



Chapter 6

Is There an Event in Biko? A Deconstructive Reading of the Dialectic of Black Consciousness

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“This is the country Biko continues to haunt, and to inspire.”¹

Introduction

South Africa is not an easy country to describe; however, there are two myths in which it is arguably most recognisable. The first, and perhaps the most prominent, is the founding myth of the New South Africa – an egalitarian rainbow nation. However, the very designation ‘New South Africa’ implies the memory of something prior, an implicit *Old* South Africa – apartheid. The old is barely repressed within the new. Not only are there continuities and discontinuities between the two, but in many ways the two have also come to be co-constitutive.² Furthermore, the intertwined nature of these two visions has led to a situation in which even points of clear discontinuity with apartheid have unexpectedly functioned to not only undermine apartheid, but to also occasion its evolution into something more democratic.³ Additionally, it is still predominately black South Africans that are most

- 1 A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander, N.C. Gibson, “Biko Lives,” in A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander, N.C. Gibson (eds.), *Biko Lives: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.
- 2 S. Mpofo-Walsh, *The New Apartheid* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021), 27.
- 3 An example of this in the economy is how the removal of racial apartheid laws – discontinuity with apartheid – has occasioned a sizable increase in black involvement in the economy, and yet has also simultaneously occasioned “privatization and inequality of wealth”; Mpofo-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 105.

disadvantaged, and the vast majority of the country's wealth is still disproportionately in white hands. This undermines the notion of progress that permeates the founding myth of the New South Africa. It is in this country, riddled as it is with contradictions, that a vision of the future from the past, associated with the memory of Steve Biko, did not materialise. Biko falls into the category of "dead and erased bodies which speak."⁴ The future that he envisioned has tended to have marginal purchase in the myth of a New South Africa, yet nevertheless it has continued to have an unsettling effect on the present. This chapter is intended to be exploratory in nature, and probes this unsettling memory. In it my reflection takes as its point of departure a question troublingly yet aptly phrased by the editors of *Biko lives*: "If black consciousness was a new stage of cognition that became generalised in the struggles of the 1980s, why didn't the total liberation that Biko envisioned come about?"⁵

This is a question that compels us to look at the present as a present that is disturbed by a past–future. It suggests a tragic sense that the future that Biko envisaged is a "former future stranded in the present."⁶ Rather than exploring the notion of saving the past, here I reflect instead on a radical eschatology – what can be called an *eschata*-poetics – as the possibility of saving Biko's past–future. I will closely follow the dialectical articulation of Biko's conception of black consciousness, paying keen attention to a rupture already present within it – the singularity and particularity of black consciousness. My exploration of the possibility of saving Biko's past–future will move through a keen attentiveness to what Caputo calls an event. This chapter will be a deconstructive reading of the dialectic of black consciousness in Biko. I will closely follow Biko's essentialising of blackness, with a keen focus on the implications it has for Biko's sense of time, and more specifically, the future. These concerns with time and especially the future have significant eschatological ramifications. These will become clear in the course of the

4 M.P. More *Biko: Philosophy, Identity and Liberation* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2017), 82.

5 Mngxitama et al, *Biko Lives*, 11–12.

6 D. Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 5.

chapter, but due to the scope of this chapter, these eschatological ramifications will not be probed. In this chapter, I will focus the theological – eschatological – thrust of the argument around the philosophical and theological issues that Biko’s dialectic opens up. Before I can directly discuss Biko’s dialectical articulation of black consciousness, I must first briefly frame this peculiar methodological choice I am making.

Reflections on Method

More precisely, the approach I am taking here is that of staging a critical encounter between the dialectical sense of temporality in Biko, and the deconstructive sense of temporality in Caputo. The approach here will not be to take Biko’s essentialism, and pit it against a notion of anti-essentialism that is (mistakenly) associated with deconstruction. I turn to deconstruction not as a way of articulating a disbelief in essentialism. On the contrary, I turn to it because it allows me to suspend disbelief, given that disbelief betrays an obsession with what is happening, and a failure to appreciate what is happening in what is happening – an event. This radical deconstructive sensitivity occasions a non-dogmatic way of reading Biko that opens up new possibilities for black consciousness in the task of reimagining the future of South Africa – and more theologically, it opens new eschatological possibilities. This requires that I read Biko with a sensitivity to his “problem-space.”⁷ The words of David Scott aptly introduce the kind of exploration this chapter will be:

Problem-spaces alter historically because problems are not timeless and do not have everlasting shapes. In new historical conditions old questions may lose their

7 Simply put, “problem-space,” as I am using it here, refers to a conceptual framework within which the issues that Biko articulates in his conception of black consciousness are historically conceivable. This is not a term I will be using in this chapter, but my sense of the temporal contingency that permeates Biko’s expectations for the future can be aptly described as what Scott refers to as a problem-space. For a fuller explanation of problem-space, particularly one that connects it with deconstruction, see D. Scott’s *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7–8.

salience, their bite, and so lead the range of old answers that once attached to them to appear lifeless, quaint, not so much wrong as irrelevant. In such conditions the old paths between questions and answers do not necessarily disappear; their cognitive connections may remain visible and intelligible as the norm or the convention, but the paths now go nowhere because the stakes involved in walking them have dissolved.⁸

Biko's expectations for the future (his past–future) emerged as an answer or response to historically contingent questions in his time (for example, the clash between his thinking and that of white liberals in NUSAS, as will be discuss below). The question then is not merely whether or not Biko's response to the problem is still correct, or whether we need to find a new way of responding to it. This thinking assumes the question itself is unchanging (metaphysics of presence). It assumes that “the problem” is fixed or static. It is not a question of whether his expected future should still be awaited. It is more radical than that. We need to probe what is happening in what is happening. The challenge here is to move deeper than a surface-level appreciation of Biko's expectations for the future (what is happening), to what happens through these expectations for the future (what is happening in what is happening), given that they long for a particular future in response to a particular (past–) present. This requires us to look more radically at the problems Biko dared to defy through his hopes for the future – what does the nature of the future for which Biko hoped, tell us about the past in which Biko longed for this future; and what does this relationship between a problematic past–time and a past–future provoke as we attempt to reimagine the future in the present?

Therefore, I draw on deconstruction because it does not dismiss on account of finding essentialism in what is read. This means that in my critical reading of the dialectic of black consciousness here, I will not be preoccupied with undermining the essentialist (and teleological) character of this dialectic –

8 D. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 4.

although a questioning of essentialism is indeed an important consequence of this reading. Rather, I frame this essentialism as a historical rebuttal to an historical problem. In this way, I evade dogmatic adherence to its prescriptions for action, which inform its unrealised predations of the future, while simultaneously evading the option to dismiss it on account of those unrealised predations. Methodologically, this approach is an *eschata*-poetics: I can suspend the question of whether or not the predicted future came to pass; I can suspend the question of whether or not to dismiss a discourse on account of the essentialism it espouses, upon which its predictions for the future are predicated; all this so that I can focus on what is happening in what is happening (event): namely, a rebuttal of concrete historical circumstances that occasions a way of looking to the future with hope. I will now proceed to offer my reading of Biko's dialectic.

Black Consciousness

Black consciousness is not merely a cerebral philosophical reflection, but rather an existential philosophy that is radically grounded in a very particular black experience. Therefore, it is ill-advised to neglect the historical conditions under which the philosophy of black consciousness, as we find it expressed in Biko, emerges. This brings us to South Africa after the time of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960.⁹ Prior to this point, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were the dominant movements that led, and gave voice to, the concerns of black South Africans in the struggle against apartheid. However, after the Sharpeville massacre, and the political uproar that followed it, the apartheid government opted to ban the ANC and PAC, with many of their leaders being sent to Robben Island, going underground, or going into exile.¹⁰ This created a political void – there was now no black-led organisation in opposition to apartheid that exerted an influence on black South Africans at a scale anywhere near that of these two movements. The only remaining group that then filled this void were white

9 Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives*, 4.
10 Dwight Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books 1990), 20.

liberals.¹¹ This means that for the first time, the primary voice of opposition to apartheid in South Africa was not led by black people themselves. Rather, white people were leading, and as a result, even with the quest for black freedom from white determination, white people were still determining things. The approach of the white liberals was that of non-racialism via racial integration. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was one of these white liberal organisations.

At the NUSAS meeting held at Rhodes University in the year 1967, black and white students were given separate accommodation. The failure of the white members of NUSAS to oppose this racist incident disillusioned those black members of NUSAS who, up to that point, had still cherished the notion of racial integration as a way of resisting apartheid.¹² Biko was one of those who became disillusioned with this approach. This was when Biko and his comrades began to move in the direction of an exclusively black solidarity as a means to oppose anti-blackness. This idea is captured in the expression: “Black Man, You Are On Your Own!”¹³ This meant that white people, no matter how well-intentioned, were not capable of giving liberation to black people – by virtue of the fact that since it would be given, it would not be freedom. In order for freedom to be truly freedom, black people had to attain it out of, through, and as their own self-determination. Concomitantly, white systems, values and structures would not bring black liberation about. This realisation (“Black Man, You Are On Your Own”) is what leads to black consciousness: as I will demonstrate below, black consciousness assumes a subjectivity that is not determined by its other (whiteness), which can therefore stand over and against whiteness as its other, so that for the first time the two can confront one another on equal grounds. It is out of this confrontation that the conditions of a more egalitarian co-existence between black and white people can be possible. It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that black

11 Danial Magaziner, *Law of Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 84.

12 T. A. Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1983), 7–8.

13 B.S. Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 1978), 100.

consciousness is opposed to non-racialism. Rather, it is opposed to the idea that non-racialism can be attained through racial integration. It is at this point that I can now engage the philosophy of black consciousness in a more explicitly philosophical manner. In what follows, I frame the discussion around Biko's dialectical articulation of black consciousness.

Dialectic of Black Consciousness

Perhaps the most well-known articulation of the dialectic of black consciousness by Biko is that given in *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity* (1973):

The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, the antithesis to this must, *ipso facto*, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance – a true humanity where power politics will have no place.¹⁴

It is important to carefully follow what Biko is parsing through this dialectic. Firstly, it is primarily racial power politics that this dialectic seeks to analyse, not racial identity. Therefore, the “balance” that Biko hopes to reach at the synthesis is not primarily in terms of identity, where that would mean Biko hopes to find a balance between white racist identity and black identity, where a balance between these two would result in the emergence of true humanity. The confrontation is predominantly at the level of power politics. On the question of identity, Biko is clear that black consciousness must completely displace whiteness, and that only black consciousness has the “truth” – I will discuss this more fully below.¹⁵ To that effect, in a paper titled *The Definition of Black Consciousness* (1971), written by Biko a little earlier than this one, the dialectical analysis is given as well. As Biko builds up to the point at which he gives his dialectical reading of black consciousness, his references to whiteness focus on how it functions as a power politics, more than as an identity: he calls it

14 Ibid., 99.

15 Ibid., 56.

“one major force” (and at that, one that “works with unnerving totality”); then, a bit later, he calls it “white power” and states that it “presents itself as a *totality* not only provoking us but also *controlling* our response to the provocation (my emphasis).”¹⁶ So, in Biko’s dialectic, the thesis is a white *racist* power, and the antithesis is a black (*racialist*) anti-racist power (black solidarity). The synthesis is a balance in which both are dissolved, but as power moves, not at the level of identity, hence Biko’s articulation of a synthesis as a reality in which there are no (racial) power politics. This notion of synthesis as a balance is not a slippage for Biko. To that effect, a bit later on the same page, Biko calls the synthesis a “*modus vivendi*.”¹⁷ In a political sense, this phrase is often used to describe a situation in which two sides reach a provisional, and temporary agreement. This is precisely the sense in which Biko used this phrase. He writes: “If South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation, it is only when these two opposites have interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and a *modus vivendi*.”¹⁸

The synthesis of Biko’s dialectic, therefore, is the point at which something new is inaugurated, but an ideal future is not yet arrived at – the ideal future, for Biko, being a South Africa in which “black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation.” This will become even clearer as we carefully follow Biko’s thoughts on black consciousness in contradistinction to white values. As Biko continues, a sharp distinction is drawn between black consciousness and white values, which clearly indicates that for Biko, black consciousness’s overcoming of white values benefits not only black people – who, through black consciousness, cease to be the disposable commodities of “white society” – but society at large. This is because for Biko: “white systems have produced throughout the world a number of people who are not aware that they too are people.”¹⁹ Whiteness, which makes black self-determination impossible, also makes the self-determination of others who have come into contact with

16 Ibid., 55.

17 Ibid., 55.

18 Ibid., 55.

19 Ibid., 55-56.

whiteness around the world impossible. Self-reliance (“Black Man, You Are On Your Own”) is the emergence in the particular experience of black South Africans, of something more universal: a true humanity. This is the sense in which, for Biko, black consciousness is the “truth”, while whiteness is the lie.

At the synthesis, true humanity (which in South Africa, can only be realised as a land in which blacks and whites live together in harmony, without group exploitation) only appears in a negative sense – not as the future harmony Biko longs for, but as the confrontation of two clashing forces (white racism and black solidarity), which results in a reluctant truce (balance or *modus vivendi*). At this stage, both powers do not have what they deem ideal: for white racists, the black as a commodity for white society is lost, while on the side of black power, however, note that there is no indication that at the commencement of the synthesis black people gain anything other than subjectivity, and the halting and incremental eradication of white totalitarianism (and, at that, reluctantly, on the part of white racists). For example, missing from Biko’s reflections on the synthesis is, amongst other things, the resolution of the issue of the ownership of the majority of land by a white minority, while the black majority are cramped on a small portion of the land.²⁰ For Biko, the synthesis is the point where negotiations are possible for the first time. Elsewhere, when Biko describes the possibility of a future stage in which negotiation can take place, he does not employ the dialectical articulation, but it is clear that the point about which he speaks can only be the synthesis of the dialectic. For example, when criticising white liberal integration – a notion that in *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity* he criticises through an articulation of the dialectic of black consciousness – he writes: “Once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration.”²¹

Then again, in *White Racism and Black Consciousness* (1971), while showing that the American black power movement is not

20 This is not to suggest that Biko had no clear ideas about land. For an example of Biko’s thoughts on land ownership, see *Ibid.*, 47–48.

21 *Ibid.*, 22.

the only, or even the earliest, source of this idea, he writes – reflecting on the thoughts of Hastings Kamuzu Banda: “We knew he [the white *man*] had no right to be there; we wanted to remove him from our table, strip the table of all trappings put on it by him, decorate it in true African style, settle down and then ask him to join us on our terms if he liked.”²² This expression of the future does not neatly fit the picture painted by Biko I discussed above, and understandably so as it is Banda’s expression that Biko is recounting here. Nevertheless, the notion of a genuine egalitarian situation emerging only after a clash and conflict – and at that, possibly, though not ideally, even outright violent conflict²³ – remains discernible. The synthetic stage of the dialectic is this stage of the clash, which will occasion bargaining and dialogue between black people and white people. This synthesis, therefore, is more like a quasi-inaugurated eschatology, which strains after a future point of realisation – a South African reality without racial exploitation. It is, in a sense, the transitionary phase that leads to that point. It is important to bear in mind here that Biko need not be understood as intending the synthesis to be one definitive moment. This fact does not always clearly present itself in the writings of Biko, though it can arguably be inferred. For example, in the above quoted critique of white liberal integration, the very notion that groups must assert “themselves *to the point* that mutual respect has to be shown...” in and of itself implies a process, rather than a moment. This point is even more clearly apparent when Biko speaks in the BPC-SASO trial of May 1976:

“Now at this given moment our strength is such that we have got to deal with issues that are very very low-key. Now as you develop strength you begin to pick up issue after issue and it is all over a course of time....The process in fact may take well over 20 years of dialogue between blacks and whites. We certainly don’t envisage failure. We certainly don’t have an alternative. We have analysed history. We believe that history moves in a particular logical direction, and in this particular instance the logical

22 Ibid., 75.

23 Ibid., 168–169, 171–172.

direction is that eventually any white society in this country is going to have to accommodate black thinking.”²⁴

Seeing that the dialectical articulations discussed above were written five and three years, respectively, prior to this trial, and that they were written under far less hostile conditions than the trial, it is remarkable that they and this statement are logically consistent with one another. In both, there is a clear sense of the inauguration of a gradual progression that plays itself out as a confrontation between two groups, which will finally be realised in a more egalitarian future. The language that Biko uses here betrays strong metaphysical beliefs about history that, in and of themselves, betray a secularised theological sense of history, and as a result, cast black consciousness in something of a secularised eschatological (teleological) guise. It is this sense of history that I will discuss more directly in the following section.

Biko’s Dialectic: Idealism or Materialism?

Biko refers to his dialectic as “Hegelian” but then calls it a “dialectical materialism.”²⁵ As Mabogo P. More points out, this is clearly a confusion of terms, as Hegel’s is a dialectical idealism, and Marx’s is a dialectical materialism.²⁶ However, considering the fact that dialectical materialism is at most atheistic, and at least post-theistic, while Biko’s dialectic not only merely has a clear idealism in it, but rather an explicitly theological component to it, the claim that Biko’s is a dialectical materialism – made both by Biko and More – should be questioned. After all, *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity* is an explicitly theological article, and the notion of true humanity there, connected to the synthesis of the dialectic, should be read in conversation with a black theological sense of true humanity.²⁷ Biko does not spell out the sense in which God factors into the dialectic; however, there are clear indications that at the very

24 Ibid., 151.

25 Ibid., 55.

26 More, *Biko*, 252.

27 G.J. Van Wyngaard, “In Search of Repair: Critical White Responses as a Theological Problem – a South African Contribution” (PhD Thesis, Vrije Universiteit December 2019), 142.

least, Biko's dialectic does not neatly fit into one or the other. At this point I will briefly argue that the dialectical logic that Biko employs has the hallmarks of a type of theological sense of history, and concomitantly is a kind of eschatology. As I mentioned above, More posits that Biko mistakenly attributes his dialectical logic to Hegel, when for him Biko's dialectic is closer to that of Marx. More argues that Hegel's dialectical idealism is theological:

Hegel believed that ideas constitute the essence of all reality and that it is the development of ideas that encourages the rest of reality towards the Absolute Idea. Thus, Hegel's conception of history is the history of the realisation of the Absolute Idea – that is, God.²⁸

In a passage that helpfully captures the theological nature of his dialectical thinking, Hegel writes:

World history begins with its universal goal: the fulfilment of the concept of Spirit – still only implicit..., i.e., as its nature. That goal is the inner, indeed the innermost, unconscious drive; and the entire business of world history is...the work of bringing it to consciousness. Thus, what we called the subjective aspect – needs, drives, passions, particular interests, as well as opinions and subjective views all this is immediately apparent to consciousness... It makes its entrance in the guise of a natural being, or of natural will. This imponderable mass of wills, interests, and activities – these are the tools and means of the World Spirit for achieving its goal, to elevate it to consciousness and to actualize it.²⁹

Hegel's dialectic is clearly teleological in that there is a necessity or a "universal goal" for the Spirit, which in its unrealised state is an "unconscious drive" to be realised by rising to the level of consciousness. (Already, with this

28 More, *Biko*, 252.

29 G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: with selections from The philosophy of right* (Massachusetts: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 27–28.

language of “consciousness,” we can anticipate a connection to black *consciousness*.) For Hegel, this happens in history: each stage of history is a step in the incremental unfolding of the Spirit,³⁰ in which the Spirit gradually moves from being implicit yet unthought-of by humans, to being thought; and this consciousness towards which world history is moving is freedom (the universal goal/the idea). The dialectic does not, however, progress in a linear manner. It moves through contradiction – the Spirit must see itself in two opposites which clash, with the result that both will be sublimated into some higher synthesis. What drives this dialectical movement of history – Spirit – is, for Hegel, God. Therefore, there is a sense of necessity in the dialectic – history will inevitably move in a certain logical direction – because of the theological nature of this philosophical system. Already, with the notion that history moves in a certain logical direction, a clear affinity is discernible in Hegel’s and Biko’s senses of temporality. In the reading I am giving here, contrary to what More posits, there is a clear theological thrust in Biko’s dialectic that brings it closer to Hegel – at least as far as the nature of necessity is concerned – than to Marx. I opt to make this case by probing Biko’s sense of necessity in *The Definition of Black Consciousness* rather than in *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity*. This is because the theological nature of the latter might be construed as Biko’s attempt to describe in more theological language something he (presumably) earlier speaks of in more materialist terms, due to the theological nature of the journal in which that essay first appears. The former, however, is earlier, and the occasion in which it first appears is not at all theological. Rather, Biko delivered this paper in a SASO leadership training course, and therefore spoke “from the heart of his and their experience.”³¹ In other words, there are no reasons external to the argument itself that can be said to pressure Biko into speaking theologically.

I will not repeat the above discussion of this dialectic, but I will build on it. What I wish to focus on here is Biko’s notion of the truth and the lie, as well as how they feed into Biko’s sense

30 Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 75.

31 *Ibid.*, 52.

of the necessity that drives the dialectic, and at that history itself. In *The Definition of Black Consciousness*, the lie is that blacks are a departure from the normal, where the normal is white.³² For Biko, it is due to this lie that there are “non-whites” who seek to emulate whites. Note the unabashedly theologically loaded language that Biko employs as he articulates an alternative to the lie (which implicitly means this is what Biko considers to be the truth): “It [black consciousness] is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black.”³³

Significantly, this very notion of a particular consciousness (black consciousness) being “a manifestation of a new realization” very easily lends itself to the Hegelian idealism mentioned above. Before Biko even begins to articulate the way in which black consciousness functions in the dialectic, which Biko articulates shortly after this, the theological weight behind black consciousness should not be missed. There is a sense in which black consciousness is a recognition of the creator’s intention at the creation. Simon Maimela’s theological anthropology that goes back to the *imago dei* therefore has very explicit and direct roots in Biko’s sense of black consciousness as we see it here: for both Biko and Maimela, white racism is, whatever else it is, a disruption of an anthropology given at creation. I posit that what moves the dialectic for Biko should not merely be thought of as necessity, but as an explicitly theological sense of necessity that has its origins in divine intention. To that effect, note the very next sentence:

Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their values, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.³⁴

32 Ibid., 53.

33 Ibid., 53.

34 Ibid., 53.

A bit later in this paper, when Biko has just articulated the dialectic, he then speaks of the truth: “This truth cannot be reversed... Someone somewhere along the line will be *forced to accept the truth* and here we believe that ours is the truth (my emphasis).”³⁵ The part I have italicised here (“*forced*”) connects truth and necessity. The significance of this connection will be clear towards the end of this paragraph. First, however, note that “truth” functions as a sort of shorthand for God’s deliberate plan as Biko articulated it earlier in the paper. This is clear when we see that at both points, what black consciousness as God’s plan, and black consciousness as simply the truth, seek to negate is the lie, which earlier in the paper is articulated as the notion that whiteness is the norm that blackness must emulate, yet to which it is a departure. Later, then, this is articulated as the notion that everywhere whiteness appears, the people it oppresses lose their subjectivity because whiteness seeks to assume the role of the best (authentic, or *true*) way of life.³⁶ In both cases – both before and after the articulation of the dialectic – the lie does not become a lie with the emergence of black consciousness. Something precedes the lie: earlier articulated as God’s original plan in creation, then later articulated as the truth. By virtue of the fact that white racism is a lie from the moment it emerges, there is an implicit, still unconscious truth that must (necessity) rise to the level of consciousness. Black consciousness, as a negating intervention, is the way in which that truth moves from unconsciousness to *human* consciousness, and concomitantly this process leads to true humanity. The point is that it is very clear here, when we hold everything Biko says in the paper together, that the necessity that drives Biko’s dialectic is explicitly theological: he refers outright to the necessity not only as a “who” but as God. To the extent to which Biko speaks in explicitly theological language, he looks back to God’s original plan in creation. However, due to the fact that the dialectic is a teleology – a foreword progression – there is an implicitly eschatological sense to what Biko is doing here. Takatso Mofokeng’s notion that the damage caused by white racism runs so deep that we cannot go back to the original creation, but

35 Ibid., 55–56.

36 Ibid., 56.

must move forward to a new creation, has very clear roots in this implicit eschatology of black consciousness.³⁷ I mention this to say that the fact that what I see as implicit in Biko unintentionally appears explicitly in an articulation of black theology – Mofokeng is primarily concerned with Christology, not eschatology – for which black consciousness is a primary interlocutor is evidence that I am not bringing this to Biko. This implicit eschatology is precisely what comes through in the italicised part of the quote above in which truth and necessity go together. Necessity can be seen here as the way in which God’s original intention moves history forward towards its own “realisation.”³⁸ In a sense here, the negation of black consciousness functions as what in theology is called inaugurated eschatology. In this sense, Biko is closer to Hegel than Marx: Biko’s truth significantly overlaps with Hegel’s Spirit, and for both they are where God features in their respective dialectics.

The point of this section is to highlight the fact that whatever else it is, Biko’s dialectic is theological; and that due to its teleological nature, there is an implicit eschatology in it. This necessity that I have probed by way of theological sensitivity is precisely the point at which I will read Biko’s dialectic deconstructively, by staging a critical encounter with Caputo’s radical theology of the event. Biko’s notions of necessity, truth, and the progression of History also betray a God that is not dead. Through Caputo, I move towards explaining how Biko’s articulation is freed, and given a fresh sense of futurity when it moves through something of a death of God. This is a perfectly legitimate way to read Biko, as Hegelian dialectic is an important development in the intellectual genealogy of radical theology more broadly, and Caputo’s radical theology of the event more specifically. The importance of Hegel for both Biko and Caputo is the point at which this critical encounter can be staged. After all, in Hegel’s own articulation of dialectic, the synthesis is reached

37 Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*, 228; J. N.J. Kritzinger, *Black Theology – Challenge to Mission* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988), 252.

38 Biko, *I Write what I Like*, 53.

through a double death of God.³⁹ Seeing that dialectical thinking is already implicated in some sense of the death of God, Biko is implicated.

Radical Theology

This section will not be an introduction to Caputo's radical theology. Rather, it will focus on the sense of temporality in Caputo radical theology, and how it can deconstruct the temporal necessity that permeates Biko's dialectical articulation of black consciousness. I will do this through a brief discussion of *différance*. My focus will primarily be on the temporal sense of *différance*. I will contrast this sense of temporality with the Hegelian dialectical sense of temporality discussed above. From there, I will be in a better position to speak to Caputo's notion of an event more directly. I will then reach the final part of this chapter in which I read the cry of black consciousness deconstructively through a weakening of the notion of black consciousness (from an absolute black subjectivity, imminent in its own eyes, to the singularity of black subjectivity in an antiblack context).

Différance as Temporal Deferral

The term "radical theology" is reminiscent of the death of God theology of the 1960's. In the beginning of the radical theology phase of Caputo's work, with the publication of *The Weakness of God* (2006), Caputo did not use the term "radical theology," but referred to his project as a "weak theology." It is clear, however, that even this early Caputo was aware of the affinity between his thought and death of God theology. For example, in *The Weakness of God*, he writes:

Suppose we dare to think of God otherwise than metaphysics and metaphysical theology allow? Suppose we say there is at least this much to the death of God: that the God of metaphysical theology is a God well lost and that

39 Sarah Moody, *Radical Theology and Emerging Christianity: Deconstruction, Materialism and Religious Practice* (Farnham: Asgate Publishing Limited, 20115), 3.

the task of thinking about God radically otherwise has been inescapably imposed upon us?⁴⁰

We see here that Caputo is acknowledging the affinity between his weak theology, and death of God theology, while simultaneously hinting at the differences. The differences are not minor. This is because Caputo's sense of radical theology seeks to avoid the notion of the ontological truth of theism, but not by asserting in its place a notion of the ontological truth of atheism.⁴¹ Both of these, conceived as metaphysical truths, are avoided. This comes out very clearly in Caputo's critique of Žižek's notion of the death of God.⁴² Caputo's critique of Žižek has implicitly eschatological, and therefore also temporal, ramifications: where for Žižek there is, never was, and never will be a God, for Caputo God does not exist, God insists – whether there will have been a God stands to be seen. Caputo's God is not eternal (theism), nor is Caputo's God dead (atheism), but is instead mortal – is not a being, but a maybe(ing), and therefore radically exposed to the future.

Caputo arrives at this theology by inscribing God into the play of *différance*. *Différance* is a word coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, through which he retrieves something that is repressed in the meaning of the word "difference." Both English and French borrow the word "difference" from the Latin *differre*.⁴³ This Latin word has both a spatial (differ) and a temporal (defer) connotation that is repressed in both the English and French words. English and French privilege the spatial sense, and through his coinage (*différance*) Derrida retrieves the forgotten, or minor sense of the word (defer) and holds both senses together. It is important to note here that Derrida's coinage of this word is not intended to replace the word "difference." This is because *différance* is neither

40 J.D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 23.

41 Sarah Moody, *Radical Theology*, 4.

42 J.D. Caputo *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013)

43 J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 7.

a word nor a concept, but is instead (1) the spatial opening that makes it possible for different words, concepts, beliefs etc. to exist – it itself does not exist, so that these things can exist – and be co-constitutive on account of difference⁴⁴; as well as (2) the temporal difference (deferral) that can be seen in the fact that whatever the present state of things – such as words, concepts, and beliefs – is, it is never eternally fixed, but is always in flux, endlessly changing as these things repeat themselves forward in time and space. For the purposes of this chapter, it is the temporal sense of *différance* that I give attention to.

To follow Caputo's critique of Hegel, it is important to note that both Caputo and Hegel inscribe God within time, but according to two different senses of temporality. Simply put, in Hegel, God is the force (idea) that drives the movement of History, and that very same historical movement is the process through which God moves from unrealised to realised. In other words, history has a goal – the realisation of God (Absolute Idea, Spirit, or Truth). This goal is bound to be reached because it is already present prior to its realisation, as the unrealised truth that moves history forward in the *quest* for realisation. When Hegel refers to this view of history in more explicitly theological language, he calls it a *Vorstellung* – a symbolic representation. By viewing religion as such, Hegel shifts away from a supernatural view of religion and more importantly, God, to one where the strange and miraculous aspects of religion – the trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection, the ascension etc. – should not be affirmed or dismissed as literal supernatural events, but should instead be read more radically: as fantastical representations in which what matters is not the representations themselves, but what is happening through these representations, namely, the above mentioned “unconscious drive” – which, for Hegel, is Truth, Spirit, or God as that which moves history.⁴⁵ Caputo follows this Hegelian move, in that for him religion should be read radically in a similar way to Hegel. The crucial difference is that for Caputo,

44 The differences between names, concepts, beliefs, etc. is what makes them sensible: for example, atheism makes sense in relationship to what it negates, namely theism, and vice versa. Therefore, difference is an integral part of meaning.

45 Caputo, *Insistence of God*, 88.

what is happening in the symbolic representation that is religion (or, for Caputo, theo-poetics) is not something conditional (necessity), but is instead unconditional: “My own idea is that religion is a *Vorstellung* of which there is no Concept, a figure that does not admit of metaphysical elucidation. My *Vorstellung* is headed for decapitation not recapitulation, having nowhere to turn for a Final Explanation of itself...”⁴⁶

Where, in Hegel, the representation depicts something with ontological weight, that is therefore bound to be realised in history, in Caputo what the representation seeks to depict, or rather to construct, is unconstructable. It is without ontological weight, but is instead a *hauntological* possibility. It cannot be realised in any final concrete sense because it is radically messianic – it is always (permanently) to come. So, Caputo’s thought is almost like a dialectic, but is without Hegelian Spirit or Absolute idea, and concomitantly also without synthesis, as it were. Where the movement of Hegel’s dialectic has all the assurance that comes with the movement of Spirit (God) in and through human history, from unconsciousness to consciousness, movement in Caputo’s radical theology comes without guarantee since it is movement, not according to the logic of Spirit (God), but to the (il)logic of the event (God, *perhaps*) – God inscribed in the play of *différance* without remainder.

For Caputo, there is no “Truth,” but there are truths (truth without Truth).⁴⁷ As a result, there is no guiding logic (Truth) in the development of any given truth. Truth has no essence that can function as a blueprint according to which it can be constructed. What interests me, for this chapter, is what this shift in the meaning of truth does to the movement of time. We can easily see this when we look at time as the temporal movement in the process of the becoming true of truth. If there is a Truth that determines the process, as in Hegel and Biko, then the movement of time is inevitable, predictable, and foreseeable (necessity); meaning that time itself is something closed. This is why for Biko,

46 Ibid., 92.

47 Ibid., 93.

as we saw above, failure could not be envisioned.⁴⁸ However, with the becoming true of truth, where truth is truth without *Truth*, the movement of time becomes undetermined, undecidable, contingent, chancy, unpredictable, and unforeseeable; meaning that time itself is something open. This, then, presents us with two different senses of history: where time is closed, history is something steady, and where time is open, history is fluctuating (flux). If history is steady and predictable, there is a sense in which change is an illusion. This is because change is really just an unfolding of the same. As an unfolding, there is no real change. Every stage of the unfolding is something that was essentially there before, but imperceptible. Movement therefore progressively untangles what is essentially already there, yet imperceptible (unrealised). Nothing new comes. Novelty is really an illusion, a consequence of our own limitations (our inability to perceive the essence) as well as the limits of what was essentially always there (its own imperceptibility). This is Caputo's critique of a Hegelian sense of history:

Hegel made a show of embracing time and kinesis even while subverting them to his own purposes. Hegelian time is not authentic, radical, Christian temporality, in which everything hinges on the "instant," the decision. It is a time which is not exposed to flux and contingency but precisely insulated from their effects. It is a time made safe by eternity, underwritten by reason, regulated by necessity. In Derrida's terms, Hegelian mediation wants to arrest the play even as it appears to affirm it. Hegelian time lacks what is truly proper to time: contingency, freedom, exposure to the future. It pays public homage to history and temporality while in private it subverts them, subordinating them to a rational teleology which monitors and controls their movements. Hegelian time is time reworked by metaphysics, made over into its image and likeness, and in which the

48 "The process in fact may take well over 20 years of dialogue between blacks and whites. We certainly don't envisage failure. We certainly don't have an alternative. We have analysed history. We believe that history moves in a particular logical direction, and in this particular instance the logical direction is that eventually any white society in this country is going to have to accommodate black thinking." Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 151.

groundlessness of radical freedom, which belongs to the essence of time and kinesis, is revoked.⁴⁹

What is being brought to the fore here is that the Hegelian sense of necessity is invoked as an attempt (whether intentional or unintentional) to be protected from contingency. It is an attempt to be spared from a reality in which there are no guarantees. It is this that I posit must be probed. The notion that history is permeated with necessity, and at that, a necessity that renders a favourable outcome inevitable, also falls under Marx's sympathetic critique of religion as an opium of the people – the paradox being that Marx's dialectical materialism is also implicated, as it invokes teleology to render a classless society inevitable. This casting of history retains what Marx rightly criticised as an attempt to give a heart to a heartless world. In other words, it is an attempt to flee material reality, to escape the original difficulty of life. For Caputo, we get the best results when we face up to the original difficulty of life. Considered in connection with the movement of history, this means that nothing about reality renders what we deem a favourable outcome inevitable. This forces us, more radically, to fall back on hope rather than certitude, on faith rather than belief. The sense of hope that is approached in this manner is one in which hope is only possible when there are no grantees; hope is only possible when it is *impossible* – when it is hope against hope. Rendered thus, hope is released from necessity, thus rendering hope unconditional. This framing of hope – as the impossible, or the unconditional – is a framing of hope as an event. This then indicates a shift in how God is conceived: God is not necessity (the conditional), but rather, the name of God is a name for the unconditional – a way of thinking about God that can be seen in both Derrida and Paul Tillich.⁵⁰ In what follows, I bring the thrust of this Caputian deconstruction of Hegelian temporality to bear on Biko's dialectical conception of black consciousness, to explore the possibility of a release of Biko's past–future by way of a Caputian open temporality.

49 J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutical Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 18.

50 See J.D. Caputo, *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional* (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2013).

A Theology of the Event

Where for Hegel religion is a *Vorstellung*, for Caputo theology is a poetics (theo-poetics). It is a hermeneutics of the event that the name of God harbours.⁵¹ There is a particular relationship between God and a particular event. In a manner that, on the surface, resembles how Hegel's *Vorstellung* contains the Absolute Idea (Spirit), the name of God harbours an event; however, unlike with Hegel, an event is not an Idea or an essence. In the case of an essence contained by a name, the essence would precede a name, and functioning like a blueprint, would occasion the construction of that name, as well as determine its meaning (how it should function). In this conception, essentialist thinking is a form of idealism. As discussed above, this is how God and Truth function in Hegel's – and Biko's – dialectic. An event, on the other hand, does not give rise to a name, but rather a name – and its history in the traditions of historical communities that have used it – gives rise to an event.⁵² An event is an effect that is occasioned by a name, which is discernible when a name is unable to exhaustively capture its own meaning, resulting in an unending deferral of a complete actualisation of the meaning of a word. An example of this is the word "democracy" – nothing anybody has ever meant by this word has been met with unanimous recognition. Something is always left to be desired, always deferred to a future that is ever receding with every attempt to actualise it. It is important, however, to bear in mind that it is not that an exhaustive meaning is possible, even in theory, but escapes us because of human limitation. Such a conception would not be an event, but a Kantian ideal.⁵³ An event is not just an unrealisable absolute meaning, but the *impossibility* of absolute meaning as such – the secret is that there is no secret. Impossibility here means that an event is the irreducible unrealisable state of absolute meaning (Idea) that is due to the fact that there is no essential core that can be realised

51 Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 2.

52 Ibid., 3.

53 C. Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below: A South African Black Christological Encounter with Radical Theology," *Black Theology: An International Journal* (2021), 5; M. Häggglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 9.

in the first place, as a result of which an unending movement of provisional constructions is occasioned. This unending deferral is the temporal effect of *différance*.

So, in a theology of the event, theology is not merely a *Vorstellung* that can be discarded once the Spirit has been absolutely realised in human consciousness. Rather, it is a theo-poetics that constructs without a blueprint – the impossible/event – and is therefore indispensable to what is being constructed. So, when the name of God is inscribed into the play of *différance*, it becomes a symbol, but not one that points to something outside of it – thus rendering it completely disposable – but one that points to what is trying (insisting) to come true through and as “God.”⁵⁴ If the name of God is too hastily discarded, there is an event that this name harbours that will be lost.⁵⁵ This radical openness occasioned by this weakening from the Hegelian Spirit (God) to the event (God, *perhaps*) is precisely what renders black consciousness irreducibly singular and particular. In what follows, I will search for the event in Biko’s conception of black consciousness by inscribing Biko’s sense of temporality into the play of *différance*.

Black Consciousness as an Event

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the objective of this deconstructive reading of Biko is not to dismiss Biko’s thought on account of essentialism. It is instead to suspend the epistemological questions of belief or disbelief so as to be exposed to what is happening in Biko – the event. If, indeed, there is a possibility of an event in Biko’s hope for the future, then an open temporality, which is the only sense of temporality in a Caputian conception of event, frees Biko’s past–future – a future he thought was inevitable (necessity), which, however, did not come

54 This is similar to how Bonhoeffer thinks religion should be interpreted: “...the New Testament is not a mythological dressing up of universal truth, but this mythology (resurrection and so forth) is the thing itself...” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 420.

55 It is important to note, however, that in the ongoing process of the deconstruction of this name, at some future point it might be replaced by other names.

to pass – by exposing it more radically to the future. What Biko invokes Hegelian dialectical necessity to protect – the future that black consciousness seeks to actualise – is where I search for the possibility of an event.

Seeing that, as I argued above, an event is occasioned by the particularity of a historically contingent construction rather than a universal absolute, I posit that within the realisation that led to the inauguration of the black consciousness movement, captured in the expression “Black Man, You Are On Your Own,” the possibility of an event is discernible. This is because, as argued above, this realisation emerged as a rejection of a white liberal absolute universality – colour-blind racial integration as the antithesis of a dialectic – in favour of the historically singular and particular experience of blackness. The notion of singularity is a crucial one in any understanding of event. To bring this point to bear, the idealism in Biko’s thought must be deconstructed. What I identify here as the idealism, or essentialism of Biko – the truth (authenticity) of blackness – is not an obstacle, but is already a first step in a deconstruction. To make this point clear, we must return to Biko’s dialectical articulation of black consciousness. In turning back to Biko’s dialectic, it is important to bear in mind here that Hegelian dialectical thinking was mediated to Biko through Sartre and Fanon. Sartre and Fanon, however, differed on the dialectic of black consciousness. For Sartre, black consciousness, as an antithesis to white racism, is a means to an end (teleology) – its goal is a more universal humanity. This means black consciousness is a provisional, temporary measure meant to be dissolved in the synthesis. Fanon’s response to Sartre’s dialectic does not straightforwardly reject Sartre’s dialectical logic as such. What Fanon laments is that this dialectical – teleological – conception of black consciousness renders it a means to an end rather than an absolute, and thus undermines its singularity:

The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still, in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No

probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower.⁵⁶

Fanon's lament exposes a problem with dialectical thinking that my recourse to deconstruction seeks to address: as a means to a greater end, blackness continues to be, not for itself, but for another. Here, black consciousness's immanence in its own eyes is covered over. Teleology maintains the crossing out of the being of the black, and then projects that erasure to the future. Framing black consciousness as a teleological ontological intervention renders blackness non-essential in the here and now – it is merely a minor term in the dialectical progression, that will pass – and in the future synthesis it will dissolve into something greater or more universal (Sartre). Blackness is then erased both in history (by antiblackness), and in history's goal (by being dissolved in Sartre's synthesis). Put differently, one of the implications of Fanon's critique of Sartre's dialectic is that teleological necessity undermines the singularity of blackness. This, for Fanon, kills black zeal for liberation. Biko somewhat follows Sartre's dialectical logic, however, as was argued above only in relation to racial power politics. In other words, as with Sartre, something about black consciousness is dissolved at the synthesis – namely, racial power politics. Unlike Sartre, however (and therefore closer to Fanon), black identity is not dissolved. In the egalitarian future that Biko envisages, black people do not become one race with white people. They exist together in harmony, and without race-based exploitation – this is what Biko means by non-racialism. For Fanon, a dialectic that moves from below completely calls into question the existing humanism that grounds white racism, and as a result brings forth a “new humanism.”⁵⁷ We see this in Biko too – hence the notion of a quest for a true humanity, or the idea that the path of black consciousness leads to the gift of a more human face. However, Fanon states that the romantic illusion of black consciousness, not as a means to an end in a teleological progression, but instead by being its own end, is necessary.⁵⁸ In the conceptual framework of Caputo's radical theology,

56 F. Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 103.

57 N Gibson, *Fanonian practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (Scottsville: KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), 9.

58 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, 103.

however, what is deconstructed in the dialectic is the sense of necessity. Necessity is replaced with contingency, thus rendering what in a conceptual framework of dialectical necessity is a necessary romantic illusion, as in fact being the reality. With this deconstruction of the Hegelian-Marxist metaphysics of dialectical progression (teleology), blackness in its historical singularity and materiality becomes precarious, but also all the more “absolute,” if by absolute we mean singular and unrepeatable. To be more precise, this deconstructive openness to event is a weakening of the conception of blackness as absolute. Rather than conceiving blackness outside of dialectical thinking in order for blackness to be absolute, this search for an event thinks of blackness outside of the dialectic in order for black subjectivity to be singular. This is already the eschatological or rather messianic sense of the event.

So, *différance* does not mean only deferral, delay, procrastination, but the spacing out, the extension between memory and promise or *à-venir* [to come], which opens up the here-now in all its urgency and absolute singularity, in the immanence of the instance. The call for what is coming calls for action now. There is the *gage*: engagement, promise, injunction and response to injunction, the pledge that is given in and for us before any concrete decision, the time of the promise, the response to the demands of justice, which is impatient, uncompromising, and unconditional.⁵⁹

In an antiblack context, such as Biko’s, where the subjectivity of blackness is undermined, Biko envisions justice as a situation in which black people will be full subjects in relation to white people. In the deconstructive reading I am giving here, black subjectivity as conceived in black consciousness is an “impatient” response to this promise to come. This singular occurrence, without the guarantees of necessity, is a more precarious *modus vivendi*, not merely one that is primarily between black power and white supremacy, as Biko argued, but a more radical condition: all interventions – including the cry of black consciousness, which I am reading here as the singularity of blackness – are irreducibly provisional arrangements out of the distance between the promise

59 J.D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 124.

of a justice to come and an unjust present, with an acute sensitivity to the lack of any guarantees (dialectical necessity). The impatient and uncompromising nature of the unconditional call for justice requires concrete responses in the present, with or without an ultimate conclusion. When we read black consciousness with *différance*, we evade the Hegelian metaphysical fortification with which Biko's reflection on blackness is insulated from the original difficulty of life. This releases the event in black consciousness: the affirmation of black subjectivity in a world that erases black subjectivity, in the absence of a big Other (history as logically progressing towards black liberation) is the possibility of the impossible – an event. It is the affirmation of blackness without why – it is the unconditional.

Lastly, this intervention also staves off the error of lapsing into a form of ethno-nationalism. This situation that Biko describes as a *modus vivendi* is universal, in that it forces two ethnical power political interventions into a situation where they have to negotiate a national situation in which these different ethnic groups can co-exist without race being a political or even economic factor – non-racialism. In other words, the intervention of black consciousness is intended as a means towards a genuine democracy, by creating a situation in which no racial group can overwhelm and over determine another. Only out of this condition is a genuine, democratic, and non-colonial exchange of ideas amongst different cultures even possible for Biko.⁶⁰ The difference between this and deconstruction is that deconstruction is an unending work, while Biko sees the *modus vivendi* as a transitional situation that will come to an end. This, as we have seen, is due to Biko's certainty with respect to the future ("We certainly don't envisage failure. We certainly don't have an alternative. We have analysed history. We believe that history moves in a particular logical direction, and in this particular instance the logical direction is that eventually any white society in this country is going to have to accommodate black thinking."⁶¹) However, Caputo's more precarious sense of time as unprogrammable and radically open to an undecidable future is more appropriately

60 Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 26.

61 Ibid., 151.

met with a movement towards the future that undermines “unfair, exclusionary” discursive measures, rather than one that positively states an ideal intervention.⁶² Deconstruction “does not provide [us with] criteria” that can either guarantee a favourable outcome, or guarantee that with or without a favourable outcome, a particular criterion is correct.⁶³ Deconstruction does, however, unendingly pursue the conditions under which we can openly and fairly perpetually debate and negotiate the way in which we will continue to co-exist in more just ways, within this risky situation without guarantees.⁶⁴ In this sense, then, this more deconstructive temporality is a more radical *modus vivendi*. It, therefore, is more universal in that it seeks a situation in which all can be part of the difficult task of debate and negotiation. It values the notion of democracy as radical disagreement. This condition requires the intervention of black consciousness as a measure that undermines the unfair exclusion and undermining of the personhood of black people, so that a truly non-racial situation can emerge, even if only in the negative – as a space where antiblackness will never exist unchallenged. Deconstruction here does not give us a solution to the problem of antiblackness, but is a praxis that unendingly seeks to create the conditions under which antiblackness, where it exists, is always being challenged. This is where the search for an event overlaps with black nihilism.⁶⁵

62 Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 197.

63 *Ibid.*, 197.

64 *Ibid.*, 197.

65 I have in mind the closing remarks that Calvin L. Warren makes in his book, *Ontological Terror*: “Continuing to keep hope that freedom will occur, that one day the world will apologize for its antiblack brutality and accept us with open arms, is a devastating fantasy. It might give one motivation to fight on, but it is a drive that will only produce exhaustion and protest fatigue. What is the solution? What should we do? How do we live without metaphysical schemes of political hope, freedom, and humanity? I would have to suggest that there are no solutions to the problem of antiblackness — there is only endurance. And endurance cannot be reduced to biofuturity or humanist mandates. Endurance is a spiritual practice with entirely different aims. *Ontological Terror* seeks to challenge metaphysical and postmetaphysical solutions. The paradigm of the free black teaches us that such solutions sustain the metaphysical holocaust. Let our thinking lead us into the “valley of the shadow of death,” and once there we can begin to imagine an existence

Conclusion

In this chapter I have closely read Biko's dialectical articulation of black consciousness, clearly following the theological nature of this dialectic. From there, I have deconstructively read the Hegelian sense of temporality in this dialectic through a search for what Caputo calls event. This has occasioned both a sense of the historical singularity of black subjectivity, and a radical openness to the future that renders a pursuit for open, fair and robust debate – *modus vivendi* – as part of a larger, unending search for more just ways of living together.

anew”; *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 172.