

Beyond Poststructuralism and Gender-Free Thought

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III. Jacques Derrida

(1) The thought of Derrida

① Écriture and Pharmakon

There is a story, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, concerning the invention of letters. There takes place the following conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus concerning the written word:

SOCRATES. Every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak.

PHAEDRUS. You mean the living and breathing word of him who know, of which the written word may justly be called the image.

SOCRATES. Exactly.¹

Logos is called a "legitimate son" if there is a father, who defends and takes responsibility for the son, existing in the background. If there is no father, then the word will become mere doubtful mythos, the sign "without spirit," and the illegitimate son, who wanders from place to place.

The invention of letters has made our life convenient, but it has sometimes resulted in the loss of the word's life. That is, letters have the dual fate of becoming a medicine and a poison. Concerning such dualism, Plato tried to remove the "illegitimate son," and leave only the legitimate "seeds" (relationships between parents and their children, or lineage).

Derrida obtained a hint from Plato's *Phaedrus*, following which he compared and discussed parole (the spoken word), in contrast with écriture (writing or the written word). He held that parole is the true word, whereas écriture is the fallen word. In other words, "parole corresponds to spirit, the inside, memory, life, existence, truth, essence, the good, seriousness, and a normal relation with the father (law), while écriture corresponds to matter, the outside, recollection, death, absence, a lie, appearance, evil, frivolity, and deviation from the father (law), in short, the illegitimate

son.² Parole has its telos and teleological essence, and its ideal is the enriched parole filled with truth, knowledge, and life.³

Derrida proposed such an *écriture* theory. The essence of his theory is that writing (*écriture*) is *Pharmakon*, which is at once a medicine and also a poison: it seems to be a medicine, but it is actually a poison.

According to Derrida, God, who is the supreme subject does not need to write. God is perfect by Himself and does not need any relation to others. The king is a subject who talks without writing, and he only orders, whereas others write down what he says. Socrates wrote nothing, but he had a Plato, who wrote down his sayings.

When it is written, the word loses its truth. According to Derrida, *écriture* is a wonder drug (*Pharmakon*) that takes a philosopher out of his element: a poison that makes him deviate from an original course.⁴

Derrida said, "Each time, writing appears as disappearance, recoil, erasure, retreat, curling up, consumption,"⁵ and Derrida's aim was "nothing less than to destroy all "writing" by demonstrating its inevitable falsehood. The writer writes with one hand, but what is he doing with the other? All writing, all texts, have their own hidden agenda, contain their own metaphysical assumptions."⁶ Thus, Derrida tried to destroy all the truth of the written thought (word). This is why he is called the person who scatters the poison of *Pharmakon* all over the world.

② Deconstruction

Deconstruction means that the reader constructs and gives a new meaning to the written material before him, independently of the writer's intention. According to the 1989 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, deconstruction is:

- (i) The action of undoing the construction of a thing.
- (ii) A strategy of critical analysis associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language.

According to Stuart Sim, a professor at Sunderland University in England, the basic assumptions of deconstructionism are:

- (i) that language is ineradicably marked by instability and indeterminacy of meaning;
- (ii) that, given such instability and indeterminacy, no method of analysis (such as

philosophy or criticism) can have any special claim to authority as regards textual interpretation;

(iii) that interpretation is, therefore, a free-ranging activity more akin to game-playing than to analysis, as we normally understand that term.⁷

The characteristics of Derrida's deconstruction are as follows:

a. Dislocation and Transformation

"It is about shaking up, dislocating and transforming the verbal, conceptual, psychological, textual, aesthetic, historical, ethical, social, political and religious landscape."⁸

b. Parasite

"There is something essentially parasitical about deconstruction. As Derrida remarked: 'deconstruction is always a discourse about the parasite'.⁹

c. Fission or Fissure

"Even the most apparently simple statement is subject to fission or fissure. . . . 'There is no atom',...Everything is divisible."¹⁰

d. Impossibility of decision

"By reintroducing the impossibility of decision into the law of Logos, it is required to make a different decision."¹¹

e. Questioning of the code

"Deconstruction should seek a new investigation of responsibility, questioning the codes inherited from ethics and politics."¹²

f. Obfuscation

"Deconstruction is a theory which appears to lend itself most readily to babbling obfuscation." (–Peter Lennon)¹³

g. Denial of essence

"Through exposing the essence of force that makes the thing as it is, deconstruction invalidates its enforcement."¹⁴

As explained above, deconstruction is destructive and negative. On the other hand, however, it is excusive and affirmative, according to Derrida:

a. The thought of new “Decision”

“In a sense, deconstruction can be said to be the thought of new decision. It is the thought of the impossibility of decision, and at the same time the thought of decision. The fact that deconstruction is the thought of the impossibility of decision makes it the thought of a new decision.”¹⁵

b. Deconstruction is a justice

“If justice itself exists outside of the law or beyond the law, it cannot be deconstructed. In the same way, if deconstruction itself exists, it cannot be deconstructed. Deconstruction is a justice.”¹⁶

c. Deconstruction is love

Deconstruction never proceeds without love; or more succinctly, deconstruction is love.¹⁷

d. Deconstruction is affirmative

In the same way as Heidegger’s “destruction,” “dismantlement,” or “denial of metaphysics” was neither a mere denial nor criticism, Derrida’s deconstruction is not negative.¹⁸

③ Difference

According to Derrida, existing philosophies are faulty. There is no eternal truth. Only a system of gaps or differences is found in language. Paul Strathern, a British philosopher, stated:

He [Derrida] argued that previously philosophy had been mistaken in searching for essential truth that was somehow contained in the “essence of things.” On the contrary, it should have concentrated on the language it uses. This does not have any essential equivalence with the objects or even the concepts that it names and describes. That is not how language achieves meaning. All we find in language is a system of differences, and meaning simply arises from these differences.”¹⁹

Derrida also said that difference without “positive terms” of identity means that

language at this underlying level of meaning is almost completely fluid. Concerning this point, Stuart Sim, professor of English Studies at the University of Sunderland, says: “There are always gaps in communication, and no way that any meaning can ever be present in its totality at any one point. Meaning is to be considered, instead, as a process in a constant state of change, never quite all there when a word is used, but always deferred from itself, as well as deferred from reaching any sense of completeness.”²⁰

④ Differance

Derrida proposed the term “differance” (*différance*) to explain that meaning always changes. Differance has the two notions of differing and deferring. Royle explains: “Differance’ designates the fact that “there is no atom.” ‘Differance’ is not the name of an object, not the name of some “being” that could be present. And for that reason it is not a concept either.”²¹ “There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of difference.”²² Thus, there is no subject to control differance and the difference is playing.

Tetsuya Takahashi, a philosophy professor at Tokyo University, says: “Whether in spatial difference, time difference, language difference, non-language difference, space/time difference, or language/non-language difference, differance is the movement to keep producing differences. . . . The play of differance is a movement wherein various differences are continuously produced, one after another, in an un-erasable and un-decidable way.” After all, meaning always “differs from itself,” and its decision is always “put off.”²³

⑤ Dissemination

Derrida proposed the term dissemination to show that the meanings of language have always been diversified. In other words, dissemination means the scattering of the meaning. What Derrida tried to show is that language has the power to develop into various unexpected directions, departing from the direction which was supposed to be the original legitimate one. Thus, dissemination leads to the continual replacement of what is called philosophy: the deconstruction of philosophy.

⑥ Supplement

A supplement is what is added on to something in order to enrich it, and what is added on as a mere “extra.” According to Derrida, the supplement is like a virus. Derrida claims, “the virus will have been the only object of my work.”²⁴

For Derrida, “there is nothing before the logic of the supplement...One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is *a supplement at the source*.”²⁵ After all, there was a supplement in the beginning. In other words, the virus was contained in language since the beginning.

⑦ Denial of metaphysics

In general, metaphysics is the study that considers the extrasensory world to be the true existence and then tries to recognize it with pure thinking. Its characteristics are the postulate of the existence of God, God’s word (logos), and teleology.

Wittgenstein and Derrida challenged metaphysics. Both of them thought that the key to the solution was language. However, their methods were different. Paul Strathern comments as follows:

Derrida solved “the problem of philosophy” by the simple expedient of exploding language from the inside, detonating its meaning into myriad fragments of ambiguity, self-contradiction, and puny jokes. . . . Wittgenstein, on the other hand, viewed philosophy as arising from the tangled knots of meaning, arising when words were applied to inappropriate categories. . . . What we call philosophy arose only from mistakes in our use of language. When the knots were unraveled, the mistakes would simply disappear. Not only was there no answer to such philosophical questions, there was no real question in the first place...Where Wittgenstein made the white rabbit in the hat disappear, Derrida produced an endless cornucopia of them.²⁶

Derrida’s avowed aim was to interrogate philosophy (metaphysics). Thus, Derrida’s “philosophy” is not a philosophy as such, but is rather a questioning of philosophy: an “interrogation of its very possibility.”

⑧ Denial of absolute truth

In the eighteenth century the Scottish philosopher David Hume accepted that all our knowledge was based upon experience. If empiricism, which claims that knowledge originates from experience, is pursued thoroughly, our objective knowledge will collapse. Therefore, according to Hume, absolute truth does not exist and knowledge has to be relative.

In 1931 the Austrian mathematician Gödel managed to prove, by mathematical-logical methods, that mathematics could never be certain. On the other hand, Derrida

tried to show that philosophy could never be certain, by invalidating the entire process of logic.

⑨ The “Other”

According to Tetsuya Takahashi, “Deconstruction is always deeply connected with the “other” of language. The critique of logos centralism is a search for the “other,” and a search for the “other of language” before anything else.”²⁷ He also says: “Deconstruction begins only as a response to the call of the other.”²⁸ Then, what is the “other”?

Nicholas Royle, an English professor of Sussex University, says, “Derrida has always been preoccupied by what precedes or exceeds language. Sometimes he calls it ‘force.’”²⁹ According to Derrida, “Force is the other of language without which language would not be what it is.”³⁰ In other words, “force” which precedes language is the other of language. It is something that moves the language from behind.

As for the coming of the “entirely other” in the future, Derrida said, “The entirely other that can no longer be confused with the God or the Man of ontotheology, or with any of the figures of the configuration (the subject, consciousness, the unconscious, the self, man or woman, and so on).”³¹ It is none other than the one without identity.

⑩ Influence of Marxism

Derrida refers to the “original violence” of the original *écriture* and a word is a violence, according to him: There was a word in the beginning and the word was violence.

According to Derrida, “if a discourse is originally a violence, it cannot but inflict violence on itself; namely, it cannot but establish itself by denying itself.” It is the violence against violence. Takahashi says the struggle of the language is the struggle between metaphysical discourse and deconstructional discourse.³² Also, according to Derrida, language cannot but go forward to the direction of justice endlessly, admitting the struggle in the language, and being engaged in the struggle.³³ This is precisely the linguistic material dialectic: language develops through the struggle between word and word.

Then, where does the order to the language to fight against the violence of language come from? It comes from the participation of the “entirely other,” according to Derrida.

In a language, an accidental supplement is added to the original sentence from the outside (or later), and it invades, settles in, and takes the place of the original sentence. This is the same idea we find in the materialist dialectic: In a thing (thesis) appears

the one which denies it (antithesis) and things develop through the struggle between thesis and antithesis.

While pointing out the mistakes of Marxism, Derrida appeals for “the necessity for a new culture, one that would invent another way of reading and analyzing *Capital*, both Marx’s book and capital in general.”³⁴ Derrida says that it is worthwhile to keep the spirit of Marx alive and he calls for a “new international.” In fact, his book *Specters of Marx* is a new call for a “new international.” Derrida is nothing but a Marxist of poststructuralism.

⑪ Influence of Darwinism

According to Darwinism, the species of living beings are not fixed, but always change through mutations. Similarly, Derrida says that language always changes. Differences are what actually exist, and there is no such thing as a positive term which has eternal identity. Language is completely fluid.

According to the Christian creation theory, God created living beings according to their species, and the species are unchangeable. However, according to Darwinism, there is no eternal species. Similarly, Derrida insists that there is no identity in a word.

There is, for Derrida, no identity without the “disorder of identity.” “Derrida’s concern is to argue that an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures.”³⁵ “Identifying always entails a logic of adding on, making up, being in place of...We are (always) (still) to be invented.”³⁶ It is similar to the statement of Darwinism, which holds that humans are still in the process of evolution.

⑫ Influence of Freudianism

Nicholas Royle says, “Derrida’s account is impelled by a profound admiration for Freud’s writing, and a respect for the value and importance of Freudian psychoanalysis.”³⁷ “The passage from *Totem and Taboo* is one of those moments in Freud’s writings that can leave us with a fleeting, curious or eerie feeling that it was written especially ‘for’ Derrida, as if waiting for him to come along and point it out.”³⁸ Thus, Derrida had developed his theory while being strongly conscious of Freud.

⑬ Love, sex, and death

According to Derrida, deconstruction never proceeds without love, and deconstruction is love. However, Derrida’s love is a drug. Nicholas Royle says, “Derrida’s text suggests a logic of the demonized heart, demonized love, the work of a

‘demon-lover.’”³⁹

For Derrida, death is the condition of love. Royle says, “We only ever love what is mortal and the mortality of what we love is not something accidental and exterior, but rather is the condition of love.”⁴⁰ For Derrida, “Love is till death us do part,” and “I mourn therefore I am,”⁴¹ in contrast to the Cartesian “I think therefore I am.” In other words, love exists because of death, and we exist because of death.

⑭ Messianism

Derrida declares “a messianism without religion,” anticipating that it is coming. It is a “link ‘without status, without title...without party, without country, without national community, without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class,’ and it is a ‘New International’.”⁴²

“A messianism without religion” is also called “a messianism of the desert” or “a messianism of despair.” This is because, the coming of the ‘other’ is never fixed, or determined, and it will never become a real existence: it always means “coming” (future) and “promise.”

(2) Critique of Derrida, and the Unification Thought View

① Ecriture and Pharmakon

According to Derrida, parole, the spoken word, is the true word (logos) and legitimate son, while écriture, the written word, is the fallen word (logos) and illegitimate son. Certainly, the spoken word is primary, and the written word is secondary. However, it is a mistake to say that the former is the true word and the latter is the fallen word. In general, the spoken word is often vague, whereas the written word is often clear since the written word is logically arranged. In addition, the spoken word will disappear if it is not written.

② Deconstruction

Deconstruction means that the reader constructs and gives a new meaning to the written material, independent of the writer’s intention. It is not true, however, that the written material continuously changes and is diversified. In fact, written material and the intention of its writer are invariable, whereas the interpretation of the reader is diversified.

According to Derrida, deconstruction is dislocation, transformation, fission and obfuscation, and at the same time, deconstruction is love, justice, and affirmation. How

can deconstruction, which is dislocation, transformation, fission, and obfuscation, be at the same time one of love, justice, and affirmation?

This is a statement akin to the Marxist material dialectic that things develop through the union and the struggle of opposites. The essence of the materialist dialectic is that things develop through struggle, but it might cause people anxiety if only struggle is stressed, and therefore, union, or peace, is put as the objective of the struggle. By the same token, he makes an exclusive explanation in saying that deconstruction is love, justice, and affirmation, since it is difficult to be accepted if it is simply stated that deconstruction is destructive. However, what Derrida intended to maintain is that the essence of deconstruction is destruction. Just as Marxism is the philosophy to destroy capitalist society, so, too, is deconstruction the philosophy to destroy traditional philosophy (metaphysics).

③ Difference

According to Derrida, difference without “positive terms” of identity, means that language at this underlying level of meaning is almost completely fluid: what exist are only differences. However, as Paul Strathern says, “If there is no identity, there are no concepts——such identifying notions are literally inconceivable.”⁴³

Derrida says that meaning simply arises from differences, but this is not true. Meaning arises through correlative relationships: From the Unification Thought perspective, meaning is expressed through a correlative give and receive action between concept and concept, and between proposition and proposition, centering on a purpose.

④ Differance

Derrida proposed the term “differance” to explain that meaning is always change: Meaning is always both “differed’ and “deferred,” since differance is playing.

It can be said that the play of differance corresponds to the mutation of Darwinism. According to Darwinism, the species of living beings continuously change through mutations, and there is no invariable species. However, the mutation is not such as to change species. It is nothing but a small variation in a species. By the same token, meaning does not always differ by differance. Even if expressions and pronunciations vary, as in the case of dialects, meaning is basically unchanging.

⑤ Dissemination

Derrida proposed the term dissemination to show that the meaning of language has

always been diversified. This is the same idea as the diversification of species through mutation in Darwinism. However, even if there are variations in a species, the species itself is unchanging. In the same way, even if the meaning of a word is diversified, the basic meaning is invariable and maintains its identity.

⑥ Supplement

A supplement is what is added to something in order to enrich it, and it is like a virus with strong infectious power. The virus has been in language since the beginning.

This is an idea similar to that of the mutation in Darwinism. Genetic recombination is carried out through the injection of fragments of other genes into a living being by way of cosmic rays, ultraviolet rays, lightning, and so on. However, even though genetic recombination is the result, species do not change into a different species in the natural world. By the same token, it is not true that the meaning of a text changes continuously by supplements.

⑦ The denial of metaphysics

The characteristics of metaphysics are God's existence, God's word (logos), and teleology. Derrida tried to destroy all of them. Such a spirit of wanting to deny metaphysics is common to Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism. Unification Thought has criticized and overcome Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism, and it has clarified God's existence, God's creation through logos, and the purpose of creation. Derrida's philosophy, which might be called linguistic Marxism, linguistic Darwinism, and linguistic Freudianism, too, will collapse, with the collapse of Marxism, Darwinism, and Freudianism.

⑧ Denial of absolute truth

Derrida denied absolute truth, and he said that philosophy is not certain. However, in spite of such a claim from Derrida, the universal and absolute truth really does exist. The traditional ethics and morality (norms) taught by Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and in other religions, are essentially similar, and stand as universal and absolute beyond time.

Paul Strathern refuted Derrida, saying that the knowledge of mathematics and science is universal and absolute: "Mathematics and science were able to survive Berkeley and Hume, and have continued regardless since Gödel. Derrida's strictures would seem to be equally effective. So what does this indicate?"⁴⁴ Actually, we do not, and cannot, question that the three angles of a plane-surface triangle add up to 180

degrees.

⑨ The Other

According to Derrida, the other of language is “force,” which precedes language, or “force” without which language would not be what it is. It is the one without identity, the one without real nature, and the entirely other. Then what on earth is it? It should be called nothing and chaos, which controls language from behind, just as natural selection, without purpose, controls living beings.

⑩ Influence of Marxism

According to Marxism, things develop through struggle, and violence is necessary for development, and human history is the history of class struggle between the ruling class and the ruled class. According to Derrida, “There was a word in the beginning, and the word was violence,” and, the history of philosophy was the struggle between metaphysical discourse and deconstructional discourse.

Derrida says that the word is violence, but this is not true. Originally, the word was to bring about the ideal world of love. Therefore, there was a word in the beginning. The word was love, and human history has been the conflict between the good words centered on God, and the evil words centered on Satan. Derrida aims at the establishment of a “new international,” while Unification Thought aims at the establishment of “one family under God,” which is God’s ideal of creation.

⑪ Influence of Darwinism

As already explained, Derrida’s thought is similar to Darwinism which claims that living beings have continuously changed and have been diversified. Thus, it can be called “linguistic evolution theory.” As it has been proven that Darwinism, which claims that the species of living beings evolve through mutation and natural selection is wrong, Derrida’s philosophy that the meaning of language continuously changes through difference, differance, dissemination, supplement, and so on, is also wrong.

⑫ Influence of Freudianism

As Nicholas Royle has pointed out, Derrida was influenced by Freud. Unification Thought has criticized and overcome Freudianism, and in the Unification Thought view, Derrida’s linguistic Freudianism is also erroneous.

⑬ Love, sex and death

For Derrida, deconstruction is love, which is demonized love. It is none other than Satanic love, and can never be true love.

Derrida says that death is a condition of love, but this is not true. Originally, human beings live forever in the spiritual world, after they have completed their life with love on earth, discarding the aged physical body as a butterfly undergoes ecdysis from a chrysalis, and therefore death means the completion of love.

Derrida also says, “Love is till death us do part,” and “I mourn, therefore I am,” but it would be more correct to say that “Love is beyond death,” and “I love, therefore I am.”

In addition, concerning “don,” Derrida said, “At the limit, the gift as gift ought not appear as gift: either to the donee or to the donor.”⁴⁵ It has something in common with the true love which invests for the sake of others, and forgets, and continues to give again and again, without ceasing. According to Derrida, “a moderate, measured gift would not be a gift.”⁴⁶ This correctly means that love should not be calculating, and it has something in common with true love. It can be said, in this case, that Satanic love and true love coexist in Derrida’s notion of love.

⑭ Messianism

Derrida declares “a messianism without religion” anticipating that it is coming. “A messianism without religion” is also called “a messianism of the desert” or “a messianism of despair.” Derrida’s messianism cannot guide us to the Canaan of hope, but will only guide us to a desert of despair. In contrast, Unification Thought declares “a messianism of hope” that guides us to the Canaan of hope, anticipating the coming of the true messiah.

Notes

1. Plato, *Euthyphro-Apology, Crito-Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. H.N. Fowler (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005), 565-67.
2. Tetsuya Takahashi, *Derrida* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2003), 75.
3. *Ibid.*, 73.
4. *Ibid.*, 63.
5. Paul Strathern, *Derrida in 90 Minutes* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 59.
6. *Ibid.*, 26-27.
7. Stuart Sim, *Derrida and the End of History* (New York: Totem Books, 1999), 30-31.
8. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26.

9. Ibid., 106.
10. Ibid., 26.
11. Tetsuya Takahashi, 245.
12. Paul Strathern, *Derrida in 90 Minutes*, 71.
13. Ibid., 81.
14. Yoshimichi Saito, *Why Is Deconstruction a Justice?* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 2006), 55.
15. Tetsuya Takahashi, 119.
16. Ibid., 189.
17. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 136.
18. Hiroki Agari, *Derrida* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Shimizu Shoin, 2001), 77.
19. Paul Strathern, *Derrida in 90 Minutes*, 30.
20. Stuart Sim, *Derrida and the End of History*, 35-36.
21. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 75.
22. Ibid., 76.
23. Tetsuya Takahashi, *Derrida* 104.
24. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 50.
25. Ibid., 50.
26. Paul Strathern, *Derrida in 90 Minutes*, 61-62.
27. Tetsuya Takahashi, 159.
28. Ibid., 202.
29. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 62.
30. Ibid., 62.
31. Royle, 154.
32. Tetsuya Takahashi, 136-37.
33. Ibid., 140.
34. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 44.
35. Ibid., 59.
36. Ibid., 59.
37. Ibid., 97.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 137.
40. Ibid., 151.
41. Ibid., 152.
42. Ibid., 127.
43. Paul Strathern, *Derrida in 90 Minutes*, 38.

44. Ibid., 35.

45. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 139.

46. Ibid., 141.