

3.3.4 *Taylor's dualism and the Cartesian split*

The Not that cannot be reduced to the known is, I assert, germinal in Kantian thought. Taylor first explores the Kantian understanding of mind, that is, conventional knowledge. He additionally notes that conventional knowledge is thoroughly relative and constructed of difference. This is his Nietzschean divine milieu. Once he has explored this branch to its own conclusion, that is, substantializing the relative without an authoritative principle, he has no other choice but to suggest the other branch of Kant's distinction – the thing-in-itself that is, beyond the reach of concepts, in order to relativize the relative, that is to allow for the possibility of value and morality. It would seem that against all his better intentions Taylor suggests a metaphysical beyond. While Taylor moves from one side of the double register to the other, valuing first the ungrounded relation of the known as a play of differences, and secondly the unknown as absolute alterity or the Not, Nāgārjuna's double register neither values the known over the unknown nor the unknown over the known, and this is because they are the same: empty or non-substantial.

3.4 TAYLOR'S DUALISM AND NAGARJUNA'S TWO-FOLD TRUTH

Charl Le Roux suggests that Mark Taylor's

... theology of 'dissolution' with its deconstructive theme of the margin, and driven by a hermeneutic of erring and *disfiguring*, attempts incessantly to open a place for a way beyond – beyond the Hegelian 'both-and' of

universal affirmation and the Kierkegaardian 'either-or' of particular faithfulness to valorize a Derridean/Mādhyanikan double register deconstruction of 'neither/nor' that could possibly open the time-space of a different difference and another other.⁶⁵

The phenomenism of Hegel, expressed in Le Roux's terms as a Hegelian 'both-and' of universal affirmation, refers to the dialectic of world/Word and God that is historically and rationally, reconciled in the Absolute Subject or God. Hegel's dialectic is, in other words, structurally a dualism that is finally reconciled in identity. The Kierkegaardian 'either-or' of particular faithfulness that Le Roux refers to is Kierkegaard's rejection of Hegel's reconciliation through the process of history and thought. The rejection of the possibility of commensurability through any process other than a leap of faith from the rational to the absurd, is Kierkegaard's main critique of Hegel. Kierkegaard offers his readers two stark alternatives: 'either' to stay on the mentally constructed side of the Cartesian split, in the world, 'or' to become a knight of faith, embrace the absurd, and leap towards the 'beyond mind', the 'thing in itself', towards 'God'. Taylor, according to Le Roux, aims to valorize a Derridean/Mādhyanikan double register of deconstruction of 'neither/nor' that could possibly open the time-space of a different difference and another other. The difference and other has, in the Western theological and philosophical past, been God. God is different to self and world. In more mundane contexts the other is everything else that is not the self. 'Neither/nor' is, then, neither world nor God, neither self nor other, neither subject nor object, neither identity nor difference. Taylor's deconstructive theme of the margin which lies between the dyadic pairs just mentioned is related by Le Roux to Nāgārjuna's 'middle path' or *pratītyasamutpāda*. The problem that

⁶⁵ Le Roux C., 'The postmodern - Tracy, Taylor and Dogen', *Religion and Theology* 3 (1996), p. 97

Taylor tackles, Le Roux asserts, is the possibility of religious thinking in a postmodern world – the problem, that is, of thinking religiously without the hierarchical assumption of self reconciled to God, difference reconciled to identity, object reconciled to subject. The postmodern world is a world that is fragmented and pluralistic. It is a world living in the conceptual wake of the death of God. In terms of Nāgārjuna's four lemmas, it is a world that has staked its hopes on the first lemma – self-arising – and has been philosophically and psychologically disappointed.

While I agree with Le Roux that Taylor's theology attempts to open a place for a way beyond the Hegelian 'both-and' and the Kierkegaardian 'either-or', and in fact attempts to deconstruct identity and difference and suggest a medium or middle, his conflation of the Derridean/Mādhyamikan double register is, in my opinion, inappropriate. Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* deconstructs all four lemma's or possibilities in the identity and difference equation, and denies them all including 'neither/nor' and insists instead on a mentally fluid ability to move between emptiness as conventional truth and emptiness posed as ultimate truth. Taylor attempts various alternative possibilities offered by the terms, such as difference as opposed to identity, or neither identity nor difference, but he does not dissolve the terms themselves.

Taylor also conflates deconstructionist and Mādhyamikan terms when he writes:

Nāgārjuna's attack on the entitative theory of existence (*bhāva*) by means of the notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) closely resembles Derrida's criticism of the principle of identity through the notion of *différance*. Furthermore, if viewed in terms of 'co-dependent origination' (*Pratītya-samutpāda*),

śūnyatā approaches the 'non-original origin' that I have reinterpreted in terms of the divine milieu.⁶⁶

Both of Taylor's texts, *Erring* and *nOts*, reveal substantialized thought, and Taylor's attempt at 'neither/nor', fails in both of his books. In *Erring* Taylor offers a Nietzschean language-based solution, the dyadic pairs – God and world – are deconstructed and the divine milieu is suggested. Taylor attempts to offer a religious alternative that does not require a metaphysical transcendental signified and the world as eternal text is divinized. The self dissolves in a set of relations. This set of relations is given a Christological slant and is divinized as erring scripture. World or Word as opposed to God, other as opposed to self, and difference as opposed to identity, are emphasized. He fails, in other words, to fully realize the possibility of 'neither' world 'nor' God, 'neither' self 'nor' other, etc. as the milieu itself is reified. His attempt to explain the divine milieu in terms of the ' / ' or margin between 'neither' and 'nor' results in the reification of intertextuality. A form of nihilism that fails to offer an ethic or morality or even a religious way of being in the world is established.

In *nOts* his attempt to offer such an ethic gives rise to the reinstatement of God, or the Wholly Other, and identity in the form of a wounded self. This is a subtle move away from the solutions offered in *Erring*. The margin, limen or border functioned in *Erring* entirely within the language based milieu. In *nOts* the margin or limen relates this milieu to an Other or Not that has characteristics of the transcendental signified snuffed in *Erring* as a metaphysical solution to the relation of identity-in-difference. Taylor solves the problem by suggesting that the

⁶⁶ Taylor M. C., 'On Deconstructing Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986) p. 553

Other is mystically and intellectually inaccessible and therefore escapes the accusation that he resolves the relation of identity-in-difference in Identity. What he offers instead is an unreconciled dualism that reifies the margin between the dyadic pairs. This shift reveals his restlessness within the labyrinthian entrapment of language offered so optimistically in Erring.

It is my assertion that Taylor can be accused of a negative excess. Nāgārjuna's complex expression of *pratītyasamutpāda* reveals this blind spot. Taylor's abhorrence of presence, being and any hint of affirmation, leads him to substantialize, to assert, its opposite: difference, nothing, deference, alterity. Nagarjuna by contrast writes:

MMK XIV: 5

A different thing depends on a different thing for its difference.

Without a different thing, a different thing wouldn't be different.

It is not tenable for that which depends on something else
To be different from it.

Nāgārjuna is suggesting that for there to be substantial difference, it must be possible to independently establish the identity and nature of the related. In Nāgārjuna's co-dependent realization there are no such things. In Taylor's nOts the singular individual – the decision maker – and the singular that is 'wholly other', are irreconcilable but not unrelated. This for Nāgārjuna is not a possible statement from an empirical point of view and becomes a metaphysical statement, a mystical proposal, the result of substantialization.

Taylor is unable to escape the Cartesian dualism that asserts a boundary between the known and the unknown. Nāgārjuna's assertion of emptiness – where there is

no knower – escapes the pendulous movement between the assertion of either identity or difference. Because Taylor believes in reason – one side of the Cartesian split – he has eventually to assert its binary opposite, its Other – a wholly Other, a nothing.

Fault or loss, in Taylor's understanding, is not secondary or accidental, but is necessary to the constitution of the system as such. Disease arises as if from within to disrupt an equilibrium or harmony that was never present in the first place. He writes:

The scheme of unity-loss-recovery has been extraordinarily pervasive and influential throughout history and continues to guide the human imagination in a variety of obvious and not-so-obvious ways. It not only provides the symbolic structure for many religious and philosophical traditions but also serves as the implicit framework for many theories in the social and natural sciences. *If* there ever were a mythic-poetic-epistemic universal, the pattern of health-disease-recovery might be a likely candidate. The study of autoimmune disease implies that the classical scheme of creation-fall-redemption is deeply flawed. There is mounting evidence that autoimmunity is our 'primal' condition and so-called health is secondary to, and dependent upon, the suppression of an autoimmune response. If this is so, then the self is never at one with others, its world, or even itself. Disease, in other words, is not 'abnormal' but is always already in our midst.⁶⁷

This mythological structure is, in my opinion, as pervasive in Taylor's own work as in those to whom he is referring, albeit in negative form. These are the final words of nOts:

Nothing ever balances . . . *nothing ever balances*. Betrayal is unavoidable, cure impossible. Disease is neither a mode of being nor of nonbeing but is

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 250-251

a way of being not without not being. The dilemma, the abiding dilemma to which we are forever destined, is to live not.⁶⁸

Taylor's Western heritage, the Eden-fall-redemption symbols, are seen here to be asserted by their absence. Taylor is wounded by the loss of Eden and the loss of possible redemption.

Taylor finishes at Nāgārjuna's starting point, the first of the Four Noble Truths – life, when there is attachment to self, is suffering or dis-ease. Taylor asserts the impossible. He writes:

Though it seems impossible, *the body is simultaneously itself and other than itself*. Never simply itself, the body is haunted by an alterity with which it cannot identify and yet with which it cannot avoid identifying.⁶⁹

Nāgārjuna rejected the third lemma, both identity and difference, both self and not-self, as an impossibility that was not possible; and not only not possible, but one of the causes of suffering. Taylor's body which is simultaneously itself and other than itself is a proposal to accept suffering. Nāgārjuna, as a Buddhist, asserts three more points: There is a cause of this suffering, namely, craving caused by ignorance; there is a release from suffering; the path to that release is the eightfold Buddhist path.

In Taylor's understanding any cure is a denial of alterity, a denial of otherness, and reveals the inherent Western desire for presence and absolute knowledge. Taylor's attachment to the Other paradoxically results in a reinforcement of self,

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 255

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 253

as the only possibility in denying self as a substantial loss is to reinstate the self because self and loss of self imply one another.

Nāgārjuna's middle path allows him to empty suffering, self and other, and therefore emptiness itself is a cure. This is not so of Taylor's 'wound', caused by his substantialized dualism for which there is no cure. 'Disease', he writes, 'we eventually learn, is *chronic*; it is as endless as time itself'.⁷⁰ Nāgārjuna, revealing Taylor's substantialization, writes:

MMK XXIII: 23 If suffering had an essence,
 Its cessation would not exist.
 So if an essence is posited,
 One denies cessation.

I believe this to be Taylor's position when he asserts that 'Betrayal is unavoidable, cure impossible'.⁷¹ Taylor denies the cessation of suffering or dis-ease, as to deny suffering in his view is to assert its binary opposite, that is health, self, wholeness, presence. Nāgārjuna's treatise reveals that Taylor is in fact substantializing dis-ease. Suffering has, for Taylor, an essence, because he cannot envisage its cessation. Nāgārjuna's position is more radical than Taylor's: He states:

MMK XXIV: 40 Whoever sees dependent arising
 Also sees suffering
 And its arising
 And its cessation as well as the path.

Taylor explicates a view which asserts the first two lines of this verse. Nāgārjuna empties out this view with a further move. Nāgārjuna explains his logic in his

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 255

following chapter, 'Examination of nirvāna'. *Nirvāna* can be understood here as the unattainable goal, the impossible cure of Taylor's woundedness. Of *nirvāna*, Nāgārjuna writes:

MMK XXV: 1 If all this is empty,
 Then there is no arising or passing away.
 By the relinquishing or ceasing of what
 Does one wish nirvāna to arise?

Taylor's woundedness reveals his Cartesian dualism, his turn to the Kierkegaardian risk. His reasoning leads him to assert an Other that is beyond reason, while in keeping with Nietzsche's denial of the possibility of absolute knowledge and asserting a neither/nor as opposed to Kierkegaardian either/or, this dualism creates an incurable wounding as the ' / ' is substantialized. The implicit condition of this situation, of which Nāgārjuna was aware, is that if the border, margin or liminal space is substantialized so will the elements that it separates.

Who is it, Nāgārjuna would ask, that is suffering from woundedness? It can only be an existent entity, a substantialized phenomena. Nāgārjuna's appraisal reveals that Taylor is mentally clinging to dis-ease, incompleteness, difference, for if he had deconstructed both identity and difference and understood the radical implications of a deconstructed reality – that is an empty reality – then there would be no disease and no one to bear the disease, both would be empty. Nāgārjuna states:

MMK XII: 10 Not only does suffering not exist
 In any of the fourfold ways:
 No external entity exists
 In any of the fourfold ways.

Nāgārjuna can realize the cure for woundedness through a process of meditative Yoga based on the co-dependent realization of all things. This results in the emptying out of suffering, which is caused by mental clinging to anything or any conception. This includes disease, self, Other, identity, difference or causation. It is the condition required for the assertion of a non-clinging existence in which disease, self, Other, identity, difference, causation and cessation all exist at a conventional level. It is therefore the condition for ethical behaviour, as well the condition required for differential 'mysticism', the insight into which is gained through meditating on co-dependent arising. This insight is the condition required for healing. Nāgārjuna concludes the MMK with this statement:

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

Taylor's twists and turns from Nietzsche to Hegel to Kierkegaard reveal his attachment to the reversal of the pervasive Western search for truth, groundedness and certainty. This would reveal, in Nāgārjuna's understanding, that he has accomplished nothing.

It seems an abiding concern of Taylor that the self or Other is necessary to make sense of an otherwise chaotic experience. Once both the self and Other are dissolved a kind of quietism of chaotic acceptance seems the only alternative available to Taylor. His move from the divine milieu to the threshold of the Cartesian labyrinth represents his ethical concern and a realization that quietism is not an adequate solution. Yet his unacknowledged reinstatement of the Cartesian anxiety offers only an incurable way of being without release. Nāgārjuna's

dissolution of self and Other results, on the other hand, not in chaos but co-dependent arising.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. TAYLOR'S A/THEOLOGY IN RELATION TO DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION AND NĀGĀRJUNA'S CO-DEPENDENT ARISING

Not to explore the influence of Jacques Derrida upon Taylor would be remiss. Derrida's 'philosophy' has centrally affected Taylor's work. By summarizing the deconstructive strategies of Derrida, and exploring how Taylor has adopted them, the nature of the deconstructive moves made by Taylor in relation to Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* are clearly revealed.

4.1 DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction takes its inspiration from the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. The term 'deconstruction' reveals that Derrida is not attempting a new philosophy but rather a strategy of reading or a group of strategies of reading. Deconstruction 'takes on' the history of philosophy and offers a particular conception of language.

The examination of the history of philosophy leads Derrida to suggest that philosophers have always been concerned with the meaning of *being*. Different philosophers have answered the question: 'What is ultimately real?', in different ways: the Platonic forms, the Aristotelian essence, Cartesian clear and distinct

ideas, Humian sense impressions, God, etc. What all these various ultimates have in common is the assumption that Being is presence. These philosophers all assumed that reality is wholly and directly present not only to the knowing mind, but also to the language in which that mind represents its knowing. Derrida relates the history of philosophy to linguistics – particularly to the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure distinguishes two elements in a sign: One is the image or a concept in the mind which he calls the 'signified'; the other is a material component the phonetic entity that is called by Saussure, the 'signifier'. Saussure states that there is no direct link between the signifier and the signified. There is nothing about the image or mental concept of an apple that demands to be signified by the word 'apple'; any other word would do in its place. There is, in other words, always a difference that separates the signifier and the signified.¹ Saussure acknowledged, and at the same time suppressed, the arbitrariness of the sign and it was therefore left to others such as Derrida to explore the implications of this linguistic understanding of language.

Derrida takes Saussure's linguistic finding into the realm of the history of philosophy and asks what significance this linguistic twist could imply for the assumption that 'being is presence'? If signifiers can fail to signify, then signification cannot be taken for granted. The 'transcendental signified' – the anchor to which all signs are somehow directed, and which lies at the heart of logocentrism, is revealed by Derrida to be yet another signifier. Derrida concludes that meaning is never a matter of presence because signs are composed not of substances but of relations, of differences not identity. He writes:

¹ Mackey L, 'Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Deconstructive Strategies in Theology', *Anglican Theological Review* 65 (1983) pp. 255-272

Difference is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be "present", appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element.²

Logocentrism is the belief, pervasive in the history of Western philosophy, that there is an eternal logos or meaning pervading the universe. The belief in the direct relation between signifier and signified results, then, in the belief in God. This relation belongs, Derrida states:

. . . in a profound and implicit way to the totality of the great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics, and in a more explicit and more systematically articulated way to the narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality.³

Derrida's attempt to cut free of Western logocentric desires echoes Nietzsche's attack on the conventions which prevailed in liberal Enlightenment culture. Nietzsche's statement: ' . . . the world has become "infinite" for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*.'⁴ heralds Derrida's reduction of the transcendental signified to signifier. Because there is no guarantee that 'being is presence', because there is no transcendental signified to anchor meaning, and because there is a possible gap or difference between signifier and signified, there is no assurance that we say what we mean and mean what we say and are directly understood in an immediate way. Meaning and being are distanced and deferred by the language in which we

2 Derrida J., Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, Allison D. B. (trans.), Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, pp. 142-143

3 Derrida J., Of Grammatology, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 13

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

presume to represent them. This double process of distancing and deferring Derrida characterizes by means of the neographism *différance*. Because the signifier has no necessary connection with the signified, language does not deliver the presence, that is, the corollary of being. In fact, language converts presence into absence. Our words do not stand for their meanings; they 'stand in' for them.⁵ Interpretation becomes infinite. What makes meaning possible is, however, the 'trace':

Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement, which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance*⁶

Deconstruction is centrally concerned with the foundations of meaning. The history of philosophy is seen in light of the gap between signifier and signified as a chain of philosophers each attempting to offer a signified for the signifier 'being' or 'truth' or 'meaning'. But as there is a gap between signifier and signified this is shown by Derrida to be a futile task, not a progressive movement towards the truth about being but a succession of suggested signifiers replacing and displacing other signifiers, all of them attempting to fill the space for the signifier 'being'.⁷

From the perspective of linguistics, Derrida characterizes the history of philosophy as a chain of supplementations without a final link, a proliferation of differences without identity, and a perpetual postponement of presence. Philosophical discourse is shown by Derrida to be ruled by a desire and obsession

⁵ Mackey L, 'Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Deconstructive Strategies in Theology', p. 258

⁶ Derrida J., *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 62

⁷ Mackey L, 'Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Deconstructive Strategies in Theology', pp. 255-272

for 'meaning', a full and unspoiled presence or a foundation or ground. Derrida shows that such a desire is infinitely deferred and that all presentations of meaning or being are always already re-presentations. By showing the interconnectedness and arbitrary nature of sign and signified and all other metaphysical binary oppositions, Derrida attempts to show that an existing order assumes an authority it does not have.

The hierarchical elevation of speech over writing is an example of such an order where authority is given to the spoken word. It is his finding that Western thought has always assumed that speech is metaphysically and historically prior to writing. Speech results, in this understanding, in the direct expression of the intention of the speaker. It offers undistorted unmediated meaning. Writing, on the other hand, is a secondary mediated and debased form of language. The written mark has a number of characteristics that the spoken word does not have. It can be produced and exist in the absence of those to whom it addresses. So, for instance, Paul's letter to the Corinthians can exist and address modern readers in spite of the fact that the Corinthians (to whom Paul) wrote are no longer living. The document has also long outlived its author. The written word additionally breaks with the context of its inscription. For example, this thesis addresses the problematical nature of introducing Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā into a postmodern, philosophical debate. What Derrida notes is that it can exist in this way, uprooted from its original thought world, from its author, from its original addressees.

Derrida questions that these characteristics, which the tradition has seen as marks of inferiority, can also be, once the gap between signifier and signified is recognized, attributed to the spoken word. Just as the written word functions in

the absence of author, context and those addressed, so can the spoken word function in the absence of the intention of the speaker. All language can be revealed to function without dependency on speaker, hearer, meaning, reference, and context. Language is not limited by any sender, receiver, referent, signified, or situation. Derrida denies that speech enjoys any metaphysical advantage over writing. All language is secondary and no language is original. Therefore, he suggests, all language is, essentially, writing.⁸

Once all language is revealed to be essentially writing, deconstruction reveals that not only 'being' and truth are illusive, the self and identity also disseminate, blur and disappear in the gap between signified and signifier. The individual is lost in the play of signs and traces and this mirror-play disrupts the proximity of self-presence that is necessary for self-identity.⁹

Deconstruction aims, then, to locate and expose the blind spots in any text it examines. It reveals that the meaning of a text is never contained within it or securely tethered to it, but always distanced and deferred by it. Derrida emphasizes that no writer is completely in control of his or her own language. Even if that writer knows what he or she means and intends it to say, he or she cannot make language mean just what he or she wants it to. What language does to the writer is as important as what the writer does with language. Derrida looks for puns, alliterative sequences, plural meanings and typographical errors. Derrida's writing, through this process, takes on a frivolous and comedic nature. His 'systematic' free-play invokes the frivolous and joking character of writing. Like

⁸ Schindler D. L., 'On meaning and the death of God in the academy', *Communio* 17 (1990) pp. 192-200

⁹ Gall R. S., 'Of/From Theology and Deconstruction', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 58 (1990) p.418

comedy, Derrida's strategies inhabit the margins of the dominant order or philosophy that it attempts to disturb. Robert Gall suggests:

Derrida's deconstructive strategy is . . . [like Comedy] subversively marginal, inhabiting the structures it seeks to demolish. Neither inside nor outside, a deconstructive reading seeks to pull at the loose ends at the margins of a (philosophical) system in an attempt to unravel it, using the logic of the system to subvert and overturn it. By so inverting and subverting a system, deconstruction hopes to neutralize the system – not by erecting another truth in its place (which would only re-establish an opposition) but – by laughing at it.¹⁰

Gall's offers this summary of the mission of deconstruction:

Breaching the very limit that it marks in its marginality, undoing the text(s) of philosophy and its (their) obsession for a presence and meaning infinitely deferred and differed, deconstruction laughs. Rising above the oppositional order (of philosophy) without gravity, deconstruction, like comedy, is *utopian* in the radical sense of the word. Breaking the rules as it defines them, marking the end of authority, of history, and of the self, deconstruction frees us for an affirmation of a play that is always already there, scattering meaning to the winds in an infinitely repeatable dissemination of significance.¹¹

Deconstruction cannot afford to suggest its own order or authority; to suggest a philosophy or thesis that itself suggests a form of presence or ultimate would be to ignore its own critique. Instead, Deconstruction offers strategies to displace meaning and to reveal hidden hierarchies within Western philosophy. In this Derrida's deconstruction has been compared extensively with Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* as both attempt to destabilize and reveal hidden biases in the viewpoints offered within their traditions without setting up a viewpoint of their

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 418

own. I would suggest, however, that the suggestion that they offer the same results is open to the same critiques I offer against conflating Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* with Taylor's a/theology. While Taylor does bring his own Christian theological background to bear on Derrida's work, the influence of Derrida in his work is pervasive and I would suggest that which distinguishes him from Nāgārjuna – a hidden Cartesian bias, the absence of a belief in the correlative nature of knowledge and practice, the use of dyadic pairs as opposed to the continuum between the two truths in Nāgārjuna's treatise, the substantialization of emptiness as opposed to the emptiness of emptiness – also distinguish Nāgārjuna from Derrida.

Derridean deconstruction through its various strategies attempts to inhabit the borders of philosophy, it aspires to inhabit an undecidable 'non-place' of alterity and otherness, a place that is neither inside nor outside the philosophical text and by doing so attempts to mark the closure of the history of meaning and being. Derrida writes:

This absolute logos was an infinite creative subjectivity in medieval theology: the intelligible face of the sign remain turned toward the word and the face of God. Of course, it is not a question of 'rejecting' these notions; they are necessary and, at least at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them. It is a question at first of demonstrating the systematic and historical solidarity of the concepts and gestures of thought that one often believes can be innocently separated. The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological. Perhaps it will never *end*. Its historical *closure* is, however, outlined.¹²

¹² Derrida J., *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 13

If 'the sign and divinity have the same place and time and birth' and that 'the age of the sign is essentially theological', and Derrida is revealing the death of the transcendental signified, then it is possible to suggest, as David Schindler does, that Derrida is merely carrying through Nietzsche's dictum that God is dead. Nietzsche wrote:

The tremendous even [of the death of God] is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; . . . deeds, though done still require time to be seen and heard.¹³

Recalling Nietzsche's madman, who says that he has 'come to early', Schindler writes:

In a sense, Derrida represents the return of [Nietzsche's] madman, insisting that the requisite time has now passed: it is time now for the death of God to be seen and heard in its full implications. Intelligibility – identifiable meaning – does not, and cannot, outlive God. Rather, following the death of God, we stray "as through an infinite nothing".¹⁴

Derrida also denies the possibility that his deconstructive strategies are a form of negative theology. Though he acknowledges some resemblance between deconstruction and negative theology, he explicitly denies any relation between the two. He writes:

. . . the detours, phrases, and syntax that I shall often have to resort to will resemble – will sometimes be practically indiscernible from – those of negative theology. Already we had to note *that* difference *is not*, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (*on*). And we will have to point

¹³ Nietzsche F., *The Gay Science*, Kaufmann W. (trans.), Random House, New York, 1974, p. 125

¹⁴ Schindler D. L., 'On meaning and the death of God in the academy', *Communio*, 17 (1990) p. 195

out everything *that* it is *not*, and, consequently, that it has neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of being, present or absent. And yet what is thus denoted as differance is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology. The latter, as we know, is always occupied with letting a superessential reality go beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastens to remind us that, if we deny the predicate of existence to God, it is in order to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being. Here there is no question of such a move, as will be confirmed as we go along. Not only is differance irreducible to every ontological or theological – onto-theology – reappropriation, but it opens up the very space in which onto-theology – philosophy – produces its system and its history. It thus encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy.¹⁵

Robert Magliola believes, however, that any persistent reader of Derrida's work awakens sooner or later to what is Derrida's own repressed vacillation: his vacillation between the fastness of the labyrinth of the text and the awesomeness of breaking out of the turn.¹⁶

The role of silence and an Other that haunts language becomes a recognizable theme in Derrida's work. In his essay 'Cogito and the History of Madness', Derrida says:

... silence plays the irreducible role of that that bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge. ... Like non-meaning silence is the work's limit and profound resource.¹⁷

¹⁵ Derrida J., Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs, pp. 134-135

¹⁶ Magliola R. R., Derrida on the Mend, Purdue University Press, Indiana, 1984, pp. 48-49

¹⁷ Derrida J., Writing and Difference, Bass A. (trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 54

In 'Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations', Derrida states that the most negative discourse, even beyond all nihilisms and negative dialectics, preserves a trace of the other. 'A trace of an event older than it or of a 'taking-place' to come, both of them, here there is neither an alternative nor a contradiction'.¹⁸ He states:

Language has started without us, in us and before us. This is what theology calls God, and it is necessary, it will have been necessary to speak. . . . Having come from the past, language before language, a past that was never present and yet remains unforgettable – this 'it is necessary' thus seems to beckon toward the event of an order or of a promise that does not belong to what one currently calls history, the discourse of history of the history of discourse. . . . When Jeremiah curses the day he was born, he must yet – or already – *affirm*. Or rather, he must confirm, in a movement that is no more positive than negative, according to the words of Dionysius, because it does not belong to position (thesis) or to deposition (privation, subtraction, negation).¹⁹

In 'Force of Law', commenting on Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence', Derrida argues:

It seems at first that there is no way out and so no hope. But at the impasse, this despair (*Aussichtslosigkeit*, "insolubility," "hopelessness") summons up decisions of thought that concern nothing less than the origin of language in its relation to the truth, destinal violence (*schicksalhafte Gewalt*, "fate-imposed violence") that puts itself above reason, then, above this violence itself, God: another, a wholly other "mystical foundation of authority."²⁰

¹⁸ Derrida J., Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory, Frieden K.(trans.), Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, pp. 3-70

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29

²⁰ Derrida J., 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, Cardozo Law Review 11 (1990) pp. 1021-23

Having introduced this wholly other, one must ask, as I ask in the previous chapter, whether Derrida is reintroducing a transcendental signifier, is reintroducing a theology, is rewriting his strategy. This talk of the wholly other, of God and of theology is at odds with his earlier rejection of a possible relation between negative theology and deconstruction. By way of reminder, I requote:

... what is thus denoted as difference is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology. The latter, as we know, is always occupied with letting a superessential reality go beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastens to remind us that, if we deny the predicate of existence to God, it is in order to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being. Here there is no question of such a move, as will be confirmed as we go along.²¹

Such a statement is at variance with later statements such as this:

The universalization of *droit* [law] is its very possibility, it is analytically inscribed in the concept of justice (*Gerechtigkeit*). But in this case what is not understood is that this universality is in contradiction with God himself, that is, with the one who decides the legitimacy of means and the justice of ends *over and above reason and even above destinal violence*. This sudden reference to God above reason is nothing other than a reference to the irreducible singularity of each situation.²²

The irreducibly singular is, after all, not a relation of differences but a reference to identity, to presence. These Derridean references to the wholly other, set apart from the network of differential relations, to God, to the event of an order or of a promise that does not belong to what one currently calls history, to the silence that bares and haunts language, suggests that Derrida can be read as offering the

²¹ Derrida J., *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs*, pp. 134-135

²² Derrida J., 'Force of Law', p. 1023

possibilities of an absent God rather than a nonexistent one. This is at least a difference in emphasis if not a total reworking of his rejection of being as presence, of his rejection of any dream of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign. There is a shift in emphasis from his acceptance of 'the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.'²³

One has to agree with Magliola that there is, indeed, a vacillation to be found in Derrida's work. I suggest that Derrida can be read in two phases, one in his exploration of the implications of a textuality that functions in the absence of a transcendental signified or anchor, and secondly, as exploring the nature of that absence.

4.2 TAYLOR AS DERRIDA'S DISCIPLE

Taylor's a/theology can be seen to rely on his interpretation of Derrida. He attempts in *Erring* to represent a groundless milieu of intertextuality, or what he calls scripture, where there are no privileged terms; he nevertheless explores the possibilities made available in terms of erring, wandering, nomadic thought, lack of system and lack of presence. What is given emphasis is clearly the opposite of presence, system or the proper.

²³ Derrida, J., *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

Nietzschean perspectivism is very much the tenor of Taylor's message in Erring. For instance, he writes in his chapter 'Erring scripture':

When it no longer seems necessary to reduce manyness to oneness and to translate the equivocal as univocal, it becomes possible to give up the struggle for mastery and to take 'eternal delight' in 'The enigmatical/Beauty of each beautiful enigma'. In the undecidable interplay of signifiers, 'Engimatic form is living form; like life, an iridescence; an invitation to the dance; a temptation, or irritation. No satisfying solutions; nothing to rest in; nothing to weigh us down'. To deny truth is to affirm 'a world freed from the ties of gravity (i.e., from relationship with a foundation); a world made of moving and light surfaces where the incessant shifting of masks is named laughter, dance, game. This gay affirmation of a world without truth is realized in the seminal adventure of the trace. The joyous wandering of the *graphé* cannot be captured in the lines of a book; it must be inscribed in erring texts.²⁴

Taylor asks for a risky balancing act between the old belief in presence, identity, unity and its opposite, non-presence, difference, plurality, but there seems little which acknowledges the parent term – the emphasis is on its opposite. In attempting to deconstruct presence, identity, speech, immediacy etc. the deconstructionist's move is to offer an alternative exemplified by the terms 'wandering', 'erring', 'absence', etc. Once offered, this alternative is supposed to, in similar fashion, be dismissed or destabilized. Yet Taylor seems to give lip-service to the next step in the process, that is, the process of dismantling the alternative position, be it plurality, marginality, difference, non-meaning; he reveals a fascination with this alternative position's possibilities. The suspension

²⁴ Taylor M. C., Erring: A Postmodern A/theology, pp. 176-177 quoting Blake W., 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Erdman D. V. (ed.), The Illuminated Blake, Doubleday, New York, 1979, p. 106; Brown N. O., Love's Body, Random House, New York, 1973, p. 246 and Haar M., 'Nietzsche and Metaphysical language', in Allison D. B., (ed.), The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation, Seabury Press, New York, 1979, p. 7

between the binary positions seems to have a magnetic effect of pulling to one or other side. Taylor states that 'Deconstruction is steadfastly non-foundational and, hence, is relentlessly critical. Rather than legitimating quietism, such criticism leads to a perpetual restlessness that issues in endless transformation.'²⁵ Taylor's erring scripture is his understanding of Derridean labyrinthian wandering. Taylor embraces the labyrinth in Erring. In his article forwarded for the symposium that reviewed Erring, he explains:

There is an undeniably nihilistic side to deconstruction. Students of religion, however, should realize that nihilism is a complex phenomenon. The nihilism of deconstruction more closely resembles Christian selflessness, Jewish exile, and buddhist emptiness than any simple libertinism or antinomianism. In Erring I have tried to emphasize the socio-ethical dimensions of deconstructive a/theology by exploring the notions of dispossession, impropriety, expropriation, communication, compassion, spending, sacrifice, death, desire, delight, errancy, and carnality. To rethink human experience in these terms requires a reconsideration of most of the principles that guide contemporary social, political, and ethical debates. Though bearing considerable socio-ethical relevance deconstructive analysis can never provide a firm foundation for thought or action. Deconstruction is steadfastly non-foundational and, hence, is relentlessly critical.²⁶

In Erring, Taylor puts a happy face on nihilism and offers the notions of dispossession, impropriety, expropriation, communication, compassion, spending, sacrifice, death, desire, delight, errancy and carnality, in positive terms.

²⁵ Taylor M. G., 'Masking Domino Effect', in 'On Deconstructing Theology: A Symposium on Erring: A Postmodern A/theology' in Journal of the American Academy of Religion 54 (1986), pp. 547-556

²⁶ Ibid., p. 554

In comparing Nāgārjuna with Derrida, David Loy argues that Nāgārjuna is more systematic in his critique of all metaphysical views than Derrida. Whereas Nāgārjuna fully deconstructs both identity and difference as opposing metaphysical dualities, Derrida deconstructs only identity and remains attached to difference. As a result says Loy:

Derrida's single-deconstruction leads to the "temporary" reversal . . . and/or to a discontinuous, irruptive "liberation" from reference grounded in the search for unattainable origins, into the dissemination of a free-floating meaning beyond any conceptual *clôture*. For Nāgārjuna, this would only be the illusion of liberation, while remaining trapped in a textual "bad infinity" which tends to become increasingly playful.²⁷

I suggest that Taylor's suggested carnality and erring can be critiqued in similar fashion.

Taylor, however, adds a uniquely Christian interpretation to Derrida's textuality when he suggests that the death of God, or the transcendental signified, results in the resurrection of the Word. He writes:

The main contours of deconstructive a/theology begin to emerge with the realization of the necessary interrelation between the death of God and radical christology. Radical christology is *thoroughly* incarnational – the divine "is" the incarnate word. Furthermore, this embodiment of the divine is the death of God. With the appearance of the divine that is not only itself but is at the same time other, the God who alone is God disappears. The death of God is the sacrifice of the transcendent Author/Creator/Master who governs from afar. Incarnation *irrevocably* erases the disembodied logos and inscribes a word that becomes the script enacted in the infinite play of interpretation.²⁸

²⁷ Loy D., *Non-duality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, p. 60

²⁸ Taylor M. C., *Erring*, p. 103

Taylor's Christological message is a message of dissemination, diffusion and dispersion, the embodied word cannot be contained within fixed boundaries or inscribed in straight lines. He concludes:

The word turns out to be a hospitable host who asks everyone to sit down at his table and even offers *himself* for our nourishment.

For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. Word becomes flesh: body and blood, bread and wine. Take, eat. Take, drink. To eat this bread and drink this wine is to extend the embodiment of the word and to expand the fluid play of the divine milieu. When freely enacted, the drama of the word proves to be self-consuming. While the incarnation of the divine is the death of God, the dissemination of the word is the crucifixion of the individual self. This dismemberment inflicts an incurable wound, which gives birth to erratic marks and erring traces.²⁹

The death of God, the disappearance of the Father, is for Taylor the birth of the Son, the appearance of the Word – the appearance of language as sovereign. As Douglas Atkins notes, Taylor reads Derrida's story of writing, *différance*, and the 'trace' as an allegory of the Christian account. Taylor argues that the erasure of the transcendental signified not only 'sets the stage for the infinite play of interpretation' but also disperses, scatters, sows the Word. Taylor's a/theology is a radical Christology which 'finds its completion in the crucifixion of the individual self and the resurrection of universal humanity'.³⁰

Taylor's Nietzschean perspectivism, his Christian theological interpretation of Derridean *différance*, his net of thoroughly relational relativity, his divine milieu,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 120

³⁰ Atkins G. D., 'Partial Stories: Hebraic and Christian thinking in the wake of Deconstruction', *Notre Dame English Journal*, 15 (1983), p. 73

are clearly reified and substantialized concepts. While God is dead, self is dissolved and meaning is unanchored, his divine milieu is a form of presence. While characterized as thoroughly relational and made of differences in which individual 'things', including the self, disappear in a net of relations, the net itself, as I have argued in the previous chapter, is itself a form of presence. It is this that Caputo notes when he argues:

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 c'd 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.³¹

What Taylor does with his understanding and discipleship of Derridean strategies in *nOts* is significantly different from Nietzschean undecidability. A move to Kierkegaardian decision, as I argued in Chapter Three, is revealed and in this too, he follows his perception of Derrida.

The Derridean vacillation between the fastness of the labyrinth of interpretation and the possibility of escape suggested by Magliola, are noted and co-opted by Taylor. Taylor can be said to move to the edge of the labyrinth in *nOts*, from beyond which an Other outside the text, the network of difference, appears. It is not surprising to find Taylor emphasizing *différance* in *nOts* as a kind of sieve or

³¹Caputo J. D., 'Erring: A Postmodern A/theology', *Man and World - An International Philosophical Review* 21 (1988) p. 110

boundary that disappears upon inspection. In proposing an ungraspable sieve he hopes, I suggest, to escape the trap of reifying the play of differences, as he was accused of doing by Caputo in his review of Erring. His motivation for the emphasis on the threshold is, I suggest, a need to distance his thought from reification and grounding presence, as well as a need to suggest an ethic or morality in face of the critiques of deconstruction as nihilistic. I requote from his conversation with Seurlemonde:

Once having grasped the stakes of deconstruction, it seems impossible to 'move beyond' it. Nor is it possible simply to remain with it. . . . One of the problems that deconstruction constantly faces is to articulate an ethics and a politics. As someone who has spent a good bit of time studying religious and ethical positions, I have never been much impressed by many of the discussions. The force of deconstruction – and it is considerable – is crucial. But what is to be done in the wake of such criticism is often far from clear. This is, I believe, one of the reasons so many followers of Derrida seem unable to do anything other than repeat the deconstructive moves they have mastered. I think that the exploration of so-called cyberspace creates the opportunity for interventions in cultural processes that are radically and politically significant.³²

What Taylor does in nOts is emphasize a difference that stands outside the labyrinth of interpretation as it was advocated in Erring. It is certainly 'outside of the text'. This alterity or Not or 'other Other' differs from the transcendental signified only in that it is never domesticated or completed since it is unthinkable and mystically unreachable. It does, however, provide the possibility of ethics and morality by means of hints of the Other offered through a gift that one is unable to respond to. He states:

³² Seurlemonde: Conversation with Professor Mark C. Taylor, 1996, 5 pages
<http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/taylor/taylor.html>

Since the resistance of alterity is not just resistance, the originary violence of the absolutely singular does not destroy ethical obligation. The ethical subject who heeds *the call of the other* [my emphasis] is, as I have stressed doubly bound. Indebted to an other that can never be known, the singular sub-ject is obligated to others whose world he shares.³³

What he does in the process, I argue, is set up an unreconcilable dualism with all the problems of the dualistic approach suggested by Nāgārjuna. More importantly it does not resolve the perceived problems that deconstruction originally intended to detonate. While Taylor pays lip-service to the ideas of combined digital and analogue measurements, he is unable to fully realize the implications of a continuum as a way of being. Taylor finally falls into digitalized thought by emphasizing an Other or a Not that constantly returns to disrupt the present. This Other that appears on the threshold is Taylor's version of Derrida's 'wholly other' as expressed in his article 'Force of Law'.

Taylor is aware of the theological implications of Derrida's 'silence', of his *wholly other*. He writes:

'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' is one of the strangest essays Derrida has ever written. Precisely for this reason, it is one of the most intriguing, most fascinating, and, perhaps, most important. The strangeness begins with the title or, more specifically, the subtitle. Force and law are familiar Derridean topics 'Force et signification'; 'Ce qui reste à force de musique'; 'Préjugés: devant la loi'; 'La loi du genre'; *Lecture de droit de regards; Du Droit à la philosophie; inter alia*. But the subtitle, which, of course is not Derrida's, refers to notions that he elsewhere calls into question: 'the mystical,' 'foundation,' and 'authority.' The force of Derrida's argument is that law is always forceful and force is always lawful. The play of forces, however, is not self-grounded but is given by an other

³³ Taylor M. C., *nOis*, p. 93

that is 'before' the law. This other, which is something like the 'mystical foundation of authority,' is neither moral nor rational.³⁴

This other is co-opted eagerly by Taylor in his search for a morality or an ethic and allows him to understand postmodern deconstruction and Derrida in a Kierkegaardian format as opposed to the Nietzschean emphasis he expressed in *Erring*. This reading of Derrida through Kierkegaard allows Taylor to reintroduce an anchor for morality behind the mask of deconstruction.

Taylor, as we find him in *Erring*, attempts to destructure the assumed hierarchic values within language by destructuring the dyadic structure and highlighting the repressed term, then crossing out this term as well and suggesting undecidability as the middle way between. Taylor does not manage to maintain this in-between stance, Caputo argues and I can only agree, that in *Erring*, Taylor leans towards the repressed term: difference, atheology, nihilism. In *nQts*, we discover that Taylor has followed a Derridean pendulistic swing to the theological side of the ' / '.

4.3 DECONSTRUCTIONIST RESTLESSNESS WITHIN THE LABYRINTH OF LANGUAGE

Magliola suggests that Derrida's quandary, his vacillation stems from a latent Cartesianism, an irredeemable split between 'mind' and 'outside'. Human mind, be it regarded individually or collectively, can not reach the 'outside' as it 'really' is. For humans, the 'outside' is 'always already' structured in terms of human ideas and other human patterns. When Derrida deconstructs logic, his very surmise that humankind is 'on the verge' of another way of knowing (realizing) which is

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84

somehow differential is a surmise, Magliola insists, *fed* by experience. Otherwise, Magliola points out, how could he affirm the 'glimmer', the diascript, the trace as he does? I requote to illustrate his point:

Without a retention in the minimal unit of *temporal experience*, [my emphasis] without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determinatic . of the content, of the *pure* movement, which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is difference.*³⁵

His unacknowledged trust in 'experience' is, Magliola argues, a kind of unacknowledged 'phenomenology'. As a Cartesian 'rationalist to a fault', Magliola continues, he can not concede a 'knowing' which is not consciousness-bound and logical. Magliola suggests that one way of describing the post-structuralist quandary is to say Derridean deconstruction can 'cross-out' but it cannot 'cross-over'.³⁶

Taylor reveals his own restlessness within the possibilities given by the strategic moves of deconstruction, when he states:

Once having grasped the stakes of deconstruction, it seems impossible to 'move beyond' it. Nor is it possible simply to remain with it.³⁷

Magliola suggests that if Derrida, and I would like to add Taylor to his suggestion, were to dissolve this epistemological model, which so surreptitiously engineers

³⁵ Derrida J., *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 62

³⁶ Magliola R. R., *Derrida on the Mend*, p. 123

³⁷ Seulemonde: *Conversation with Professor Mark C. Taylor*, 1996, 5 pages
<http://www.cas.usf.edu/journal/taylor/taylor.html>

his quandary, perhaps the off/way would be clear to a serene joy – a differential joy.³⁸

It is my suggestion that this epistemological model is Derrida's Western inheritance which includes the influences of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Nietzsche, because his dead God looms so pervasively throughout his work. Taylor, following Derrida, is forced into the same model by a tradition that cannot escape itself.

In Erring, Taylor, following Derrida, is unable to escape the labyrinth of the text due to the Cartesian belief that everything that can be perceived or conceived is an extension of mind – there is nothing in this paradigm that can escape mind or text or language. Taylor's version of this is read by Caputo as nihilistic and atheological, as opposed to Taylor's asserted undecidable a/theology. This a/theology can also be understood, however, as a radical Christology, a divinization of the network of relations, that is, of the text. This is clearly illustrated when he writes:

Writing is an unending play of differences that establishes the thoroughgoing relativity of all "things". This complex web of interrelations is the divine milieu. Within this nontotalizable totality, nothing is itself by itself, for all things emerge and fade through the interplay of forces.³⁹

What we see now is a pendulistic swing to the dualism of the singular and the 'wholly other', a move to decision as opposed to the undecidable. A Kierkegaardian need to leap from one side of the Cartesian split to the other – the

³⁸ Magliola R. R., Derrida on the Mend, p. 124

³⁹ Taylor M. C., Erring, p. 118

beyond mind – results. The following quotation has a notably different message to the preceding quotation. He states:

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.⁴⁰

But, as we shall see, Taylor is still unable to 'cross over', to leap the gap. Taylor highlights the boundary, threshold, sieve of the between of differences. In *nOts*, this sieve functions in different ways to the joyful nihilistic divine milieu we are exposed to in *Erring*. The loss of presence, truth and completion is, as noted in the previous chapter, mourned. Taylor's awareness of loss is emphasized. Truth, completion and presence are still denied, yet we find him standing on the threshold of the labyrinth from which a 'wholly Other' approaches. This Other is, however, unreachable. He writes:

The appeal (*l'appel*) of deconstruction is the call (*l'appel*) of an other that 'arrives' by infinite deferral. Though never present, this other is not absent. The nonabsent absence of alterity implies an 'incalculable disproportion' in all rational and moral calculation. It is precisely this unavoidable disproportion that calls for resistance.⁴¹

Taylor has to admit the inability of the network of language to attain this Other in mystical union, as union denies difference and plurality. To attain this Other would be to deny difference, to in fact deny the deconstructive starting point. He is consequently unable to give up language and is left unable to cross the threshold. To cross the threshold would be to admit to a term privileged amongst signifiers,

⁴⁰ Taylor M. C., *nOts*, p. 90

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93

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⁴⁰ Taylor M. C., nQts, p. 90

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93

would be in fact to suggest a signifier. Nevertheless this Other, as an echo within language, allows for the possibility of ethical or moral decisions.

At this late hour – and what hour is not always already late? – the only ethic that remains possible is an ethic that acknowledges its necessary entanglement with the impossible. 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.⁴²

I emphasize the point that I make in the previous chapter, namely that in Mādhyamikan terms he is left clinging to language, and by extension he is left stranded in the first of Buddha's noble truths: Life is suffering. In Taylor's own terms he is left, living not, forever wounded. The inability of the self and Other to be reconciled, yet its necessary entanglement, leaves Taylor with an incommensurable dualism. It leaves him dis-eased and wounded, living in a body that constantly betrays him. I re-quote from his final chapter:

Though it seems impossible, *the body is simultaneously itself and other than itself*. Never simply itself, the body is haunted by an alterity with which it cannot identify and yet with which it cannot avoid identifying. This alterity is the *not* of the body – the not that the body 'is' as well as the not that the body cannot be. In relation to this not, intelligence and counterintelligence strategies, however elaborate, are always inadequate.⁴³

Taylor's use of exclusive terms – 'is', 'is not' – finds him stating the impossible. Nāgārjuna, by contrast, was aware that exclusive terms lead one to these impossible conclusions. He wrote:

⁴² Ibid., p. 94

⁴³ Ibid., p. 253

MMK XXV 14 How could nirvāṇa
 Be both existent and nonexistent?
 These two cannot be in the same place.
 Like light and darkness.

Taylor's attempt to assert impossibility results from his use of exclusive terms. Nāgārjuna proposed a continuum from light to dark, from conventional to ultimate and back again; this was what he called co-dependent arising. The 'impossible' binding of 'is' and 'is not' is the third tetralemma, which he rejects right at the outset of his treatise when he writes, and I re-quote at the risk of overkill:

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

About suffering he writes, in stark contrast to Taylor's wounded living Not:

MMK XII: 10 Not only does suffering not exist
 In any of the fourfold ways:
 No external entity exists
 In any of the fourfold ways.

Nāgārjuna reveals that 'Taylor suffers because for him the 'self' has not truly dissolved, neither has the Other/death, or the Not. All of these conceptions are substantialized and therefore result in suffering. Taylor – following his understanding of Derridean deconstruction – believes that the hierarchical value given to identity, that once served to ground meaning in the West, is illegitimate. The disillusionment of the postmodern world with modern and traditional solutions leads deconstruction and other post-structuralist strategies to

destructure these values. What results from Taylor's deconstruction, it would seem, is unfortunately no more workable than that which deconstruction targeted as problematic. The exclusivist thought process, that once having rejected identity, one must turn either to difference or deferral, would be inherently problematic from a Mādhyamikan viewpoint, as any exclusive thought process reveals substantialization and does not recognize co-dependent arising or *śūnyatā*. Therefore, in any of its various forms, the postmodern deconstructive process as it is offered by Taylor, cannot be said to parallel Nāgārjuna's *pratītyasamutpāda*.

Tracing Taylor's understanding of Derrida in *nOts* reveals a structural dualism that seems to be so fundamental to the cultural thought heritage of Western philosophical/theological thought that any attempt to destructure and destabilize it only results in the evocation of various alternative formulations of the same dyad.

Derrida's vacillation between the fastness of labyrinthian entrapment, and the restlessness that ensues, is re-marked in Taylor's *Erring* and *nOts*. There is no sense of restlessness or vacillation in Nagarjuna's *MMK*. Ultimately this is, for me, the most telling difference which leads me to conclude that a conflation of these thinkers' proposed terms and salvic solutions is overenthusiastic and misguided.

CONCLUSION

Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* can be seen, I conclude, as a search, find and dissolution of substantialization of any kind whatsoever, rather than a search for an alternative to identity, transcendental or phenomenological. His starting point is the belief that any ontological practice results in mental clinging. His 'deconstructive' method, found in the *MMK* combined with Buddhist meditative practice, results in the goal of non-clinging – a non-dualistic way of being. In this non-dual mental state, the fabric of reality is revealed to be one of co-dependent arising. The fabric of reality as co-dependently arisen reinforces and reflects, in circular relation, Nāgārjuna's point of departure that any priority given to any substantialized concept, subject or object, is in fact dependently co-arisen and the emphasis given to it is ill-founded. Once the fabric of reality as co-dependently arisen is itself revealed to be empty and not a fabric at all but constituted of co-dependently arisen conceptualization, then the circle is complete. We return to the beginning. Everything is the same, but nothing remains the same. Therefore any subject, object or concept can be viewed from different standpoints to be with or without identity, with or without difference, depending on the focus. To have ethical and pragmatic focus at a conventional level depends on one's ability to focus on the ultimate level, and, *vice versa*, the ability to focus at the ultimate level depends on the dissolution of concepts: self and other. A continuum from conventional to ultimate is revealed and one's behaviour and one's understanding of self and other can slide along the continuum according to what is appropriate for the moment.

Taylor, by contrast, in his search for alternatives, may negate the self, the transcendent, or identity, but his moves are neither fluid nor pragmatic. In asserting the divine milieu, in asserting devalued or ungrounded language and concepts, he leaves his followers with no clear ethical or pragmatic way of being in the world. Taylor's divine milieu is, to my mind, a very bleak landscape, a landscape without rest, a landscape where no 'thing' can be valued over any other thing. Relativity is substantialized. The only possible way of being in this milieu, is as a destitute, a nomadic wanderer, a drifter. Taylor attempts to make this appear as a Dionysian celebration of life but, in my opinion, he asserts a form of nihilism. Taylor's divine milieu is an assertion of half of the Cartesian dualism: the mind. Nothing in his divine milieu is outside of the text or language; whatever proposes to be outside of the text, or hierarchically valued as a signified, is revealed to do so illegitimately and is reincorporated into the text.

In his book nots, however, this labyrinth is revealed to have a boundary. The emphasis is on the illegitimate practice found in Western philosophy and theology of attempting, like Hegel, to domesticate alterity or otherness. A 'wholly other' appears outside the labyrinthian language net suggested in Erving. This is an alterity that can not be incorporated within the text. It differs from the transcendental signified, rejected by earlier deconstruction, in that the transcendental signified was available to those in search of grounding meaning. This 'wholly other' is unavailable. It echoes within the text but cannot be reached by knowledge, faith or reason; it is a gift of grace towards which there is no possible response. Taylor asserts an irrevocable dualism, a Kierkegaardian chasm, over which one cannot leap.

Postmodern deconstruction rejected phenomenallism on the basis (among others) that the mind, turning inward upon its own ideas as a test of their ultimate validity, is bound to be blinded to inherent bias. In the same way, I assert, Taylor's postmodern deconstruction as a Western thought process turns inward upon the processes of Western philosophy, but like the phenomenological process postmodernism criticizes, it is blinded by its reflexive inspection. So, too, Taylor's deconstructive process is unable to see possibilities beyond the tradition that it deconstructs and is unaware of its own bias towards the Cartesian distinction between mind and beyond mind.

Taylor reveals a hidden Cartesian bias as he asserts the knowable in Erring as the divine milieu where all signifieds are shown to be signifiers. There is no authoritative principle that can be asserted from such a milieu as no sign or 'thing' can be valued above another. Absolute relativity reveals a need to be relativized, hence in his following book Taylor suggests such an authoritative principle in his 'wholly other', also called the Not. This Not is, in my reading, the unknowable, the other side of the Cartesian duality, the beyond mind. Taylor swings from one side of the Cartesian split to the other.

It is my suggestion that Nāgārjuna's 'deconstruction', as an external element arising from an alien environment, when applied to Taylor's deconstructive process, reveals the blind spots mentioned above, i.e. praxis, ethical implications, and additionally, pendulistic swings that result from a bias towards paired concepts or binary implications.

Taylor's move from the divine milieu to the threshold of the Cartesian labyrinth represents his ethical concern, and I believe a realization that quietism, no matter

how celebrated, is not an adequate solution. Like the Jains one could suggest that he is epistemologically a non-absolutist, a relativist, but a metaphysical dualist. His unacknowledged reinstatement of the Cartesian anxiety offers only an incurable way of being without release.

Nāgārjuna's dissolution of self and other results not in chaos but co-dependent arising. Just as Taylor is unable to escape his tradition and the alternative conditions of possibility that it allows, so, too, Nāgārjuna is a thinker moulded by his environment. Nāgārjuna is able, in my opinion, to assert *śūnyatā* as a result of his embeddedness in his Buddhist tradition and his Indian environment. The original Buddha, having access to Indian meditative praxis, discovered the possibility of a non-substantialized world view. This possibility arose from the acceptance of the coextensive relationship of knowledge and practice. This possibility was made available by the original Buddha and reiterated by the 'enlightened ones' that followed. Nāgārjuna's *prasanga* targets substantialization whereas Taylor's deconstruction targets the dissolution of difference into identity and the various alternative relations of these terms. What Taylor is unable to do is dissolve these terms into emptiness and then resolve them once again into a workable, pragmatic way of being as Nāgārjuna does. Taylor is in a process of suggesting this or that alternative to the traditional God/world dualism. In the wake of the conceptual death of God, his process is speculative and intellectual. Nāgārjuna offers, in distinction to Taylor, a solution made available to him through his particular milieu. My analysis of the two thinkers reveals that any superficial similarity disappears on closer inspection.

The concepts and terms and leading explanations offered by Taylor and Nāgārjuna are not hermetically sealed, easily transferable, idea packages but are embedded in

their own intellectual, spiritual and cultural landscapes. These landscapes, I have argued, offer different conditions of possibility.

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