

As an alternative to Garfield's, Inada's translation is as follows:

MMK XXIV: 7 Let us interrupt here to point out that you do not know the real purpose of *śūnyatā*, its nature and meaning. Therefore, there is only frustration and hindrance (of understanding).⁷

Nāgārjuna insists that the opponent has fundamentally misunderstood what he [Nāgārjuna] has indicated by the term *śūnyatā* as well as the purpose of *śūnyatā*. We see here that *śūnyatā* functions in a particular way, as emptiness, emphasizing the non-essential nature of phenomena. If *śūnyatā* is misunderstood as non-existence - which he indicates is his opponent's position - then its significance will not be gained and the alternative incorrect understanding, which also functions in its own way - has the consequence of (depending on the translation) frustration and even harm. If Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* is misinterpreted as a thoroughgoing nihilism in regard to conventional phenomena, the result is suffering, caused by invalidation of the conventional world, which is the everyday world. As previously stated, Nāgārjuna revealed that conventions were relative and dependent - not essential or independent. This is his understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) but, importantly, non-essential is not identical to meaningless or non-existent, a distinction his opponent does not make.

⁷ Inada K. K., Nāgārjuna: A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakārikā with an Introductory Essay, Hokuseido, Tokyo, 1970 found in Magliola R. R., Derrida on the Mend, p. 114

2.2.2 Interpretations of the term '*śūnyatā*' and the implications thereof

The interpretation of *śūnyatā* is from this viewpoint of great significance. This is true of modern Buddhist scholars as well as for Nāgārjuna's contemporaries.⁸ Magliola, in *Derrida on the Mend*, following Mervyn Sprung, offers 'devoidness' as the translation of *śūnyatā*. 'Devoidness', he notes, evokes negation, the Latin prefix *de* meaning 'completely', which gives the meaning 'devoid' or 'completely void'. 'Devoidness' also evokes constitution as the Latin prefix *de* means 'away from', so we have 'devoid', or 'away from voidness'.⁹ In this way voidness itself is emptied, which we will discover is a crucial twist in the Mādhyamikan tale. Garfield, Streng and most recent scholars in the field choose the translation 'empty' with the adjunctive meaning that there is no self-existent phenomena or essential entity or reality. Magliola and Sprung's translation is useful in terms of Nāgārjuna's dialectic as it bounces between the two truths revealing that both are conventional, and dependent and relative, that is co-dependently arisen or *pratītyasamutpāda*. Garfield and Streng's choice of the term 'emptiness' emphasizes the lack of inherent essence of phenomena and therefore the co-dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) of phenomena including *śūnyatā* itself. Both translations are useful, Magliola and Sprung's use of 'devoid' has the nuance of the two truths, whereas Garfield and Streng's term 'emptiness' emphasizes the non-essential, non-reified nature of both truths.

⁸ The historical transmission of the concept of *śūnyatā* has undergone various translations, for a review of contemporary reworkings of the concept, refer to Glass N. R., *Working Emptiness: Toward a Third Reading of emptiness in Buddhism and Postmodern Thought*. Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1995

⁹ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 89 quoting Sprung M. (ed.), *The Question of Being*, pp. 132, 135.

Other scholars, contemporary as well as Nāgārjuna's opponents, use terms and translations that are fundamentally inadequate and deceptive. For instance, Fernando Tola and Carmen Dragonetti translate *śūnyatā* as 'voidness' with all the consequences of the denial of empirical reality that Sprung and Magliola note are implicated by the term. By way of example Tola and Dragonetti note:

His [Nāgārjuna's] abolishing analysis of the empirical reality does not limit itself to the common beings and things of the world; it attacks also, with the same severity, the most valuable and respectable beliefs and doctrines of the Buddhist Church, to which he and his school belong. With the same implacable logic and in the same way in which Nāgārjuna denies movement, birth and destruction etc. he denies also Buddha's person, his teachings, the action that enchains to the reincarnations' cycle, the reincarnations themselves and liberation (*mokṣa*).¹⁰

Having interpreted Nāgārjuna as denying the world and the Buddhist way of being in the world, they conclude their article 'Nāgārjuna's Conception of "Voidness"' with this nihilistic message:

Without raising any principle to the rank of an *a priori* postulate, the *Mādhyamika* masters refute the rival thesis utilizing only the principles upon which these rival theses are built, putting them in contradiction with themselves, in order to leave, as a last result, the total and absolute voidness.¹¹

This should indicate that the translation of *śūnyatā* is of grave consequence to the understanding of the two truths. I find that this understanding of Nāgārjuna does not do justice to the complex message expressed in the *MMK* and implies that Nāgārjuna asserts a dualism, an absolutism, or a nihilism, all of which Nāgārjuna

10 Tola F. and Dragonetti C., 'Nāgārjuna's Conception of "Voidness" (*Śūnyatā*)', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1981), p. 279

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280

refuted. I therefore prefer the position of scholars such as Garfield, Streng, Magliola, Mason et al.

Harold Coward in his Derrida and Indian Philosophy translates *śūnyatā* as 'silence'.¹² This translation creates the impression that ultimate truth exists at a level in which language and convention do not. This is a dualistic understanding more in keeping with Sāṃkhya and other Hindu schools - a stance which Nāgārjuna, the non-dualist, is at pains to avoid.

Paul Sagal, in his article 'Nāgārjuna's Paradox',¹³ translates *śūnyatā* as 'absurd', rather than 'devoid' or 'empty'. Sagal suggests that Nāgārjuna's paradox lies in his claim that *all views are absurd*. The paradox being that the view that *all views are absurd* should itself be absurd by its own lights. This is a misunderstanding of Nāgārjuna's understanding of *śūnyatā*, the same misunderstanding that Nāgārjuna addresses at this point in his treatise. Nāgārjuna argues that this is a substantialization of emptiness, a nihilistic understanding of conventions as non-existent.

If *śūnyatā* is interpreted as absurd, silence or non-existence, it may result in interesting intellectual games, such as the one that Sagal pursues, but in doing so a nihilistic understanding inevitably results, and the understanding of *śūnyatā* as the non-essential co-dependent arising of non-substantial *asat* phenomena is missed. Nāgārjuna makes it understood that if one treats emptiness as non-existence, all the absurd conclusions that the opponent enumerates will indeed follow.

¹²Coward H., Derrida and Indian Philosophy, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, p. 140

¹³Sagal P. T., 'Nāgārjuna's Paradox', American Philosophical Quarterly 29 (1992), pp. 79-85

The opponent, as a substantialist, makes a fundamental mistake in failing to see that dependent co-origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is emptiness (that is non-essential) and sees instead the attribution of emptiness as the denial of causality, rather than the assertion of *pratītyasamutpāda* (co-dependent arising). Nāgārjuna argues that while the opponent claims to preserve the reality of the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths and dependently arisen phenomena - in other words the core tenets of Buddhism - against Nāgārjuna's supposed nihilism, he shows that, ironically, the tenets must be non-existent according to the opponent's view. He argues:

MMK XXIV: 16. If you perceive the existence of all things
 In terms of their essence,
 Then this perception of all things
 Will be without the perception of causes and conditions.

Magliola notes that there are two related assertions contained in this very critical verse: First, at the conventional level, the opponent, in virtue of thinking that to exist is to exist inherently, will be unable to account for *pratītyasamutpāda* (co-dependent arising) and hence for anything that must be dependently arisen. Nāgārjuna is explicit that this includes such things as suffering, its causes, nirvāṇa, the path thereto, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the Buddha, as well as more mundane phenomena. Nāgārjuna's argument when fully unfolded affirms that 'happenings' or phenomena really occur but, critically, these happenings everywhere show forth *dependence* - not essential, self-identical, reified, entitative causality. This, Nāgārjuna would insist, is the most Buddha says. Buddha does not affirm a theory of entitative causality, not even for second order *dharmas* entities,

(as discussed in the previous section on Nāgārjuna's relation to the *abhidharma*) but dependent co-arising, *pratītyasamutpāda*.¹⁴

But secondly, Magliola notes, and more subtly, since the opponent is seeing actual existence as a discrete entity with an essence, it would follow that for the opponent the reality of emptiness would entail that emptiness itself is an inherently existing entity. To see *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in this way is to see it as radically different from conventional, phenomenal reality. It is, in fact, to see the conventional reality and phenomena as illusory, and emptiness as the reality standing behind it. If Nāgārjuna were to adopt this view of emptiness, he would have to deny the reality of the entire phenomenal, conventional world. This would also be to ascribe a special, non-conventional non-dependent hyper-reality to emptiness itself. Ordinary things would be viewed as non-existent, and *śūnyatā* (emptiness) as substantially existent.¹⁵

Central to Nāgārjuna's dialectic is the view that these go together - nihilism about one kind of entity is typically paired with reification of another. Nāgārjuna was therefore aware that the nihilification of conventional reality leads to a reification of ultimate truth termed *śūnyatā* or *nirvāṇa*.

2.2.3 *Absolutism*

Nāgārjuna was aware that absolutism would be the next critique offered by his opponent. He went to great lengths to establish that this understanding, like the

¹⁴ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 114

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115

nihilistic interpretation, was a misperception. Nayak clarifies the situation when he writes:

Mādhyaṃika does make a distinction between the highest truth (*paramārthasatya*) and conventional truth (*lokasaṃvṛtisatya*) and lays utmost emphasis on the knowledge of their difference. 'Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths,' says Nāgārjuna 'cannot understand the deep significance of the teachings of Buddha.' ('Examination of Four Noble Truths', Chapter 24, verse 9) But this, it should be borne in mind, is not a distinction between a transcendental Reality and the world. *Paramārtha* may mean the highest or the ultimate truth, the highest good, the final goal to be realized or whatever else one may want to speak of it, but to describe it as an Absolute will be subscribing to an ontology of the absolutistic type which would never be acceptable to Nāgārjuna. It will be committing a mistake against which Nāgārjuna has given a thoroughgoing critique throughout his work. The ultimate truth is that every concept is *śūnyā* in the sense of being essenceless, and when one is firmly entrenched in this truth he is said to have realized the highest truth (*paramārthasatya*) as distinguished from the conventional truth (*lokasaṃvṛti-satya*), and that is all. That is why it is said to be *tathāta*, that is, thusness or suchness. If anything beyond *śūnyatā* is adhered to it will itself amount to an incurable "ism" which Buddha had taken much pain to overthrow.¹⁶

Frederick J. Streng agrees that the relationship between *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha* in Mādhyaṃika thought has often been conceived as an epistemological dualism: *Samvṛti* is regarded as phenomenal illusion, and *paramārtha* is an undivided mystical union with the One eternal absolute. For instance, he notes, Edward Conze, in the section on Mādhyaṃika in Buddhist Thought in India, speaks of a substratum at the base of all phenomenal reality which is the Mādhyaṃika 'vision of the One.'¹⁷ Streng's critique can also be levelled at Harold Coward, who

¹⁶ Nayak G. C., 'The Mādhyaṃika attack on essentialism: A critical appraisal', Philosophy East and West, 29 (1979), p. 486

¹⁷ Streng F. J., 'The Significance of Pratītya samutpāda for understanding the relationship between Saṃvṛti and Paramārthasatya in Nāgārjuna' in Sprung M. (ed.), The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, 1973, p. 27

translates Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* as 'silence'. This results in his suggesting an absolute which he calls 'the real'. In his chapter 'Derrida and Nāgārjuna' Coward states:

For Buddhism, and Nāgārjuna in particular, language (including scripture) expresses merely imaginary constructions (*vikalpa*) that play over the surface of *the real* [my italics] without giving us access to it.¹⁸

Once *śūnyatā* or emptiness is given value as an essential reified truth, the problem of absolutism, which precipitates a dualistic world view, necessarily arises. *Śūnyatā* is misunderstood if it is taken as a metaphysical reality, a place that exists outside experience, a truth that is eternal, or as in any way separable from conventional existence. The understanding of conventional reality as functioning by way of entitative causality provokes a dualism. The result is a swing from one side to the other, alternatively to reify the one, at the expense of the other, with the possibility of swinging back again. It was this that Nāgārjuna revealed as unsatisfactory. His answer to entitative causality is the co-dependent arising of all phenomena.

2.3 TAYLOR AND SUBSTANTIALIZATION

Taylor's work, is, in my opinion, an example of such pendulistic swingings. The substantialization of relativity, as found in his *divine* milieu, negates the possibility of ethical or moral judgement as the ability to choose is denied – any choice reveals a valuation of one thing at the expense of its repressed opposite. By advocating a radical christology, by substantializing relativity as well as the opposite terms – wandering, erring, plurality, difference, absence, sickness,

¹⁸ Coward H., *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, p. 135

disease – to those that have been so prevalent in the West – being, wholeness, oneness, presence, health, ease – Taylor finds it impossible, in my opinion, to suggest any stance other than nihilism, even if he attempts to represent his nihilistic divine milieu as a place of joyful spending and bacchanalian revelling. We find him attempting to move away from this nihilistic stance in nOts – his solution is, true to Nāgārjuna's understanding, a swing of the pendulum – an Other or a Not is proposed. The Not contains, Taylor tells us, an altarity more radical than any binary difference or dialectical other. The Not, in other words, is an escapee from the labyrinth of relative terms. It would be wrong to misrepresent Taylor at this point – this Other is not the same mystical unity, presence or God that we are used to in the West. Sadly this Other does not have the same salvic qualities of the usual Western solution to dualism – rather dualism itself is substantialized. The threshold between differences becomes an uncrossable barrier between self and altarity. Taylor has apparently dissolved the self in Erring, as his second chapter 'Disappearance of the Self' attests to – yet this self is reconstituted in nOts and stands on the Cartesian threshold. Taylor reveals himself to be clinging to some notion of self, essence or substance, and this becomes clear in his chapter on the Body where he writes such things as:

Since self-tolerance must be learned, the autoimmune response is *antecedent* to both self-unity and self-identity. If our initial relation to ourselves is autoimmunity, our body is not originally an integrated whole governed by the principle of inner teleology but is inherently torn, rent, sundered, and fragmented. The body is *always* betraying itself. Otherness is not only a threat from without but is a danger lurking within. Though it seems impossible, *the body is simultaneously itself and other than itself*.¹⁹

¹⁹ Taylor M. C., nOts, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 252-253

Taylor reveals an inability to dissolve both self and other and reifies both. In other words, the self, while not looking like it did a century ago, is still haunting Taylor. The Other looms large, dualism is reified. Taylor's neither/nor is in fact a substantialized dualism rather than an alternative to the hierarchized dyadic pairs so prevalent in Western thought. This situation leads, as Nāgārjuna was aware, to suffering. Taylor's words – torn, rent, sundered, fragmented, threat, danger, lurking, betrayal – found throughout nOts, are words of a suffering self.

2.4 NĀGĀRJUNA'S ALTERNATIVE

2.4.1 *Pratītyasamutpāda*

The concept of co-dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is the central, fundamental and crucial assertion²⁰ that Nāgārjuna proposes in his MMK. Nāgārjuna establishes a relation between emptiness, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and verbal convention as implying each other, and asserts that understanding *pratītyasamutpāda* as emptiness, and emptiness as verbal convention, is itself the 'middle way' toward which his entire philosophical system is aimed.²¹ This is of extreme importance as this is the basis for understanding the emptiness of emptiness itself – for if one affirms an everywhere-manifested dependency and if one identifies dependency and causality, then one cannot also affirm entitateness.

²⁰ The adjectives, 'central' and 'fundamental', are of course misleading if understood to reify *pratītyasamutpāda*.

²¹ Garfield J. L., (trans.), The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, pp. 304-305

Nāgārjuna has already shown in MMK I all the way to MMK XXI the absurdity of an entitative causality whereby entitateness takes effect by transfer or positive connection. He also reverses the arguments discussed in the previous chapter, and states that if one affirms self-origination, or entities of any kind, one cannot also affirm dependency or change. Nāgārjuna shows in his earlier chapters that entitateness absolutely precludes dependency. He reiterates the arguments he has so carefully constructed in his earlier chapters at this point:

MMK XXIV: 16 If you perceive the existence of all things
 In terms of their essence,
 Then this perception of all things
 Will be without the perception of causes and conditions.

MMK XXIV: 17 Effects and causes
 And agent and action
 And conditions and arising and ceasing
 And effects will be rendered impossible.

Nāgārjuna has already stated in his prologue and carefully argued in his early chapters (MMK I – XXI) that there is no essential ground but only conventional co-dependent arising. The relation of conventional truth, ultimate truth and their common make up, that is, *pratītyasamutpāda*, allows a critical insight into the exact nature of concepts as they really are: essenceless, emptiness understood as the co-dependent origination of all things, *pratītyasamutpāda*, which Nāgārjuna states is the 'middle-path':

MMK XXIV: 18 Whatever is dependently co-arisen
 That is explained to be emptiness.
 That, being a dependent designation,
 Is itself the middle way.

The basic perspective of the 'middle way' is *pratītyasamutpāda*. It asserts the view that all existing things are empty of a self-established nature (*svabhāva*) and this is a prerequisite for any existing thing to come into being. This perspective, Streng notes, does not deny the arising of mundane existence; it simply claims that this 'coming into existence' cannot be accounted for by self-substantiated factors, causes, conditions, times, ignorance, desire – though these 'things' are experienced as essential and self-substantiating, in the same way that mirages and fairy castles are experienced.²²

The fundamental state of all things (*bhāva*) is that they are dependently co-originated (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and therefore empty of their own essential character. This is the nature of conventional truth and the realization of this is ultimate truth.

Nāgārjuna's key argument is that entitative causality contradicts *pratītyasamutpāda*. *Pratītyasamutpāda* (co-dependent arising or origination) is the alternative to the entitative causality to which the opponent clings. Without *śūnyatā* understood in terms of *pratītyasamutpāda* there can be no craving, no cessation of craving, no disciplined path and no Three Jewels. One must conclude, Magliola states, that all happenings or phenomena, being utterly dependent, must be empty, and empty of entitative transfer or continuance. Nāgārjuna's adversary, in displaying his understanding of dependent co-arising, of 'The Four noble Truths' and the 'Three Jewels, has vitiated rather than proven entitative existence.²³ In other words, Nāgārjuna turns his opponent's argument against

²² Streng F. J., 'The Significance of *Pratītyasamutpāda*' in Sprung M. (ed.), *The Problem of Two Truths*, p. 28

²³ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 115

itself. The opponent, whose charge against Nāgārjuna is that he rejects the Four Noble Truths, is in turn revealed to do exactly what he accuses Nāgārjuna of doing:

MMK XXIV: 20 If all this were nonempty, as in your view,
 There would be no arising and ceasing.
 Then the Four Noble Truths
 Would become nonexistent.

Nāgārjuna explicitly equates *śūnyatā* and conventional truths in the form of *pratītyasamutpāda*, not in order to argue that dependent things do not really exist and therefore are empty, but to argue that emptiness expresses the dependent nature of all things. Thus, everything exists insofar as it is dependent. Nāgārjunā does this because a coherent understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent co-arising) is the only possibility that allows for phenomena as well as for change:

MMK XXIV: 36 If dependent arising is denied,
 Emptiness itself is rejected.
 This would contradict
 All of the worldly conventions.

Existence, Nāgārjunā insists, presupposes relations, and relations resist a substantialist account as his earlier sections of the MMK revealed. There is no absolute, non-relational, independent 'presence' that is unconditioned.

The only completely general characteristic and determining feature of existing things, of that about which we can be said to know anything, is relationality – *pratītyasamutpāda*. As Michael G. Barnhart states:

Nagarjuna argued forcefully, especially in his *Mūlamahyamaśāstra* (MMK), that all reality was *śūnyā* or empty. No thing, including nothing

itself, had *svabbāva* or substantial and individual being, self-identity, self-being, or self-existence. Rather, emptiness or *śūnyatā* was dependence; that all things were empty meant that all things were mutually (and thoroughly) dependent – the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*. Thus, no faith in a transcendent reality or principle could be sustained, nor could human reason pretend to independence from the kind of constraints that pragmatists recognize. . . . within the appropriate context, certain claims are more appropriate than others, and some claims are true; its just that *absolute* truth or objectivity outside such contexts is meaningless.²⁴

In other words, there is no principled way to draw a boundary around our ontology, to circumscribe its extent or the referential import of our conceptual schemes. Nevertheless Streng explains that it appears clear from MMK XXIV and elsewhere in the treatise that the world-ensconced truth refers to the practical understanding which is required to live. There is a practical value in regarding tables and chairs as 'things' (which do not disintegrate because from an ultimate viewpoint they are considered to be empty of self-existence). It also means affirming general and broad distinctions between good and bad, real and illusory, and full and empty as practical distinctions. To say 'God is the same as dirt' is false in the context of practical truth.²⁵ In the context of ultimate truth, however, these things are empty, and of course, emptiness too is empty, that is, reliant on the context of practical truth.

Sociologist W.I. Thomas's notion of the 'definition of the situation' is useful in this regard. He claimed that if people 'define the situation as real, it is real in its consequences'.²⁶ This works well as a definition of the context of practical truth.

²⁴ Barnhart M. G., 'Śūnyatā, Textualism and Incommensurability', *Philosophy East & West*, 44 (1994) pp. 649-650

²⁵ Streng F. J., *Emptiness*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1967, p. 94-5

²⁶ Thomas W. I., *The Child in America*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1928, quoted in Hagedorn R. (ed.), *Sociology*, Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Iowa, 1983, p. 22

There is no necessary grounding in an ultimate truth to function at a pragmatic level. But, critically, Nāgārjuna would argue that to function at a pragmatic level, co-dependent arising must be understood, because to have the substantialized view that 'this' or 'that' has essential nature at an ultimate level would result in misjudgment, ignorance and suffering, which is not a pragmatic way of being. Streng further asserts that each of the two kinds of truth are valid when correctly applied; and wisdom is insight into the nature of things (happenings) whereby the proper means for knowing the truth is used in a given situation.²⁷

Nāgārjuna is, then, asserting a continuum, and a fluid movement on that continuum from conventional to ultimate understanding and a fluid movement back again. This would be quite in keeping with the Buddha's teaching of skill in means. In fact Nāgārjuna writes in 'Examination of Self and Entities', in a chapter where we would expect an ethic to be expressed, not only that the self is dissolved in a set of co-dependent relations, as in MMK XVIII: 4, but also that all possibilities on the continuum from substantial self to selflessness have been taught as in MMK XVIII: 6:

MMK XVIII: 4 When views of 'I' and 'mine' are extinguished,
Whether with respect to the internal or external,
The appropriator ceases.
This having ceased, birth ceases.

MMK XVIII: 6 That there is a self has been taught,
And the doctrine of no-self,
By the buddhas, as well as the
Doctrine of neither self nor nonself.

²⁷ Streng P. J., *Emptiness*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1967, p. 94-5

As Garfield explains, nihilists, such as the contemporary eliminative materialists or classical Indian Carvakas (briefly reviewed in the previous chapter) who denied the existence of the self, would be approached with the teaching of the conventional reality of the self. To those who reified the self, the doctrine of no-self would be taught.²⁸ Such was Buddha's way of teaching that which would shift the perception. But there is a deeper view – that of neither self nor non-self, that is, emptiness. But even this should not be clung to. He states, in a move that branches off significantly from Taylor's textuality as expressed in *Erring*, a move which would be suggestive of a mystical experience beyond language, and therefore be flashing warning lights at deconstructive thinkers:

MMK XVIII: 7 What language expresses is nonexistent.
 The sphere of thought is nonexistent.
 Unrisen and unceased, like nirvana
 Is the nature of things.

What can be noted is that this beyond language is not a beyond of the conventional world, not a silence or an end of language, but rather is the nature of things as co-dependently arisen. It is this that allows Nāgārjuna to make this particular move: The non-existence of language is non-existent – not as a leap, Kierkegaardian or mystical, to an Other, but as a return to that language with the fluid viewpoint gained through meditation. The following paragraph bears this out, rather than moving off into the sunset of a different horizon, Nāgārjuna states:

MMK XVIII: 8 Everything is real and is not real,
 Both real and not real,
 Neither real nor not real.
 This is Lord Buddha's teaching.

²⁸ Garfield J. L., (trans.), *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 249

This elegant movement from one end of the continuum to the other contrasts with Taylor's attempt to regain an ethic in *nOts*. Taylor moves from one side of the continuum to the other and from this threshold states that an Other approaches from beyond the continuum. This allows Taylor to give value to decisions because justice is a gift of grace from this unreachable disappearing Other. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, moves from one side of the continuum and then turns around and moves back again. He has no reason to suggest an Other. Taylor writes:

'This is my body

broken'

Nothing ever balances...*nothing ever balances*. Betrayal is unavoidable, cure impossible. Disease is neither a mode of being nor of nonbeing but a way of being not without not being. The dilemma, the abiding dilemma to which we are forever destined, is to live not.²⁹

Taylor's neither-nor leaves him a wounded fisher king. His neither-nor binds him to his incurability without escape. The basic Cartesian belief to which he clings is, that to suggest anything beyond language, instates a signified beyond the net of signifiers. The closest he can come is to suggest the opposite of presence – altarity – but this cannot be embraced as to do so would be to revert to the Western philosophical bias that deconstruction has hounded from (among others) Plato to Descartes, from Descartes to Hegel to Husserl to Heidegger. Taylor stands mournfully on the threshold of the labyrinth contemplating the possibility of leaping, a Kierkegaardian leap out of the labyrinth, but to leap would be to leave his deconstructive premises behind, and so he remains living not. He writes, and I choose at random:

²⁹ Taylor M. C., *nOts*, p 255

If absence cannot be negated to create presence, and emptiness sublated to generate fullness, then desertion is absolute. In this desolate (no)place, the not can be neither overcome nor undone. The double bind of the inescapable not turns sand to ash.³⁰

Nāgārjuna was aware that a misunderstanding of emptiness and relativity reinforced suffering rather than dissolved it. He strongly appealed for the dissolution of this view:

MMK XIII: 8 The victorious ones have said
That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.
For whomever emptiness is a view,
That one will accomplish nothing.

2.4.2 *Pratītyasamutpāda* and the emptiness of *śūnyatā*

Against the suggestion that *śūnyatā* is an absolute, Nāgārjuna offers the insight that the ultimate nature of things is, like *saṃsāra* or conventional truth, empty or co-dependently arisen – *pratītyasamutpāda*. That is, *śūnyatā* itself has no-self. It too, has no essential reality. It is dependent on conventional reality. This insight can only be gained through reasoning and hence through language and thought. And the truth that is to be grasped can only be indicated through language and thought, which are conventions, and which can only be interpreted literally at the conventional level. Garfield emphasizes that it is important to see here that Nāgārjuna is not disparaging the conventional in contrast to the ultimate, but is arguing that understanding the ultimate nature of things is completely dependent upon understanding conventional truth. This is, he states, true in several senses: First, understanding the ultimate nature of things is understanding that their

³⁰ Ibid., p. 154

conventional nature is *merely conventional*. In Derrida's terms, there is no signified, only signifiers. Second, to explain emptiness, one must use words and concepts and explain interdependence, impermanence and so forth. And all of these are conventional phenomena. In the end, the understanding of ultimate truth is in an important sense the understanding of the nature of the conventional, and on the path where the cultivation of such understanding requires the use of conventions, conventional truth must be affirmed and understood.³¹

Nāgārjuna's chapter on 'Self and Entities', is clear in expressing this skill in means. In keeping with this understanding, we can note that once we understand the direct message, that a distinction is needed between conventionally understood entitative 'things' and 'selves' and the relations between them, and the understanding that ultimately these entitative 'things' and 'selves' and the relations between them are empty, *anātman*, essenceless and co-dependently arisen, we discover that there is a twist because in the final instant there is no difference between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. We are told in chapter XXV, 'Examination of Nirvāṇa', that:

MMK XXV: 19 There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence and nirvāṇa.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvana and cyclic existence.

MMK XXV: 20 Whatever is the limit of nirvāṇa.
That is the limit of cyclic existence.
There is not even the slightest difference between them,
Or even the subtlest thing.

³¹ Garfield J. L., (trans.), The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, pp. 298-299

Streng sums up the relation between the two truths brilliantly when he states:

If *pratītyasamutpāda* is basic to both *samvṛiti* and *paramārtha* then participation in *samvṛiti* is part of what it means to know *paramārtha*. That is to say, the use of *samvṛiti* is not just a necessary evil, it is a component part of realizing emptiness. The practical, everyday world as such is not to be rejected – only the ignorance, the attachment to *svabhāva*, should cease. Such attachment to *svabhāva* is not a part of the conditioned empty relations that form existence; and one need not – or cannot – reject the dependent co-origination of empty forms when one sees the truth of dependent co-origination. Thus, Nāgārjuna would never suggest that since all things are empty *any* belief or *any* view is equally conducive to knowing the way things are or, on the contrary, to hiding the truth. The *way* a person participates in *vyavahāra* is important for realizing the truth of *pratītyasamutpāda*. To state this another way, and more strongly, we would say that truth claims made through conditioned concepts and experiences have power to expose one to the highest truth insofar as one avoids imposing a self-existent quality on any concept or experience (such as using the notion of 'emptiness' as a dogma).³²

In order to convey the truth in conditioned mental forms, claims Nāgārjuna, one must be very sensitive to the tendency in verbal designation to superimpose a self-existing quality on that aspect of reality that one has circumscribed with a term. As Streng notes, it is this superimposition of self-existing reality, or substantialization, which is the source for the misconceptions about one's self and the phenomenal world. These misconceptions are as dangerous as a snake that has been incorrectly handled. In fact these misperceptions are the cause of cravings which result in suffering. It is the ending of this suffering which is the fundamental Buddhist enterprise. The insight into emptiness brings *dṛṣṭi* or viewpoints to a halt; but at the same time emptiness is the reality in which concepts (*prajñāpiti*), imagination (*samkalpa*) and logical analysis (*prasanga*) are formed, and this effort

³² Streng F. J., 'The Significance of Pratītya samutpāda' in Sprung M. (ed.), *The Problem of Two Truths*, p. 34

can lead either to cessation or further production of suffering. It is this ethical and pragmatic end which is Nāgārjuna's central aim.

2.4.3 *The realization of śūnyatā*

David Loy argues that dualities ineluctably inscribed in language and fundamental categories of thought are not believed by Nāgārjuna to be inescapable; the deconstruction of these dualities points finally to an experience beyond language or, more precisely, to a non-dual way of experiencing language and thought.³³

I am convinced that Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the relation to the two truths is best described in Loy's more precise revision. The deconstruction of these dualities points not to an experience beyond language, as this suggests that there is such a realm, but rather to a non-dual way of experiencing language and thought.

Magliola expresses this well when he argues that true Nāgārjunism is differential, not purely rational nor centrically mystical. This rather long quotation from him is worth inserting:

Indeed if Nāgārjuna were simply a rationalist, then his demonstration that ontological causality, that entitativism (and so on) are illogical, would simply establish 'theories of presence' are *false*, and there would be no justification for their reinstatement. In their stead, *śūnyatā*, demonstrated as logically true, would be the way of both truth and right behaviour. If Nāgārjuna were simply a centric mystic, his relentless logic would shatter 'theories of presence,' but just to show that all logic subverts itself – so as

³³ Loy D., 'The Clôture of Deconstruction: A Mahāyāna Critique of Derrida', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1987), p. 59

to facilitate the leap to the non-rational center. In this case, any return to the logocentric would indeed be just for the sake of convenience. The reader must recall, however, that the Nāgārjunist version of the Buddhist 'two truths' – as we established it – affirms the valid functioning and the integrity of the logocentric realm and the differential. Thus Mervyn Sprung's insistence, you will recall, that the Nāgārjunist wise man 'takes things in their truth. We may describe his way of taking things as "as if," but that is for our purposes, not his; the everyday for the yogi could not be "as if" because there is nothing outside of the middle way for it to be as. ...' (see Mervyn Sprung, *The Question of Being* p.127). Without retreat into centrism, the 'two truths' are somehow a wayward way: 'the limits of *nirvāṇa* are the limits of *samsāra*,' and '*saṃvṛti* is *paramārtha*.' But Nāgārjuna actually tells us precious little about *how* the wayward way avoids monism and nothing at all about *how* the logocentric can maintain *as* rather than *as if* status if logocentrism is by nature self-contradictory. What Nāgārjuna does give us, you will recall – and it is a precious communication – is the assurance that the realization of the two truths is not a *reasoning* but a special sort of *prajñā* knowing. That it is a very special sort of *prajñā* knowing when compared to the various cognitions typically associated with mysticism, becomes obvious on two counts. For one, Nāgārjuna proceeds to enlightenment by way of *prasaṅgika*, which is precisely the skilled use of logic. That is, through Nāgārjunist 'negative dialectic' logocentrism is deconstructed and eventually *śūnyatā* appears beneath an erased alternative (and the alternative is usually a fourth lemma). The frequenting of *tathātā*, then, is somehow laced with very methodical logic (Nāgārjuna's purpose, unlike that of several Zen exercises is never to 'snap one out of logic'). On the second count, though, it is obvious that Nāgārjunist *prajñā* knowing is special because as we said above it is not pure reasoning. The Nāgārjunist literature describes the *prajñā* knowing as mystical and insists that asceticism and sustained good conduct are necessary for its attainment. We can already conclude then that Nāgārjuna's knowing, his mystical realization, is neither logical nor non-logical but mysteriously off-logical.³⁴

Magliola argues here that Nāgārjuna does not leap into a reality beyond language. His mysterious off-logical is well described by Loy as a non-dual way of

³⁴ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 151

experiencing language and thought. This non-dual way neither clings to language nor to a languageless experience.

The realization of *śūnyatā* results, Streng argues, in the cessation of all essentialist thought-constructions. *Śūnyatā* therefore consists in the cessation of the speculative mind and the prolific linguistic habits thereof, and is the experience of the end of essentialist impulses. It is not, however, the end of the experience of conventional truth or empirical reality. The key for at least a rational (and thus, 'mere') cognition of Buddhism here is the notion, as Streng puts it, that "'becoming" and knowledge are coextensive.³⁵ For example, in proportion to the lessening of objectifying activity, 'perception' disappears because the Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object disappears. The relation between yogic practice and the realization of *śūnyatā* suggested by Streng is, as I have previously noted, reinforced by Magliola, Betty, Mason and Sprung who argue along the same lines. I requote Sprung who writes:

It must be understood at once that this is not the philosophy of the '*als ob*', of the '*as if*'. The yogi does not orient to things '*as if*' they neither were nor were not. He orients, understanding that it is the nature of things neither to be nor not to be. He takes things in their truth. We may describe his way of taking things '*as if*', but that is for our purposes, not his; the everyday for the yogi could not be '*as if*', because there is nothing outside the middle way for it to be as, for it, that is, to be compared with.³⁶

Streng argues in similar fashion:

The English word 'realize' captures the two elements in the sense that man can be said to 'realize' certain possibilities. He both 'knows' and

³⁵ Streng F. J., *Emptiness*, p. 38

³⁶ Sprung M. (ed.), *The Question of Being*, p. 127

'becomes' the possibilities. In Buddhism, as in other yogic forms of 'realization,' the character of knowledge and the character of 'becoming' change along the scale from illusion to ultimate knowledge. (*prajñā* = wisdom).³⁷

Pratītyasamutpāda is pragmatic in its soteriological application, ontology and epistemology merge, as 'to know' is 'to become'. What is known as 'intrinsic relatedness' in the personal relationship between living beings is known as 'compassion'.³⁸ Not only is Nāgārjuna's assertion of the two truths pragmatic but it is, therefore, the way things are. He states in chapter XXII, 'Examination of the Tathāgata':

MMK XXII: 16

Whatever is the essence of the Tathāgata,
That is the essence of the world.
The Tathāgata has no essence.
The world is without essence.

Any attempt to distribute the above 'description' in terms of an 'enlightened' individual on the one hand, and knowing a 'this worldly existence' on the other, misses the point. True-realization, Magliola argues, for Nāgārjuna, is the yogic meditative art of dissolving the *Gestalt* of self-origination.³⁹ Additionally, Garfield states, the above quoted verse emphasizes that emptiness or conventional reality is the final nature of all things, from rocks to dogs to human beings to buddhas. This fact, Garfield argues, entails for Nāgārjuna the possibility of any sentient being – being fundamentally transformed – attaining enlightenment.⁴⁰ It is therefore the view of the emptiness of emptiness that allows him to assert the Buddhist 'Four

³⁷ Streng F. J., *Emptiness*, p. 38

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 151

⁴⁰ Streng F. J., 'The Significance of Pratītya samutpada' in Sprung M. (ed.), *The Problem of Two Truths*, p. 29

Noble Truths'. In other words, it breaks the Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object without denying the truth of conventional phenomena.

Streng reinforces once again that the two truths should not be understood as two different worlds, but co-dependently arisen:

While I heartily concur that Nāgārjuna's effort is best understood in terms of a religious concern for release from suffering, I would suggest that if the release is interpreted as a movement from conditioned existence (*samskṛta*) to a qualitatively different unconditioned reality (*asamskṛta*) it is done with a failure to take seriously Nāgārjuna's perspective that 'dependent-co-origination' is the meaning of 'emptiness'. Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) refers to two-dimensions of the Buddhist concern: (1) it is the situation in which conditioned existence arises and dissipates, and thus it applies to practical everyday experience; and (2) it is the situation of freedom from suffering, the highest awareness.⁴¹

Realization, therefore, is the living out of the understanding of the co-dependence of all things including self, in the arena of all empty things by the empty activity of the empty self. The highest truth does not, Streng states, refer to an unconditioned reality, but to effecting the truth *within the capacities already in life* – namely empty relationships [my italics]. This 'effecting the truth in life' is indicated by the loss of attachment to anything that would claim *svabhāva*; and logical inference and perception *can* be useful to effect such truth.⁴²

Once again the importance of meditative practice is what I stress as a close to this chapter. It is this practice that allows for the dissolution of substantialist views, for realization, for the coextension of 'knowing' and 'becoming', not the mere

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 34

rational explanation of co-dependent arising. It is such a process that rejects the 'as if' and becomes the way things are. Once this is so, enlightenment has been realized and the Buddhist practitioner lives a non-dual existence within the conventional everyday world.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In the dedicatory verse at the beginning of the treatise, Nāgārjuna bows down before the Buddha for having taught *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) which, according to him, is the same as *śūnyatā* (essencelessness) and *madhyamā pratīpat* (middle course). *Pratītyasamutpāda* is therefore the middle path between the two truths, the central and abiding message of the MMK.

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,
The best of teachers, who taught that
Whatever is dependently arisen is
Unceasing, unborn,
Unannihilated, not permanent,
Not coming, not going,
Without distinction, without identity,
And free from conceptual construction.

Nāgārjuna certainly can be said to have a view, and a message, yet the nature of this view is one where ontology cannot be placed, where there is no substantialization, no essence, and no hierarchy of values; yet its nature, as relation, allows for compassion, and for responsibility. The movement between ultimate and conventional truth allows for the practice of allowing the one truth to reflect the other and *vice versa*, which is the purpose of the practice of meditational Yoga, flickering between the two truths with the purpose of living both at the same

time – this is the way to be in the world. According to Nāgārjuna, it allows for ethical behaviour and an understanding of one's ethical motivations based on the realization of co-dependent arising.

This is in distinction to Taylor's divine milieu as explored in Erring, where ethical behaviour and value are denied as there is no way to legitimately elevate one signifier say 'good', over another, say 'bad'. Strangely, however, Taylor does assert wandering, propertylessness and erring without exploring the consequences of these as elevated signifiers. It is for this reason that Caputo⁴³ argues that he does not remain on the stylus of undecidability and falls to the atheological side of a/theology. These terms are binary opposites to the terms traditionally elevated by the Western theological tradition, for instance: purpose, property and truth. Taylor's divine milieu is by my analysis a nihilistic milieu where the proposed way of being in the world promotes the random and the meaningless.

As an alternative, Taylor offers us a threshold or boundary in nOts from which a Not approaches and allows for the possibility of justice. However, this creates a dualism that reinstates many of the problems critiqued in Erring. Taylor's pendulistic swingings reveal an inability to escape substantialist thought. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, had access to a highly refined process of yogic meditation which allowed him to sustain substancelessness to the point where he could assert non-dual *śūnyatā*, the emptiness of emptiness.

⁴³ Caputo J. D., 'Erring: A Postmodern A/theology', Man and World - An International Philosophical Review 21 (1988), p. 112

CHAPTER THREE

3. HEGEL, NIETZSCHE AND KIERKEGAARD – THEIR IMPACT
ON TAYLOR'S DECONSTRUCTION IN ERRING AND NOTS

While my opening chapters concentrated on Nāgārjuna's context and central doctrine, the final two chapters focus on Taylor. Taylor's philosophical and theological inheritance from Hegel, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to Derrida is the main theme of this and the following chapter. This theme – Taylor's legacy from specific thinkers – is related and threaded through an undergirding theme, which is the locating of Taylor in his wider Western context as embedded in a Cartesian framework.

Taylor's relationship with Hegel, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is a complex one. It is the aim of this chapter to unravel the implications of his shifting interpretation of Hegel, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Through this process I aim to reveal the ahistorical conflation of his a/theology with Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* as a deceptive and inadequate procedure. It is my conviction that the conditions of possibility available to Taylor are ones that are limited to the Western philosophical and theological tradition. His suggested alternatives to the dominant trends discovered in Western thought are moulded by this very same thought world. I will argue that Taylor's work reveals a hidden bias toward the structure of the Cartesian split between mind and extension (or beyond mind). The philosophical and theological tradition that Taylor is intent upon critiquing is the same tradition from

which his work arises. His a/theology is culturally determined and reveals inherent structures that do not arise in Nagarjuna's work.

3.1 TAYLOR AND THE CARTESIAN SPLIT

3.1.1. *Nietzsche's aphorisms as Taylor's 'middle path'*

Taylor's work deliberately resembles a cocktail of quotations, references and influences. His patchwork style is, one surmises, an attempt to reveal the intertextual nature of writing and thought, and illustrate his undermining of the authority of 'authorship'. This characteristic of his writing reveals that Taylor has read widely and that his thoughts cover a wide philosophical spectrum. Nevertheless, it is possible to pick out strands within his work that are more central to his concerns than others. Both of his works under review reveal an abiding concern with Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. And it is these thinkers that, I believe, are the significant in deciphering the nature of Taylor's work.

Taylor attempts in both Erring and nOts, to solve the paradoxical nature of identity-in-difference first forwarded by Hegel. His various alternatives, once Hegel's solution of the resolution of identity-in-difference to unity in identity is rejected, result in a reinstatement of the dyadic relationship with one or other of the elements of the problem being substantialized. Whereas in Erring the tissue of texts, scripture as the Word or the labyrinth of language which he calls the divine milieu is reified, in nOts self, Other, text and God – now called the Not or wholly Other – are reinstated and substantialized. Taylor does not escape the dyadic framework, which Nāgārjuna's co-dependent arising as a continuum does, but merely attempts various alternatives on the theme.

Taylor's restlessness within the labyrinth of language is best illustrated by his uneasy relationship to Nietzsche. Taylor places Nietzsche's aphorisms in the central position between Kierkegaard and Hegel in Erring – a position from which he (Nietzsche) is displaced in nOts. In nOts, Taylor's leaning towards Kierkegaard becomes more pronounced. I suggest that Nietzsche is placed in this central position in Erring, because the ungrounded perspectivism that deconstruction seems to require in its attempt to deny metaphysics, is best served by Nietzschean Dionysian thought and images. As Taylor becomes increasingly aware of the problem of ethics and politics, which the deconstructive enterprise seems unable to address from a position of ungrounded relativity, he gravitates towards Kierkegaardian decisiveness rather than Nietzschean perspectivism.

Taylor states in Erring:

Although rarely presented in terms of the debate between Hegel and Kierkegaard, the deconstructive reading of Hegel as the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing both acknowledges the force of Kierkegaard's critique and recognizes the continuing power of Hegel's position. The most significant anticipation of this shifty middle ground *between* Hegel and Kierkegaard is to be found in the aphorisms of Nietzsche. While denying any possibility of absolute knowledge, Nietzsche preserves Hegel's revolutionary recognition of the vital importance of relationships that both join and separate everything that is and is not. The analysis of interpretation that grows out of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power prepares the way for Derrida's notion of *écriture*. When read through Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, Derridean writing points beyond the deconstruction of theology to deconstructive a/theology. In unraveling God, self, history, and book, we have already glimpsed writing, markings, mazing grace, and erring scripture.¹

¹ Taylor M. C., Erring: A Postmodern A/theology, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984., p. 99

Here Nietzsche takes a central position between Hegel and Kierkegaard. This middle position is reiterated in Taylor's article 'Masking Domino Effect', his response to the symposium held on Erring. He states:

For nearly two decades, I have been alternating between Kierkegaard and Hegel – oscillating from one to the other and back again. Eventually it became clear to me that this errant course repeated the rhythm of much twentieth-century theology. The longer I wavered, the less satisfactory became the opposing extremes. By rereading Kierkegaard and Hegel through Nietzsche and Derrida, the mean, the middle, the milieu itself became not only fascinating but actually compelling.²

What I find significant is that Nietzsche's central role (but not, as I discuss in the following chapter, Derrida's) falls away in Taylor's subsequent work nOts. While Nietzsche's thought runs sinuously throughout nOts, Taylor uses it illustratively rather than centrally in constructing his exposition of the Not that haunts Western thought. It is rather a concern with Hegel and Kierkegaard that is revealed in nOts, as the following quotation shows:

I have been pursued by a certain not for many years – perhaps from the beginning, even before the beginning. My earliest work on Kierkegaard and Hegel represents, inter alia, a sustained investigation of alternative dialectics of negation. The longer I have struggled with these two precursors whose grasp I cannot escape, the more I have become convinced that neither Kierkegaard's either/or nor Hegel's both/and is adequate to convey the ever-elusive not. My search for an unthinkable third that lies between Kierkegaard and Hegel has taken many unexpected twists and turns.³

There is no mention of Nietzsche at this point and it is clear that Nietzsche is no longer on the cusp. It is my intention, in this chapter, to follow Taylor's 'twists

² Taylor M. C., 'Masking Domino Effect', p. 553

³ Taylor M. C., nOts, p. 2

and turns', noting his use of Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, to whom he turns and from whom he turns away. I argue that his use of Nietzsche in *Erring* serves his purpose of suggesting a milieu that does not resolve the identity-in-difference through the unity of identity and difference in Identity. Nietzsche's aphorisms function in *Erring* to destabilize such a solution and is of great use to Taylor in formulating an ungrounded, non-metaphysical milieu. Nietzsche's perspectivism does not, however, offer the possibility of an ethic or morality and Taylor's attempt to suggest such an ethic or morality in *nOts* finds him following Derrida's hints and references to Justice and the Wholly Other. In his reading of Derrida through a Kierkegaardian sieve, Taylor moves away from complete Nietzschean relativity. Kierkegaard's resolution of the identity-in-difference problem differs from Nietzsche's. Nietzsche refuses to admit a metaphysical Other whereas Kierkegaard suggests that a metaphysical Other is intellectually unattainable. Nietzsche argues that God is dead, Kierkegaard argues that God is 'wholly Other'. Taylor's turn to Kierkegaard reveals that his divine milieu as a language-based intertextual net needs to be relativized by an Other. That Taylor offers such a solution, after the strong denial of a transcendental signified emphasized in *Erring*, is understandable once he is contextualized as working within his inherited philosophical and religious tradition.

3.1.2

The Western search for being or truth

The Western ontotheological tradition has attempted to circumscribe the infinite by trying to understand it. The following quotations from Plato and Aristotle illustrate the importance given to knowledge in the attainment of the truth or being.

But of the heaven which is above the heavens, what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe; for I must dare to speak the truth, when truth is my theme. There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul. The divine intelligence, being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more gazing upon truth, is replenished and made glad, until the revolution of the worlds brings her round again to the same place.⁴

Plato's belief in pure knowledge, and the possibility of beholding reality and truth, are revealed in this quotation.

Though disagreeing with Plato on some fundamental issues, Aristotle's belief in science and reasoning reveals that he shares with Plato a belief in truths that are approachable through the use of the intellect. He states:

Science is the coming to conclusions about universals and necessary truths. Now all science (for science involves a process of reasoning) and all facts scientifically proved depend ultimately upon certain first principles. When we see this we perceive that the first principles upon which all scientific results depend cannot be apprehended by science itself; nor we may add, by art or common sense. The body of scientific knowledge is the product of logical deduction from premises which are eternally valid; but art and practical wisdom deal with matters susceptible of change. Nor can we say that speculative wisdom is merely a knowledge of first principles. For there are some truths which the philosopher can learn only from demonstration. Now if the qualities by means of which we reach the truth and are never led to what is false in matters variable and invariable are science, prudence wisdom and the intelligence which apprehends the truth in reasoning; if, moreover, this mental endowment by means of which we are enabled to

⁴ Plato, *The Philosophy of Plato*, Edman L. (ed.), The Modern Library, New York, 1956, p. 288

grasp first principles cannot be either prudence, science, or wisdom, we are left to conclude that what grasps them is 'intelligence'.⁵

While Aristotle rejects various ways of attaining first principles or truths, that they can be attained goes unquestioned. We can understand from these statements that from its source Western philosophy has held knowledge and truth in the highest esteem. The attainment of truth or being as presence is, in other words, the purpose of knowledge. The attempt to incorporate the ineffable or the impossible unthought in thought through knowledge is characteristic of the Western ontotheological tradition. The *via negativa* or the attempt not to think and therefore to access the unthought is suggested by Taylor to reveal a reversal of, but not an alternative to, the ontological and epistemological principles that lie at the foundation of Western thought and culture.⁶ The *via negativa* attempts to mystically experience, through a process of non-thought, what the theologian or philosopher attempts to understand through a process of thought. While the mentally rigorous philosopher and the anti-intellectual mystic, have historically related most often as antagonists, their terms and goals are related and in fact, reinforce each other. The *via negativa* is rejected by Taylor as an alternative to the Western search for the truth or God, as both processes, philosophical and mystical, share a need to 'know' the unknowable.

The Western ontological/metaphysical belief that knowledge, either metaphysical or mystical, rendered ultimate reality knowable was first doubted by Descartes and finally undermined by the philosophy of Kant. It is therefore to these

⁵ Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, Thomson J. A. K. (trans.), Penguin Books (S. A.) Pty Ltd., Cape Town, 1956, p. 178

⁶ Taylor M. C., *ibid.*, pp. 2-3

philosophers that we need to look to discover the original impetus that results in deconstruction.

Descartes decided to doubt everything and concluded that there was one thing that could not be doubted – the fact of his own doubting. His famous statement *Cogito, ergo sum* testified that all else can be questioned but the irreducible fact of the thinker's self-awareness. The *cogito* revealed, however, an essential division in the world. Self-awareness was shown to be certain, but entirely distinct from the external world of material substance. Thus *res cogitans* – thinking substance, subjective experience, spirit, consciousness, that which one perceives as within mind – was understood as fundamentally different and separate from *res extensa* – extended substance, the objective world, matter, the physical body, in fact everything that one perceives as outside mind.⁷ Despite this dualistic split Descartes more or less assumed a mind-world correspondence.

Such assumptions were, however, questioned by philosophers such as David Hume who argued that all human knowledge be regarded as opinion. Kant stated that the reading of Hume's work had awakened him from his 'dogmatic slumber'; he now recognized that one could know only the phenomenal, and that any metaphysical conclusions concerning the nature of the universe that went beyond his experience were unfounded. In his attempt to reconcile the claims of science to certain and genuine knowledge of the world, he offered the solution that in the act of human cognition, the mind does not conform to things; rather, things conform to the mind. He suggested 'synthetic a priori' truths – truths that are necessary but not logically necessary. The mind is not in a purely passive relation

⁷ Tarnas R., *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Random House, London, 1991, pp. 277-8

to its objects, but contributes much to them. Much, but not all; there are also 'things-in-themselves' that are wholly independent of any mind, and contribute something to the objects that we know. 'Things-in-themselves' cannot be known in that they are beyond the reach of experience, whereas the knowledge of objects involves the possibility of experience. Kant demonstrated that human observation of the world is never neutral, never free of priorly imposed conceptual judgements.⁸ He wrote:

Our intellect does not draw its laws from nature, but imposes its laws upon nature.⁹

The Cartesian schism between the human mind and the material world offered by Descartes continued in this way in a new and deepened form.

Hegel, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard can be seen as offering differing responses to Cartesian dualism. Taylor's concern with Nietzsche, Hegel and Kierkegaard points to the underlying problem that has worried Western thinkers since Kant, that is, the problem of how mind and 'things-in-themselves' or inside and outside, self and other, identity and difference, or by extension, world and God, are related.

Hegel solves the problem when he asserts that the unknowable, beyond reason, becomes known through a dialectical process where mind is seen to be in a process of coming to know itself. Kierkegaard maintains Kant's distinction; there is that which can be known and that which can't be known; that which can't be known must, through faith and indirect knowledge or an echo within the known,

⁸ Ibid., p. 341

⁹ Kant E., Critique of Pure Reason, quoted in Frankl G., Civilisation: Utopia and Tragedy Vol. 2 Open Gate Press, London, 1992, p. 118

be held to exist. The relation between the unknown and the known can only be bridged by a leap of faith not by a bridge of knowledge. Nevertheless, while the chasm between is wider than it is for Hegel, it is possible to bridge the gap. Nietzsche, on the other hand, relentlessly denies the possibility of a metaphysical resolution; in so doing he emphasizes self and world. To admit metaphysical solutions was, in Nietzsche's opinion, the weakness of the Western mind.

3.1.3 *Hegel's understanding of force*

While Kierkegaard and Nietzsche rejected Hegel's teleological and speculative solution to the relation of identity-in-difference, Hegel's resolution of the Cartesian schism offered a revolutionary way of thinking about dyadic pairs of terms. Inside/outside, world/God self/other are, he argued, paradoxically related in that the one term determines the other. This paradoxical way of thinking about identity-in-difference was co-opted by his detractors, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. His central understanding of force and relation is maintained by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and their philosophical heirs; the deconstructionists, including Derrida and Taylor. Taylor maintains that Hegel's identity-in-difference is best revealed in his understanding of force as suggested in Phenomenology of Spirit. This understanding of force becomes a central metaphor in Erring. Taylor writes, quoting Hegel:

The untotalizable totality of negativity becomes more comprehensible if approached through the notion of *force*. As I have emphasized, writing embodies a tissue of differences in which terms are sites of passage. This liminal passageway is the domain of force. Constantly in transition and perpetually transitory, force is absolute passage or passage as absolute. Since there can be no force apart from forces, force is never simple or

merely one but always inherently complex and intrinsically (at least) double. It can be itself only in and through opposition – opposition to other(s) and to itself. . . . Force '*desubstantializes*' everything by breaking down apparently fixed boundaries and creating an infinite field in which all 'things' are interrelated. Within this generative/degenerative matrix, nothing is (merely) itself, for no thing can be itself by itself. Everything is fabricated by the crossing of forces. This intersection marks the threshold where 'each *is* solely through the other, and what each thus is, it immediately no longer is, since it *is* the other.' The margin of force is forever embodied in word and ceaselessly reinscribed in writing.¹⁰

Force, from this description, does not exist; rather, force, as Hegel points out, becomes actual only in the play of forces.

This understanding of force is strongly reminiscent of Nagarjuna's awareness of co-dependent arising as relational, but Hegel remains true to the Western philosophical tradition and, thus, privileges unity over plurality.

His overriding concern, Taylor stresses, is to establish the *union* of union and non-union and the *identity* of identity and difference. Hegel's foundational structure is fully manifested, Taylor notes, only in absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge emerges gradually through a complex process in which all dimensions of subjectivity and objectivity are progressively reconciled. To the gaze of the speculative philosopher (meaning Hegel), Taylor explains, objectivity is but a moment in the self-development of an all-encompassing subject. Objectivity is, through this process, reconciled to subjectivity. Taylor states that by developing the manifold implications of the philosophy of the subject, Hegel's speculative system both constitutes the closure of the search for unity and identity that

10 Taylor M. C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, pp. 111-112 quoting Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Miller A. V. (trans.), Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, pp. 85-86

characterizes Western philosophy, and arrives at a form of certain knowledge that is supposed to overcome the doubt and uncertainty that occasioned Descartes's inward turn.¹¹

3.1.4 *Kierkegaard's response to Hegel's resolution of identity-in-difference*

Taylor characterizes Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel as resting on two closely related premises: his rejection of Hegel's speculative notion of identity, and his analysis of the temporality of the individual.

Against Hegel's notion of identity, Kierkegaard argues that the speculative mediation of opposites both demands and destroys otherness. In terms of the foundational structure of identity-in-difference, Kierkegaard maintains that *either* difference is real and reconciliation with otherness is not actual, *or* reconciliation with the other is actual and difference is not real. On the one hand, if difference is real, as it must be on Hegel's own terms, opposites cannot be mediated, but must remain independent of and in unmediated antithesis to one another. On the other hand, if Hegel's mediation of contraries is actual, opposites are merely apparently opposite and are really identical. Kierkegaard insists that, efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, Hegel collapses difference in identity and thereby dissolves the tensions inherent in concrete human existence.

¹¹ Taylor M. C. (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, pp. 8-10

This is reminiscent of Nāgārjuna's rejection of the combination of both identity and difference as causes for the arising of phenomena. By way of reminder I quote his opening verse of chapter one:

MMK I: 1 Neither from itself nor from another
 Nor from both, [my italics]
 Nor without a cause,
 Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.

In Nāgārjuna's formulation, the assertion of both essentialized or substantialized identity and difference results, as previously stated, in either complete non-relation or the hierarchical assertion of one of these substantialized conceptions over the other. In Hegel's case it is the valuation of identity or self-arising that is privileged. Nāgārjuna would see no evidence for asserting this case, and, by way of extrapolation, Murti concludes that if this were so, we should find ourselves living in a block universe.¹² Kierkegaard suggests, in a strikingly similar fashion, that the 'I-am-I' (self arising of self) that forms the telos of Hegelian idealism is 'a mathematical point that does not exist'.¹³

Kierkegaard's second pivotal premise is now brought into play. Kierkegaard insists that identity of thought and being that constitutes absolute knowledge is forever deferred for the individual existing in time. As Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard explains:

Not for a single moment is it forgotten that the subject is an existing individual, and that existence is a process of becoming, and that therefore the notion of the truth as identity of thought and being is a chimera of

¹² Murti T. R. V., The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1955, reprinted 1980, p. 169

¹³ Kierkegaard unreferenced quote in Taylor M. C. (ed.), Deconstruction in Context, p. 15

abstraction, in its truth only an expectation of the creature; not because truth is not such an identity, but because the knower is an existing individual for whom the truth cannot be such an identity as long as he lives in time. Unless we hold fast to this, speculative philosophy will immediately transport us into the fantastic realm of I-am-I, which modern speculative thought has not hesitated to use without explaining how a particular individual is related to it.¹⁴

Kierkegaard's understanding of the temporality of the individual is implicit in his critique of Hegelian identity. For Kierkegaard temporality cannot be rationalized as time escapes every system that tries to assimilate it. In Kierkegaard's own words, 'time cannot find a place within pure thought'. Because the existing individual is thoroughly temporal, he can never be totally incorporated into any system. In other words, the existing individual can only rationally exist in one half of the Cartesian split, namely the realm of conventions and mental constructions.

Since the existing individual is *always* in the process of becoming, Kierkegaard is convinced that the quest for certainty that drives modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel inevitably ends in failure and frustration, demonstrating that the Cartesian schism is irreconcilable through the process of thought. The closure required for certain knowledge of the truth is impossible.

Kierkegaard's device of writing his work using pseudonyms reveals masks behind masks and therefore the real Kierkegaard is illusive. The work of these fictive authors leads the reader from one logical truth to another, every truth offered reveals the previous truth to be ungrounded and unstable. Taylor states that in all

¹⁴ Ibid.

his unsystematic writings and unscientific fragments, Kierkegaard attempts to force the reader to confront the impossibility of certain knowledge.¹⁵

However, there is a 'real' Kierkegaard behind these fictive masks. Kierkegaard's final aim is the truth. As Robert Gall notes:

As he parodied systematic philosophy through a series of ironic prefaces, forwards, fragments, and postscripts, Kierkegaard practiced a kind of comic theology of 'transcendental buffoonery' that hid the 'subjective truth' of his inward leap of faith behind the comic masks (i.e., the pseudonyms) he showed the world.¹⁶

Kierkegaard is revealed, in the final instance, to be a theist.

3.1.5 *Nietzsche's rejection of certainty*

In his effort to address problems posed by what he calls the 'uncanniest of all guests' – nihilism, Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, rejects Hegel's closed system and ends by embracing the impossibility of certainty. Nietzsche believes, Taylor notes, that the search for truth is actually an exercise of 'the will to power' through which one tries to master the uncertainties of the human condition by repressing the inevitability of fragmentation and dislocation.¹⁷ In what he describes as a 'transvaluation of values', Nietzsche maintains that philosophers, priests and moralists are really nihilists who, in affirming a world beyond this world, say 'Nay' to life. He calls upon 'immoralists' to reverse this denial by saying

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Gall R. S., 'Of/From Theology and Deconstruction', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58 (1990), p. 423

¹⁷ Taylor M. C. (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context*, p. 15

'No' to every such No. This radical "Yea-saying" supposedly subverts nihilism by negating its negation. Nietzsche's 'gay wisdom' joyfully affirms the inescapability of incompleteness and the impossibility of knowledge. Nietzsche affirms the side of the Cartesian schism that affirms 'man' in the here and now and insists that the meaning of life is to be found in purely human terms. To suggest that there is another side to the Cartesian split is, in Nietzsche's view, the bias and weakness of Western philosophy. His vision of what mankind might become without the safeguard of absolute knowledge and completion is exemplified in this passage from The Gay Science:

Excelsior! 'You will never again pray, never again worship, never again repose in limitless trust – you deny it to yourself to remain halted before an ultimate wisdom, ultimate good, ultimate power, and there unharness your thoughts – you have no perpetual guardian and friend for your seven solitudes . . . there is no longer for you any rewarder and recompenser, no final corrector – there is no longer any reason in what happens, no longer any love in what happens to you – there is no longer any resting-place open to your heart where it has only to find and no longer to seek, you resist any kind of ultimate peace, you want the eternal recurrence of war and peace – man of renunciation, will you renounce in all this? Who will give you the strength for it? No one has yet possessed this strength!' – 'There is a lake which one day denied it to itself to flow away and threw up a dam at the place where it formerly flowed away: since then this lake has risen higher and higher. Perhaps it is precisely that renunciation which will also lend us the strength by which the renunciation itself can be endured; perhaps man will rise higher and higher from that time when he no longer *flows out* into a god.¹⁸

Nietzsche's indebtedness to Hegel is evident, Taylor notes when he states that consciousness is the effect of the interrelation of conflicting forces. Since force is

¹⁸ Nietzsche F., Nietzsche F., The Gay Science, Kaufmann W. (trans.), Random House, New York, 1974, p. 374

inevitably relational, there can never be only one force, but always at least two. Nietzsche stresses, Taylor notes, and this is crucial in distinguishing him from Hegel, that force is actually a play of *differences* that cannot be reduced to unity or identity.¹⁹

Nāgārjuna would of course suggest that to emphasis difference over identity is merely to highlight one of the four lemmas, that is, difference. He was aware that a play of differences would not result in identities but in non-relation. Taylor's emphasis of Nietzsche's aphorisms suggests that his a/theology can be shown, as I attempt to show later, to be a substantialization of difference.

3.1.6 *The difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard*

Nietzsche's assertion of the inevitable failure of thought to attain presence suggests a superficial resemblance to Kierkegaard's philosophy and analysis of Western thought doomed to frustration and failure in this quests for certainty. Taylor notes this resemblance when he declares:

Kierkegaard's analysis of Hegelianism anticipates many of the most significant features of the equally devastating critique of the dreams of philosophy that Nietzsche develops several decades later. The fragments in which Kierkegaard argues that the truth is but a fantasy of pure thought become the aphorisms in which Nietzsche contends that truth is a fiction whose fictive status has been forgotten. In this way, Kierkegaard's subjectivism is transformed into Nietzsche's perspectivism.²⁰

¹⁹ Taylor M. C. (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context*, p. 16

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15

To suggest that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche share their aims and enterprises is, however, gravely misleading. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are often placed together as 'existentialist' thinkers who rejected the great systematic philosophies of their time in order to assert the freedom of individual choice and values but Christopher Norris notes, this classification is superficial and deceptive. Norris states:

Certainly they shared an aversion toward Hegel, expressed by Kierkegaard in a famous image: that of the philosopher who erects a magnificent edifice of theory, while dwelling himself in a wretched hovel beneath its shadow. Nietzsche likewise saw nothing but grandiose delusion in the claims of Hegelian dialectic. But the two had very different reasons for adopting this negative attitude to Hegel. Nietzsche's objections took rise from a thoroughgoing epistemological skepticism, a belief that Hegel's entire dialectical system was founded on nothing more than a series of metaphors, or figural constructions, disguised as genuine concepts. In Hegel the will-to-power within language achieved its most spectacular and self-deluded form. For Kierkegaard, the case was to be argued on ethical, rather than epistemological grounds. The danger of Hegel's all-embracing dialectic was that it left no room for the 'authentic' individual, the agent of choice and *locus* of existential freedom. Subject and object, experience and history, were all taken up into a massive unfolding of absolute reason which no human act had the power to resist or decisively push forward. Dialectics in this guise was a form of 'aesthetic' aberration, a means of evading responsible choice by setting up a fine philosophical system which the mind could contemplate at leisure.²¹

Kierkegaard's 'aesthetic' and fictional devices work, Norris argues, to suspend the dialectical progress that Kierkegaard equates with the inward coming to truth. The method of his coming-to-truth and the goal that is coming-to-truth places Kierkegaard in a highly ambiguous relationship to Nietzsche. The reader of Kierkegaard necessarily takes, Norris states, a detour through dangerous regions of

²¹ Norris C., *The Deconstructive Turn*, p. 99

thought which bring him close to a Nietzschean position of all-consuming skeptical doubt. Nevertheless, Norris emphasizes that Kierkegaard's detour is just that – a detour. His ultimate aim is to leap to the truth.²²

It is evident that in Taylor's eyes Hegel's excess – that is, presence, unity and the possibility of absolute knowledge – is undermined on the one hand by Kierkegaard's existing individual who, by existing in time, escapes the Hegelian speculative system, and on the other hand by Nietzsche's remainder of difference which bars the doors to the possibility of complete identity. It is Taylor's conclusion that though Kierkegaard and Nietzsche approach their tasks from different perspectives and with significantly different purposes:

In their critiques of modernity these 'posthumous men' glimpse the confusing worlds of postmodernity. Their contrasting unphilosophical fragments sound the death knell for Western philosophy.²³

What Taylor does not make explicit and what he does not clarify are the conditions of possibility offered by these thinkers. I suggest that Taylor is offered on the one hand the possibility of the absolute denial of a transcendental signified by Nietzsche, a possibility which he fully explores in *Erring*, and on the other the impossibility of knowledge of the transcendental signified offered by Kierkegaard, which is the possibility that he explores in *NOIs*. What he does not do is acknowledge his shift from the one possibility to the other.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 86

²³ Taylor M. C. (ed.), *Deconstruction In Context*, p. 18

3.2 TAYLOR'S DIVINE MILIEU IN *ERRING*

Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's shared refusal to accept completion of the system or the attainment of absolute knowledge results in Taylor's rejection of the possibility of the unification of identity-in-difference. Nietzsche's Dionysian world affirming 'Yea-saying', which is in effect a 'Nay-saying' to the transcendental signified, is clearly a strong motivating force behind Taylor's divine milieu. Taylor's message in *Erring* is a message of reversal. He writes:

The body of the incarnate word marks the negation of the transcendence that is characteristic of God, self, and history. Through unexpected twists and unanticipated turns, erring and aberrance show the death of God, disappearance of self, and end of history to be the realization of *mazing grace*²⁴

Taylor's divine milieu is never a completed system. The way of being in the divine milieu is the way of a nomadic wanderer who is never to reach home. He writes:

The labyrinthian surface opened by the death of God and discovered in the second (always second) 'innocence' of a/theology is completely superficial. With the negation of transcendence, covert interiority and latent depth disappear. The free play of appearances harbors no secrets that ultimately remain hidden. Behind the mask of the player there is always another mask. Mazing grace situates one in the midst of a labyrinth from which there is no exit. There is no Ariadne to save the wandering Theseus, no thread to show the way out of the maze.²⁵

The inescapability of the maze, the death of God and the disappearance of the self, is, however, no burden to Taylor who advises in *Erring*, that we affirm our

²⁴ Taylor M. C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, p. 168

²⁵ Ibid.

rootlessness and homelessness, our loss of self, and our unavoidable purposelessness. He states:

In addition to being rootless and nomadic (originless), as well as excentric and exorbitant (centerless), the erring trace is purposeless and aimless (endless). The prospect of *radical* purposelessness emerges with the realization 'that becoming has no goal and that underneath all becoming, there is no grand unity'. In the absence of a final *telos* for the entire generative/destructive milieu, it is possible to affirm purposeless process. The wanderer has no certain destination, goal, aim, purpose, or end. While the exile apprehensively pursues the salvic cure of closure, the drifter is 'indifferent to any possible results'. Having 'lost' all direction, the trace becomes a 'purposeless tension'. The aimlessness of serpentine wandering liberates the drifter from obsessive preoccupation with the past and future.²⁶

Taylor declares that there is no exit from the labyrinth of interpretation -- everything is always already inscribed within an interpretive network. He repeatedly observes that relationships constitute all things, that interpretive perspectives are neither independent nor self-identical and are thoroughly differential and *radically relational*. Notably different to Nāgārjuna's argument that difference results not in identity but in non-relation, he suggests that the co-implication of differing viewpoints establishes the contextuality of all perspectives. Every interpretive stance is inextricably entangled in a formative context. There is, in other words, no signified, only signifiers. He agrees with and quotes Derrida when he maintains that 'the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely'.²⁷ Without a signified to

²⁶ Taylor M. C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, p. 157 quoting Nietzsche *The Will to power*, p. 13; Bataille G., quoted in Derrida J., *Writing and Difference*, Bass A. (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 271 and Herrigel E., *Zen and the Art of Archery*, Hull R.F.C. (trans.), Random House, New York, 1971, p. 52

²⁷ Derrida J., *Writing and Difference*, p. 280 in Taylor M. C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, p. 172

serve as a secure anchor, Taylor confirms signifiers float freely within a field that appears to be endless. Like Nietzsche, he affirms the side of the Cartesian chasm that involves conventions, mind and language. He argues that since perspectives are radically relational, meaning is irreducibly relative. Meaning is not in things but in between. Meaning is never fully present, meaning is both transitional and transitory, migratory and nomadic.²⁸

Taylor's divine milieu has characteristics of Hegel in that it is structurally reminiscent of the paradoxical nature of force, yet it embraces Nietzsche's rejection of a metaphysical solution, or the possibility of unifying identity-in-difference in identity, and suggests instead an unanchored textuality where difference constantly defers the possibility of identity; in this Taylor includes Kierkegaard's declaration that the system is never completed.

3.2.1 *The substantialization of the divine milieu as scripture in Erring*

As opposed to the economy of the book which suggests that meaning is both determinate and determinable, a complete and finished product, Taylor suggests the text. In contrast to the closure of the book, he advocates that the text is radically open. A text, he asserts, is a relational event and not a substance to be analyzed. He states:

Every text is, as I have already noted, a context. Con-texts are woven (*textus*) together (*con*) in a complex fabric that is thoroughly constitutive. Since each text becomes itself in relation to other texts, every text implies a difference that dislocates its proper identity. There no more can be a text-

²⁸ Taylor M. C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, pp. 172-173

in-itself than there can be independent signifiers. This irreducible relativity constitutes every text an intertext. When understood in this way, a 'text is a relational event, and not a substance to be analyzed'. The web within which all texts are eventually entwined has no beginning, middle, or end.²⁹

Taylor's explication of textuality allows him to suggest a way of being in a time after the death of God. He states:

The tissue of texts not only shows that writing is reading; it also displays reading as writing. Instead of a finished product of a single author, the text is the *social* activity of countless coproducers. Productive readers infinitely expand and extend the text. Since the play of the word never stops, erring never ends. The unending erring of scripture is the eternal play of the divine milieu.³⁰

The text as an incomplete event opens, Taylor suggests, the possibility of delight. Quoting Nietzsche he proposes:

Delight is the inversion of satisfaction. Satisfaction is possessive – to seek satisfaction is to strive for the fulfillment that seems to result from the appropriation of otherness. Delight, by contrast is non possessive. By granting the incurability of primordial emptiness, the dispossessed subject creates the possibility of overcoming the desperate struggle for possession and possessions. Delight can be understood as *enjoyment without possession*. . . . Since delight always involves loss, the joy it brings is inevitably an *anguished joy*. Dispossession, impropriety, expropriation, anonymity, spending, sacrifice, death and desire all come together in this anguished joy. Such delight "is not something promised; it is (always already) there if you live and act in such and such a way."³¹

²⁹ Ibid., p. 178

³⁰ Ibid., p. 182

³¹ Ibid., pp. 147-8 quoting Nietzsche F., *The Will To Power*, Kaufmann W. (trans.), Random House, New York, 1968, p. 99

Taylor's emphasis on Nietzsche, his Dionysian mazing grace and his assertion of his divine milieu as erring scripture are imaged as an eternal web of intertextuality, but like Nāgārjuna's emptiness, one has to ask whether this net is self-arising or substantial. Terms such as 'unending', 'eternal' and 'irreducible relativity', 'web' and 'tissue of texts' would wave the red flag denoting substantialization to a Mādhyamikan philosopher. While Nāgārjuna empties emptiness by returning to the value of conventions, Taylor's eternalization of the play of the divine milieu leads one to suspect that he reifies emptiness by devaluing every value and essentializing relativity.

In an earlier chapter: 'Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the twofold truths', I explored Nāgārjuna's emptying of emptiness. Co-dependent arising was revealed to be more than a rejection of absolutism and a swing to emptiness as an absolute. Emptiness was itself co-dependently arisen and in dependent relation with conventional truths. Thus relativity and co-dependent arising which may have surface similarities, were shown to be distinct. I add an example for further clarification. The term 'father' does not designate an essential truth. A father becomes a father only when a child is conceived. The child gives rise to the father as much as the father gives rise to the child. Neither term has ultimate essential truth, yet the convention of being a father or of being a child is not a non-existent state – it is a conventional truth. To reveal that there is no ultimate status given to the term 'father' does not deny the conventional and valuable role of being a father. To suggest such a thing would be nihilistic. The ultimate truth that there is no ground or essence to terms or signifiers is the point at which Taylor leaves us in his divine milieu. He even leans towards the extreme of difference and towards the opposite terms in the dual pairs that are so distinctive in Western thought: the improper, dispossession, theft, lack, loss, laughter, uncertainty. In Erring, while

his attempted emphasis is on undecidability, groundlessness, uncertainty, his bias towards lack, and loss and difference is notable.

Caputo, in a book review of *Erring*, draws out these implications when he writes:

Unless one is a regular reader of Parisian philosophers, the first chapter of Part Two, 'Writing of God', ought to knock one's theological socks off. . . The transcendent God of classical theism which was immanentized in Hegel, and anthropomorphized in left wing Hegelianism and Nietzsche, is '*écriture*-ized' or (graphized) by Taylor, i.e., reduced to the differential matrix, to – God bless us – *écriture*, *différance*. That I think is an ending calculated to surprise Derrida himself (not to mention God). When he signed the piece Reb Derrida I did not think he was angling for this. Indeed if Derrida was worried that someone would consider *différance* a word or a concept, that would be nothing compared to this. But indeed for Taylor *écriture* is divine enough for the job and all the divinity we need.³²

Later in the same article, Caputo adds:

Erring is not genuinely a/theological because it does not manage to situate itself in the *entre/antre* which is prior to the theism/atheism dispute. Rather it is a more thorough-going, radically atheistic atheism than atheistic humanism – which everybody from the Pope to Heidegger saw to be inverted theism. That means that *Erring* is still caught in the moment of reversal, that it is still engaged in the preliminary stage of stamping out theism, which says that the death of God has to be followed up with the death of man. It is true that by trying to think the divine *milieu* Taylor has tried to remain in this realm of undecidability, but by calling the milieu *divine*, and claiming that this is what becomes of God in deconstruction, he has undone his own claim, and forced *différance* into a decision about god which is both reductionistic and beyond undecidability.³³

³² Caputo J. D., 'Erring: A Postmodern A/theology', *Man and World - An International Philosophical Review* 21 (1988), p. 110

³³ Ibid., p. 113

Such are the implications of Taylor's first step of the drawing of 'difference'. Taylor does not maintain undecidability, he emphasizes loss, his milieu is divinized and is therefore substantial. What can also be noted is that Nietzsche's 'eternal return' and Dionysian delight play a central role in Taylor's articulation of the divine milieu. Nietzschean carnality, delight and errancy weave their way through Taylor's identity-in-difference, difference-in-identity. What occurs is a substantialization of difference and an attempt to deny identity. Taylor explains that the divine milieu, or the play of differences, which can also be understood in terms of Derrida's textuality, is 'permanent' and 'eternal'. We must hypothesize that Nāgārjuna would have pointed out that the divine milieu has an identifiable essence – namely the lack of inherent existence. It fails on that count to be completely interrelational – it turns upon itself. It turns upon itself by becoming epiphenomenal, the impermanent 'permanent' medium that 'grounds' itself – a 'stable' instability.

Taylor's need to assert a completely relative milieu reveals itself to be incomplete without an Other once the question of ethics and value arise. I suggest that this incompleteness has its roots in Nietzsche's Dionysian vision which is reactive to the traditional concept of God rather than a true alternative, and as such does not escape the problems inherent to Cartesian dualism as the following famous quote exemplifies:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives – who will wipe this blood off us?³⁴

³⁴ Nietzsche H., *The Gay Science*, Kaufmann W. (trans.), Random House, New York, 1974, p. 374

The absolute denial of the metaphysical is revealed here to be reactive. The God that Nietzsche wishes to deny, haunts him. The transcendental signifier rejected so vehemently by Nietzsche remains in his work in latent form. Taylor's reliance on Nietzsche as the most radical of thinkers leads him to restate the terms and problems inherent in the Cartesian split, rather than to escape them.

Within the context of morality Taylor, having substantialized the divine milieu, necessarily has to, given this heritage, provide an Other, to relativize relativity. Taylor attempts in Erring to offer an image of complete relativity and offers instead a matrix, a net, a textual fabric, that insists on difference and deference, but is itself substantial or essential. Unlike Nāgārjuna, Taylor has not at this stage emptied emptiness, unlike Nāgārjuna, Taylor depends on a tradition that has asserted being as presence, in his attempt to suggest an alternative. Taylor is obviously enamoured with Nietzschean imagery and solutions in Erring. In nOts, Taylor develops an analysis of the ethico-political implications of deconstruction by reading Derrida's 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority' through Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, and then by reading Kierkegaard through Derrida. This development distances Taylor (following his understanding of Derrida) from the attempted suggestion of 'undecidability'. The problem of dualism which is apparently resolved in Erring recurs in nOts.

3.3 TAYLOR'S SEARCH FOR A MORALITY BEYOND THE DEATH OF GOD

3.3.1 *The substantialization of difference/deference/altarity/loss in nOts*

What appears in nOts is a marked emphasis on Kierkegaardian thought – not Kierkegaard's pseudonymous message which is akin to Nietzschean perspectivism, but the religious Kierkegaard who advocates the inwardness of self-understanding which constitutes religious faith. This aspect of Kierkegaard's work establishes a link between identity and difference, and, like Hegel, favours identity or the religious solution of a relation with God. Unlike Hegel, however, the process of reconciliation is not a smooth relationship of the Subject coming to know itself, but a rejection of the omnipotence of knowledge. Only a leap of faith into the absurd allows for such reconciliation. Nevertheless reconciliation and the acknowledgment of the existence of God are the final aim of Kierkegaard's religious philosophy. Taylor moves from the central Nietzschean position, found in Erring, to an extreme in nOts, and asserts excessive difference; this excessive difference is posited as the Not, a substantialization of the unknown. Taylor's theology in nOts, while differing from Kierkegaard in its rejection of final reconciliation, owes more to Kierkegaard in its structural implications than to Nietzsche.

Taylor accuses Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani, a member of the Kyoto school of thought and author of Religion and Nothingness,³⁵ as he does Hegel, of positive excess. He argues that Nishitani's notion of forces provides him with a

³⁵ Nishitani K., Religion and Nothingness, van Bragt J. (trans.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982.

way to think the return of all things to a home-ground. When all things assemble in and through the home-ground, Taylor interprets, the absolute centre is in everything and all things are in the absolute centre. Though this centre is empty, Taylor elucidates, it nonetheless recentres everything in such a way that all is gathered together in an inclusive totality. The unifying principle of the All is nothing other than force itself. Absolute immediacy, for Nishitani, is completely purposeless. Taylor translates Nishitani's *śūnyatā* as the 'Leben ohne Warum' that is embodied in the perfect spontaneity of play. He quotes this passage from Religion and Nothingness:

At the point that our work becomes play, it is at the same time an elemental *earnestness*. In reality, there is no more unrestricted, take-things-as-they-come sort of play than the emergence of self into its nature from non-ego; and, at the same time, there is nothing more serious and earnest. In the state of 'dharmic naturalness' – of natural and spontaneous accord with the dharma – this is how it is with all things. That is why from time immemorial the image of the child has so often been invoked to portray such an elemental mode of being. For the child is never more earnest than when engaged in mindless play.³⁶

At this point, Taylor communicates his position when he writes:

Force, however, is not always so gentle, and play not always so childish. It is possible to interpret the play of forces as decentering in a way that forecloses every possibility of recentring. Force, I have stressed, is never present as such but appears only as the disappearance enacted in and through the eternal return of different forces. Force, therefore, is never simply one but is always already divided *between* forces. This between *is not* a home-ground that serves as a secure base or faultless foundation. To the contrary, the turning and re-turning of the play of different forces inscribes the *absence* of every ground and the *impossibility* of all grounding. Within the endless alternation of the play of forces, everything is mediated and thus nothing is immediate. In the absence of immediacy, nothing is present to itself and hence there is no-thing in itself. The play of

³⁶ Nishitani K., Religion and Nothingness, p. 255 in Taylor M. C., NOTS, p. 71

differences does not simply gather and assemble; it also distends and disperses. The return of force is never the return of the same but is always the return of difference(s) in which difference forever returns differently.³⁷

This is a highly debatable topic as the nature of Nishitani's home-ground is not a substantial entity but a psychological state of feeling centred in one's self as the process of the universe. More importantly, Taylor's rejection of Nishitani's home-ground reveals an unacknowledged revision, I suggest, in his thinking, as his divine milieu, as drawn in Erring, could be understood as having the very characteristics of Nishitani's image of force as home-ground that Taylor shuns. Taylor's divine milieu is called a net, a tissue of texts, eternal etc., all which suggest a ground or foundation which is the play of differences. In nOts, Taylor reveals a need to move away from the possibility that his divine milieu can be characterized as a 'grounded' relativity. Taylor's following statement is of added interest as he distances himself from the position he followed in Erring by associating Nietzsche with Hegel, Nietzsche is no longer between Hegel and Kierkegaard but 'on Hegel's side'. He writes:

The between of differences stages in the play of forces opens the space of the not in which nothing and/or disappears. This not does not simply repeat the Hegelian-Nietzschen 'No to No', which is a 'Yes' to 'both Yes and No'. The not of the play of forces is more unsettling than the negation of negation, for it calls forth resistance, which can take place, if at all, only along a constantly shifting border that is neither simply affirmative nor negative.³⁸

Taylor seems at this point to be taking a middle path, a middle path more radical than the middle path characterized by Nietzsche's aphorisms in Erring. However, his next logical step belies this assertion as he absolutizes loss. He states:

³⁷ Taylor M. C., nOts, p. 71

³⁸ Ibid.

To heed this call [the call of the not of the play of forces] is to engage in a 'no play' that is not child's play. There is nothing elemental about the not, for nothing is elemental. Nor is this 'no play' primal, for nothing is primal. If, however, nothing is elemental, if nothing is primal, then there is no home-ground. In the absence of a home-ground, any return to the All is impossible. Loss is not only inevitable and irrevocable but is absolute. When loss is absolute, nothing can be gained. Then and only then can nothing be ventured.³⁹

What can be noted from the quote above is the assertion of absolute loss, and the assertion of someone heeding the call. Taylor's attempt to deny a ground leads him to assert absolute groundlessness and, more importantly, the loss of ground. This loss of essence, ground, and self, results, as we shall see, in Taylor's assertion of homelessness instead of radical emptiness, and instead of self in Other. To essentialize loss is to essentialize that which is lost, and to essentialize Other results, paradoxically, in the reinstatement of self as these terms, as Hegel made clear, imply one another. Substantialization in any form starts the pendulum swing from absolute truth to nihilism. These extremes are implicated in each other. Nagarjuna revealed this understanding when he wrote:

MMK XV: 10

To say 'it is' is to grasp for permanence.
To say 'it is not' is to adopt the view of nihilism.
Therefore a wise person
Does not say 'exists' or 'does not exist'.

MMK XV:11

'Whatever exists through its essence
Cannot be nonexistent' is eternalism.
'It existed before but doesn't now'
Entails the error of nihilism.

³⁹ Ibid.

Loss, of course, implies that there was something to lose, or 'It existed before but doesn't now'. Taylor states that when loss is absolute, nothing can be gained. Then and only then can nothing be ventured. What Nāgārjuna would be quick to recognize is that once loss is absolute, Taylor will be asserting non-existence. Taylor's 'non-existence' wobbles between nihilism and absolutism. There is no return to a home-ground or meaning yet the Not or the wholly other beyond language is, it becomes clear, an absolute.

3.3.2 *Taylor's ethical concerns*

Taylor is aware that the consequence of a completely relative milieu (that is a milieu grounded in unanchored resistance or force) is nihilism. 'The question of resistance, he writes, is the question of ethics and by, extension, of politics'.⁴⁰ He asserts that though we live in an age of all kinds of fanatical moralisms, it is no longer obvious that ethics is possible. Taylor contends, that as yet another century draws to a close, we seem to be approaching that point foreseen by Nietzsche at the end of the last century. Perhaps, Taylor surmises, the vehemence of contemporary moralism, which, he insists, *is not* ethical, is a symptom of the implicit awareness that we have actually passed 'beyond good and evil'. In pursuing the question of resistance, Taylor feels called upon to interrogate this 'beyond', which he describes as neither good nor evil. He proposes that this beyond, which is not ethical, may be the condition of the possibility of morality.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 73

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 73-74

Taylor is aware that questions about the ethical and political status of deconstruction have become more pressing in the wake of the continuing controversies surrounding Heidegger's political allegiances, and the disclosure of the troubling shadows that darken Paul de Man's past. He is aware that many of Derrida's opponents highlight Derrida's debt to Heidegger, and association with de Man, and conclude that deconstruction has nihilistic implications.⁴² In *nOts*, Taylor attempts to present a deconstruction that offers the possibility of a morality, a deconstruction that while ungrounded and still refuting being as presence cannot be called nihilistic. He asks whether ethics presupposes something that is not ethical but may be religious. The result is a move away from Nietzsche and towards Kierkegaard, in particular towards the Kierkegaard that reinforces the Cartesian schism between the known and the unknown.

It is strange to have Taylor speaking of a 'beyond' and of religious solutions as the deconstructive enterprise is one which undermines any surfacing of a beyond and especially a religious 'beyond', certainly a beyond that is beyond the radical metaphoricity of textuality would be a radical revision of the deconstructive proposal that there is no signified but only signifiers.

Taylor explains that Derrida's defenders respond to the charges of ethical nihilism and political quietism by turning to Levinas for support. While, he notes, this strategy is often effective, it can be misleading. Those who cite Levinas⁴³ to defend Derrida consistently, according to Taylor, exhibit a strange aversion to the *theological* dimensions of Levinas's ethics. It is impossible, Taylor asserts, to

⁴² Ibid., p. 74

⁴³ Unreferenced in Taylor M. C., *nOts*, p. 75

understand Levinas's account of ethics without an appreciation for his interpretation of the Jewish theological tradition.⁴⁴

This is bewildering as Taylor, who has consistently denied attempts in the Western thought process to assert a transcendental signified, should hardly find Derrida's defenders behaving strangely when they attempt to dissociate Derrida from theology as both *theos* and *logos* have been revealed as notions of the 'transcendental signified' – signifiers that, Derrida constantly reveals are illegitimately granted a privileged place outside and 'beyond' the play of textual signification. Derrida's strategies are explored in detail in the following chapter, the crucial thing to note at this point is that Taylor proceeds to explain and, more importantly, to endorse, Levinas's definition of 'the ethical':

The 'ethical' *is not* simply a code of conduct that regulates sociopolitical life but is, more importantly, the designation of the relationship of the individual to alterity, which, in one of its guises, appears to be God.⁴⁵

So understood, Taylor concludes, the ethical is neither reducible to, nor irrelevant for, morality and ethics in the commonly accepted use of these terms.

In suggesting alterity or God, it appears that Taylor has swung from one side of the pendulum – nihilism, where there is no anchor to define value, to the other – absolutism, where something, or some 'Not', ultimately determines value.

⁴⁴ Taylor M. C., *nQis*, p. 75

⁴⁵ Levinas, unreferenced quote in Taylor M. C., *nQis*, p. 75

3.3.3 *Taylor's use of the Kierkegaardian echo*

Now Taylor suggests that a critical evaluation of the ethico-political implications of deconstruction presupposes an account of the interplay between religion and ethics. This, of course, brings us into the Kierkegaardian realm. Taylor states that he will develop an analysis or account for the interplay between religion and ethics by reading Derrida's major contribution to Critical Legal Studies, 'Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'', through Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, and reading Kierkegaard's text through Derrida's writing.⁴⁶

I suggest that Taylor, having explored the implications of the divine milieu – the ungrounded, undecidable, Dionysian, Nietzschean vision – has realized its inadequacy as it offers no ethical or moral solutions to being in a world without guidelines or values. In my opinion, he has had to face the reality that the divine milieu suggested in Erring is nihilistic.

A nihilistic stance is one from which Taylor is obviously attempting to dissociate. It is possibly for this reason that, when discussing the possibilities of ethical or non-ethical and moral issues in a postmodern situation, Taylor is silent about Nietzsche. Rather than radicalize Nietzschean ungroundedness, he now looks to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's dialectical progress resulted not in perspectivism but finally in an inward coming to truth. His ultimate aim, being the truth, removes the possibility of Kierkegaard being classed a nihilist.

⁴⁶ Taylor M. C., POs, p. 76

Kierkegaard maintains that there is an 'absolute difference' between God and man, and one's obligation to God must be distinguishable from one's obligation to oneself and to one's fellow human beings.⁴⁷ Kierkegaard can be read as reinstating the Cartesian/Kantian split between what can be known and what can't be known. Because ethical obligation and devotion to God are distinguished in a structure of 'either-or' he believes it is possible for them to come into conflict. The devotee's ethical mandate must be 'suspended' because of his absolute relation to a higher *telos* – to God. In this situation, there is a teleological suspension of the ethical. In this way the self seeks simultaneously 'to sustain an absolute relation to an absolute end, and a relative relationship to relative ends'.⁴⁸

For Kierkegaard the singular who relates in this way to God is higher than the ethical or social. God or Absolute Singularity is 'infinitely and qualitatively'⁴⁹ different from everything that exists and, therefore, is other – *wholly other*. Incomprehensible in any system, this Other resists all totalization. Kierkegaard realizes that the Other as such is unthinkable, or is thinkable only as unthinkable. The impossible task he sets for himself and his reader is to think the unthinkable. This impossible non-thinking cannot be straightforward, but must be indirect. Consequently Kierkegaard develops an indirect method of writing that reveals the Other as an echo. The purpose of Kierkegaard's aesthetic education is to lead the reader to the limit of human experience. At this point, which is a vanishing point, something Other approaches. The human choice is 'either' to remain in human rational experience or as a singular individual to leap across to the wholly Other

⁴⁷ Kierkegaard S., *Postscripts*, pp. 386-387, SV VII, 374-375 in Taylor M. C., *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975, p. 248

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Unreferenced quote in Mark C. Taylor, *POIs*, p. 79

beyond the collective experience. The echo of the unthinkable reverberates through the thinkable in an elusive way. The wholly Other is unthinkable to thought but is finally accessible to the knight of faith who leaps from the rational to the absurd through the process of inward passion and involvement.

Taylor lauds this liminal method of indirectly thinking the unthinkable, what he rejects is the possibility of the leap from the rational to the absurd. Taylor wishes to recognize the Other as Other without reducing it to the same. He sees, like Nietzsche, that this is the weakness of Hegel and traditional Western metaphysics. Taylor does not seek a unity that can be a foundation from which understanding is gained. Taylor suggests that Kierkegaard, by leading one to the vanishing point, to the boundary line of conventional reality, stages an unrepresentable retreat. Through indirect communication, Kierkegaard attempts to say the unsayable in and through the failure of language.

Agreeing with Kierkegaard, Taylor suggests that the 'name' of this failure is the unnameable, and one of the pseudonyms of the unnameable is God, whose devastating power of non-designation incites the passion of understanding. Understanding pushes itself to its limits, to its boundary place, by struggling to think what it cannot think. By pushing understanding to its limit, Kierkegaard glimpses an unnameable limit that he names 'the absolute difference'. This extraordinary heterogeneity, Taylor believes, marks and remarks the limit of human experience. It is this vanishing of the Not, Taylor argues, that paradoxically allows for the possibility of the ethical, the conventional, the rational.⁵⁰ This

⁵⁰ Taylor M. C., *nQls*, p. 90

possibility relies, Taylor suggests, on a grace to which, unlike Kierkegaard, there is no response.

Just as Hegel's metaphysical structure is subverted by Derrida's ends, so Kierkegaard's is subverted for Taylor's. Kierkegaard's openness, his undomesticated altarity is appropriated. That his Other is not reduced to identity but maintains its difference is commended and the echo within language allows Taylor an ethical edge that is unavailable in the Nietzschean play of differences. Yet the possibility available to Kierkegaard to finally bridge the gap through the loss of collective experience, and the acceptance of the singular one of the absurd, is unavailable to Taylor as this solution is yet another reduction of the Other to the same.

Taylor discovers a surprising companion in his re-evaluation of Kierkegaard. Derrida mentions Kierkegaard once in 'Force of Law'. He writes: 'The instant of decision is a madness, says Kierkegaard'.⁵¹

Derrida notes in his 'Force of Law' that, in addition to reinscribing a difference that is not reducible to identity, not all otherness or difference can be comprehended by reason. He speaks of the law and the calculable, which, in other words, Taylor interprets, can be comprehended by reason and is the sphere in which moral agents interrelate through general values, norms and principles that are shared by a given group. The Law is always the law of exchange, which makes both communication and community possible. Through lawful

⁵¹ Taylor M. C., *id.*, p. 76 see also Derrida J., 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice', *Cardozo Law Review*, '1 (1990), p. 967

circulation, contraries seem to be bound together in an integrated totality. The universality of the structure of exchange makes theoretical and practical calculations comprehensible. This is, I believe, a working definition of Taylor's divine milieu or tissue of texts as offered in *Erring*. While every such calculable economy is lawful, it is not, Derrida argues, just. Justice remains forever incalculable; as it is 'prior' to the calculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable. The heterotopos or different place of justice is for Derrida, Taylor states, a dis-place that is 'exterior' to the law.⁵²

While law is comprehensible, justice is beyond comprehension. It is a gift of grace that is needed for comprehension. I quote from Taylor:

The heterotopos of justice is a dis-place that is 'exterior' to the law. Though outside the law, justice is not exactly lawless. It is beyond every system of exchange that is constructed to establish and maintain a balance between good and evil, as well as truth and falsity. Justice is neither good nor evil, true nor false. It is a 'gift beyond exchange and distribution'. That which lies beyond exchange permits no reciprocity – not even the response of thanks or gratitude. *Le coup de don* establishes an 'absolute dissymmetry' in which the responsible subject finds himself or herself unable to respond to that to which he or she is indebted.⁵³

For Derrida as for Kierkegaard, Taylor notes, decision is a singular event enacted by a singular subject. The singular always eludes the rule, as it stands before the unknown at the boundary line of the known and the unknown, and unknowns the known to reach a decision. Decision is inevitably a blind leap that entails unavoidable uncertainty and absolute risk. The moral law of good and evil, true and false, is suspended to gain germinal forms of insight or justice that is then

⁵² Taylor M. C., *Erring*, pp. 85-88

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 87 quoting Derrida, J., 'Force of Law' p. 929

reappropriated by the ethical, or the construction of good and evil, true and false.⁵⁴

Both Kierkegaard and Derrida name this dislocation of the conventional world 'a wholly other'. Derrida follows Kierkegaard when he insists that this 'wholly other' or 'absolute alterity' is absolutely singular.⁵⁵ Kierkegaard also calls this 'wholly other' 'infinite qualitative difference'.⁵⁶ It is without relation, beyond conceptualization. It becomes in Taylor's nOts, the Not, which escapes his divine milieu as proposed in Erring as it is without relation, and beyond thought.

I would suggest this Not resembles Eckhart's God beyond God. But unlike Eckhart's God, there is no two way relation of worship and Grace, there is only grace in this equation as there is no possibility of reaching out to Taylor's 'God', mystically, intellectually or even faithfully. It is a situation of incommensurability, an unreconcilable dualism. Taylor emphasizes, while the Not or Justice resists all totalization, it cannot be domesticated. Inasmuch as the Absolute Difference eludes the grasp of reason, it is unspeakable. Reason constitutes itself in and through the exclusion of the incomprehensible; it therefore needs the Not which it cannot undo. Justice, Taylor tells, is neither good nor evil, true nor false. It is a 'gift beyond exchange and distribution'.⁵⁷ That which lies beyond exchange, he tells, permits no reciprocity – not even the response of thanks or gratitude. In

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 91

⁵⁵ Derrida J., 'Force of Law', p. 971 in Taylor M. C., nOts, p. 87

⁵⁶ Unreferenced quote in Taylor M. C., nOts, p. 87

⁵⁷ Derrida J., 'Force of Law', p. 929 in M. C. Taylor, nOts, p. 87

other words, reason is bound to and by that which it cannot bear.⁵⁸ Language, he writes, therefore, indirectly witnesses alarity, which it never knows.⁵⁹

Since language presupposes reason, that which is inaccessible to reason remains unspeakable. One of the 'names' of this point of withdrawal, Taylor argues, is 'God'.⁶⁰ God, then, becomes the name of the unnameable without which language could not speak. God, in other words, is the silence whose eternal withdrawal makes language possible. In this way the withdrawal founds both the universal moral law and the universal principles or reason.

'In the beginning was the word'. Before the beginning was something else, something other, which, while it does not exist and hence is not, nonetheless is the mystical foundation of the law in all its guises.⁶¹

The radical Christological message given in Erring, where God is dead, but scripture, the Word or the text as the divine milieu is not, is redefined. God is not dead, merely absent and whispering into the Words of the divine milieu. This reveals Taylor's Kantian distinction between synthetic a priori knowledge and the thing-in-itself. It is also a reinstatement of theism. A theism which asserts that God cannot be known.

Taylor's dualism is illustrated in this quotation:

⁵⁸ Taylor M. C., nQts, pp. 86-94

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 91

⁶⁰ Taylor M. C., nQts, p. 90

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 91

'The not beyond of language' must be read in at least two conflicting ways at once: the not that *is* beyond of language, and the not that *is not* beyond language, that is, the not-beyond of language.⁶²

Taylor's thoroughly relative divine milieu as presented in Erring, because it is unlimited and eternal, can be suggested to be itself a metaphysical ontological reality – an absolute – and therefore demands to be relativized by that which it is not. The Not which is suggested in nOts is beyond the labyrinth of language and therefore a dualism is revealed. In nOts, he ends his chapter 'Not Just Resistance' with these words:

To decide is always to decide not; and to decide not is always to resist. But resistance is not enough. The Other that calls not, calls for not just resistance.⁶³

In Derrida's account of force and law, incomprehensible alterity, which is a non-foundational 'foundation' of the moral law through a disproportionate relation of gift or grace without a possible human response, returns repeatedly to interrupt and dislocate the lawful structure and structure of laws whose space it also opens.⁶⁴

Once Taylor has accepted the theological implications of Derrida's Other, I argue that he absolutizes an irrevocable dualism: incompleteness and loss. The deconstructive incalculable Other is a reactive refusal to accept completion, fullness and wholeness, and insists instead on an irrepressible alterity.

⁶² Ibid., p. 46

⁶³ Ibid., p. 94

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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