“Et Iterum de Deo”

Jacques Derrida and the Tradition of Divine Names

HENT DE VRIES

State et nolite iterum iugo servitutis contineri. (Stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.)

—Galatians 5:1, the Latin Vulgate, RSV

Neither traditional philosophical theism nor modern secular humanism nor, for that matter, theoretical or practical humanism and atheism seem adequate designations to capture the simultaneous generalization and trivialization, intensification, and exaggeration to which Derrida subjects the religious and theological—indeed, theologico-political—categories, drawn from the vastest and deepest of archives.¹

Instead of demonstrating what is wrong with these alternative interpretations of Derrida’s projects—I have neither a gift nor much patience for polemics—I would like to give a few examples of what this apparent laboriousness and tediousness, as well as indecisiveness, looks like. I will do so, basing myself on a few fairly recent texts, not least since I have addressed some earlier statements elsewhere and do not feel I need to summarize or significantly restate my view. In sum, I claim that Derrida, as he himself often enough indicated, remains at once near to and far from—indeed, infinitely close to and at an infinite remove from—the archive that makes up “religion.”

This archive, which is not only an ensemble of words and things, images and sounds, gestures and powers, that reconfigure themselves in both structural and random ways, but also a past whose metaphysical status (as Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze knew and insisted throughout their writings) is best described as absolute, pure, and virtual—this archive, then, has lost nothing of its historical and, perhaps, ontological weight, even though in any of its singular and collective instances and instantiations it remains contestable and, indeed, deconstructable through and through.
Let's assume for a moment that the known debates concerning so-called turns in Derrida's work (whether toward ethics and/or religion or to, say, the "literary object," architecture, law, America, perestroika, Europe, animals, learning how to live—and the differences matter little)—in other words, debates concerning any "turning," quasi-Heideggerian 
Kehre, or what have you, all of which assume a before and an after, a linearity of progression, conversion, inventions of the other, and the like—have largely run their course. They are either inconclusive or simply moot (an urgent matter for intellectual historians and biographers at best). For the sake of argument and the attempt to find common ground, we can easily postulate a continuum and coherence of the Derridian project and ouevre and bury the rhetoric of "turns" once and for all. Yet, this would still leave us with an important question, one for which the reference to Descartes's Meditations, at a central point of the argument in Limited Inc—notably its invocation of (and need for) the "iterum" at the heart of theological proof—could well serve as an emblematic rendering. It is summed up in the following question: What drives the need to repeat—that is to say, recall, reiterate, and change—a tradition, even and especially when it is seemingly over and done with, and to do so without submitting oneself once again (iterum) to its most dogmatic assumptions and codifications, pictures and images? As I have sketched elsewhere, there is throughout Derrida's more recent writings a quasi-Pauline stance of belonging without belonging to a tradition, whose legacy one knows to be virtually all-determining in the history of Western thought, from the age-old ontological constitution of metaphysics up to the "globalatination" (to cite Samuel Weber's apt translation of mondialisationisation) of our days. Indeed, this legacy casts its shadow over any attempt to say, write, or do something else as well, which is, precisely, why not even the thought by trace or our "learning finally how to live" can ever fully hope to escape it.

"And"

We can, I think, all agree that the title of our symposium—"Derrida and Religion"—neither asks nor allows for a simple answer. In one word, it can hardly mean that the "and" implies a merely disjunctive clause—in logical symbol, indicated by "v" (suggesting the Latin adverb vel)—-as if we ought to begin by differentiating and ending up choosing between "Derrida" and "religion" as alternatives, let alone opposites, standing apart from each other, linked negatively, as it were, through disjunction alone. Speaking of "Derrida and Religion," we do, I take it, not imply "Derrida or religion" (say, p v q) intimating that there is "Derrida"—the man, the thought—on the one hand, and "religion"—the historical reference, concept, and practice, name and spirituality or ritual—on the other. The title "Derrida and Religion"—in logical notation, p ^ q—connotes something else.

Not, conversely, can our conference title signify that we simply equate or identify these names (more precisely, but here all our difficulties begin, the proper name and the concept or practice), conflating "Derrida" and/or his work (perhaps even just a part of it) with "religion" (or any distinctive part or element of it). Again, in logical notation, "Derrida and Religion" hardly suggests p ^ q—or, evidently, its opposite, namely that p does not only not equal q, but is actually the strict negation or exclusion of q, just as q would be the exact opposite of p, without any overlap of the references (values or sets) represented by these symbols.

In other words, there is a conjunction and disjunction of and between the two symbols or, rather, "names"—a proper name ("Derrida") and a common name or, rather, noun ("religion")—that merits further reflection. And the unexpected ways in which a singular name may inflect a general or generic concept leads to the very heart of the problem that interests us here.1

In fact, taken in isolation, neither the inclusive (weak or connective) use of the adverb "and" in our title, "Derrida and Religion," nor its exclusive disjunctive reading makes much sense in light of the readings and interpretations that Derrida himself proposed, whether speaking of "religion" directly or expressly, or discussing the messianic, the law, its so-called mystical foundation, the shibboleth, circumcision, confession, or, I would venture to add, just about anything else. Indeed, precisely the "fact" that a name or term (here: "religion") can come to stand in—or non-synonymously substitute for—just about anything whatsoever, invests it with a value that is absolute or, in any case, absolves itself from easy determination, is what troubles and confounds the question we seek to answer. How and why is it that "religion" invades a territory (a mind, an ouevre) in which it has, perhaps, no place? Is this yet another example of the way life affects and, perhaps, precedes (primum vivere deinde philosophare) thought, illustrating the very "contamination" of the transcendental by the empirical and vice versa that is one of Derrida's earliest and most original and influential insights?2 Or is the cohabitation of religion and philosophy (literature, psychoanalysis, political analysis, etc.) in Derrida's writings—a curious and enigmatic coexistence and, perhaps, coextensiveness, whose peculiar figure and format interests us here—of an altogether different nature? Could its proper phenomenality obey a logic that is, strictly speaking, indestructible, "indeconstructable," as Derrida (sometimes) says?3

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That there is an undeniable disjoinedness of the proper name and its metonymic use (after all "Derrida" comes to stand here for much more), on the one hand, and the referent or concept and practice (namely "Religion," whose reference is even vaster in scope), on the other, goes without saying. Nonetheless, the relation between these names or terms calls for an interpretation that does justice to the complexity and subtlety of their mutual implication, interrelation, which hints at a rapport that goes further than a mere overlapping of edges, and this to the point of confusion.

What should puzzle us is that this holds true, especially, where "Derrida" and "religion" (more than, say, "Derrida" and "literature," "Derrida" and "psychoanalysis," "architecture," and even "politics") are concerned. After all, why is there this doubtful, even dubious privilege and why does it deserve our attention more than anything else? What causes or justifies, in any case, explains this prima facie implausible conjunction of names and terms (or of one name and one term or noun, rather than others)? What accounts for this drawing and pulling of certain meanings and forces that "haunt" our present, preventing it from ever coinciding with itself. What are these overwhelming questions of the name and of everything "done in the name of": questions of the name or noun "religion," of the names of God, of whether the proper name belongs to the system of language or not, hence, of its untranslatability but also of its iterability (which is to say, of that which makes it a site of repeatability, of idealization and therefore, already, of techné, of technoscience, of tele-technoscience in calling at a distance . . . ?)[1]

Before attempting to answer these questions, let me suggest that if we read our title—"Derrida and Religion"—we need to mobilize all our skills in reading ambiguous titles such as Being and Time, Truth and Method, Tautology and Infinity, and, perhaps, Mind and World, that suggest something else, and something more than, the mere hermeneutic complementarity of the terms (names and noun) in question. That is to say, we must not cede to yet another temptation, which is to assume contiguity, complementariness, or partial overlap between the references, realities, and realms, for which these "conjugated" words ("Being," "Truth," etc.) stand, where, in fact, there is none. Perhaps the proper name in our title ("Derrida") prevents us from going there? Or is the relationship between an individual thinker and a general subject merely an illustration of the very problem that these modern philosophical classics and their authors (here: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, John McDowell) evoke?

Things are not that simple and it would seem, at first glance, that, paradoxically, a certain undecidability of the "Derrida and/or Religion"—the "and-slash-or" expressing our sense of not quite knowing as to where or how to locate their relative positions vis-à-vis each other—is de rigueur. Instead of any identity or difference, let alone resemblance or analogy, between "Derrida" (the proper name and metonymy, the man, the work), on the one hand, and "religion" (the historical referent, concept, and practice), on the other, there might well be total overlap, congruity, but one that does not exclude or deny the—non-numerical—distinction or distinctiveness of these two poles of analysis or points of attention. The relationship between them, if there is one ("il y en a, as Derrida so often cautions), would be "without relation" or, rather, it would be one (but, one wonders, just one?) of being distinct, distinctive, and indistinguishable at once, not unlike Joseph Jastrow’s duck and/or rabbit, which "now you see, now you don’t," that Ludwig Wittgenstein uses to great effect in his Philosophical Investigations to illustrate the implications of so-called dual aspect seeing. Perhaps, we might even say that they are—in what are often the most indirect, oblique, and occulted of ways—reciprocally, if not symmetrically, constitutive of each other, without yielding one simple and undivided picture, a unique image of oneness, of the One—one of the Divine names—that would, supposedly, stand on its own and be one of a kind, the sole "example" of its kind.

If we steer clear from all biography, from all psychologizing, as indeed we should: if we focus on matters of principle and method or, rather, of axiomatics, theoretical matrix, and interpretive praxis (all of them terms that stem directly from the Derridian idiom)—leaving the proper name (here: Derrida) for what it is—then our topic becomes simply this: deconstruction and/or religion. The Spinozistic understanding and rhetorical use of the Latin sive rather than vel—as in the well-known, but still little understood, expression Deus sive natura—would thus form a second best alternative to that of taking the "and" as, precisely, undecidable, that is, a relation without relation, without us being able to determine the place (call it the meaning and/or use) of its constitutive terms, once and for all.

But, again, do these terms—"deconstruction" and "religion"—and the unlimited set of concepts and/or practices on which they rely indeed form a pair? Do they represent the dual aspects of one and the same eternal and necessary truth, as in Spinoza’s one and only substance, which is named both God and Nature and gives itself to be thought and intuitued and loved at once (as the second and third order of knowledge make strikingly clear)? Or is deconstruction—meaning, in part, the disassembling of a ‘machine’ so to transport it elsewhere—for linguistic, epistemological,
moral, and political reasons unable to reassemble the elements (and, hence, the One) that it had begun by taking apart?

Be that as it may, the title "Derrida and Religion," we may now see, is much more suggestive and promising than, for example, "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Religion" (to parody an earlier title and, indeed, conference, which took place some twenty years ago in New York and which got the debate about these matters started in the first place). For we can now suspect that neither the deconstructive argument nor, for that matter, any of its key elements or terms, such as the "trace," the "supplement," "différence," can claim to name or designate the place or locality (as Derrida says, the khora) of the archi-, quasi-, ultra-, simili-transcendental condition of possibility (and/or of impossibility) for anything whatsoever. To claim as much would mean to assume that any such conditioned thing, for example and a fortiori "religion," would be somehow dependent and parasitical upon this condition, as if it came chronologically and logically "later," so to speak. But, as we will see, it is the condition—at least, our philosophical meditation upon it—which comes later and, paradoxically, follows the conditioned wherever it goes.

Perhaps the proper name in our conference’s title—however etymologically it may further be intended, as a stand-in for the deconstructive operation at large—reminds us of this singular footing and nature of the co-implication of "Derrida and Religion" no less than that of the curious "fact" that they may always come to be seen and judged as mutually—and simultaneously or eventually—at odds or opposed ("out of joint," as Derrida, citing Hamlet, so often says). Bound and unbound at once.

I would like to follow up on this somewhat abstract preamble by merely declaring and clarifying that what I mean to suggest is, all in all, fairly straightforward, in fact, a truism, of sorts: it is the insight that Derrida intuits and formalizes with great consequence, namely that with respect to tradition—that is to say, under the modern, current regimen of "faith" and "knowledge" in which global markets and media affect and inflect global religion in a variety of ways (just as they are informed and driven by its "two sources" and manifestations, in turn)—we all find ourselves in a continuously shifting position that is both closest to and at an infinite remove from the archive that, for lack of a better term, we call "religion."

Before giving a few concrete examples of the lingering—the living-on (survivior), remaining (or remaindering, restance), or haunting spectrality (hauntologie)—of the religious, suggesting that Derrida helps us understand that if religion outlives or has already outlived itself it may well come out or have come out stronger, indeed, more viable and alive than ever before, let me clarify the relevant context from which my title’s reference to religion’s repetition—or, in the jargon: iterability—takes its lead. More important, let me explain why the reference to "the Divine name" is pertinent here at all.

Taking my lead from this context will allow me to avoid repeating—at least, all too explicitly—some of my own earlier tentative attempts to understand and sketch the logic of Derrida’s mention and use of Divine names (in the chapter on "Hyperbole," in Philosophy and the Turn to Religion, in the chapter on the "mystical postulate," drawing on his borrowings from Michel de Certeau, in Religion and Violence, and in the chapter on the "other" or "inverse" theology as well as the appendix on the apophatics of deconstruction, in Minimal Theologies). These analyses, for all their inevitable shortcomings, must speak for themselves and, grosso modo, contain absolutely nothing that I would not be prepared to reiterate today.

I will not revisit the different stages of Derrida’s engagement with apophatics, with so-called negative and mystical theology (in Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, and Angelus Silesius, his explicit references directly; nor will I return to the telling expressions with which Derrida himself tried to capture the subtle dialectics and aporetic of his thinking and operating at once from within and without the tradition that has been (and, perhaps, still is) "our language," namely metaphysics. And, by implication and extension, this would mean also natural, philosophical, or onto-theology.

These expressions are well-established and known and range from the adopted Levinasian figure of the à Dieu/dieu (as a simultaneous turn toward and away from God, and whatever comes to substitute for His place, name, and concept) to the tout autre est tout autre ("the every other is every bit—or totally—other," which at once infinitizes finite singularities and de-transcendentalizes and pluralizes the one, for example, ethical Other), to Derrida’s ironic self-description as the le dernier des juifs que je suis ("the last and the least of the Jews that I am or follow") that, likewise, conveys a Blanchotian motif and motivation, which is that one can every so often find oneself to be at once closest to and at the furthest remove from a certain legacy.

Derrida’s magnificent readings of Heidegger’s analytic, in Being and Time, of being-toward-death, use this paradoxical, near-aporetic characterization to indicate Blanchot’s—and, at greater distance, Levinas’s—relation to, at least, this part of Heidegger’s thought. But it is far to say that this relation governs Derrida’s own rapport to all of these thinkers as well as that it regulates his approach and more occasional stance on the tradition.
and contemporary phenomenon or set, indeed sets, of phenomena that interest us here and that go under the heading of "religion."

"Iterum"

As you may recall—and it merits repeating—in his long riposte to John Searle, in Limited Inc, Derrida sheds light on the concept of iteration by referring to one of the subtitles of the essay that kicked off the debate around J. L. Austin’s How to Do Things with Words (the unlikely, confusing, and, at times, somewhat disingenuous debate on Anglo-American speech act theory, the performatives, and so-called perlocutionary and passionate utterances to which many, most significantly, Stanley Cavell and Jean-Luc Marion have contributed since in a somewhat more distanced—one might add, serious and sincere—tone and demeanor).10

The subtitle in question is taken from Derrida’s seminal 1971 essay “Signature Event Context,” republished in 1972 as the concluding chapter of Margins of Philosophy. It reads: “Parasites. Iter, of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist.” This subtitle cites and parodies, perhaps interprets, a title by Descartes, to be precise the subtitle of the fifth of his Meditations on Metaphysics, which reads: De essentia rerum materialium; et iterum de Deo, quod existit; or, in French: De l’essence des choses matérielles; et derechef de Dieu, qu’il existe; or, finally, in English: “On the Essence of Material Things; And Likewise of God, That He Exists” (or, in yet another rendering: “The Essence of Material Things, and the Existence of God Considered a Second Time”; “Concerning the Essence of Material Things; and Again Concerning God, that He Exists”).11

Derrida recalls that the latter part of the title that begins with the adverbial et iterum (meaning “and again,” “and afresh,” “another time,” “once more,” “for the second time”) and, in the French version of Descartes’s Meditations, with et derechef (that is to say, “and likewise” or “a second time”) —in the literary and archaic use in French, often used somewhat in jest, for “once again,” “once more,” “anew,” in a more current rendering: une seconde fois, de nouveau—is a later addition made by Descartes “who thus returned to his original title, repeating and changing it in this way, augmenting and completing it with a supplementary iterum.”12

Derrida also reminds us that this seemingly minute and almost trivial addition inspired a “classical” debate as to “why Descartes deemed it necessary to demonstrate the existence of God for a second time, after the proof had already seemed established according to the order of reasons in the third Meditation.”13 He then raises the question that interests me here: What could that curious fact that inspired a long round of discussion among eminent Descartes scholars such as Martial Guéroult, Henri Gouhier, and Léon Brunschvicg, some fifty years ago now, still teach us about the very “structure of iterability” itself or in general?

Furthermore, what would “God,” more precisely, the “Divine name” of God have to do with it? Is the Divine name—and the longer, wider, even deeper tradition for which it stands—an illustration or exemplification, an ultimate and enabling condition, or is it an ultimate and merely secondary—however, “special”—effect? If so, it would be an effect without necessary, sufficient, or, in any case, determining—that is, efficient—cause, as an earlier text in Margins of Philosophy, namely “Differences,” had also suggested, in a context that likewise invoked the tradition of Divine names and, more specifically, of negative theology.

Derrida muses about the interest of an investigation for which, he says, the argument of Limited Inc leaves no room, but which, in retrospect, may well have found its place in earlier and later writings, whether they deal with “religion” directly, indirectly, obliquely, or not at all. It is the “endeavor to shift the question out of the necessary and rigorous debate” held among the generation of his teachers as to the correct interpretation of Descartes’s text and to “draw it towards regions” in which Derrida claimed he had been “navigating,” discussing the relationship between “signature,” “event,” and “context” and the element and effacement of an in principle infinite repetition and change of and between them.

Now, could one say that such iterability begins with nothing less than—the name and concept, perhaps, revelation and veneration of—God Himself and, hence, with no One less than God, with nothing more than the “One”? Does—for Descartes, for Derrida—everything begin with God, with His being One, the first and the last and everything in-between? In sum, does this—paradoxical, aporetic, in any case, repeated, reiterated—reference to God (and everything—and it is everything—this reference, stands for) find no end anywhere, at any time, in nothing and no one?

Why, as seems the case here, prove things again, or at least twice (afresh, anew, once more), especially if the thing in question is the ultimate Thing, that is, neither the thinking or extended thing, soul or body, but the supreme substance, the un- or self-caused Cause (causa sui), which is the metaphysical name of God par excellence?

What of use and mention in the case (unique or not?) of the Divine name? What, in such a case, of reference and of citation? What shall we think of the possibility or even of the necessity of repeating the same demonstration several times, or rather of multiplying the demonstrations in view of the same conclusion, concerning the same
object? And this precisely where the object concerned (God) is held to be beyond all doubt and the ultimate guarantee (being unique, irreplaceable, beyond all substitution, both absolutely repeatable and unrepeatable) of all certitude, all proof, all truth.16

"Unique or not?" But also: exemplary or not? These are the questions that are raised here, where the Divine name is mentioned or used in this most unlikely of contexts. Repeatable, although unrepeatable, and both of these "absolutely." I will return to both motifs in a moment, not least since they mark a decisive feature of sovereignty—often in its most outspoken theologico-political formations—namely to conceive of itself in terms of oneness and indivisibility as well as exemplariness, whereas Derrida thinks of iterability, precisely, in terms of a repetition plus change, in view of the "1 + at least one more," the "n + 1."

Put differently, while the reference, if not invocation, of God and His Divine Name may well be unavoidable in matters metaphysical and political—and this on conceptual no less than historical or, as we might say, deeply pragmatic grounds—God, His name and concept, definitely cannot claim to be or speak the last word. As a matter of fact and of principle, "God"—like all "religion"—need neither be first nor last to play a historical and phenomenal role and, hence, remains an eminently quotable quotation at best.

But then, that this is so cannot, must not, ought not be ignored, let alone dismissed or disparaged. In this sense, Derrida's writing, almost throughout, insists on the more than merely traditional, let alone documentary, deep significance of "the theological" archive and a fortiori of the "Divine Name." Indeed, one is tempted to place this archive in somewhere the vicinity of the "authentic mode of ideality"—that is to say, "what may be indefinitely repeated in the identity of its presence, because of the very fact that it does not exist, is not real or is irreal—not in the sense of being a fiction, but in another sense which may have several names . . ."—with which Derrida, in Speech and Phenomena, characterizes the "non-worldliness" that Husserl seeks to ascertain in the first of his Logical Investigations.17 This "nonworldliness" of the logical space of reasons, as we would now say, is neither "another worldliness" nor "an existent that has fallen from the sky," but an "ideality" whose sole "origin" lies in the always possible "repetition of a productive act."18 For this possibility to be radically "open, ideally to infinity," requires the assumption of an "ideal form" that assures the "unity of the indefinite and ideal" and it is this form and unity that Husserl, Derrida claims, implies in the concept of the "living present," of "transcendental life."19 Derrida, however, probes further,

even deeper, if one can say so, insisting that this ideality—and, hence, phenomenology's very method and project—remains "tormented, if not contested from within," premised as it must be on a simultaneous and coextensive "nonpresence" and "nonlife," an "inerradicable nonprimordiality" as well.20 And yet, this observation does little to diminish the first and primary aspiration of so-called first philosophy, of metaphysics, just as, we might add, it does little to demean its onto-theological corollaries, including the anti-philosophical positions that oppose religion and reason, faith and knowledge, pure and simple, as Derrida writes with respect to Husserl:

This does not impugn the apodicticity of the phenomenological-transcendental description, nor does it diminish the founding value of presence . . . It is only a question of bringing out that the lack of foundation is basic and nonempirical and that the security of presence in the metaphorical form of ideality arises and is set forth again upon this irreducible void.21

Only this perspective, Derrida goes on to claim, would invite an investigation of "language in general," of the "transcendental logos," that is to say, of the "inherited" and the "ordinary" language—that is, the language of "traditional metaphysics"—within whose horizon phenomenology operates its reductions and whose determining force is never quite "bracketed."22 Indeed, Derrida concludes: "Transforming a traditional concept into an indicative or metaphorical concept does not eliminate its heritage."23 There is, as it were, a larger, wider, and deeper, historical and more than simply historical "a priori" that an analysis that reduces logos to logic and reason to epistemology does not "cover" or "exhaust."24

Mutatis mutandis, the same would seem to hold true of everything Derrida's own more consequent meditation upon the premises and reaches of phenomenology (or any other philosophical ambition) brings to bear upon the theological tropes and tropoi it traverses and, of necessity, only barely transcends. We could extend, therefore, what Derrida concludes into Husserl's own thought and method:

There is, then, probably no choice to be made between two lines of thought; our task is rather to reflect on the circularity which makes the one pass into the other indefinitely. And, by strictly repeating this circle in its own historical possibility, we allow the production of some elliptical change of site, within the difference involved in repetition; this displacement is no doubt deficient, but with a deficiency that is not yet, or is already no longer, absence, negativity, nonbeing, lack, silence. Neither matter nor form, it is nothing that
any philosophy, that is, any dialectic, however determinate, can capture. It is an ellipsis of both meaning and form . . . . More or less, neither more nor less—it is perhaps an entirely different question.25

A host of descriptions would seem equally valid here: Derrida speaks of "parallelism," echoing Husserl's "duplication [Verdoppelung]," that is, the opening up of a realm of "sense" that is situated somehow alongside, right next to the data that naturalisms of all stripes mistake for our world, forgetting that the transcendental ego—as opposed to the worldly soul—"incorporates" the latter and vice versa, the one "inhabiting" the other.26 And yet, the two are irreducible, if supplementary, to each other.

The "Total Movement of the Trace"

But what does Derrida mean by the two references that interest us here ("the theological" and the "Divine Name"), both of which are mentioned and used almost interchangeably?

If "the theological"—the Divine name, God—is a "determined moment" of the "total" movement of the "trace," as Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, then it is clear that it neither is nor determines this "movement" as such, that is to say, from the start, midway, at the end, or in toto. But does this reduce the "moment"—and, we are nowadays tempted to say, momentum—of "the theological" in this "total movement" to something merely partial and derivative, inessential and arbitrary, temporary and doomed to render itself obsolete? Could we even have thought and spoken of the "trace," without ever referring to it?

Here we encounter the problematic, once again, of what *Of Grammatology* calls "palaeonymics" and what "Faith and Knowledge" sees as "the grave question of the name." It is a problematic that allows one to see the whole of tradition—including and especially the tradition of Divine names—as a gigantic non-formal taxiology in which one non-synonymous substitution follows, echoes, haunts, and prophecies another, none of them either first or last.

Further: even or especially if the theological regiment of Divine Names, on the one hand, and the total movement of the trace, on the other, are parallel, yet coextensive, universes—one unimaginable, indeed, impossible without the other, indeed, the one accompanying and somehow "conditioning" the other, each step along the way—each one of them is irreducible to the other.

This much is clear; then, if an existing being—any "entity" and, hence, likewise the highest or super-essential being called "God" or "the other"—comes into presence or represents absolute presence, then the latter is a priori "determined," that is to say, predetermined or structured (we could even say, fated or predestined) by differences and differentiations, temporalizations and spatializations, that are not quite it (or even quite up to it), that potentially betray and pervert it, and that will, of necessity, never allow it to come fully into its own (let alone be "intact, safe and sound," as "Faith and Knowledge" stipulates a certain definition or "source" of "religion" would seem to require).

Let me recall the full passage from *Of Grammatology* that frames our original citation:

The "theological" is a determined moment in the total movement of the trace. The field of the entity, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities—genesis and structure—of the trace. The presentation of the other as such, that is to say, the dissimulation of its "as such," has always already begun, and no structure of the entity escapes it.27

But then, we might add—and Derrida does so elsewhere with so many words—that the reverse holds true as well. With *Saussure's langue*, the system of language, and *parole*, the unique-singular utterance ("passionate" or not), the conditioning or determining, if we maintain this vocabulary, works both ways, is reciprocal, even if not symmetrical. In fact and "historically speaking," then, "the theological," like Saussure's *parole*, comes "first."28

True enough, Derrida never equates the determining "movement"—what *Limited Inc* calls the "graphematic drift"—the supplementary substitution in which the "determined moment" of the theological is both produced and effaced, with its supposed "effect," which would be, say, the pronunciation of the Divine name and its subsequent negative determination or unsaying.

But, in the logic of *differance*, the effect has no determining or effective cause, *stricto sensu*, and is, therefore, no mere effect or effected instance or instant either. That is to say, it is precisely not a "moment" (dialectical or other), just as it is hard to imagine what it would mean to say of the "movement of the trace" in whose "drift" the theological is supposedly caught, and whose "graphematic" tracing produces or "determines" the Divine Name's proliferation or dissemination, that it could be somehow and eventually "total" (whether in dialectical terms or not).

In fact, if we keep this terminology, it is only the effected instance that manifests—one might be tempted to say, reveals, in any case, *phenomenalities, historicizes, theologizes, and politicizes*—the supposed "drift" in the first place. Like Saussure's "system of language," the graphematic drift of the
trace and its determining movement (whether "total" or not) has no existence or meaning in and of itself, outside this repetition or, more precisely, repetition of instances and instances of ("paroles," as it were), that is, it has no actual life outside of the subsequent and "heteronymous" substitutions it "traces" and that, in a sense, follow in its "wake." By the same token, the trace erases not just presence and self-preservation but, necessarily, also itself and, hence, paradoxically, yields a certain phenomenality that is no longer seen as present or present to itself—and, perhaps, never was. As a consequence, the theological, likewise, has no existence, no life, independent of the ("total") movement of the trace, taken now as a radically finitizing drift that is, ultimately, infinite, nothing less.

To use a quasi-Spinozistic vocabulary and general thought: its "substance" is (or is "in") its very "expression" and can claim no conditioning or determining role beyond (i.e., before or without) it.

As Emmanuel Levinas put it aptly in the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity*: "The Infinite does not exist first so as to reveal itself in a second moment." The same, *mutatis mutandis*, holds true for the Infinite Name that draws this philosopheme (the "Infinite" or, as Levinas would come to say, "In-finite") into the singular naming that—apophatically—never has the final word.

### What's in a Name?

But what names called "Divine" are there? And how many does Derrida use or mention or both? Tradition has it that there are infinitely many, all of them equally expressive or indicative of the existence and essence—and, at times, in-existence and hyper-essentially—for which "God" (deus) remains the proper name, indeed, the most proper name (even if this name is inviting and welcoming of innumerable others, metaphysical and properly divine, that is to say, theological or, rather, mystical ones).

Derrida references a number of Divine Names, notably in his reference to Kabbalah and to Meister Eckhart in *Writing and Difference*; in his reading of Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Mythical Theology* and *Celestial Hierarchy*, with yet another reference to Eckhart, in "Denials: How To Avoid Speaking"; in his poetic musings in between the lines of Angelus Silesius’s *The Cherubinic Wanderer*; and the list is far from complete. What these names have in common is a certain mystical quality or postulation whose peculiar phrasing and modality is that of an absolute performative, of sorts.29

It is this motif and motivation—a "passionate utterance" (Stanley Cavell), if ever there was one—that has great relevance for us today and this well beyond the reception of (and tribute to) Derrida’s oeuvre.30

Whatever one could say further about the phenomenological conception of the "trace" and the deconstructive formalization and radicalization it invites and receives from Derrida’s earliest writings on Husserl onward, there is absolutely nothing in these analyses that contradicts the Levinasian schema of the criteriological indiscernibility that the "trace of the other" (as *Autre and Autrui*, as metaphysical alterity, human face and divine name, whether the Infinite, Illeity, or God) presents beyond representation. Derrida adopts this reference in "Violence and Metaphysics," his first major essay on Levinas, in *Writing and Difference*, and elsewhere, and nowhere, to my knowledge, does he stress the variation or, rather, alteration this Levinasian conception of the trace—of the ethico-religious Other—might bring to his own earlier elaboration of this (at least nominally identical) theme he shares with this author.

By the same token, Derrida further nowhere denies the consequence that Maurice Blanchot, in *The Infinite Conversation*, draws from Levinas’s version of this idea: the fact, namely, that the "trace of the trace" yields not so much a further absence but rather a "presence" of sorts. It is precisely this paradoxical reversal or inversion of the very concept of the trace—in both its Levinasian and Derridian rendering—that makes the link between the negative and positive or apophatic and the kataphatic moment in all mystical theologies, like the relation without relation between the ethico-religious "Saying" and the ontologico-phenomenological "Said," inevitable and irrevocable. Indeed, it is the very same logic that makes the slippage of deconstruction into the apophatic-kataphatic discourse of Divine names not so much necessary, but unavoidable, making all its initial "denials"—including those explicitly formulated in the early programmatic essay on "Difference," as "How to Avoid Speaking" explains in abundantly clear terms— vain and vulnerable.

### "Deus"

In the limited context of *Limited Inc* on which I am focusing here, all this is abundantly clear for several reasons. Let me tease out at least two. Recalling the replacement of the Fifth Meditation’s amended and supplemended title "On the Essence of Material Things: And Likewise of God, That He Exists" by "Signature Event Context’s" own subtitle "Parasites. Iter, of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist," Derrida asks:

What is repetition—or the iteration of the "itern"—in this exemplary case, if this exemplariness is both that of the unique and that of the repeatable? What does its possibility or its necessity imply, in...
particular concerning the event of language and, in the narrow sense or not, that of writing? In substituting "of writing" for "of God," See [i.e., "Signature Event Context"] has not merely replaced one word by another, one meaning or finite being by another which would be its equivalent (or not); See [as it were, almost dryly] names writing in this place where the iterability of the proof [of God's existence] produces writing, drawing the name of God (of the infinite Being) into a graphematic drift (derivation) that excludes (for instance) any decision as to whether God is more than the name of God, whether the "name of God" refers to God or to the name of God, whether it signifies "normally" or "cites," etc., God being here, qua writing, what at the same time renders possible and impossible, probable and improbable oppositions such as that of the "normal" and the citational or the parasitical, the serious and the non-serious, the strict and the non-strict or less strict.31

In other words, from the "exemplary" case that God, the Divine name (more precisely, "the Existence of God Considered a Second Time") presents here, already in the fifth of Descartes's Meditations, but more significantly even in the adoption and ironic repetition and extension of, at least, part of its title, several things can be gleaned.

First, Derrida ties Descartes's and his own repetition or iterum of the supplemental title to a peculiar "event," namely the "event of language" and, more specifically, to "writing" in either the "normal" (i.e., "narrow") or "general" sense of the term. More tellingly, having "writing" or "Writing" (i.e., scripture, with a lower case or capitalized, as in "Holy Scripture"; or "Difference," with a capital "d," that is to say, "difference") take the place of God is not just any "substitution." It is, I quote, "not merely [replacing] one word by another, one meaning or finite being by another which would be its equivalent (or not)."32

But, then, what else or more could it be? What, if anything, outweighs— or deepens, intensifies—the equivocality? And why would God, the Divine name, not to mention the—renewed yet once again failed—proof for His existence (which, moreover, would have been the proof of a being whose existence or meaning could be called "finite"), why would God be the very instance that renders that something else legible, if not visible and tangible, audible and intelligible? What, in other words, is the surplus value of "God," the "Divine name," such that "writing"—of all things—and, ultimately, "God qua writing," should substitute for it, as its "universal equivalent" (cf. Marx) and truth variable (cf. Wittgenstein), indeed, its "n + 1," of sorts?

Second, Derrida rightly observes that Descartes's repetition of the "proof"—just as his own repetition and variation of Descartes's "et iterum de Deo quod existat"—introduces and requires "writing," in both the quotidian or conditioned (or lower case) and the emphatic or conditioning (or capitalized) meaning and use of this term. To prove God's existence demands writing and it is this process or, rather, this "production" that draws "God." His Divine Name and concept and/or Referent, into a slip-page or, as Derrida writes, "graphematic drift" that no theology—and notably no ono-theology—could wish for without contradicting its very premise (which is the uniqueness and unity, self-causation and freedom of its One subject, namely God, the "infinite Being").

God knows what will come to be said and predicated and preached of "God"—and "in the name" of religion—where the "event of language" takes place and nothing protects the Divine name from being misspoken, idly used, producing a host of idolatries and blasphemies, parodies and ironies that make up the very history of religion in toto. Not even God's own word, speech, or name could stop these derivative mentions, uses, and abuses.

Indeed, "Dieu déjà ou contesté," "God contradicts Himself already" (as the essay on Edmond Jabès, in Writing and Difference, has it). Where God says "I," he is already an "other" (to perversely parody Rimbaud's famous phrase). And we are thus hard-pressed to tell the one (even the "One") from the other (whether a lower case "other" or capitalized "Other" or something, someone, different still).

Again, in Derrida's words, which I quoted earlier (but they merit repeating): the so-called graphematic drift of writing, besides many other things, excludes... any decision as to whether God is more than the name of God, whether the "name of God" refers to God or to the name of God, whether it signifies "normally" or "cites," etc., God being here, qua writing, what at the same time renders possible and impossible, probable and improbable oppositions such as that of the "normal" and the citational or the parasitical, the serious and the non-serious, the strict and the non-strict or less strict... 33

One can easily suspect why I insist on this point. For, if it has any pertinence—and I firmly believe it does, just as I am convinced that it is maintained and explained, indeed, reiterated throughout virtually all of Derrida's writings—then the whole question concerning his supposed thesis (whether Judeo-Christian or not), atheism (whether "radical" or not) or even a-theism (whether ad majorem Dei gloriam or not), and anathema

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whether it espouses "not knowing" and the provisos of "maybe" or not) becomes moot.

This question is not what interests Derrida in the proper name or noun "God" and even less in the language—the *encomium*, praise, and prayer, in short: the "passionate utterance"—that the "Divine name" inspires and calls for. The religious and theological archive—epitomized by the Divine name—has a different, more deeply pragmatic, relevance that all attempts to co-opt Derrida's writing and legacy in either confessional God-talk or some quasi-secular-materialist thinking of "life" and "hitude" tend to ignore and leave unexploited.

We have no way of answering—indeed, we just and justly find no interest and desire in answering—the question concerning the existence or non-existence of "God" and the very posing of (and posturing around) this question blocks our view of the more challenging engagement with "religion" that is proposed in Derrida's writings. Call this approach "post-theist" and "post-secular," if you like. But, of course, these terms have their respective difficulties as well, and I will not be so foolish to insist all too much on them here.

The matter is not one of skepticism either. After all, the point being made is not so much that just or especially God's existence or inexistence is "undecidable," for so is the existence or inexistence of "writing." And neither one of these indecisions, on Derrida's view, ever yields the "indifference" (moral as other) that characterizes the modern *homo* sum since Pascal and well beyond.

The "perhaps" of the "that it perhaps does not exist" [the "Of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist," again, substituting and, perhaps, parodying the far from original but already supplemented Cartesian "Of God, That He Exists"] does not oppose the status of writing to that of God, who, Himself, should certainly exist. It draws the consequences from what has just been said about God himself and about existence in general, in its relation to the name and to the reference. In leaving the existence of writing undecided, the "perhaps" marks the fact that the "possibility" of graphematics places writing (and the rest) outside the authority of ontological discourse, outside the alternative of existence and non-existence, which in turn always supposes a simple discourse capable of deciding between presence and/ or absence. The rest of the trace, its remains *renunciation* are neither present nor absent. They escape the jurisdiction of all ontological discourse even if they render the latter at times possible.14

In sum, "writing," taken here in its generalized sense, does not assume a "status" that would "oppose" the one ascribed here to the Divine name, since, as the supplemental proof of Descartes's Fifth Meditation demonstrates indirectly, God's existence and being are nothing outside—or before and beyond—their in-principle infinite repetition, which inscribes alteration in their meaning no less than their use. And of this "drift"—which one could call "graphematic" or also "machinal"—the Divine name is historically and systematically the most "exemplary" example (and will probably remain so for, at least, some time still to come).

Why is this so? The answer, I think, is that this name, like the category of religion, and everything it stands for—that is, presupposes and, indeed, names, even as it suggests the insufficiency of all names and every concept, including these ones ("Divine," "name," their conjunction, indeed, "religion")—epitomizes, condenses, and conjures the vastest and deepest archives, whose virtual existence precedes and pervades, exceeds and inspires, unsettles but also temporarily (locally) stabilizes our thoughts and endeavors, and does exemplarily. There is no denying that there are many archives that have taken over that function in more limited regions and with partial success. What makes the religious archive—hence, the tradition of Divine names—stand out is its greater depth and global reach, the simple and indisputable fact that, historically and intellectually as well as institutionally and economically speaking, there is no space of reasons and affects that has more power, indeed, power of thinking and imagination, invested in it.

This said, a more interesting question—not least in terms of Derrida's overall philosophical argument, here and elsewhere—remains: Does "writing," in its turn, call for "God," for His "existence" or "inexistence," for both, for the undecidability between this affirmation and negation or for yet another mode of His "remaining" or "haunting" that coincides with neither one of these traditional or modern predicates or attributions that are, admirably, deeply steeped in ontology, onto-theology, and the conceptions of sovereignty they imply and, inevitably, generate?

Again, the answer is not so much unclear as it is—wisely—left in abeyance, that is to say, neither affirmed nor denied. But that, I think, is a remarkable answer in its own right. It is echoed in Derrida's suggestion, in "Faith and Knowledge," that, *like writing,* "the machinal," the technologies of media (both old and, especially, new) that are its most visible expression in our "universe" may very well "produce" what we could only call "religion" or "gods." Bergson, whom Derrida cites approvingly, had suggested as much in the final words of his 1932 book (which would be his last) *The Two Sources of Religion and Morality.*
"Unique or not," the Divine name allows, invites, and requires both Descartes and Derrida to go back on what has been proven or said already, in both cases with all the necessary detail and rigor. Yet, as the "example" makes abundantly clear—the example that, as Derrida writes, is "an event of parasitism, that of one title by another (which hence is no longer quite a title), the parasitism of the famous title borrowed from Rent Descartes, a title that had already parasitized itself"—there is no beginning or end to grafting one thing on another, or further adding one thing (one word, one name) to the next. This will always already have taken place.

Yet there is also a sense in which substituting "writing" for "God," or ontological and theological "non-existence" for existence, even existence *par excellence,* adds *almost or virtually nothing* to the equation as such, that is to say, alters nothing in the infinite series—or, as Derrida says, "seriature"—of "non-synonymous" substitutes that make up the history of theological, no less than philosophical, thought.

For the reverse substitution—that is to say, of "God" for "writing," speaking not only of "God *qua* writing," as Derrida does, but of "writing *qua* God"—is, of necessity, possible and, perhaps, unavoidable as well. (Does this make Derrida not so much a traditional or modern theist, but what could only be called a "radical theist"? Nothing could be further from the truth. That there can be nothing "radical"—not even God, even less so his opposites—is precisely the point.)

Further, was it necessary to ascribe to "writing" a theological moment, motif, let alone motivation? It needs no discussion that the answer is no. Was it avoidable that this association—often to the point of identification or confusion—took place? The answer is, again, probably not.

Indeed, it is this substitution that Derrida—in this particular context, citing and, as he says, parasitizing Descartes, but also in so many others where very different texts and contexts, occasions and concerns, form his point of departure—invites us to meditate on, traversing and transcending a traditional as well as modern concern for which, again, "God" is the oldest and most proper (as we said, exemplary) of names. It is, in one word, the one—the "One"—that gives and demands us most to think and do. Its exemplarity is that it has extensively and intensively most to offer (philosophically and theologically, semantically and semiotically, pragmatically and, indeed, politically speaking).

One could, of course, object that, in *Limited Inc* and elsewhere, this reverse implication of one thing—name or referent—in another is a fleeting and, hence, non-necessary one; further, one might add that other things—figures or concepts—might have been cited and parasitised instead and with equal or, who knows, greater right and effect. But this incontestable fact does not so much undermine as it only reiterates—and, indeed, *once more* (*iterum* proves)—my point, namely that the theological instance (here: the Divine name, but also the supposed "entity" for which it stands) is, for Derrida, not only a "determined moment" in what Of Grammatology calls "the total movement of the trace.

Conversely, it is a determining moment as well and this, if we can say, so where several infinities (of the Divine and its infinite names, of difference) are at issue, in equal measure. In other words, the determining "movement" and the determined "moment" are mutually constitutive and, in Heidegger's idiom, equi-primal. How could they be? But also, how could they not be?

Needless to say, to answer these questions we would need to spell out what we mean by "determining" as opposed to "determined" and also what Derrida might have meant by deploying an overly dialectical term such as "moment" to elucidate the "movement," even "total movement," of the "trace."

Further, why invoke the Divine name if what one has demonstrated or proved—the logic of iterability, of the trace, the supplement, of citations and parasites, and the like—would seem to exclude any reliance on transcendental signifiers, and first of all the one—the "Big One"—named "God"?

But also this: Why is it God or the Divine name—indeed, the whole negative-theological or mystical problematic of Divine Names—that is best positioned to make iterability and the like, if not fully intelligible, then at least intuitable as necessary, unavoidable, a genuine chance as well as a fatality (or *Ananke,* as Derrida says)? The answer would have to be that God and, hence, the Divine Names form the alpha and omega of our philosophical and theological discourses, including all the theoretical propositions and practical norms that rely upon them, and do so historically and conceptually—indeed, more than that—steeped as these notions are in a virtual archive (a pure and not always actual, immemorial past) that has no parallel as to its sheer breadth and depth. No concept or name exemplifies this archive more than God or whatever Divine Name substitutes for it.

The common ground of the non-longer and not-yet quite there or here of the presence (i.e., the reality or actuality) for which the Divine name still stands is that they are both immemorial—that is to say, an-archival and virtual—and also that their more than simply historical or future weight weighs upon us in ways we have hardly begun to fathom. In the age of
global, ever-expanding markets and media, our social space is *curved* by these idealities—that is to say, irrealties and inactualities—whose phenomenal effects (indeed, effects without causes and, hence, special in more than one respect) are increasingly difficult to ignore.

**A Preliminary Ending**

We can all quickly agree: no one should attempt to "accommodate Derrida's thinking to religion." To my knowledge, no serious reader of his work—whether early, middle, or late, dealing directly or obliquely with religious themes and theologoumena in its pages—ever did. Nor should anyone claim that Derrida critiques religion, if critique means engaging in a negative operation or even—in a more Kantian vein—delineating the conditions of its possibility (and, presumably in Derrida's case, impossibility) alone. The reason for this dual rebuff of two temptations is simple. For both these operations presuppose or require that one keep at a distance a legacy—in Derrida's idiom: an archive—whose limitation one is supposedly able to measure with criteriological, that is to say, linguistic and epistemological, normative and conventional means (or that, at the very least, one can fathom with the intuitive reach of imagination). All this, we now realize, not least thanks to Derrida's decisive insights, is only pretended in vain. Our criteria are too fallible, too "disappointing," Stanley Cavell would say, to warrant any assurance as to their adequacy or aims. They decide nothing, nor can we as long as we follow their lead. Indeed, their decision, like any other, as Kierkegaard knew, is in its very "instant" nothing less, nothing more, than "madness."*

In fact, Derrida's engagement with "religion"—with some of its isolated themes as well as with the immensity of its immemorial archive, indeed, with the sum total of its social fact—is far more laborious, at times, tedious, in any case, indecisive, than any sweeping account of its supposed implicit religiosity or its apparent, indeed, "radical atheism," seems to suggest.

For reasons of space, I will end on a different note, in a different tone, taking leave from the letter, if, perhaps, not the spirit, of Derrida's text. Let me offer a preliminary and tentative conclusion that sums up my argument.

What I am suggesting here simply reiterated what one of Derrida's much later writings, *Voyage (Rogues)*, states very clearly, namely that "secularization is always ambiguous in that it frees itself from the religious, all the while remaining marked in its very concept by it, by the theological, indeed, the ontotechnological."*

One might, of course, counter that the concept and practice of deconstruction—or grammatology, even pragrammatology—should not be confused with that of secularization (indeed, that the former is as much at odds with the latter as it is with, say, secularization's supposed opposites, namely "religion," the political theologies and ideas of sovereignty of all ages).

But to do so would be to miss the point, which is that, for Derrida, the conditioned (here: "the theological"), however paradoxical this may sound, is conditioning what conditions it, determining what determines it (namely: "the total movement of the trace"), in turn, as well. The two directions, each of which finds ample evidence and staunch defenders throughout the history of Western religion and philosophy, faith and knowledge, cannot be separated metaphysically or ontologically (to say nothing here of the empirical and psychic life of individuals and societies where they are irrevocably bound up with each other), even though they remain analytically or conceptually distinct and gesture, albeit often in a less than rigorous or strict fashion, to "two sources," each of them integral moments of the religious archive and its cultural, political expressions as a whole.

To be sure, the conditioning in question is anything but empirical, say, causal or even transcendental. And, in earnest, to qualify the latter determination by invoking some "archi-" ("quasi-", "ultra-", or "similitranscendental") function does not do much to clarify things further. Which is another way of saying that there can be no "determination" in any understandable sense of the term, other than the mutual and reciprocal—if not necessarily symmetrical—"impression" of one aspect or element of this relation between "the theological" (the "Divine name") and the "trace." And even "impression," "contamination," "spectralization," and "haunting" are inadequate concepts to express this relation. "God, What More Do I Have to Say? In What Language Does One Say it?" Derrida quips in one of the subtitles of *Rogues*.

Indeed, when we realize, once more, that the relation between the Divine name and the "unnamable possibility of the Divine name" remains "without relation" and, hence, has no actuality and presence in itself or for us, other than the one we are able and willing to attribute or, rather, ascribe to it—*calling it names*, as it were, becoming idolators and blasphemers as we speak—then we must also know that these aspects, elements, or (quite literally) "elliptical" poles of our general experience change places, revert into each other, in ways that elude all criteria and that are, therefore, *indiscernible*. It is no accident that *Of Grammatology* associates "the possibility of the Divine name" not just with Heidegger's later thought of Being, not only with grammatology's "theoretical matrix" of "graphematic
drift," but also—and, in this strategic context, perhaps, first of all—with "Kabbalah." But the series or "seriatum (seriatum)" doesn't stop here.

For example, of the two lectures that make up the body of Roger Derrida says that they are based upon a "common affirmation" that "resembles," as he puts it, "an act of messianic faith—irreligious and without messianism."41 Not so much a "religion within the limits of reason alone," which would be "still so Christian in its ultimate Kantian foundation," this affirmation, he goes on to say, would "resound through another naming,"42 namely that of the khora. The motif, freely adopted from Plato’s Timaeus—and arguably the greatest challenge for any interpretation of Derrida’s work that would wish to situate him in an unbroken lineage of apophasic discourse, whether of negative theology, mysticism, or both—stands here for what Derrida calls "another place without age, another ‘taking place’... a spacing from ‘before’ the world, the cosmos, the globe, from ‘before’ any chronophenomenology, any revelation..."43

Thinking "the theological" and, say, the political—hence, engaging oneself morally and pragmatically—thus entails the simultaneous invocation of two heterogeneous, irreducible, yet indissociable aspects and virtualities, whose relationship, Derrida insists, remains non-conclusive—paradoxical, indeed, aporetic—to be decided in an infinite series of singular instances, that is to say, case by case, time and again.

No other tradition, no better figure, so far, than that of the saying and unsaying of the Divine name, of the different ways of naming (proving) God—etierum de Deo—can capture this most ordinary, if at times tragic, of circumstances, practices, and responses to the "undecidables" that make up our lives. Indeed, there is nothing more—nothing less—to "the theological" as it reveals itself as a "determined moment in the total movement of the trace" and becomes a "determining" moment of it, in turn.

For this remarkable relation to be thought through—but also experienced and experimented with—in all its philosophical and spiritual, practical and aesthetic repercussions, no historical (and, in fact, more than simply historical) archive offers more conceptual and argumentative (but also: rhetorical and imaginative, motivational and affective) resources than that of religion and theology, apophaticism and mysticism, whose shared legacy constitutes a virtual repository for the expression and articulation of the greatest possible variety of questions and problems, acts and affects that are still ours (or that may well become ours, yet again).

Needless to say, the religious archive also contains the greatest reservoir of—quite literally—dogmatic representations and figurations of what it is that blocks our access to these greater depths and wider dimensions for which the Divine name, in both its backward and forward and sideways oriented perspectives, stands as well. Which is, precisely, why it cannot but keep naming God, the Divine.

To counter that "the infinite difference is finite" won’t help, because this sentence merely reminds us that the infinitizing operation that this technical term captures has to traverse and transcend the finite differences that are mistaken and dogmatically fixed as limited signposts of the infinite plurality of infinitely differentiated "worlds" that there are.

This, nothing else—and regardless of whatever it is one has (always) already affirmed—dictates whatever there is or still may be that is (a future or forever) "to come." Hence, an important "axiom" that Derrida, in "Faith and Knowledge," formulates as follows, drawing once more on a theological idiom (here: that of the Biblical covenant and of the ecclesial sacrament of confirmation):

no to-come without heritage and the possibility of repeating. No to-come without some sort of irrevocability, at least in the form of a covenant with oneself and confirmation of the originary yes. No to-come without some sort of messianic memory and promise, of a messianicity older than religion, more originary than all messianism.43

But, again, messianicity—"older" and "more originary" in a way that contraderves all chronology in terms of the before and the after and every logic of founding and the founded—is contaminated or haunted by the very historical messianism that it makes possible and that it must traverse and transcend to speak its unspeakable name. What makes religion possible is made possible by it; what makes religion impossible (to come first, coming into its own, having the final say) is what is, in turn, made impossible—and, as Derrida says, "occulted"—by it.

More than anyone else of his generation, Derrida has taught us that the distinction and often opposition between tradition and modernity, between the thinking of infinity and of finitude, theism and atheism, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, theology and idolatry, prayer and blasphemy—in short, between our being either on the "inside" or the "outside" of our historical legacy, including its contemporary contestations—is, on closer scrutiny, no longer pertinent. And, perhaps, never was.

There is a remarkable consequence to this observation that we have only begun to slowly realize—namely, that certain habitual patterns of assuming and experiencing temporal and spatial separation, of the now and here, perhaps, even of cause and effect, of the first and after, simply no longer obtain in full rigor, if ever they did. As a consequence, Derrida writes in Learning to Live Finally: "One can be the ‘anachronistic’ contemporary of a past or future generation."44
The Divine name ("God," the à Dieu—or, again, the iterum: adieul a-dieu—the "toward-and-away-from-God-including-His-nether-side," or everything and every "One" that has come or may still come to take His or its place) draws and pulls our concepts and discourses, acts and affects, both backward and forward, into an immemorial past and an unidentifiable, as of yet unrecognizable, future-for-ever-to-come. The Divine name is both archival in all the archeological, genealogical, genetic, documentary, dated, and outdated senses of the term and still further projected, infinitely iterable, yet again to be proved and quoted. *Et iterum de Deo* . . .

QED.