



Title	The Postmodernist Critique of the Humanistic Frame in Religion
Author(s)	Govorounova, Alena
Citation	大阪大学言語文化学. 2003, 12, p. 47-61
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/77948
rights	
Note	

The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

The Postmodernist Critique of the Humanistic Frame in Religion*

GOVOROUNOVA Alena**

Keywords: humanism, religion, deconstruction

本論文はポストモダンの言説における宗教、特にキリスト教解釈の脱構築にみられる人間主義的な側面について考察したものである。モダニスト、ポストモダニストはそのキリスト教批判において「Spiritual/material」といった二元論を超えようとしたが、筆者はそこに浮かび上がるパラドクスを指摘することにより、彼らの試みの限界を見極めた。特にキリスト教の二元論を「good/evil」という倫理の問題に還元して批判したモダニスト、ポストモダニストのスタンス自体が二元論的、人間主義的フレームであることを指摘し、その超越方向である「holistic」という概念を批判した。

これらの方向性にかわり、筆者は脱構築の先駆者であるニーチェのキリスト教批判と聖書福音書のパウロの思想に着目した。彼らの思想には共通して「grace」の概念があらわれるが、これは「good/evil」の二元論を否定することなく超越する可能性をもつものとみなすことができる。つまり、キリスト教に本来備わる Trinity の三元論の見直すことで、「good, evil, grace」の三元論パラダイムを主張する新しい可能性が見出されるのである。

A Passion for Transcendence

The following was the response I got one day in an e-mail message from a deconstructionist scholar¹⁾, concerning a discussion about the status of religion in the postmodernist age:

“This is supposed to be one way of answering your question: how do we recuperate religion from deconstruction.

* 宗教の人間主義的フレームに関するポストモダン批評(ゴヴォルノヴァ・アリョーナ)

** 大阪大学大学院言語文化研究科博士後期課程

¹⁾ Takayuki Yokota-Murakami

Autumn Rainer Maria Rilke

The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,
 as if orchards were dying high in space.
 Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."
 And tonight the heavy earth is falling
 away from all other stars in the loneliness.
 We're all falling. This hand here is falling.
 And look at the other one. It's in them all.
 And yet there is Someone, whose hands
 infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.²⁾

And yet there is Someone whose hands infinitely calm, hold up the fragments of the world, falling apart...

The above-proposed poetic approach would undoubtedly qualify for one way – a romantic one – of recuperating a religious doctrine of hope from the critical challenge of deconstruction. It might not be an exaggeration to say that this response reflects the general attitude of many of our postmodernist contemporaries who consider religious faith legitimate as a personal choice of an individual but do not acknowledge it as having any intellectual basis. The secular intellectuals admit that one still may choose to make a "leap of faith"³⁾ towards Deity – if only they ignore the entire intellectual critique of religion: materialistic, scientific, humanistic, historical and finally, postmodernist, -- all those "enemies of Christianity," which altogether seem to have left no chances to recuperate religion and to resurrect the "dead God" among the intellectuals.

And yet their romantic selves are still looking for something or someone that would help them to find the way out of the relativistic decay of their world into fragments. The recuperation of religion in the contemporary philosophical thought has shifted towards formation of a "religion without religion"⁴⁾ concept, which is meant to satisfy the romantic parts of the souls that do not want to give up the religious doctrine of hope while honestly admitting that it is impossible for them to go on with the obdurate theological dogmas.

A number of secular academics over the past century revealed their longing for

²⁾Translated by Robert Bly

³⁾The concept, proposed by Soren Kierkegaard, which suggests the total separation of the rational and faith.

⁴⁾I borrowed this expression from the title of *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* by John Caputo, Indiana University Press, 1997

mysticism while refraining from theistic structures and expressed the critical need for the formation of a non-theistic spirituality, which undercuts the assumption that belief in God is the only condition for a spiritual orientation and the only source of spiritual values. Such are the “spiritual-humanistic tradition” as suggested by Marx and developed by Fromm; the “new mystique” as proposed by Julian Huxley for the improvement of men; and the “concept of real religion that transcends the false dualism of spiritual vs. carnal” as expressed by T. Yokota-Murakami:

Socialism, for Marx, is a society which permits the actualization of man's essence, by overcoming his alienation... it is the fulfillment of the prophetic aim: the destruction of the idols... Does not all this mean that Marx's socialism is the realization of the deepest religious impulses common to the great humanistic religions of the past? Indeed it does, provided we understand that Marx, like Hegel and like many others, expresses his concern for man's soul, not in theistic, but in philosophical language. ... Marx's fight against God is, in reality, a fight against the idol that is called God. ... Marx's atheism is the most advanced form of rational mysticism, closer to Meister Eckhart or to Zen Buddhism than are most of those fighters for God and religion who accuse him of “godlessness.” ⁵⁾

From the specifically religious point of view, the desirable direction of evolution might be defined as the divinization of existence – but for this to have operative significance we must frame a new definition of “the divine” free from all connotations of external supernatural beings. Religion today is imprisoned in a theistic frame of ideas, compelled to operate in the unrealities of the dualistic world. In the unitary humanist frame it acquires a new look and new freedom. With the aid of our new vision it has the opportunity of escaping from the theistic impasse and of playing its proper role in the real world of unitary existence. ⁶⁾

⁵⁾ Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co., New York, 1966, pp. 61-64

⁶⁾ Julian Huxley, ed., *The Humanist Frame*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1961, p.46

...How do I come in terms with Quakerism? I don't think I believe in "inner light." It does not come from the God, but it arises as a result of social contacts that one has before the meeting. I may be a disqualified Quaker, but my taking this view doesn't mess with my enjoying meditation and sharing thoughts with others. And I don't think I am being a-religious thinking this way. I am just trying to get out of the dichotomies of spirit/flesh, inside/outside, spirit/material, etc., above which, I believe, exists the real religion.⁷⁾

The passion for transcendence of the dualism of spiritual vs. material was primarily forged in the writings of the modernist intellectuals and developed further by their postmodernist heirs. Thus, the postmodernist project of Deconstruction, argues J. Caputo in his work *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, likewise appears to be "a passion and a prayer for the impossible... the blindness of faith ... in the impossible, but without the dogmas of the positive religious faiths":

... Deconstruction ... is set in motion by an overarching aspiration, which on a certain analysis can be called a religious or prophetic aspiration, what would have been called, in a plodding language of the tradition (which deconstruction has rightly made questionable), a movement of "transcendence."

Deconstruction repeats the structure of religious experience, i.e., of a specifically biblical, covenantal, Abrahamic experience, according to the strange logic of Blanchot's *sans*, which is no simple negation. Deconstruction regularly, rhythmically repeats this religiousness, *sans* the concrete, historical religions; it repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious. It repeats the passion of the messianic promise and messianic expectation, *sans* the concrete messiaisms of the positive religions that wage endless war and spill the blood of the other, and that, anointing themselves God's

⁷⁾Takayuki Yokota-Murakami, in personal correspondence; cited with his permission.

chosen people, are consummately dangerous to everyone else who is not so chosen; it ceaselessly repeats the *viens*, the apocalyptic call for the impossible, but without calling for the apocalypse that would consume its enemies in fire and damnation; it repeats the work of circumcision as the cut that opens the same to the other *sans* sectarian closure; it repeats Abraham's trek up to Moriah and makes a gift without return of Isaac, *sans* the economy of blood sacrifice, repeating the madness of giving without return; it repeats the movements of faith, of expecting what we cannot know but only believe – *je ne sais pas, il faut croire* – of the blindness of faith *sans savoir, sans avoir, sans voir* in the impossible, but without the dogmas of the positive religious faiths.⁸⁾

Religion without religion... Non-theistic religion... Real religion that is above the theological vs. humanistic dualism... The proponents of non-theistic spirituality and mysticism are men of integrity and justice, yet of sentimentality and compassion: their prayers and tears were wept in vain, for them God is dead, and their search for His love ended in rejection and disillusionment in the Almighty. Despite the pain of betrayal and alienation they do not ultimately sweep away religion from the picture – they still recognize the human need for the romantic “doctrine of hope” even if expressed in the non-theistic language. Incurable romantics, they still strive to recuperate religion from humanism, materialism, socialism and even from the attack of deconstruction and – to no surprise – succeed in doing that greatly, for the nature of all those “-isms” is of religion.

Religion has always been welcomed within the Church as well as in the secular world as long as it was not challenged by the reality of God. Religion as a legalistic social construct within the Church is merely a secular humanistic dichotomous paradigm: it puts a religious self-righteous Self in the center of the system, authorized to pass judgments within the binary frame of good and evil.

Secular humanism, on the other hand, fits under the religious paradigm of moral dualism of good and evil – it adopts the thesis vs. antithesis model: things are ascribed attributes of true vs. false, negative vs. positive, absolute vs. relative, superior vs. inferior and the like. Therefore, as long as religion remains a legalistic construct, which applies a humanistic dichotomous

⁸⁾ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. xix-xxi

paradigm, its recuperation does not appear a challenging enterprise in the secular academy. A famous theologian apologist F. Schaefer argues,

There is a real unity in non-Christian thought, as well as differences within that unity. ... The unifying factor can be called rationalism, or if you prefer, humanism ... [which] is the system where men and women, beginning absolutely by themselves, try rationally to build out from themselves, having only Man as their integration point, to find all knowledge, meaning and value.⁹⁾

Humanistic spirituality, non-theistic mysticism and deconstruction, however, all epitomize an outcry to get out of dichotomous thinking and to transcend various moral and intellectual dualisms: philosophical vs. theological, spiritual vs. carnal, metaphysical vs. materialistic, theistic vs. humanistic. The classical paradigm of religion does not appear to be such a way out, for it remains within the system of rivaling dichotomies and conceptual hierarchies. Hence, modernist “spiritual-humanistic tradition” and postmodernist “religion without religion” attempt to eradicate these dualisms by picturing a holistic paradigm of the world; they argue that spiritual vs. material dichotomy arose as an erroneous, historical construct within the Western Christian tradition. In their passion for transcendence they strive to go “beyond good and evil,” absolute and relative, spiritual and carnal – towards the real nature of things, towards the “unitary humanist frame” in the words of Julian Huxley. However, such a holistic model of transcendence under an honest critical consideration appears to be merely a revised materialism.

One way out of this dilemma is to employ a philosophical paradigm, that transcends the categorical polarization without denying dualism but asserting the ontological validity of the dichotomies. It must be a threefold paradigm. Such a paradigm has long existed within the Western tradition even though it has long been suffering a conceptual distortion and vulgarization. In the present essay I attempt to present such a “threefold” paradigm of transcendence alternative to the holistic mode of recuperation of religion discussed above. I argue that a Christian concept of grace, that transcends the duality of Law while affirming it, forms a unique threefold philosophical system, which truly goes beyond good and evil and transcends the dichotomies without merely unifying them into a somewhat mystique conceptual

“wholeness.” I propose that the critique of religion paradoxically turns out to be a critique of humanism¹⁰⁾ and thus becomes Christianity’s greatest advantage: despite the widely shared assumption to the contrary, the anti-humanizing methodologies of deconstruction and the broader postmodernist critique of humanism actually provide the strategies for the intellectual assertion of theistic Christianity and a theological doctrine of hope.

Deconstruction: Philosophical Apologetics¹¹⁾

The above-presented statement at first may sound as a perplexing, even groundless proposition. Admittedly, the postmodernist critique of the validity of religious faith and the notion of God seem to have far exceeded the most profound criticisms the religious categories have ever suffered in the past. The preceding modernist critique followed the classical logic of antithesis: the “questionings” of modernity have been formulated in terms of whether the essence of religious faith was true or false; whereas the postmodern critique shifts the methodological strategies towards challenging the validity of the notion of truth per se. The intellectual comfort of our modernist predecessors rested upon the conventional assumptions about the validity of the classical philosophical categories, which no longer appear legitimate to our postmodern contemporaries who have become largely disillusioned with all the claims to universally transcendental truth, reason and morality. This new critical approach supposedly presents an unprecedented threat to theology, which traditionally relied on the categories of metaphysical and moral absolutes, as in this statement by Anthony Thiselton:

These [postmodernist] perspectives constitute the most serious and urgent challenges to theology, in comparison with which the old-style attacks from “common-sense positivism” appear relatively naïve. Theology has more at stake than perhaps any other disciplines because, although philosophy and some other disciplines share the same loss of truth, theology serves to establish critically-informed trust, whereas the

⁹⁾ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 30

¹⁰⁾ The term “humanism” here should not be confused with the term humanism in a humanitarian sense. According to Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, “There are two meanings: (1) Any philosophy or system of thought, that begins with man alone, in order to try to find a unified meaning of life; (2) that part of humanistic thinking in the above wider sense that stresses the hope of an optimistic future for mankind.” (p. 216). I use the term humanism solely in the first meaning of the word.

¹¹⁾ Apologetics is the branch of theology having to do with the defense and communication of Christianity, often is referred to as “theological apologetics.” Here the term is used as a proposition that non-theistic philosophy likewise has a potential of serving the above-mentioned purposes.

postmodern perspective rests on suspicion.¹²⁾

I propose that this view of postmodernism as a “most serious and urgent challenge to theology” is based on the assumption that the essential conflict between theology and postmodernism is rooted in the conceptual opposition between universalism and relativism, where theology is associated with the affirmation of trans-cultural absolutes and postmodernism unprecedentedly affirms the triumph of relativism and cultural/linguistic determinism. The relativistic academic position appears as supposedly more open-minded and intellectually brave whereas the theological establishment of the absolute categories and universal moral values appears rigid and intellectually naïve. As Gordon Kaufman states in his *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, relativists often tend to claim “a kind of superiority for their own perspective,” which results in “philosophical arrogance.”¹³⁾ On the other hand, while relativism exercises “philosophical arrogance” over absolutism, absolutism generally tries to reestablish its grounds following the logic of classical Absolute Cause argumentation, as presented here:

Relativism is logically inconsistent and even self-contradictory in that, on one hand, it presupposes certain logical criteria as of exclusive significance in formulating its own theory, while, on the other hand, the theory itself is directed precisely to showing that these criteria are not of exclusive significance. That is, relativistic theories presuppose the very concept of objective validity which they allegedly destroy, and without such presupposition they lose all meaning.¹⁴⁾

If I viewed the relativism vs. absolutism encounter as taking place within the humanistic dichotomous paradigm, I personally would subscribe to the “philosophical superiority” of relativism over absolutism. Admittedly, our being socially, culturally and historically conditioned in our judgments and evaluations is our fate, regardless of the ontological status of the category of relativity itself, thus, if I accepted the dichotomous view of conceptual rivalry between relativism and universalism, I would take a relativistic position without hesitation. Yet I do not subscribe to such a humanistic dichotomous paradigm per se; I adopt the paradigm offered by

¹²⁾ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self, On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, T&T Clark Edinburgh, 1995, p. 16-17

¹³⁾ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 10

Christianity, which transcends humanistic dualism.

The postmodernist critique of modernist and religious dualisms allows us to trace the genealogy of the humanistic dichotomous paradigm and to clarify the mechanisms that imprison Christian gospel into the humanistic and religious dichotomies. Perhaps the first and most profound critique of the humanistic frame in religion appeared in the writings of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the precursor of deconstruction, whose influence on the development of the postmodernist philosophy is explicitly acknowledged by postmodernist thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

Beyond Good and Evil.

A Prelude for the Philosophy of the Future.

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity does not concern the concept of grace, i.e., theology of justification by faith. The target of his bitterest diatribes is a vulgarized perception of Christianity as merely a revised moral system. The cornerstone of the gospel of grace, however, is not morality but redemption by faith in the Savior. Ironically, the Nietzschean attack on the prejudices that keeping up to the moral code is a way to the heavenly kingdom strikingly resembles that of Apostle Paul in his *Epistle to the Romans*. Pauline soteriology emphasizes the fact that conventional morality has no value in it, i.e., it has no justifying or redemptive power. The Law is merely a standard system meant to reveal the sin of humanity, where sin is understood as alienation from God. Moral law was given not as medicine to heal the sickness; it serves as a device to diagnose it. Ontological good and evil are at war and the way out of the struggle is not self-improvement but trust in God's redemption:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his

¹⁴⁾ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 9

forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.¹⁵⁾

At what point did the conceptual opposition of absolute and relative come into existence? In the context of the Bible, the dualism of absolute and relative appeared in Genesis Chapter 3, after humans ate some of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the beginning of creation Deity and humanity had a trust relationship, which was challenged by the temptation to “become like gods, knowing good and evil” or – in terms of Nietzsche by a “will to self-power,” becoming a Superman, a humanistic ideal, which puts a human into the center of creation. Once people chose to become their own gods - to take an authority to pass judgments and change the rules - their trust relationship with the Deity was destroyed. In Christian theology the divine love always glorifies the other; it is reflected in the relationship within the nature of the Triune God, recorded in the Scripture: God the Father glorifies the Son and the Holy Spirit, Jesus seeks to glorify the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit gives all the glory to the Father and the Son. Love... “is not self-seeking.”¹⁶⁾ When humans become their own god they destroy the divine love order by putting themselves on the throne of their hearts. The “relativistic rebellion” is the firstborn sin of the Bible, an abyss of distrust, which splits Creator and creation and can be overcome only by restoration of the trust relationship. The transgressions of the Law, known as sins – behavioral misconducts – however, are merely the outcome of the original “will to power.” This way, the moral standards were given to humanity¹⁷⁾ not for the improvement of the human nature, but as a mirror, reflecting the sinful – unstable, alienated, confused, constantly

¹⁵⁾ Romans 3:20-31

¹⁶⁾ 1 Corinthians 13:5

¹⁷⁾ In *Epistle to the Romans* chapter 2, verses 14-15 Paul points out that the Jews, recipients of the revealed Law, were not the only ones with moral standards. The gentiles too had a moral nature, and a conscience that identified moral issues and led them to set up standards of right and wrong by which to judge, measure and evaluate human

changing, and relativistic – nature of the disconnected creation. The intercessory substitutionary death of Christ that provided a means for God to “passover” the sins of humanity provided a bridge over the abyss, allowing the reestablishment of a trust love relationship with God. “I am the way, [I am] the truth and [I am] the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”¹⁸⁾ Therefore, “if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”¹⁹⁾ This was the famous revelation received by Martin Luther about “salvation by faith alone,” which prompted him to rebel against the dead religious rituals of the legalistic church. The doctrine of sanctification by faith implies the reconciliation in the love relationship: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”²⁰⁾ Christ’s series of teachings on the “heavenly kingdom” present this kind of transcendental righteousness that surpasses humanistic self-perfection. “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”²¹⁾ One important principle of this heavenly kingdom was expressed by Jesus in the words: “Do not judge or you too will be judged,”²²⁾ which is a call to renounce the relativistic “will to power” to pass judgments. The heavenly kingdom achieved on earth reestablishes the lost paradise where the absolute vs. relative rivalry did not exist.

The Apostle Paul, however, emphasizes that righteousness by grace, in its transcendence of the Law, does not subvert the Law but affirms its absolute validity: “Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith? Not at all! Rather we uphold the Law.”²³⁾ Grace does not deny dichotomies but seeks to transcend them. Specifically, it transcends the dualism of good and evil by not requiring goodness or worthiness on the part of the recipient. “Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life,”²⁴⁾ “Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”²⁵⁾ Righteousness by faith does not require any good work or self-purification. In fact, self-righteousness is contradictory to the doctrine of the Gospel. It is a prideful act to earn

behavior by moral criteria.

¹⁸⁾ John 14:6

¹⁹⁾ Romans 10:9

²⁰⁾ Mathew 22:37-40

²¹⁾ Mathew 5:20

²²⁾ Mathew 7:1

²³⁾ Romans 3:31

²⁴⁾ Revelation 22:17

²⁵⁾ Mathew 9:12-13

salvation, to try becoming worthy of God's love. The most amazing truth of the Gospel –the free gift of grace - is the most difficult to comprehend. The fact that forgiveness for sins is *free* hurts our pride. It is free for us because it has been already paid for on our behalf. It requires a real humbleness to accept this free gift. At the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, Peter tried to stop him, saying, "No, you shall never wash my feet."²⁶⁾ Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me". Jesus stated that if you are not *humble enough* to accept God's redeeming sacrifice you are not His! What is that "part with Jesus" that one cannot have otherwise? In responding to Peter, Jesus was in essence saying "you have to let My coming sacrifice cleanse you from your sin." The most imaginably wicked person receives forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit as a promise of eternal life only by faith in Jesus Christ. What an insulting notion for the pride of all "good" people! One does not have to become "good" and change their behavior in order to deserve God's love. God *is* Love and He loves His creation no matter how far they go away from Him in their stubbornness. Love is impossible to earn. Grace means one can come to God the way they are and lay their sins, imperfections, and impurities under the foot of the Cross. Christ's redemptive work on the Cross was absolute and complete. Whereas the Gospel dwells on the omnipotence of the Almighty, legalistic self-righteousness is humanistic at heart: it puts humanity at the center of the system, with the assumption that it requires human effort to accomplish God's plan of salvation. The humanistic self-righteousness is most notably represented in the Pharisees, the religious leadership, who kept every iota of the Law, but "killed the author of life."²⁷⁾ The Christ of the Gospels explicitly expressed His opinion on religiousness as the greatest enemy of God, calling pharisaic leaders "snakes." The sinners and tax collectors did not crucify Jesus – the High Priests of the Almighty put God on the Cross.

Religion killed God.

The critique of religion by Nietzsche follows the same logic: first, he affirms the dualism of good and evil, claims its relativistic reversibility and implies the need for transcendence. As Ofelia Schutte rightly observes, "What he defined in the *Genealogy* as the opposition of 'good and bad' (master and slave) was just as dualistic as the target of his attacks, the Christian fixation on the opposition of good and evil. Nietzsche negates the moralistic position, which relies upon the dualism of good and evil... The person who transcends this dualism is only an immoralist in

²⁶⁾ John 13:6

²⁷⁾ Acts 3:15

the eyes of the one who is still trapped in the dualistic moral perspective.”²⁸⁾ (I agree with Schutte that the dualistic moral perspective is a trap, but I take a totally different position from the nihilistic option of viewing the transcendence as “only immoralist.”)

Nietzsche attacks the moral prejudices of the herd, which live in the dogmatic comfort of self-righteousness. He attacks the notion of an ascetic ideal, which is a product of religious self-purification – it too contradicts the message of the gospel and is simply non-biblical. Also, I believe, the Bible questions the concept of false guilt as much as Nietzsche does. “Guilt is such a big thing with us and is felt so intensely by so many, that it is hard to grasp the fact that the Bible does not really speak about guilt *feelings* [my emphasis]. Instead, Scripture speaks only of real guilt, the responsibility for acts of sin. [But] guilt is hardly a dominant biblical theme.”²⁹⁾

My most crucial point is that Nietzsche consistently demonstrates that the nihilistic ideal, the Superman, is a relativist in the most radical sense, having become a god, knowing good and evil. When he cries out in his *Thus spake Zarathustra*: “People! Your God is dead!” he shouts at those whose self-righteousness has replaced God in their hearts, to those whose adherence to moral self-development has denied God’s grace. Nietzsche’s criticism of the legalism in the church, which has a tendency to backslide towards measuring of faith by the standards of the Law, is very similar to that of the Apostle Paul in the *Epistle to the Galatians*: “You foolish Galatians! ... Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ... After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”³⁰⁾ The Apostle Paul emphasizes a strong tendency to go astray from sanctification³¹⁾ by grace towards the simplified way of good works and rituals of religion. Both the humanistic traditions – socialism, communism, materialism – with their secular moral codes for the betterment of society, and the religious traditions, with their attempts to reach the Deity, remain within the humanistic dichotomous paradigm as modes of moral and societal improvement.

However paradoxical, the critique of religion as a doctrine of moral self-perfection by Nietzsche helps to restore a proper understanding of Christianity as a gospel of grace. The recuperation of the Gospel from the historical vulgarization by association with the humanistic dualistic doctrine of self-perfection was indeed the most possibly challenging enterprise, and demanded so much caustic sarcasm on the part of Nietzsche, to break the strongholds of

²⁸⁾ Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism, Nietzsche without Masks*, The University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 108

²⁹⁾ Lawrence O. Richards, *Teacher’s Commentary*, Scripture Press Publications, 1987, p. 808

³⁰⁾ Galatians 3:1-3

³¹⁾ The format of the present essay does not allow, however, to analyze here how the doctrine of sanctification is different from the legalistic self-perfection. I leave this task for the succeeding work.

humanism in the minds of his intellectual brethren. His potential audience, the target of his critique is what he calls the “free spirit,” namely: the thinking man, the intellectual aristocrat, the philosopher and ruler... Apostle Friedrich foresaw the resurrection of God from the tomb of legalism, yet he spoke in parables to his contemporaries and it is no surprise that he used sharp irony and witty metaphorical expressiveness as his means to bring across the prophetic message to his generation, which still remained optimistic about humanism:

The modern self retained a basic optimism about the capacities of human reason, governmental or social strategies and scientific achievement, to shape the world for the general advancement of human society. But such optimism omits too many factors to provide hope for the postmodern self.³²⁾

Deconstruction strives to overcome humanistic dualisms but it fails to devalue the ontological status of the fundamental binary opposition of *positive* vs. *negative*; it emphasizes the reversibility of dichotomies according to one's political interests. It demonstrates its inherent instability of opposition, which follows the pattern, set by Nietzsche: demonstration of the incoherence and instability of moral absolutes. Yet deconstruction fails to fulfill the task that it claims to, that is, to get out of the dichotomies (inside/outside, spirit/material, self/reality etc.) ontologically. The deconstructionist philosophy is colored in sadness; it is a quintessence of contemporary philosophical helplessness and despair, for it is incapable of squeezing the three-dimensional thought – a reflection of the nature of the Triune God in the human being – into the dichotomous paradigm. The Christian God does not leave three-dimensional beings to agonize, trapped in dualisms. The threefold paradigm of good, evil and grace constitutes the completeness of the three-dimensional relationship: with the self (zero on the coordinate scale), with the other (horizontal axis) and with God (vertical axis). The God of the Christian Gospel is always there but He waits for his creation to become humble enough to let Him wash their feet. He chooses to be invited. Love does not impose Himself. Yet throughout the centuries He keeps knocking on the door of people's hearts: “I stand at the door and knock,”³³⁾ He keeps reminding people about Himself through His prophets.

³²⁾ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self, On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, T&T Clark Edinburgh, 1995, p. 12

³³⁾ Revelation 3:20

Nietzsche, the knower of the nature of men, could predict that the stubborn intellectuals would want to go back into the slavery of socially constructed morality where they lived in bondage yet self-contempt with an illusion of standing on stable ground. This was a stumbling block for deconstructionist philosophers: not being able to comprehend the three-dimensional paradigm, they reduced (the understanding of thought) to binary oppositions. But their wandering in the philosophical wilderness of the twentieth century has not been in vain. They have to learn for themselves the intrinsically political nature of the notions of good and evil before they enter the Promised Land, *a philosophy of the future* – post-humanism, when the humanistic frame not only in religion but in secular thought will be questioned.

Bibliography

- Caputo John, D., *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Indiana University Press, 1997
- Fromm, Erich, *Marx's Concept of Man*, Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co., New York, 1966
- The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1984
- Huxley, Julian, ed., *The Humanist Frame*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1961
- Kaufman, Gordon D., *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*, The University of Chicago Press, 1960
- The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, The Modern Library, INC., 1954
- Richards, Lawrence O., *Teacher's Commentary*, Scripture Press Publications, 1987
- Schaeffer, Francis A., *The God Who Is There*, InterVarsity Press, 1998
- Schutte, Ofelia, *Beyond Nihilism, Nietzsche without Masks*, The University of Chicago Press, 1984,
- Thiselton, Anthony C., *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self, On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, T&T Clark Edinburgh, 1995