Editorial Foreword:

The (Limit) Experience of the Impossible: On the Religious Dimension of Deconstruction*

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> "The experience of faith is something that exceeds language in a certain way, it exceeds ethics, politics and society. In relation to this experience of faith, deconstruction is totally useless and disarmed. And perhaps it is not simply a weakness of deconstruction. Perhaps it is because deconstruction starts from the possibility of, if not grace, then certainly a secret, an absolutely secret experience, which I would compare with what you call grace. That's perhaps the starting point of any deconstruction. That is why deconstruction is totally disarmed, totally useless when it reaches this point."
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> — Jacques Derrida[①]

In late November 2002, less than two years before Derrida (1930-2004) finally embraced the "gift of death." He spoke for the first time, at an

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① J. D. Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood, "Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, eds. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (Routledge: New York, 2005), 39.

academic conference entitled "Derrida and Religion," about the "beginning" of Deconstruction. Derrida said that all Deconstruction may begin with grace, and if not grace, then certainly a secret, an esoteric experience comparable to grace. This is a very important, but also questionable, "confession." Why is grace, a religious experience, or at least a secret experience, the possible starting point of all Deconstruction? Why does Derrida emphasize "possible"? Derrida once said that he "can rightly pass for (je pass à juste titre) an atheist." Then, does grace still mean something for an atheist?① If so, what does it refer to? Can deconstructive thought, as a philosophy, "forcefully recruit" religious terms to describe itself? Does it lose its philosophical persuasiveness as a result? Why does Deconstruction become powerless and useless in the face of the experience of faith? What is the connection between Deconstruction and religion?

Since the 1980s, Derrida has frequently discussed religious topics:② for example, *D'un ton apocalyptique adopte naguere en philosophie* (1980) dealing with the book of Revelation; *Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations* (1986) and *Sauf le nom*, (1992) on the relationship between Deconstruction and negative theology; *Des tours de Babel* (1985) on the name of God, *Force de loi: Le 'Fondement mystique de l'autorité'* (1989-1990), on the relationship between law, justice, and faith; *Circonfession* (1991) describing a personal "religious" experience; *Donner la mort* (1992) dealing with the relationship between responsibility, gift-giving and faith, as well as *Spectres de Marx* (1993) on the "messianicity of non-messianism"; and *Foi et Savoir: Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limits de la simple raison*,(1996) in homage to Kant's and Hegel's treatises on religion, to name but a few.③ He has also actively participated in a series of conferences organized by the religious studies community in his honor, ranging from "Derrida and Negative Theology," "Religion and Postmodernism" to "Derrida and Religion."④

① Jacques Derrida, "Circonfession", in Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 146; "Circumfession," in Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida, Jacques Derrida, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 155.

② Jason Powell, *Jacques Derrida: A Biography* (London: Continuum, 2006), 148-149.

③ The year in which the work was originally published is indicated in parentheses. Many of these were presented as conference papers before official publication. See Jason Powell, *Jacques Derrida: A Biograph;* John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997)

④ Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 43; Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009),4.

Derrida's sudden and intense interest in religion is surprising. First of all, Derrida clearly stated that he could rightly pass for an atheist. Despite coming from a Jewish family, being circumcised, and being deeply exposed to Christianity while studying in Paris, he was never committed to a religion. Second, Deconstruction seems hostile to any religious establishment. There have even been some who have criticized Deconstruction as nihilism. After all, Deconstruction has always been known for busting metaphysical myths such as center, origin, and presence. Although Derrida repeatedly emphasizes that Deconstruction is not denial or destruction, Deconstruction is indeed "destructive," and it has greatly undermined the "natural" legitimacy that metaphysics and ontotheology previously enjoyed. This, in the view of many, has seriously shaken the foundations of religious faith. Again, while religion seeks certainty and assurance, Deconstruction constantly emphasizes the undecidability of decision. Therefore, the two seem to be in complete opposition to each other.

How do we understand the "religious turn" of Deconstruction? One simple explanation is that Deconstruction as a theoretical method has already impacted the humanities, such as inliterature, law, and political science. It is not surprising that Deconstruction is now being applied to religion. However, Derrida clarifies that although Deconstruction has been taken as a method, if we follow the logic of Deconstruction itself, it is neither a method nor an operation, but "an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject."[①] Another interpretation tries to follow the so called Derrida's early thought, that is, before the "religious turn": after Deconstruction has liquidated philosophical arrogance, religion, as an ancient authoritative discourse, an arbitrary claim to truth, naturally becomes its next "ideal" object of scrutiny. There is some truth in this explanation, but it is intriguing to note that Derrida often discusses religion as if he were a religious believer, to the inside rather than the outside of the religious experience, very different from the external perspectives that atheist scholars usually adopt, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, or cultural studies. As the Catholic theologian Kevin Hart puts it, "Deconstruction should not be

[①] Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," trans. David Wood & Andrew Benjamin, in *The Invention of the Other*, eds. Peggy Kamuf & Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 4.

regarded as offering an entirely hostile critique of religion in general."[1] Another common interpretation is that the religious turn of Deconstruction is less of an ethical turn, and that Derrida, having been influenced by Levinas, is merely appropriating religious discourse to explore ethical issues, or ethicalizing religious discourse, i.e., turning religious discourse into a type of ethical discourse following demystification. But in fact, Derrida has clearly stated in "Donner la mort" that "Responsibility and faith go together, however paradoxical that might seem to some,"[2] So, it is impossible to separate ethics from religion.[3] Responsibility and faith should exceed the subject's "mastery and knowledge."[4] That is to say, at the "core" of both lies an unspeakable secret, a "mysterium tremendum" that cannot be completely demystified.[5]

In this regard, the first main point to be made in this paper is that deconstructive thought contains a religious orientation from the very beginning. It can even be said that religious experience and theological discourse are among the prerequisites that make deconstructive thought possible. Therefore, precisely speaking, the so-called "religious turn" of Deconstruction is nothing more than the natural expression of the religious orientation inherent in Deconstruction.

Many scholars have already pointed out that, from the etymology, the term déconstruction contains a Judeo-Christian pre-history. We all know that Derrida's Deconstruction comes from Heidegger's term "destruktion," who was in turn inspired by Martin Luther. Luther used the Latin word "destruuntur" (to undermine, to destroy) to indicate that true theology — which he also called the theology of the cross — should do as the Bible says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."(Isa. 29:14, 1 Cor. 1:19).[6] It has also been shown that Derrida had a keen interest in religious questions from his youth. At the age of 19, he wrote two essays on religion, "Les

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[1] Kevin Hart, "Jacques Derrida", in *Twentieth Century Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Graham Oppy & N. N. Trakakis (London: Routledge, 2014), 262.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 6.

[3] Ibid., 84.

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] Ibid., 6,7,21.

[6] Kevin Hart, "'Absolute Interruption': On Faith," in *Questioning God*, eds. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley & Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 192.

Dieux et Dieu: les Dieux existent-ils?" (The Gods and God: Do Gods Exist? and "L'Athéisme est aristocratique" (Atheism is Aristocratic).[1]

But in this paper I would add that, to understand the religious dimension of deconstructive thought, perhaps attention should be directed not so much at one particular religious scholar, theologian, or theological tradition in the strict sense of the word, but rather a group of French intellectuals known to Derrida who explored the impossible, a group of "non-professional" (not in a pejorative sense) religious thinkers.[2] These included Georges Bataille (1897-1962), Pierre Klossowski (1905-2001), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003), and Simone Weil (1909-1943). They constitute the third important source of deconstructive thought, besides phenomenology and structuralism. They are thinkers who predate Derrida's generation, who dismantled and subverted the Western ontological-theological tendency. Their emphasis on the impossible, their emphasis on experience and reflection, their position of "religion without religion" which deviates from the framework of the godless/godly dichotomy, and their paradoxical way of speaking have so much similarity to Derrida that they can be called the forerunners of Deconstruction.[3]

It was, to borrow Blanchot's words, a unique "community without community," an "unavowable community" (communauté inavouable), or rather an "impossible community."[4] On the one hand, although they shared friendship (they were friends, or friends of friends), and influenced each other's ideas, they never formed a common banner, advocacy, or school of thought during their lifetime, nor did they have a sense of community with each other (inavouable). They did not, strictly speaking, form a community in the usual sense of the word. In other words, this is an impossible community (Communauté impossible). On the other hand, despite their different thoughts and positions, they all coincidentally focus on the "impossible," repeatedly speaking of its

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[1] Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62-63.

[2] See Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[3] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 49.

[4] Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté Inavouable* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), 46.

ineffability, unrecognizability, ungraspability, as well as the "(in) experience" of its transcendental experience. From this point of view, it can be said that they form a community with the impossible, and that they are connected to each other through this common concern (community without community).

This is a community without a leader. Or, in Bataille's words, a "headless" (acéphale) community, with only one invisible point of interweaving that is not the hub of the hubs, namely, Blanchot. He is invisible, because he is not the leader of this "Constellation." We call him the point of interweaving, because he is the largest common denominator of this community. Weil is the only person whom he has never made acquaintance with, while all the others are his friends.[①] Moreover, Blanchot's ideas are highly dialogical. He is the only member of this "community" who is explicitly influenced by the ideas of all the others (plus Derrida). Even more interestingly, it was Blanchot who brought this group of thinkers together, who had never simultaneously met in person, in a fictionalized dialogue in his book, *The Infinite Conversation*.[②]

This was a community inextricably linked to religion. Although they were philosophers, writers, or artists, and by no means religious scholars or theologians in the traditional sense, religious experience and theological discourse were an integral part of their thought. Both Bataille and Klossowski began as Catholics and even aspired to become priests, but eventually the former decidedly embraced atheism, while the latter, while retaining his religious beliefs, developed a non-Christian theological theory that incorporated pagan traditions.[③] Levinas identifies as Jewish, but he has a very personal and unorthodox understanding of the Jewish faith. Blanchot, though born into a Catholic family, grew up to be a humanist atheist. Weil, a Jew, is deeply influenced by Catholicism and claims to have had a mystical experience of Christ, yet comes up with a non-Catholic, anti-Orthodox theology. They have very different takes on faith, but they all believe that even in a modern secular society where "God is dead," religion is still very important. It is an

① Blanchot's friend, Bataille, knew Weil well. Although their personalities and ideological orientations differed greatly, Bataille took Weil as a confidant and spoke highly of her. See Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes t. 11* (Paris. Gallimard, 1988), 537.

② See Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien Infini* (Paris. Gallimard, 1969).

③ Daniel W. Smith, "Introduction. Pierre Klossowski. From Theatrical Theology to Counter Utopia," in Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*, eds. Vernon W. Cisney, Nicolae Morar & Daniel W. Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11.

irreplaceable way of experiencing and responding to "the impossible."[①] As Weil says, "Impossibility is the door to the supernatural,"[②] and Bataille also argues that "to face the impossible ... is to have an experience of the divine."[③]

Derrida is so familiar with the writings of these thinkers that he can be seen as the second, or external, intersection of this "community." The influence of Bataille, Blanchot, and Levinas on Derrida is most obvious. Their names appear frequently in Derrida's writing, beginning with his early work Writing and Difference, and On Grammatology. Klossowski also "appeared" in Derrida's writings a limited number of times. However, his influence is equally far-reaching, and he is instrumental in Derrida's early formulation of the concept of "supplement," analysis of Bataille's economic thought, and later exploration of the ethics of hospitality.[④] Though Weil almost never appeared in Derrida's post-college work, he had in fact read her intensively while studying at the Sorbonne in Paris[⑤] and was attracted to her "atheistic mysticism," the idea that an authentic love of God must be premised on the belief that God does not exist, and that atheism is a purification of faith.[⑥]

Perhaps the most obvious mark left by this community on deconstructive thought is this description of Deconstruction by Derrida, "The interest of deconstruction, its force and its desire - if it has one - is experience of the impossible."[⑦] In 1989, in Force de loi, Derrida re-emphasized, "Deconstruction, as an experience of the impossible, is possible."[⑧] In 1992, in *Sauf le nom*, he

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① See John D. Caputo, "Dreaming the Impossible Dream. Derrida and Levinas on the Impossible," *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 20-25; Simone Weil, "The Impossible," *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford & Mario von Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 94-97; Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien Infini.*

② Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 95.

③ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 33.

④ Pierre Klossowski, "Letter on Walter Benjamin," trans. Christian Hite, *Parrhesia*, No. 19 (2014), 22 n. 11.

⑤ Geoffrey Bennington & Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 328.

⑥ Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 63. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 15, 114.

⑦ Jacques Derrida, "Psyché. Inventions de l'autre", in *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre (Nouvelle Édition)* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), 27.

⑧ Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi: Le 'Fondement mystique de l'autorité'* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 35, 78 n1.

was at pains to confirm yet again, "deconstruction has often been defined as the very experience of the (impossible) possible experience of the impossible, of the most impossible, a condition that deconstruction shares with the gift, the 'yes', the 'come,' decision, testimony, the secret, etc. And perhaps death."[①] Both "the impossible" and "experience" are, in fact, key words repeatedly used by this "community" in its exploration of religion.

Derrida's close friend, the American philosopher and theologian John D.Caputo (1940-), was the first to note the importance of this description by Derrida. Caputo pointed out that this "definition" which is not a definition — "Deconstruction.... is the experience of the impossible" — is key to understanding Deconstruction, and it shows the close connection between Deconstruction and religion. Caputo also restates the description in the context of Derrida's later biographical work "Circonfession," "Deconstruction is a passion and a prayer for the impossible, a defense of the impossible against its critics, a plea for/to the experience of the impossible."[②] In this reconstructed "definition" of Deconstruction, is it possible that Caputo's striking use of the religious word "prayer" is due to his profession as a theologian? Indeed, prayer is a word that Derrida himself uses several times in "Circonfession," going so far as to say, "My life is but a long history of prayer."[③]

Prayer means to beseech, and to make sincere requests to God.[④] To whom is an atheist praying, and what response does he expect? If one's prayers do not presuppose a belief in the existence of a listener, do they still qualify as sincere, and are they still meaningful? One explanation is that the atheist's prayer is merely a parody of the believer's prayer, a simile, a rhetorical device to show that the atheist's earnestness and value of what he asks for is comparable to that of the believer. Yet this mimetic interpretation hides a dangerous dichotomous hierarchy in which the devout, earnest religious believer is superior to the vain, materialistic atheist.

In this regard, the second main point to be made in this paper is that

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① Jacques Derrida, "Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)," trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 43.

② John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), xx.

③ Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession,"39.

④ See "prayers": Etymonline Online Etymology Dictionary. https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=prayer.

Deconstruction breaks down the impenetrable boundary between the interior and exterior of faith, i.e., between religious faith and atheism, and dismantles the dichotomous hierarchy between faith and reason. In other words, deconstructive discourse is able to be effective in both religious and humanistic discourses. This is not because Deconstruction is only a method and a tool, without positions and completely neutral. Deconstructive thought, on the one hand, uses religious discourse, recognizing and valuing the value of religious experience, while on the other it insists on the reflective-critical nature of humanistic discourse, without relaxing its demands for logical rigor and consistency. In other words, Deconstruction is the product of maintaining a dialog between religious and humanistic discourse.

Therefore, when we say that Deconstruction has a religious orientation from the very beginning, "religion" here does not refer to any specific, established and doctrinal religion, but rather to the religiosity that exists universally in the life experience of humans, both religious and non-religious. It is an experience of faith that transcends all established religions, what Derrida calls "religion without religion."[①]

"Religion without religion" nicely summarizes deconstructed "religion," or the religious orientation of Deconstruction. Here Derrida emulates the oxymoron, a rhetorical technique especially favored by Blanchot, Weil, and Levinas, in which two opposing terms are juxtaposed in the same phrase, thus creating a paradox. Religion and irreligion do not constitute a Hegelian dialectical unity, but have always maintained a paradoxical relationship of mutual interrogation. Then, how to understand the Deconstruction of the view of "religion without religion?"

First of all, "religion without religion" means that the deconstructed religious orientation is a kind of self-questioning, never-ending self-Deconstruction, Deconstruction of its own "religion," especially Deconstruction of the self-sanctification of religion, the self-confidence and arrogance of holding the truth, and the gathering of strength and power. "Religionlessness" is not a denial or destruction of religion, but rather a caution against the inherent metaphysical structure of religion, against the tendency to idolatry in religion, that is, against the substitution of worship of

[①] Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart. eds., *Derrida and Religion*, 45.

anything tangible for authentic faith in the Unpresentable. In Derrida's words, "True believers knows they run the risk of being radical atheists ... In order to be authentic ... the belief in God must be exposed to absolute doubt."[①]

Second, "religion without religion" is the remainder of the Deconstruction of religion by "nothingness," the endless resistance encountered in Deconstruction, pointing to an undeconstructible faith.[②] At the same time, "religion without religion" highlights the passion of faith with its logical paradox that cannot be tamed by rational cognition. This passion longs for the impossible. As the young Derrida puts it, "I believe because it is absurd ... which is to say, my belief is not naive and spontaneous; neither is it detached from reason; it is a voluntary and courageous act."[③] Weil also discusses the relationship between logical paradoxes and faith. She points out that it is the paradoxical oppositions that stimulate thought, "Whenever the intelligence is brought up against a contradiction, it is obliged to conceive a relation which transforms the contradiction into an correlation, and as a result the soul is drawn upwards."[④] She thus calls contradiction "the lever of transcendence."[⑤] Kierkegaard, who inspired Weil and Derrida, noted that the experience of faith is necessarily a paradox, a marvelous combination of infinite passion and uncertainty. The believer is infinitely passionate about the "object" of faith, but the object of faith is "objectively" in a state of uncertainty, because if it could be determined through empirical evidence and reason, then there would be no subject's choice of belief or disbelief. Belief would be completely replaced by cognition.[⑥]

Third, if one of the central significances of religion is bond or connection, then the connection that religion establishes is first and foremost a connection

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① J. D. Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood, "Epoché and faith. An Interview with Jacques Derrida,"46.

② Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 19.

③ Jacques Derrida, "Les Dieux et Dieu," sheet 4. Quoted in Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945-1968*, 63.

④ Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, trans. & ed. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 113.

⑤ Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 134.

⑥ Søren Kierkegaard, *Provocations. Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*, ed. Charles E. Moore (Farmington: Plough Publishing House, 2007), 70-71.

with the impossible. Deconstruction is an "impossible (possible) experience of the impossible." As a "religion without religion," deconstruction tries to keep this connection as a "relation without relation."[①] This relation without relation will always recognize and welcome the impossibility of the impossible, rather than vainly attempting to understand it as, or even transform it into, the possible.

The phrase "relation without relation" comes from Levinas and Blanchot. Levinas uses it to remind us that the connection between the subject and the transcendental being, or between the subject and the infinite, can never cancel the infinite interval between the two. In this connection, the subject is confronted with "things" that she cannot absorb (whether by thought, knowledge, or power), grasp, or comprehend, i.e., the impossible. So much so that, ultimately, between the subject and the transcendental being, "no community of concept or totality" can arise. Levinas also emphasizes that "the same and the other cannot enter into a cognition that would encompass them," and the relation of the two "do not crystallize into a system." In his view, it is this "relation without relation" that is at the heart of religion.[②] Derrida sees Levinas's understanding of religion as what he calls "religion without religion."[③] In other words, Levinas's anti-system, anti-totality, and insistently spaced-out view of religion in relation to connection offers a reciprocal hermeneutic echo of Derrida's "religion without religion."

Finally, it can be argued that "irreligion" for "religion," and "unconnectedness" for "connectedness" constitute what Derrida calls the "absolute interruption"—another expression from Levinas and Blanchot. Simply put, "interruption" refers to the disintegration, separation, and severance of connections and bonds, while "absolute" refers to

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① Derrida concludes that the word religion in European languages contains two main meanings: (1) harvest, gathering, and (2) connection, binding. See Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 71. Michel Serres (1930-2019), on the other hand, argues that etymologically religion encompasses two meanings: rereading and linking. Michel Serres, *Religion: Rereading What is Bound Together*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), xii.

② Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 80.

③ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 49.

the impossibility of the interruption being completely resolved and disappearing.[①] Derrida points out that absolute disruption is implicit in the constitution of all social bonds, the space in which all communities breathe.[②] For what makes a bond a bond is that it must be a link between different things. If there is only a link without the possibility of separation and interruption, then there is only conformity, a single item, and the necessity and possibility of making a connection is completely lost. As Blanchot puts it, it is the interruptions — the pauses between sentences; the pauses created by picking up, interjecting, or switching speakers; the pauses of attention; the pauses of tacit agreement, etc. — that make conversation possible.[③]

The "absolute interruption" does not cease to break with what Levinas calls the "hegemony of the Same"[④] and the panoramic vision of the synchronization[⑤] that takes everything in, to open to the ungraspable difference, the unexpected and the transcendent, thus making real connections possible. More importantly, this interruption also "opens up the space of faith," which in turn becomes the experience of the "absolute interruption."[⑥] For it is precisely because of the existence of the "absolute interruption" that, in establishing any social bond, however ordinary, whether religious, philosophical or scientific, we are forced to have, in spite of all the assurances that institutions, proofs, and knowledge can provide, a "blind faith." With this "blind faith," we take risks that cannot be completely eliminated (lies, perjury, one-sidedness, etc.), to believe in a promise that cannot be completely guaranteed ("What I say is true!"), to believe in a promise that cannot be fully assured ("I am telling the truth."), and to have to believe in what the promisor says "as if it were a miracle."[⑦]

Derrida also states that "the possibility of the impossible… leaves an

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① Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics? Sings of Responsibilities* (Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2000), 110.

② Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge,"99.

③ Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien Infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 106.

④ Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 12.

⑤ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 19.

⑥ Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 99.

⑦ Ibid., 98-99.

absolute interruption in the frontier of the domain of possibility," providing another perspective for understanding "absolute interruption."[①] To explore what is possible and what is impossible, we always need to do so within a certain horizon. This horizon, which is implicitly a premise, consists mainly of the "reality" that the judge determines in the present, in this moment, and the inferences and extensions of the future that follow the logic of the known on the basis of this "reality." In Derrida's words, "This horizon is … a limit forming a backdrop against which one can know, against which one can see what is coming. The idea has already anticipated the future before it arrives."[②] Thus, when we say that something is possible, it means that it conforms to the logic of reality as we know it. When we say something is impossible, it means that it does not conform, after being compared and tested against the established logic. But, even more so, it means that we have already placed it, and are able to place it, in that field of vision, i.e., we can already see it. That is to say, the impossibility that we are able to judge and speak of, is in fact an impossibility that can already be foreseen, an impossibility based on possibility, an impossibility subordinate to the possible that is still under the horizon of possibility.

The "true" impossibility, or what Derrida calls "more impossible than the impossible," is outside the horizon of possibility, or rather, an impossibility that cannot be placed under any horizon. Derrida calls it "the messianic," which "may come at any moment, [but] no one can see it coming, can see how it should come, or have forewarning of it."[③] Thus, from this point of view, the "possibility of the more impossible" indeed marks an "absolute break" in the domain of possibility.

The relation between impossibility and possibility is not simply one of opposition and isolation. On the one hand, the impossible transcends the horizon of possibility. But on the other hand, impossibility is in fact the condition of possibility, "it runs through possibility and leaves in it a trail of its withdrawal."[④] This can be understood through what Derrida calls an "event." For him, the true event, the absolute event, must be an unanticipated

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① Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, 43.

② Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971–2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 242.

③ Ibid.

④ Ibid., 362.

occurrence, an accident and an exception, the arrival of which is absolutely other, without any horizon of expectation, i.e. impossible.[①] However, once an event occurs, it always changes or even subverts the original horizon and introduces a new logic, thus enabling us to construct new possible explanations for the past and to open up new possibilities for the future. That is to say, we must recognize the occurrence of the event as possible in some way, and that the interruption of the original horizon of possibilities caused by the event has left a break in the continuity of "reality", which is marked by the uniqueness of the event, a trace of the withdrawal of impossibility.

If Deconstruction is the "experience of the impossible," if Deconstruction is not a method, but only a happening, "an event that does not await consideration, consciousness or organization by a subject [even Derrida, who has been called the "father" of reconstruction]," then we find that before Derrida, in the respective writings of Bataille, Levinas, Klossowski, Blanchot, and Weil, the experience of the impossible had already existed in a rich variety of explorations and that Deconstruction as an event was occurring in a variety of different ways.[②] All of this has profoundly influenced Derrida, but he is not the "master" of these experiences and Deconstructions, not only because he does not have the will to be so, but also because of the impossibility — these pioneers constituted a heterogeneous "community" that declined communion and unity, and their ideas could not be homogenized into a whole.

Therefore, the Deconstruction mentioned in this paper will no longer be limited to Derrida. Derrida will no longer be regarded as the absolute origin and center of Deconstruction — which is contrary to the logic of deconstructing the myth of the anti-origin, the center, and the patriarchy.[③]

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① Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971–2001*, 194, 96.

② Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend", trans. David Wood & Andrew Benjamin, in Peggy Kamuf & Elizabeth Rottenberg eds, *Psyche: The Invention of the Other Vol. II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 4.

③ "This thing called deconstruction, if there is any, is not reducible to Derrida; it must always be 'done' without him, in his complicated absence." Martin McQuillan, *Deconstruction Without Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2012), 1. "Derrida's work should not occupy a privileged or transcendental place in the discourse of deconstruction. If this were allowed, deconstruction would indeed become a 'sect' and certain texts would be given a fatherly position, while presence and authority status would be granted to Derrida as a person." Martin McQuillan, "Introduction. Five Strategies for Deconstruction," in *Deconstruction: A Reader*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 1.

We extend our examination to this "community" of what might be called the pioneers of Deconstruction, exploring each "member's" discourse on religion, in the hope of thereby more fully presenting the "religious orientation" of Deconstruction. It is hoped that this will more fully "present" the rich possibilities of the religious orientation of deconstruction. This is the third main point made in this paper.

Indeed, we will find much in common between Derrida's definition of Deconstruction as the "experience of the impossible" and the "limit experience" proposed by these pioneers of deconstruction.① If we say the former focuses on the "object" of the experience, the impossible, then the latter emphasizes the most important "characteristic" of the experience, i.e., the limit, the boundary. In exploring the "experience of the limit," these pioneers, like Derrida, relied heavily on the resources of religious experience and theological discourse, and creatively put forward their own distinctive radical religious ideas, demonstrating a variety of deconstructive approaches.

Derrida's fellow thinker, Foucault, described his understanding of "limit experience" in the following way: " (For Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski) experience is trying to reach a certain point in life, that is as close as possible to the "unlivable," that which can't be lived through, What is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time ... Experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. That is a process of desubjectivation."②

"Limit experience" is Blanchot's creative reworking of Bataille's notion of "inner experience."③ It is easy to mistake Bataille's "inner"as referring to the inner self that the Romanticists prized, and "inner experience" as referring to one's inner feelings and experiences. In fact, however, what he means by "inner" is to be within the experience, or to be focused on the experience

① Maurice Blanchot, "L'Expérience Limite," *L'Entretien Infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 300-342.

② Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault", in *Power (Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 3)*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 2001), 241.

③ See Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

itself, i.e., the experience "cannot have any other concerns nor other goals," and it can have no "principles, either in a dogma (a moral attitude), or in science (knowledge can be neither its goal nor its origin), or in a search for enriching states (an experimental, aesthetic attitude)". In short, in inner experience, " itself is authority."[①] And accordingly, this means that everything will be endlessly tested, challenged and questioned by experience, i.e., that experience ultimately gives us no knowledgeable answers, i.e., that it "reveals nothing, and cannot found belief nor set out from it."[②] Inner experience will lead one to the extreme of possibility, when "all possibilities are exhausted; the possible slips away, and the impossible prevails."[③] The "I" facing the impossible will be torn to pieces by this experience.[④]

Bataille's reason for promoting inner experience is that he believes, first of all, that inner experience is capable of overcoming the subject-object dichotomy that inevitably results from the use of tools, and regaining the "fusion of subject and object."[⑤] This fusion is as subject non-knowledge (neither acquiring nor seeking knowledge) and as object unknown — not the unknown that may be known, but the unknown that can never be known.[⑥] Second, inner experience can save modern society from an over-indulgence in the intellect. After the Enlightenment, "the development of intelligence leads to a drying up of life which in turn has narrowed intelligence."[⑦] It is only in inner experience that we can break through the limited, stale possibilities, reach the extreme boundaries of what is possible, and connect what is necessarily divided by logical thought.[⑧] Finally, the "ego" that is shattered in inner experience is no longer a subject that separates itself from the world. On the contrary, it becomes a "place of communication," an "ocean" — a group of many people. — A swarm of people, a community.[⑨]

Georges Bataille recognizes that the formulation of "inner experience"

[①] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience,* 7.
[②] Ibid., 3-4.
[③] Ibid., 33.
[④] Ibid., 7.
[⑤] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 27.
[⑥] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.
[⑦] Ibid., 8.
[⑧] Ibid., 89.
[⑨] Ibid., 27.

is inspired by religious mystical experience, but points out that there is a fundamental difference between the two. Inner experience is "laid bare, free of ties, of an origin," or even a God-less, a-theist, experience. The problem with mystics is that they see only what they want and discover only what they already know. In other words, mystics experience only what is within the limits of their understanding, whereas inner experience is about entering into the "dark night" of total "non-knowledge."[①]

When Blanchot rewrites inner experience as "limit experience," he has in mind similar considerations to those of Derrida, namely, the need to remind the reader that what he means by "experience" differs from the Western metaphysical understanding of experience. The traditional view is that the universal form of experience is presence, and that consciousness is the self-presentation of experience, or that experience is able to scrutinize its own presence in silence.[②] Blanchot uses the term "limit" to emphasize that the "limit experience" is the end of experience, the impossibility of experience, a presence in which nothing is present anymore, which "may sound like an experience, but we can never say that we have encountered it," because "(it) is not an event or a state that can be experienced," but rather "the experience of the non-experience" (expérience de la non-expérience).[③] Blanchot further points out that all experiences, in fact, necessarily contain a "limit experience" aspect, since every event we encounter always exhibits both the possible, that is, that it can be "understood, borne, mastered (by connecting it to some goodness or value, and ultimately to the whole)," and at the same time exhibits the impossible, that is, we experience the event as "free from all utility and purpose, escaping even our ability to experience it, but in turn, it tests us in a way that we cannot escape."[④]

Foucault points out that Klossowski was also a central thinker involved in the construction of the notion of "limit experience."[⑤] Starting from the

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① Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 33, 3, 9, 175.

② Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 58.

③ Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien Infini*, 311, 310.

④ Ibid., 307-308.

⑤ Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Power (Essential Works of Foucault 19541984, Vol. 3)*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. The New Press, 2001, 241.

Greek myth of Actaeon, who was condemned to be transformed into a deer after mistakenly entering the forbidden bathing place of the goddess Artemis, Klossowski explores the theophany as a kind of "limit experience." Theophany, the manifestation of the gods in front of mortals, is a very important religious experience and theological issue. God is infinite and transcendent, whereas humankind is finite and immanent; God is far beyond human perception, and when God manifests Godself in a form that humankind can experience, it makes the otherwise impossible communication between God and humankind possible. However, Klossowski points out that the event of theophany cannot change the absolute otherness of God, cannot remove the absolute interval between God and humankind, and therefore the possibility of theophany — divine-human communication — must at the same time manifest the impossibility of this communication, and the encounter between the divine and the human must at the same time be a miss of the encounter.[①]

Although Weil does not use the term "limit experience," her theology of decreation is a major inspiration for Blanchot's formulation of "limit experience." It could even be argued that the "decreation" she advocates for the emptying of the self is a kind of "limit experience" that the subject will undergo. In Weil's view, God's creation is at the same time God's self-concealment, abandonment, and emptying, or self-sacrifice out of love, so as to make room for the world and for the creation to exist. Thus, in the real world, God does not exist and the Supreme Good is absent. The absence of God/Goodness leaves a hole in our souls, which expresses itself in our desires, our infinite longing for "goodness." However, in reality, no finite beings can truly satisfy our infinite desire for the Infinite. It is in this sense that "our life is impossible, absurd." But, it is only misfortune, the malheur, that makes us feel this impossibility, "forcing us to recognize the impossible as real."[②] Giving up the illusion of seeing the finiteness of the "relative good" of the world, and the illusion of using it to satisfy the longing for the infinite, requires us to learn to love truly, to follow God's example of the "decreation," to give up "the power to say 'I'" and to "become something."[③] Weil's understanding of

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① See Pierre Klossowski, *Diana at Her Bath/ The Women of Rome*, trans. by Stephen Sartarelli, Sophie Hawkes (Boston: Eridanos Press, 1990).

② Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, 95, 81.

③ Ibid., 26, 33.

gensis as decreation deconstructs the metaphysics of presence and understands God/goodness as not based on being, or "beyond Being," prefiguring the later thought of Derrida and Levinas. Her philosophy of life as "decreation" points to the ethical value and significance of the "limit experience" of "self-emptying."

Levinas has a concept very close to "limit experience," that is, "absolute experience" (l'expérience absolue).[①] It is an experience that cannot be incorporated into any given framework, nor translated into any concept, and that transcends the egocentricity and the capacity of the subject to feel.[②] It is the experience of the infinite, of the face of the Other, or of the face-to-face relationship.[③] Levinas points out that, the relation to the infinite cannot be expressed in terms of a so-called "objective experience" because "infinity overflows the thought that thinks it." Yet, on the other hand, if the essence of experience is the experience of the new, of that which overflows the thought, then the true experience, the experience par excellence, is the experience of the Absolute New, or the Absolute Other, or precisely the relation to the Absolute Other.[④] This "absolute experience," Levinas suggests, exceeds my powers., not quantitatively, but by putting all my powers into question.[⑤]

As mentioned earlier, the French thinkers who preceded Derrida, such as Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski, Weil, and Levinas, explored in their own ways the "experience of the limit" of the "impossible." When Derrida describes deconstruction as "the experience of the impossible," we have a suitable opportunity, a "secret path" that connects him explicitly to this "community of the impossible," identifying this community as a pioneer of deconstruction. We also find that in the process of deconstructing the Western metaphysical tradition, both they and Derrida, who was inspired by them, not only relied heavily on religious experience and theological discourse, but also engaged in highly creative religious thinking, presenting a rich possibility of the religious dimension of deconstruction. Due to the limited space of this article, the specific manifestations of the religious orientation in their respective thought,

① Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2000), 61.

② Ibid., 103, 211.

③ Ibid., 103.

④ Ibid., 10, 242.

⑤ Ibid., 213.

the differences between their thinking, and other more in-depth issues cannot be developed here/ must await further study.

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