Derrida On Western Metaphysics

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1. Three Great Philosophers of the 20th Century.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) were the three most important philosophers of the 20th century according to Mark Taylor. (2004)

2. Three Orientations of Contemporary Western Philosophy.

There are three major influential orientations in contemporary Western philosophy:
1. The hermeneutic orientation of the German philosophers, Heidegger and Gadamer.
2. The analytic orientation of Wittgenstein and Carnap.
3. The postmodern orientation of the French philosophers, Derrida and Lyotard. (Badiou; 2005; 31)

The ontological - hermeneutic approach aims at understanding the meaning of Being-in-the-World, and interpretation is its central concept. The logical- analytic approach stresses the distinction between meaningful and meaningless utterances. The central concept here is the rules that bring about an agreement regarding meaning of utterances. The postmodern approach comprises the deconstruction of the “the idea of historical subject, the idea of progress, the idea of revolution, the idea of humanity and the ideal of science.... The aim is to show that these great constructions are outdated...that there are no great epics of history or of thought” (Badiou; 2005; 32-33)

On the negative side, all these three orientations talk about the end or elimination of traditional Western metaphysics and the end of great metanarratives of history. Thus the truth-oriented classical metaphysics has been replaced by meaning-oriented new philosophies. On the positive side, all these three approaches accord a central place to language and hence philosophy becomes “a meditation on language”. Metaphysics of truth has been rejected and the plurality of language and polyvalence of meaning become supremely important for all the three contemporary Western orientations. (Badiou; 2005; 31-36).

It should be made clear however that metaphysics has been challenged and criticized on different grounds in each of these three traditions. Similarly, even the centrality accorded to language in these different orientations has different aims, meanings, contexts and implications. Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida have their own reasons to challenge the Western metaphysical tradition and they have their own reasons for according central place to the analysis of language. Thus, the general thematic convergence on the criticism of metaphysics and centrality of language among the three orientations is undermined by a lack of consensus on the very grounds of the attack on metaphysics and on the very grounds of according centrality to the understanding and analysis of language.

3. Derrida’s understanding of Metaphysics.

In Derrida, the word “metaphysics”, “is a shorthand for any science of presence” (Spivak’s Preface to Derrida’s Of Grammatology; p;xxi ). [Derrida’s Of Grammatology has been cited as OG in all further references to it in this text.] Derrida treats metaphysics as “the history of determination of being as presence” (OG; p; 97) and also as an “exemplary system of defence against the threat of writing” (OG; p 101). “In linguistics and in metaphysics, phonologism undoubtedly is the “exclusion or abasement of writing” (OG; p, 102). Linguistic and metaphysical phonologism always privileges speech over writing. Derrida shows that there are metaphysical presuppositions underlying the distinction between speech and writing and hence, “meditation
upon writing and the deconstruction of philosophy become inseparable” (OG; p, 86). Of course, Derrida does not believe that all concepts are intrinsically metaphysical. We have to find out the nature of work that any concept is made to do in the texts. (Positions; 50)

Such a grammatical characterization of metaphysics is unique to Derrida and therefore his critique of metaphysics is different from the critique of metaphysics found in Heidegger. Derrida considers language in the context of, diffe’rence, (a new French word coined by Derrida) whereas Heidegger understands language in relation to Being. Both these approaches to language are different from the treatment of language in the philosophy of later Wittgenstein, Ryle and Austin.

The 20th century logical positivists established a certain criterion of meaningfulness of propositions and then summarily dismissed the whole of Western metaphysics as nonsensical in a very broad generalization. Derrida does not do that. Derrida does not consider metaphysics as meaningless in that sense. Of course, he does not offer any alternative metaphysics of his own and he shows why he can not do it. He also admits that, in a certain sense, we can not help using the categories of metaphysics which we propose to reject. He rejects the claim that a system of metaphysics of presence is possible. This is because, meaning is never fully present anywhere without difference in space and deferral in time. Nothing, for Derrida, is simply present or absent anywhere. Every element of any differential system is constituted by the trace of other elements of that system. Thus, “there are everywhere differences and traces of traces” (Positions; p; 24). He was interested in showing by close readings of the Western of philosophical works that the logic of supplement or the logic of deconstruction was already at work in the very aporetic structure of the concepts presented in texts concerned. Deconstruction shows how aporias destabilize the assumed safety, simplicity, or purity of concepts like pure presence, pure origin, absolute singularity, fixed center, etc.

Derrida finds that even ordinary language is not neutral or innocent, because all types of metaphysical presuppositions are also involved in ordinary language also.

“Speech-acts theory” of Austin has been discussed in details by Derrida. American philosopher John Searle has very critically responded to Derrida’s analysis of Austin’s theory though Searle had accepted Derrida’s point that performative speech-acts discussed by Austin presuppose repeatability. Derrida has also responded seriously to Searle’s objections against Derrida’s reading of Austin. Of course, inspite of such infrequent interactions between continental and analytic traditions of Western philosophy, the differences and even certain misunderstandings among thinkers belonging to these two traditions still continue to persist.

4. Two types of Deconstruction; Heidegger and Derrida.

There are two types of deconstruction in the context of recent Western philosophy. Deconstruction, as it is known generally in its primary sense, is a specifically a Derridean innovation. Derrida himself however traces deconstruction to Heidegger’s “destruction” of metaphysics. We must however distinguish between Derrida’s transgressive deconstruction from Heidegger’s initially negative operation of destruction of metaphysics which aimed positively at the retrieval of the original primordial sense of Being. Derrida’s “Deconstruction” is an adoption Heidegger’s German term Destruktion.

Moran has put it as under:-
“...around 1919, Heidegger began to conceive of the way forward in philosophy as requiring a kind of ‘destruction’ (Destruktion) or ‘dismantling’ (Abbau) of the tradition. Heidegger may have found this notion of ‘destruction’ in Luther (who wished to destroy the Aristotelianism in the Christian heritage), but it was certainly also present in Husserl who spoke of Abbau in several key texts. In Being and Time, Heidegger’s “destruction of the history of philosophy” included a stripping away of Kantian and Cartesian elements to recover the original existential (and Greek) ways of conceiving of phenomena of human existence, for example, to recover the real meaning of Aristotle’s conception of human praxis”. (Moran, 2000)

Derrida has himself distinguished two types of deconstruction as under:-

“......the one type is defined as ‘a deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic,’ while the other type purports ‘to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, by brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference’ ”. [Schrag; In, Constantin V. Boundas(Ed); (2007); pp; 483-484]

S c h r a g  also points out that “the former take on deconstruction, that of repeating founding concepts in an original problematic, has very much a Heideggerian ring to it. It tells the story of a deconstructive retrieve that dismantles metaphysics only to enable a return to a primordial understanding of the meaning and truth of Being. Derrida’s deconstruction, with its accent on ‘an absolute break and difference,’ is more Nietzschean than Heideggerian – and it would be a fair inference that it is also more Derridean. Derrida’s spin on the dynamics of difference leads him not only beyond metaphysics of presence, but veritably beyond any determination of presence within an original problematic of Being.” [Schrag;In, Constantin V. Boundas(Ed); (2007); p 483].

For Heidegger, the history of productionist metaphysics is a regression into darkness. He endorsed Luther’s thesis that Greek metaphysics has to be deconstructed in order to recover authentic primordial Christian life- experiences. Heidegger’s deconstruction of Aristotle’s metaphysics aimed at showing that understanding of the existential aspects of human life required categories different from the categories listed by Aristotle. In Heidegger’s later philosophy, Being is characterized in non-theological post-monotheistic language, but Heidegger’s later thought can hardly be treated as endorsing any atheistic agenda. Heidegger finds that original revelation of Being happened to early pre-Socratic philosophers. Since then, we find forgetfulness of Being among Western philosophers.

Heidegger was a methodological atheist only, as he was concerned with Being rather than any Creator God. Of course, explicitly, Being is neither a God nor any foundational principle in Heidegger, but a language of revelation of Being, of concealment of Being, of sending of historical stances by Being itself, of recovery of primordial experience of it, etc, represents definitely a certain implicit theological agenda. This is because unless Being is thought in terms of a certain kind of person and an agent, Heidegger could not have established any of his later claims. [Philipse (172-188)]

The point is that one can deconstruct a metaphysical tradition in order to retrieve primordial, original, pure, and authentic experience of presence, self-presence, of Being, of God, of Dasein, etc. through the negative operation of de-sedimentatation and destruction of imposed layers of meanings on the pure original experience of reality or alternatively one can go beyond this nostalgic theme of recovery of the pure original understanding to a totally
new understanding of the original problematic itself. Derrida opts for the second alternative. Heidegger and Derrida thus agree on the general negative operation, but not on the positive outcome of that operation. Derrida has insisted that he has clearly marked his “departure from Heideggerian problematic” in all of his essays on Heidegger (Positions; p; 48).

Derrida has used the word ‘destruction’ not in the sense of ‘demolition’, but in the sense of ‘de-sedimentation’, ‘de-construction’ of logocentric significations (OG; p; 10). As Derrida says, “the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from outside”. This is because deconstruction “operates necessarily from inside” (OG: p; 24). Deconstruction is a ‘strategy without finality’.

Derrida has used the word ‘deconstitution’ also when he has pointed out that dismantling of logocentrism amounts to deconstituting of idealism or spiritualism (Positions; p; 45). Deconstruction can never be just a negative or simply theoretical operation. According to Derrida, it is not neutral. It intervenes (Positions; p; 74, 76).

The French sense of the term ‘deconstruction’ implies mechanical or even an architectural disassemblage, but deconstruction is not just a certain type of critical analysis of structures or systems. Deconstruction remains highly receptive to a “...non-present remainder or heterogeneous other which exceeds all structures and systems even while making them possible”. (Simon Morgan Wortham; 2010; p;32).

Derrida’s deconstruction, unlike Heidegger’s ‘destruktion’, does not lead to any retrieval of originally pure authentic disclosure of Being. In fact, Derrida’s deconstruction, without any nostalgia for the lost presence, comprises a new way of going beyond the binaries grounded in logocentrism and also a new way of reconceptualizing and reinscribing the hierarchical binary oppositions of the pure and impure, original and derived, present and absent, speech and writing, nature and culture, etc.

The difference between Heidegger and Derrida’s treatment of differences has been stated by Schrag as under;

“The contribution of the left-wing Heideggerian, Jacques Derrida, to advancing inquiry on matters of difference could well be summarized as a shift from the landscape of Ontology to the terrain of grammatology. Heidegger’s ontological-ontic difference is transposed into a grammatological key. Difference, written as difference, juxtaposes the senses of ‘to differ’ and ‘to defer.’ The consequence of this juxtaposition of senses is a deconstruction that dissimilates the received semiotic binary of signifier/signified.” (Schrag; p Constantin V. Boundas(Ed); (2007);483)

5 Reversal and Displacement; Two phases of Derrida’s Deconstruction.

According to Derrida, the metaphysical binary oppositions like speech/writing, nature/culture, etc, do not involve peaceful coexistence. In fact, they involve violent hierarchies. The opposition of such metaphysical concepts always involve “hierarchy and the order of a subordination”. Deconstruction can not pass immediately to the neutralization of such oppositions. For Derrida, “.... it must through a double gesture, double science double writing, put into practice a reversal of classical oppositions and a general displacement of the system.” (Derrida; “Signature Event Context” In, Taylor and Winquist 1998; p; 413)

Derrida’s deconstruction does not consist in simply moving from one concept to the other. It reverses and displaces the conceptual as well as nonconceptual order and thereby
provides the means of intervention in the field of oppositions it criticizes. Deconstruction comprises reversal as its first and displacement as its second phase or moment. Derrida thus distinguishes between an overturning deconstruction and a transgressive or displacing deconstruction. (Positions; p; 56)

Firstly, deconstruction overturns the hierarchies by emphasizing the crucial importance of the subordinated second term for the dominant first term and secondly, it replaces the opposition in a new way such that such binary hierarchies are destabilized from within. For example, those thinkers who established binary hierarchies by privileging speech over writing or nature over culture or presence over absence, themselves have admitted that writing shows something very important about the structure of speech or that the nature–culture distinction is itself a constituted distinction only within a certain level of culture or that culture is a necessary supplement of nature in order to overcome some lack or deficit in nature.

For Derrida, we should not ignore the phase of overturning. We must not proceed quickly towards the neutralization or jumping beyond oppositions by saying that the situation is neither of this type nor of that type.

Though reversal or overturning is an important phase of deconstruction, we can not stop there only, because the structure of the opposition will still remain the same with the difference that instead of dominant term ‘A’ the subordinated term ‘B’ becomes dominant by reversal. For example, one may privilege graphocentrism against phonocentrism or absence against presence or culture against nature by reversal according to Derrida. But, substituting one center by another center does not dissolve the general hierarchy of the central over the marginal (Positions; p; 10). Derrida does not want to establish the superiority of empirical writing over empirical speech by freezing the distinction at the first phase of reversal. If he valorizes writing in its normal sense in some contexts, it amounts only to a strategic reversal, but his ultimate aim is to endorse the relevant distinctions at the pragmatic level without subscribing to the metaphysical presuppositions governing such binaries.

By strategic reversal, Derrida finds that even those who endorse the hierarchy speech/writing admit that writing illuminates the structure of speech to a great extent. Hence, Derrida says that we can move to the next stage where the distinction between the two is maintained only at the pragmatic level. Both speech and writing, in their standard meanings, are then at the stage of displacement, included under the new term ‘arche-writing’ which is a transcendental structure of differance in the sense of differing and deferral, common to both speech and writing. Spacing, iterative structure of language, inexhaustible context, etc, are new ways of understanding and displacing such standard metaphysical oppositions.

Thus, the second phase of deconstruction involves ‘irruptive emergence of a new concept’ that can not be included at all in the previous regime. It disorganizes the entire inherited hierarchical order and it invades the entire field [David Mikics; 2009, p 72]. Derrida’s analysis of hierarchical opposition of speech/writing for example, clearly brings out the nature of such a deconstructive intervention.

6. Sassure’s Linguistics; Signifier and Signified.

Sassure made very important distinctions between signifier and signified, speech and language (as a system), and synchronic and diachronic linguistics. Sassure’s structuralism has greatly influenced Roland Barthes and Levy Strauss in contemporary French thought. Derrida analyses thoroughly the main distinction between signifier and signified. He found that Sassure privileged speech over writing, but Sassure was himself moving away from this position, because
he also believed that differences rather than the substance of phonic or graphic signifiers as such was crucial for meaning. Meaning was located in differential structures rather than in transcendent Platonic or Hegelian Reality and this, to a great extent, was a progressive move, but for Derrida, it was totally impossible even for Saussure to give up the metaphysical associations of the concept of sign itself.

According to Saussure, two distinct elements-signifier (acoustic image) and signified (concept) constitute a sign. For example, the sign “cow”, has nothing in that it is essentially or necessarily connected to its signified meaning or its actual referent. In different languages, we have different words for “cow”. The relation between spoken words and meanings is arbitrary and the relation between the written word and the spoken word is also arbitrary. There is no connection, for example, between “letter t and the sound it designates (OG; 326; Note 17). The letter t can be written in many different ways-as t or as t or as t. It retains its identity through repetition and its difference from b, p, l, etc. The same applies to sounds as signifiers. Any spoken signifier is audible and any written signifier is visible. Time and space are thus involved in writing and speech. Thus signifiers are sensible, whereas signifieds are intelligible. Any sign thus involves internal heterogeneity. Graphic and phonic signifiers are different from their signifieds and from themselves and yet they are unified in signs which are different from referent things.

Saussure second major claim is that signifiers get their identity only from being different from other signifiers. “On the level of sound, “c-o-w” gains its identity only because it is slightly different from “Mao”, which is slightly different from “sow”, which is only slightly different from “bough”..! (Powell;42). The same is true of the signed concepts. The meaning of cow is different from the meaning of horse or lion or tiger. “Lake also means what it means because it is different from bake, fake, make, etc.” (W Terrance Gordon;2010;49) Thus, in language, there are only differences and no positive terms.

Derrida accepts Saussure’s claim regarding the arbitrariness of signs and their identity being constituted by differences. Unperceived and non-present spacing, pause, blank, punctuation, interval, constitute the origin of signification (OG; 68).What Derrida emphasizes is that it is impossible for any sign as a unity of signified and signifier to be ‘produced within the plenitude of presence and absolute present”(OG;69). Word is not identical to thought which is not identical to a thing as a referent of the word. The two component parts of any sign are in a relationship of difference, which in turn refer to things by convention. Reference to things is due to difference. Any phonic or graphic signifier is “a structure of difference”. As both are equally arbitrary and differential, Saussure’s privileging of phonic over graphic signifiers can not survive deconstructive scrutiny. ‘Trace’ plays the part of radically other in such a structure of difference. (Spivak; Preface; OG; xvi-xvii)

For Derrida, sign has remained a metaphysical or theological concept, firstly because, it depends upon the basic distinction between the sensible and intelligible, and secondly because, in a certain ontotheology, there is a definite relation between intelligible meanings and the things which are always present in the divine mind or logos. Signified is linked
to the signifier on one side and to the things on the other side. Saussure’s doctrine of signs leaves open the possibility of a “transcendental signified” a signified, which is “thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers” and this possibility remains dependent on onto-theology. Derrida thus finds that it has become necessary to deconstruct the concept of sign itself. It is not that only a signifier is a trace. Signified is also a trace. “It is always already in the position of a signifier” (OG;73). If you look up the signified of an unknown signifier in any dictionary you will come across other signifiers without ever arriving at a signified. (Bennington; p;31-33)

7. Speech, Writing and Arche-writing.

According to Derrida “The history of ... metaphysics . . . from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger,”... is “the debasement of writing, and its repression outside ‘full’ speech” (Positions; p, 39).

Derrida however has clarified that science and history have been made possible only because of a durable system of writing in the form of graphic signifiers. Writing is the necessary condition of possibility of ideal objects. Historicity and scientificty are themselves possible only due to writing before the possibility of history of writing or science of writing. (OG; 26)

For phonocentrism speech is living, but writing is dead. Derrida, in his “Plato’s Pharmacy”, shows how writing is claimed to be both a poison and a remedial drug. The word pharmakon is used in both these incompatible senses in Plato’s dialogue-Phaedrus. It destabilizes Plato’s phonocentrism.

For Aristotle, spoken words are the primary symbols of mental experiences and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Voice has thus an immediate relation to mind. Aristotle has pointed out that all men have the same experiences, but all of them have not the same spoken words or the same writing to signify them. The relationship between experiences and things is natural, but the relationship between speech and things as well as the relationship between writing and speech is conventional. Thus writing is far removed from reality. (OG; 11)

According to Rousseau, “Languages are made to be spoken, writing serves only as a supplement to speech” (OG; 145).

Rousseau considers writing as nothing but representation of speech. Thought, claims Rousseau, is analyzed by speech and speech is analyzed by writing. The relation between speech and thought is conventional and the relation between writing and speech is also conventional. Rousseau says that writing is nothing but a representation of speech which represents thoughts by conventional signs. Speech is a natural expression of thought.

For Rousseau, writing, as a supplement to speech, is also a “dangerous supplement”. ‘Supplement’ has two incompatible meanings. It means adding something extra to what is already fully present and it also means adding something as a substitute to complete something which in itself is inadequate in a certain sense. Either supplement is superfluous or it is a substitution. Writing is added to speech as a supplement and Rousseau considers it as a ‘dangerous supplement’. ‘ Whether it adds or substitutes itself, supplement is exterior, outside the positivity...”(OG;145)

Language, said Saussure(1857-1913), has an oral tradition independent of writing. Saussure, like Aristotle, clarifies that, “Language and writing are two distinct systems of
signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first.” (OG; 30) Saussure said that the linguistic object is not at all a combination written word and the spoken word; “...spoken form alone constitutes the object” (Derrida; OG; 31). Saussure also finds that though unrelated to speech, which is an inner system, writing is used to represent language. (OG; 34)

The primacy of speech over writing is *phonocentrism*. Phonocentrism merges with *logocentrism*, because of the claim that speech is nearer to *logos* than writing. Any original, pure, foundational, and fully present reality reflected directly in speech is *logos* in this context. Primacy of logos is logocentrism and primacy of speech as an immediate signifier of logos is phonocentrism. Writing has been treated as secondary to speech. It is outside of or exterior to speech. It is ‘a signifier of signifier’. It is a ‘supplement’ to the spoken word. Writing is the ‘other of’ speech. It has been thus marginalized and excluded due to phonocentrism. It has been repressed, because of the claim that immediate and full presence is found only in living speech and in ‘hearing oneself speak’. Writing is a sign of speech and speech is a sign of thought but thought is a sign of things.

Saussure maintained that writing, “veils the appearance of language; it is not a guise for language, but a disguise (OG; 35).” Saussure has also said that the undeserved importance given to writing can be traced to the undue importance given to literary language. Saussure refers to the ‘tyranny of writing’. The prestige of the written word has unduly influenced the linguists. Writing, has thus, becomes a ‘trap’ for them. (OG; 37-38).

Derrida finds that in spite of having thus emphasized the priority of speech over writing, Saussure also says that sound alone can not belong to language. In fact, the linguistic signifier is not itself phonic in essence, but it is non-corporeal, non-material. This is because it is not constituted by any special material substance, audible or visible, but by its place in the differential nature of the chain of arbitrary signifiers (OG; 53). Linguistic form can be identified independently of phonic or graphic substance. Saussure himself admitted that the linguistic signifier, *as constituted by differences*, is not essentially phonic. Derrida finds that we have therefore to oppose Saussure to himself (OG; 52-54). Saussure’s text itself comprises two opposite ideas in irresolvable tension. It thus deconstructs itself. Thus, the resources of deconstruction are inherent in the texts themselves.

Derrida argues that if writing is a ‘signifier of a signifier’, the same is true of speech also. Again, if graphic signs are arbitrary, then the same is true of phonic signs. Graphic or phonic signs are all *equally* arbitrary and *equally* differential. Of course, Saussure does not say that the choice of signifier is arbitrary in the sense that every individual can use any signifier for anything at will or by choice at random. (OG; 46) Again how can graphic signs reflect or symbolize the basically different phonic signs? If graphic signs are *signs* what is the point of saying that they *symbolize* the phonic signs in spite of the basic dissimilarity between them? Graphic and phonic elements are so dissimilar that there is no point of talking about any derivation of the graphic element from the phonic element. A sign is not at all an image. Derrida says that the phoneme is *unimaginable* itself (OG; 45).

Derrida points out that deconstruction of phonocentrism can not just involve reversing the speech/writing opposition and rewriting it as writing/speech opposition. Derrida proceeds to neutralize the hierarchical opposition—speech/writing, through the *displacement* of that opposition at the level of *arche-writing*. *Arche-writing* (a generalized open system of play differences, never fully present, of any type of marks) is not writing in its standard normal
notational sense, but it is a quasi-transcendental structure of *diffe´rance* (of spacing and of deferral) which makes both writing and speech in their empirical sense possible. Derrida shows that here the hierarchy cannot be maintained, because the characteristics which were supposed to be unique to the subordinated term, ‘writing’ are true even of the dominant term, ‘speech’. The difference between speech and writing in its empirical sense is not denied by Derrida. Any such pragmatic distinction is not abolished by him but any linguistic sign implies an “originary writing” (OG; 52).

In a wider but special sense, ‘writing’ as *arche-writing* is a free play of traces, of which, speech and writing (in the normal sense of writing) are the linguistic effects. This is a deconstruction of transcendental signified and therefore of ontotheology. Play is the *absence* of transcendental signified (OG; 50). The world is not to be understood as God’s free play in the world as a spontaneous expression of God’s nature. This way of understanding play is a return to theology as it posits pure traceless origin as ground of play.

8. *Diffe´rance*.

Derrida’s coining of “... the neologism *diffe´rance* sought to situate at the foundation of deconstructive analysis attentiveness to both meanings of the French verb *diffe´rer*; to defer in terms of delay over time and to differ in terms of spatial non-identity. Insofar as *diffe´rance* names the movement of both *temporal* deferring and *spatial* differing, it stands as the transcendental condition of the possibility of differentiation. *Diff e´ranc e* is what makes differences possible.” (Alan D. Schrift; 2006 p;59)

Derrida’s new French word, *diffe´rance* includes both *difference* and *deferral*. *Diffe´rance* is spacing. It is a neutral and dead spacing. It is a play of differences. It disrupts the notion of living presence. It is the difference between the sensible and intelligible and therefore it is neither sensible nor intelligible. It is not an essence or substance, or a fully present original reality. Derrida’s *diffe´rance* is a subversive intervention upon structural linguistics (Caputo; 2009).

“..the difference between two phonemes which permits them to remain operable as ‘different’ cannot itself be audibly expressed or positively articulated... *Différan ce* thus precedes and eludes full conceptuality since in setting up the possibility of differences or discernible distinctions it is what makes conceptuality, possible... in French, this difference between ‘*différence*’ and ‘*différance*’ cannot be heard, it must be written. Derrida’s text thus obliges speech (for instance, that of the author delivering a lecture) to recite, refer or resort to writing in order to mark this difference at the origin of difference.”( Simon Morgan Wortham; 2010; p;38)

In this general context of deconstruction, in its phase of overturning and in its phase of transgressive displacement, it is clear that Derrida does not accept logocentric metaphysics of presence. He shows a way out of closure imposed by the system in terms of and *diffe´rance* and trace as under;-

“Since language ...has not fallen from the sky, it is clear that the differences have been produced; they are the effects produced, but effects that do not have as their cause a subject or substance, a thing in general, or a being that is somewhere present and itself
escapes the play of difference. . . . I have tried to indicate a way out of the closure imposed by this system, namely, by means of the "trace." (David Allison. 1973b, 141)

All signifiers are always signifiers of other signifiers. The endless play of traces never comes to rest in any transcendental signified or any Being. Trace, is not a left over impression of a previously fully present thing, but trace here is constitutive of origin itself, which is to say that there has never been any simple and pure origin. Originary trace or arche-trace is not to be understood as some present impression of an experience of full undivided presence which had existed in the past as non-trace.
(Caputo’s Lecture on Derrida; 8-9-2010. Syracuse University.)

The (pure) trace is the différence. It is the difference between the sensible and the intelligible, but it itself is not more intelligible than sensible. It is never present anywhere. It makes presence possible. (OG p; 62-65) ‘Différence’ does not refer to actual differences in the system of language, but it refers to the differentially or being different of these differences. It is itself nothing outside differences. (Bennington; 84). Différence is neither God nor supreme entity. It is not a being or Being of beings or Ultimate Reality. Différence does not imply any negative theology. It also does not imply atheism per se. It connotes neutral spacing.

9. Iterability (Repeatability).

In his analysis of Austin’s theory of speech-acts, Derrida, (referring to Husserl) points out that writing can function in the absence of the referent object. Not only that, but writing can function in the absence of signified also. ‘Square circle’, for example, marks both the absence of any legitimate referent and the absence of any signified, but it does not show absence of meaning, because we are able to claim truly that it is false that there are square circles. It has sufficient meaning for us. Thus, the phrase ‘square circle’ is not like the meaningless ‘word’ “abracadabra” or the combination of words like “the green is either”. Even the meaningless combination of meaningful words such as “the green is either” can function in the context of giving examples of agrammaticality to others. Language surely functions in some context or the other, but no context is fully exhaustible or saturated.

Derrida explains this as under;

“The possibility of disengagement and citational graft belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written…. Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written... can be cited, put between quotation marks, in so doing it can break with every given context ....This citationality.... this iterability of mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that ... without which a mark could not have a function called ‘normal’. What could a mark be if could not be cited?” (Derrida, “Signature Event Context”; In, Taylor and Winquist, 1998; Vol. 1, p.404).

Derrida does not say that there are no authors, no readers, and no present intentions of the authors, no performative or constative speech-acts, no meanings, and never any live interactions between speakers and the addressees. He admits all these as effects of différence. He is only claiming the necessary possibility involved in the very iterative structure of language, whether spoken or written.
The iterability “combines the Latin iter (‘again’) with the Sanskrit itara (‘other’). ...every mark, each singular text or irreplaceable event is at once a unique, ‘once-and-for all’ occurrence and yet manifests or inscribes itself on condition of a possible re-marking. Thus, the ‘singular’ is always repeatable; or, rather, it is iterable, since every repetition (iter – ‘again’) inevitably alters (itara – ‘other’), just as each signature – as the supposed hallmark of identity – nevertheless attains validity only on condition of its inscription at another time or in a different place’ (Simon Morgan Wortham; 2010; p; 78).

Derrida makes it clear that any writing, (even a shopping list, for example,) that is not _structurally readable_ in the absence of its referent object, original author, its initial context, its original intention and its intended readers would not be writing at all. It does not mean that the sender and the receiver can never be present at the same time and understand the writings concerned. But for Derrida, it _must be possible_ for any writing to _meaningfully and independently_ function in the absence of any referent or intentions of any writer. Writing involves its readability in the absence or death of authors and readers. This is a “necessary possibility”. It the can not then be ignored or excluded. Derrida shows that even if the mark is produced for one time only, structure of repeatability divides this one time production of the mark also. Any mark may function sometimes in the presence of a person producing it, but its repeatability is a _structural possibility_ for there to be any kind of mark. There can not be private language as Wittgenstein has already demonstrated.

“‘Necessary possibility’ describes the apparently paradoxical situation where absence is a _possibility_ rather than a certainty, but one that is absolutely irreducible rather than a matter of contingency or provisionality. Because the sign remains functional irrespective of the actual presence of the thing itself, this absence belongs to the order of possibility; simultaneously, this possibility, because it alone can give rise to a repeatable sign, is absolutely necessary. Qualifying absence as a necessary possibility does not mean that the thing has to be absent for the message to be identifiable; it means that the message has to be functional even if its referent is absent. This essential possibility is the provenance of the act of signification, which is why Derrida claims that absence, leaves an indelible mark in all aspects of the trace it produces.” [Eftichis Pirovolakis; 2010]

In his reply to John Searle’s assessment of his review of Austin’s theory, Derrida points out that writing and the mark in general _must be able_ to function in the absence of the sender receiver etc. He finds that “this _possibility is always_ inscribed hence _necessarily_ inscribed as _possibility_ in the functioning or the functional structure of the mark.” (Derrida;” “Limited INC. a b c”; In, Taylor and Winquist 1998;Vol. 1,p;437)

Iterability (repeatability) is _irreducible and general_ and it is true of both speech and writing. Derrida links iterability with _alterity_. Repetition in different contexts either monologically or in social interaction is condition of constituted meanings. Iterability conditions citationality.

Death of the reader or writer is already involved in the essential possibility of meaningfully functioning of any mark. I think that suicide- notes or legal documents relating to property signed by the persons concerned would also support Derrida’s claim of placing language in the context of mortality.
A spoken or a graphic sign can never be absolutely singular and unrepeatable. Repetition comprises all types of altered contexts over and above the initial contexts of the production of speech and writing. The singular is always bound with the general. An absolutely pure singularity is impossible. The singular has to participate in the “genre, the type, the context, the meaning” etc, in order to be readable. There are aporias involved in ideas of the proper name, the proper, the property, the signature and the singularity. Can there be absolute singularity of signatures. For Derrida, the very structure of signature involves the possibility of forgery. This means that a signature is imitable in essence. Derrida says that the conditions which make signature possible also make its absolute singularity and its rigorous purity impossible. A signature should have a repeatable form in order that it can function as signature.

“ As Derrida notes, the signature puts itself to work precisely in the absence of the signer. In one respect, the signature attempts to recuperate presence in writing by setting its seal on the literal presence (or having-being-present) of the one who signs. Nevertheless, the signature acquires its validity and identity only to the extent that it is repeatable. This repeatability is manifest not simply in subsequent renditions of the signature which might be compared with the ‘original’ so as to determine the authenticity of a particular example. Instead, repeatability – and thus divisibility – is inscribed in the very structure of the signature from the outset, since it must always already be repeatable (countersignable) if it is indeed to be considered authentic and authoritative. Repeatable and thus divisible at its origin, the signature at once constitutes and deconstitutes or deconstructs these values of authenticity” ;( Simon Morgan Wortham; 2010; p, 187 (Italics added).

Such irreducible and general structures dissolve the claims of hierarchical oppositions like, speech/writing, nature/culture, without erasing their relevant practical differences. Iterability, spacing, arche-writing, (as generalized writing) trace, and différences are common to both speech and writing and other such binary oppositions and they make unfounded destabilizing play between them possible. Speech/writing and other such binaries can not be possible without such conditions which both make any meaning or any stable identity contingently possible (as an effect) as well as render any final meaning or final closure of self-identity of a thing, situation or an entity or any final closure of a system necessarily impossible.

This is all due to the aporetic structure of time, which makes nothing present-in-itself or in a full presence, whether it is the object of knowledge or the subject (knower) of knowledge. This is not to deny any actual presence as such, but it is to deny a certain theory of presence.


Rousseau also emphasizes the general superiority of speech over writing, and he emphasizes the natural innocence of primitive tribes who do not possess writing against societies which have developed writing. Rousseau claims that writing becomes a source of social inequality and violence. The same claim has been made by structuralist anthropologist of the 20th century, Claude Levy Strauss also. Strauss is considered as modern disciple of Rousseau.
They both share the theology of original innocence of any small and completely self-present verbally interactive community (OG;136-137).

French anthropologist Levy Stauss develops this thesis in his studies of Nambikwara tribe, on the basis of which, he also subscribes to the nostalgic theology of innocence and goodness of such primitive tribes. Nature/culture hierarchy thus follows closely the speech/writing hierarchy in Rousseau and Levy Strauss. A certain kind of primitivism associating writing with absence, guilt, fall, deviation, slavery, inequality, exploitation, immorality and speech with authenticity, innocence, goodness and pure presence has been endorsed by Rousseau. Derrida points out that generalized differential structures of *arche-writing, trace, and diff’reance* do generate inequality, hierarchy and dominance even in the primitive tribes which do not possess writing as an empirical system of notation. Such transcendental differential structures are found both in groups who do not possess writing and societies which know how to write. Exploitation and enslavement can not thus be always treated as the effects only of writing in the ordinary sense. Derrida clarifies here that non-exploitation, and liberty etc, can not be treated as going hand in hand with illiteracy. Writing may also be liberating rather than enslaving. (OG; 131-132).” “The arche-writing is the origin of morality and immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics” (OG; 140).

Sometimes we do find that the author himself rejects the binaries he had maintained earlier. Levy Strauss, for example , first distinguished between nature and culture by saying that what is universal belongs to nature and what is culturally normative belongs to culture. Derrida points out that having made this distinction, Strauss found that at least in the case of prohibition of incest, the distinction breaks down, because incest- prohibition is both universal and culturally normative and hence, by the criterion accepted by Strauss himself, prohibition of incest belongs to nature as well as to culture. To avoid theoretical embarrassment due to such a difficulty, Strauss claims that even though its ontological truth- value of such a distinction can not be established here, this distinction between nature and culture is methodologically useful for social sciences. Thus a distinction whose truth can not be established can be used in the interest of science! (Taylor and Winquist; 508-511)

Derrida distinguishes between two manners of critical approach to the language of social sciences. Thus, one can choose to challenge and rethink the original distinctions fully or one can accept them only as a methodologically useful distinctions. Though Strauss felt the limits of the nature/culture binary, instead of *deconstituting* the founding concepts of the entire history of thought, he preferred to accept the distinction only as a methodological tool. I would like to add that some behaviourist psychologists had adopted the same methodological stance to the mind-body problem.

Derrida concludes his remarkable paper “Structure, Sign and Play in Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966) as under;

“There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher… a truth or an origin which escapes play… The other… affirms play”. Derrida admits that these two interpretations are absolutely irreconcilable (Taylor and Winquist p, 519).Any structure requires center which closes off the play of elements which it has made possible. Deconstruction is therefore a certain kind of centering.
11 Deconstruction and Western Metaphysics.

Derrida has clarified that deconstruction has never been opposed to institutions as such or to philosophy as such. It is affirmative without being conservative. Deconstruction in no case is a discourse against truth or science. Such a project would be absurd. It analyses various philosophical approaches to truth, but therefore it does not automatically endorse skepticism or relativism (Positions; 85). If history has been appropriated by philosophy and a grand design of history is presented by philosophers like Hegel or Marx, then we can definitely assess it (Positions; 50-52). Thorough critique of all such philosophies is essential to philosophy itself. Philosophy has not to be dissolved into other disciplines. But we should encourage audacious philosophers who cross the borders to get at the new themes, new problems, new methods etc. Mere repetition of any tradition, just because it is a tradition, leads us nowhere. Derrida insists that deconstruction is not neutral. It intervenes. “…systematic deconstruction can not be simply theoretical or simply negative operation” (Positions; p; 74)

Displacement is not Hegelian Synthesis.

Derrida makes it clear that the phase of displacement in deconstruction is not any kind of Hegelian synthesis (Aufhebung). Hegel determines difference as contradiction to be resolved in ultimate idealistic ontotheological synthesis.

‘Differance’, ‘pharmakon’ ‘supplement’ ‘gram’, ‘spacing’, ‘trace’, etc., are presented as displacements which reinscribe the original oppositions in totally new ways by erasing the hierarchies involved. But Derrida here does not at all imply any Hegelian resolution of contradictions into any higher third terms or any final transcendental signifieds. Pharmakon in Plato’s text, in the context of speech/writing hierarchy, for example, is neither finally determinable as poison nor as a remedy and supplement in Rousseau’s text in the context of nature/culture binary, is neither only something extra added to what is already complete in itself nor only something necessary added to complete something which is by itself inadequate. There is a radical undecidability here due to endless free play of alternative meanings. No final reconciliation or synthesis in terms of speculative dialectics is possible here because neither/nor is simultaneously either/or also (Positions; p; 40).

Idealism and Materialism.

For Derrida ‘…metaphysics is the general name for any philosophy of pure undivided presence. “pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only another name for death” (OG 155/223).

As Derrida claims, “…. all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center, have always designated the constant of a presence… ….God, man, and so on” (Spivak’s Preface; OG p; xxi).

The strategy of Western metaphysics is firstly to posit intact, pure, self-identical or fully present being or reality and then to show that everything that is different from the original purity can be treated in terms of derivation, deviation, complication, etc. This is logocentrism. Plato’s Ultimate Reality, for example, is posited as pure, original, foundational source of all values and all meanings in the mode of purely intelligible transcendent Forms. Hierarchical binaries are thus grounded in logocentrism.
Derrida thus finds that in this context, metaphysicians from Plato to Rousseau and from Descartes to Husserl, have conceived “good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. (Derrida; “Limited INC a b c” In, Victor E. Taylor and Charles E Winquist p 486)

Derrida therefore does not accept metaphysical idealism, privileging spirit over matter or metaphysical materialism which only reverses the hierarchy by privileging matter over spirit. Derrida does not also accept the claim that dialectical materialism being superior to both idealism and simple unhistorical materialism can therefore be finally accepted. Derrida points out that his critique of metaphysics is a critique of idealism also. Materialist critique of idealism can be accepted in general, but Derrida would not endorse simple reversal of hierarchy by privileging matter over spirit. Realism, empiricism, sensualism and materialism –all of them would ultimately endorse logocentric metaphysics which Derrida can not accept. Any metaphysics of foundational principle in the form of spirit, matter, soul, mind, God, etc, is logocentric and not acceptable to Derrida. Such metaphysics is self-deconstructing because of the general structure of temporality, differance, trace, archi-writing etc, which make possible all the differences without any of them being self-identical or fully present to intuitions or thoughts.

“All dualisms, all theories of the immortality of the soul or of the spirit, as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar, are the unique theme of a metaphysics whose entire history was compelled to strive toward the reduction of the trace . . . [which is] required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence, as parousia, as life without differance another name for death, . . .. That is why, if this movement begins its era in the form of Platonism, it ends in infinitist metaphysics. Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God . . . is the name of indifference itself. (OG p 71)

Derrida shows how negative infinity of time is an irreducible condition for being in general. (Hagglund 2008; p 45)

Derrida on Subjectivity

The self or subject according to Marxists, is a product of ideology of historical periods. For psychoanalysis, self is never fully itself, because it is determined by unconscious motives. French Psychoanalyst Lacan refers to linguistics in any understanding of subjectivity. A child’s entry into language is a movement towards conscious subjectivity.

Derrida’s critique of metaphysics is also a critique of the modern humanistic concept of autonomous, free, fully conscious, fully present rational human self, which is the locus of all decisions, actions and knowledge. For Derrida, iteration, both in the sense of repetition and alterity, is an essential possibility for the notions of language as well as for the notion of self.

“... essential possibility does not mean that the speaker has to be absent or dead for “I” to be functional, but that “I” has to be understandable even if the speaker is dead, and his or her speech is reproduced, for example, with the help of a tape recorder. Life and self-presence, therefore, are only contingent; they constitute the telos of the pronouncement of the
pronoun rather than its eidos” [Eftichis Pirovolakis;2010;p;125])

French thinkers Derrida, Barthes (1915-1980) and Lacan (1901-1981) have placed the human self in relations of signification. French Marxist Althusser (1918-1990), has placed self in the context of relations of production and also in the context of Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus. For Foucault (1926-1984), knowledge is integral to “power/subjectivity nexus”.

Feminists, Marxists, postcolonialists and others, are critical of the reduction of self or human subject, in the early history of modernity, to male, European, propertied individuals. Such an idea of self has excluded women and others. The individuals of these groups were treated not as rational autonomous subjects, but instead they were subjected to all kinds of domination. But, some kind of determinism in relation with the construction of self has been endorsed by Marxists, psychoanalysts, feminists, structuralists and post-structuralists. The difficulty is that of simultaneously treating human self as both constituted by various forces as well as itself constituting the field of free choice and action. The tensions between free individual constituting agency and ideological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, economic, socio-cultural and historical determinations constitutive of such an agency are not fully resolvable in any system.

For Derrida however, the project of including women and other groups into an extended and inclusive concept of homogeneous, rational, internally undivided and autonomous self-identical subjects, though strategically useful, will not work at a metaphysical level, because the temporal structure itself disrupts any holistic idea of any individual’s self-presence or self-realization in any context of any group.

According to Derrida, the conscious and speaking subject depends upon the system of differences and the movement of differance. The subject is “constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral” (Positions; 25)

“Like Sartre, Derrida sees the human impulse toward undivided consciousness, and therefore integral selfhood, as a basic part of us. In reality, Derrida and Sartre agree, such wholeness is a fond delusion. Derrida decentered the subject, but Sartre had already deprived the subject of security, of stable identity”. (Miciks; p;28)

By relating self to time and differance, Derrida does not deny the subject or individual or self. What he denies is the subject as a “master of difference”. He thinks that subject is indispensable. He does not destroy the subject. He situates it in the system of differance.


Nietzsche and Heidegger;

Nietzsche (1844-1900) rejects Plato’s claim that our actual world is devoid of truth and reality as it is just a copy of the real transcendent forms belonging to the higher world. Nietzsche pointed out that generally philosophy proceeds with binaries like truth and error, real and unreal etc. The idea of truth is due to the privileging of the first term of any such binary
over its other term. Nietzsche characterizes the devaluation of traditional values as ‘nihilism’ and his own philosophical positing of new values as ‘completed nihilism’. Truths are only useful errors in the interests of will to power and domination.

For Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s interpretation values as an event of devaluing of the highest values and the revauling of all values is a metaphysical interpretation”(William Lowitt; 1977;93)

Value-positing is due to will to power. Nietzsche was the last metaphysician according to Heidegger, because his anti-Platonism, even as a reversal or overturning of Platonic metaphysics, was still a kind of metaphysics. Derrida says that the same can be said about Heidegger and others also who could not escape the language of metaphysics.

Sartre and Derrida.

Plato claimed that forms are the “eternally true archetypes”. Concepts are mental copies of these forms. Objects are corporeal copies of these forms. Images are “phantasmagoric copies of objects”. Given such a hierarchy, for Plato, forms are the most real and valuable and hence images are the least real. (Palmer; 2010; p 74).

Rejecting such a Platonic hierarchy, the famous French existentialist philosopher Sartre (1905-1980), claimed that existence precedes essence in the case of human beings. Man, is a “useless passion”. He exists contingently in this absurd and contingent world. He is “condemned to be free”. Hence, he creates his own values and meanings. The possibility of denying such groundless freedom and thus living in bad faith is always already there in such a freedom.

About consciousness, Sartre says that, “Its being is never given… since it is always separated by the nothingness of otherness, the pour-soi-(for-itself) is always in abeyance because its being is perpetual deferring” (Howells; 1992; p 333).

Derrida would have agreed with this position, because Derrida’s differance is a prepersonal field of the possibility of all types of differences without itself being fully present anywhere.

“ Derrida followed Sartre’s idea that we wish to, but cannot, achieve a seamless, confident identity; but in contrast to Sartre, he denied value to this striving for authenticity” (Mikics; 2009 p; 25). Derrida however, did not consider Sartre as a very strong philosopher.

Heidegger. Heidegger has pointed out that for Plato and Aristotle, the structure of all things was like the structure of human artifacts. They thus offered productionist metaphysics. Things for Plato were to be analyzed in terms of original designs and their copies. For Aristotle, they were to be understood in terms of form and matter. The notion of creator and creation in medieval monotheistic theologies also reflected the same anthropocentric and productionist thinking. The productionist-technicist thinking was inaugurated by the Greeks, consolidated by the Romans, and it was perpetuated by medieval Christian theology. Ultimately, it has culminated in “our age of global techno-science”(Clark; p; 39).

Heidegger finds the productionist metaphysics also in modern technological approach, which has been associated with nihilism, and which is reinforced due to “globalization of the Western modes of rationality”. For Heidegger, globalized technological civilization, due to its technicist metaphysical interpretation and due to its stance of theoreticism, is a threat to the very essence of humanity. (Clark; 2002; 30-31).
Heidegger distinguished between pre-reflective non-theoretical human understanding of things and scientific, theoretical, analytic, conceptual reflective human understanding of things in the context of their structures and causal laws. The first is the mode of understanding of engaged practical human agents dealing directly with practically meaningful things like tables, chairs, hammers, plates, glasses, watches, shoes, books, toys, dresses, etc., in the context of their everyday instrumental uses.

The context of such daily activities is implicit, informal, inexhaustible, nontheorized and unformalizable. Any prereflective contextual understanding is radically different from the scientific analytical-theoretical understanding of things as they really are. This second mode of understanding is, for Heidegger, not basic at all, but in spite of that, the whole Western tradition has valorized theoretical understanding as the only true mode of understanding” (Clark; 25-26).

For Heidegger, things which are simply there, [present-at-hand (German term; - vorhanden)], disengaged from the human practical context, have to be distinguished from things that are ready-to-hand (German term; - zuhanden). Heidegger emphasizes man’s being-in-the-world, in its “average everydayness”, dealing with things ready-to-hand. Hammers and tables are not merely entities or objects of thought with certain geometrical shapes and a set of theoretically determined micro-physical properties. They are primarily the objects of daily use. The table is for writing or eating and hammer is for hammering. (Inwood, M. 2000; 31-33)

Heidegger rejected Platonic metaphysics as well as the philosophy of Descartes (1596-1650) and dissolved the oppositions between mind and body, subject and object etc., in an inclusive idea of man’s being-in-the-world. Heidegger is concerned with the fact that Western productionist metaphysics since Plato has forgotten about Being which makes all beings or entities possible and instead it has focused only on beings or entities. Heidegger did make a distinction between things for daily use and things understood theoretically as two modes of being, along with the unique mode of being of Dasein, but that does not mean that he endorsed the technological stance which privileges human beings in relation to the world and permits the full possession and control of the world. Humanity is not at the centre of universe. Heidegger rejects existentialism and humanism in favour of general ontology of Being by endorsing deep ecological nonpossessive attitude of care rather than domination.

The distinction between Being (Sein) and beings (Seiendes) is basic for Heidegger. For Heidegger, ontological-ontic difference is the basic difference. The question of Being of entities and the question of being who raises the question of meaning of Being have been forgotten in Western metaphysics.

Heidegger and Derrida

Derrida is well aware that we have to borrow the conceptual resources of old metaphysical language in order to see how the traditional metaphysics undermines itself. Hence we have to adopt the Heideggerian strategy of writing under erasure. Being, for example, is to be written as Being. Sign, for Derrida, is to be written as Sign. Erasure is a strategy of crossing out the word in such a way that both the deletion and the word remain legible. The word is to be put under erasure through this device because the word is not adequate and it should remain legible because there is no other alternative to it.

As Philipse(1999; 284-85) has shown in details, Heidegger, in his later philosophy, emphasized the transcendence of Being in a certain non-theological language and hence he
deemphasized *Dasein* and accorded a central place to Being which sends fundamental stances in major periods of Western history, but conceals itself in the process.

Nietzsche rejected transcendent metaphysics, but accepted certain metaphysics in the sense of will to power as totality of beings. Heidegger rejects metaphysics in the sense of a study of mere totality of beings as entities by raising the fundamental question of Being. Heidegger’s later thought however reemphasizes transcendent Being, which remains concealed though it sends various frameworks or stances in various historical epochs through which all entities are revealed in a certain manner. This position, according to Heidegger himself, is beyond any rational scrutiny!

In his famous paper “Structure Sign and Play in the discourse of Human Sciences” read at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, which initiated the post-structuralist movement, Derrida notes that *decentering of metaphysics of center* started with Nietzsche’s critique of Truth and Being for which he substituted the concepts of play, interpretation and sign. Freud, by his concepts related to unconscious, centered subjectivity, self-consciousness, and self-possesion. Of course, Heidegger’s destruction of metaphysics of presence was more radical. According to Derrida, all these three had to work with the inherited concepts of metaphysics and could not completely escape metaphysics.

Derrida however points out that ultimately even Heidegger could not escape from some kind of metaphysics of Being. Being is a “transcendental signified” in Heidegger’s thought. Being is prior to signification and it transcends signification. This is metaphysics, because all metaphysics, for Derrida, is about the transcendental signifieds i.e, the logocentric-phonocentric metaphysics of presence or center or ground or essence in all its forms. [Gayatri Spivak’s Preface; Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* xvi].

It is clear from this that Nietzsche tries to undermine Platonism by rethinking the ideas of Being, truth, interpretation, and customary morality. Heidegger rejects Platonism as productionist metaphysics forgetful of the meaning of Being of entities and thus leading to the technicist domination of nature, whereas Sartre rejects Platonism because of its essentialism. For Sartre, existence precedes essence in the context of free human beings trying to make sense of the rationally underivable and therefore unjustifiable absurd world. The reasons for the rejection of Platonic metaphysics by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre therefore differ according the orientations of those philosophers concerned.

13. **Heidegger, Derrida and Philosophical Eurocentrism.**

In his interview with Jean Birnbaum (which turned out to be his last interview), Derrida admits that what he calls “deconstruction” is European. Deconstruction for Derrida is a product of Europe. In so far as it is a critique of classical metaphysics, it is, in a sense, also a part of the European enlightenment tradition. Derrida clarifies that he has been also a strong critic of Eurocentrism of Valery, Husserl, and Heidegger. Deconstruction is a “gesture of suspicion towards Eurocentrism”. Still however, Derrida thinks about new alter-globalist Europe to come in “geographical Europe” and elsewhere, which will take responsibilities in relation to the future of humanity and the new future of Sovereignty and International Law. To that extent only, Derrida is prepared to say; “we Europeans”.

For Derrida, the unconditional absolute freedom of thought, speech and criticism, without political and religious interference, is the original concept of a University and of literature. Unconditional openness to critical debates is the essence of a University. Such a freedom is the legacy from Europe, from Greek philosophy and it should be adopted by the
Derrida fully endorses this modern Western tradition of intellectual freedom. In fact, without such a tradition of freedom in contemporary times, even deconstruction could not have been possible (Pascale-Anne Braut and Micheal Ness).

It is interesting to note that though Heidegger and Derrida deconstruct Western metaphysics for their own reasons, and in their own styles, neither Derrida nor Heidegger has ever thought of philosophically utilizing any of the categories of non-Western classical or contemporary philosophies either of language or of meaning or of Being. Like Kant, they were confident about dealing with the crises and disruptive effects of their respective critiques of metaphysics from the resources of the Western philosophical legacy itself. It is never a question of applying non-Western philosophical methods and alternative non-Western categories to the Western works. For Derrida, those Western philosophical works deconstruct themselves and the only relevant problem is to find out innovatively why it so happens. Western thought therefore, for both of them, is competent enough to transform itself from within itself. For Heidegger, language can certainly be freed from the productionist and technologically exploitative thought.

Though he was fascinated by Buddhism, Heidegger claims that a creative originating transformation of prevailing representational, instrumental thought can come only from Germany and the German language, which like the Greek language, is ideally suited to recover the deepest possibilities of hitherto unthought-of revelations of the meaning of Being. Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern experience according to Heidegger however, will not be relevant for the authentic retrieval of the sense of Being. Heidegger claims that along with German, the Greek language is the most spiritual of all languages. (Clark; 84-86). Heidegger says that “...the Greek language is no ordinary language, but one with special and immanent relationship to Being... Due to language’s special relation to beings and Being, Heidegger stated that Greek was the Logos; a language where the words of a language are inseparable from what they name” [Eric Lemay and Jennifer. A. Pitts 2010; p; 92].

Heidegger claimed that the Germans are metaphysical people. He claimed that Europe can be saved by them. German language is ultimately related to the Greek language. He had a provincial conviction of uniqueness of Germany. “Being chose the German language for sending its hints to mankind” (Philipse -232-233).

Heidegger’s claim of the recovery of the sense of Being only on the basis linguistic-metaphysical exclusivism however, is definitely a certain kind of metaphysical and linguistic Eurocentrism.

Derrida thinks about the new Europe to come which could realize more and more humane international order, though no final justice is possible anywhere. Of course, Derrida is not a Eurocentric or ethnocentric thinker. Still however, as Gayatri Spivak has pointed out, “…the East is never seriously studied or deconstructed in Derrida’s text” [Preface to Derrida’s Of Grammatology; p; lxxii].

In Classical Indian philosophy there was a tradition of empiricism, materialism, skepticism, as well as a tradition of mysticism and idealism. It is comparable to traditions of classical Greek and Roman philosophy. So the false contrast between Eastern mysticism and Western Rationalism has to be given up (Julia Annas; 2000; p; 115). By highlighting this fact, I am not suggesting that Derrida or Heidegger could have found solutions to their philosophical difficulties by extensive borrowings from the Indian traditions, but it can not be denied that there is a scope of comparative philosophy of language and insights from such comparative studies can be intrinsically rewarding. Some modern Indian thinkers are also not keen to apply the philosophical tools of Western thought and it can be said that this can not always be treated as a limitation of Indian thought. But I still find that in classical Indian thought, the relation...
between perception and language has been so fully discussed in terms of determinate and indeterminate perception that some of the insights generated from that discourse can turn out to be fruitful for the contemporary philosophical discourse anywhere.

I will illustrate how certain concepts can be analyzed in future in Derridean way though I have not done it here.

In the lectures delivered in French in Paris on reality and language in Indian thought, Bronkhorst Johannes has analysed the Indian approach to Language and reality. The lectures have been translated into English. I quote some passages from that translation here in order to throw some light on the type of problems relating to language and reality.

“Let us begin with a passage from the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad: “At that time, indeed, the world was undivided. Name and form divided it [or: it was divided by name and form], such that one says: it has this name and that form. Today name and form divide this same world, such that one says: it has this name and that form.”

“This passage seems to assert that in the beginning the world knew no division between names and forms. That is to say, words and the things denoted by them formed a unity; words were not distinct from their objects. This interpretation, which stays close to the original Sanskrit, is naturally inseparable from the idea of a close connection between words and things”.

“A passage from the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa confirms this conclusion:

“Prajāpati brought forth creatures. Those brought forth were conjoined. He entered them by means of form (rūpa). That is why one says: ‘Prajāpati, truly, is form.’ (rūpam vai prajāpatir iti). He entered them by means of name (nāman). That is why one says: ‘Prajāpati, truly, is name.’” [Bronkhorst. Johannes (2011); p:3]

This raises number of questions regarding the relation between names and objects, logocentrism, metaphysics of presence, binary oppositions and so on and this can be taken up as an independent problem of philosophy, accepting inputs from any tradition – Western or Eastern classical or contemporary.

14. Time, God and Theology.

Derrida has said in various interviews that he “rightly passes for an atheist”. This means he is neither a radical atheist nor a traditional theist. His ‘system’ of thought can not permit closure and finality.

There are scholars like Caputo who have shown that Derrida’s position can not be construed as atheism in its standard sense. There are commentators who have shown that given Derrida’s notions of time and differences, his “system” has no place for any kind of theology. Here I have briefly referred to Derrida’s position on theology as analyzed by Caputo (1997) and by Martin Hagglund (2008)

“Deconstruction is not out to undo God or deny faith, or to mock science or make nonsense out of literature, or to break the law... Deconstruction is not in the business of defaming good names, but of saving them” (Caputo; p; 5). However deconstruction is not a negative theology. Negative theology is always a higher, more refined way of affirming that God in the full sense exists. Derrida never has said so.
In a very important interpretation of Derrida however, Martin Hagglund (2008), points out that Derrida’s deconstruction of the logic of identity proceeds from a notion of *temporality* that informs his work from beginning to end. In Speech and Phenomena, Derrida claims that “what is ultimately at stake, what is at bottom decisive [is] the concept of time” [Hagglund 2008; p 15].

“Derrida’s argument is radically atheist, because it entails that nothing—including whatever is posited as “God”—can be exempt from temporal finitude...” (p142). “Such radical atheism follows from the thinking of the trace that informs Derrida’s writing from beginning to end” (p143). Everything is subjected to the *infinite finitude of time*. “The deconstruction of God is the deconstruction of the very idea of absolute immunity, which is the foundation of religion (Caputo;145). The absolute being of God or the immortality of the soul are usually considered to be ideal and desirable, but the implications of the treatment of time and presence in Derrida leads Hagglund to maintain that, in fact, Derrida’s atheism is so radical that God or immortality would be undesirable, because in the absence of time, nothing can happen and nobody can wait for anything to happen. There is neither any threat nor any promise nor any expectation in the context of eternity or positive infinity.

Hagglund claims that “finitude is thus not a negative limitation that prevents us from having access to the fullness of being. On the contrary, finitude is an unconditional condition that makes the fullness of being unthinkable as such” (2008;p 30) Being, for Derrida, is essentially temporal. Temporal finitude is essential for anything that is desirable. If you accept immortality, then you also have to accept that “immortality annihilates the time of life”.


Compared to Husserl (1859-1938), Heidegger or Sartre, Derrida’s approach is more textual in the sense that over and above standard arguments of detecting contradictions in other systems, he also uses the texts(in the sense of writings) of the creative writers and philosophers and reads them very closely and even playfully against the intentions and claims of their authors themselves. Derrida’s texts can also be read in similar mode or style. It has never been Derrida’s claim that his readings are final and all subsequent readings by other philosophers therefore would amount to mere repetitions.

Derrida has read the texts of philosophers very seriously and carefully. It is not a type of close reading resulting in holistic final grasp of textual meaning. It is also not just an overall skeptical dismissal of all the claims of the philosophers whose text Derrida has read creatively. Derrida himself has said that he loves everything that he deconstructs. He has admitted that, “The texts that I want to read from deconstructive point of view are the texts that I love” (Royle; 2007; 97).

Derrida has repeatedly read Plato, Aristotle and other past masters, but his idea behind such readings was not to repeat or to conserve the heritage. He is never trying to find simple, final homogeneous claims of the texts presented in transparent language matching perfectly with the intentions of the relevant authors. The texts of Plato or Hegel or Marx are not homogeneous. Derrida highlights aporias, blind spots, heterogeneity and various inner tensions in the concepts presented in the texts which do not have any final resolution. But one has to observe meticulously all the protocols of normal classical unhurried readings in order then to
locate these tensions. A summary dismissal of the claims of philosophers has never been Derrida’s goal.

In his reply to Searle’s criticism of Derrida’s writing on Austin, Derrida claimed that, his readings of a philosopher is not concentrated on the points which appear to be most central or crucial. Rather he “deconcentrates” and hence the marginal, the secondary the eccentric and the lateral become more “important” to him. Deconstruction is thus deconcentration “of the general functioning of the textual system” (Taylor and Winquist p; 433).

Derrida admits that the desire to deconstruct a text on the part of a critic may become a desire to completely master the text and of showing how the author could not successfully command the language of the text concerned. Such a closure of any deconstructive reading would contradict the deconstructionist claim that there is no such closure or interpretative finality. On the other hand, deconstructive reading may remain faithful to its premise of “open-ended indefiniteness of textuality” which would result into a desire for the pleasure of “limitless indeterminate freedom”. Derrida finds that we are thus required to do a thing as well as its opposite. Deconstruction, which is not dogmatic about its skepticism of interpretative closure, is itself inhabited by différence and hence it is perpetually self-deconstructing.

In his own preface to (OG; p; lxxix), Derrida has clarified that in the first part of the book, he has presented theoretical and critical concepts and the in the second part, he has put them to test in the context of Rousseau and Levy Strauss. But he immediately points out that he is also not happy with the distinction of a theory and is applications in such an absolute manner. Thus Derrida is always ready to question his own project also whenever it becomes necessary to question it. He admits that we have to use the linguistic resources of the tradition itself which we are trying to criticize. He reflects constantly on his own style of writing and reading Derrida admits that he respects classical norms of reading in his interpretations of Rousseau’s text, but he also emphasized that reading should free itself from the standard categories of history of ideas or history of literature or the history of philosophy.

Discussing the duality and instability of the term ‘supplement’ in Rousseau’s works, Derrida finds the no author or reader can be in full command of what he writes or what he reads. Reading, therefore, should aim at certain relationship between what the writer commands and “....what he does not command in a pattern of language he uses”. A reader who produces a signifying structure is not just reproducing it by a ‘doubling of commentary’. Derrida is careful to point out that critical reading always requires a doubling commentary. He does not reject any of the standard methods of traditional criticism. His objection is that such methods have always only protected, they have “never opened, a reading (OG p; 158)

There is a tendency in any binary hierarchy always to reestablish itself again and again in various forms and Derrida finds the need here is for an “interminable analysis”. Deconstruction is a project of repeating - i,e, doing the same thing again and again in different contexts.

In his unique reading of Plato’s Phaderus, Derrida has shown that in that dialogue, Socrates first claims that we should be guided by logos or Reason rather than by myths. But in the same text, Socrates uses the Greek myth of Theuth to explain the truth about writing. Similarly, after having marginalized writing in favour of speech in various ways, Socrates shows that there is “good writing” engraved in soul which is to be distinguished from writing in the normal notational sense. Thus, writing is good if and only if, it is metaphorically characterized as writing in the sense of divine inscription in the soul.
Derrida focused on the duality of the word “pharmakon” (both as poison and a remedy) in deconstructing Plato’s privileging speech over writing and he analyzed the duality of the word “supplement” in dealing with Rousseau’s privileging of nature over culture as well as speech over writing. Derrida finds loose thread in the form of the word pharmakon in Plato’s text and the word supplement in the text of Rousseau, thus destabilizing any final closure of meaning in those texts. He clarifies that supplement is highlighted by him in Rousseau’s writing not because it has any psychoanalytical symptomatic significance for the author. In a sense, supplement in Rousseau’s text or pharmakon in a Plato’s dialogue are not author-specific psychologically loaded local terms with biographical-narrative significance. In fact, such terms destabilize their respective texts from within and illustrate a kind of self-deconstruction.

Derrida highlights such terms to show how they function generally in the context of establishing and also destabilizing the speech/writing and nature/culture and other such binaries based on logocentric foundational metaphysics of undivided presence. Derrida reads Rousseau in his deconstructive manner and he does not therefore just repeat what Rousseau said about ‘supplement’. He finds a blind spot in ‘supplement’ which Rousseau could not overcome. Such terms also show why deconstruction itself can never establish any closed system by arresting the free play of differences and by positing a fixed center.

Though Derrida focuses on the close reading of ‘texts’ (in the standard sense) Derrida’s approach is not exclusively textual and linguistic. In fact, he was challenging the authority of Structural Linguistics. Derrida was more interested in the ‘other of language’ i.e., in what precedes and in what exceeds language. His concept of trace or text is not linguistic. He prefers the pre-linguistic and non-anthropological term, ‘mark’. He uses the word ‘text’ in its normal sense as well as in his special sense. A text, in this special sense, is an open differential network, a fabric of traces. Text is not to be confused with ‘writing’ in its normal sense. Hence, when Derrida said, “there is nothing outside text”, he did not mean that there is nothing outside the books. He meant that that there is nothing outside the differentially determined open contexts. Deconstruction already is at work especially in literary works. Plato’s texts or the texts of Joyce are already in deconstruction. They are not to be deconstructed from outside with a certain literary theory or the tools of its applications. Literature for Derrida, is “the most interesting thing in the world, may be more interesting than the world”. (Royle; 85-86)

As far as the readings by others of Derrida’s own texts are concerned, Derrida clarifies the situation as under:-

“Let it be said in passing how surprised I have often been, how amused or discouraged, depending on my humor, by the use or abuse of the following argument: Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn’t it, the skeptic-relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in truth, stability, or the unity of meaning, in intention or "meaning-to-say", how can he demand of us that we read him with pertinence, precision, rigor? How can he demand that his own text be interpreted correctly? How can he accuse anyone else of having misunderstood, simplified, deformed it, etc.? In other words, how can he discuss, and discuss the reading of what he writes? The answer is simple enough: this definition of the deconstructionist is false (that’s right: false, not true) and feeble; it supposes a bad (that’s right: bad, not good) and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which therefore must finally be read or reread”. (Derrida, Limited Inc.; In, Victor E. Taylor and Charles E Winquist)
16. Conclusion;

It has been claimed that Derrida’s deconstruction is neither a purely literary theory nor a philosophy of language nor just a new method of reading nor one more additional school of literary criticism in any *standard* sense. However, it should be pointed out that writing continues to be meaningful and readable in various contexts after the death of the authors. As Derrida himself has shown, there can not be totally singular author-specific writings or exclusively reader-specific readings. Language is essentially repeatable and public and the possibility of *iterability* and hence *citationality* is its *essential* possibility and not just a contingent circumstance which accidentally influences reading or writing. There can therefore be *unintended* effects of Derrida’s deconstruction in various contexts. Thus, despite Derrida’s intentions, deconstruction gets transformed into a philosophical or literary theory and paradoxically this confirms Derrida’s position that language does not reveal any fully present intentions of any author transparently and that texts can never be fully mastered or totally controlled by the orientation of readers or the intentions of authors. Derrida’s deconstructive language can not be absolutely singular and unique and only a Derrida-specific language, though deconstruction is definitely Derridean, just as psychoanalysis is originally Freudian. Still, there can not be any one-person-specific unrepeateable language as Derrida himself has shown. Thus, Derrida’s readings of Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Sassure, Levi Strauss, Levinas, Austin and others are, unique, but their implications differ according to the contexts of philosophical discourses and also according to the standpoints of the readers concerned.

There have been various discussions about deconstruction in relation to Christianity, Judaism Marxism, Buddhism, Indian philosophy etc. He has talked about messianism and the messianic, about prayers and tears, about confession, about circumcision, about sacrifice, about Jewish identity, about the most unexpected future to come etc. Ethical, theological and political-legal- global and international contexts have provided new resources to understand and extend the implications of deconstruction in unexplored areas.

*Hauntology* and *ontology* of Marxism, International Law, democracy, liberal capitalism, social justice, inequality, hospitality, forgiveness, gift, sovereignty, responsibility, friendship, death, autobiographical confession, mourning, end of history, idea of unexpected arrival of a new future, etc, are the themes to which Derrida himself has contributed with his new aporias-centered analysis comprising the conditions of possibility and impossibility of all these phenomena. He has also discussed the relation between biography and philosophy. Derrida has analysed the problem of the epistemological and ethical treatment of animals by different philosophers.

Some illustrations of Derrida’s new analysis of various aporias from Ryole’s book are as under:

1. Literature is the freedom of saying anything and therefore, there is a certain kind of acceptable irresponsibility involved in literature. He claims that there can not be any literature without democracy.

2. To love one’s own name is to love what is not one’s own. One is always stranger to one’s name.
3 The conditions of the possibility of a gift are the conditions of the impossibility of it.

4 There can not be any truthful testimony without the possibility of fiction.

Royle therefore has rightly said;
“Derrida’s texts have described and transformed the ways in which we think about the nature of language, speech and writing, life and death, culture, ethics, politics, religion literature and philosophy. More than any other contemporary thinker or writer, Jacques Derrida has defined our time.” (2007; P;8)

Taylor appreciates Derrida’s impact on various areas of thought and practice in the following words:-

“No thinker in the last 100 years had a greater impact than he (Derrida) did on people in more fields and different disciplines. Philosophers, theologians, literary and art critics, psychologists, historians, writers, artists, legal scholars and even architects have found in his writings resources for insights that have led to an extraordinary revival of the arts and humanities during the past four decades. And no thinker has been more deeply misunderstood.... As an Algerian Jew writing in France during the postwar years in the wake of totalitarianism on the right (fascism) as well as the left (Stalinism), Mr. Derrida understood all too well the danger of beliefs and ideologies that divide the world into diametrical opposites: right or left, red or blue, good or evil, for us or against us.”[New York Times, October 14; 2004]].
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