



Almost against information ethics, with lessons from Caputo's obligation and Foucault's ethics of freedom

Quase contra ética da informação: lições a partir do conceito de obrigação em Caputo e da noção de liberdade em Foucault

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RESUMO

Está na hora de repensar a ética informacional. John Caputo é contra a ética, que ele propõe substituir por "obrigação". Este artigo é guiado pelo seu trabalho porque Caputo localiza a obrigação no âmbito dos desastres do nosso tempo. Ao fazê-lo, desafia o campo confortável da ética informacional a enfrentar a obrigação confrontando desastres, dilemas e catástrofes. Está na hora de perturbar a ética informacional, de descobrir uma nova cepa de ética informacional. Este artigo pretende provocar essa busca. Questiona a força da obrigação de Caputo em um cenário mediático contemporâneo que gera distração, dormência, desatenção, concentração fragmentada, anedonia e distúrbio emocional tecnologicamente mediados. Argumenta que a ética da liberdade de Foucault pode apontar para a descoberta de possibilidades de escapar da dormência provocada pela nossa situação tecnologicamente mediada. O artigo também encoraja uma *small-e information ethics* que se alimente de conceitos pré-modernos da informação capazes de transmitir processos continuados de informar-se - isto é, experimentando e adquirindo uma nova forma. Trata-se de uma ética informacional acolhedora das lições de Caputo sobre a obrigação e das de Foucault sobre liberdade, uma ética que nos convida a buscar outras formas de

ABSTRACT

It is time to rethink information ethics. John Caputo is against ethics. His deconstruction of ethics replaces it with obligation. This paper is guided by his work because Caputo locates obligation in the midst of the disasters of our time. In so doing, his work challenges the comfortable field of information ethics to face obligation by confronting disasters, dilemmas, and catastrophes. It is time to disturb information ethics, to discover a new strain of information ethics. This paper is intended to provoke such a pursuit. It questions the force of Caputo's obligation in a contemporary mediascape that generates technologically mediated distraction, numbness, inattention, fragmented concentration, anhedonia, and disturbed affect. It argues that Foucault's ethics of freedom can point to the work of discovering possibilities of escape from the numbing effects of our technologically mediated situation. It also encourages a "small-e information ethics" that draws from pre-modern concepts of information that convey the ongoing processes of becoming informed, that is, trying out and taking on a new form. It is an information ethics hospitable to Caputo's lessons about obligation and Foucault's lessons on explorations of ways of becoming other than what we are.

Keywords: Information Ethics; John Caputo; Obligation; Michel Foucault;

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From undergraduate to doctorate, I mostly avoided courses on ethics. I read some of the basics, which in my day was Kant and Mill, the progenitors of deontology and consequentialism, the then two main pillars of philosophical ethics, and I did take one course on ethics as a doctoral student in philosophy, but I never really understood the point of philosophizing about ethics, a reaction confirmed by the course. But some years ago, I'm not sure precisely when, my stance towards ethics softened. I mostly blame Foucault—a brief flirtation with Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics notwithstanding—because my deep admiration for his work made thinking about ethics unavoidable. Foucault's ethics of freedom, the product of his late period, made sense to me, and still does, as we'll see below.

Recently I discovered John Caputo, who is against ethics; he has a book of that title, subtitled “contributions to a poetics of obligation with constant reference to deconstruction” (1993a). If you're against ethics, you're also against principles of ethics, so Caputo has a paper titled “Against principles”, subtitled “a sketch of an ethics without an ethics” (2003). A corollary, which he doesn't pursue, would hold that you must then also be against codes of ethics, both because unprincipled codes of ethics are an abomination, and because once you're against ethics it's not there to encode. Codes of ethics are anyway pretty dubious entities, perhaps most obviously so with those comfortably situated in some layer of multinational corporate monuments, just down the hall from the public relations department. Monsanto, the producer of both Agent Orange for the U.S. military's Operation Ranch Hand in the Vietnam War and genetically modified seeds that produce barren plants that oblige farmers to purchase Monsanto seeds for each crop, has a “Code of Ethics for Chief Executive and Senior Financial Officers”. In Canada, we speak of ethical oil, oil that flows thanks to ethical principles. Professional codes of ethics abound, as many as there are professions. The still-booming field of information ethics can't get enough of codes and their principles. Caputo's book and related work hadn't been published when I was avoiding ethics, but now I wish it had, because down deep, somewhere below my self-understanding, I too, I think, was against ethics. But times have changed. Now I find myself here, bringing together Caputo's and Foucault's thoughts on ethics, seeking to present my version of an information ethics.

Caputo wasn't always against ethics. He confesses he was once quite intimidated even by the word “ethics”. “When I saw it coming down the street”, he writes, “I always greeted it with my very best smile, tipped my hat and bowed in the most courteous way, offering it my warmest salutations.” But that “halcyon time is over now”, he continues: “I will no longer be able to perpetuate this ruse. My neighbors will soon know that I am registered in the opposing party” (1993a, 1).

Caputo deconstructs ethics, replacing it with obligation. The “oldest and most honorable work of ethics”, he writes, “has been to defend and honor obligation, to make obligation safe. But”, he goes on to say, “my impious thought is that obligation is not safe and so, in the shameless deconstructionist view I espouse, that it is just in virtue of obligation that ethics becomes unstuck. ... The deconstruction of ethics ... lets obligation be even as it lets it in for trouble, exposing it to disaster” (1993a, 5). He writes not a philosophy but a poetics of obligation. He asks whether it might be possible “to tell very beautiful stories of obligation”, “to have a kind of poetics of

obligation” (1993a, 10), to write, in the words of Søren Kierkegaard speaking in the voice of his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, as an *Extra-Skriver*, or supplementary clerk, one who would need only to “offer certain fragments about obligation”, just “such bits and fragments of obligation as I find strewn about ... scraps of obligation that have fallen to philosophy’s floor” (1993a, 21). I will now present some bits and fragments I have collected from Caputo, to give us a working understanding of what he means by obligation, and some of its important properties and characteristics. Caputo writes:

Obligation does not mean answering the call of Being, or of the History of Being, or of the History of Spirit, or of the Voice of God. I have ... lost all communications from On High. My satellite has been knocked out. I have in mind instead a very earthbound signal, a superficial-horizontal communication between one human being and another, a certain line of force that runs along the surface upon which you and I stand: the obligation I have to you (and you to me, but this is different) and the both of “us” to “others”. ... I mean the feeling that comes over us when others need our help, or support, or freedom, or whatever they need, a feeling that grows in strength directly in proportion to the desperateness of the situation of the other. The power of obligation varies directly with the powerlessness of the one who calls for help, which is the power of powerlessness (1993a, 5).

I want to emphasize four points of this passage which Caputo returns to and enlarges upon in his ... what? argument? analysis?—no, not those, so let’s use his word: “story”. The first point is about what obligation doesn’t mean: it’s not about answering calls from senders whose names are written in capital letters. His suspicion of such exhausted “starry guides” and “heavenly satellites” is evidenced in different formulations in several places, for example, in this bracing question: “What else does it mean to say that one has lost one’s faith in *grands récits*, that one responds with disbelief to sweeping narratives, that one declines fine names like Ethics and Metaphysics, Science and Religion, that one refuses to crown anything with capital letters, that Being, presence, *ousia*, the transcendental signified, History, Man—the list goes on—have all become dreams?” (1993a, 6). Second, obligation means receiving a signal, a communication, one which is “earthbound” and “horizontal”, between ourselves and another. Third, it is an unsought, affective signal, a feeling, one that surprises us, “comes over us”, with a strength in direct proportion to—and this is the fourth point—the degree of powerlessness of its unknown sender. It is a call for help.

“Obligation happens” (1993a, 6), says Caputo, which means that “obligation is not anything I have brought about, not anything I have negotiated, but rather something that happens to me. ... It binds me”. He embraces Lyotard’s notion of obligation as a scandal to the “I”, to “Philosophy”, and to “autonomy” (1993a, 7). “Obligation is ... the feeling of being bound ... but I cannot get on top of it, scale its heights, catch a glimpse of its rising up. It comes at me, comes over me, overtakes me, seizes hold of me. ... When I am obliged I do not know by what dark power I am held”. “All that I know about obligation”, Caputo writes, “is that I am taken hold of from without, seized by something else, something other ... It is the alterity or the otherness of the other, the heteronomy, that disrupts me, that is visited upon me, that knocks me out of my orbit” (Caputo 1993a, 8).

Obligations, says Caputo, “lay siege to us with a particular forcefulness” in the case of disasters; obligation consorts with disasters (1993a, 28). “An obligation is a matter of

being bound to a disaster" (1993a, 30). Unlike Blanchot's "The Disaster" (Blanchot 1986), Caputo's disasters are common; they are "written all over the surface of damaged lives" (1993a, 27). Disasters are about loss; they are not the same as pain and suffering, and they always befall the other. Disasters "are marked with dates and proper names" (1993a, 30); they are always with us: "the disasters of capital and the disasters of Stalingrad, the disasters of Auschwitz and the disasters of Horoshima and Nagasaki, of northern Ireland and the West Bank, of South Africa, the south Bronx, and Sarajevo. The killing fields are everywhere and everywhere they are fields of disasters". They "have an ominous sameness, which invariably involves spilled blood, limp bodies, broken minds, damaged lives" (1993a, 41). Disasters are an abyss, bringing "destruction for which there is no recompense", events that "ethics" cannot contain (1993a, 29). "A disaster is an economic notion" because it "refers to an unrecoverable loss." It is "an utter wasting"; there are no terms in which the loss can be reckoned part of an acceptable expenditure, an acceptable cost that one is willing to pay" (1993a, 29).

Obligation, says Caputo, is "a fact as it were, not of pure practical reasoning, as in Kant, but of our factual life, and as much a fact, in fact, as any other fact, e.g., so-called empirical facts." "Obligation is a linguistic fact": it is a prescriptive, and "the happening of prescriptives is an irreducible part of any language". As a "fact of factual life, of linguistic, social, political, institutional, personal, family life, of any sphere of life", prescriptives belong to Lyotard's "flux of phrases", about which Caputo says: "We find ourselves in the flux of phrases, born into and bathed by phrases, including obligatory phrases". Prescriptives prescribe: they tell us what to do. They "do not succumb to reduction ... no one ... is able to put them put of action, to bracket or suspend them ... they still keep coming in, still keep arriving" (1993a, 25). The travel industry tells us where to go, the food industry tells us what to eat, the entertainment industry tells us what movies, video games, internet content, news, and reading to consume, the funeral industry tells us how to dispose of our bodies; the list unravels by its own momentum. "But", says Caputo, "not every prescriptive is an obligation". The core of obligation is the signal, the communication, the feeling of being obliged, which seizes and binds me. Today's newspaper may prescribe that I see the latest Adam Sandler film, but it puts me under no obligation. "An obligation is a call we receive to which we must respond, a prescriptive to which we must keep an open line" (1993a, 26), but my line to Adam Sandler films is easily cut. I can turn a prescriptive into a quasi obligation when, for example, I accept an invitation to an event I'd rather miss, but that's hardly an obligation that binds me to a disaster. There is "nothing subjectivistic", says Caputo, "about obligation": "It is not an effect produced by a subject, not the work of a subject, but rather something produced in me, as in a patient, something that happens to me". Caputo explains that "the whole idea of a poetics of obligations is to find an idiom for the fact (as it were) that we are laid hold of by others, seized and laid claim to, that the fullness of freedom is hollowed out by the hollow eyes of those who suffer (1993a, 32)."

But I'm nagged by a problem I face with Caputo's obligation. He fails to reflect upon the media of the communication of obligation and therefore upon their effects. What are we to make of obligation's force, its seizing us, its knocking us off our pins, out of our orbit? How does this defining and necessary feature of obligation fare in our contemporary mediascape, one of whose main effects, as observed by empirical psychologists and many deep thinkers of media and culture who together have built a monument of scholarship around it, is the numbness, distraction, inattention, anhedonia, and generalized lack of affect induced by media technologies— a condition branded by the verbal tic, "whatever"? Psychologists report that

prolonged exposure to media violence atrophies sympathy to violent events and to their victims. McLuhan taught that because technologies were extensions of man that shocked the human sensorium, the defensive, self-regulating response was the numbness of self-amputation (McLuhan 1966). Adorno and Horkheimer saw mass numbing as an effect of the cultural industries (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Walter Benjamin's analysis of distraction as the perceptual mode of reception of art in an age of mechanical reproduction can be extended to fixation on the screens of contemporary digital media (Benjamin 1969). Jonathan Crary's *24/7* dissects the perceptual consequences of the perpetually "always on" mode of attention to such media. His discussion of the attack on sleep includes a brief passage highly relevant to my problem. Crary writes in a Caputovian vein that for Levinas, insomnia

is a way of imagining the extreme difficulty of individual responsibility in the face of the catastrophes of our era. Part of the modernized world we inhabit is the ubiquitous visibility of useless violence and the human suffering it causes. This visibility, in all its mixed forms, is a glare that ought to thoroughly disturb any complacency, that ought to preclude the restful unmindfulness of sleep. Insomnia corresponds to the necessity of vigilance, to a refusal of the horror and injustice that pervades the world. It is the disquiet of the effort to avoid inattention to the torment of the other. But its disquiet is also the frustrating inefficacy of an ethic of watchfulness; the act of witnessing and its monotony can become a mere enduring of the night, of the disaster (Crary 2013, 18–19).

The numbness and distraction generated by our contemporary mediascape has me worried about how to live up to Caputo's obligation—how to feel its shock, to be seized by its dark force, to be knocked out of my orbit. I can learn from what he says about prophetic poetics, where he says the point of what the prophets say is not "to measure whether it is getting things right or correct" ... but instead "that we are no match for their stories ... we cannot keep up with them. ... Nothing is ever is up to what they demand. ... Prophets are not reporters, sending back eyewitness accounts of what exists. They are poets and storytellers, who throw us into confusion with soaring, searing tales ... telling us how to shape up" (1993a, 80). These words, which belong to Caputo's response to Levinas, capture, admittedly with much more force and profundity, my rather puny response to Caputo's poetics of obligation. I confess that when I reflect on my failure to feel the full force of the feeling of obligation upon seeing all those videos, those pictures and news reports, those stories of disasters, I'm thrown into confusion, into a feeling of inadequacy, a worry about being insensitive, unfeeling. Caputo's powerful poetics of obligation tells me to shape up, to feel seized and knocked out of my orbit. But what can I do with what I really do feel, which is an obligation to feel the shock of obligation, which is, as we've seen, an obligation to feel the autonomy of my "I" disturbed, to become other than I am, in this case, something other than a distracted and benumbed consumer of communications from disasters? My questioning about this, the questioning that came to me when writing this paper and which I now present to you, my being in this state of questioning my failure to feel the call of obligation as described by Caputo, this state of discomfort, is it the only effect on me of Caputo's poetics of obligation? I really don't know, but here I am nonetheless, worried, discomfited. His poetics has moved me a bit by landing me in this questioning state, which I feel as confusion, as discomfort. So I've moved somewhat, I've been slightly nudged, I've been obliged to take a small step, make a small movement, to feeling the discomfort of not feeling anything like the full force of Caputo's obligation. And I feel this because when I read

his words about prophetic poetics and learn that the point of his poetics is not to tell the truth of obligation, I ask myself what happens should I renounce my own puny will to truth, this time about my so-called thesis about the numbing and distraction inflicted upon our sensibilities by our contemporary mediascape, which I thought surely not only blocks the shock and force of obligation as described by Caputo, but in so doing stops even him in his tracks. But he's not stopped, because he's not trying to tell the truth of obligation. And now, where I've landed, even when I'm just a small step from where I was, just a mere nudge away, is at least someplace different, not fantastically different, not a movement I can be proud of even if I wanted to be, and certainly I'm not transformed. My discomfort can't live up to the shock of Caputo's obligation, which I am, I confess, sometimes tempted to write with a capital letter. I'm left with something much weaker, much more mediated, and therefore remote, mediated by my recognition of my failure to feel the full force of the obligation of Caputo's poetics, not seized, merely discomfited.

But I want to do more with my feeling of discomfort than simply confess to it. I want to pursue what I see as a connection between obligation as Caputo describes it and Foucault's ethics of freedom, which may at first glance seem far-fetched, because Foucault's ethics is an ethics of thought, a critique, and therefore far removed from cries for help and our obligations to them. Yet Caputo and Foucault share an important common idea. Caputo's obligation produces decentering and displacement of the "I" and its autonomy. The "philosophical ethos" proposed by Foucault in "What is Enlightenment?" is "a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as a work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (Foucault 1997, 316). It is an ethos "consisting of a critique of what we are saying, thinking, and doing (315)", one that "will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think (315–316)." Even though this philosophical ethos "may be characterized as a *limit-attitude*" (315) insofar as "the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and of the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined" (316–317), which always puts us in "the position of beginning again" (317), our critical work on possibilities of becoming other is also an experiment in displacing and decentering the historically contingent "I" each of us have become.

In his paper on what he calls Foucault's hermeneutics of refusal, Caputo says that Foucault has an "apophatic" discourse about the individual, a discourse analogous to apophatic (or negative) theology, which holds that what you say God is is not true, but what you do not say God is, that is true. Analogously, Caputo says, Foucault's apophatic discourse states: "Whatever way the individual is historically constituted is not true; but whatever alternatives there are to the way we are constituted, that is true" (Caputo 1993b, 251). That is why the philosophical question is not "what am I?", but "who are we now, at this particular moment of our historical constitution (252)?"

But at this point yet another worry begins to nag at me. The phrase "our historical constitution" can be daunting. What if, as I fear, the magnitude and difficulty of the critical work of excavating possibilities of becoming other present themselves to me as a direct function of the effects of a colossal, epoch-founding machinery, one whose effects extend everywhere, thereby creating a hermetically sealed, totalizing era, and whose by-products include our historical constitution, that is, our identities, who we are?

I take some comfort from this remark by Caputo: "Not having been commissioned to speak on behalf of the [capitalized] Spirit of the Age or the Destiny of Being, and

speaking for myself, I feel forsaken by such starry guides. It is not a question of knowing what to put in their place, but of just getting along without such a place, of conceding that things are just “decentered”, “disseminated”, “disastered” (1993a, 6). I’m also somewhat comforted by Foucault’s analysis of Kant in “What is Enlightenment?”, where he observes that Kant did not see the historical constitution at work in his time—the Enlightenment—as “a world era to which one belongs”. He did not think that Kant sought “to understand the present on the basis of a totality” (1997, 305). Instead, he says, Kant sought an answer to the question: “What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?” Foucault sees in Kant’s text “the outline of what one might call the attitude of modernity”, even though he recognizes that “modernity is often spoken of as an epoch.” He then asks: “I wonder whether we may not envision modernity as an attitude rather than as a period of history (1997, 309).” By focussing on an attitude, it seems to me, Foucault offers an approach to the work of becoming other which is limited to specific aspects, or lines, of our historical situation. Drawing out just a few possibilities of becoming other seems to me a “modest”, one-line-at-a-time approach, which also acknowledges Foucault’s focus on “partial and local” critical work, as opposed to “projects that claim to be global and radical” (1997, 316). This kind of approach befits a genealogy of the present that is woven from many strands. Because Foucault’s critique, which aims at becoming other, protects freedom from forces of determination and identity formation, the work of ethical subjectivation can proceed along multiple strands of our situation.

Caputo has drawn out an inescapable strand. I believe he is right about obligation as an inescapable feature of our situation. Every report of slaughters of innocents, drowned or suffocated migrants, psychotic murders, political tortures, racist killings, and gender slayings—the list goes on and on, unceasingly and relentlessly, is a cry, a howl, for help. Are we obliged? Of course. Caputo’s poetics of obligation interpolates us as creatures knocked off our pins, bowled over, knocked out of our orbits, seized by our situation’s obligations. Do we respond? Most don’t, but some do, courageously and selflessly. In a report on Monday, September 7, 2015, *The Globe and Mail* observed: “By midday on Saturday, Vienna’s Westbahnhof station is thronged with refugees who have crossed the border from Hungary. There are huge numbers of volunteers handing out apples, water, chocolate, flatbreads, sandwiches and donated clothes. There are large charitable organizations in action but also individuals doing whatever they can: A young woman is standing by herself amid the crowd, offering a small tray with cookies and paper cups of tea; an architecture student is handing out a homemade list of key phrases, translated into Arabic, German, and English. Volunteer translators appear to be everywhere, with signs taped to their front and back listing the languages they speak (Slater 2015).” A few days previously, the Aljazeera English website reported convoys of private cars heading to Hungary to transport refugees to the Austrian border (Austrian aid convoy). Since then, newspapers have reported many enthusiastic welcomes by Austrian and German citizens. But now, even German and Austria have introduced border checks.

A second strand, and equally inescapable, has been drawn out by the thinkers mentioned above, who have identified and analyzed the machinery of distraction at work in our contemporary mediascape. These two lines—obligation and distraction—intertwine, one reinforcing the other. Distraction, the second strand, harbours specific possibilities of becoming other. One kind of the becoming-other of distracted subjects is an ascetic of self-tuning, which means clearing a space free from distraction, through the work of cultivating focus, attention and continued

concentration. An ascetics of attention and concentration disturbs not only the distracted subjects we know we have become, but our unknown identities, those created by corporate and governmental surveillance of our digital transactions and activities. An ascetics of attention enables switching off the pervasive “always on” mode of attention that concerns Crary, a mode that leaves us vulnerable to digital control systems. Cultivating resistance to the machinery of numbness and distraction can become the practice of a Deleuzian ethos of invisibility, imperceptibility and anonymity (see Frohmann 2007, 67). Distraction-free spaces cleared by an ascetics of attention opens channels for receiving obligation’s signal, for feeling the force of the distressed other, of becoming vulnerable to being seized and bound, a becoming-other that lives in the knowledge and acknowledgement of obligation’s “must”.

Crary’s reference in his remarks on insomnia about “the frustrating inefficacy of an ethic of watchfulness” gestures toward something I have tried but failed to avoid by my reflections above on responses to obligation’s signal. I didn’t plan to pose the question of what to do in response to obligation’s call. I wanted to be a good Foucaultian by avoiding the question, “What to do?” Foucault has warned us to be wary of prescriptions, and I’m exhausted by ethical systems that propose an endless labour of sorting right from wrong conduct, and of generating long lists of rules. But I find the question “What to do?” hard to shake in thinking about ethics. Caputo’s “against Ethics” stance is the best example I know of not evading or dodging the question, but of strategically ignoring it. And he succeeds, not by arguing, suggesting, implying, or even hinting it’s a silly question, but by being against Ethics. “What to do?” is an ethical question, so if you’re against Ethics, it doesn’t arise. By writing, not a treatise on Ethics but a poetics of obligation, Caputo achieves two important results at once. His “beautiful stories of obligation” and his collection of “scraps of obligation that have fallen to philosophy’s floor” are meant to disturb the reader, to convey the force of obligation but without consoling answers to the question, “What to do?” Yet, at the same time, they convey how Caputo himself, at least as philosopher, deconstructionist, hermeneutician and theologian, responds to the call of obligation, but by performing—by showing, not saying—his answer to the question, “What to do?”

I greatly admire Caputo’s manoeuvre. But I can’t write a poetics of anything, much less a poetics of obligation. My paper is a small thing, and my presentation doesn’t amount to much, especially when measured against the obligations of our situation, but it was brought about by that small nudge Caputo’s poetics gave me. I don’t say this to claim any virtue; I say it only as a confession. Caputo has escaped Ethics by replacing it with the state of being under obligation. For him, feeling obliged means receiving obligation’s signal. He has nothing to do with an Ethics that tells you what to do. Neither has Foucault. Yet both of them are profound ethical thinkers. Neither Caputo’s obligation nor Foucault’s critique of the present with respect to who we are give us our moral marching orders. But for me, they provide us with a way to think about a small-e information ethics, which would be neither a philosophical theory of the grounds of moral principles, nor an ethics of conduct with respect to modes and practices of the transportation of signals and contents—the so-called “information”—channelled through the communication media of the contemporary mediascape that defines our situation. It would, like Caputo’s and Foucault’s ethical thought, not prescribe but lead you to a place where you are staring straight at the possibility of action. What you do then is up to you; Caputo and Foucault just help you get to that realization, to shake you awake to your freedom to act.

My small-e information ethics would accommodate mysterious communications like Caputo's obligation, and, guided by Foucault's ethics of becoming other than who we are, it would rely upon pre-modern meanings of "information". The Oxford English Dictionary lists some of them: the shaping of mind or character; the giving of form to something; the action of imbuing with a particular quality, animation; to impart life or spirit. My concept of information conveys the ongoing process of becoming other than we are by becoming in-formed, that is, by trying out, taking on, a new form. My information ethics is apophatic: whatever ethics says is not true, but whatever ethics does not say is true. Beyond what ethics does not say, my information ethics has nothing to do with truth. It thrives on unresolved ethical dilemmas and impossible obligations (Caputo's paradigm case of the force and impossibility of obligation is Abraham's obligation to God's command to kill his son). I am content with an information ethics that combines Caputo's and Foucault's ethical thought to propose an ascetic of receptivity, attention to and concentration on the shocks and disturbances of obligation's communications from disasters, and that practices an ethos of invisibility, imperceptibility and anonymity in response to the forces of distraction and numbing imposed by our contemporary mediascape. It would be an information ethics without rules, codes, and philosophical excavations of the grounds of morality, but one constantly disturbed by obligation and the awareness of the possibility of freedom to become other than who we are, disturbed almost to the point of being against information ethics.

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