

On Reading Heidegger: An Outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium

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(*Editorial Note:* Jacques Derrida did not read a formal paper at the Essex Colloquium but presented some remarks on “Reading Heidegger” based on conversations of April, 1986, at Yale University, with Tom Keenan, Tom Levin, Tom Pepper, and Andrzej Warminski. David Farrell Krell has provided a brief outline of Professor Derrida’s remarks, followed by a transcript of the discussion.)

Four threads are to be drawn out here, emanating from four areas of hesitation and disquiet in my current reading of Heidegger:

- I. The privilege of *questioning* in Heidegger’s thought and the gesture of *affirmation*;
 - II. The privilege of *essence* in Heidegger’s account of technique and the necessary *contamination* of essences;
 - III. The thought of *life* and *animality* in Heidegger’s ontology;
 - IV. The thought of *epochality* and epochal suspension (ἐποχεῖν) in Heidegger’s history of Being.
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- I. The privilege of *questioning* in Heidegger’s thought and the gesture of *affirmation*.
 - A. The question is privileged everywhere by Heidegger as *the* mode of thinking.
 1. Heidegger often redoubles the question—“Why the why?”—yet never doubts its dignity: the *Denkweg* is always a way of questioning.
 2. That way appears to be subjected to both teleology and

- archaeology: for even in errancy there may well be orientation, destining, and—above all—provenance (*Herkunft*).
3. Such insistence on the questioning way would in that case *limit* the being under way of questioning.
- B. My own gesture is to sketch a movement of thinking, tracing, writing, that begins in affirmation.
1. Questioning is a particular form of discourse—one could perform a grammatical, rhetorical, and pragmatic analysis of it.
 2. In addition to what Heidegger calls *das Gefragte*, *das Befragte*, and *das Erfragte*, there must be someone or something else [*quelqu'un d'autre*] involved in questioning: there is the call of the other [*l'appel de l'autre*] that precedes, *must* precede, philosophy and the path of thinking.
 - a) For Heidegger, *Sein* is the “totally other,” and yet such otherness is not totally unrelated to the Socratic/Platonic tradition.
 - b) It is necessary to pursue what in *Was heißt Denken?* Heidegger calls *verheissen*, “promise.”
 3. The moment I set out on a path of thinking there is already the trace of the other; the trace calls for questioning yet does not itself pose questions.
 4. The trace is an ever-renewed affirmation of questioning: “Yes, one must question!” and “Yes, one must question again!” The “yes” of affirmation must always be confirmed by a second “yes”: affirmation promises the memory of itself.
 5. Yet by the very necessity of such repetition, affirmation is inevitably exposed to the menace of supplementarity, parasitism, technique—in a word, contamination.
- II. The privilege of *essence* in Heidegger’s account of technique and the necessary *contamination* of essence.
- A. Heidegger avers that the essence of technique is nothing technological: his thinking of technique *as such* and *as an essence* tries in a classically philosophical manner to shelter the thought and language of essence from contamination.
 - B. Yet can anything in language and in thought be sheltered absolutely from technicity? In the very will to protect oneself against “x” one is more exposed to the danger of reproducing “x” than when one tries to think contamination.
 - C. Contamination, a contagion born of contact and a kind of touching, foils every strategy of protection; it puts at risk the

central theme of Heidegger's thinking—that of the ontological difference.

1. Being's difference *from* beings is itself dissimulated *in* beings, and thus appears to be a kind of contamination. Yet Heidegger would insist that contamination is merely an "ontic" scheme, a mere "metaphor."
2. The Heideggerian figure of Being's self-veiling, its withdrawal, reserve, reticence, holding-back, may well be a strategy of protection.
3. Contamination requires the thinking of a kind of *différance* that is not yet or no longer ontological difference.

III. The thought of *life* and *animality* in Heidegger's ontology.

- A. Heidegger's unceasing effort to discredit *Lebensphilosophie* suggests that the question of life disturbs almost all of his analyses and conceptual distinctions.
 1. The thesis, "The animal is poor in world," from the 1929/30 lecture course, remains problematic: the animal's intermediate position (between stone and human being) reproduces an ancient conceptual scheme and involves the classical machinery of mediation.
 - a) Heidegger tries to subordinate all the sciences and regional ontologies to fundamental ontology.
 - b) He tries to insist on access to the *as such* (the essence) as the distinguishing mark of humanity.
 2. There is no such thing as Animality, but only a regime of differences without opposition. The concept of animality, along with the "world poverty" of the animal, are human artifacts, indeed, artifacts that are difficult to wield; and their effect is to *efface* differences, to homogenize.
- B. In addition to the ontological framework, one must analyze the *political* and *institutional* context of Heidegger's opposition to *Lebensphilosophie*.
 1. In spite of Heidegger's insistence that all the sciences must submit to the philosopher-metaphysician, who alone thinks their essence, Heidegger fails to challenge the traditional division of the university into departments or faculties.
 2. Yet this is not to deny that Heidegger's thinking—in spite of 1933 and in spite of his silence on the Holocaust, a silence as monstrous as that about which he remained silent—still has a deconstructive role to play in our political life, especially in the academy.

- IV. The thought of *epochality* and epochal suspension (ἐποχ εἶν) in Heidegger's history of Being.
- A. For Heidegger, "epoch" is the movement in which Being gives itself by dissimulating itself, holding itself back in reserve even as it shows itself.
 - B. Although an epoch is not a historiological period, it is still a large ensemble or totality gathered toward a single sense.
 - 1. In *Einführung in die Metaphysik* Heidegger argues that Plato's χώρα is confluent with the determination of Being as ἰδέα and that it prepares the way for Descartes' *res extensa*. Yet might not χώρα resist both conventional Platonism and modernity?
 - 2. In *Satz vom Grund* he argues that the principle of sufficient reason pertains to an epoch dominated by the subject-object relation, representedness, and *Ge-stell*. Yet Spinoza, precisely in the name of reason, develops a thought that is not of the subject, not of representedness, not of sufficient reason, not of certitude, not of finalism. And Heidegger largely ignores him.
 - C. These forced moves and silences on Heidegger's part cause us to hesitate in the face of his powerful and otherwise extremely convincing epochal organization.

These are the four threads. The question at the end is whether we can or should knot them together. Perhaps we should, after the manner of Heidegger, try to think these four threads, not as a unity, but as a *Geflecht* or weave. . . .

DISCUSSION

- P. Crowther:* I have to confess that I found myself profoundly shocked by your discourse, if only for the reason that to read you in the printed word has proved an enormously difficult task, whereas listening to you today has proved enormously easy. Now, is this just a reflection of the contingencies of the situation—presenting some remarks to this conference—or does this mark a change in your approach to deconstruction?
- J. Derrida:* What do you mean by being shocked?
- P. Crowther:* Well, just surprised, puzzled. . . . The fact that there is such a difference between your written text and your verbally presented text.
- J. Derrida:* That's the reason I attend colloquia. It has to do, of course, with what I said at the beginning: it was an oral presentation,

intended to open discussion. I think that the written texts, which you seem to prefer, usually are more difficult to question, more protective, strategically more clever, or “rused,” and this limits discussion. And further, it is fair just to open up, to deal in a straightforward way, with all these problems, presupposing that some of you have read my texts, the written texts, so that there could be an exchange between the written implication and the oral performance. But what do you mean by being shocked? Did you find the oral too great a simplification?

P. Crowther: When I read your texts I sense exactly the things you were talking about, a sense of strategy, quite willful. Now you’ve reversed that and talked in a very open way. I thought for a long time I was listening to an Oxford analytic philosopher, so that is probably the reason for my shock. But I am also interested in the fact that you finished by going into an ethical dimension. I wonder whether it has to do with the openness of a colloquium?

J. Derrida: No, no. I often ask myself ethical questions.

P. Crowther: You ask *yourself* them, but you don’t . . .

J. Derrida: No, in the background there are many texts with which many of you, perhaps all of you, are familiar. The paradox is that this very easy and straightforward speech is at the same time very formalized, that is, implies many hidden complicities. I thought I would try strategically to reach the points that are at stake. Whether I succeeded or not I do not know, but that was my intention. And this implied a tacit *formalization*, notwithstanding the really “everyday” style.

P. Crowther: It was an everyday style, but it wasn’t everydayness.

G. Bennington: I wanted to pick up on the notion of the *yes* and affirmation. I understand your point about challenging Heidegger when he says that the essence of technology is not technological. Your move with respect to that is to say, well, yes it is. . . . But then you seem to operate on the question of the question in a way that is not dissimilar to what you seem to be reproaching Heidegger for on the question of technology. On the question of the question, you are the one who seems to say the *essence* of the question is not interrogative but affirmative.

J. Derrida: Not the essence, not the essence. No, the *happening* of a questioning discourse is something affirmative; it is a situation, a scene, in which you have to affirm, to say “Yes, I am questioning,” or “I prefer the question to the dogma, or to the position; I *prefer* it.” And this is the happening of a sort of contract. I won’t say it *is* a contract, but when you ask a question, the first question, the question

of the question, you have already decided that it is good to speak, for instance, or that it is good to address the other, that it is better than not to do so. And even if you don't explicitly say "yes," you imply this affirmation—that it is better to address the other than not to, better to ask questions than not ask them.

G. Bennington: But insofar as that yes or that affirmation is always already contaminated by the possibility of repetition—*mimēsis*, miming, hesitation, various thoughts of this kind—then presumably that yes, or that affirmation, is not understandable in opposition to a "no" or a negation. Affirmation wouldn't work in an oppositional way.

J. Derrida: Yes, that is right. It is not symmetrical with negation.

G. Bennington: But then I'm a bit unsure about this choice as to what is "better." Might it not be that one is in a position where there is no choice? In the absence of the possibility of opposing that yes, or that choice, to a no, to a refusal or a negation, where does that leave the notion of choice? Is there not a *pathos* attached to your yes? And could one not imagine a version that would have a different sort of *pathos*, one attached to a no, using the same sequence of possibilities of repetition, mime, and so on? If one could construct a similar argument, where one says that what opened the question was a no, a no that was always already affected by the possibility of contamination, how different would that be from your saying that what opens the question is a yes?

J. Derrida: The no is not opposed to the yes in the case you mention. There is no symmetry between them. Even the no implies the yes. When you say "no," taking the most negative stand, engaging in the most negative discourse, the yes to which I am referring now is implicated. That is, not that it is better—"better" is a mode of translation of what I am saying—not that it is "better" to speak, or to address the other, than not to. It is not a matter of ἀγαθόν, the "good." It is the mere fact or experience of addressing the other, of speaking, even if to say, 'No, no, no, no, no', as a devil. . . . I am referring to *Ulysses*, to *l'esprit qui dit non*. Even in this perspective of absolute negativity, absolute negativity implies an affirmation, the kind of affirmation I am referring to. And this affirmation cannot occur without a repetition, thus without a contamination, and so on. So, this yes is not a value, not an affirmation of a value, not an ethical stance. It is something implied by every trace. That is why I do not speak of speech acts, because usually these imply the line between animality and humanity. As soon as there is a trace traced, there is such an affirmation, what I call affirmation in this case.

G. Bennington: What I'm really interested in is to what extent the affirma-

tion isn't just, let's say, a *necessity*. What you're calling the affirmation might simply be a necessity.

J. Derrida: Yes. Sometimes I write necessity with a capital N. That is to say that it is a singular necessity, not simply the law, but Necessity, the other which I cannot escape. And, in the present case, affirmation, such affirmation means Necessity. You cannot but have already traced the trace, and this has to do with a singular experience, with Ἀνάγκη, a singular situation, whose singularity is Necessity. But it is not affirmation in the linguistic sense. It is not really "yes." "Yes" is a translation, a linguistic translation, of what I call affirmation.

D. Simon-Williams: I was very struck by your mentioning trace and veil at the end of your remarks, because I feel that it is possible actually to take those two in a sense together. Especially in "veil" there is this reference to a source of experience that actually doesn't call for affirmation *or* negation. And I think that it is something one finds in trace as well. I know "trace" is a very difficult idea, that it is more something in the sense of imprint, mould; but both veil and trace somehow link up together in an upsurge of something, something irreducible to technicity, technology, technicality, something that grants the possibility of seeing and touching. And I think that there is a link that seems to have its original place in a very undefined space of experience, a being at the source, a re-sourcing.

J. Derrida: Yes. First, I would not say that the trace is described the way it should be described when you speak of imprint, mould. I think the trace differently. Of course, the word *trace* doesn't mean anything by itself. But the model of imprinting, mould, etc., of τύπος, is one particular mode of determining the trace—and it is not mine, I would say. On the contrary, I am trying to deconstruct this model and even the model of the vestige, the footprint in the sand. I would prefer something which is neither present nor absent: I would prefer *ashes* as the better paradigm for what I call the trace—something which erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself. So that would be the first repercussion of what you call the trace. Then, as to technicality and touching, contamination. . . . Of course, what happens with modern technology is that it deprives us of the possibility of touching. But what scares Heidegger is not the fact that we cannot touch anymore; it is not that he would like to protect the possibility of touching; but it is the *contamination* between touching and nontouching, between the authentic human way of touching, the way a Dasein touches, and another way of touching-not-touching. That is a contamination which he would like to avoid, contamination between touching in the human sense and touching in the nonhuman sense,

technical, animal, or whatever. That's why I insisted on the strange combination between contact, a kind of contact, and another kind of contact or noncontact. Whereas he would like to draw a limit between an authentic touching and an inauthentic touching. And that is what leaves me perplexed. I think there is a contamination, there has always been a contamination between touching and not touching.

- H. Lubasz: May I ask whether you could say something more about the political potential you see in Heidegger? I was very puzzled by your saying that, and I just want to say briefly why. It seems to me that in many ways Heidegger wants to circumscribe, circumvent, avoid animality and the *Lebenswelt*. He wants to circumvent not the essence of technology but technology itself. But I do not remember any comment by Heidegger that I would regard as a relevant, original, penetrating comment about anything in the German political situation. So where do you see the potential for some political illumination?
- J. Derrida: As you can imagine, the concept of potentiality is rather obscure here: what is potentiality in the present case? If it's *too* potential, it's nothing. So, what do I mean by *potentiality*? To answer your question, I should point out something which is not only potential, but which is *actual*, otherwise it is all too indeterminate. I don't agree with you when you say that he never said anything relevant to German political history, even during the thirties. I think that, if we had time, we could show that he—indirectly, in his own manner, and so on—perhaps put the good questions. Perhaps. Are we sure today that we can understand what Nazism was, without asking all the questions, the historical questions, Heidegger asks? I am not sure. I am not sure that we have today really understood what Nazism was. And if we have to think and think about that, I believe we will have to *go through*, not to stop, at Heidegger's questions, *go through* Heidegger's trajectory and his project. We cannot understand what Europe is and has been during this century, what Nazism has been, and so on, without integrating what made Heidegger's discourse possible. And then you will have to *read* Heidegger to see what has occurred. In all these questions of *praxis*, *poiēsis*, *Volk*, etc., the fact that Heidegger does not propose a political philosophy as such doesn't mean that he was simply "out"; probably he was thinking that politics and political philosophy were not capable of thinking what was happening in Europe at the time. I think that there is a real potential in meditating on what has happened: it is, of course, difficult for me to improvise on that. Yet he was not simply out of the

field. Who *could* have been? How? But *all* the questions he was dealing with had to do with Nazism, with the history of Western culture, with Marxism, with capitalism, with technology. How could you say he was simply outside the question?

H. Lubasz: I didn't say that. What I said was: Nothing that Heidegger says has any bearing on anything that happened in Europe in the last hundred years. What I'm asking is: How can you find potential for political illumination in what Heidegger says?

J. Derrida: What do you mean by illumination? I'll tell you what I think in a very, very rough way. I do not find in *any* discourse *whatsoever* in this century anything illuminating enough for this period. And if there is nothing in Heidegger, who—I ask you, it is a question—or what discourse are you referring to now which gives you satisfactory illumination for what has happened or is happening now? I must confess. . . .

H. Lubasz: I think it's fair to turn the question around on me, but it was you who said there was a potential for political illumination, understanding, or insight.

J. Derrida: Potential for questions, yes, for *questions*. Questions addressed to, let us say, technology, to Marxism, to the political discourses which are now available, none of them being, as far as I can see, satisfactory. So I can find help in Heidegger for questioning all the discourses which are today dominating the scene. That is what I call potentiality. This doesn't mean that he has a message or a political program that we could apply, or find simply available. No, no, certainly not. But he has a deconstructing strength which is very useful for so many discourses which possess some authority today in our Western culture.

J. Rée: I'm very interested in your putting educational institutions, I won't say at the center, but giving them some importance as a place of practical struggle. People might say, "Why think that *anything* important is happening there today, when all the important things are happening elsewhere?" I would like to ask you about the word *institution*, to which you recurred quite a lot. Is it true to say that that word has for you some special importance?

J. Derrida: No. I don't like the word. It is an easy word, referring to too many things we are *supposed* to understand. I think the word *institution* is a problem. But I use it, as with so many other words, as a tool, as a provisional tool, in this context. But, of course, as you know, Heidegger has a very powerful meditation on institution, on *Stehen*, *Stiftung*, etc., and so to define exactly what we are speaking about we would have to go through this meditation on *Stiftung*, instituting. What does

this word mean? Does it imply a contract, for example? Well, in short, I wouldn't retain this word if I had time to elaborate.

J. Sallis: It seems to me that there may be a thread in Heidegger's work that is not entirely different from the kind of contamination that you are sketching. What I'm thinking of is the kind of development that one finds most succinctly in *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, though also in the 1937/38 lecture course, where Heidegger uses the phrase *Wesenheit des Wesens*. In questioning *die Wesenheit*, *Wesen*, and *Wahrheit*, what is perhaps most important is that "essence" comes no longer to be determined in a way that simply excludes its opposite, or, I should say, its opposites, because there are several senses of opposition here. That is to say, this essence is no longer a simple limit, outside of which you've got $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$, or all the forms of falsehood. Rather, essence is redetermined as involving the *Unwesen*, the *Gegenwesen*; that, of course, then leads into the question of *die Irre*, errancy, and so on. It does seem to me that there is something like a kind of contamination of essence going on here, something quite different from the demand for purity.

J. Derrida: I am not sure that Heidegger would say that in the case you mention it is impurity. There are many places in which he says, for instance, *Wahrheit ist Unwahrheit*, la vérité de la vérité est la non-vérité. . . . So this reversal, or this quasi-negation, or non-identity of essence with itself, is not contamination, I would say. It is a reversal, it is the *Un-*. But is it what I call contamination? I'm not so sure. It is still too pure, too rigorously delimited. It is not simply a dialectical reversal; it is not dialectic in that sense. Nonetheless, it is, again, something pure: the *Unwesenheit*, the *Unwahrheit*, are as pure as *Wesen* and *Wahrheit*. What I am interested in is something out of focus; in French I would say *flou*. When, for instance, I use some words or concepts, such as *hymen*, for instance, or *supplementarity*, they are not simply yes and no concepts, they do—at least they should—introduce some instability which is not simply of the yes and no, of *Wesen* and *Unwesen*.

J. Sallis: You see, I think that in the notion of errancy there is precisely a kind of necessary flowing of essence, as it were, over into . . . , a kind of necessary blurring of the distinction between Being and beings.

J. Derrida: But, if I agree with you—and I do agree with you, to some extent—I still must ask: Why does this blurring of the distinction have no general effect on all of Heidegger's discourse? Because, when you say the essence of technology is not technical—and he makes such types of statements—then you cannot blur the distinction. But if, in errancy, there is a situation in which this blurring occurs not by

accident but unavoidably, this should have effects on the whole *corpus*, on the whole discourse. In that case you couldn't any longer draw such a rigorous distinction between the essence and that of which it is the essence. So, you can imagine the consequences of this contamination. Of course, I am not advocating the blurring of all distinctions! No, on the contrary. I am just asking the question. You have to take into account the *possibility* of the blurring of distinctions, even if you do not blur them. And then the whole rhetoric, the whole scenography changes; the whole style of discourse, all the procedures of demonstration, of affirmation, of drawing conclusions, are different. The style of thinking, of philosophizing, changes.

T. O'Connor: I have a problem about the trace with regard to its difference from philosophy. You stated that philosophy comes with the trace, but that the trace is not philosophical. When you talked about the ontological difference in Heidegger, you were indicating that the difference here is a difference in kind between ground and the dissimulation of that ground. Yet it seems to me that what you show in terms of deconstruction, or deconstructions, is differences in degree, which forbid you to state a difference of kind between trace and philosophy. In other words, the trace would in some sense be philosophical, if the word *philosophical* is still an appropriate word to use in the task of deconstruction. Or is it the case that the word *philosophy* must be identified with the enterprise of mastery and, perhaps, metaphysical presence, which presumably you want to undermine?

J. Derrida: The term *philosophy*, in that case, would be identified not with a project of mastery but with a project of ἐπιστήμη, enquiry, knowledge, science. But you can't say that the trace is philosophical or not philosophical. The trace is nothing. And the "experience" of the trace—whether there is such an experience is already a problem. If the experience of the trace is the experience of *presence*, then you have no experience of the trace. The trace is something you cannot experience *as such*. But if for the moment we speak easily of the experience of the trace, then what I said in my remarks is that in the experience of the trace *as such*, the experience *as such* of the trace *as such*—precisely the *as such* does not work any more. The experience is not philosophical as such; the philosophy comes afterward. Once we presuppose this experience of the trace and then ask questions in the style of enquiry—where does that come from? where are we going? who left this trace? etc.—that is science, ἐπιστήμη. Even in animal behavior. Your question also touched on the difference of degree. That is a difficult question. It is not to avoid the difficulty that I say this. But in the difference between the difference of degree and the

difference of kind another difference is blurred. That is what I call *différance*, with an "a," which is not a distinction, not a difference, either in essence or of degree. But there are an indefinite number of differences in structure, which, by way of contamination, look like differences of degree; therefore I would go very slowly, without accepting in advance the opposition between difference of degree and qualitative difference, because this opposition also has to be questioned. But this, of course, is a very important question.

J. Llewelyn: In the *Grundfragen* Heidegger briefly discusses the proposition that philosophy begins in wonder. You didn't mention the word *wonder* today. In Plato and Aristotle, the question is treated as though wonder were a logical question in search of an answer, or a solution to a problem. But Heidegger is particularly concerned, of course, with the *that it is* of a being, rather than its being nothing. And I have some difficulty in seeing how you are going to capture that as technology or technicity. It sounds more like being shocked, if I may use the word *shocked* again, this time in order to translate *Staunen*. Can you accommodate that? *How* do you accommodate that? This is assuming that there is something to which we could apply the word *wonder*, something like an ontological presupposition for all questions of "why" and "how."

J. Derrida: I don't know. I'm not sure. We would have to go back to the whole question of θαυμάζειν. I am not sure that this is an absolutely specific experience, absolutely original; that it happens with human beings at a certain moment, one that could be totally distinguished from an analogous experience in animals or in human beings when they are surprised or shocked for other reasons. Is there an absolutely, rigorously original experience of θαυμάζειν? I am not sure. We have here an enormous *corpus* linking this experience to the question of the origin or beginning of philosophy. But I am not sure we have to accept it as true. Perhaps we have to reinterpret all these descriptions of the *étonnement philosophique*. Usually we distinguish this *étonnement philosophique* from all sorts of surprises, or from problems that we have to solve technically, etc. But is this distinction safe? I am not so sure. I have the feeling that you were implying that I want to technologize everything, that I would like to describe technicity in animal society, and so on. No. I was saying that the limit between what is technical and what is not technical is not safe, even with the animals, and even with the very first structures of experience. So, it is not a way of saying, well, everything is instrumental. No: this is all meant just to problematize the concept of instrumentality.

J. Llewelyn: It looks as though there might be a possibility of finding some

kind of purity in this area of the *that it is*. This is how Heidegger might respond to what you are saying, even though one doesn't have to accept what he says. But when you say that something has not yet been shown to be pure, it has not yet been shown to be impure, either. Maybe it stands a chance.

J. Derrida: The impurity is not rigorously impure; otherwise everything would be in place. No, there is no pure technology. Nothing is purely technical, either.

D. Wood: It seems to me that there are political consequences in what you are saying about Heidegger's treatment of animals, in the way we might start to renegotiate the relationship between human animals and nonhuman animals. But if we were to substitute for a relation of opposition a relation of difference, or differentiation, and a multiplication of those differences, wouldn't that have an enormous implication for all those social practices we have that are based on opposition? And when you think of Auschwitz, which people around the camp knew about but didn't really know about, because they pushed it out of their minds. . . . If you start blurring the difference between people and animals, if you start to blur the difference between Auschwitz and battery farms, chicken farms. . . .

J. Derrida: No, on the contrary, you have to *multiply* the differences, not *blur* the differences.

D. Wood: But that doesn't mean that there *are* more differences.

J. Derrida: More differences, yes. For at the same time you will have to take into account other discriminations, for instance, between human society and animal society. There are a lot of things to be said and done. But there are also other partitions, separations, other than Auschwitz—apartheid, racial segregation—other segregations within our Western democratic society. All these differences have to be taken into account in a new fashion; whereas, if you draw a single or two single lines, then you have homogeneous sets of undifferentiated societies, or groups, or structures. No, no I am not advocating the *blurring* of differences. On the contrary, I am trying to explain how drawing an oppositional limit *itself* blurs the differences, the difference and the differences, not only between man and animal, but among animal societies—there are an infinite number of animal societies, and, within the animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences. Now, there is the *ideology* of difference, of genetic difference within human society which we have to be very careful about; it cannot be a matter of merely manipulating the ideology of difference, of course. But this ideology of racism, the genetic or biologist ideology, again blurs differences; it is not in the end an

ideology of difference at all, but an ideology of homogeneity, with a single limit between white and black, Jewish and non-Jewish, etc. So the discourse I am trying to deconstruct is not a discourse of difference; it is a discourse of homogeneity, even if, or precisely because, it refers to oppositional differences.

S. Houlgate: I also was particularly interested in what you had to say about the universities. It put me in mind of various eighteenth-century figures such as Herder, Schiller, or Goethe, who had a similar interest in undoing certain faculty distinctions both at a philosophical and in many ways at the university level. Now, the one thing that differentiates them from you, it seems to me, is a certain code of language and also their not being afraid to use words like *telos*, unity, and wholeness. The terms that you use—dissemination, unsettling, destabilize, out of focus—possess a certain negativity. And, if that is the case, does that have something to do with your taking over Heidegger's or, for that matter, Nietzsche's view that somehow such talk of unity and wholeness ultimately does suppress the differences? Whereas it seems to me that one could look at a Herder, a Schiller, a Hegel, or a Goethe and say exactly the opposite—no, it doesn't suppress difference.

J. Derrida: First, Heidegger wouldn't say that *Versammlung*, gathering, suppresses difference. On the contrary, there is a way of gathering which does not reduce the difference. That is why gathering is neither unity nor identity. There is a gathering which is not systematic, which is not identifying, so there is some *Versammlung* which is not a repression of the difference. Now, to go back to those words, "my" words. They look negative; they are not negative. Dissemination is not negative, the *dis-* is not negative. I insist many times on the fact that dissemination is not negative, that on the contrary it is affirmative, generative. But, as you correctly noticed, each time I use a word which is grammatically negative, *destabilize*, for instance, *deconstruction*, I would not say that here it is merely an appearance. I would say that it is to be read in a context where you have to oppose a certain dominant logic of opposition. And this is also true in politics, where, in order to displace the question to plane terrain, you have first to oppose, and, in a very classical way, to reverse the order. You cannot do without this phase. I often use this rather easy pedagogical scheme, that in deconstruction there is a first phase in which you have to oppose, to reverse the order, the hierarchy. And it is a negative move. In politics you have to violently oppose something before you can neutralize the opposition, or the previous logic, in order to open the way to another distribution, prepare another structure. The phase of negation, of

opposition, cannot be avoided. So when I use negative words, it is with this strategic goal, with this *telos*.

S. Houlgate: So that if the appearance of negation has to do with this stage, you would not feel unhappy to be associated with, let us say, Goethe; that is, associated with an ideal of unity in difference.

J. Derrida: That is my dream. It is what I try to think. I can't avoid dreaming, of course. . . . But I try not to dream all the time.

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ARTICLES