportedly attempts to do with tradition is to:

> unfold what has been folded over by and in the tradition, to show the pliant multiplicity of the innumerable traditions that are sheltered within "tradition." A tradition is not a hammer with which to slam dissent and knock dissenters senseless, but a responsibility to read, to interpret, to sift and select responsibly among many competing strands of tradition and interpretations of tradition.

Let us pause once again to analyze some of the sentiments contained in

this passage. First of all, the word "sheltered" is revealing: this word implies safety, of keeping safe, of self-insulation: Caputo's contention is that traditions "shelter" innumerable traditions within them. But is that really the case? Don't traditions try their damndest to do the opposite? Rather than shelter alternative and/or competing voices, they typically seek to drive them out or silence them. Rather than sheltering alternative or heretical traditions, dominant traditions attempt to—and often spectacularly succeed in—destroying them, leaving behind their smoldering embers. Furthermore, a "tradition" in the Derridean-deconstructive sense may theoretically not be "a hammer with which to slam dissent and knock dissenters senseless," but the use and/or threat of force is certainly one way dominant traditions maintain dominance. (And isn't what we are describing here one way we could describe history? History as the hammering-away of Tradition's others, other traditions.)

Caputo then makes the following remark: "For he [Derrida] sees deconstruction as a way to keep the *event* of tradition going, to keep it on the move, so that it can be continually translated into new events, continually exposed to a certain revolution in a self-perpetuating auto-revolution" (1997: 37). Caputo goes on: "That is an aporia that conservativism can never swallow"—and so, perhaps, can't we: isn't Caputo being too gracious to tradition/s, giving them too much benefit of the doubt? Isn't he being too optimistic—even perhaps overly naïve (for a certain degree of naïvete is a good thing)—when he is proposing/asserting that traditions "*can be*" continually translated, that they *can be* auto-revolutionizing? And when Caputo proposes that a tradition is/may be "auto-revolutionary," how revolutionary can it be? Can there even be "auto-revolution" when it comes to a tradition? Isn't a "tradition" that which resists any radical self-revision? There may be a certain degree of reformation going on in some of our traditions, but shouldn't such reforms be deemed merely self-adjusting or self-reforming rather than auto-*revolutionizing*? Surely such adjustments or reforms can't be considered worthy of the name (revolutionary) "event" (which, we remind ourselves, is emphasized in the original text). The *event* is precisely that which interrupts, disrupts, and radicalizes traditions to the point of transforming them or replacing them with new/ish ones. For example, "Jesus" is the name of a (purported) *event* which first disrupted Judaism and then created a new/ish faith. Isn't the *event*—or at least the most *eventful event*—precisely that which challenges traditions, radicalizes or transforms them, and indeed even sometimes *destroys* them, leaving behind their smoldering embers, creating something new—even new traditions—in

their stead?[4]

If history has taught us anything, it is this: that it is *much more often* the case that traditions hold on for their dear life, and that their keepers threaten, injure, or kill those who question them or dare to destroy the traditions that oppress the different and the powerless. Isn't a tradition, *by definition*, that which seeks to hold onto itself despite the forces of time, openness, questioning, doubt, rationality, knowledge, science, justice . . .? Isn't it the case that dominant traditions usually only reform in the face of real pressure, real threat? By employing a somewhat ambiguous and expansive phrase like "event of tradition," Caputo has brought "event" and "tradition" too close together, whereas I propose that the two are different and even often/usually antithetical to each other. I would even contend that existing dominant traditions are more-often-than-not *enemies* of the event; traditions are typically hostile to it. In other words, dominant traditions are usually oppressors of the event, of events, and all-the-more oppressive when the event is all-the-more eventful. (For example, the Christ-event was suppressed by the twin traditions of Judaic clericalism and Roman Imperialism.)

Furthermore and unfortunately, Caputo does not explain what the "certain [kind of] revolution" this self-revolution might/would be. My hunch is that such a "self-revolution' is more likely to be more of a pseudo-revolution rather than an authentic one—or, to negatively-critically employ Derrida's formula of "x-without-x" (e.g., "religion-without-religion") that we ordinarily invoke in a positive sense: a revolution-without-revolution, i.e., not a *real* revolution, not a transformation that either radically transfigures the traditions into more reasonable-ethical-just ones or obliterates them, attempting to construct more reasonable, ethical, just ones in their stead, on top of their smoldering embers.

So what Caputo probably has in mind here is *reform*. (I return to this point shortly when I discuss Caputo's advancement of a "reformed capitalism," and also treated in the latter, programmatic chapters.) No doubt, we are certainly grateful that Caputo has dared to mention the blessed but dangerous word "revolution"—indeed, by employing the phrases "auto-revolution" and "auto-deconstruction" in close proximity, we may perhaps intuit a certain commensurability, compatibility, or symbiosis between the two (which is my hope for deconstruction, for a

[4] I am reminded here, by way of Merold Westphal (1998), of the Christic admonition: "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God [*sic*] in order to keep your tradition!" (Mark 7:1). (As I explain in more detail in due course, the "[*sic*]" registers the gender-exclusiveness of words like "God," "man," etc.; I *periodically* insert the "[*sic*]" to avoid tiresome repetition.)

more destructive deconstruction). Deconstruction and revolution, or stated otherwise: deconstruction and reconstruction. But rather than embracing an opportunity to emphasize any relation between deconstruction and revolution, and in the process, foregrounding the radicality that the two share or may share, Caputo instead dilutes and downplays deconstruction's radicality by advancing the notion that revolution is a part of tradition, it occurs *within* tradition, *by* tradition. Which isn't altogether unreasonable, given that deconstruction is always already working within whatever it deconstructs. But for a more destructive deconstruction or deconstructive destruction, however, the reverse is/would be true—or at least *truer*: revolution either transforms or annihilates dominant, oppressive traditions; the most revolutionary revolution occurs from "without"—or at least as if from without—breaking-in like a thief in the night, as an event.

Maybe one could object by reiterating that what Caputo is describing here is "tradition" as figured by Derrida—at least according to Caputo's rendering. But Caputo's overly optimistic rendering is *too* open, *too* forgiving. Its excessive naïvete, its error, is the notion that dominant traditions radically change from within: but the brutal historical truth is that this rarely occurs; much-more-often-than-not, traditions require external intervention—oftentimes, they require annihilation, thereby leaving behind smoldering embers. Derrida's/Caputo's "bigger, wider, more diffuse and mobile" idea of tradition doesn't help us when dealing with *actually existing* traditions, with traditions as they actually operate—especially dominant traditions, which are big and wide and stubborn and immovable.[5]

What makes this example even more intriguing is that Derrida and Caputo *themselves* realize deconstruction's revolutionary (or at least transformative) potential. For example, the word "revolution" is uttered twice in the same sentence by Derrida during the Villanova Roundtable

[5] Perhaps worth citing here is a remark by that ruthless slayer of traditions, Nietzsche: "What characterizes the free spirit is not that his [*sic*] opinions are the more correct but that he has liberated oneself from tradition . . ." (1997: 108). Of course, even the great Nietzsche requires revision: *(Only) By liberating ourselves from enslaving traditions and establishing enlightened traditions will our opinions and actions become more "correct" (i.e., more rational, more ethical, etc.).*

(1997: 25).[6] So even though he is "a very conservative person," he nevertheless speaks of revolution. And Caputo himself does not shy away from recurring references to a radical ethico-politics. In Caputo's first full-blown (and typically wonderful) theological work, *The Weakness of God* (2006) which was published almost a decade after *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, there is a number of allusions to radical change: Caputo explicitly mentions the word "revolution" several times (2006, e.g., 31, 32, 34, 52). We may conjecture that Caputo had moved on from a more conservative praise/appraisal of tradition to a more critical position—but, as I say, this is a conjecture.

In any case, Derrida's conservatism and Caputo's affirmative portrayal of tradition show how even radical philosophical movements tend to concede too much to philosophistry, yielding too much to it. This is not to say that deconstruction's more radical ethico-political dimension may be more clearly and strongly identified and advanced, thereby contributing to the restoration of philosophy and its radical ambition. After all, couldn't deconstruction's radicalization contribute to the task of either significantly reforming or replacing oppressive traditions, institutions, systems? Shouldn't deconstruction be instructive and prescriptive, even violently if need be, leaving behind a path of destruction and *not even smoldering* embers—just in case these smoldering embers re-ignite?

I hope deconstruction is/can be more threatening, more *destructive*—and thereby more constructive, given that destruction often creates a clearing for creation. I therefore call for a more dangerous deconstruction, one that focuses less on description and more on prescription. A deconstruction that focuses less on elegantly unraveling its target, focusing much more on *destroying* it or whatever is bad in it. Not just "unpacking" it or reading it "against the grain" but demolishing it or radically transforming it if/when the justice in/as deconstruction requires it. Such destruction and/or transfiguration is a daunting task, of course, but one that must be undertaken by philosophy if it is to become re-faithful to itself.

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[6] The word "revolution" is mentioned with reference to messianicity (as "opposed" to the concrete messianisms—in other words, religious traditions): "There is the possibility that my relation to the Messiah is this: I would like him [why a "him"? Couldn't the Messiah be female, transgendered, or gendered otherwise?], I hope that he will come, that the other will come, as other, for that would be justice, peace, and revolution—because in the concept of messianicity there is revolution —. . ." (Incidentally, I briefly discuss the question of a Second Coming in the fifth chapter.)