

## **THEOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM IN *BLESS ME, ULTIMA***

**Dr. Albertine Minderop**

**Lecturer Department of English, University of Darma Persada**

**Jalan Radin Inten**

**Pondok Kelapa, Jakarta Timur 13450**

**Indonesia**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* written by Rudolfo A. Anaya (1972) reflects the philosophy of skepticism that displayed by some of the characters in this novel. Scepticism is generally questioning attitude towards knowledge, facts, or opinions/beliefs stated as facts, or doubt regarding claims that are taken for granted elsewhere. Religious Scepticism refers to doubting of given religious belief or claims. The approaches used in this research are literature, namely content analysis, and philosophy - scepticism. This research also uses a philosophical method - the method of hermeneutics, stated that human is a formal object as well as subject in philosophy. Hermeneutics method used in this study is to interpret the views, thoughts, and words of the characters in this novel that are relevant to Scepticism. The results of this study, there are some characters that display different kinds of skepticism that is based on the idea and the tendency towards the concept of God.

Keywords: novel, religion, philosophy of Scepticism, and methof of hermeneutics.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya was born on October 30, 1937 in Pastura, New Mexico. *Bless Me, Ultima* is largely autobiographical, as Anaya drew on the religious and political issue that shaped his experience as a Hispanic American living in the Southwest during World War (1939-1945). His father was a vaquero (a sheep and cattle rancher) and his mother was a devout Catholic came from a farming family (<http://www.novelexplorer.com/category/bless-me-ultima/> pp. 1). During the mid-1960, he wrote prodigiously, expressing his life and his experience through poetry, short stories, and novels. For Anaya, writing became an expressing of freedom. Seeing his people around him “in chains,” he revolted against that world. Breaking those chains was important; his characters would no be enslaved. He realized that if he could write about his experiences and his family, using the town where he grew up as a setting, he could focus on these years and create a sense of being liberated. Using his childhood as the subject matter for a novel, Anaya put together a world filled with ideas and activity. *Bless Me, Ultima*, then, is a work that examines the various forces that shape the life of Antonio, a young Mexican-American boy who is a main character in the novel ([http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/rudolfo](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/rudolfo) pp. 1).

*Bless me, Ultima* is wonderful story based on the “Chicano” or Northern New Mexico native people culture, religion, and customs that tells us about a young Mexican boy, Antonio Marez, growing up in New Mexico during the mid 1940s. It begins when he is six years old, and Ultima, a curandera or healing women, comes to live with his family because she is getting too old to live by herself. This novel shows us how Tony faces a lot of difficulties and has to deal with curses, healings, dead people and mean friends. Tony becomes a man of learning throughout his childhood with Ultima’s help. Through Ultima’s gentle guidance and support, Tony faces his uncertainties and learns to go on with life (<http://www.amazon.com/Bless-Me-Ultima-Rudolfo-Anaya/dp/04466> pp. 3). Tony’s parents are opposites, his father being a Marez, people of Ilano (the desert land in New Mexico), and his mother being a Luna, farmers and people of the moon and the earth. His father wants Tony to grow up free to roam the land and become a vaquero, as he once was. His mother wants Tony to be a priest, a man of learning. Tony is torn between them regarding his future. The novel contains a rich panorama of visual imagery as it describes the New Mexico landscape of the 1940s, and it also shows realistic concepts about life and living of people. One important view of the novel is the power struggles that is a result of acculturation. (Black, 2000: 146).

Throughout the story, Tony also faces confusion over religion and spirituality. Tony is confused over Catholicism. Though he does believe in God, he wants understanding from Him, answers to his questions. From a very young age, Tony witnesses death, deaths of Lupito, and death of a family friend, Narciso. Tony realizes the power of good over evil and understands that truth is more powerful than that which is prescribed by custom. Another important character in this novel is Ultima. She believes in God, but she also believes and works magic, but there is no evil in her. She represents the importance of tolerance and understanding. Though she comes from an indigenous mystical tradition, she openly acknowledges the value of the Catholic faith. She also encourages Tony to draw from various conflicting sets of ideals that define his outlook. Learning the importance of tolerance marks Tony's growth, especially as he begins to realize that some religions may be better suited to some people than to others, as Florence is seemingly better suited to the faith of the golden carp than to Catholicism (<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/ultima/themes.html> pp. 2). Theological confusion faced by the characters in this novel is also shown by several other characters; they are friends of Tony with a variety of reasons, trends, and implications. Religious teachings which Tony knows so far is not aligned with the realities of life which he witnesses. This condition makes him become hesitant about the concept of God. He becomes sceptical in his spiritual beliefs, similarly faced by his friends. Scepticism in the theological issues covered in the discussion of the philosophy of religion.

Philosophy of religion as a distinct discipline within western philosophy traces its pedigree back to the philosophical critique of religious ideas which was a hallmark of the European Enlightenment, and which was exemplified by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and David Hume. Philosophy of religion requires such an external standpoint from which the philosopher can critique and judge the beliefs located within specific religious traditions (Harrison, 2010: 48). Scepticism in religion has been a discussion of philosophers throughout the ages; this doctrine is often referred to, in this case, is Pyrrhonism.

Philosophical scepticism is opposed to philosophical dogmatism, which maintains that a certain set of positive statements are authoritative, absolutely certain, and true. Philosophical scepticism emerged early in ancient Greek philosophy, such as the Sophist Georgias (483-378 BCE) and Pyrrho (c. 360-c.270 BCE) is primarily considered the first philosophical sceptic in western philosophy – the Pyrrhonists held that we should suspend judgment. When applied to moral rules, this view is known as moral relativism, a type of philosophical scepticism that denies there are any absolute moral values. Moral relativism is the view that the morality of an

act depends on what one believes about the morality of the act (<http://skepdic.com/skepticism.htm#5> pp. 1). Most ancient sceptics do not seem to have believed that simply because one cannot be absolutely certain about anything, one should therefore suspend judgment on all things. Religion ought to be based on certainty. Its aim, its effects, its usages collapse as soon as this firm conviction of its truth is erased from the human mind (file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion - pp. 2). Theological scepticism is based on belief about the nature of supernatural claims and the nature of the human mind. A sceptic may be an atheist simply because he or she perceives little, if any, evidence for the belief in a god. Montaigne refers to varied moral authorities, one of the being custom and the other reason. Through philosophy, he seeks full accordance with the diversity of life (file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion - pp. 4).

Scepticism, according to Dr. Lorens Bagus (1996), is a philosophical method that is used by those who suspend judgment about something because of doubts or because they are waiting for better evidence. Sceptic means thoughtful, reflective, curious, listen, and examine carefully. A sceptist is a person whose attitude is critical, thus usually provotive; not easily accepts the statement without any convincing evidence. Pascal's scepticism stated the only way out from a legitimate sense of uncertainty is by degrading someone and then turning to the humility of faith (1019). According to Hume, cited by Lorens Bagus, the belief in the existence of the external world and the existence of God can only be justified psychologically based on matters relating to customs, habits, conventions, statutes, and coherence between our impressions and ideas (1024).

Sceptics do not deny the reality of sense perception. One particular type of metaphysical scepticism is noteworthy: theological scepticism. A theological sceptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. A theological sceptic may be an atheist, a theist, or an agnostic. The theological sceptic maintains that we cannot know for certain whether any god exist. Such a view does not entail the notion that we should be atheists (<http://skepdic.com/skepticism.htm#5> pp. 3). The feeling of absolute dependence related to episode of the particular religious emotion-types, such as joy, gratitude, hope, contrition, compassion, and sorrow is the essentially religious element in these emotions. The particular religious emotions, are responses, some pleasant and some unpleasant. Gratitude, for example, is a response to a particular kind of situation in which the subject is the recipient of some

benefit; contrition is a response to a situation in which a subject has committed some fault; and so forth (file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion - pp. 4).

Atheism is traditionally defined as disbelief in the existence of a god. Atheism involved active rejection of belief in the existence of at least one god. (<http://skepdic.com/atheism.html> pp. 1). A pragmatic atheist is defined as one who rejects belief in gods because believing in gods is unnecessary for any pragmatic, important part of one's life. Pragmatic atheist need not positively assert that any gods do or do not exist; instead, a pragmatic atheist merely assert that the existence of gods simply does not matter (<http://atheism.about.com/od/Atheist-Dictionary/g/Definition-Pragmatic> pp. 1). Perhaps, however, most theist believe in God simply because their parents and teachers have told them that he exists. Perhaps the parents and teachers believe in God because of what their parents and teachers told them.

Agnosticism is the position of believing that knowledge of the existence or non-existence of god is impossible. It is often put forth as a middle ground between theism and atheism. Agnosticism is scepticism regarding all things theological. The agnostic holds that human knowledge is limited to the natural world, that the mind incapable of knowledge of the supernatural. An agnostic could be also be a theist or an atheist. The former is called a fideist, one who believes in god purely of faith. The latter is sometimes accused by theists of having faith in the non-existence of god. The agnostic atheist simply finds no compelling reason to believe in god (<http://skepdic.com/agnosticism.html> pp. 1).

Some studies have been done on this novel, one of them was written by Kaunang (2012) who discussed the conflict of cultural values and Anaya's criticism of Catholicism. In this thesis Kaunang discussed Anaya's criticism of the church practice conveyed through Tony. Other researchers discussed the reflection of Transcendentalism in this novel that believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; in inspiration, and ecstasy, which is achieved through meditation (<http://www.transcendentalists.com/terminology.html>). Criticism of *Bless Me, Ultima* revealed that Antonio's character caught the maternal and paternal cultural conflict as well as Chicano and American cultural conflict. This conflict is a reflection of Anaya's life in New Mexico in 1940 ([http://www.clifnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/criticism](http://www.clifnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/criticism)). Other research is connected to mysticism content (<http://www.enotes.com/bless-me-qn/themes-characters>). There is also a research discussing the search for identity and reconciliation of old and new American cultures that is considered as the central theme of this novel. This novel has also provoked strong reactions in contemporary Chicano literature, as it relates to Catholicism;

in addition, this novelist was considered unique with his interesting narrative techniques, and the story is conveyed accurately and lyrical (file:///D:/rudolfo anaya critics files/translate\_p.htm).

The problem that I will discuss in this study begins with the research question, why are the characters in this novel skeptical of the concept of God, how they thought about divinity, and what kind of skepticism they profess?

## **METHOD**

This research is to explore the content of the novel in order to reveal the philosophical values of literature (Endraswara, 2008: 163). Procedures related to the procurement of data, involve reading all the contents of the novel thoroughly in order to understand the content of the deepest meaning intended by the text. The second, is determining the unit of analysis – includes sampling and data recording. I focused on a problem that I want to deal with, that is the perception of the characters who doubt the existence of God. In accordance with the theory, doubts about the existence of God belong to the concept of religious scepticism. Finally, I specified a particular character embracing a particular type of of scepticism based on their thought, ideas, and behaviour. To analyze the philosophical thoughts and views of the characters in the novel, I used the method of hermeneutics, which is called the hermeneutic circle (Hadi, 2014). The general procedures in hermeneutics are: the text must be read with earnestness using sympathetic imagination. A researcher who is using the hermeneutical method must determine the signs of the symbolic with the aim of uncovering the hidden inner meaning (60). The stages of hermeneutic circle are as follows. First, I read the novel from beginning to end, and to be clear, I read it many times to understand covered in the symbolic connotative, metaphorical, and suggestive forms. Second, I assume; that the characters were experiencing conflict in their belief about the existence of God. My assumption is based on the process of understanding. According to hermeneutics, literary reserachers who use this method must have knowledge beyond the science of literature so that they may have extensive knowledge to interpret literary works. Third, I let my horizon of understanding shaped by the text and then projected into a new understanding, that doubts about divinity are a reflection of the concept of religious scepticism. Meanwhile, religious scepticism belongs to the theory of philosophy; in this case, I use some types of it. Then, I specified that certain characters of the novel show some common tendencies of different type of scepticism.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Data obtained from *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) show that the characters in the novel have certain thought, views, and perception of divinity. Most of them are sceptical as the reflection of Pyrrhonism scepticism. A theological sceptic may be an atheist, a theist, or an agnostic. Maria might be is a theist, she thinks of growing up as a loss of innocence, so that, Tony is saved if he becomes a priest. Tony's friends might be atheists. They show a variety of attitudes towards the concept of God; while Gabriel might be a pragmatic atheist; he thinks of growing up as a fact of life, developing strength, and self-confidence. It is not good that anyone should meddle in another's destiny. Tony and Ultima might belong to the group of agnostic. An agnostic is a person who does not have a definite belief about whether God exists or not; a person who does not believe or is unsure of something. Broadly, an agnostic is a person who holds the views that any ultimate reality (as God) is unknown and probably unknowable; one who is not committed to believing in either the existence of the nonexistence of God or a god. Related to this concept, Tony and Ultima may be included in this group.

### **Reflecton of Atheist and A Pragmatic Atheist**

The Pyrrhonists hold the view that there are no absolute standard or values. Each person has their own standards to determine the truth. A theological sceptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. Anaya in *Bless Me, Ultima* shows this kind of thinking through his fictional characters. For example, Maria and Gabriel displayed contradictory attitudes about the concept of God and religious rituals. The difference of this view affects the attitudes of their children when doing worship. Maria was very religious and always invited all family members to constantly pray; while Gabriel, Tony and his sisters were reluctant to follow the will of Maria: "We must pray," she beamed with joy although her eyes were red with crying. We prayed rosary after rosary, until the monotonous sound of prayers blended into the blur of flickering altar candles (56).... . "Maria," my father complained, "but we have prayed all night!" Nevertheless we had to kneel for one more prayer (58). Then Tony's family members carry out religious activities only based on the tradition and for the will of Maria:

We prayed until our faith passed into an exhaustion that numbed us to sleep. The first to fall asleep was Theresa, and my father quietly got up and took her to bed. Then Deborah nodded and toppled. And I, who wanted to endure to please my mother, was next. I felt my father's strong arms carrying me out, ... I do not know how long they prayed. I only know that my sould floated with the holiness of prayer into the sky of dreams (57).

A pragmatic atheist is defined as one who rejects belief in gods because believing in gods in unnecessary for any pragmatic. Pragmatic atheist need not positively assert that any

gods do or do not exist; instead, a pragmatic atheist merely assert that the existence of gods simply does not matter. Skepticism is relating to moral relativism; the view that the morality of an act depends on what one believes about the morality of the act. Tony was familiar with the moral teachings derived from Maria, he assumed that an action that is contrary to the teachings, is an act which was not in accordance with morality. This assessment is subjective and relative to individuals and depends on the context in which the individual finds himself. In connection with the acts of moral relativism Gabriel do things according to his views on morality:

”My father was not a strong believer in religion. When he was drunk he called priests “women,” and made fun the long skirts they wore. ... my father’s father had taken a priest from the church and beaten him on the street for preaching against something my grandfather Marez had done (27). My ears seemed to explode with a ringing noise... . I felt very small and lonely. ... For a while I had even dreaded that the Marez at the house of the sinful women might be my father, because I remembered the way he and Serrano had whispered jokes about the women here when the bull was humped over the cow (155-156).

### **Reflection of An Agnostic and A Atheist**

Tony reflected agnosticism and his friends reflected atheism. Theological confusion that whacked Tony, made him want to prove that God existed as the reflection of agnosticism. Related to this concept, Tony always asked God to answer his question, he wanted to meet Him. He wanted God’s answers, why all the teachings of the Lord was not in accordance with the realities of life:” This was another question for which I wanted an answer. I was thinking about how it could be answered when I heard a blasting goat cry behind me (185). He thinks, why God let this happen. Is not God Almighty? : “No, it didn’t seem fair, but it could happen. “For a moment I couldn’t answer. The questions Florence had posed were the same questions I wanted answered. Why was the murder of Narciso allowed? Why was evil allowed?” (188).

The view of the existence of God became a matter of debate between Tony and Florence: “I don’t know,” I shook my head, and I didn’t. “Once everything was all right; in the Garden of Eden there was no sin and man was happy, but we sinned –“ Florence absolutely do not believe in the teachings he receives from the church: “Bullshit we sinned,” Florence disagreed, “old Eve sinned! But why should we have to suffer because she broke the rules, huh?” Tony tries to survive from the view of faith, but Florence opposing Tony’s view based on logic and common sense: “But it wasn’t just breaking the rules,” I countered, I guess because I was still trying to hold on to God. I didn’t want to give Him up like Florence had. I

did not think I could live without God” (188). The answer of Florence was logical and reasoning, making Tony become more confused:

“They wanted to be like Him! Don’t you remember the priest saying the apple contained the knowledge that would make them more things, like God they would know about good and evil. He punished them because they wanted knowledge –“ Florence smiled. “That still doesn’t seem right, does it?” Why should knowledge hurt anyone? We go to school to learn, we even go to catechism to learn –“ (188).

Most sceptics do not seem to have believed that simply because one cannot be absolutely certain about anything, one should therefore suspend judgment on all things. This view is shown by Florence which questioned the truth of religion that does not make sense:

“You mean I can go out and sin, do bad things, throw fingers, say bad words, look through the peep-hole into the girls bathroom, do a million bad things and then when I’m about to die I just go to confession and make communion, and I go to heaven – You know, it doesn’t seem fair –“ (185).

Atheism is traditionally defined as disbelief in the existence of a god. Atheism involved active rejection of belief in the existence of at least one god. A sceptist is a person whose attitude is critical, thus usually provocative; he does not easily accepts the statement without any convincing evidence. This concept refers to a person who has doubts or less sure of a doctrine. He provokes people around him by providing a view of the concept of God based on reason as performs by Florence:

Florence shook his head. “I thought about that,” he said, “but the way I figured it, if God is really as smart as the priest says, then, he wouldn’t have needed any of that testing us to see if we’re good Catholics. Look, how do you test a three-year-old kid who doesn’t know any thing? God is supposed to know everything, all right, then why didn’t he make us so that we would always be kind to each other? He could of made it so that it was always summer, and there’s always apples in the trees, and the water at the Blue Lake is always clean and warm for swimming – instead He made it so that some of us get polio when we go swimming and we’re crippled for life! Is that right?” “So I asked myself,” he continued, “how can God let this happen to a kid. I never asked to be born. But he gives me birth, a soul, and puts me here to punish me. Why? What did I ever do to Him to deserve this, huh?” (188).

Florence always affected his friends the reason he did not embrace any religion. Florence’s doubt of the existence of God turned into rejection. He thought God was not fair because He had taken the lives of his parents so that his sister had to work in the house of brothel:

... “I say God has sinned against me because he took my father and mother from me when I most needed them, and he made my sisters whores – He had punished all of us without just cause, Tony,” his look pierced me, “He took Narciso! Why? What harm did Narciso ever do –“ ... “ – last year Maxie got polio, Florence was going on, “and my cousin got dragged by that damned horse and got his skull busted. They found him two weeks later, along the river, half eaten away by the crows and buzzards. And his mom went crazy. Is that right?” (199).

Religion ought to be based on certainty. Its aim, its effects, its usages collapse as soon as this firm conviction of its truth is erased from the human mind The reflection of Pyrrhonism is revealed in the thought of Florence. He showed extreme attitude towards the existence of God. In his mind if God was omnipotent, He should not have made innocent people suffer. Florence’s perception about divinity seemed extreme because the traditions and conventions of divinity were not instilled in him. Florence got the impression and idea that God was based on reality and rationality. His experience in life was a reality that became the foundation for how he perceived of God. His family, and his friends’ life experiences and sufferings were not aligned with the perception of divinity. This idea made him doubt the existence of God. He thought if God was truly Almighty and Most of everything, of course God would bring down all the good upon human life. As stated in the concept that an assessment is subjective and relative to individuals; assessment depends on the context in which an individual finds himself. Florence, who ceaselessly denounced the existence of God, never understood the concept of God, and he did not understand the concept of hell and heaven:

“You mean, when the priest asks where is God, I am to say God is everywhere: He is the worm that await the summer heat to eat Narciso, He shares the bed with Tenorio and his evil daughters –“ (196).

He did not understand why God did not give happiness to his life and the lives of everyone he knew. Both of his parents died when the he and his sisters were in need of a parental figure. Both sisters were working in entertainment places, so that their life was miserable.

... “I say God has sinned against me because he took my father and mother from me when I most needed them, and he made my sisters whores – He had punished all of us without just cause, Tony,” his look pierced me, “He took Narciso! And why? What harm did Narciso ever do –“ ... “ – last year Maxie got polio, Florence was going on, “and my cousin got dragged by that damned horse and got his skull busted. They found him two weeks later, along the river, half eaten away by the crows and buzzards. And his mom went crazy. Is that right?” (199).

Tony's friend, Horse showed a more solemn attitude and always played around when he was in church. His attitude when he was in church really did not reflect that of a religious person. He did not feel guilty, especially when he was acting in front of the altar. He displayed behavior that made his friends laugh: "They have to squeezed in tight," Horse grinned with his ugly horse teeth, and he took the white stuff he had been picking from them and wiped it on his pants. ... "Don't go bite on God," Horse whispered (194). To eliminate Horse's boredom to the pastor's preaching at the church, he passed the time by doodling on the back of the seat: Horse sat by me. He was carving his initials into the back of the seat in front of us. Horse never prayed at all, he happened to be sitting by me. I looked at the wall and saw that today he had picked to sit by the third fall of Christ (209). Horse expressed his doubts through behavior that distracted other people who worshipped in church. Disorderly manner in church, playing around when others were praying earnestly, and behaving in such a way so as to break the concentration of his friends. He went to church because he just wanted to meet and hung out with his friends.

Atheism is traditionally defined as disbelief in the existence of a god. As such, atheism involves active rejection of belief in the existence of at least one god. This definition does not capture the atheism of many atheists, which is based on the indifference to the issue of the existence of gods. Cico cornered Tony with statements that affected his mind. Cico was also skeptical about the concept of God and he acknowledged that Tony was experiencing theological confusion, he offered Tony a new god that could provide peace, a beautiful gold fish that often came up from the pool: "That is beautiful, he said. He laughed. "You know, this land belonged to the fish before it belonged to us. I have no doubt about the prophecy of the golden carp. He will come to rule again!" (72). Tony felt confused because he had to determine the choice of the Lord:

"You have to choose, Tony, Cico said, "You have to choose between the god of the church, or the beauty that is here and now – "He pointed and I looked into the dark, clear water of the creek. Two brown carp swam from under the thicket into the open (227). Cico has a certain concept of God which he aspired. He wants to deliver a new view of divinity which is based on peace and happiness:

"There are many gods," Cico whispered, "gods of beauty and magic, gods of the garden, gods in our backyards – but we go off to foreign countries to find new ones, we reach to the stars to find new ones –". "The golden carp accepts all magic that is good, but your God, Tony, is a jealous God. He does not accept competition – Cico laughed cynically (228).

Tony began to be affected and even support the idea of Cico who wanted to display another god who would give peace: “No,” I nodded, “but what if there were different gods to rule in his absence?” Florence could not have been more surprised by what I said than I. I grabbed him by the collar and shouted, “what if the Virgin Mary or the Golden Carp ruled instead of – !” (189). Antonio considered the possibility that his mother had been praying to the wrong god; perhaps she should pray to the golden carp. The initiation into the religion of golden carp cause him to begin to raise doubts about Catholicism ([http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/...](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/...) pp. 1&3).

Tony even had an intention to replace God with other gods and he was sure Florence would receive his idea with joy: “No,” I nodded, “but what if there were different gods to rule in his absence?” Florence could not have been more surprised by what I said than . I grabbed him by the collar and shouted, “what if the Virgin Mary or the Golden Carp ruled instead of – !” (189).

### **Father’s Sermon Increasing Doubts**

Philosophical scepticism is opposed to philosophical dogmatism, which maintains that a certain set of positive statement are authoritative, absolutely certain, and true. Because the measure of a metaphysical nature of truth based on common sense and logic, then the doctrine derived from religious leaders difficult to be accepted by the skeptics. Perhaps, however, most theist believe in God simply because their parents and teachers have told them that he exists. And perhaps the parents and teachers believe in God because of what their parents and teachers told them. The perception of God that Tony understood is that He was worshiped because He is everything. God could give kindness to the good and could punish evil humans (191). He also listened to the sermon of Father Byrnes; in his view the sermon was very unreasonable, and very scary:

Father Byrnes went on to discuss the difference between mortal and venial sins. His explanation was very simple, and in a way frightful. Venial sins were small sins, like saying bad words or not going to the Stations of the Cross during Lent. If you died with a venial sin on your soul you could not enter heaven until the sin was absolved by prayers of rosaries or masses from your family on earth. But if you died with a mortal sin on your soul you could never enter heaven. Never. It was frightening to think of missing mass on Sunday, then dying, and for that one mortal sin to go to hell forever (191).

Sceptics do not deny the reality of sense perception. According to the children’s view who visit the church, pastor Byrnes’ sermon absolutely unreasonable and difficult to be accepted by common sense:

“Now I’m going to tell you a story that will teach you how long eternity lasts. Now, keep in mind, this is how long your soul will be burning in hell if you die with the black spot of mortal sins on it. First, try to imagine our whole country is a mountain of sand. A mountain of sand so high that it reaches to the clouds, and so wide that it stretches from one ocean to the other –“ (193).

The feeling of absolute dependence related to episode of the particular religious emotion-types, such as joy, gratitude, hope, contrition, compassion, and sorrow is the essentially religious element in these emotions. The sermon in the church did not give a sense of peace to the congregation, especially to children, and made the children confused. They could not accept the contents of the sermon according to their common sense. Father Byrnes’ stories about hell made the children very frightened:

“And if you die with mortal sin on your soul?” he asked, and his voice was cold. The church seemed to shudder from a blast of wind outside, ... (191).

The father nodded. “And is there any escape from hell?” he raised his finger. We nodded no in silence. “No!” he shouted and slapped his hands so we all jumped in our seats. “There is no hope in hell! Hell is a place of eternal damnation! The fires of hell burns forever and ever –“ . “For eternity!” Father Byrnes said emphatically. He reached ... the catechism book. ... “Look there on page seventeen. Eternity. What does the word eternity mean?” (191).

Terrible sermon and did not give a sense of peace might make the children become uncomfortable to follow the activities in the church.

“Gee whiz!” Abel’s eyes opened wide. Horse, sensing something he could not understand, began to get nervous. Bones rolled his eyes. We all waited patiently for father’s story to develop, because we knew he had a way of telling stories that very clearly illustrated the point he wanted to make. I thought of Florence holding his arms outstretched for eternity (193).

### **Skepticism As A Result of Personal Experience**

Montaigne refers to varied moral authorities, one of the being custom and the other reason. A theological sceptic raises doubts regarding the possibility of knowledge about any gods. Spiritual conflict that was experienced by Tony was based on the contrasting views that he experienced through religious teachings and from his personal experience: “But God didn’t forgive anyone. Perhaps, like the dream said, the waters of the river had washed his soul away, and perhaps as the water seeped into the earth Lupito’s soul would water the orchards of my uncles, and the bright red apples would ...” (26).

The theological sceptic maintains that we cannot know for certain whether any god exist. The feeling of absolute dependence related to episode of the particular religious emotion-

type, such as joy and hope. Tony thought if God does exist, he hoped God would grant the request of His people:

“My other uncles had tried everything to cure their youngest brother. But the doctor in town and even the great doctor in Las Vegas had been powerless to cure him. Even the holy priest at El Puerto had been asked to cure him, but he had failed (77). I had been thinking how Ultima’s medicine had cured my uncle and how he was well and could not understand how the power of God could fail” (98).

Gratitude, for example, is a response to a particular kind of situation in which the subject is the recipient of some benefit; contrition is a response to a situation in which a subject has committed some fault; and so forth. Tony felt sorry for doubting the existence of God:

... While we waited time flowed through me and filled me with many thoughts. I was still concerned with the silence of God at communion. ... I prepared my body and my thoughts for receiving God, but there was no communication from Him. Sometimes, in moments of great anxiety and disappointment, I wondered if God was alive anymore, or if He ever had been. He had not been able to cure my uncle Lucas or free the Tellez family from their curse, and He had not been able to save Lupito or Narciso. And yet, He had the right to send you to hell or heaven when you died (226-7).

Normative theological volutarism about the status of acts as obligatory or non-obligatory. One might hold that there is a single supreme obligation, the obligation to obey God. Every particular type of act that one might perform thus has its moral status as obligatory or non-obligatory in virtue of God’s having commanded the performance of acts of that type or God’s not having commanded acts of that type. Metaethical theological voluntarists want to say something interesting and informative about them by connecting them to acts of the divine will: “Had I already lost my innocence? How? I had seen Lupito murdered ... I had seen Ultima’s cure ... I had seen the men come to hang her ... I had seen the awful fight just now ... I had seen and reveled in the beauty of the golden carp!” (156).

### **Between Doubt and Belief**

In an effort to maintain his belief, Tony displayed an attitude of humility and faith into thinking that maybe God was too busy that He overlooked some events in the world: “Perhaps, I thought, God had not seen the murder take place, and that is why He had not punished Tenorio. Perhaps God was too busy in heaven to worry or care about us” (130). Because of Tony’s humility, though God did not grant his request to meet with Him, Tony remained faithful to implement the teachings of his religion. Merely to entertain and relieve his restless feelings and thoughts. Tony even turned to blame himself, as he thought that he did not

seriously implement the religious doctrine, so that many times he apologized to God. Tony was accustomed to obtaining religious education, so he always tried to obey the religious teaching:

“I went alone to church and kneeled and prayed very hard. I asked God to answer my questions, but the only sound was always the whistling of the wind filling the empty space. I went alone to church and kneeled and prayed very hard. I asked God to answer my questions, but the only sound was always the whistling of the wind filling empty space” (130).

Tony's self-concept is based on the traditions and customs about God that he got from her mother. Tony was back to apologize to God for all his mistakes. It reflects that he feared the punishment of God. This attitude is an effort to dampen the theological crisis in the traditional way as a result of his education. Moreover, by apologizing to God he felt more comfortable. The linkage between beliefs, doubts, and psychological problems, can be seen clearly in Tony. While he and his friends were in the church, he worried whether God would accept Horse's worship. Horse's attitude which was not serious in following the church service disturbed Tony and his friends' concentration.

Tony became very upset because God according to his mother's teachings and the teachings of the church did not show His power to overcome all the pain of life: "Did God Listen? Would He hear? Had he seen my father on the bridge?" (21). When Tellez family got disease, neither doctors and pastors could cured them, Tony thought: So again the power of the priest has failed, I thought. Why can't the power of God work against the evils that beset the family of Tellez? Why is it allowed to continue? (215).

Tony suffered a theological conflict, but his hesistancy about God's existence diminished when he suffered from uncomfortable experience during his questioning of the existence of God. He was afraid of sin because experience had taught him that. He began to think maybe there were other forces that could provide answers to his doubts. Tony's doubt of God's existence culminated as his desire to meet God was not fulfilled. He felt disappointed and blamed himself: either he was not really ready to accept the presence of God, or God has gone.

Children believe what their parents tell them, but as they get older they start to question various concepts about reality and experience which used to be unquestionable, ([http://www.directessays.com/essays\\_on/God/Religion/Christianity/T](http://www.directessays.com/essays_on/God/Religion/Christianity/T)). Tony, who was growing up and seeing how cruel the world was, could not control his curiosity, which made him constantly questioned the existence of God. Tony was still carrying out the religious tradition. Aside from the traditions and customs that he had, Tony often felt worried when he

did not carry out religious orders, he was afraid of punishment from God, as taught by his mother. Although his mind was filled with doubts about God. Tony did his utmost to draw closer to Him. Eventhough God was not also present in his call, sometimes he felt guilty and less prepared to accept the presence of God; then he tried to purify himself: “I used to think everyone believed in God.” I said (227).

When Tony’s doubts culminated and he intended to replace God with the golden carp, the weather suddenly deteriorated and he felt God had admonished:

In that moment of blaspemy the wind swirled around me and drowned my words, and the heavens trembled with thunder. I gasped and looked up at the bell tower. “DAH-NNNNNGGGGgggg ,,” The first clap of the bellthunder split the air. I turned and cringed at its sound. I crossed my forehead, and cried “Forgive me, my Lord!” Then the second loud ring sounded (189).

Tony’s conviction grew stronger, when Florence receiving the disaster, he believed that God was upset to Florence who was always condemning Him:

“Florence is down here!” Bones cried. “Florence hasn’t come up!” Abel sobbed and tugged at my arm. “He drowned, he drowned,” Bones whimpered (288). “Help me!” Cico said and grabbed my arm. We pulled and tried to tear the dead weight of his body from the waters of the lake (229).

### **Worship For The Sake of Friendship and Comfort**

Theological confusion can be a bit muted with grounding traditions and psychological problems. This attitude arises when a person consciously or unconsciously resolves this problem by returning to the tradition derived from the family education and for psychological comfort. According Lorens Bagus (1024), it is impossible to get the substance of justification, belief in the existence of the external world and belief in God. This belief can only be maintained in the context of psychological problems that are based on: customs, habits, conventions, statutes, and coherence between impressions and ideas of individuals.

This quote shows that unwittingly Tony was degrading his mind to the path of faith. Scepticism which is based on tradition and psychological problems, also appears on Cico, Horse, and Florence. Doubts about the concept of God cannot be justified from the presence of a person in religious ceremonies. Perception of the divine and the behavior that were shown by the characters of children in this novel demonstrated that psychological comfort is the main reason they attended the ceremony in church. They loved to get together with friends, even if they did not appreciate deeply the nature of the ceremony.

People around Tony showed skepticism about the divinity, but they are always present in the church. If they doubt the Lord why they were in church? According to Hume cited by Lorens Bagus (1996), the belief in the existence of the external world and the existence of God can only be justified psychologically based on matters relating to customs, habits, conventions, statutes, and coherence between our impressions and ideas (1024). Tony was also influenced by psychological factors for the convenience of himself and his feelings for the sake of fun. Sociological factors also influenced the attitude of Tony with the motivation to preserve harmony with his mother. The reflection of psychological and social factors were also revealed through Ultima, whose motivation was maintain good relations with Marez family and for the sake of comfortable feeling.

Ultima represented the importance of tolerance and understanding. Though she came from an indigenous mystical tradition, she openly acknowledged the value of the Catholic faith. She also encouraged Tony to draw from various conflicting sets of ideals that defined his outlook. Learning the importance of tolerance marked Tony's growth, especially as he began to realize that some religions might be better suited to some people than to others, as Florence was seemingly better suited to the faith of the golden carp than to Catholicism.

Ultima always followed the tradition that had been taking place and for the sake of psychological comfort for all those close to her. Ultima was also not too religious because she was mystical, but related to this concept, she displayed humility to visit the church along with Maria and Tony. This expression is a social consideration - a tradition for the sake of maintaining harmony with people and psychological considerations for the sake of comfort for themselves and for others.

Although Tony was always overwhelmed by theological anxiety, he tried to return to the religion which he knew so far. Although at first Tony tended to reflect the probability of Scepticism, he also reflected Pascal's scepticism as he lowered his wits and displayed an attitude of humility to beg God for forgiveness. Based on his experience, Tony felt a punishment from God when he was thinking negatively about divinity. A sudden storm and thunder boomed that made him fear and feel guilty: ... I crossed my forehead, and cried "Forgive me, my Lord!" Then the second loud ring sounded (189).

Tony's friends gave a reason why they had always been to church, but doubted the divinity. A conversation between Horse with Florence, known that Florence was blasphemous,

but he always went to church because he wanted to hang out with his friends. He could not stand loneliness, which is the real hell when one does not have friends and lives in solitude:

“You’ ll go to hell, too, Florence!” Horse shouted, “you don’t believe in God!” “So what, Florence Shrugged, “if you don’t believe in God then there is no hell to go – “ Then Tony asked: “*But why do you go to catechism?*” I asked him. “*I wanna be with you guys. I just don’t want to feel left out,*” he said softly. “Then that would be hell,” he nodded. “I think if there is a hell it’s just a place where you’re left all alone, with nobody around you. Man, when you’re alone you don’t have to burn, just being by yourself for all of time would be the worst punishment the Old Man could give you –“ (187).

Tony seemed reluctant to attend church, but he stayed there: “Let us pray,” Father Byrnes said and knelt. We followed suit, kneeling on the rough, splintery knee boards of the pew (191). Nevertheless, his friend, Cico went to church regularly, just to please his mother's feelings: “Then why do you go to church?” I asked. “My mother believes” – he answered, “I go to please her –“(227). Tony felt guilty because he and his friends doubted God, so he tried to be able to accept His existence just to please God. (163).

Although Ultima was not religious enough as she was mystical, she always followed the will of Mary to pray (43). Ultima always helped Maria prepare the equipment for praying (56, 57). It showed that the unity in prayer could make human relationships become more harmonious.

## CONCLUSION

Anaya provided an explanation why the characters in the novel reflected skepticism. The reason of the characters reflected theological skepticism was based on personal experience. The experience includes a tradition of family life, miserable experience, and the teachings of the church that were considered scary, illogical, and did not give peace. While agnosticism in the novel was the implications of skepticism, when Anaya featuring the characters who wanted to create another god that is expected to provide peace. Anaya might want to say that agnosticism - between theist and atheist - as the implications of skepticism. However, Anaya might not agree with skepticism when he made Tony feel guilty and went back to God. This happened when Tony surrounded by usual doubts, suddenly lightning boomed and storm blew so made him feel fear (189). Anaya made Florence dead by drowning in a pool when he was constantly protesting God (229) proved and perhaps Anaya wanted to say, those who do not believe in God would be bad for humans.

Anaya covered the theme in this novel that had significance in his own life. Tony's experiences mirrored Anaya's own experience. It also typified the experiences of many Hispanic struggling to reconcile two cultures. Tony had to reconcile two different religious philosophies. Tony's mother is devoted to Catholicism and his father has no interest in religion. It might be a picture of both Anaya's parents. Skepticism issues might be considered important by Anaya as the expression of his childhood. Skepticism might also be important at this time in real life. A lot of people who seemed to be very religious, but committed violence among humans just to defend God. Whereas, God Almighty, He does not need to be defended by human beings and killing each other. Most people believed that the essence of religion is peace.

## REFERENCES

- Anaya, Rudolfo, A. (1972). *Bless Me, Ultima*. California: TQS Publications.
- Black, Debra B. (2000). *Times of Conflict: Bless Me, Ultima As a Novel of Acculturation*. Source: *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (May - August 2000), pp. 146-162. Published by: Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25745700>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- Black, Robert. (1989 - 1990). *Moral Scepticism and Inductive Scepticism*. Source: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, Vol. 90, pp. 65-82. Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Aristotelian Society. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4545109>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- Baker, Anton and Zubair. (1990). *Method Research on Philosophy*. Jakarta: Pustaka Filsafat, Kanisius.
- Endraswara, Suwardi. 2008. *Method Research on Literature*. Jakarta: Penerbit Medpress.
- Lorens Bagus. 1996. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Kaunang, Tumoutou Passah. 2012. "*Criticism on Rudolfo Anaya*", Thesis on American Studies Program, University of Indonesia.
- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. (2008). *Moderate Classy Pyrrhonian Moral Scepticism*. Source: *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 232 (Jul., 2008), pp. 448-456. Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Scots Philosophical Association and the University of St. Andrews. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40208637>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- <http://www.amazon.com/Bless-Me-Ultima-Rudolfo-Anaya/dp/04466>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/ultima/themes.html>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- <file:///D:/BLESS ME ULTIMA/ANAYA/SCEPTICISM/Hume on Religion>. Accessed: 01/02/2015.
- <http://www.transcendentalists.com/terminology.html>. Accessed: 29/01/2015.
- [http://www.clifnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/criticism](http://www.clifnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/criticism). Accessed: 29/01/2015.

file:///D:/rudolfo anaya critics files/translate\_p.htm. Accessed: 11/01/2013.

<http://www.enotes.com/bless-me-qn/themes-characters>. Accessed: 11/01/2013.

<http://www.noveexplorer.com/category/bless-me-ultima/>. Accessed: 06/06/2012.

[http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/rudolfo](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/bless-me-ultima/rudolfo). Accessed:  
11/01/2013.

<http://skepdic.com/skepticism.htm#5>. Accessed: 09/02/2015.

<http://atheism.about.com/od.Atheist-Dictionary/g/Definition-Pragmatic>. Accessed: Accessed:  
09/02/2015.