

**WHOSE APOCALYPTIC RUSES?
DERRIDA, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM**

Kirk Boyle, University of Cincinnati

...Derrida has always maintained a highly complex, ambivalent yet critical relation to that [apocalyptic] “tone” in its various modalities, sometimes through a kind of multi-layered intertextual dialogism such that his opponents might almost be forgiven for lumping him together with the latter-day zealots and mystagogues.

– Christopher Norris, “The Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy”

OF AN APOPHATIC TONE INHERENT TO DECONSTRUCTION

In *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross*, Stephen D. Moore recounts the oft-cited response to Derrida’s original presentation of “La Différance,” where “one participant was audacious or innocent enough to remark: “[This *différence*] is the source of everything and one cannot know it: it is the God of negative theology” (23). Since its inception, critics have identified deconstruction as a form of apophaticism. Part of the blame, at least, for the persistence of metaphysics in a post-philosophy that is supposed to be anti-metaphysical *tout court*, must be assigned to Derrida himself. In the first chapter to *Poststructuralism*, titled, “Deconstruction, Theology, and the *Différance* Between Them,” Moore cites Derrida’s “Letter to a Japanese Friend.” Derrida writes, “[Deconstruction] has been called, precipitately, a type of negative theology (this was neither true nor false...)” (quoted in Moore 13). Although Derrida chides quick judgment of deconstruction, he leaves the final analysis mired in ambiguity: deconstruction is and is not a type of negative theology.

It may be more appropriate to fault Derrida's followers for the propagation of confusion concerning deconstruction's theological status. More than any other popularizer of Derrida, John D. Caputo—in books like *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* and *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*—promotes an understanding of deconstruction as apophatic. In *Deconstruction*, he writes, “this confusion or *convergence* of deconstruction and negative theology was something for which Derrida was criticized—*why not congratulated?*—right out of the gate...” (92, all italics mine). Caputo acknowledges that a categorical confusion exists between theory and theology, but instead of clearing this confusion he contributes to it by celebrating a convergence between deconstruction and negative theology. In the deserts of deconstruction—where we expect apostasy—we arrive at faith. Caputo's work treats the margins of philosophy as the not-so-pearly gates of a/theology.

If some of Caputo's claims leave the backdoor open for apophaticism, the structure of his prose invites a religious reading through the front door. While discussing the messianic tone deconstruction has recently adopted, Caputo writes, “The messianic future of which deconstruction dreams, its desire and its passion, is the unforeseeable future to come, absolutely to come, the justice, the democracy, the gift, the hospitality to come. Like Elijah knocking on our door!” (“Deconstruction” 156). Caputo subjectivizes deconstruction as an entity that can dream, desire, and experience affectations. He personifies what Derrida refuses to even call “...a method or some tool that you apply to something from the outside” (9). Deconstruction is likened to a prophet who announces that a messianic future will come despite our doubts and inability to imagine it. For Derrida, however, “deconstruction is something which happens and which happens inside” (9). In other words, deconstruction is an exegetic hermeneutical activity. By associating deconstruction with Elijah in an eisegetic move, Caputo introduces—from the outside, to cite Derrida—an anagogic meaning to an otherwise irreligious interpretive activity.¹ Instead of being a

¹ The disclaimer included in all popularizing publications on Derrida and deconstruction warns that to define deconstruction is to misunderstand deconstruction. In *Introducing Derrida*, for example, Jim Powell's reply to the question “What is deconstruction?” reads, “Well, defining deconstruction is an activity that goes against the whole thrust of Derrida's thought. Actually, Derrida has said that any statement such as ‘deconstruction is X’ automatically misses the point” (21). Caputo exhibits an awareness of the problems with defining deconstruction (his commentary on the Villanova Roundtable begins with a chapter emphatically entitled “Deconstruction in a Nutshell: The Very Idea (!)”). Yet, his borrowing of religious metaphors suggests that these problems have more definite answers.

philosopher, or even an anti-philosopher, Caputo's Derrida, becomes "*Saint Jacques*, Derrida the Desert Father!" ("Prayers" 38).²

Caputo interests me because no matter how many reservations Derrida makes about the "hyperessentiality" of negative theology and the imminent threat of the onto-theological reappropriation of deconstruction, Caputo equates them; he confidently announces the nullification of the difference between negative theology and deconstruction. Instead of retracing the general contours of the infinitesimal difference between deconstruction and theology,³ in what follows I offer a specific semantic analysis based on the close reading of one of Derrida's pieces, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," in order to posit some claims about why Derrida himself elicits such theological readings. Tentatively, I wish to claim that an extra-linguistic feature of his writing, the tone, contributes to the reverential staring-into-the-abys of his apostles. Finally, I propose that Slavoj Žižek's contemporary strain of Lacanian psychoanalysis offers biblical criticism an alternative theory that forces us away from contemplating the void in a pseudo-metaphysical way to experiencing it politically and historically.

THE METAPHYSICS OF "METAPHYSICS SANS METAPHYSICS"

In *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory*, Graham Ward writes:

If theology is not to dissolve simply into a psychology or, more generally, anthropology, it must have its origin in revelation. Whether we understand the nature of revelation as punctuating the world with its intervention, or as ever-present in the world despite our blindness, or as some mediation between the poles of transcendence and immanence, it is a theological interpretation. (13)

What is striking about this passage is Ward's equating of three disparate kinds of revelation, what I will refer to as the messianic, the Enlightenment, and the theological. For Ward, all of these revelations are theological. In an interview conducted by Caputo, Kevin Hart, and Yvonne Sherwood that begins the 2005 collection, *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, Derrida

² Also see Hélène Cixous's *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint* (trans. Beverly Bie Brahic, Columbia, 2004).

³ See Moore's *Poststructuralism* for a solid introduction. Chapter three on "Poststructuralist Criticism" of the Bible and Culture Collective's *The Postmodern Bible* (Yale, 1997) also gives a good overview of the debate surrounding the "mystical tendency in deconstruction" (135). Finally, Graham Ward's *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (MacMillan, 1996) introduces a wide variety of thinkers in a theological context, including the intersection of Derrida and a/theology.

addresses the possibility of confusing different revelations in the context of Heidegger's distinction between *Offenbarung* and *Offenbarkeit*, revelation and revealability, respectively. In the interview, Derrida flips the Heideggerian binary that revealability is ontologically (not logically or chronologically) prior to revelation to claim that the event of revelation reveals or opens revealability. Not satisfied with simply reversing the binary, Derrida says:

I would try to think the relation between the two in a different way. And I don't know which way. I must confess that the logical order, the chronological order, even the ontological order, is not appropriate. So I'm trying to think something that removes the event that one calls revelation from the scheme of veil, revelation, revealability. I'm trying to think the event as something other than an unveiling of a truth or the revelation of a truth, as something that has effect but makes no reference to light, no reference to vision, no reference to unveiling. (44)

Chronologically speaking, Derrida's first attempt to find another way to think "appropriately" about the event without the theological and metaphysical valences of revelation, a revelation *sans* revelation, occurs in "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy." Through a careful analysis of this text I want to show how, far from clarifying the connotations of revelation, Derrida's text produces and proliferates the confusion. In short, an obsession with debunking revelation is still an obsession with revelation.⁴

Derrida's turn to the apocalyptic should first be separated from previous biblical scholarship that makes an abundance of reference to light, vision, and unveiling. His use of the Bible diametrically opposes the archetypal criticism characteristic of someone like Northrop Frye, whose typological method constructs a metanarrative that teleologically links the Old Testament to the New: "...the last book in the Bible, the one explicitly called Revelation or Apocalypse, is a mosaic of allusions to the Old Testament: that is, it is a progression of antitypes;" or, an even more specific example: "the apocalyptic contrast with the tower of Babel and its confusion of tongues is the coming of the gift of tongues to the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2)" (135, 158). Derrida also deviates from deceptively more complex literary theorists interested in the Bible like M.H. Abrams, whose analysis of the Western literary tradition of the apocalypse cunningly mixes historical and thematic codes in order to (re)present an onto-eschato-theological interpretation of

⁴ Likewise, an obsession with debunking origins still means an obsession with origins, or more abstractly "an obsession with debunking X is still an obsession with X."

the apocalypse as a marital reunion of God with his redeemed people. The appearance of Abrams' theological code becomes most apparent when he claims that "pious explorers of the inner world transferred the locus of the marriage of the Lamb from the apocalyptic conclusion of history to the individual soul, which they held to be capable of achieving, even in this fallen life, the acme of experience, the mystic union with Christ the Bridegroom" (46). It becomes increasingly difficult to separate Abrams from the pious explorers he discusses; his narrative of the Romantic translation of the sacred into the secular constitutes as much as it describes this Protestant tradition.

Ironically, Derrida's thoughts on the apocalyptic naturalize the supernatural, too, to riff off the title of Abrams' study. This naturalization, however, slips through the backdoor of the Christian-Hegelian-Romantic eschatological appropriations of the "apocalyptic tone" that promote various ideological visions of the trajectory of history. Instead of citing or reciting a teleological metanarrative, Derrida claims that "nothing is less conservative than the apocalyptic genre," and asks us instead to consider the fact that we have no access whatsoever to this great revelation (we cannot unveil Isis), yet we constantly "beg the answer" in our everyday language (89). He asks, "...isn't this completely angelic structure, that of the Johannine Apocalypse, isn't it also the structure of every scene of writing in general? ...wouldn't the apocalyptic be a transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience itself, of every mark or every trace?" (87).

Before positing these rhetorical questions, however, Derrida discusses, deconstructs, and then ironically mimes Kant in a lengthy treatment of his essay *Of an Overlordly Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy*. In Derrida's words, "I wanted thus to mime in citation but also transform in kind or genre, and then parody, depart, deform the well-known title of a perhaps less well-known lampoon of Kant" (65-66). The miming doubles Kant's text; Derrida at once lampoons with and against Kant, claims and disclaims him, and, in typical deconstructive fashion, shows how Kant's piece performs exactly what it rails against—eschatological mystagogy in philosophical discourse. Kant's 1796 piece takes aim at a "manner" or "mannerism" in certain philosophical texts of his time that announce, in a tone of pretentious supernatural revelation, the death of philosophy. Derrida writes, "[Kant] brings to judgment those who, by the tone they take and the airs they give themselves when saying certain things, place philosophy in danger of death and tell philosophy or philosophers the imminence of their end" (67). Such mystic prophesizing betrays Kant's conception of philosophy as "*seine erste Bedeutung*," rational knowing-living, with its internal "brazen voice" resounding the all-prescriptive practical reason that "orders, mandates, and

commands without giving anything in exchange;” in short, the super-ego which gives man the idea of duty (68, 72). Derrida, however, exposes a great irony in Kant’s railing against those who “never fail to take themselves for lords...elite beings, distinguished subjects, superior and apart in society;” Kant’s philosophical “systematic” betrays his own partisanship of “intellectual intuition” (68-69). A series of swift passages turns the finger Kant points at these imposter philosophers and their false *agogic* hermeneutic powers to Kant’s own identification with a demagogic oligarchy serving double-duty as the police and parliament of knowledge. The “out-of-tune” chords struck by the priestly mystagogues represent a political threat to the philosophical order Kant resides over. Motivated by a narcissism of minor differences, Kant must dismiss them to protect his own territory.

Derrida further critiques Kant’s own overlordly position by deconstructing his “distinguishing between the good Plato and the bad Plato” and his separating philosophy as masculine discourse from poetry as feminine discourse in order to privilege the former (73). Having unveiled these Kantian contradictions, Derrida makes the leap first announced in the mimetic title of his piece. Not only does Kant mark the end of a certain type of metaphysics that “freed another wave of eschatological discourses of the end,” the entire philosophical history of the West “has been dominated by a powerful program that was also an untransgressible contract among discourses of the end” (80). Differences and deviations in these discourses, Derrida writes, “[take] the form of a going-one-better in eschatological eloquence, each newcomer, more lucid than the other, more vigilant and more prodigal too than the other, coming to add more to it” (80). Derrida cites a slew of philosophical pronouncements that take the form of “the end of” or “the death of X,” with special emphasis placed on Heidegger’s *Überwindung* (conquest, overcoming) of metaphysics and Nietzsche’s declaration of Oedipus as the last man (to which I would add Lacan’s reference to the upheaval in the subject that clinicians refer to as the ‘twilight of the world’ (Lacan 203)). The history of philosophy becomes the history of one apocalyptic discourse replacing another. The tone recently adopted has always been.

With the enlightenment promised by philosophy always already the illumination envisioned in John’s apocalypse, the question then becomes: “What effect do these noble, gentile prophets or eloquent visionaries want to produce?” (82). Tentatively assuming the “fiction” of the unitary apocalyptic tone he has proposed, Derrida proceeds by claiming that truth itself is what is at stake in the apocalyptic tone of “the end is beginning.” “Truth itself is the end, the destination,” he writes, “and that truth unveils itself is the advent

of the end” (84). It is here, with truth on the line, that Derrida enlarges the scope of his claims about the apocalyptic tone found in philosophical and religious discourse to argue that this tone is characteristic of all discourse. The apocalypse is a sending, “a leap from one place of emission to the other” where we “no longer know very well who speaks or who addresses what to whom” (87). In an apocalyptic tone of his own, Derrida states, “but by a catastrophic overturning here more necessary than ever, we can as well think this: as soon as we no longer know very well who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic” (87). When the sender, message, and addressee each exist as unknowns, the revelation of the apocalypse becomes the always already “...apocalyptic structure of language, of writing, of the experience of presence, either of the text or of the mark in general: that is, of the divisible dispatch for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination” (87). We speak from an abyss of an abyss to an abyss.

Thus, Derrida returns to the beginning where he initially cites and recites John’s apocalypse simply by beginning his speech. “I shall speak then of (with) an apocalyptic tone in philosophy,” the first line reads (63). The split preposition of/with (sustained in John P. Leavey, Jr.’s translation) transforms the sentence into an embodiment of Derrida’s thesis on the apocalyptic structure of language. In speaking of the tone, he performs the tone. The apocalypse becomes an immanent quality of language, timelessly belonging to it, although we may distinguish the historical manifestations of writings with overt apocalyptic content, writings that designate the revelatory announcement in their apocalyptic form, and writings with a seductive apocalyptic tone that desire to de-mystify us of our illusions.

Or can we? Rhetorical pyrotechnics and hermeneutical gymnastics aside, these important distinctions are not clear. By naturalizing the supernatural, by making the apocalypse coincidental with the scene of writing, how exactly do we cut the pie between the demystifiers and the imposters, the deconstructionists and those who “yield to obscurantism” (as Derrida overtly claims he does not, on page 93), especially considering Derrida’s outright claim, “Each of us is the mystagogue *and* the *Aufklärer* of another” (78)? To ask an age-old philosophical question, who is really the philosopher and who is merely the sophist?⁵

⁵ In a recent course on Plato, I jokingly claimed that Plato’s attack on sophists and sophistry was motivated by the threat they posed to steal the best quality of adolescent boys with their rhetorical bravado. A bit more seriously-speaking, there is no denying that Plato’s dialogues seem just as interested in distinguishing what makes a person a philosopher as they are in metaphysical, ontological, and ethical questions, and this concern for who the philosophers

But isn't this not-being-able-to-decide the whole point of deconstruction? Does it not enhance its validity? Not quite. The trajectory of "Of an Apocalyptic Tone" requires the impossibility that we can tell the difference although there seems to be no difference. Derrida wants the Enlightenment *sans* the Enlightenment. He writes, "We cannot and we must not—*this is a law and a destiny*—forgo the *Aufklärung*..." (82, my italics). Yet, we must keep "enough apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, to demystify, or if you prefer, to deconstruct the apocalyptic discourse itself and with it everything that speculates on vision, the imminence of the end, theophany, the parousia, the Last Judgment, and so on" (82). On the following page, Derrida promotes the mobility of a "diversity of interpretive devices available today" because "our epoch would rather be superarmed in this regard" (83). In this regard, he goes as far to say that,

deconstruction, if it does not stop there, nonetheless never works without some secondary work concerning the system joining up this superarmament to itself, articulating, as is said, psychoanalysis to Marxism or to some Nietzscheanism; to the resources of linguistics, rhetoric, or pragmatics to the theory of speech acts; to the Heideggerian thought on the history of metaphysics, the essence of science or of technics; and so on. Such a demystification must give in to the subtlest diversity of apocalyptic ruses. (83)

Whether the ruses of psychoanalysis, Marx, and Nietzsche are considered stratagems or tricks remains undecided. The passage as a whole is difficult to follow, but it seems that here Derrida admits that deconstruction not only requires *Aufklärung* and an apocalyptic tone, but also some other demystifying weapon—all of which are supposed to be mutually exclusive—just to get off the ground, so to speak. This concession, however subtle, should raise a red flag because it marks a significant limitation of deconstruction: it needs *to work in conjunction with* some secondary work in order *to work against* apocalyptic discourse.⁶ Hence the hidden tension

are cannot simply be equated with epistemological issues (philosophy obtains knowledge in X way, therefore a person who obtains knowledge in X way is a philosopher), but must also be seen in the light of the political implications (the intellectual royalty of philosopher kings, for one).

⁶ And it needs to work immanently with these diverse interpretive devices. Derrida writes, "No doubt one can think—I think this—that this demystification must be led as far as possible, and the task is not modest. It is interminable, because no one can exhaust the overdeterminations and the indeterminations of the apocalyptic stratagems. And above all because the ethico-political motif or motivation of these stratagems is never reducible to some simple" (89). These "stratagems" are supposedly conservative ones not to be mistaken with the demystifying ruses.

between prescription and description; without some sort of trace of an apocalyptic ruse, deconstruction can only describe the limitations (the failed structure) of language. It can not tell us what is in need of derailment.

So the obvious answer to the question—“Thus shall we continue, in the best apocalyptic tradition, to denounce the false apocalypses?”—is yes (or perhaps “yes, yes!”) (89). Although what is apocalyptic exists within language in general, we are to somehow fight apocalyptic fire with apocalyptic fire. The contradiction between the naturalization of something supposedly beyond language as somehow always already part of the linguistic system does not occur only with apocalypse. “Tone” gets the same treatment. Derrida rhetorically asks, “And so we can ask ourselves if eschatology is a tone, or even the voice itself. Isn’t the voice always that of the last man?” (81). Not only is what we say always apocalyptic, supposedly how we say it is as well. Historical implications immediately follow from the calling of all humankind throughout history “last men.” For one, such a formulation calls into question the ability to make crucial historical distinctions, a point I will return to later. What I am more concerned with here is how tone, an extra-linguistic phenomenon, becomes mixed with strictly discursive content. Because if language is always apocalyptic and tone or voice is always eschatological, then how can we distinguish between the two? Derrida seems to recognize that an important distinction exists: “...I definitely say the tone that must be distinguishable from all articulated discursive content. Which means the tone is not perforce what the discourse says, and either one can always contradict, deny, make drift, or derail the other” (84).⁷ And yet, how do we explain this remark— “...every language on the apocalypse is also apocalyptic and cannot be excluded from its object”—considering Derrida’s claims about the apocalypse being the “structure of every scene of writing in general” and the apocalyptic being “a transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience itself, of every mark or every trace” (90, 87)? How can the tone be distinguishable from all articulated discursive content if “Of an Apocalyptic Tone” specifically shows how they are inseparable and indiscriminate? There is no explanation other than to say that any distinction we could make disappears in the “natural workings of language,” for lack of a better phrase. Down this path lies linguistic idealism, as we see with the claim that the apocalyptic is a condition for all discourse *and* all experience (traces all of the sudden moving beyond the text into the material world of textuality, an extremely problematic move that Frederic Jameson has acutely diagnosed in

⁷ What are the implications of this claim to the fundamental deconstruction of privileging speech over writing?

the writings of Paul de Man).⁸ This trail also leads to the inability to make evaluative claims about the tone of a piece, which is one of the major driving forces of Derrida's argument. Instead, the difference between Kant's tone and the priestly mystagogues' tone falls away. As does the tone Derrida adopts, which he acknowledges by referencing a few passages from his own work and by straightforwardly asking, "Will it be possible to hear or detect the tone of a philosopher, or rather (this precision is important) the *soi-disant* or alleged [so-called or would-be] philosopher?" (66). What happens if there is no significant difference between Kant and Derrida? Take the following passage:

The overlordly tone acts on the authority of a *dalto mortale* (which is also Kant's expression), a leap from concepts to the unthinkable or the irrepresentable, an obscure anticipation of the mysterious secret come from beyond. This leap toward the imminence of a vision without concept, this impatience turned toward the most 'crypted' secret sets free a poetico-metaphorical overabundance. To that extent this overabundance has indeed an apocalyptic affinity, but Kant never mentions the word.... (72)

The passage represents Derrida's rendering of Kant's critique of the authorial backbone of the mystagogues' overlordly tone. For provocation's sake, I allege that the only difference in this description of the workings of mystagogy and Derrida's deconstruction involves the latter's not-quite-so overlordly tone, and the only difference between Kant and Derrida is that Derrida mentions the word "apocalyptic." Is there not a deconstructive version of "religion within the limits of reason alone" (see Capote's *Prayers*)? But, again, should we be surprised, for "each of us *is* the mystagogue *and* the *Aufklärer* of another" (78, my italics)?

The references to a "leap from concepts to the unthinkable or the irrepresentable" and "an obscure anticipation of the mysterious secret come from beyond" point directly to the quasi-transcendental configuration of Derrida's philosophy. The gnomic pronouncements about the nature of language and the pseudo-apocalyptic tone of his work refer to the quasi-

⁸ See Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* (Verso, 2002), for instance, where he diagnoses de Man as a "formalist (or better still a literary-autonomist) and an anti-historical one," citing "the bold and scandalous leap of the final sentence of [de Man's] 'Literary History and Modernity'" as a perfect example: "If we extend this notion beyond literature, it merely confirms that the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions"(108). Derrida may not go as far as to say that bombs are only texts, but he does claim that the apocalyptic is the condition of all experience.

condition of possibility of language that Derrida signifies by the quasi-concepts Moore has aptly called “the non-names of what should not be called God” and the “open chain of ‘nonterms’...” that are the ‘nonsynonymous substitutions’ for *différance*” (“Poststructuralism 36, 25). These quasi-concepts⁹ include pharmakon, supplement, hymen, dissemination, parergon, and in the case of “Of an Apocalyptic ‘Tone,’” “come.” “Come” embodies the singular, irrecoverable, and imperative gesture/event; “‘Come’ is *only* derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriable identity, from nothing that may not already be derivable and arrivable without ‘rive’” (94). Furthermore, “come” “comes from beyond being and calls beyond being...” (94). In the final deconstructive move of the essay, we learn that the apocalyptic is the apocalypse *sans* the apocalypse, “a closure without end, an end without end” (95). Thus, the anti-term *différance* wears the clothes of “come” and is reiterated, reaffirmed, to produce yet another allegory of deconstruction. Derrida follows Heidegger’s belief that “...essential thinkers always say the Same” (Heidegger 264).

Again, Derrida exhibits a meta-awareness of the implications of these quasi-devices in his clever phrase “transcendental contraband” (quoted in Bennington 14). Geoffrey Bennington addresses the problem of appealing to at least one metaphysical concept in order to escape metaphysics:

The situation has led some commentators to assume on Derrida’s part, far from an iconoclastic desire to destroy philosophy in the name of ‘play’..., a culpable and perhaps reactionary complicity with a metaphysics he is supposed to be denouncing; but Derrida’s argument establishes that ‘complicity with metaphysics’ is both unavoidable (traditionally as the positive condition of thinking) and infinitely negotiable once the twin blindnesses of simple subservience and heroic oppositional revolt have been pointed out. (14)

The question arises once again: what exactly separates “simple subservience” from “heroic oppositional revolt?” Is it a simple matter of tone? Bennington senses the aporia and adds, “The unease that this situation generates is, however, real” (14). This uneasy situation requires an infinite negotiation and produces an endless regress of argumentation. An unconditional affirmation of the beyond, although not present, risks being taken in theological terms.

⁹ Marian Hobson’s book *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (Routledge 1998) calls these “...points of accumulation of an argument, places where it was possible to bring complexity together into a word and hence raise a theme,” *lexemes* (3).

After refuting linguistic idealism, Ward writes, “The point of Derrida’s insistence on the quasi-transcendental, the promise of the trace, is that changes and developments in language are governed *both* by the immanent processes of socialization *and* by a beyond. The difficulty lies in the impossibility of stipulating the nature of that beyond” (27). And so we continue to “come” *sans* source and destination.

In a combination piece with Catherine Keller called “Derridapocalypse,” Moore provides examples of how this quasi-transcendental structure replicates itself, as I see it, like a strand of DNA. In addition to the apocalypse exemplifying “the transcendental structure of any and every speech act,” Moore also points to “faith” enabling “any and every address to the other,” and the “absolute secret,” as embodied in the scroll of John’s text (191, 190).¹⁰ Moore also cites the “radical, irruptive opening to and for the other, otherness, the future” of “Come” as “inextricably intertwined in turn with other recent Derridean themes or nonthemes, not least justice beyond the law, hospitality beyond reciprocity, and the gift beyond debt (up to and including the gift of death). And, of course, the messianic” (194).¹¹ The inextricably intertwined double-helix of Derrida’s later thought justifies placing him, as John P. Manoussakis rightly points out, “in that tradition of transcendence that goes, via Lévinas and Husserl, back to Kant” (320). He continues, “But by pursuing such Kantian Ideas as the infinite [Other], the absolute [justice], or the pure [gift], don’t we sacrifice what constitutes a concrete human experience?” (320). Manoussakis also is correct to identify “...any imbalance in the chiasmus between transcendence and immanence [as constituting] the inception of ideology...” (321).¹² Because this imbalance is ubiquitous in all quasi-transcendental formulations, theology and ideology find themselves caught in the never-ending twisting movement of a Möbius strip. As Moore writes, “might this very strategy [of “faith without religion”]

¹⁰ For a paragraph, Moore plays with the idea that the scroll is a “Lacanian phallus that can only perform its function when veiled” (192). Then he abruptly drops the idea of this “Lacanian digression, or regression” (192). Moore initially read this piece with Derrida in the second row of the audience; the anxiety between psychoanalysis and deconstruction is a point I will touch on near the end of this paper, and we will see that this is not the only place it appears in Moore’s writing.

¹¹ Caputo adds another: “...everything in deconstruction is turned toward a “democracy to come” (“Nutshell” 43).

¹² Manoussakis, as a Christian believer, thinks “that the two, flesh and spirit, should be better taken as the christic formula that Chalcedon advises, ‘without division and without confusion,’” a formulation which raises the question – how do we separate true belief from ideology? (321).

not be echoing—so inadvertently, indeed with such gentle intent—the foundation of orthodox theology?” (“Derridapocalypse” 202).¹³

This inescapable echo marks Derrida’s failure “to think the event [of revelation] as something other than an unveiling of a truth or the revelation of a truth.” Christopher Norris, one of the preeminent Anglo-American translators of deconstruction, laments the “anti-realist” and “quasi-mystical” direction of Derrida’s later work. He admits to being put in the awkward position of urging a return to the “‘early’ Derrida” (“What” 48). He insists “(*contra* just about every other commentator) that Derrida is a realist where it counts, i.e., when it comes to acknowledging that there are—indeed must be—a great range of objective (recognition-transcendent) truths that lie beyond our present or even, quite possibly, our best-attainable methods of verification” (46). Norris, therefore, cites the necessary, “*cogent and logically articulated process of argument* by which he leads up to” his more “generalized statements” as evidence against Derrida’s participation in the “postmodernist cult of unreason” (“Undecidability” 421, “What” 45). He recognizes Derrida’s “highly complex and ambivalent relation to Enlightenment values and the ‘unfinished project of modernity,’” yet he argues for the realist interpretation of his works, all the same (“What” 45).

The debate spurred on by this ambivalence plays itself out most overtly in Norris’s “The Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,” an essay that directly comments on Derrida’s “Of an Apocalyptic Tone.” In this essay, Norris largely anticipates the problematic readings I touched on above about the inability to differentiate between a theological and non-theological reading of Derrida’s text. After referencing Derrida’s statement that “all language on apocalypse is also apocalyptic and cannot be excluded from its object” (a quote I questioned above), Norris writes:

At this point one can well imagine an exasperated reader—Habermas perhaps—who simply loses patience with Derrida’s ventriloquist strategy and asks “Well, which is it to be?” For he does rather appear to be having it both ways, running with the hare and the hounds, of maintaining the need for analysis, critique and the “lucid vigil” of enlightenment thought while denying that these

¹³ Moore smoothes over the conundrum in true pragmatic fashion: “Nonetheless, some of us within and between the religious depend upon Derrida to help release the infinite indeterminacy—khoric and tehomic—from the anxious grip of every orthodoxy, even the most progressive. Indeed for this bottomless indeterminism—in its democratically cosmopolitan justice as well as its meditative apophysis—some of us have come to depend upon his mysterious overflow into theology, his divine surplus” (“Derridapocalypse” 202).

values can ever be attached from the residual presence of a certain “apocalyptic tone.” (184)

Not that I advocate a Habermasian position, but Norris hits the nail on the head. How can we run with the hare *and* the hounds? However, Norris’ sole refutation is to repetitively insist that the “attentive reader of Derrida’s text” knows quite clearly that “there is more going on at the level of analysis and critique than could possibly be accounted for on these terms” (184-85). The terms, Norris suggests, set up a binary between “promoting a rhetoric (an ‘apocalyptic tone’) that summarily revokes the philosophic discourse of modernity” (185). Derrida’s text exceeds the privileging of one of these terms over the other. Indeed it somehow exceeds the entire binary altogether because of the “range, depth, and philosophical acuity of Derrida’s work;” his “readings that exhibit the highest qualities of philosophical rigour, acuity, and insight;” and, as referenced above, the “*cogent and logically articulated process of argument*” Derrida engages in (“Tone” 186,149; (“Undecidability” 421).¹⁴ My point is that Norris offers no cogent and logically articulated argument of his own to support Derrida. Although I do not agree with Dallas Willard on several issues, he picks up on this glaring omission in the first piece of the collection in which Norris’ essay appears, *European Philosophy and the American Academy*. In “The Unhinging of the American Mind,” Willard writes: “Neither Derrida or Norris nor any other rigorous deconstructionists have ever made any sense of this contrast between manifest and latent sense. And no wonder, for some of the deepest of metaphysical issues are involved” (17). Willard loses me when he takes this criticism a step further by equating Derrida’s work with “the loosest ‘reader response’ theory of texts and their meanings...”; however, I do agree that “Derrida has never tamed this area in such a way that his admirers could be held responsible in it and his critics could be satisfied...” (17).

In summation, Norris, like many others, can pose the question, but he, like Derrida himself, can offer no answer. Norris states, “More relevant to ask what exactly is at issue when [Derrida] speaks of ‘another limit of demystification,’ a limit ‘perhaps more essential,’ and one that would ‘distinguish a deconstruction from a simple progressive demystification in the style of the Enlightenment’” (Norris 186; Derrida 90).

¹⁴ Norris’ essay is excessively long (around forty pages), I contend, because he sets up de Man and Lyotard as straw men to take the fall for the critique against linguistic idealism and postmodernism, which are to be distinguished from deconstruction. So not only does he fall back on these purely opinionated appraisals of Derrida’s philosophical practices, he evades the issue by attempting to deflect the criticism to easier targets.

OF AN APOCALYPTIC TONE RECENTLY ADOPTED IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

In a pastiche of the apocalyptic tone adopted by Marx and Engels in 1848, Slavoj Žižek begins *The Ticklish Subject*, “A spectre is haunting Western academia, the spectre of the Cartesian subject” (1). Žižek then identifies the “postmodern deconstructionist” as a member of “a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre” (1). Indeed, psychoanalysis and deconstruction have a long and combative history that continues to the present. They share what Bennington calls, a “problematic proximity” (“Interrupting” 94). Bennington refers to a discussion in which Derrida declared, “I have never subscribed to any proposition of psychoanalysis” (quoted in Bennington 95). He also cites Derrida’s well known caveat: “In spite of appearances, the deconstruction of logocentrism is not a psychoanalysis of philosophy” (quoted in Bennington 97). Time and the risk of repeating a well-worn subject prevent me from tackling the debate in depth.¹⁵ Suffice it to say that the primary objection of deconstructionists to psychoanalysis is that the latter, like all targets for deconstruction, participates in the Western tradition of metaphysics. To take Bennington as representative: “...essentially what distinguishes deconstruction from psychoanalysis: not really thinking through both the necessary belonging of its concepts to the history of metaphysics and its necessary strategic displacement of these concepts, psychoanalysis *understands less* than deconstruction” (101). As indicated by the tone recently adopted by Žižek, he disagrees, and tosses the metaphysical hot potato back. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he writes, “...the position from which the deconstructivist can always make sure of the fact that ‘there is no metalanguage’...is *the position of metalanguage* in its purest, most radical form” (155).

More to the point, Žižek delivers two penetrating critiques, not against how deconstruction works, but in regard to the effects of its working. For Žižek, deconstruction fails adequately to account for historicity, and it collapses important distinctions between ethics and ontology which produce metaphysical effects. In an interview with Christopher Hanlon, Žižek forthrightly exclaims that the tension between Derrida and Lacan is not “an interfamilial struggle,” but “a struggle between two radically different global perceptions” (14). The Lacanian global perspective posits three experiential registers—the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. To grossly summarize,

¹⁵ For a good discussion from the anti-psychoanalytic point of view, see Todd Dufresne’s *Tales from the Freudian Crypt* (Stanford 2000), in particular the section in chapter two entitled “Derrida and the Deconstructive ‘Beyond’; or, How One Philosophizes with a (Jacques-) Hammer,” pages 129-144). For a pro-psychoanalytic position, see Peter Dews’ *The Logics of Disintegration* (Verso 1998).

deconstruction makes no distinction between the Symbolic and the Real. Consequently, Žižek claims that for deconstructive thinkers like Judith Butler, “historicity *is* the ultimate horizon” of their critique. He writes:

As an old fashioned Freudian, I think that historicity is always a certain horizon

which has to be sustained on the basis of some fundamental exclusion. Why is there historicity? Historicity doesn't simply mean that “things change,” and so on...Historicity means that there must be some unresolved traumatic exclusion which pushes the process forward. My paradox would be that if you take away the nonhistorical kernel, you lose history itself. (16)

The nonhistorical kernel is represented by what is designated as the Real. The paradox derives from the fact that this nonhistorical kernel is, in fact, historical. “Each horizon of historicity,” Žižek writes, “presupposes some foreclosure of the Real” (16). Without some kind of conception of the Real, deconstruction operates in a quasi-ahistorical mode of Symbolic analysis. I say “quasi” because this type of work, in order to make historical distinctions, reverts to problematic teleological pronouncements about epistemic changes, or what Žižek labels “the worst kind of pseudo-Hegelian historicism (15). Although I am hesitant to dismiss all of Foucault (one of Butler's primary sources), for example, as pseudo-Hegelian, the criticism strikes a reverberating chord, one that I think biblical critics who struggle with shifting gears between deconstructive and historical analysis would be well served to take into account. Žižek's mixture of dialectical materialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis could promise to be the automatic transmission these critics have been looking for.

In addition to the pitfalls of historicity, deconstruction has problems shifting between different philosophical registers. Norris cites this problem in his criticism of leaps made to connect the findings of quantum mechanics with, for him, a misconstrued version of deconstruction. He writes, “This sinking of the crucial difference between ontology and epistemology is of course a main plank in the anti-realist's argument since it lends credence to the notion of ‘truth’ as nothing more than ‘warranted assertability’” (410). Although Norris, as mentioned above, defends Derrida against his identification as an anti-realist, the crucial difference between ontology and epistemology (crucial because if they are collapsed we fall or rise, depending on your viewpoint, into the realm of metaphysics), brings to light an equivalent difference that Žižek claims is not being respected in Derrida's deconstruction, that between ontology and ethics. In *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek deftly explains how for

deconstruction, and even the late Frankfurt School, “Justice functions as the ultimate horizon, ‘indeconstructible,’ as Derrida put it” (37). From such a perspective, if there is no such thing as justice, everything becomes meaningless and our entire universe falls apart (37). “As such,” Žižek claims, “Justice is the pure construct-presupposition—true or not, it *has* to be presupposed. . . . although we know it may be an illusion, we *have* to rely on it. Justice provides the secret link between ethics and ontology” (37). “Justice” represents the quasi-transcendental, quasi-concept, the ontological ground, that ensures (or saves) the ethical sphere of deconstruction. Just as we should not mistake the epistemological claims of deconstruction for the ontological claims of quantum physics, we can not allow for ontological slips when constructing ethical arguments.

To his above comments on the deconstructive construct-presupposition of Justice, Žižek adds, “Since even ‘deconstruction’ remains within this theological horizon, one can see why it is so difficult to be an atheist” (37). To be an atheist in psychoanalytic terms means going beyond Nietzsche’s apocalyptically-toned “God is dead,” to Lacan’s “God is unconscious.” “For Lacan,” as *The Postmodern Bible* quotes, “the gap of the unconscious may be said to be *pre-ontological*,” meaning that the unconscious, contrary to what Derrida might claim, is not a “pure construct-presupposition;” it is “neither being, nor non-being, but the unrealized” (202). The gap is precisely a void, and the fundamental gesture of psychoanalysis and philosophy, according to Žižek, is “not to close the gap, but on the contrary, to open up [this] radical gap in the very edifice of the universe, the ‘ontological difference,’ the gap between the empirical and the transcendental, in which neither of the two levels can be reduced to the other” (*Organs* xi). Žižek sees Derrida as filling in this gap or void with the spectral Otherness of Justice, in one instance, the messianic in another, etc. For him, the “definition of atheism is precisely ‘religion without religion’—the assertion of the *void* of the Real deprived of any positive content, prior to any content, the assertion that any content is a semblance which fills in the void. ‘Religion without religion’ is the place of religion deprived of its content, like Mallarmé’s—*this* is atheism’s true formula—‘nothing takes place but the place itself’” (Žižek “Rhetorics” 100-01). “Atheism is the Real as grimace of reality, as the gap, the inconsistency, of reality” that must be insisted upon for “the fact that our reality is not ultimate and closed—the experience of this Void is the original *materialist* experience, and religion, unable to endure it, *fills it* in with religious content (100, 101). Žižek admits that this definition of atheism sounds like Derrida’s (“religion without religion,” is Derrida’s phrase), but he adamantly maintains a strict difference. They are, in fact, opposites. Derrida’s global perspective takes him to the horizon of the abyss in anticipation of the radical Other;

Žižek's resides within the abyss and posits us as radically Other, in the Lacanian and not Levinasian sense.

No doubt this crucial difference remains at risk of disappearing, and my brief and cut-and-pasted treatment by no means pretends to be the final word.¹⁶ The line between theology, a/theology, and atheism remains thin. No doubt, as well, that my argument can be criticized for turning Caputo into a straw man and for rehashing some familiar complaints against Derrida. Nonetheless, my intention has been to create an extended treatment of these positions in order to introduce the possibility of an alternative, especially in the context of biblical studies, that branch of literary studies always already at risk of conveniently blurring the lines between these related but mutually exclusive positions. *The Postmodern Bible* succinctly sums up the promises and pitfalls of psychoanalytic criticism of the Bible:

It is this homologous relationship [i.e. between the Bible and psychoanalysis as a “para-religious discourse in its own right”] that makes psychoanalytic reading of the Bible at once so difficult and so promising—difficult because of the danger (or fear?) of anachronism, the imposition of twentieth-century cultural codes onto an ancient document, that animates modern biblical scholarship; and promising because the striking similarities between biblical and psychoanalytic thought enable a cross-fertilization that could enrich biblical studies and psychoanalytic theory. (222)

The risk of anachronism has not stopped Moore from conducting biblical scholarship that explores the crossings between ancient texts and anatomy guides, beauty parlors, body building, and contemporary theory of the poststructuralist, and recently, the postcolonialist variety. “The avoidance of anachronism,” he writes in *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*, “is not, perhaps, my strong suit as an exegete” (123). What is interesting for me are the hidden traces of Lacan Moore's early attempts to “see the new literary criticism of the New Testament finally come to terms with secular literary criticism...” (“Poststructuralism” 5). Although *Poststructuralism and the New Testament* limits itself largely to Derrida and Foucault, Moore lets slip “an occasional glance at Lacan” (4). These glances, in the context of the present argument, amount to a poststructural appropriation of Lacan that Žižek would no doubt call a radical misreading. However, there are two moments in the text where this misreading is interesting. The first plays with a theological reading of Lacan's injunction to accept one's castration (Jane

¹⁶ See Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (MIT 2003) for his extended treatment of the issue.

Gallop) as “smacking so strongly of the doctrine of original sin” (81). Moore cites a couple of instances where Lacan makes “lapsarian pronouncements” about the “central lack” that separates desire from fulfillment (“[F]orever, by dint of a central fault, desire is separated from fulfillment”) before rhetorically asking, “Is it my own strict Roman Catholic upbringing that renders these austere ideas so attractive to me?” (81).

Less in the confessional mode of a theorist’s theological flirtations is the sentence that ends Moore’s book. In the final paragraph, he significantly questions the relationship of poststructuralism to historical criticism. Foresightedly, his inquiry disallows viewing poststructuralism as “historical criticism’s slayer” (117). But instead of recognizing an irreconcilable rift, Moore envisions a synthesis. He writes, “Rather, in the context of biblical studies, poststructuralism would be historical criticism’s id, the seat of its strongest antiauthoritarian instincts—historical criticism unfettered at last from the ecclesiastical superego that has always compelled it to genuflect before the icons it had come to destroy” (117). The passage uses Freudian concepts as metaphors to signify, quite poetically, what strikes me as a Foucauldian future in biblical studies, especially considering Moore’s following work (and the naturalization of “authoritarian,” a problematic psychologism that Žižek cites in postmodern thinkers like Foucault and Deleuze, etc.). Still, I can’t help but think that the internal tensions of this id and superego position psychoanalysis as the ego, and that scholars—both biblical and literary—have yet to fully explore the possibilities of this remainder brought forth by the insoluble equations of poststructuralism and historicism.

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