
Metaphysics, Myth, and Myopia: Religio-deconstructive Reflections on Philosophy, Hermeneutics, and the Human Condition*

Shane R. Cudney

Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario

I drink not from mere joy in wine nor to scoff at faith—
no, only to forget myself for a moment, that only do I want from intoxication,
that alone.

Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát*

The reality that human beings are finite creatures of faith who spin fragile webs of security and significance has been a well-kept secret for so long now that the guardians themselves refuse to admit such a truth. Indeed, it is a major concern of this essay to take seriously the contention that the western “mind” has been largely bent on denying this reality, a history in which humankind has, in one form or another, attempted to take flight from its finitude by seeking refuge in its many elaborate and varied constructs, particularly those of the metaphysical variety. Once considered to be no mere cultural by-products, these construals were thought to be immutable gifts of the gods.

This soporific dream of certainty, however sweet, has proven to be a nightmare for those outside the more recent circle of “Enlightenment,” for it has been persuasively shown, in a project that arguably began with Kierkegaard, that reason itself is blind to its own condition of possibility. This means, following Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 46), that “‘I think’ comes down to ‘I can’—to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality.” This dawning, which is at the same time an eclipse, has given rise to a post-traditional state of af-

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fairs that has fostered what is now commonly referred to as the "postmodern condition"¹ a situation that has predictably generated feelings of anomie as well as euphoria. With its "incredulity toward metanarratives"² this post-critical critique has called Reason to account. And to the extent that the western Church has paid homage to this lesser, now truncated god, it too has been complicit with the violence it so deeply abhors. If this is the case, Christian theology must face not only a difficult truth, but the equally difficult and crucial task of re-visioning itself *other*-wise.

If it is true that the hard line which has traditionally been drawn between myth and metaphysics is itself mythical, that is, conditioned by prior commitments rooted in trust, then to a certain extent the ground levels out to reveal a space within which the dualisms that still plague western culture could be recast in non-violent terms, a model perhaps more in keeping with ancient, pre-philosophical sensitivities.³ Instead of a blind, inherently violent faith in the ability to get the world right (epistemological realism) or the related, equally destructive attempt to transform the world according to strictly human aims (human autonomy),⁴ we would be free to affirm rather than deny or valorize the intrinsic goodness of our finitude as the starting point in our hermeneutical endeavors. This admittedly more precarious, open-ended posture recognizes not only the laughter of Zarathustra, but also the whispering of Abraham.⁵

By drawing on the deconstructive resources of religion and on the religious resources of deconstruction,⁶ I want the two to mingle with each other to the point of radicalization, a mutual, "friendly subversion" of sorts, as John Caputo (1986, 252) would say. I suggest that a "religio-deconstructive" hermeneutic emerges in the interplay between the two that points us beyond the violence that seems endemic to both metaphysics and deconstruction. This healing hermeneutic rooted in suffering love offers an anthropological alternative to the realist "hero," the constructivist "hobo," and the deconstructionist "harlequin." Instead, this "helper" would exude a healing stewardship in all manner of creaturely endeavors, one that is able to redemptively translate "creational glossolalia" in such a way that "the sound of creational groans decreases and the voices of praise increases" (Middleton and Walsh 1995, 169, 171). It is here that this "helping hermeneutic" reveals a heart that is deeply and fundamentally ethical in nature.

That philosophy and theology are conditioned by previous commitments ("forehavings," [Heidegger] "prejudices," [Gadamer] "final vocabularies," [Rorty] or "worldviews," [Jaspers]), which themselves

provide the starting point for all theorizing, is considered by some to be the single most important philosophical dawning of this century. However, even more radical, indeed scandalous, is the notion that such postures are “always already” religious in nature. For the philosopher it is one thing to *assume* that these commitments grow in the desert of philosophical “quasi” neutrality, it is quite another thing to *confess* that they may just as readily be found in the lining of a womb-like matrix.

Although deconstruction seems to be quite taken with faith, in a strange and general sort of way, its resistance toward specific historical exemplifications of what it terms a universal (religious) structure, seems oddly reminiscent of the spectre that sanctioned the nature/grace bifurcation of medieval scholasticism. By attempting to keep concrete religions at bay, by committing them to a place where they can no longer hurt themselves or anyone else, it is difficult to see how the deconstructive gesture does not (violently) drive a wedge between faith and religion. Such a move, it seems to me, reveals the assumption that particularity, that is, that which is constitutive to being human, is considered structurally violent. Thus, on this reading, to be human is to be caught in a web of violence where violence is a necessary reality.⁷

While this postmodern deconstructionist move to a *fall within particularity* from the modern *fall from universality* may address metaphysical violence, it does not, however, address the seemingly unquestioned assumption of structural violence. The problem is that the extent to which deconstruction maintains a partition between structure and content, it represents the flip-side of the same economy it wants so desperately to avoid and so vehemently critiques. If this is the case, deconstruction may be the unwitting vassal of the “ghost of full presence,”⁸ the spirit of which had its genesis in the metaphysics of early Greek philosophy.

Metaphysics, Hubris, and the Rending of Creation

Because it seems all too easy these days to slip into an implicit either/or blanket type condemnation of the western philosophical/theological tradition, I do want to qualify my reflections by acknowledging the fact that ours is a rich and multifaceted heritage, one that cannot be reduced to a monolithic essence. Indeed, there have always been thinkers, who, like Heidegger and Kierkegaard before him, have defied the rule of rationality, who have delimited its sphere of influence, indicating as Derrida has rightly emphasized, that the openings produced by reason are irreducibly entwined with withdrawal.

On the one hand, then, to be suspicious of those who see post-modernity as a way of thinking that has made a radical break with an inherently flawed metaphysical tradition is a warranted posture. Those who choose a riveted focus on the undeniable legacy of violence, in my opinion, will only perpetuate an already aggravated state of affairs. On the other hand, without going the optimistic way of the dialectician, we do need to acknowledge the unique and radicalizing contributions that deconstruction in particular has made, contributions that no doubt have further shaken the foundation of western culture. That the house of being has been found empty, or at the very least, bankrupt, carries with it far reaching implications that have already altered our traditional sensibilities to the extent that questions of faith, God, and religion have once again come to the philosophical fore.

Mathematics, Philosophy, and the House of Being

Whereas metaphysics has traditionally focused on the "actual truth" about things, myth by contrast has concerned itself with fanciful storytelling, likely tales of questionable epistemic value. At least that is how the story is told by metaphysicians. That metaphysical theorizing is, à la Hegel (1977, 41), "serious business," I do not doubt; however, in keeping (not uncritically) with changing sensitivities, it seems to me that mythical storytelling is of equal importance. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there is a mythical, indeed deconstructive moment within metaphysics itself which is the very condition for its possibility.

By conferring some semblance of intelligibility on the chaotic flux of lived experience, both metaphysics and myth perform different yet deeply related functions. That is, by providing us with a sense of orientation and understanding as to the "Why, What, and Wherefore of things," these constructing activities⁹ enable us to feel at home in the world and thereby serve to quell the cosmic anxiety, "the ontological *Angst* to which the human being is particularly prone" (Madison 1988, 126). Hence, they enable people to feel, as Camus said, that life is worth living.¹⁰

The discovery of that most Greek of all Greek discoveries—the mathematical—which stands as a paradigm for philosophical, that is, metaphysical thought, no doubt was a heady (no pun intended) experience. And as we might have expected, given, that is, the natural proclivity of the human mind to confer on its offspring the title of "reality," this discovery was soon misinterpreted. For the cultivated intellects of the time, these "mathe-radicals" were far more intriguing

than the old primitive gods and demons. Hence, not only did these new “prophets” (Laertius 1972, 19) quickly usurp the authority of the old cohort, they inherited their divine attributes at the same time. Indeed, as the “reason” (*logos*) for what appears, this intelligible, mathematical essence *is* reality itself, the apex of reality. As such it becomes first in the order of being, a throne from which the Unmediated rules absolutely. To be sure, it is the nature and logic of the ratio, when functioning as the first and last word, to defend a rational utopia. In this sense it cannot help but think totality. In a word, Reason “dictates that what is is and what isn’t isn’t, and that what is, whatever it be, *is* more truly than what simply appears to be which, strictly speaking, *is* not at all, or, at the very least, not really *real*” (Madison 1988, 129).

The point is, whether appearances are painstakingly preserved or thrown out altogether, the sensible is subsumed under the “meta-net” of the intelligible. In other words, “[t]he sensible, which is the realm of flux and imprecision, is knowable, thus real, only in the light of theoretical reason” (Madison 1988, 129).

Metaphysics in the Tragic Mode

As a result of the growing tension between the sensible and the intelligible, which the pretensions of metaphysics fostered, a rift occurred creating a fissure between *mythos* and *logos*, one that widened as humankind depended less on the “old gods” and more on its newly discovered powers of critical analysis. Thus the stage was set for what has become the four act epic stage production of the western worldview. While the actors have changed and the props rearranged, this formative time largely determined the course of philosophy for the next three millennia. If Derrida and company are right in their assessment/critique of the western tradition, then the term *logos* has in fact defined the course of western history (Dupré 1993, 281).

As far as my thesis is concerned (one that has a deep yet reserved affinity for Derrida’s project) understanding this early period as a time of “tearing” is crucial because it is here that we begin to see a tear in the fabric of creation, one that has been the birthplace of many varied and violent dualisms, the reverberations of which are still being felt at the end of the twentieth century. For example, what was to become the matter/form dualism of ancient Greece metamorphosed into the medieval split between nature and grace, which, in turn, mutated into the nature/freedom and secular/sacred schisms of the modern era. And although in this century efforts to level the ground rightfully abound, it is evident that the two-headed chame-

leon is attempting to extend its reign in the form of the same/different bifurcation of the now postmodern period.

It would seem that while the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece usurped the role of faith (*mythos*), this rational-noetic view of the world, out of necessity, assumed the religious function of comprehending the truth of reality in different, though strictly speaking, mythological terms. "Since metaphysics needed a centerpiece, a keystone in its house of being, it may be credibly said that the advent of 'God' in philosophy arose less from God than from metaphysics" (Olthuis 1995, 40).

This way of thinking, that is *logos* as *causa sui*, found its full formulation in the modernity of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel. Indeed, the modern, subjective quest for certitude can reliably be traced to Descartes, who, in the wake of the medieval grand narrative of ecclesiasticism, declared: *cogito ergo sum*. This allowed him to identify philosophical truth with mathematical certainty and establish it as such. Armed with a new-found faith in deductive reasoning, which was driven by the newly posited, methodologically derived heroic self, the search for knowledge became an all-consuming pursuit for "essence," one directed toward a fundamental "thing-in-itself."¹¹

Since the time Descartes set out to establish the ego as a point of absolute certainty, being has been characterized by what Spinoza (1955, 136) termed the *conatus essendi*: "Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being." Since for Spinoza God's power is synonymous with his essence, and all things are modes of God, then the will-to-power, notes Levinas (1969, 46), becomes the linchpin of modern ontologies, the veritable well-spring of human activity. On this reading, what has developed over a long history is a process by which reason has become an instrument of terror, a tool of oppression and domination used by an ego or society of egos to suppress what is Other or different. Jacques Derrida (1981, 64) terms this totalizing "motif of homogeneity, the theological motif *par excellence*."

All of this considered, it is not difficult to see, at least through this lens, that the category of being, as the "institutionalization of reason" (Caputo, 1987, 228) is fraught with difficulty. Indeed, with its penchant for control, it is painfully evident that unbridled Reason has left wide swaths of destruction in its wake.

Myth, Humility, and the Mending of Creation

This sad history, I contend, is a story of tears,¹² wounds and fissures, one that still needs to be leveled, deconstructed, demythologized,

and re-thematized. While the task and the accompanying questions seem to be debilitatingly formidable, we must hope in the One who delights in paradoxes and inversions, take seriously the postmodern critique, and begin to think otherwise than being.

Deconstruction, Dissemination, and the House of Cards

With a very large brush, I have attempted to indicate that being, particularly as it has come to expression in the modernity of Descartes, has largely been a "power-over" system of maintenance, a construction given divinized status and deemed immutable by its disciples. By dint of its autonomous fixation on Reason, this house of being has, wittingly or unwittingly, placed a premium on instrumental control and domination.

In this century, however, initially at the hands of Husserl and Heidegger (in the wake of Nietzsche), the western philosophical tradition has come under heavy fire. While both philosophers in the end were unable to emancipate themselves from the strictures of metaphysics, as Derrida (1982, 130-33) has rightly shown, their pioneering work has spawned an array of philosophers who have further radicalized their thinking and pushed the tradition to the brink of the "abyss." In so doing they have convincingly shown that the house of being is merely a house of cards.

As I alluded to earlier I am suspicious of at least two extremes that have emerged as a result of the cacophonous discourse of postmodernity, some of which, no doubt, is hyperbolic and misleading. In Derrida's case, because he himself has built upon and radicalized Heidegger's philosophy, it is often wrongly assumed that he is against metaphysical thinking altogether. However, my sense is that he is much more clever than that. For Derrida, the culprit is not so much metaphysical thinking, as it is a metaphysics of *presence*. In a more lucid moment, he tells us that western metaphysics has always looked for a centre and can be thought of as a history of substitutions of center for centre:

Its matrix...is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth (Derrida 1978, 279-80).

It is not that Derrida is calling into question any and all distinctions, nor is he seeking to rid us of metaphysics. For this would only replicate the logic of exclusion he rightly seeks to expose. He himself explicitly states that,

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest (280-81).

Although this passage itself is open to divergent readings, it does seem clear that what he wants to show us is that all binary oppositions need to be *questioned* not necessarily *abandoned*. Even Derrida wants to communicate.

Unlike the common misreading of deconstruction which makes Nietzsche and Derrida out to be intellectual bedfellows, the latter's critique affirms yet questions the reality and need for both groundlessness *and* groundedness. So instead of privileging groundlessness (becoming) over groundedness (being), or advocating some mixture of the two, Derrida, strangely enough, comes close to the language of faith as the starting point, indeed the condition, for all theorizing when he talks, for example, of a "pre-originary pledge," a "promise" that precedes language "without belonging to it...a *yes* before all opposition of *yes* and *no*..." (1989, 130, 94). Indications such as this cause me to think that questions of faith, God, and spirituality are not only crucial to the postmodern conversation but are unavoidable.

Could it be that the West is close to having come full circle where once again due weight will be given to the mysterious, to the need to allow the gaps in knowing and understanding to remain as a testimony to the reality that we are (inter)dependent, finite creatures of faith who can no longer pretend that it is possible to encompass the cosmos with our constructs, metaphysical or otherwise? Could it possibly be that, as Christians, we owe a great debt to deconstruction for putting its stylus tip of judgment on a deeply rooted and all-pervasive methodological hubris?

If it is true that western Christianity has been complicit with the deeply entrenched dualisms which have fostered a violent suspicion of the "other," what are we to do now? Are we to be simply subsumed by deconstruction? Or, are we left to add snippets of the deconstructive fabric to a thinning Christianity in order to make it last a little longer? What is the criteria, if any, with which to judge our present

state of affairs? I suggest that although things seem to be sliding in all directions, a space has opened in which both Christianity *and* deconstruction can be further radicalized, an alternative space wherein we need not suffer from “Cartesian Anxiety” (Bernstein 1983, 16ff), Nietzschean frivolity, or Derridean suspicion.

Metaphysics in the Religious Mode

As for Christianity, deconstruction in particular has convincingly shown that no community, tradition, or system of belief is an island unto itself. Indeed, the “masters of suspicion” (Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche), the phenomenologists (Husserl, Heidegger), and now post-phenomenologists such as Derrida and Foucault, were among the first to scathingly criticize our constructed versions of reality, showing us that the way we view the world can and often does result in an ideological justification for a certain way of life.

That no tradition is innocent, not even Christianity, may evoke for some a sense of despair, for others it may and rightly ought to provide the catalyst for a renewed sense of humility, vigilance, and hope. Indeed, it seems to me that it is largely because of deconstruction that Christianity is now in the position of being able to retrieve the broader meaning of *pistis* as “trust” or “commitment,” rather than the more widely used and narrowly conceived notion whereby faith is reduced to propositional assent to some doctrine (Smith 1997, 77). Such a turn, I suggest, is a significant shift in perspective that changes things considerably in that, despite our best intentions to the contrary, it reveals that we have been complicit with an insidious idolatry, where, in biblical terms, the law has preceded the spirit, where ethics has preceded justice. It is in this deconstructive and disconcerting light that we must now proceed from the “other” vantage point, carefully and cautiously loosening our “onto-grip” in order that we might re-imagine Christian theology differently, one that begins with an open hand, one extended toward the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.

As for deconstruction, my sense is that it is still haunted by the “ghost of full presence,” which is to say that Derrida and company seem to construe Nietzschean absence against the horizon of Hegelian presence. In other words, for deconstruction to renounce the dream of complete (for example, epistemological) certainty means that we are left with an utter lack of certainty. The reason for this, as I have already suggested, is that by superimposing itself over an economy of chaos and chance, deconstruction has no recourse but to represent the flipside of the Enlightenment worldview. Whereas moder-

nity saw the Baconian hero attempt to subdue (through reason) the chaotic forces of nature, the Derridean harlequin sees itself as a mere effect of these same anathematized forces. In the former instance we were told to neutralize our commitments in the name of sameness, and in the latter instance we are told to formalize (or bracket) our commitments in the name of difference.

Based as they both are on the assumption that the gash in existence is a mortal wound, the result is the perpetuation, indeed, hybridization of a certain Neoplatonism that in effect asks us to live a detached sort of existence where to shelve or to put on hold that which is inescapably human is deemed "good." In Derrida's case, motivated as he is by the desire to avoid the inevitable violence inflicted in the name of particular "religions of the Book" (Caputo 1997, 136), he retreats to a hyperbolic realm where he is able to draw the line of commitment between the structure of religion and the content of religion. This is doubly curious given the fact that deconstruction emphasizes the retrieval of a full-bodied existence.

In contrast (yet indebted) to both deconstruction and traditional formulations of Christianity, I believe that if the Derridean "yes," heard on the wintry horizon of faith (Marty 1983, 18), is able to affirm the intrinsic goodness of existence, then a "Yes" will emerge that it is able to take seriously *both* the universal structure of the "messianic" and the historical particularity of "messianisms." It is precisely because this faith proposal has a both/and trajectory that we can say (in fear and trembling), from whence this "Yes" comes, even though it is a "Yes" without a why.

This embodied, particular faith injects the veins of deconstruction with an empowering agent, one that in dismissing the co-primordality of good and evil generates a difference that makes a difference. Such a faith (not in content per se, yet not separate from it) does not foster either a limp philosophical undecidability or a triumphal religious decidability, but rather a sober hope rooted in a faith that believes in the face of the abyss. This kind of faith embraces the a/symmetry of mutuality, an economy that sees the deconstructive mean, first and foremost, not as an abyss-like khora space of withdrawal, but as a creative womb-like matrix, a space of both connection and disconnection. In this way, rather than becoming a question of how one is to escape the violence of a two-headed despot, the focus becomes more persistently ethical. In this economy, the "gift/call" of love is at once a *gift* that compels us to respond, and a *call* that can be refused and abused.

Allowing for the ubiquity of violence rather than the necessity of violence opens a religio-political space within which we can wrestle with the possibility of both peace and violence, a space within which we are able to confront violence *as violence* precisely because it functions against the horizon of possible justice. So instead of having determinate religions be the whipping boy of the messianic, the ground is leveled to the extent that the messianic is also brought into the "beautiful fray" as another messianism among messianisms. This being the case, we can release religion to be understood as a "fundamentally deconstructive gesture," yet also a pharmacological site where there exists both the possibility of "poison and cure," of injustice and justice (Smith 1998). In other words, if deconstruction is unable to maintain its universal, "desert religion" (Caputo 1997, 155) yet discourse remains grounded in faith, as Derrida (1993, 29-30) himself confesses, then instead of dismissing out of hand the viability of determinate religions in the call for justice, we would free to bring our particular faiths to the fore in order to cultivate a religio-ethical vigilance that has an ear bent toward the other.

Although Heidegger said that he could not believe, and John Caputo wants to believe,¹³ and Derrida doesn't know if he believes, in the economy I am suggesting, one cannot help but believe because faith, as the very condition for im/possibility, is inextricably linked to our philosophical theories of belief. So while both Caputo and Derrida consider faith to be philosophy's "other," I suggest that this other remains necessarily but unduly detached from their own "desert religion." This is precisely why Caputo (1993, 245-46) cannot say who it is that calls, *Il* or *Il y a*. Caught between "Kierkegaard" and "Nietzsche," the most (or least) we are able to say is: "'There is' (*es gibt*).... There are (*es gibt*) events. They happen 'because' (*weil*) they happen.... There is no 'why'.... What happens is what there is (*es gibt*). That is all" (223). Indeed, is it any wonder that for Caputo in "[f]our and a half billion years from now, when our little star has cooled off and congealed, and has dropped back into the sun, when the solar system itself has dissipated, the call of justice will have sunk into oblivion" (17).

Conclusion: Toward a Provisional End

It has been said that a radical disease demands radical treatment. In the case of the West, our present fragmented condition is the result of precisely this mentality. Indeed, we have treated the human condition as something to be cured, something to be overcome and emancipated from, a mentality that has produced less-than-adequate grist

for the metaphysical mill resulting in misguided methodologies and totalizing systems. In a religio-deconstructive manner of speaking, however, ours is not so much a disease to be cured as it is a condition to be affirmed, an affirmation rooted in the suffering love of God.

For the Christian, the biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption is the story in terms of which every story is weighed. Such judgement, however, is not rendered as a result of the violence of theoretic demonstration "but in the degree it participates in, shows forth, and nourishes love and life..." (Olthuis 1993, 26). In other words, life exceeds cognition and logic to the same extent that truth exceeds verification. This means à la Wittgenstein that the acceptance of any position, system, or tradition always involves faith, and needs to be confessed as such. Hence, while we confess the biblical narrative to be a healing story of cosmic proportions, it is a story, like all stories, that needs to be held in an open hand. Even stories of God need to be deconstructed because such stories are always already expressed in fallible, imperfect, and incomplete human terms. This alone should give us reason to pause and bend our ear toward the sobering laughter of Zarathustra that we might once again proceed in "fear and trembling." "For to follow the path of the absolutely unconditioned is not only an impossible demand, an illusion, it is a dangerous illusion" (Caputo 1992, 129).

We must remember that the way of the Christian is not the way of the Hegelian hero, furiously shoveling coal on the Great Train of Being, nor is it the way of the Nietzschean hobo, wandering aimlessly in the Great Labyrinth of Chance. It is not the way of the Derridean harlequin who, with careful ease, dances in the deconstructive mean between seriousness and play. Rather, it is the path of a Christ-like helper, a sojourner journeying with others on a precarious path in the "wild spaces of love" (Olthuis 1995), where remembrance, biblical remembrance, is the fuel that propels the pilgrim forward.

Endnotes

1. Lyotard 1984. Even though John Caputo reservedly uses the term "post-modernism," he rightly considers that it has become an overused and much abused word, one that has "been ground into senselessness by opportunistic overuse..." (1997, 119). As a heuristic term, it does, however, help to describe a growing sense of suspicion and dis-ease in western culture. From pop culture to politics, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Enlightenment myth of progress is fast losing its ability to inspire enthusiasm and generate faith among its advocates, the spirit of which the term "postmodern" nicely captures.

2. Lyotard 1984, xxiv. While there are some who consider the Bible to be a “metanarrative,” I suspect that Lyotard does not think so. In this regard, the following distinctions are important to emphasize: whereas the pre-modern “grand narrative” was *naively given*, the modern “metanarrative” was *rationaly legitimated*. In contrast to these the postmodern prefers to speak of *suspiciously held* narratives. Given that the Bible is a collection of narratives which are by no means rationally legitimated (or naively given), I doubt that the “incredulity” of which Lyotard speaks can be leveled against the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. However, to the degree that the Christian tradition views the Bible through a Greco-Cartesian lens, it too is subject to the postmodern critique.

3. This does not mean, however, that I endorse a mythic return to a pristine ethos from which humankind has fallen and now must be saved. With John Caputo (1987, 244), I agree that such nostalgia “fails to see that nothing [no historical epoch] is innocent, that it is only a question of different forms of difference and violence.... There was never any perception, presence—or virtue.”

4. While it seems that postmodernity has given up on the notion that we can get the world right, it remains thoroughly modern to the extent that it believes we can make the world into anything we want. Hence, I remain sympathetic to those who insist that, if anything, we live in a “hypermodern” age (Borgmann 1992, 78ff).

5. What I mean here is that if it is true, à la Caputo, that philosophical “undecidability” goes “all the way down,” then it necessarily follows that Zarathustra must also tremble at the thought that his own “faith” in the primordality of the abyss may be misplaced. This is where Caputo, like Heidegger, pulls back from where the trajectory of his own thought leads, that is, toward the radically religious nature of thought itself (Caputo 1990, 168). See also Caputo’s genealogy of the religious and tragic (1987, 278-88).

6. An important point that I wish to emphasize here is that the following proposal is not to be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship, a synthesis constituted by the two theses. Rather, it is a reading that is at once very near to and very far from traditional conceptions of the Christian faith *and* deconstruction. My hope is that this proposal will escape such strictures in the spirit of Kierkegaardian, indeed biblical, repetition.

7. Derrida (1976, 112) contends that at the origin of language, prior to empirical violence there is “arche-violence”.

8. Olthuis (1997, 160) reserves this term for those who, to a greater or lesser degree (and who, for various reasons and in different ways), are haunted by the spirit of certainty, completion, or perfection.

9. See Peter Berger 1967, 3-28, where he rightly argues that language itself (including both metaphysical and mythological varieties) serves to construct and transform the social world. As such, it functions, fundamentally, as a shield against the terror of anomie (22-23). See also William James (1956, 283-86) for a similar emphasis.

10. Camus 1975, 11ff. See also Carl Jung 1966, 187-88, where he notes that man is a "reason monger" because he sees in theoretical reason the only line of defense between him and the horrors of the great unknown. This is essentially Berger's point from a psychological perspective.

11. Smith and Cudney 1996, 39. If Descartes is the father of modernity, as many claim, is it safe to assume that he is also the progenitor of modern day fundamentalisms? In our article, James Smith and I (1996, 38-41) explore the "modernity of fundamentalism."

12. Taylor 1989. With John Caputo I embrace Mark Taylor's homograph, "tears/tears"; one can read "tears" as either cries or cuts. See also Caputo 1997, 340.

13. See Caputo 1995, 27, where his philosophical dualism is especially evident when he asks: "What can we learn about reason in history if we expose reason to the words and works of faith?", as if faith and philosophical reason were separated by some inexplicable chasm. It is clear that for Caputo, faith is limited more strictly to the credal or institutional variety.

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