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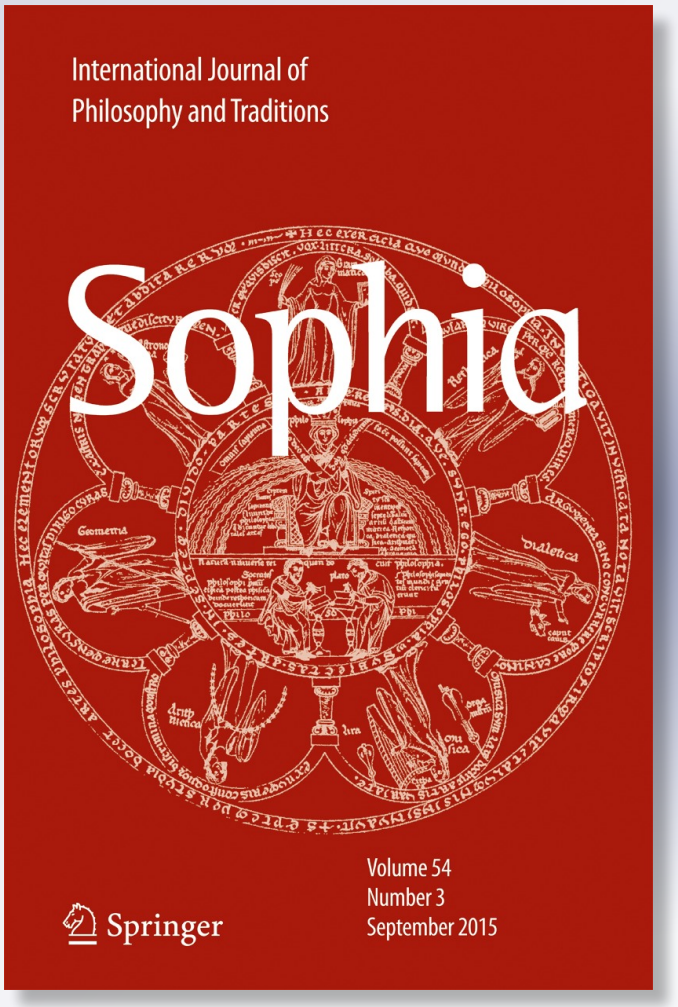

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Abstract Jacques Derrida's 'Faith and Knowledge' presents an account of the complex relationship between religion and technoscience that disrupts their traditional boundaries by uncovering both an irreducible faith at the heart of science and an irreducible mechanicity at the heart of religion. In this paper, I focus on the latter, arguing that emphases in Derrida's text on both the 'sources' of religion and its interaction with modern technologies underemphasize the ways in which a general 'mechanicity' is present throughout religion. There is no faith, I contend, that is not in some way materially constituted according to a mechanicity operative not only at its origin but continuously and in ever-changing forms, and not only in its interactions with other fields and institutions but within its own structure and daily life. By closely examining 'Faith and Knowledge'—along with examples from his essay 'A Silkworm of One's Own' and Michael Naas's *Miracle and Machine*—I argue that more attention should be paid to the mechanisms, both human and non-human, that populate and perform religion in its factical life. Mechanical bodies and practices are enlisted by religious traditions in order that these traditions continue to exist by continually reconstituting themselves in, for example, the repetitive use of religious objects or the vocal recitation of creeds. Such mechanical acts of religion are not ultimately opposed to the faithful experience that is often taken to be the wellspring of religious life; on the contrary, they are the conditions for the possibility of this experience.

Keywords Jacques Derrida · Religion · Faith · Science · Technology · Machines

In his 'Faith and Knowledge: Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone,' Jacques Derrida argues that religion has two distinct sources: sacredness, purity, or health and belief, credit, or faith (Derrida 2002a). In doing so, he also presents an account of the complex relationship between religion and the scientific, technological, or mechanical. As presented in his essay, religion appears as the field of the living and the singular event, while the technological or scientific realm is that of the inorganic, programmable, repetitive machine. Derrida does not seek to undermine

M. B. Norton (✉)
Department of Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Stabler Hall 307, 2801 S. University Ave., Little Rock, AR 72204, USA
e-mail: mbnorton@ualr.edu

such distinctions once and for all, but he does highlight various points at which they do not hold fundamentally. Science, he argues, rests on an irreducible 'faith' without which knowledge and communication would be impossible; this claim seems to be the central one of the essay, and it is that to which its commenters have given the overwhelming majority of their attention. Yet, Derrida also argues that at the heart of religion, we find the structure of a response that is in a sense automatic or pre-programmed—and no less irreducible than the faith at the root of science. Despite its expert and strategic blurring of these boundaries, however, Derrida's text exhibits a tendency to discover the technological or mechanical within the religious ultimately at only two distinct registers: that of the origin, where the 'source' of religion is automatically divided (both within itself, between faith and sacredness, and from the realm of science and knowledge); and that of the contemporary world, where the forces of abstraction and tele-technology are things with which religion interacts according to the autoimmunity characteristic of religion particularly and life generally.

In this paper, I will argue that these emphases obscure the ways in which, according to Derrida's own account, the mechanical—or what I will call a general 'mechanicity'—should be recognizable at every stratum of religious life. If Derrida's argument is correct (and I contend that it largely is), then there is no sacrality or faith that is not in some way materially constituted according to this mechanicity that is operative not only at its origin but continuously and in ever-changing forms, and not only in its interactions with other fields and institutions but within its own structure and daily life. By closely examining 'Faith and Knowledge'—along with examples from the contemporaneous essay 'A Silkworm of One's Own' and Michael Naas's recent pairing of Derrida's text with the fiction of Don DeLillo in *Miracle and Machine*—I will argue that more attention should be paid to the mechanical aspects of objects and bodies that populate and perform religion in its factical life. Both human and non-human bodies are enlisted by religious traditions in order that these traditions continue to exist by continually reconstituting themselves in, for example, the repetition of rites and creeds. Such embodied, mechanical acts of religion are not ultimately opposed to the faithful experience that is often taken to be the wellspring of religious life; on the contrary, they appear as the conditions for possibility of this experience. There is, then, what might be termed an archi-mechanicity that is just as determinative of religion as a certain elementary faith is of science.

The Mechanics of Religion

Derrida, both at the opening of 'Faith and Knowledge' and at various points throughout it, problematizes the abstract conceptualization, the singularization, and the universalization of 'religion.' Nevertheless, he proceeds—though not without continual hesitation—to treat it in these terms. Such a treatment, he acknowledges, is largely determined by his original audience and by the commitments that they and he have in common (Derrida 2002a, p. 44). Similarly, though much of the force of his argument works to blur (or at least complicate) distinctions between religion and science or faith and knowledge, he assumes such distinctions at the outset and never completely casts them aside. The reasons for the latter are basically the same as for the former: the religious and the scientific or technological are, at least in the contemporary West and

increasingly throughout the 'globalatinized' world, understood as distinct spheres. To one belongs the singular experience of faith, to the other belongs public knowledge; to the one belongs belief in the immaterial, to the other belongs calculation of the material; to the one belongs the absolute value of the sacred, to the other the limited value of what is useful. Such distinctions are indeed at the root of most definitions of religion at least since the Enlightenment, and accounts that seek to contest them still frequently begin by assuming them. [1] In a similar way, Derrida states that he wants to '*link the question of religion to that of the evil of abstraction*,' where the latter is represented by '*the machine, technics, technoscience and above all the transcendence of tele-technology*' (2002a, p. 43, italics in the original). The way in which such a link is posited here presupposes that the 'question of religion' and the 'question of the machine' are in the first place separate questions, and indeed, these questions tend to remain separate even as Derrida argues that they have a shared origin.

Again, at the recommencement of his account in the 'Post-Scriptum' section of the essay, Derrida places religion at the same time alongside and yet conceptually distinct from the technical systems that characterize the contemporary world: 'in three words, *digital culture*, *jet* and *TV*' (p. 62). Admittedly, the emphasis on the dependence of religions today on these technical systems is a crucial part of Derrida's argument, and the way in which he explicitly articulates the argument makes clear that he thinks we cannot understand religion apart from such systems. He writes, '*with respect to all these forces of abstraction … "religion" is* at the same time *involved in reacting antagonistically and reaffirmatively outbidding itself*' (p. 43). If this is the central hypothesis of 'Faith and Knowledge,' then it should be clear that religion also cannot be thought apart from its distinction from the mechanical forces that it both reacts against and reaffirms. However, if one takes this argument to its furthest conclusion, it appears that this distinction is undermined from the outset and that religion itself (if there is such a thing) can also be counted among the forces of abstraction.

There are certainly places in 'Faith and Knowledge' where exactly such a notion shows up. For instance, Derrida points out that one aspect of an 'originary reactivity' to the contemporary forms of tele-technology that structure the contemporary world is a kind of alienated (and often awestruck) 'scientific incompetence' coupled with an ever more extensive "manipulatory competence," the result of which is a relation between the human and the technological that resembles animism or mystical reverence (p. 91). Thomas Carlson (2005) emphasizes this point by contrasting Derrida's claim to the position of Weber nearly a century earlier: according to Weber, any gap between what Derrida calls manipulatory competence and the knowledge of what makes such manipulation possible is always in principle reducible, since the end of technoscience is essentially human mastery over nature. On the contrary, Derrida argues that in the late twentieth (and a fortiori early twenty-first) century technologies, the gap between

[1] For example, anthropologist Daniel Miller begins his introduction to a volume on the important role material culture plays in religion and other social institutions: 'There is an underlying principle to be found in most of the religions that dominate recorded history. Wisdom has been accredited to those who claim that materiality represents the merely apparent, behind which lies that which is real' (Miller 2005, p. 1). The idea is that, despite the actual importance of bodies, objects, and materiality in general to religion, religions' understand themselves as being primarily and essentially concerned with the immaterial. It would seem, though, that the work of Miller and others making similar claims (de Certeau, Asad, Latour, etc.) would tend to question the dominance of such a 'principle' in actual practice.

manipulatory competence and scientific understanding is, for most of humanity, not only wider than before but no longer hypothetically reducible (p. 55). Thus, the universalization and deracination brought about via the internet, for example, is accompanied and supported by an alienation of the user from the technological structures with which and through which she interacts—an alienation that can produce a kind of reverential awe. Yet, the reaction on the part of religion to the alienation and deracination that accompany the technological systems of globalization that Derrida has in mind can, even simply within its negative mode and setting aside religion's reaffirmative embrace of technology, manifest not only a retrenchment into local, tribal, or national identities but also a global or universal protest against precisely those technological structures that spur the growth of globalism and universalism as such.

Derrida's hypothesis, though, remains that religion's embrace of the technological as a means of carrying out its protest, while not only predictable but even inescapable, is an autoimmune reaction in which religion turns on itself. In an effort to avoid becoming a casualty of its own defensive maneuvers, religion withdraws back into an essential core of sacredness and faith that it has—in principle if not in fact—preserved all along against contamination by the technological forces of abstraction. Thus, religion presents itself as the province of the singular and authentic tenuously holding its ground against the encroachment of modernization via technology and science, and it is precisely in such an account that the traditional distinction between religion and the machine is repeated (mechanically, one could say). On the contrary, I would like to suggest that we think the autoimmunity of religion along an opposite trajectory. That is, religion should be understood as proceeding from an originary mechanicity that generates the phenomena of sacredness and faith. It is these phenomena that, perhaps counterintuitively, necessarily disrupt and threaten the life of religious traditions according to an autoimmune operation, and it is in the face of such disruptions and threats that religion reaffirms its mechanicity in order to survive.

Before examining such a notion, however, it may be helpful to point out that in 'Faith and Knowledge,' Derrida does not evoke a distinction that he explores in other texts that touch on religion: namely, that between belief (*croyance*) and faith (*foi*). The former often designates a factical or first-order phenomenon, marking not only 'religious beliefs' (i.e., propositions one's assent to which places one within a particular group of 'believers') but also any instance of giving credence or credit (*créance*) to another. Faith, however, is often treated by Derrida as a second-order, (quasi-)transcendental operation that at once makes possible and complicates belief. Consistently throughout 'Faith and Knowledge,' these are placed together as different ways of naming one source of religion and thus distinguished from the sacred or holy as such. Now, this is not to say that keeping this distinction in mind while examining the arguments of 'Faith and Knowledge' is not a fruitful way of approaching the text, and especially of understanding its place within Derrida's overall approach to religion. However, since the distinction between belief and faith has deservedly received much attention in secondary scholarship, it is beyond the scope of this paper to present even a cursory survey of the work that concerns it.[2] While it is not my intention directly to enter discussions on this point but rather simply to draw more attention to that facet of

[2] Caputo (1997) offers one of the initial and most influential accounts of this aspect of Derrida's work; it is also a recurrent theme in Sherwood and Hart (2005).

Derrida's argument which has more explicitly to do with the ways in which religion and mechanicity are intertwined, there is one point that needs to be addressed. According to Caputo, the relationship between this second-order faith and the technological or mechanical is a dangerous one: 'No faith without repetition, and no repetition without the risk of technical, wooden, automatic, rote repetition, which ruins the faith and sinks down into a mere repetition mechanism' (1997, p. 157). It is my contention that Caputo is mistaken in characterizing mechanical repetition as ruinous to faith, though I do not think that the account of mechanicity presented in this paper is fundamentally at odds with Caputo's larger account of the distinction between faith and belief. Insofar as emphasizing the role of mechanicity in religion privileges the facticity of religious life, however, my account is sympathetic to the criticisms of Caputo's reading offered by, for example, Richard Kearney (2001, 73ff.), Merold Westphal (2005), or more recently, J. Aaron Simmons (2012). Ultimately, though, this account does not stand or fall according to which view one adopts of the possibility of a rigorous distinction between faith and belief, since it does not directly involve such a distinction. What I want to suggest, then, is a Derridean approach to religion in terms of mechanicity that does not directly contest but that is largely complementary to those that focus on faith, belief, or the sacred.

In order to explore this interpretation of religion, then, let us turn briefly away from Derrida's work and to observations made by anthropologist Webb Keane regarding the spread of Christianity in colonial Southeast Asia. In his book *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, Keane puts the Calvinism of Dutch colonial missionaries into relief against Catholic doctrine regarding the efficacy of ritual and, specifically, creedal formulas. First, Keane notes that the formulation and recitation of creeds is 'a characteristic practice of Christianity' and that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the legacy of this practice had greatly contributed to the Western conceptualization of religion that identified it with assent to a set of particular propositions (Keane 2007, p. 67; cf. Asad 1993, p. 40). Understanding religion largely in terms of this kind of belief opens the possibility for the theological attitude, exemplified in the nineteenth century Calvinism, according to which the inner state of the believer takes precedence over the form of her practice: rituals and creeds become mere symbols for an unmediated faith that retains a privileged place. On this basis, the religious reformer is able to argue against the use of creeds or formulaic (rather than spontaneously articulated) prayers, on the grounds that these present obstacles to the development of the individual's personal faith. As Keane explains, creeds consist of 'words over which the speaker has no control other than utterance and acceptance,' so grounding the concept of religion in creedal expression puts it at odds with the moral sovereignty of the modern subject (p. 71). However, the public, embodied act of oral repetition (and thus acceptance) that constitutes the ritual recitation of a creed is what in the first place transforms a speaking body into a religious subject and what subsequently maintains it as such (p. 74). Creeds are not only constative expressions of dogma; they also, and perhaps primarily, open performative sites of assent that provide the conditions for the possibility of faith. It is for this reason that reform movements that seek to minimize the role of creeds and rituals in order to emphasize the primacy of immediate faith inevitably introduce new formulas that play roles very similar to the old ones (p. 79). Religions need material, bodily mechanisms through which to operate, and the creed is simply one part of one such

mechanism. It is a repetitive act that engenders and renews the possibility of faith and reestablishes the sacred as such.

It is important to emphasize the significance of this insight, for in one sense, it may be taken as a rather obvious point that religion, as a product of human activity, is a phenomenon that exists in and through material forms and embodied practices. However, the apparent banality of this claim is belied by a long tradition within theology and philosophy of religion in which such forms and practices are taken as secondary, if not in direct opposition, to either an inner state (psychological, intellectual, or affective) or a transcendent reality—or both. That which is often seen as primary in religious life is taken to be purely spiritual (i.e., precisely non-material), and that which is material and embodied is understood at best as an outward manifestation of the spiritual and at worst a distraction from or perversion of it. In the Christian tradition, this asymmetric dichotomy can be traced back to the Pauline distinction between spirit and flesh, and followed up to, for example, Kierkegaard's claim that true Christianity is in no way to be identified with 'a complete inventory of churches, bells, organs, offering boxes, collection boxes, hymn boards, hearses, etc.' (p. 35), and on into discourse about religious in the present day. A greater recognition of and focus on the constitutive nature of materiality within religious life such as that advocated by Keane have the potential significantly to sharpen philosophical approaches to religion. I hold that Derrida's own exploration of the mechanicity inherent in religion is in keeping with such a position and that it therefore deserves more attention and emphasis than even Derrida himself gives it.

The Fabric of Revelation

In order to explore further this contention regarding Derrida's account of religion, let us turn to another of his religiously themed texts, 'A Silkworm of One's Own.' In this essay, Derrida offers extended considerations of two textile objects that play important roles in religious contexts, the first of which is a veil. The multiple resonances of both this object—indeed, the various objects that are called 'veil'—and the word itself (*le voile*) give rise to a number of different trajectories within Derrida's text. One of these, and the most pertinent for our initial consideration of the text, is a meditation on the veil in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem: the fabric that marked the dividing line between what was simply 'holy' and what was 'most holy.' This particular sacred veil stands as the exemplar of the veil in general and of the act of veiling. Despite what Derrida recognizes as its incomparable status, he states that it is this sacred veil 'which allows us to think nonetheless every other separation' (2002b, p. 316). The veil, precisely as the object that demarcates that which is most private or hidden, is always at the same time that which makes *un*veiling possible. As Derrida notes, it is 'destined to lift'; this is 'its own movement' (p. 318). On the one hand, the veil is that which hides and keeps safe; on the other, it is part and parcel of the veil—of the nature of the veil or the nature of veiling—to reveal or to make appear that which has been veiled. The veil that encloses the space of the Holy of Holies, therefore, does not only hide this most sacred space from view of the public. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, it grounds an intentional trajectory toward an unveiling—the unveiling of the divine, which one could perhaps understand as the fulfillment of the promise of the founding

covenant of the Jewish faith. Thus, in this case, the veil operates not only at but *as* the foundational site of religion, the condition of the possibility of religion insofar as it instantiates the act of revelation in ways oriented toward both past (the founding covenant) and future (eschatological fulfillment).

We can see the veil itself as a manifestation of the relationship that Heidegger brings to light between revelation and revealability. Heidegger contends that revealability (*Offenbarkeit*) serves as condition or horizon for the appearance of any revelation (*Offenbarung*). However, in 'Faith and Knowledge,' Derrida questions the structure of this relationship—asking which of these two in fact serve as the ground for the other—and he is unwilling or unable to offer an answer (2002a, p. 55; cf. Derrida and Caputo 1997, p. 24). Elsewhere, in a discussion with Jean-Luc Marion and Richard Kearney, he posits that perhaps the very question of priority is 'not well posed, that we should displace the question' (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, p. 73). This appears to be a point of contestation between Derrida and Marion, with Marion defending a position closer to that of Heidegger's. Since much of Marion's recent phenomenological work focuses precisely on revelation, it is worthwhile to take a moment to consider some elements of this work and their relation to the Derridean position we have been exploring.

It is, not surprisingly, Marion's phenomenology of revelation that is most directly relevant to our examination here. We should distinguish at the outset between the particular content of a Revelation (marked by its capitalization) and the act or structure of revelation as such; it is the possibility of the latter that, Marion argues, can be phenomenologically explained (2002, p. 367n90). Marion sees revelation as the most radical example of what he calls a 'saturated phenomenon,' an unforeseeable and fundamentally unconditioned appearance the intuition of which is inherently excessive of the normal conditions of experience (Tin 2010, p. 873; cf. Marion 2002, p. 225ff.). As saturated phenomenon, then, 'revelation gives objects where intuition surpasses the intentional aim' (Marion 2008, p. 16). Marion thus recognizes that revelation is essentially paradoxical insofar as it escapes determination by any horizon of experience yet appears nonetheless, and in its appearance radically reorients the horizons of subsequent experience.

Such an understanding of revelation is, I think, in keeping with Derrida's account of the veil. In the account examined above, the veil is the foundational site for the Jewish religion because it both presents and disrupts the presentation of that which stands at the center of this tradition. It is in this sense the site and concrete manifestation of revelation as such. Yet, to return to Heidegger's distinction, is this revelation strictly speaking or the general revealability that serves as its condition? Marion takes a somewhat different position on this issue than Derrida, aligning revealability (*Offenbarkeit*) with manifestation according to the limits determined by the horizons of experience, so that the excess of revelation (*Offenbarung*) necessarily stretches beyond such conditions (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, p. 74; cf. Marion 1991, p. 70). In this case, the possibility of revelation inherent in the veil depends on its connection to a transcendence that would be the source of this possibility, and it would be difficult not to see (contra Marion's argument) the manifestation of this possibility in and as a particular Revelation as being determined a priori by such a connection. That is to say, if the veil necessarily serves to (un)cover a divine, transcendent source of truth, it is this relationship that determines the meaning of the veil as such and thus determines the horizon of the experience of revelation. Although Marion does claim that revelation 'is

purely of itself and starting from itself' (2008, p. 45), it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it in fact operates within a prior determination: not of the horizon of experience for the subject, but of the relationship to the transcendent that is the foundation of both its form and content (thereby also blurring Marion's distinction between revelation and Revelation).

For this reason, I believe it would be more fruitful to understand the veil as establishing in an immanent, material, and concrete (and therefore perhaps not wholly universalizable) way a certain revealability that serves as the condition for the possibility of the revelation on which, in turn, the religion to which the veil belongs is founded. The irreducible facticity of the veil as such a condition may be illustrated if we turn our attention to the fact that the Temple veil first appears in Derrida's text in an allusion to its supposed tearing at the moment of Jesus' death (2002b, p. 314).[3] This tear in the veil serves not only to emphasize the double operation—covering and uncovering—enacted by the veil in general but also to bring out a modification of this operation within the Christian framework. The veil that is torn has already at least partially fulfilled its destined unveiling. It allows what is covered by it to appear, even as it remains covered. Through the torn veil, the anticipated event of revelation has already occurred—or rather it is occurring, and it continues to occur. We may go so far as to say, then, that the mention of the tearing of the veil in the gospels is not merely a literary device; the tear is a necessary condition for the institution of the early Christian tradition insofar as it conceived of itself as having received an eschatological revelation. So, in this case, the veil still constitutes the condition for the possibility of revelation, yet the particular revelation made possible is structured differently here than in the earlier case. What accounts for the difference is, at least with respect to the concrete condition of the veil, the material difference that is the tear.

The logic of the relationship between the veil and its religious tradition(s), it perhaps goes without saying, is somewhat strange, insofar as the veil—already a religious object, one the creation and installation of which is prescribed in a supposedly revealed document—stands at the origin of the religious heritage to which it can only subsequently belong. However, such is the strange temporality (the 'time out of joint' that Derrida explores most substantially in *Specters of Marx*) of the phenomena that belong to the traditions of revelation that we are accustomed to calling religious. I think it is important as well that we not too easily consider the veil in these examples as merely a figure for a concept such as 'revealability as such.' This is indeed at the very least implied in Derrida's treatment of the veil in 'A Silkworm': after grounding the possibility of revelation, belief, and sacredness and thus uncovering the possibility of religion precisely as it covers over the site of its institution, the veil may become a figure of revealability in a general sense. However, prior to this moment, the veil cannot yet be a figure for a general concept; it can only be a material, tactile object and can thus only serve as the concrete ground for factical religious life. It is only after this moment of institution that religious life can retrieve an origin (by retroactively creating it through its practice) that ostensibly transcends the material and, on the basis of this transcendental conceptualization, make the veil into a symbol of a general structure.

The second religious object Derrida considers in 'A Silkworm of One's Own' is something that, while resembling a veil, circumvents the logic of revelation and

[3] Cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark 25:38; Luke 23:45.

revealability. This is the prayer shawl or *tallith*. Derrida introduces the tallith—and, importantly, not just *a* tallith but *his* tallith—as what appears before or beyond the theme of seeing or knowing (*le voir ou le savoir*) in the domain of touch. 'It veils or hides nothing,' he writes, 'it shows or announces no Thing, it promises the intuition of nothing' (2002b, p. 326). It does not, therefore, belong to the structure of revelation in the way that the veil does. Even more than the veil that marks an originary separation from the wholly other out of which a religion emerges, the tallith seems to serve for Derrida as an inescapable point of reference for the religious life about which he at the same time cannot speak and yet cannot refrain from speaking (cf. Derrida 1993; Caputo 1997). Derrida narrates his tallith's history and the relationship he has with it, using it not so much in prayer but nevertheless in a kind of daily ritual that involves a touch without knowledge or meaning (2002b, p. 328). The tallith seems to lie outside the domain of truth; or rather, 'if there is a "truth" of this shawl,' says Derrida, 'it depends less on the lifting or the unfolding of a veil, on some unveiling or revelation, than on the unique event, the gift of the law and the "coming together" it calls back to itself' (p. 342). This unique event and calling back to itself should allow us to see a distinction between the significance of Derrida's touch *without meaning* and an ordinary touch that is *meaningless*. The meaningless (i.e., commonplace, unremarkable) touches that populate all the mundane activities of one's day, insofar as they are manifestations of the relationships that one has with other persons and objects within the larger system of signification that makes up a world, cannot be said to be 'meaningless' in the strict sense. They retain the marks of referentiality that characterizes relation in general and perhaps touching in particular. What characterizes Derrida's touch of his tallith, however, seems to be precisely that it excepts itself from the larger web of signification and is thus properly *without meaning*—that is, it does not, in any clearly determinable way, refer to anything beyond itself.

As Michael Naas points out, 'The tallith is thus, in some sense, another name for *khora*, the place that gives place and has no name that is absolutely proper to it' (2012, p. 232). To the tallith in this way, though, it would be necessary to think something like a religion that is not—neither in fact nor in principle—universalizable or conceptualizable but irreducibly singular and concrete. This would be particularly difficult not least because there is obviously no disputing that the tallith belongs to a particular religious tradition that, while concrete and historical, is also as such both a community and a horizon of meaning. The tallith belongs to a tradition and a community that specifies its form and function (even if, notably, according to the tradition, the tallith only belongs to the men of the community; tallithim are not given to women). It would thus seem mistaken to suppose that a tallith could be, strictly speaking, without meaning. Yet, any particular tallith is non-transferable; it thus stands in a unique relationship with its owner. This is crucial to Derrida's meditation on his own tallith, as it further distinguishes it from the veil. 'Unlike a veil,' he writes, 'this tallith depends on the One of the unique, the singular event whose repetition repeats only, and that's history, the "once only" of the Law given, the 613 or so commandments that make up the Law' (2002b, p. 338). The tallith's relation to the Law—that is, the revelation in which the tallith's own manufacture and use is prescribed—is not a relation to the revelation of a truth that has been unveiled or that has to remain veiled in order to be protected. The tallith, *his tallith*, relates rather to the event of revelation *as event*. Therefore, this relationship remains in principle non-universalizable and non-

signifiable, and any religion that is grounded on it would be as unique as the tallith itself. Its connection to the Law and its tradition is thus at once necessary and impossible.

Furthermore, the singularity of the tallith in its relationship to its bearer and the event on which this depends precludes what Derrida seems to be doing in this text: namely, the turning of the tallith into a figure for a concept like religion or faith. As Derrida explains, though,

> What separates the logic or topic of the veil from those of the shawl … is the difference of the event, the irreducible reference to the One, to the One + n which multiplies only the first time, and gives me my tallith, my own, to me alone…. The uniqueness of this reference, the untranslatable carry of this reference prevents a tallith, which one cannot and must not get rid of, from being or becoming, like every veil, merely a figure, a symbol, a trope (p. 344).

The singularity of the tallith prevents it from being subject to the symbolization to which the veil is not only subject but, it seems, necessarily tends. If Derrida is correct about this, then it must be the case that his account of the tallith in 'A Silkworm of One's Own' necessarily fails, precisely because the tallith (and again it can only be *his* tallith) is something that cannot be translated into the universal idiom of philosophical literature. This is, I contend, due to the materiality of the tallith—specifically its tactility, not because touch necessarily escapes the structure of signification (which it certainly does not) but because it nevertheless leaves such a possibility open insofar as it is not as complicit with the structure of knowledge and meaning as sight has become.[4] The place of Derrida's tallith outside (or at least at the margins of) the realm of sight and the seen, we can understand the tallith as a material *khora*, and the prayer that he says by touching it as both an unrepeatable event and a mechanical iteration. This object can only serve the unique role at the ground of Derrida's somewhat perplexing religious life to the extent that it remains a machine-object and not a concept or figure and to the extent that Derrida's relationship with it remains unburdened by meaning—that is, merely mechanical. As Timothy Beal and Tod Linafelt suggest (even as they express reservations about the degree to which the tallith can truly be extricated from the logic of the veil), Derrida's tallith may offer the promise of an alternative to the long history of the conceptual determination of religion according to the 'vocabularies of revelation' (2005, p. 185). If this is the case, then we may use Derrida's reflections on his tallith not as a model for something like the 'nature' or 'essence' of religion in general (as if there is such a thing)—and a fortiori not as an example of the content of particular religious practices or traditions, not even that which from which his tallith emerges. Rather, it can provide a purely formal heuristic—something like a Heideggerian 'formal indication' (cf. Heidegger 2004, p. 44)—for understanding the event of religion as arising from and never completely escaping the repetitive action characteristic of the machine.

[4] The association between seeing and knowing is touched on repeatedly in Derrida's text (cf. 319ff.), echoing the text by Hélène Cixous, 'Savoir' (Cixous and Derrida 2001), to which it serves as a response.

The Mundane Matters of Religious Life

Returning to our original examination of 'Faith and Knowledge,' let us also consider Michael Naas's rich exegesis of this essay in *Miracle and Machine*. In much the same way as Derrida, Naas tends to emphasize a distinction or gap between the religious and the mechanical even as he explores their close relationships. In the chapter titled '*La religion soufflée*,' for instance, he brings the spirit of religion and the autonomic repetition of breath together to think through the relationship of faith and the machine. Prompted by Derrida's account of the genesis of the conference at which he first presented 'Faith and Knowledge,' Naas locates a mechanical element at the core of the living organism and at the same time recalls the deconstruction of the living present in Derrida's early work (Derrida 2002a, p. 75; Naas 2012, p. 111ff.). Yet, the *souffler* in which Naas locates a mechanical automaticity is not identified with the machine as such. He writes that 'the undecidability of *souffler* [between the self-presence of the living subject and the mechanical operations that problematize this self-presence] comes, in a machinelike way, to contaminate the original intention' and that '[e]verything about this single passage thus speaks about the duplicity of religion and its necessary relationship to repetition and the technical supplement' (p. 124). The breath itself—which Naas also relates to the Genesis 1 account of creation (p. 122)—hangs between the spontaneity of the living and the repetition of the machine. It operates 'in a machinelike way,' but it is not quite mechanical. It marks a 'necessary relationship' between religion and its technical supplement, but at the same time retains this link *as a relationship*—that is, as a connection (albeit a necessary one) between elements that are essentially distinct. Not only that, but the machine retains its place as a (somewhat intrusive) supplement the originariness of which is not, I believe, fully recognized in this text. A similar logic arises earlier in the same chapter, when Naas focuses squarely on Derrida's understanding of 'machine' as such. He explains, 'Derrida says that the machine is simply another way of speaking about calculation and repetition, but about calculation and repetition in relationship always to the incalculable and the unforeseeable' (p. 118). The incalculable and the unforeseeable, even as they remain tied to the workings of repetition, thus remain distinct from mechanicity as such; they are 'what exceeds the machine.' The continual return to this emphasis—and especially to the idea that mechanicity is a kind of finite ground always already exceeded—belies the radical depth and breadth of the involvement of the mechanical throughout the religious.

Despite this emphasis, Naas certainly does not entirely ignore the ways in which the mechanical lies at the foundation of the structures we usually associate with religion. For instance, he writes:

> [T]he machine makes possible not only the perfectibility of a sworn faith and promise to the other, a responsibility to and for the other, but the possibility of radical evil in a reactive denial of the other. The machine must thus be thought in terms of both repetition *and* difference, iterability *and* unpredictability. It makes possible the faith that opens up a future but it does not determine that future in one way or another (p. 120).

Naas here directs us toward those points in Derrida's essay where the elements of faith and mechanicity are joined most closely. In §38, Derrida does claim that 'the

machine-like and faith' should be considered together rather than in opposition, since the automatic repetition characteristic of the former opens up the possibility of the latter through the inescapable structure of the confirmation or the response (2002a, p. 83). Earlier in 'Faith and Knowledge,' he very nearly identifies religion with the response itself—or at least he identifies a certain identification of these two already at work in the concept of religion (p. 64). Religion, he argues, depends constitutionally on the possibility of the response and on a certain idea of responsibility.[5] What I would like to point out is that this possibility, bound up as it is with the notions of witness, testimony, and promise, is one that is always already technical or mechanical. Derrida argues that every address to or from the other carries with it a promise, and thus that every affirmation however constative is at once reaffirmed in the performative gesture of an oath. In addition, every oath bears the structure of a transcendental appeal—i.e., every address, even the least concerned with religion, calls on God as its witness (p. 65). Now, the recognition of an automatic reference to an absolute witness in any concrete instance of witnessing, testifying, or addressing complicates any attempt to move away from traditional, metaphysical understandings of either God or religion, but at the same time, it emphasizes the extent to which the religious and the secular, scientific, or modern cannot be rigorously separated. Let us put aside the implications of this particular claim on, for example, the idea of secular politics or the possibility of atheistic humanism, though, and focus instead on what it says about the constitution of religion. If the structure of the response is such that it cannot help but appeal to, as Derrida has it, the 'unengendered and unengenderable, prior to being itself,' then it seems both to reinforce the most traditional understandings of religion to say that it is characterized fundamentally by a response and at the same time to point toward an interpretation of religion that gives more attention to its mechanical side.

Derrida explains this process of response and appeal as a 'quasi-mechanical' operation, a 'production and reproduction of the unproducible absent in place' (2002a, p. 65). In other words, the transcendent point of reference that in principle guarantees the efficacy of the responsive and responsible address, the address that expresses the belief that ostensibly lies at the heart of religion, is itself produced by that address and more specifically by the automatic doubling, the repetition of the address in its mechanical reaffirmation. It would seem that such an account would direct Derrida's attention—as well as Naas's—more closely toward those aspects of religious life that most evidently exhibit machine-like qualities. Yet, in both cases, what we see is in many ways a return (albeit not without significant modification) to the traditional focus on the experience of faith.

For an example, let us return to *Miracle and Machine*. Naas uses Don DeLillo's novel *Underworld* as a continual reference point for the various links that Derrida wants to indicate between the realms of religion and technology, and this literary work serves the purpose well. Near the end of Naas's work, he turns to a scene near the end of *Underworld* where an aging nun, Sister Alma Edgar, experiences a transformative mystical vision thanks to a passing train and what appears to her younger companion as a simple trick of the light. The machinery of the train, as well as of all the social and

[5] I will only make the briefest reference here to the mutual interdependencies of the modern concepts of religion and of the responsible moral subject, political subject, intellectual and emotional subject, etc., but such connections are crucial and obviously well worth exploring elsewhere.

economical forces that lie behind the production of a certain billboard, allow the briefest emergence of the joy of faith—brief, but powerful enough to alleviate the Sister Edgar's perpetual fears of both deadly contagion and loss of religious belief (DeLillo 1997, p. 821ff.). Naas reads this at the same time as an account of the (re-)emergence of the nun's faith and as an indication of the more elementary faith at the origin of both religion and the machine (2012, p. 280ff.). According to such an interpretation, at the junction of faith and knowledge, what we find is only a higher order of faith.

What *Underworld* offers its reader, though, is not only a glimpse at this general faith that knowledge and religious faith share but also an account that is perhaps more revelatory of inextricable bond between religion and the mechanical—one that moves between religious and scientific concerns so smoothly that the two can be said to overlap, the common mechanical origin of both uncovered. When the reader first meets Sister Edgar, it is early on a typical morning as she begins her daily rituals. At this hour, these consist almost exclusively of movements of prayer and hygiene, performed together with liturgical exactitude. 'She made the sign of the cross, murmuring the congruous words. … She said a morning offering and got to her feet. At the sink she scrubbed her hands repeatedly with coarse brown soap' (p. 237). DeLillo describes Sister Edgar's mental calculations regarding the indulgences earned by her devotional words and deeds with the same clean prose that he uses to describe her anxious considerations about the threats posed by dirt and disease. She is conscious of the ease in which her traditional religious faith can be replaced—perhaps is already being replaced—by a paranoia grounded in obscure scientific processes and technological systems (p. 241). This slippage is possible not due to the strength of a force fundamentally dissimilar from the structure of her familiar religion. Rather, it is possible precisely because of the basic structural similarity between the mechanical repetitions that make up her religious life and the scientific systems that she faces in the profane world. She protects her body by cleaning it according to the strict use of hygienic products, covering it in a meticulously folded and draped old-fashioned habit, and enveloping its extremities in latex. Likewise, she protects her soul by the repeated performance of oral, manual, and bodily supplications. Thus, it is not only at the end of her story that one can clearly see the mechanical at the heart of religion—the end where 'the smell of jet fuel … the burnt cedar and gum' allow her to retain the experience of 'a fellowship of deep belief' (p. 824). In the beginning, her faith (shaky though it may initially be) is already grounded in the thousand repetitive movements by which her body performs its vocation. Despite any appearances to the contrary, the distinction between the 'something holy that throbs on the hot horizon' (p. 824) and the throbbing pain of her body's perennial routine may be only formal. That is, the sacredness that Sister Edgar rediscovers can be understood as grounded in the profane machinations of her everyday environment. While the difference between the holy and the everyday may come down, as Naas puts it, to 'the way we read the signs, to the space that is or is not available for those signs, to whether we read them as true signs of a miracle … or as signs of a mass hoax or delusion made possible by the machine' (2012, p. 283), the example of Derrida's tallith that we explored above as well as this very episode in *Underworld* should also suggest that both sides of this difference—if not the difference itself—may be produced by virtue of the mechanicity operating on both sides of the distinction. This is not to say that the distinction between what we call religious and

what we do not disappears, only that this distinction cannot rigorously be made by taking the machine as the symbol of the profane.

Sister Edgar's story demonstrates the aspect of Derrida's account of religion that, though present in the text, remains underemphasized. It is this aspect that I have tried to give a more robust account of here: just as there is an originary faith at the heart of the scientific and technological, so is there an originary mechanicity and materiality at the heart of religion. Indeed, religion—and perhaps especially religion today—cannot be adequately understood without conceiving it first of all in terms of its mechanical operations and of the various bodies that perform these operations. This is not to undermine the aspects of religion associated with sacredness or with belief, with the unpredictability of life or with the singularity of the most elemental faith. On the contrary, thinking religion in terms of mechanicity allows us to understand more deeply the belonging together of religion and technology insofar as the latter always serves in some way or other as the condition for the possibility of the former. Whether in the recitation of a creed, the movement of fingers over a rosary, the construction of a temple, the call to prayer over loudspeakers five times a day, the lighting of a devotional fire, or the broadcasting of a sermon on Sunday morning, religion does not appropriate a technology that is somehow foreign to its essence. Religion is constituted as such in and through these technologies, fulfilling its role as (to read Bergson's words in the context into which Derrida puts them) 'a machine for the making of gods' (Bergson 1935, p. 317; cf. Derrida 2002a, p. 77).

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