TRAGEDY OR RELIGION? A QUESTION OF "RADICAL HERMENEUTICS"

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Toward the end of his quest for a radical "hermeneutics" forged from the thinking of Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida, John Caputo presents us with two incommensurable responses to suffering—the religious and the tragic—and, with that, a dialectical tension between "laughter" (as in Kierkegaard/Nietzsche/Derrida) and the "spirit of seriousness" (as in Heidegger). On the foundation of such contradictions and tensions rests our "openness to the mystery" and the "final" chapter of radical hermeneutics.[1]

At the end is where we begin, for in its end "radical" hermeneutics as envisioned by Professor Caputo would seem to betray itself as questionable and treaten to undermine the purported radicality of its hermeneutic. For one thing, it is not unusual in our Western philosophical and religious traditions to find religion (i.e., Christianity) and tragedy contrasted. Therefore, by creating incommensurable genealogies of the religious and the tragic, Professor Caputo is simply repeating a distinction (and a bias) that is millenia old. In addition, in keeping with the bias of this distinction (though contrary to his stated neutrality [RH, 285], Professor Caputo also has a weakness for the religious (as he understands it) and with that—not surprisingly—a weakness for laughter and the comic. All of this suggests that Professor Caputo's "radical" hermeneutics amounts to no more than a repetition of the "divine comedy" that is the legacy of Western philosophical and religious thought. That legacy, which tries to tell a story that turns out all right in the end in and according to terms common or accessible to all (i.e., reason or faith),[2] hardly has anything to do with a "radical" hermeneutics conceived as "an attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life" (RH, 1). Indeed, it seems that the radicality of hermeneutics might be served better by attempting to think that which would "destroy" Western philosophy and religious thought: a tragic "theology."[3]

These are the issues to be explored in this paper. Our first step will be to analyze the genealogy of the religious as presented by Professor Caputo, followed by an analysis of his genealogy of the tragic. In each case, we will offer a different "genealogy" whereby, in the end, we will be able to briefly sketch the possibilities of a tragic "theology," a hermeneutic that is truly radical in its response to what is called for today.

I. GENEALOGY OF THE RELIGIOUS

Professor Caputo claims that "the genealogy of the religious is found in a hermeneutic of suffering" (RH, 280). How one interprets suffering, how one deals with suffering, is to be his benchmark for deciding whether one is religious or not. In contrast to what he takes to be the tragic acceptance of suffering, Caputo asserts that religion is fundamentally defiant, arising as a protest against suffering. Shamelessly invoking the language of contemporary liberation theology, Professor Caputo insists that religion does not begin "from above" with God, for "to invoke grace from on high is just one more familiar way of bailing out on the flux" (RH, 281), i.e., a way of trying to control the mysterious, ever-changing, risky business of living. Instead, religion begins "from below," affirming life and protesting suffering by affirming God, i.e., "He who stands always and necessarily on the side of those who suffer, He who intervenes on behalf of the sufferer" (RH, 280). Religion, on this conception, is committed to a fight against those powers that waste life by demeaning and degrading it. This includes a fight against the seductive power of metaphysics to divide and conquer, to divide the world into believers and infidels and assume the certainty of salvation for a chosen few and the certainty of damnation for all others. In the end, then, religion, in its affirmation of life and God as an expression of solidarity with the suffering, does the work of *universal* liberation and emancipation (RH, 282, 289).

What is noteworthy about this genealogy of the religious, first of all, is its continuity with Professor Caputo's other accounts of religion. In previous work, he defined religion in terms of faith, that is, in terms of an absolute and unconditioned hope or trust in an absolute Lord of history, in a God who is a plenum of being, goodness, love, and intelligibility.[4] Here that faith has simply been given a socio-political twist, in recognition of the fact that a good and loving God cannot but be on the side of those who are oppressed and hurting. The continuity is clear, as Caputo himself admits (RH, 298 n. 6).

However, this is a parochial and provincial characterization of the religious, both culturally and historically. We would be hard pressed, for instance, to apply this understanding of the religious to Eastern religious traditions. In Hinduism, those who are marginal in the society are understood to be there as a consequence of their actions; one's station in life is a product of the *karma* one has accumulated in previous lives. Philosophically, suffering is recognized for the most part as an illusion arising from identification of oneself with things (e.g., body consciousness) rather than one's True Self (*Ātman*), which is one with the unchangeable ultimate reality (*Brahman*). Of course, one could say that according to Hinduism everyone is suffering insofar as he or she is trapped within the wheel of existence (*samsāra,* the delusive realm of change and rebirth), and that in theistic Hinduism one has an ultimate god (*Śiva* or *Visnu*) that intervenes for the devotee to pull him or her out of *Samsāra*. However, besides being only *one* facet of the Hindu tradition, this is not so much a protest *against* suffering as it is an attempt (as in the other forms of Hinduism) to *escape* suffering, to escape *samsāra* and life as we know it.

Similar problems arise in applying Caputo's definition to other Eastern traditions. Taoism and Confucianism, insofar as they are construed as religions, are concerned chiefly with establishing social and cosmic harmony, and have no recourse to a loving God in prescribing how to achieve harmony. Even Buddhism, which directly addresses the issue of suffering in the first of Siddharta Gautama's Four Noble Truths ("Life is suffering [*dukkha*]"),[5] does not fit Caputo's definition. Buddhism sees one's attachments to things and craving for existence as the root cause of suffering, and suffering thereby is extinguished not by affirming God (another attachment) but by

giving up all cravings and attachments through one's own efforts. The devotional Buddhism of the Mahayana tradition, in which one turns to a compassionate Buddha or bodhisattva ("enlightenment being," a "Buddha-to-be") for help in one's salvation, does not fit Caputo's definition either, since the Buddha or bodhisttava is never God, and the goal (extinguishing cravings and attahcments to alleviate suffering) remains the same.

Caputo's characterization of the religious obviously has greater affinities with the Western religious traditions, but here his genealogy runs into historical difficulties. Of course there have been times in which affirmation of God as a "protest" against suffering has been an important part of Western religious history: the Exodus, the preaching of the Hebrew prophets, and the figure of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke all testify to that. However, this hardly serves as a complete account of the religious concerns of the Western traditions throughout history; affirmation of God has just as often provided an explanation for suffering (as in the theodicies of these traditions) and/or a reason for indifference to suffering (e.g., Dante's attitude toward those suffering in the *Inferno*). The symbol of the crucified Christ has meant many things down through the centuries besides besides "the symbol of solidarity with those who suffer," (RH, 284).[6] To dismiss this contrary evidence as simply a betrayal of religion's work of liberation (RH, 281) is suspiciously ad hoc, dogmatically glossing over centuries of tradition.

To these cultural and historical difficulties with Professor Caputo's "genealogy" we may add a third problem: does religion (as he defines it) do what he claims it does as a response to suffering? His claim is that the faith of the believer consists in staying in play with the unsure and ever-shifting contours of the world and thereby involves maximum risk uncertinty (RH, 280). In other words, instead of trying to control "the flux" with conceptual schemes about God and the world, the religious response to suffering—the affirmation of life and God—is supposed to free us for involvement in the world, allowing us to plunge into "the flux." Yet the risk and uncertainty Caputo claims for such faith is only conceptual; its lack of evidence and living without assurances concerns the finite categories of our conceptuality and our acceptance of their contingency (RH, 279, 281), not the ultimate presence or absence of God. Though God never appears in these categories and symbols and thereby is deferred in his presence, he nonetheless is *asserted* to be there "beneath" the busy work of conceptualizing. This is why the heroes of "radical" hermeneutics are Soren Kierkegaard, who *chooses* an *inward* transcendence in a leap of faith (RH, 32ff), and Meister Eckhart, whose work attempted to "breakthrough" to the "truly divine God" beneath and behind all the familiar, comforting conceptions of God that are nothing but nonsense (RH, 268-69).

However, we can see that this sort of *via negativa* and dialectical theology still harbors an affirmation and assertion of God, even in its relinquishing of any sort of concept to capture God. Negative and/or dialectical theology relinquishes finite categories in order to recognize God as a superior and ineffable mode of being that forms the constantly present basis for its world-view. As Heidegger noted, in "faith rules *certainty*, that kind of certainty which is *safe even in the uncertainty of itself, i.e., of what it believes in.*"[7] Such underlying certainty that sees (affirms, wills) a "loving power" and "the voice of God" in the flux (RH, 279) frees one, liberates one, from the flux. It is a way of escaping being-in-the-world, for it privileges the future—"the *incognito* of the eternal which is *incommensurable with time*" (RH, 15; my emphases)—while being-in-the-world knows no such privilege, being equiprimordially what has been and what is to come.[8] One does not have to take responsibility here for the claims and concepts one uses, for what one has been; these always already will have been inadequate to an ideal, a perfect future, that is *no place* in time and the world. Religion by this genealogy does not place us in the world but escapes to a u-topia, a non-place that marks the revenge against time and the imperfect ("It was"—what has been) that is characteristic of metaphysics.[9] Concepts and finite categories become "indirect communication," a sleight-of-hand, a game, a joke. "Religious" man stays in control (*wills* one thing, as Kierkegaard would say) by retreating to the safety of his own little *utopia*—his subjectivity, where he reigns supreme—and laughs at the world with a leap away into faith. "Religious" man is ultimately a comedian, as Kierkegaard was,[10] hiding the hidden truths, the "subjective truth," of his inward transcendence behind the comic masks he shows the world. Rising above the world without gravity to a privileged (non)position that asserts the certainty of God beneath and behind the flux of the world, "religious" man aims to have the last laugh at the expense of the flux (and the suffering within it). Professor Caputo's "religious" man is an "absolute comic," triumphing in fantasy rather than in reality,[11] living in the world only insofar as he is detached from the world, i.e., only insofar as he thinks he really is someplace else.

We need another genealogy of the religious, a genealogy that is commensurate with the phenomenon of religion and will not take us out of this world. To do this, we first might listen, in Heideggerian fashion,[12] to what the word "religion" says. From the Latin *religio* and *religare* (where the root *ligare* means "to connect" or "to bind" and the prefix *re-* means "back" or "again"), religion speaks of a binding-back or a re-connection. For the Romans, with whom the concept originated, this meant being bound (back) to the gods and our *place* before the gods. Our (extended) use of the term "religion" likewise acknowledges this idea of reconnection to a place. Being religious in Hinduism emphasizes that who we are—our True Self (*Ātman*)—is *outside* the delusive realm of change and rebirth (*samsāra*), and gives us various methods by which we can make this connection and identification in our lives. Contrary to this, Buddhism insists that there is no-self (*anatta* or *anātman*) outside the impermance (*anicca*) of the world; once we recognize our place amidst the impermanence of things (i.e., recognize ourselves and all things as impermanent), we will cease to grasp at things (ourselves or other things) and thereby cease suffering. Similarly, Taoism emphasizes that our place is within the ceaseless flow of the Dao (the "Way" [of all things]) and urges us to reconnect ourselves to the Dao in order to establish harmony within the cosmos. Confucianism maps out our place in the world according to our family and social relationships, and exhorts us to bind ourselves by the rules of these relationships so that harmony may be (re)established in the world. In Judaism, to be religious is to recognize one's place in the world as a partner with Yahweh, amidst a people who are connected to—and constantly reconnecting themselves to—Yahweh through a covenant. Christianity

stresses abiding in Christ, in a community of believers (the Church) that is one with Christ, whereby we are reconciled (reconnected) to God. Islam locates us in the brotherhood of mankind, connecting us to our place before Allah as his servants through the precepts of the Qu'ran. In all these cases, religion seems to concern to who we are, to our proper *place* in the world.[13]

This definiton may be expanded and clarified further through reference to Martin Heidegger's "topology of being" and his characterizations of the world in terms of the holy and the fourfold (*das Geviert*) of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities.[14] As the relational whole of significance and meaning in which we already find ourselves and by which we are given possibilities that enable us to find ourselves and be who we are, the world encompasses the whole (*das Heil*) of our being. As such, the world may be thought of as the holy (*das Heilige*), i.e., the dynamic, creative, historical "action" of revealing and concealing that arranges everything real and grants to everything the essential space in which it belongs according to its essence. Dwelling in the world and on the earth as mortals amidst things, some possibilities are revealed (sky) and concealed (earth) through the advent or withrawal of what is divine. Here the gods are hints (*Winke*), beckoning (*winkende*) messengers of the holy that direct us to our place in the world, providing us with a measure. Si(gh)ting ourselves by what is divine, we come to know what and how we may be.

Here it is important to note, first of all, that the reference to the gods, or what is divine, must be taken in a broad sense. The god(s) may be one or many, present (as in Western traditions) or absent (as in philosophical Taoism, Buddhism, some forms of Hinduism). The god(s) may be completely transcendent (as in Judaism and Islam) or incarnate in an individual (as in Christianity and some forms of devotional Hinduism). In cases where, strictly speaking, there is not a god or gods (in the sense of a supernatural being), what is divine is the example and/or teaching of an exemplary individual (as in Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism). In any case, the god(s) or what is divine is (are) part of the "whole" of signifying and meaning that is the dynamic, revealing-concealing, historical action of the world, even when "utterly transcendent". In other words, the god(s) is (are) subject to being shown or demonstrated within-the-world through the "dwelling" of mortals. This dwelling manifests itself as speaking (e.g., naming a god), building (a space, a place, an "idol" or other artwork), worshipping, doing philosophy or theology, or undertaking some other activity that *manifests* what is divine. The gods need men in order to appear (EHD 40-41, 191). This does not mean that the god(s) or what is divine is "reduced" to things within-the-world; the god(s) remain(s) a stranger (*Fremde*) to mortals, even in its (their) advent in and through things (VA 197ff/225ff). But it does mean that what is divine is not simply posited "outside" of the world as some sort of ineffable sacredness (e.g., some inexpressable perfect future), for then it is meaningless.

In summation, then, we may say that the genesis of religion involves finding our place in the world, binding ourselves back and being bound back to the place where we attain to whom we are in our essence, whereby we are made whole (healed) and therefore holy, whether or not this has anything to do specifically with a faith or belief in (i.e., affirmation of) a god or gods.

II. GENEALOGY OF THE TRAGIC

Taking his cue from Nietzsche in contrasting the religious and tragic responses to suffering in the first place,[15] it is only natural that Professor Caputo likewise follows Nietzsche in sketching his genealogy of the tragic. According to this genealogy, suffering is seen as a condition of life, a phase of the flux. Since it is woven into the very fabric of life, "there is no question of protesting suffering, for that would be to protest life itself" (RH, 282). Just as life is innocent, so is suffering. One consequence of this is that the tragic view has no need of God, who is invoked by religion in its protest of suffering. Indeed, "the tragic denies God in order to affirm the justice of suffering" (RH, 283). Another consequence is the demand that suffering be affirmed along with life. It is not enough, on this account, to simply tolerate, accept, and endure suffering; since suffering toughens and strengthens one, enhancing life as a part of life, one must affirm suffering as one affirms life. This affirmation of life and suffering ultimately "takes the form of laughter, a Dionysiac exuberance which sings and dances, which affirms and exhults in the totality of life" (RH, 285). The tragic actor wears a comic mask that liberates him from the *ressentiment* and hatred of life that Nietzsche takes to be the character of the religious.

There is undoubtedly some merit in considering Nietzsche and his view of the tragic when attempting to sketch out a genealogy of the tragic. After all, at the very least, he had some insight into the fact that (Greek) tragedy posed an alternative to our traditional Judeo-Christian faith and therefore might prove illuminating in a culture struggling with a widespread loss of such faith. However, to take Nietzsche as "the great spokesman for a tragic hermeneutic in our time, indeed, in any time" (RH, 283) seems to overstate the case. For one thing, it conveniently avoids grappling with tragedy and tragic literature and the difficult issues they present for our consideration, substituting a "spokesman" who will simplify things for us. More importantly, such a claim for Nietzsche overlooks the fact that many of his comments on the tragic occur within the context of his own project of thinking the will to power, the eternal return of the same, and a transvaluation of value, and may be severly compromised by that context. This would be the case especially if Nietzsche's thinking were so entangled in those viewepoints he is criticizing (i.e., Platonism, Christianity) that he turned out to be their consummate expression rather than their overcoming. His view of the tragic would then be simply an antireligious posture that makes many of the same assumptions as a "religious" viewpoint.[16] If we attend to the literature, we can see specifically what is wrong with Professor Caputo's genealogy of the tragic. For example, only someone who has not read tragedy could claim, as Caputo does, that "in the tragic view, suffering is not a violation, not an injustice, not an intruder without rights," such that "life is not unfair" (RH, 285). Do not the likes of Prometheus, Oedipus, and Antigone, for example, challenge the justice of their suffering? In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* Prometheus protests the injustice done to him in being punished for loving humanity and giving it fire, and condemns Zeus for punishing him for this nobly intended action. Oedipus can be judged quite innocent according to the action of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* insofar as he piously and scrupulously attended to Apollo and the warnings of his oracle at Delphi—to no avail. Oedipus certainly does not see

justice in that. Antigone, too, suffers for having respect for piety, and she does not see that as just, as she recants nothing and questions the justice of the gods. There is violence and loss throughout these plays, and the plays are far from seeing things as "fair".[17]

Attending to the literature points out other issues that make this genealogy questionable. It is hard to see, for instance, how tragedy "makes light" of the situations it shows us (RH, 285). Indeed, the situations depicted by Greek and Shakespearean tragedy often are deadly serious, concerning the fate of entire cities, nations, and empires. Likewise, it is unclear how tragedy is "politically naive" (RH, 286), for in those instances where it is concerned with politics, the heroes and heroines of tragedy are concerned with setting things right and doing the right thing, all too aware that there is something rotten in Denmark or Thebes. Toward that end, it is then difficult to see how one could claim that tragedy counsels the suffering to love their oppression (RH, 286), for characters such as Prometheus, Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet, and Brutus directly challenge the powers that be and seek to overturn the established order, even at their own expense. There is a complexity to these tragic situations that defies Caputo's simplistic characterizations.

Much of this complexity has to do with the gods. Caputo calls the tragic view "antireligious" (RH, 272) and claims that it "denies God" (RH, 283). Yet numerous references to the gods in Greek tragedy testify to the fact that the nature of divinity is an important issue, while the characters of Shakespearean tragedy often embody virtues associated with (the Christian) God (e.g., love, honesty, devotion, justice) and, like their Greek counterparts, call upon the gods in numerous instances. The tragic view is only "antireligious" if we accept Caputo's narrow definition of religion; the tragic view only "denies God" insofar as it recognizes many gods and the plurality of values that may guide mortals as they go through life. Tragedy proposes a different sort of divinity, a different sort of "religion," that is only obscured by the characterizations that Caputo makes.

We need another genealogy of the tragic, one that is true to the great tragic literature of our tradition and is attentive to the issues it presents. Toward that end, the first thing we need to note about tragic drama and literature is its effort to faithfully reproduce (mimic) actual life, to trace a course of events in all its complexity and show us how the participants in those events reflect upon them. Thus, even though the tragedy often is compact in terms of the time and space depicted, we nonetheless are shown how the patterns of deliberation undertaken by the actors have their roots in the past and look forward to various consequences in the future. Since tragedy thus explores the meaning and value of ideals and virtues as they operate in time and in a particular social context, we might say that the basis of the tragic vision is being in time.[18]

This is important in helping us understand another point essential to tragedy: that life's mystery and uncertainty are at the center of the tragic vision.[19] Mystery and uncertainty—that is, the extent to which individuals lack control over their fates and are dependent upon "luck"—are tied to being in time. For instance, following Heidegger, we may note that our history is the basis for who we are; its happening (*geschehen*) is a sending (*schicken*) of being that determines our fate (*Schicksal*). Our past "throws" us into definite possibilities that we are and must be, beyond our control or determination. This is a fact that tragedy emphasizes over and over again, showing us history is a "burden" for the tragic hero or heroine, exerting a determining power on his or her fate that he or she does not control.[20] Likewise, tragedy shows us that realizing one possibility means that we do not realize or recognize others; they are closed off and deferred for the present. This means, on the one hand, that we cannot fully see the possibilities that may emerge in the course of events that would make us regret how we are now. on the other hand, it also means that our attentiveness to particular values and individuals means that we must neglect others, that they must be put off for now. Either way, the darkness of the future determines the way we are, the way being (i.e., how we should be) comes to be disclosed.[21]

We can see from these observations that the uncontrollability of circumstance, the mystery and darkness of the world, has social dimensions as well. Hence we see that the world of tragedy is not and cannot be defined simply in terms of one individual (or one group of individuals) and his (their) values; it is a world of conflicts and differences that resists simplification. We *are* by virtue of the "conversation" of a community or the "conversation of mankind," which does not express an overarching or underlying agreement but a plurality of differing meanings and values that have some bearing on the individual (who must nonetheless make his or her *own* way). It will not do to dissociate from the competing claims (see Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*), nor will it help to insist upon one value above all others (see Sophocles' *Antigone*). This leaves one in a strange situation, marking man as the strangest (*das Unheimlichste,* Heidegger's translation of *deinon* in the first chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone*), for in fulfilling one's fate one is always to some extent at odds with the world that is one's "home."[22]

Finally, we must take note of the response tragedy makes to this darkness and mystery of the world, for that response is equally essential to the makeup of the tragic vision. Tragedy does not despair in the face of the abysmal nature of being-in-the-world and being in time by either renouncing commitments and responsibility or willing one thing. Instead, it recognizes that we are only by virtue of being situated in time and place; it is only out of the limitations of virtues and ideals, the finitude of being, that "there is" (*es gibt*)[23] being. Hence only if we are open to the mystery of the world and release ourselves to the limits of our ability to control and calculate are we able to live, act, and be. This implies a picture of excellence and human worth

> that is inseparable from vulnerability, an excellence that is other related and social, a rationality whose nature is *not* to attempt to seize, hold, trap and control, in whose values openness, receptivity, and wonder play an important part.[24]

III. TRAGIC THEOLOGY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A RADICAL HERMENEUTIC

A genealogy of the religious that is attentive to the phenomenon of religion reveals our concern for place (*topos*)—our place in the world whereby we are given direction and meaning in our lives. A genealogy of the tragic that is attentive to the literature reveals a concern for our place in time and how meaning and direction emerge within the limitations and vulnerability of being in time. Brought together in a tragic "teology," these two genealogies suggest a radical hermeneutic, i.e., a hermeneutic that sticks

with the original difficulty of life by finding meaning and direction *in* (not "beneath" or "behind") the course of events—a meaning and direction that thereby is inherently limited and potentially dangerous in certain circumstances.

Such a hermeneutic, practiced by the tragic poets, does not "affirm" or "assert" a god or gods, presenting us with "something" (such as a perfect future) in which we are to believe or have faith. Instead, the gods in (Greek) tragedy generally are not actors in the play and do not appear except through the words and deeds of the exemplary individuals that are the heroes or heroines of the play. The tragic poet thereby names the gods in recognition of something illuminating, something divine, in the actions and activities of certain individuals and the course of events surrounding them. The gods are indications or hints of that which was and may yet be wonderful and awe-inspiring in being.[25] Even when the gods are actors in the play—as in the prologue appearances of Athena in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Aphrodite in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, or as in *The Eumenides*, which serves as a commentary on the events of the *Orestia*—the gods have this function of marking ways to be, pointing to how we may be in our lives.

As hints, the gods (or the ideals and/or virtues they show us) are duplicitous, mirroring the duplicity, the revealing-concealing essence, of being as time. On the one hand, the perfection of a god—its immortality and "constancy," its illuminating power—helps disclose how we may be, opening up the world for our consideration. On the other hand, the gods are misleading, blinding us to how we should be. The tragic poets show us, in a variety of ways, that if we get *carried away* and *lose ourselves* in imitation of the god as something constantly present by which we measure ourselves (e.g., by *willing* one thing), we lose sight of ourselves. We presume too much and are blinded and dazzled (*atē*, "divine blindness") into a forgetfulness of, an obliviousness to, the whole of being, the dynamic, incipient essence of the world. Thus Agamemnon forgets that Iphegenia is his daughter, Antigone that she is a citizen, Creon that he has a family. In each case, the hero or heroine tends to forget the complex nature of their humanity, whereby they fall even as they show themselves to be exemplary in their devotion to "something" divine.[26]

The hermeneutic of the tragic poet therefore names what is illuminating, what is divine, as questionable and questionworthy (*fragwüdrig*); such is its character as a hint. This means, first of all, that this hermeneutic does not provide a method or technique that produces and secures our success or salvation; its very character as questionable indicates that there are limits to the value of such a measure, limits to which we must be attentive. This means, then, that hinting calls for thinking, questioning, judgment (cf. Aristotle's *phronesis*); hints must be interpreted and thought about in the context of being in time. One must *remember* that there are a plurality of claims put upon us, a plurality of paths that are open to oneself and to those with whom one makes one's way in the world. This does not mean that one should not follow a given path, that one should give up on all values and commitments. That would be either the way of despair and inaction (e.g., Hamlet throughout the first part of Shakespeare's play) or the strange and arbitrary way of one who, without character or principles, improvises himself from moment to moment in an insertion of a value or goal above all others, "actively forgetful" (see Nietzsche) of all others (including any value previously asserted). Agamemnon does something like this in Aeschylus' play, and it strikes us as mad, inhuman.[27] Instead, the questionable-questionworthy character of what is divine, of what serves as one's measure, means that one should take *care* in following out the path given and chosen, that one must be ever attentive and thoughtful about finding one's place in the world. On the one hand, that means that one should accept those unique abilities and possibilities that have been granted to you, taking care to nuture those abilities and possibilities in the best way possible, as one sees fit. Such a thought-full attitude will grant a measure of stability, a measure of success. Yet such an attitude also would entail being *thankful* for any good fortune that comes one's way, in recognition of the contingency of one's good fortune—that is, that one is not completely responsible for what one is and that one, no matter how good, is vulnerable, subject to a reversal of fortune. On the other hand, should disaster strike by virtue of what one has been, when a reversal of fortune explicitly reveals the limits of one's virtue and the questionable nature of what has been illuminating, one should take care not to despair and forget what one has been. Instead, as with the tragic hero, one remembers what one has been and done and accepts responsibility. Even though the tragic hero questions, challenges, and indicts the god(s) as having brought him or her to ruin, such questioning is not an attempt to escape blame and repudiate what one has done. On the contrary, such questioning is integral to marking the limits of what has been one's measure and therefore revealing the worthiness of the measure, for only as limited does something come to be.[28] The mistake of the tragic heroes is not that they confuse a conceptual appearance of the god for the "truly divine god"; the appearance was *the* god, but limited, "finite," as are all the gods. Their mistake (if there indeed is a mistake) lay instead in taking their measure to be perfect, invulnerable, a secure means for controlling the world. In short, tragedy teaches us that, whether in success or failure, we should be open to the complex nature of being, to the plurality of ways of being that make-up the world in addition to one's own way, making one's way difficult, risky, and uncertain, but not unworthy.

Another way to put this would be to say that the hermeneutic of tragic "theology" calls for us to be human. Such is the "radicality" of this hermeneutic: it calls us back to our *roots*, to our humanity, which itself is *rooted* in a past that reaches ahead to the future. Unavailable as a constantly present (or absent) measure that we can imitate by somer method, what is illuminating and divine throws us back on ourselves and our questioning existence, to the *work* of finding our place in the world. Such an existence does not irresolutely vascillate "between Abraham and Zarathustra, Augustine and Nietzsche" (RH, 288), but *abides* in the uncertain worthiness of human activity. The hermeneutic that informs such an existence not only gives us to think the "original difficulty of life" but also gives us to think the worthiness of life, despite its difficulty, thinking the past as well as the future, wherby it has some integrity. In these times, that is truly radical.

ENDNOTES

1. *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 268-94 (hereafter RH).
2. Cf. Dante's explanation for the title of his epic *Commedia* (as cited by Will Durant in *The Age of Faith*

[New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950], p. 1067): the story passes from *misery to happiness*, and is written in a careless and *humble* style, in the *vulgar* tongue, which even housewives speak.

3. Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 226: "Explicit formulation of the tragic theology would mean self-destruction for the religious [and, we would add, the philosophical] consciousness." Note that we put "theology" in scare quotes since, as we shall see, it is not the usual idea of theology with which tragedy presents us.
4. *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio Univarsity Press, 1978), pp. 246-47, 249; *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay in Overcoming Metaphysics* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press), pp. 280-82.
5. In fact, though it is common to translate the Pali word *dukkha* (Sanskrit *duhkka*) as "suffering", it is misleading and not quite accurate. It would be better to translate *dukkha* as "unsatisfactory" or "out-of-joint" in the context of the 1st Noble Truth. See Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1974), pp. 16ff.
6. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), in which some 17 images of Christ in the history of the West are discussed.
7. *Nietzsche*, Band II (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), p. 425 (my emphases) (translated by Joan Stambaugh in Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* [New York: Harper and Row, 1973], p. 23). Cf. Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), p. 35-36 (translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund as *Discourse on Thinking* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966], p. 61), where Heidegger notes that Meister Eckhart's notion of "releasement" (*Gelassenheit*) operates within the domain of the will. See also my "Mysticism and Ontology," pp. 467-69, and *Beyond Theism and Atheism*, pp. 26-28, 156.
8. See, e.g., Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe Band 2 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 432, 434, 473 (hereafter SZ) (translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as *Being and Time* [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], pp. 375, 377, 401), and *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, Gesamtausgabe Band 26 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1978), p. 268f (hereafter MAL) (translated by Michael Heim as *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984], p. 207f).
9. See Heidegger, *Vorträtze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), p. 116 (hereafter VA) (translated by Bernd Magnus in Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" *Review of Metaphysics* 20 [March 1967], pp. 422-23). See also, David Farrell Krell, "The Perfect Future: A Note on Heidegger and Derrida" in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 114-21. On the future perfect ("will have been") as the characteristic tense of postmodern, deconstructive thought, also see Andrew J. McKenna, "Postmodernism: It's Future Perfect" in *Postmodernism and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Donn Welton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 228-42.
10. For an account of Kierkegaard as comedian, see Richard Keller Simon, *The Labyrinth of the Comic* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1985), pp. 78-116.
11. See Edith Kern, *The Absolute Comic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 13, 41-49, 114-15 and *passim* regarding the triumph of fantasy and imagination over reality that occurs in comedy. Cf. Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 185, on the final stage of comedy that tends to retreat to some esoteric place detached from reality.
12. Though not following Heidegger himself, who was distrustful of the concept of "religion" as unduly constricting the experience of the Holy. See EHD, 114, and Otto Pöggler, "West-East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu" in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 59.
13. See my "Mysticism and Ontology," p. 473, and *Beyond Theism and Atheism*, p. 152.
14. Heidegger discusses the holy in a numbert of places, notably *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, Gesamtausgabe Band 4 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981), pp. 18, 59-75, 148 and *passim* (hereafter EHD), but also *Wegmarken*, Gesamtausgabe Band 9 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 351-52 (hereafter WM) (translated in Heidegger, *Basic Wrtitings* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], p. 230) and MAL, 211n/165n. The fourfold is discussed in VA 150ff, 171ff (translated by Albert Hofstadter in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], pp. 150ff, 172ff) and elsewhere. See my *Bewyond Theism and Atheism*, pp. 74-95, for a review and synthesis of Heidegger's accounts of the holy and the fourfold, and their bearing on "religious" thinking.
15. See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), no. 1052 (p. 543).
16. Such is *part* of Heidegger's multifaceted account of Nietzsche. See, e.g., *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe Band 5 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 237-40 (translated by William Lovitt in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Esays* [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], pp. 81-85) and VA 120-22/426-27.
17. For a discussion of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, see Anthony C. Yu, "New Gods and Old Order: Tragic Theology in the *Prometheus Bound*," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971): 19-42. Regarding the innocence of Oedipus, see Thomas Gould, "The Innocence of Oedipus and the Nature of Tragedy," *The Massachusetts Review* 10 (1969): 284, 288-90, 298-99, and Normand Berlin, *The Secret Cause: A Discussion of Tragedy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 4-8. Sophocles' *Antigone* is discussed at length in both Berlin, pp. 11-2, and Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 51-82.
18. Northrup Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 3. Cf. Nussbaum, p. 14, and John D. Barbour, *Tragedy as a Critique of Virtue: The Novel and Ethical Reflerction* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 158. Kern, pp. 27-30, cites the mimetic quality of tragedy—i.e., its realism—as the decisive point on which it is different from comedy.
19. Berlin, p. 9 and *passim*. Cf. Nussbaum, pp. 20, 49-50, 79-82, 429-21, on the vulnerability of human being depicted in tragedy.
20. See SZ, 179ff, 377-78, 507f/173ff, 321-22, 435f; ZD, 13f/13f. See also, Barbour, p. 155.
21. SZ 378/322; ZD 13f/13f; Barbour, p. 185. See also my "Beyond Theodicy: The Divine in Heidegger and Tragedy," *Philosophy Today* 28 (1985): 114, and "Heidegger, Tragedy, and Ethical Reflection," *International Studies in Philosophy* (forthcoming).
22. For Heidegger's account of plurality, difference, the "conversation of mankind," and man as "the strangest" (commenting on *Antigone*), see *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Gesamtausgabe Band 40 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), pp. 140, 142, 153ff (hereafter EM) (translated by Ralph Mannheim as *Introduction to Metaphysics* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], pp. 131, 134, 144ff) and EHD, 36ff. See also, Gregory Schufrieder, "Heidegger on Community," *Man and World* 14 1981): 25-54, and my "Heidegger, Tragedy, and Ethical Reflection." See Nussbaum, pp. 22-50, 51-82, for interpretations of *Agamemnon* and *Antigone*, including, in the latter, a discussion of man as *deinon* (the "strangest").
23. Heidegger makes much of this idiom in terms of the impersonal (*es*, "it") giving (*gibt*, "gives") at work in any revealing of being in time, such that *es gibt Sein* might be better translated "it gives being" or "being [is] given." See WM, 334ff/214ff, and ZD, 5f, 8, 10/5f, 8, 10.
24. Nussbaum, p. 20; cf. pp. 318-372. Also, cf. Barbour, pp. ix, 154; "Heidegger, Tragedy, and Ethical Reflection," and *Beyond Theism and Atheism*, pp. 92, 119, 140, 155-156.
25. Cf. Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, trans. Moses Hades (1954; rpt. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp. 195ff.
26. Regarding these themes of duplicity, measure, blindness, forgetfulness/obliviousness, and the inadequacy of thinking the holy (the whole of being) in terms of an absolute Other or something Eternal, see Heidegger's discussions in e.g., EHD, 18ff, 69, 73-74; MAL 13, 211n/11, 165n; VA, 197/23, and VA 222-24, translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank Capuzzi in Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). pp. 72-74. See also "Beyond Theodicy," pp. 13-16, and *Beyond Theism and Atheism*, pp. 77-78, 91-92, 119, 146, 154-56, especially for how this relates to tragedy and a tragic hermeneutic.
27. See Nussbaum, p. 47-48. This strange and arbitrary attitude would seem to characterize not only a Sartrian "existential hero," but also a deconstructive approach to ethics and politics as espoused by, e.g., Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially pp. 60-67 ("Legitimation by Paralogy"). See also his "dialogue" with Jean-Loup Thébaud revealing titled in English as *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
28. EM 64; SZ 179-81; VA 17; *Holzwege*, Gesamtausgabe Band 5 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 40, 71; *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 125.

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