

DERRIDA AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: DECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract:

Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction" theory is known as a revolutionary school of thought in modern philosophy. It is an analytical method that is opposed to the traditional interpretation based on a text or textual object, which reveals the contradictions and structural inconsistencies hidden within the text. Derrida showed that language can never represent a specific and fixed meaning. Every word is dependent on another word, and this dependence creates the uncertainty of meaning. In this process, the concepts of 'fundamental truth' or 'ultimate meaning' are questioned. Deconstruction is essentially a new reading of the text—where the reader, not the author, becomes the real creator of the text. It is not just a literary technique but a philosophical and political position that challenges established ideas and power structures. Now some important questions arise about the above discussion and thought: How is deconstruction different from the conventional stream of text analysis? How is the relationship between language and meaning uncertain according to Derrida? How important is the role of the author in the deconstruction method? How is the role of the reader redefined in the theory of deconstruction? Is deconstruction just a literary technique or a philosophical position? Analyse. How is the influence of Derrida's thought reflected in contemporary literature or sociology? Therefore, I will attempt to answer the questions posed above in this article.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Textual Analysis, Reader-Centered Interpretation, Power and Language, Structure and Deconstruction, Process of Meaning-Making, Post-Structuralism

Introduction:

Jacques Derrida was one of the most prominent, controversial, and insightful figures in modern French intellectual society. He developed a new way of practicing philosophy, which he called *deconstruction*, a method that brought fundamental changes to many academic disciplines—particularly literary studies. Derrida was born in 1930 in El-Biar, a suburb of Algiers, then a French colony in Algeria. His family was Jewish, and his father worked as a salesman for a local wine company. Initially, Derrida did not show signs of academic brilliance in school and dreamt of becoming a professional football player. In 1942, due to new laws enacted by the Nazi-collaborating Vichy government in France, all Jewish children, including Derrida, were forcibly expelled from school. He spent most of that time at home with his mother. Beyond the Nazi laws, he also suffered from the anti-Semitism of Algeria's majority Muslim population. This experience of being at the bottom

of the hierarchy among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—three religions deeply connected yet distinct—left a lasting mark on him. He observed that each of these faiths claimed to speak the truth, yet none knew how to respectfully engage with the others.

Language is Inherently Unstable:

In 1949, at the age of 19, Derrida came to Paris to study at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. He was an exceptionally intelligent student, but his position was unusual—he had access to elite educational opportunities, yet as an Algerian Jew, he remained marginal to metropolitan Parisian life. Though Derrida was not an autobiographical writer, many interpret his works as highly abstract responses to his firsthand experiences of religious intolerance, exclusion, and prejudice—though Derrida himself never admitted this. Starting in the late 1960s, Derrida began to articulate the ideas that would make him famous. At one point, he became a celebrity intellectual in Europe and the United States. He was considered quite handsome and had a distinctive hairstyle. His love life was varied and vibrant. In 1980, he was falsely arrested in a drug smuggling case, and he received support from both left- and right-wing politicians, including the then-President of France. He loved playing soccer. Derrida died in 2004 of pancreatic cancer at the age of 74. He wrote nearly 40 books, all of which are dense and subtle. Yet the importance of his work becomes accessible through understanding three initially strange-sounding words he often used: *deconstruction*, *aporia*, and *logocentrism*—each of which carries crucial concepts.

The word *deconstruction* is primarily associated with Derrida. It was his term for his way of thinking, though he often felt that others misused it and failed to convey its original intent. At its core, *deconstruction* means breaking down excessive allegiance to an idea and learning to see that part of the truth may lie in its opposite. In 1967, he published his first major book, *Of Grammatology*. There, Derrida argued that since the time of Socrates, Western philosophy had systematically privileged speech over writing—treating speech as more authentic communication, and writing as merely a copy or secondhand report lacking the interaction and truth found in spoken dialogue. The dramatic force of Derrida's work came from pushing this claim even further. His more sweeping, unsettling proposal was that all of our thinking is shaped by unconscious forces that irrationally grant one thing superiority over another: privileging speech over writing, reason over emotion, men over women (at least for much of history), sound over image, sight over touch. His central argument was that this tendency to grant privilege often results in a failure to assess the value of the supposedly lesser side of the equation.

Criticism and Controversy:

He did not claim that everything is meaningless. Rather, he believed the neglected half of many fundamental oppositions deserves attention and care. In his 40+ books, Derrida deconstructed many such binary concepts: reason vs. emotion, masculinity vs. femininity, profit vs. kindness, high culture vs. low culture. He hoped we would learn to live more intelligently with the tensions behind these words—realizing that both sides hold meaning,

both contain flaws, and both ultimately need each other. This constant push and pull may prove to be unresolvable. It might seem that Derrida always used deconstruction to critique traditional thought and free-market capitalism, aligning with leftist or socialist ideals. But he was far more nuanced. For instance, when deconstructing the idea of equality, he proposed that the claim “equality is always better than inequality” might be the guiding principle of modern liberalism, but in practice, it’s unstable and ambiguous. He showed that some of the finest human experiences do not clearly exemplify equality in action. To deconstruct an idea means to reveal how it is filled with logical contradictions and uncertainty—to remind ourselves that such ideas are rarely clean or pure. Derrida criticized our tendency to imagine that every problem has some clear and correct solution lurking behind it. He believed that we are creatures destined to live without absolute answers, and that our longing for such certainty lies at the root of many problems.

Derrida wanted to cure us of our love for crude simplicity and help us feel at ease with a state of ongoing intellectual suspense. For example, he argued that we are justifiably conflicted about the advantages of both capitalism and socialism—just as we are often conflicted about love and sexuality. On such matters, we can never truly reach a final answer, since both sides contain valid elements. To quickly conclude that capitalism is either wonderful or sinful, or that love and sex are either deeply connected or utterly separate, is to ignore the rich and messy reality. According to Derrida, being uncertain or doubtful in such areas is not a sign of weakness or stupidity—it is, in fact, the central mark of maturity. "Derrida's strategy was to glamorize or make these situations attractive, to present them in a positive light. For this reason, he revived that beautiful Greek word *aporia*, which means an impasse or a puzzling, confusing state; he suggested that *aporia* is a condition we should take pride in, a situation of doubt that we should regularly experience. In Derrida's worldview, doubt is not an embarrassing or incomplete condition, but rather something that only a mature mind is capable of.

Legacy and Influence:

One of Derrida’s primary critical targets was a mode of thinking he called *logocentrism*, by which he meant the overzealous commitment to reason and clear definitions — a reliance on language based on the blind belief that it is the natural and best medium for communication. Derrida, a lover of music and the arts, claimed that many important things can be felt that can never be clearly articulated in language — whether spoken or written — something logocentrists often forget. One example of logocentrism particularly struck him: the special importance given to the concept of IQ, which primarily measures a person’s ability to solve logical puzzles, broadly ignoring other qualities of the mind — such as how much ability a person has to form friendships, to be a good parent, to enjoy life, or to regulate emotions. Some people may not be good at solving geometric sequence puzzles, but they might be very capable of making a marriage work, succeeding in business, or making a vacation or celebration meaningful. IQ tells us nothing about those capabilities, each of which Derrida recognized as important.

Derrida, a football and sugar-loving Algerian Jew who taught at the world's top universities, raised a skeptical finger at modern intellectual attitudes. Like many famous thinkers, Derrida should be remembered as a correction to some overly rigid worldviews — in his case, excessive loyalty to logic and clear answers. Derrida did not want to abolish all hierarchies; he knew cruelty should never be given priority over kindness, or intelligence over ignorance. But he also understood how often we unknowingly dismiss ideas simply because their opposites lie on the other side of the equation. Derrida gently reminds us, with patience and humility, to consider the value in those discarded ideas, and to remain curious — about why it might be good, even for a brief moment, to stand on the other side of any debate." Martin Heidegger, the foremost pioneer of modern atheistic existentialism, sharply attacked metaphysics in his philosophical theory—he referred to metaphysics as the “chain of fate.” With his phrase “the end of philosophy,” Heidegger intended to signal the disappearance of metaphysics-bound philosophy. He claimed that true philosophical inquiries can only relate to “Being”; that is, they must concern ontology—a concrete theory of the nature of existence. According to Heidegger, philosophical inquiries involving the transcendental or the supernatural are meaningless.

In the 1960s, Heidegger's phrase “the end of philosophy” acquired new dimensions. Increasingly, this phrase was interpreted to mean that philosophy, philosophical inquiry, and philosophizing in general are nothing more than ideologies rooted in Western social values. Later, proponents of liberal humanism stated that philosophy exists in its current form due only to its historical prestige (a *de facto* situation), and not because of any inherent truth (*de jure*). In other words, they argued that, like natural axioms, philosophy has traditionally enjoyed a privileged status—this privileged status is inherently ideological. French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2003) responded to this by asserting that Heidegger did not advocate forgetting or abandoning transcendentalism. Derrida claimed that the “Being” Heidegger described is, in any case, as transcendental as other metaphysical or transcendental terms. If philosophy is indeed an ideological construct, as some have argued, Derrida contended that such an accusation is undermined by the very language and rhetorical structure that philosophy employs. He suggested that Heidegger actually sought to replace authoritative, ideological Western philosophy with philosophies that express different, broader, or alternative ideologies.

Such ideologically charged philosophies could include, for example, Marxism (in which philosophy glorifies the ruling class), Freudian theory (where philosophy centers around sexual signs), or anti-Freudian theory (which claims that philosophy is based on male-centric ideology). Ultimately, Derrida argued that the structure of reason itself is absolute and eternal.

While Heidegger claimed that “philosophy is nearing extinction,” Derrida refrained from directly debating this point with him. Instead, Derrida questioned whether this idea could be expressed differently—since he believed philosophy can never truly disappear, as rationalism is eternal and absolute. Thus, philosophical questioning of philosophy is always possible.

As an alternative expression of Heidegger's "philosophy is nearing extinction," Derrida adopted a more subtle strategy—he played a "double game." Because Derrida had to work within the rational and philosophical language structures, he created a trap in which philosophy would ensnare itself. He aimed to subdue philosophy by exposing its inherent internal contradictions and paradoxes—issues that could not be adequately or logically resolved within the domain of philosophy itself. What Heidegger once termed *Destruktion*, Derrida transformed into a new conceptual weapon—known as *deconstruction*. In narrating the history of the search for history, Heidegger had no other option but to invoke the concept of *Destruktion*. He argued that in the world, the being of the individual (which Heidegger calls *das Sein*) is constantly trapped in the mundaneness of daily life. The individual's being is constantly influenced by ingrained habits and perceptions of the world, which reside in memory. According to Heidegger, this leads to a "fall" of the individual's being—it degenerates from *das Sein* into *das Man* (the anonymous "they" or collective existence).

Conclusion:

Therefore, Heidegger suggests that anyone who truly wishes to live an authentic life must strive to break free from the enclosure of everyday life and reflect on their own mortality (non-being or nothingness). This process, according to Heidegger, can be initiated by becoming overwhelmed by *angst* (a deep existential dread stemming from constant awareness of death), and through the rigorous intellectual discipline of *Destruktion*. Thus, *Destruktion*, as Heidegger defines it, is a complex synthesis of: The negative expansion of average everyday life (the *today*), and The positive expansion of *history*, which continually challenges established authority and empowers the self to become authoritative. *Destruktion* can also sometimes refer to the effort of breaking down a word in order to trace the origin of its constituent elements. Derrida's concept of *Deconstruction* is a more narrowly scoped idea but possesses immense critical power. When someone speaks, they do so meaningfully and rationally; however, Derrida suggests that behind this speech lie dormant regions—hidden processes by which these rational utterances are formed outside the traditional rules of *logos* (the logic or reason of language).

Derrida outlined two key conditions for this process: To play a cunning double game, one must consistently use the philosophical language full of ambiguity, duplicity, and even hypocrisy—exploiting the inherent duality in meaning. The speaker, whom Derrida calls the *deconstructor*, must continuously reject and resist the natural logic of *logos*. In doing so, they must blur the distinction between factual truths and rational truths, and adopt a strictly empiricist stance. Through this method, Derrida's concept of *différance* is realized.

Heidegger saw *difference* as a result of worldliness. History and language have helped humanity to shape and advance its sense of being, and as a result, *being* has never managed to break free from the constraints of language and environment. The *being* (which Heidegger calls *das Sein*) embodies only the historically accumulated past—it does not always reflect the present realities of surroundings and everydayness. From this perspective, the authoritative *subject* remains distinct from the objectified *being* that has accepted authority.

Derrida repackaged this idea into his theory of *la différance*, which consists of two characteristics: Differentiation in essence or identity Differentiation in terms of the progression of time.

Derrida developed this theory by challenging the impossibility of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of history. Derrida questioned Husserl's framework by asking: "What kind of truth should we accept as truth?"—a question Derrida saw as ultimately unresolvable. He argued that if truth is accepted as truth, then it must be absolute and eternal. In his book *On Grammatology*, Derrida introduces several key terms, which can be summarized for clarity: Grammatology: The science of writing. Derrida proposes that we abandon traditional linear notions of writing and instead move toward transcending them. Grammatology encompasses the history and evolution of writing systems and their philosophical applications. According to Derrida, the origin of grammatology lies in the relationship between metaphysics and the act of writing. Metaphysics of Presence: The assumption that speech is more valid or authentic than writing because the speaker is physically present to assert meaning. This implies that speech, being immediate, is superior to writing, which is considered a secondary representation. Derrida critiques this assumption, which he terms phonocentrism. Logocentrism: The belief that at the origin of creation, there was only sound, or the *Word*, often attributed to a divine source (God), who provided humanity with language to attain knowledge. This belief holds that divine or transcendent entities such as God, the Idea, the Great Spirit, or the Self are the central sources of meaning in our speech, thought, and action. This creates hierarchical binary oppositions like: god/man, spiritual/physical, man/woman, good/evil. In such binaries, the first term dominates the second, establishing a power structure in meaning.

Binary Oppositions: These arise from logocentrism and represent dominant-subordinate word pairs. Derrida focuses more on the marginal or suppressed terms to deconstruct meaning. Originary Lack: The feeling of a gap or void that arises when attempting to expand a word's meaning. Derrida argues that in such cases, supplementary meanings must be invoked. Erasure: A strategy in which a word or signifier is simultaneously accepted as meaningful and marked for deletion, signaling its instability. Trace: The presence of absence. It refers to the way in which something that is no longer present still leaves behind a mark or indication of its former presence. A signifier contains traces of other signifiers, revealing that no word bears full, fixed meaning in isolation.

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