PHILOSOPHY VS THEORY: RESHAPING THE DEBATE

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I: A 'Debate' or a 'Squabble'?

Calling the by-play which occasionally surfaces between philosophy and theory a 'debate' is perhaps doing it too much honor. What I have in mind is the squabbling between those, from Habermas across to Quine, who uphold the values of "reason, truth, and scholarship," and those, from Nietzsche to Derrida, who question or even mock those values.[1]

This may seem an unduly narrow conception of 'theory,' for in a sense all the 'theoreticians' I will discuss here can be called philosophers, and 'postmodernist' ones at that; I will mention this again. At the moment, it is clear that no 'debate' is possible between two positions such as I have characterized. For theoreticians, to argue 'rationally' with philosophers would be to give up in advance. For philosophers, to use reason against theoreticians would be to expose themselves, not to arguments but to questions, and even to mockery – as John Searle found out most spectacularly.[2] So, instead of a debate, we get clashes in which the theoreticians indulge in mordant badinage, while the philosophers take refuge in stony silence. The Searle/Derrida encounter is only one of these. It and its like, I am afraid, generally resemble nothing so much as the penultimate scene of Monty Python and the Holy Grail, in which John Cleese, playing a Frenchman, prances about on Castle Doune while hurling insults at Graham Chapman's utterly flummoxed King Arthur.

Getting beyond this, it seems, requires not so much 'reshaping a debate' as reshaping a debacle *into* a debate. But how to do so? I think we can make some early headway by thinking about the word 'theory.' *Theôria* in Greek, is compounded of the words *theia*, 'divine things,' and *horaô*, 'to see.' It originally meant to witness divine things and was the activity of a *theoros*, one who consulted an oracle.[3] Because divine things are on a higher level than we humans we cannot change them, and 'theoretical' knowledge came to mean knowledge which, in contrast to 'practical' knowledge, does not change its object.

The Greek gods cannot be changed, at least not fundamentally, because they are immortal and so exempt from the ravages of time. As Sophocles put it in Oedipus at Colonus,
> monoi ou gignetai
> theoisi gêras oude kat'thanein pote.
> Ta d'alla sugkhei panth' ho pagkratês khronos (685-688)

In my translation:
> Only for the immortal gods
> Do old age and never dying not come-to-pass.
> All other things are obliterated by all-ruling time.

The term 'theory,' then, is not merely an empty sound which we may take up and apply to things without consequences. With respect to the current debate (debacle), it does two things:
> (1) It *epistemologizes* the debate – leads us to see it as a debate about things like

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[1] The phrase is from the open letter, signed by Quine among others, protesting Cambridge University's awarding of an honorary degree to Jacques Derrida and quoted in Caputo, 39.
[2] See Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: a Reply to Derrida" as well as Derrida's response, Limited Inc.
[3] This meaning of the term is beautifully played out in the opening lines of Plato's Republic, where *theôresthai* is paired with *proseukhesthai*, to address in prayer.

> reason and truth (and 'scholarship');
>
> (2) It *pushes* us to see 'theory' as involving the cognition of things which are, or are taken to be, outside of time – a view which runs counter to every basic impulse, I would think, of what today is called 'theory.'

I will come back to (2), but for the moment, I am more concerned with (1). What if epistemological construals of the squabbling between theory and philosophy were red herrings? What if the issues between the two camps were too deep to be stated in epistemological terms? What terms would then be appropriate? With that question in mind, I advance two candidates for such deeper construals, one prepared by philosophy and the other congenial to theory.

II. Two Ways of Reconstruing the 'Debate'

Deeper than epistemology, if I may dare to generalize, is ontology; for epistemology, as the attempt to determine in general terms whether and how far knowledge is possible, becomes pressing with the adoption of a certain sort of ontology (see Appendix 1 below). This is, broadly, an ontology which sees knowers as radically different in kind from knowns. So, from a philosophical point of view, the debate between philosophy and theory may be intractable because both sides are presupposing different ontologies, with philosophers thinking that the things we know are more like us than the theoreticians are willing to allow. If we accept this construal of the debate, two further steps will be called for: we must articulate the ontologies underlying the two positions, and we must attempt to evaluate them. From the philosophical side this is an old and complex story, and I will not retell it here; the main effort at articulating a 'postmodern' or 'theoretical' ontology is that of Gilles Deleuze, and I will not rehearse that either. The process of mutual evaluation, for its part, has not begun; that is why the debate is really a debacle.

In any case, recent history suggests an answer more congenial to theory. The last four decades have seen a vast movement by the oppressed of this earth to shake off their oppression. Beginning with Rosa Parks on a Birmingham bus and continuing into the recent stunning walkout by the Group of 21 from the World Trade Organization conference in Cancún, this 'Great Liberation' (as I will call it) has embraced diverse struggles by racial, religious, and ethnic minorities, women, gays, and formerly colonized peoples—among others. At its abstract end, it has been seen in epistemological terms as a struggle against 'presence' (Derrida), 'unity' as an historical category (Foucault), and 'representation' (Deleuze) – underlying concepts which are held to validate those of "reason, truth, and scholarship" which Habermas, Quine, et al., seek to defend. 'Theory' as I define it here thus signifies (as I noted in the first paragraph) only one part, the abstract part, of a much larger enterprise – 'theory' in the various forms of cultural, literary, political theory, and so on (not all of which, by the way, are 'postmodern'!). From this point of view, philosophers are to be judged politically – and negatively – in terms of their stubborn adherence to 'reactionary' positions.

Neither of these two candidates for a deeper construal of the philosophy-theory debate will work. The philosophical response, for its part, places us back in the safely philosophical domain of abstract argument – with no connection to recent history. That domain is congenial to philosophers (certainly to me!), but it has its dangers. Even for philosophers, such disconnection from history is problematic, for philosophers gain legitimacy from their relation to history as much as any other field. Analytical philosophy, for example, is often accused of being thoroughly ahistorical. But it developed in this country as an attempt to understand and appropriate the single most important historical process of the three and half centuries up to

1950 – the rise of science, which made possible capitalism, the nation-state, bourgeois social institutions, and the various colonial systems. (It is no accident at all that one of the most important books of this tradition is entitled The Rise of Scientific Philosophy.)[4] The Great Liberation, which began at almost the moment when Cold War funding and the aporias of the Quantum Theory ended Great Science and left us mainly with Big Science, deserves equally intense philosophical reflection today. But recent history seems to teach us that philosophers cannot engage in such reflection without questioning the very things on which they trade, concepts such as those of truth and reason.

If we accept the theory-candidate, a different problem arises. For when the basic concepts of reason and truth are identified as oppressive, we undermine discourse itself. And this, too, leads us to abrogate something: the Delphic imperative *gnôthe seauton*, know thyself – interpreted by Plato, following Socrates, as the demand to *logon didonai*, to give an account *to others* of what you are doing. This imperative is not merely an artifact of the Western project of reason; if we cannot explain ourselves to others, no mutual understanding is impossible – and no common action. An approach which situates itself at the abstract end of a movement of liberation, but undercuts the possibility of common action to achieve that liberation, is (as Hegel would say) remarkable indeed (Hegel, Wissenschaft der Logik I 3ff). So, theoreticians need to give accounts of themselves. But none of what I will call the Three Wise Men of postmodern theory – Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze – can do so (see Appendix 2, below). My suggestion is that they all have this problem because one strand of their thought undermines truth and reason to such an extent that they cannot *didonai logon* – cannot give *to others* accounts of their own discourses. It is as if the recognition of true otherness silences them – and forces them, paradoxically, to turn away.

The reason why Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault find themselves tempted to undermine truth and reason in this way is, I think, because they are all following Heidegger in his fateful conflation of *ousia* and *parousia* – of being and presence.[5] Presence – *parousia* – is a condition for truth and reference, and these in turn are general conditions for thought, language, and common action. *Ousia*, by contrast, is both more specific and more sinister, as I will argue below.

III. Ontology and Liberation

Construing the philosophy/ theory debate as about ontology separates us from history; construing it in terms of the 'Great Liberation' separates us from mutual understanding, and so from common action. This invites us to ask if the two construals themselves need to be separate, or if there is some important connection between ontology and liberation. If there is, then arguing about ontology would not chase us from our historical situation. It would be a way of clarifying it.

I have argued elsewhere (in Metaphysics and Oppression) that the main version of ontology in the Western world, which I will call 'ousia ontology,' is intrinsically allied to oppression, for it writes domination into the nature of being itself. According to it, something is a 'being' in the plenary sense if:

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[4] See Reichenbach.

[5] For a sampling of the many places where Heidegger does this, see his Basic Problems of Phenomenology 113; An Introduction to Metaphysics (the important discussion is at 194ff; see as well 64 and 206); The Question of Being 21; Wegmarken 161; and the more extensive listing at Feick 63.

> 1. It is securely and determinately bounded;
> 2. One unitary component within its boundaries – what Aristotle calls the 'form' – generates and/or orders everything else within those boundaries.
> 3. Only that governing unit affects the world outside those boundaries.

I call these traits 'boundary,' 'disposition,' and 'initiative' respectively. They suffice, I suggest, as a very general characterization of what the world's oppressed are fighting. They are appealed to, under different names, in Valentin Mudimbe's characterization of the 'colonial project,' in Frederick Douglass's account of the slave plantation where he was the property of Colonel Lloyd, and in Simone de Beauvoir's account of bourgeois household and marriage. They are also at play in Marx's account of capitalist production and in Freud's account of the structure of the human mind. [6]

But they have nothing to do with concepts such as those of reason and truth. Those arise, as Aristotle's Categories shows us, from the basic activity of predication; and (as he also shows us) the ontology they presuppose is one in which the unity of a being is established, not by a bounding, disposing, and initiating form, but by an inert substrate. I call this ontology the 'substance ontology'; where *ousiai* are intrinsically oppressive, substances are merely boring.[7]

Thus, discussing ontology does not necessarily take us away from history; ontology has played a major role in shaping Western history. *Ousia* ontology, in particular, is relevant to today's liberation struggle because it articulates the very structures from which modern liberation movements seek to free us all. At its most general level, the Great Liberation therefore needs a critique of the *ousia* ontology; of those other ontologies which write domination into the nature of being itself; and of the many 'theoretical practices' which trade upon that inscription. What theory should be questioning, then, is not presence, but the *dominance* of presence; not unity, but the *dominance* of the category of unity over historical practice; not representation, but the *dominance* of representation. And to conduct that questioning, theory as I have characterized it can make free use of all the techniques of argument and truth philosophers have advanced over the centuries (well, of many of them, anyway!): it can become philosophical.

But showing how that battle can be fought requires some reshaping of philosophy itself, in the sense of a bringing-together of strands within philosophy that have been kept too far apart for far too long.

IV: Reshaping Philosophy[8]

We can begin putting them back together by noting that 'truth,' in most of its forms, is an affair of the present tense. It is a plain fact that to inquire whether a sentence is true is not to inquire about its Before and After – about its relation to events earlier or later than itself. Such information is sometimes extremely important; but to ask about it is not to ask after truth.[9] If I ask you if it is true that the cat is on the mat, I am not asking how the sentence

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[6] See my Metaphysics and Oppression 96 and 180-193.

[7] And, as substrates, unknowable: as Appendix 2 suggests in more detail, it is the substance-ontology which makes epistemology pressing.

[8] The views expressed in the rest of this paper are developed in more detail in my Reshaping Reason: Toward a New Philosophy. Also see my Time in the Ditch, Chapter Five.

[9] As when we investigate the truth of a scientific sentence by inquiring whether the experiment that supposedly establishes it was correctly carried out. But even here, the

'the cat is on the mat' came to be produced on this occasion, or what effects its production will have. Rather, I am asking for evidence or testimony to be produced *now* that will verify the sentence: the mat with the cat on it, or an argument, or a nod of your head. And if I ask you whether it is true that the cat was on the mat last Thursday, or that Caesar crossed the Rubicon on January 10, 49 B. C. E., I am also asking for evidence, argument, or testimony to be produced *now* that will verify or falsify that statement. In both cases, the evidence, argument, or testimony must be produced *now*. For without some sort of simultaneous availability of sentence and evidence, the notion of verification makes no sense. And without the possibility of verification, the notion of truth makes, as far as I can see, no sense.

When we restrict inquiry to asking after the truth of sentences alone, our inquiry remains in the present tense; we are exemplifying one form of what can be called the 'dominance of presence.' Worse, we are (as Sophocles would say) *deifying* those sentences. For by presupposing that their Before's and After's are not relevant to our investigation, we are taking them out of the temporal flow, exempting them from time (this was the second of my complaints about the word 'theory' above). But how can we do otherwise? How can we talk about the past without uttering true sentences about it?

V. Philosophical Narrative and the Untrue Past: Hegel

Hegel gives us an answer. His philosophy is a giant rationalization of history. It can best be viewed as making no standard truth claim at all.[10] What it does claim is twofold: it claims to be comprehensive, and it claims to be ordered. In general, we can say, a narrative of the type Hegel offers – what I will call a 'philosophical' narrative – is better the more materials it links together, and the greater the rational transparency with which it links them. The final stage of such a narrative, as for Hegel, is ourselves – our present situation. A philosophical narrative, like certain other types of historical narrative, thus enables us to see ourselves as the outcome of a past.

All the stages in such a narrative must, of course, be truthfully reported. In constructing a philosophical narrative, we still try, in all the traditional ways, to describe the Before of what we are talking about accurately, to 'get the facts right.' But we do not *stop* there, for historical narratives, whether philosophical or not, may include only true statements but fail to be comprehensive. On this view, it was not, strictly speaking, false for such classic historians of the American West as Eugene C. Barker, T. R. Fehrenbach, and Walter Prescott Webb to focus exclusively on characters and situations who were not African Americans; they may have described their selected historical objects accurately enough. But the resulting narrative failed comprehensiveness in morally repugnant ways.[11]

Hegel has an account of rational transparency as well as of comprehensiveness. It lies in his view of what he calls 'determinate negation.' To 'negate' for Hegel means, very generally,

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questions are different: we cannot be sure that creationism will not, someday, turn out to be true. But we can be quite certain that it is not scientific, i.e. cannot currently be located at the current stage of the growth of scientific knowledge.

[10] That is how I view it in my The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy.

[11] See Massey ix.

to move on from a thing.[12] In determinate negation, just one feature of a thing is moved on from at a time (hence, I prefer to call it 'minimal negation').[13] For an historical development to be 'transparent' is just for it to be reconstructable as a series of minimal negations – the fewer, of course, the better. Such negations are not explanatory factors (and dialectics does not explain anything). They are merely a certain way of organizing data.[14]

When the transparency is 'rational,' as I use that term, each such change can be seen to solve a problem in the preceding stage (typically, for Hegel, a contradiction). Hegelian philosophical narrative is thus a way of reconstructing the past as a series of solutions. So we can talk about the past without *just* saying true things about it, by using Hegelian narrative strategies.

As to the future, we can take some cues from Heidegger.

VI. Philosophical Demarcation and the Untrue Future: Heidegger

The future as we experience it, Heidegger argues in Being and Time, is not just a set of facts that have not yet come to pass, but has two other characteristics: it is essentially unknowable and it is coming at us.[15] True, it is not coming at us with a determinate and cognizable form: the future is not something we know. Rather, it shows up in our present experience as an emptiness. This emptiness, however, this place in our experience where there is nothing to be known, is not a 'gap' in the usual sense. It is not what the ancients would have called a *kenon*, a void. For it is a gap into which we are constantly being pulled, a dynamic gap which shapes our lives. It is what I call a *diakenon* – an emptiness which, like our death, gathers a being or beings around itself.[16]

Diakena are by no means shadowy or mysterious; they are all around us. Sofia Coppola's 2003 movie Lost in Translation, for example, is entirely centered on the final words of its dialogue – words which we, the audience, cannot hear. They function as a 'diakenic' emptiness active at the heart of the entire picture. You cannot understand anything in the movie without knowing how it is helping the rest of the movie prepare for those words – and yet they are unknown to us, lost. The blankness which filled the past thirty seconds of The Sopranos is a more recent example. An architectural example is the renovation of Soldier Field in Chicago, which was described by Ned Cramer, curator of the Chicago Architecture Foundation, in these 'diakenic' terms:

> You have this beautiful, static, stately, white classical building, and through
> that passes this incredibly dynamic and fluid contemporary expression of

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[12] A good deal of mischief has been done by reading contemporary, atemporal versions of logical negation back into Hegel. For a highly pitched example, see Popper.

[13] See my The Company of Words, 143-148.

[14] A minimal change is not necessarily a trivial one. It changes only a single aspect of the situation, but that aspect might be central to it. If we look at the criticisms of Plato's theory of forms in the ninth chapter of the first book of Aristotle's Metaphysics, for example, we find that they are all directed to just one of its assertions: that forms are 'separate' from the things of which they are the forms. This single, minimal negation of Plato's philosophy, however, was central enough to produce a massive transformation in philosophy itself.

[15] For a recapitulation of Heidegger's argument, see my Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era, 157-158.

[16] For a discussion of 'diakena,' see my Metaphysics and Oppression, 15ff.

architecture. I think people are still in shock at the difference. (qtd. in
Farmer, D11)

That a set of beings, or of aspects of one being, is diakenically structured is evident when:
   A. None of them is adequately understood apart from the others;
   B. None grounds or explains the others;
   C. No yet more basic phenomenon can ground, i.e. explain, all of them together.

For anything to have what I will call an 'essential future' is for it to exhibit this sort of structure. The activity of aiding this sort of exhibition is what I call 'demarcation,' and it comprises the other half of what I call 'situating reason'; the half which opens philosophy and theory up to the unknown-but-impending future.

Since we are not gods and will never know anything fully, our encounters with things are *always* incomplete and underway towards further encounters; everything we experience has 'diakenic' aspects. The various techniques and gestures of demarcation, like those of narrative, can thus apply to anything whatsoever. From the present point of view, they apply most particularly to the dialectical continuities established in Hegelian narrative – a crucial move that Hegel himself never makes, and which I call 'demarcation.'

Demarcation does not 'refer' to *diakena* or point them out, but *allows them to happen*. For we can always cover them up – as when we form our best conjecture for the final words of Lost in Translation and go on to 'understand' the movie in terms of that conjecture. Demarcation counters this by reminding us, in manifold ways, that we have not yet discovered all of the possible unifying factors in any thing, and that there is a definite space within the thing as we have experienced it so far where such unifying factors may come to be evident. Like dialectical continuity, diakenicity is not so much a matter of what is in things as of how we take them, and so cannot be captured by the notion of 'truth.'

Postmodern theory can thus be understood as a way of opening up futures, in which case I call it 'demarcation.' The centrality of the future as a category of postmodern thought is underlined by Derrida himself in a *cri de coeur* in his recently published interview on terrorism:
   [What is unacceptable about Bin Laden etc.] is not only the cruelty, the
   disregard for human life, the disrespect for law, for women, the use of what is
   worst in technocapitalist modernity for the purposes of religious fanaticism.
   No, it is, above all, the fact that such actions and such discourse *open onto no
   future and, in my view, have no future*. (Borradori 113)

VII. Conclusion

To recapitulate my argument: getting a common intellectual space within which the various *squabbles* between philosophers and theoreticians can become *debates* required seeing that the basic issues between the two camps are not epistemological. The camps in fact divide, I suggested, in answering the question of whether thought and reason need be affairs of the present tense only. Is it possible for them to respond in different ways to the past and the future? I tried to suggest, if not actually to show, that it is. It then became clear, I hope, that 'postmodern theory' does not need to undermine the traditional values clear, I hope, that 'postmodern theory' does not need to undermine the traditional values of truth, reason, or clarity. Rather, I claimed, it seeks to supplement them by introducing a kind of thinking which is attuned to the future as we experience it – as unknown but impending. Adding in Hegelian techniques for reconstructing the past as rational – as a series of solutions – gives

us a form of discourse which is faithful to Kant's point that all our cognition is in time, and so are all objects of our knowledge as such.

This discourse, seeing all things as the products of previous problem solving and as teetering on the brink of unpredictable futures, is able to continue the historical work of one of its parents – 'theory.' It can expose and challenge the static structures of ousiodic ontology, be they exhibited in the factory, the household, the plantation, or the colony. But because it consciously avoids blanket sacrifice of the virtues of the present tense, i.e. of argument in the service of truth, it is able to follow the crucial injunction of its philosophical parent and to give an account *of* itself *to* others. If this is right, the debate between philosophy and theory is over. Their future, so far as I can predict it, is one of unbridled cooperation.

Appendix 1: Ontology and Epistemology

That a certain kind of ontology is required for the project of epistemology to make sense is a point originally made by Heidegger in "The Age of the World-Picture." Plato, I think, illustrates the point in an interesting way. The general issue of whether sensible things can be known is almost omnipresent for him. As he puts it at Phaedo 65a-d, they cannot, for true knowledge can only come when the soul is *autê kath' hautên*, "itself according to itself" or, as I would put it, most truly itself. Whether or not we can know the Forms themselves, by contrast, seems to be not nearly as pressing; Plato generally assumes that we do, probably, after death (cf. Phaedo 663-67a; he makes some extremely cryptic remarks on the issue at Parmenides 133b-134c). While the argumentative filiations here remain matter for future research, it is apparent that knowledge becomes a general problem for Plato only in the case of the kind of objects which is most unlike us. Since soul is "kin" (*suggenês*— cf. Phaedo 84b2) to the forms, not to sensibles, soul can truly be itself only when unaffected by sensibles, and true knowledge is of only of the non-sensible forms.

The ancient Skeptics illustrate the same thing, though in less interesting ways than Plato. They follow him in believing that the soul becomes most itself, i.e. achieves serenity (*ataraxia*), when involvement with the sensory world is suspended (especially cognitive involvement); again, the objects of which knowledge is sought were for them not similar to thinking minds, but mere 'substrates.'[17]

When ancient and medieval thinkers, in the wake of Aristotle, conceived both knower and known as alike structured by form, the first part of philosophy had as its task not validating the possibility or impossibility of knowledge, but laying out the basic nature of form: it was 'logic,' not 'epistemology,' and indeed in that famous sense of 'logic' which coincides with 'metaphysics.'[18] Only when 'substantial forms' were evicted from nature, leaving only matter in motion (and taking us back to the 'substrates' of Skepticism), did the question of whether knowledge as a whole was possible at all become pressing.

Skepticism, and so epistemology as the antidote to it, is thus associable with what I will call 'substrate ontologies' – ontologies which see all beings as consisting of a substrate in which various properties inhere. Combined with the view that all we can know of things is the properties they have, such ontologies raise the problem that we cannot know what is most basic – the substrates. If we are Cartesians, we can appeal to intellectual intuition of some sort, as Descartes does in the second Meditation (VII 30-32). But if we are Empiricists, the nut is tougher. At one point, for example, Locke characterizes the attribution of substrates somehow underlying the properties we actually perceive to be a matter of 'custom' and 'supposition,' which suggests that the idea of substance could be entirely dispensed with – an attractive move, in view of the epistemological problems it would put to rest (Essay II. xxiii.1f). But when challenged on this ground by Lord Stillingfleet, who thought that Locke was making substance an optional concept, Locke responded that any other explanation for the subsistence of concatenated ideas is "inconceivable."[19] It is Berkeley who will establish definitively that the idea of an unknown material substratum for the concatenated ideas we

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[17] *Hypokeimena*: Sextus Empiricus I, 19.

[18] Hence, as Aristotle put it, "in syllogisms *ousia* is the start of everything" (Metaphysics VII.10 1034a30ff; see also VII.10 11035b27f and VII.14 1035b20f.

[19] Locke, Essay II.23.1ff. See also the Editor's Note at II.23.1 (390, note 3).

actually perceive is untenable – a main thesis of his 'subjective idealism.'[20]

Appendix Two:
Ousiodic Structure in the great Liberation (Mudimbe, Douglass, Beauvoir)

When Valentin Mudimbe comes to characterize the overall nature of the 'colonial project,' he say that it aimed at securing three things:

> the domination of physical space; the reformation of *natives's* minds, and the integration of local economic history into the Western perspective. (2)

When Frederick Douglass describes the plantation of Colonel Lloyd, to which he was sent after being taken from his mother, he notes that:

> every leaf and grain of the products of this plantation . . . [was] transported to Baltimore in [Lloyd's] own vessels [i.e. the plantation, in Mudimbe's words, was "integrated into the Western economic perspective"]. In return everything (and everyone!) brought to the plantation came through by the same channel. (486)

Domination of physical space was thus assured by the *boundaries* of the plantation. Within them, space was dominated through an imposed inner order, centered on the 'great house':

> [In addition to slave quarters] there were barns, stables, storehouses, tobacco-houses, blacksmith shops, wheelwright shops, cooper shops; but above all there stood the grandest building my eyes had ever beheld, called by everyone in the plantation the *great* house. . . . It was a treat to my young eyes to behold this elaborate exhibition of wealth, power, and beauty. (488)

The owner, Colonel Lloyd, thus put himself on display, while remaining invisible. The aim of the display of the unseen owner, of course, is to 'reform the minds' of the slaves, reducing them *in their own eyes* to their proper status: that of owned animal matter.

In Simone de Beauvoir's account of bourgeois marriage in The Second Sex, the site of the marriage is, once again, securely bounded. It takes:

> material form in the house, whether cottage or castle; it stands for permanence and separation from the world. Within its walls the family is established as a cell or unit group, and maintains its identity as generations come and go. . . . (471ff).

But, in an effort to establish herself as a "conscious being," the woman takes over care for the boundary: "When a living being enters her house, her eyes gleam with a wicked light: 'Wipe your feet.' . . ." (475). Internal domination or order is exercised by the wife:

> she is the one who has chosen, made, hunted out furnishings and knick-knacks, who has arranged them in accordance with an aesthetic principle. . . . Because she *does* nothing she seeks self-realization in what she *has*. (474)

Her ordering activity is so intense because it is the only activity she is allowed:

> woman, too, must envisage purposes that transcend the peaceful life of the home; but it is man who will act as intermediary between his wife as an individuality and the universe. (471).

She is not, in other words, "integrated into the economic perspective." Only her husband can leave the house.

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[20] See, for example, Berkeley, 74-96. The qualities we actually sense cannot for Berkeley be shown to be caused by external substances, or at least by a plurality of unintelligent ones: they are all caused directly by God (71ff). See my Metaphysics and Oppression, 109-179.

In each of these cases, as in many others, we find oppression exercised trough the same triad of factors, which I call 'boundary,' 'disposition,' and 'initiative.' Why is this so? And what does it mean for people who worry about oppression?

Appendix 3: The Three Wise Men

> [Note: this criticism of Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze is important enough to some of my claims here that I am including here brief sketches of arguments I make in my Philosophy and Freedom.]

We can begin to see Derrida's problem with explaining himself by considering his characterization of 'presence' in "Force and Signification": to be 'present' means most basically to be "summed up (*résumée*) in some absolute simultaneity or instantaneity".[21]

This is ambiguous. To be 'summed up' means, in one sense, to be complete, i.e. not to require anything else to be or to be given. But that a being's completeness at some "absolute . . . instantaneity" sums it up may mean not only that it is complete and independent at that instant but also that what it is right then is all it ever 'really' is. This sense of 'summing up' is more extended than the other, for what gets summed up is the thing over the entire duration of its existence. These two characterizations of presence are clearly quite different from one another. For it is entirely possible to take something as being complete at a particular moment without going on to say that that momentary completeness 'sums up' what it was earlier, and will be later: that its whole existence is determined from its completeness or givenness at this (or some) present moment. This extended version of presence arises, Derrida says, from a certain interpretation of time: one which takes the punctuality of the present moment as the "indisplacable center" of time. It is only in virtue of giving such special status to the present state of something that we can presume that what the being is right now is what it has been and will be.[22] I will call this further move the 'privileging of presence,' to distinguish it from the narrower sense, i.e. from what I will call 'presence' itself. This distinction is not always made by Derrida, and when he runs the two senses together, as he does in "Force and Signification", he generates what I call the Derridean Knot.

The first strand from which this knot is woven – the view that presence itself, rather than its privileging, is the object of challenge – contains two substrands. If something is not to *any* degree complete, it cannot present itself to us: we cannot experience or encounter it. If it is

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[21] See Derrida, "Force et signification," 26; 14 (references to translations will be given after a semi-colon). This concept of presence has for Derrida undergone only one major modification in the history of the West: its transformation from an 'objective' sense in which something is present if it exists on its own in a state of completion (which the tradition, following Aristotle, calls 'actuality') into a 'modern' sense of complete givenness to a subject (which Descartes called 'clearness and distinctness') (La Voix et le phenomène [henceforth VP] 70; 63). See also Derrida, De la Grammatologie(henceforth Gramm), 60 and 146; 40 and 97. For a discussion of clearness and distinctness in Descartes, see my The Company of Words, 100-102. For a discussion of actuality in Aristotle, see the first two chapters of my Metaphysics and Oppression.

[22] See Derrida, VP, 66ff; 69ff; "La Structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," 426; 291; La Dissémination (henceforth Diss), 336; 302; "Ousia et grammé," 75; 64ff; and Gramm 97 and 236ff; 66ff and 166.

not independent enough of other things to be even *intellectually* detached from them, it cannot be referred to or spoken truly of. Some degree of completeness is thus necessary for truth and reference to be possible at all; and the possibilities of truth and reference are, clearly, conditions of our speech.[23] If we are to abandon them wholly, it appears that we not only cannot talk truly; we cannot talk at all.

The knot becomes clear when we ask if Derrida is to be read as challenging presence in the narrower or the more extended sense. Is he suggesting that nothing is ever, even momentarily, complete or independent – that the concept 'presence' has no referents? Or is he questioning, not presence itself, but the second sense – its privileging? In that case he is challenging, not a concept at all, but a practice: what Heidegger calls the 'onto-theological' practice of taking a concept which may apply to some things and instating it as the paradigm for all, in this case as the founding validator of all knowledge and speech.[24] Derrida is then challenging, not 'presence' itself, but the *dominance* of presence.

If, on the other hand, presence itself, rather than its privileging, is taken as the object of Derrida's challenge, is it in fact the minimal degree of presence that is required for truth and reference? If so, then Derrida can challenge presence only at the price of embracing unintelligibility. If not – if, for example, the kind of presence he challenges is some sort of absolutistic ideal foisted upon language by metaphysics – then it is unclear just what import Derrida's challenges to it will have.

The Derridean Knot is thus composed of two main strands, one of which bifurcates. Strand I, to give it a name, takes the object of challenge to be presence itself, which then must be construed either as a condition for all speech (Ia) or as a mere ideal in terms of which metaphysicians have regarded speech (Ib). Strand II says that Derrida's thought challenges, not presence at all, but its privileging. The knot is a knot because Derrida never decides which strand to pursue: all three run together throughout his discourse, which therefore appears at times genuinely emancipatory (II), at times willfully unintelligible (Ia), and at times banal (Ib).

Thus, in one passage of "Différance", Derrida simultaneously puts into question the "authority of presence [and] of its simple symmetrical opposite, absence or lack": he seems, in other words, to challenge authority, or privilege, rather than presence (II).[25] On the other hand, the famous argument against the 'transcendental signified,' given elsewhere in "Différance" and again in Positions, suggests that the object of what Barbara Johnson has called "deconstructive critique" is presence itself, not its privilege (Ia).[26] A transcendental signified would be something that is, in Derrida's sense, present in that it "refers only to itself": it is detachable from other things, and hence can be located on what I called the first level of Derrida's characterization of presence. His argument, which I will not recount, is that nothing is ever given that way:

    The play of differences supposes, in short, syntheses or referrals which forbid

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    [23] As generations of analytical philosophy have taught us. Hence, for example, the plausibility to so many of Donald Davidson's reduction of meaning itself to truth conditions.

    [24] See Heidegger, "Die Onto-theologische Verfassung der Metaphysik."

    [25] Derrida, "Différance," 10; 10. But even here the situation is equivocal: absence conceived as a 'simple symmetrical opposite' is presumably absence conceived as given all at once, as present.

    [26] Johnson, xv.

> that at any moment, or in any sense, a simple element could be present in
> itself and not refer to anything but itself.[27]

Derrida's claim here is that presence is a concept which has no referents. It is problematic in itself, independently of any structures of domination: even right now at this instant nothing 'really' is present as anything.

If 'metaphysics' is discourse based on such a conception of presence, then it is indeed inescapable: we can leave it only at the price of intelligibility. In some places, Derrida in fact seems to be quite clear that such is the case:

> There is no sense in passing up the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake
> metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is
> foreign to this history: we cannot enunciate any destructuring proposition that
> has not already had to slip itself into the form, the logic, and the implicit
> postulates of the very thing which it wishes to challenge.[28]

Freeing ourselves from presence, i.e. from metaphysics, is impossible. Metaphysics is a house which sits nowhere, and every door leads back inside:

> One must then attempt to free oneself from this language. Not to *attempt* to
> get free, for that is impossible without forgetting our history. But to dream of
> it. Not to *get free* of it, which would have no sense and would deprive us of
> the light of sense. But to resist as long as possible.[29]

But Derrida also views the completeness, or complete givenness of a being all at once as a sort of essentialistic ideal (Ib). An example occurs in "Différance": the "signified concept is never present in itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself."[30] What, we may ask, is 'sufficient' presence, and how does it differ from presence *tout court*? Is a more relaxed version of presence possible in which a signified refers *mostly* to itself? Or, perhaps, *just a little bit* to itself?

On this view, presence is not something that must actually be achieved in order for speech to become possible, but an idealized concept which has an undue dominance over thought and language, a dominance which can be undone without destroying them: the

> absolute *parousia* of the literal meaning . . . should be *situated* as a function
> responding to an indestructible but relative necessity, at the interior of a
> system which comprehends it. Which amounts to *situating* metaphysics of the
> onto-theology of the logos.[31]

Derrida is thus unclear about the aims and limits of his own discourse. Is he uncovering something he claims to be unhealthy in truth and reason themselves, as people like Quine and Habermas insist? Or is he targeting something more specific?

Foucault considers his own practice to be one of description. Indeed, for an object of Foucaldian discourse, a 'discursive formation,' to exist is for it to be describable.[32] It is

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[27] Positions 37; 26. See generally 28-41 and 18-29, as well as "Différance," *passim*.

[28] Derrida, "La Structure, le signe, et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," 412; 280; see also Gramm, 24; 13, and "Violence et métaphysique," 166; 113.

[29] Derrida, "Force et signification," 46; 28.

[30] Derrida, "Différance," 11; 11.

[31] Derrda, Gramm, 136; 89. See also the references to 'pure' presence, suggesting that there is some other kind, at Derrida, "Signature, événement contexte," 378; 318, and Diss, 336; 302, as well as to 'full presence' in Husserl at Derrida, VP, 109.

[32] Foucault, L'Archéologie du savoir (hereinafter AS), 208; 159.

therefore not lightly, or exclusively with ironic intent, that in <u>The Archeology of Knowledge</u> Foucault calls himself a "positivist" with respect to truth (164-167; 125-127). Archeology is to be, on its basic level, theory-free: it does not seek a hidden meaning in the statements it describes, but simply asks how they arise and pass away (143ff; 09).

On the other hand, Foucault's discourse seeks not merely truth but also a form of liberation as well. This is presumably why he says (for example) that archeology seeks not to "describe" defining lacunae or ruptures but to "multiply" them.[33] Archeology is to *introduce* rupture, or isolation, into the proliferating networks of discursive formation and reformation. Discontinuity for Foucault is not merely the *object* of archeological description but its *result*: it is the "operation" of the historian and something which the historian, in and through her work, constantly redefines and transforms (16ff; 8ff). And so, as Foucault recognizes, his "descriptions" are in fact "regulated transformations" of the previous discourses they treat (183; 140). Archeology does not report discontinuities but "has to *make* differences: to constitute them as objects" (268; 205). In a clear statement of his confusion, Foucault says:
> I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say that they were outside the truth. It seems plausible to me to make fictions work within truth, to introduce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make discourse arouse, 'fabricate,' something which does not yet exist, thus to fiction something.[34]

Finally and even more briefly, consider this passage from the first page of the first chapter of Gilles Deleuze's brilliant <u>Difference and Repetition</u>:
> Imagine something which distinguishes itself – and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it. . . . Difference is this state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction. We must therefore say that difference is made, or makes itself, as in the expression 'make the difference.'[35]

What, here, is the sense of "therefore"? Is it restricted to the imaginative act to which we are invited, so that the underlying warrant is only that we want to imagine things in a consistent way? Why would we want to do that? What, moreover, is the relation between "imagining" and "saying"? If we are talking about our imaginings and utterances, in what way can anything at all be said to make *itself*?

These, I think, are interesting questions, and I do not doubt that Deleuze, like Derrida and Foucault, has answers to them. But until at least some of those answers are forthcoming, we do not know what "therefore" means – and so do not know what Deleuze is trying to do.

Appendix 3: Varieties of Demarcation

Demarcation has a vast number of styles, techniques, and gestures – as many as there are questions. There is some order to it, however, for we may 'demarcate' the kind of narrative

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[33] <u>AS</u>, 13, 15, and 221; 6 (where *multiplie* is translated as "seeking and discovering"), 7, and 170.

[34] Foucault, "Interview with Lucette Finas," 75. Fiction is both the goal ("something which does not yet exist") and the means ("all I write," to paraphrase) of Foucault's discourse. Deborah Cook sees the former but not the latter in her "History as Fiction: Foucault's Politics of Truth."

[35] Deleuze, 28.

I have advocated in two general ways. One is to disaggregate its own constituents, as Bachelard did to Meyerson's dialectical reconstruction of the Theory of Relativity.[36] The other is to show such a narrative to stand in a 'diakenic' relationship to various things external to it. Among the latter, most importantly, will be the historical situations from which its own truths are drawn, and other narratives connecting those same situations with each other. In the former case, we undermine our narrative by showing that in fact it does not quite fit the facts it claims to connect (as Barker, Webb, and Fehrenbach's narratives of the Old West did not fit the facts of ranch life or cattle drives). In the latter, we show that other narratives can be constructed to interconnect the same set of facts. In both cases demarcation leads to a proliferation of narratives.

Appendix 4: Derrida and Demarcation

If we replace the Hegel-inspired term 'narrative' with 'text,' we can see that the most intense and productive development of demarcative strategies comes from Derrida (hence the length of my discussion of him in Appendix 2). For a text to have a future is, as for anything else, for it to be conditioned by something unknown but impending. And since the business of a text is to say something, this something that it says – its meaning – must also be so conditioned. The text's future thus includes the ways it will be understood by those who hear it, and these must therefore be unpredictable. An unpredictable slippage of meaning must be built into the text right now.

Derrida highlights this essential unpredictability by showing, throughout his writings, how very slippery texts are, here and now: how easy it is for them to loose the bonds of clarity, truth, and of what traditionally stands behind both: speaker's intention. Derrida's critique of the role of speaker's intention in speech act theory is a model of this.[37] The main 'referent' of such Derridean 'concepts' as 'différance,' 'hymen,' 'looseness' (*jeu*), and 'khora' – of everything that Rodolphe Gasché calls an 'infrastructure' – is on this reading the unknown-but-impending future.[38] It is only when we take Derrida to be 'deconstructing' present structures of a text without regard to its future that he can even seem to undermine the values of 'reason, truth, and scholarship.'

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[36] Gaston Bachelard claimed, against Emil Meyerson, that the movement from Newtonian to relativistic physics cannot responsibly be reconstructed as the kind of step-by-step improvement that philosophical narrative, at least of my (Hegelian) kind, trades in. Rather, the Theory of Relativity transformed, all at once, our concepts of space, time, velocity, simultaneity, algebra, rationalism, realism, man and causality: see Bachelard, "La Dialectique philosophique et les notions de la relativité." What Einstein achieved was thus not a gradual displacement of Newtonian physics, but the simultaneous transmutation of a number of its fundamental concepts into radically new ones. For seeing this, Bachelard is credited by Georges Canguilhem with introducing the idea of 'epistemic break,' so crucial to postmodern thought (Canguilhem 185).

[37] Derrida, "Signature Event Context." This is the essay to which Searle so innocently responded.

[38] Gasche, 163-224.

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