

Jacques Derrida

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Jacques Derrida is the founder of a school of thought termed “deconstruction.” His views have had specific influence on literary theory and criticism, but have also addressed broad philosophical questions concerning reality, truth, and meaning. His “precursors and forerunners,” to whom he responded, include “Freud, Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Marx, Nietzsche, [and] Saussure.”¹

Born in Algeria in 1930, he later studied and wrote in France. He and his wife, psychoanalyst Marguerite Aucouturier, settled in the Paris suburbs. In 1996 he attracted attention in America at a structuralism conference at Johns Hopkins University. In 2004, he died of cancer in Paris at age seventy-four.²

Derrida himself avoids giving clear definitions for the terms that he uses. The general idea of deconstruction is that it dissects the relationship between opposing ideas, and then turns that relationship around. In his book *On Deconstruction*, Jonathan Culler attempts several definitions, one of which is that “to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies” by using a certain method.³ But before analyzing the deconstructive method, first let us put Derrida’s ideas in context.

¹Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 24.

²Jonathan Kandell, “Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74,” *New York Times*, 10 October 2004.

³Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 86.

Before the theory of deconstruction attempted to take things apart, the literary theory of structuralism attempted to put things together. One author, Robert Scholes, argues that structuralism “is a response to the need . . . for a ‘coherent system’ that would unite the modern sciences.”⁴ Or, as David Richter explains, structuralism looks at life through language and the system of language.⁵ In other words, structuralism views life as an ordered system, and deconstruction attempts to deconstruct that order.

The Sign

For example, let us consider the sign. From a structuralist perspective, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) explains the relationship between the signified, or concept, and the signifier, or sound-image. The two parts—signified and signifier—together form a whole, the sign.⁶ Saussure views language as an organized structure.

Many philosophers view language as objectively referring to something. The signifier refers to a signified that exists in reality, as Wittgenstein’s picture theory of language argues.⁷ An ordered system of language has a center—a correspondence to reality—which grounds the system.

Derrida deconstructs this view in his essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.” He writes, “The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a

⁴ Robert E. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 2.

⁵ David H. Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3d ed (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins’s, 2007), 819-820.

⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure, “Nature of the Linguistic Sign,” trans Wade Baskin, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3d ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins’s, 2007), 842-843.

⁷ Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy* (London: Dorling Kindersley Book, 2001), 203-206.

play based on a fundamental ground, a play . . . which itself is beyond the reach of play.”⁸

Structure allows for signs to have only limited freedom. Instead of the English term *play*, some translators use the term *freeplay*.⁹ The center restricts the play of the sign, and without this center “it plays without security.”¹⁰ In other words, Derrida’s opponents believe that the center of the structure is fixed rather than free, motionless beyond the motion of language.

The center, however, presumptuously supposes the meaning that it secures. Derrida writes, “If there are structures, they are possible only on the basis of the fundamental structure which permits totality to open and overflow itself such that it *takes on meaning* by anticipating a *telos*” By presupposing meaning, structure “risks stifling force under form.”¹¹ The center unjustifiably stops the freeplay.

In contrast, Derrida’s own theory of language has no center. The center is “missing” or replaced by another sign.¹² He writes, “In the absence of a center or origin, everything became . . . a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.”¹³ Derrida rejects the idea

⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” trans. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3d ed., ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 915-916.

¹⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” trans. Bass, 292.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, “Force and Signification,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 26.

¹² Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” trans. Bass, 289.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 280.

that the sign is a “sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified.”¹⁴ Meaning is an infinite chain of references, leading to nowhere but a new referral.¹⁵

After turning inside out the idea of signification, he then takes it apart and argues, “If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word ‘signifier’ itself which must be abandoned as a metaphysical concept.”¹⁶ Derrida deconstructs the correspondence between language and reality.

Furthermore, Derrida argues that the freeplay of language precedes any reality that may exist. He speaks of reality in terms of absence and presence. Signifiers and the signified presences to which they point all form part of an interminable game. The game itself has primacy. Derrida writes, “Play is the disruption of presence. . . . Play is always a play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.”¹⁷ Freeplay of language has the primary role, and we must redefine presence and absence on its terms.

Presence, Absence, and the Trace

But before going any further, we must examine how Derrida uses the term presence. He questions the “hierarchy between the sound-imprint . . . and the visual (graphic) imprint,” or the hierarchy between spoken words and written words.¹⁸ In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida responds to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl believed that a person can be sure of his

¹⁴ Ibid., 281.

¹⁵ Derrida, “Force and Signification,” 25.

¹⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” trans. Bass, 281.

¹⁷ Ibid., 292.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 65.

own existence and can be sure that he has consciousness of the external world, whether or not these phenomena exist anywhere outside his consciousness.¹⁹ Derrida correlates the “privilege” that Husserl gives to an object’s presence in the conscious to the privilege of the voice’s presence in the conscious. Derrida writes, “The phenomenological voice would be this spiritual flesh that continues to speak and be present to itself—to *hear itself*—in the absence of the world.”²⁰

Derrida deconstructs the presence of the speaker in the spoken word and the presence of meaning in the sign.

In his essay “*Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time*,” Derrida argues that traditional metaphysics associates being with presence. Contrasting presence with time, change and absence, he writes, “Nonpresence is always thought in the form of presence The past and the future are always determined as past presents or as future presents.”²¹ He attributes the idea of the *nun* or now, the present instant, to Aristotle. In Derrida’s words, “the now is determined as the intemporal kernel of time” and “time is what overtakes this nucleus.”²² In other words, when people think about time, they really think of it in the terms of presence.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identified being with time.²³ Yet, as Derrida has already mentioned, people think of time in terms of presence. Derrida writes, “Time is that which is thought on the basis of Being as presence, and if something—which bears a relation to time, but is not time—is to be thought beyond the determination of Being as presence, it cannot be a

¹⁹ Magee, *The Story of Philosophy*, 210-211.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans David B. Allison. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 15-16.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē: Note on a Note from Being and Time*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 34.

²² *Ibid.*, 39-40.

²³ Magee, *The Story of Philosophy*, 212.

question of something that still could be called *time*.”²⁴ Derrida claims that Heidegger falls into the trap of the metaphysics he intended to critique.²⁵ The idea of time should be thought of in its own terms, but attempts to do so fail and slip in ideas of presence.

Derrida’s view of metaphysics has been called a “countermetaphysics of absence.”²⁶ Yet in using the term *absence*, one must not forget that this absence is not an absence of presence. Derrida’s rejects presence as the foundation of metaphysics. In his philosophy, absence is not an absence of presence, but a trace of nothing. He writes that “The trace is produced as its own erasure.”²⁷ The trace relates to the sign, discussed earlier. Derrida writes, “Presence, then, far from being, as is commonly thought, *what* the sign signifies, what a trace refers to, presence, then, is the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace.”²⁸ The trace does not imply a missing absence, but instead presence implies a missing trace. Derrida’s deconstruction not only inverts the relationships between presence and absence, but also takes apart the meaning of the two words.

Although Derrida’s metaphysical views may appear unique, he is not the only philosopher to redirect metaphysics toward absence. For example, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), combining Freud’s psychoanalytic theory with semiotics, bases his own “theory of the unconscious on the sense within us of something *absent*,” such as “lack (*manque*) or need (*besoin*).”²⁹ Like Derrida, Lacan attempts to prove disconnection between the sign and the

²⁴ Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē*,” 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52, 63.

²⁶ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 830.

²⁷ Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē*,” 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁹ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 1112.

signifier.³⁰ Derrida, however, disagrees with Lacan, accusing him of still working within the old system of ideas that Derrida wants to deconstruct.³¹

Différance

In this critique of presence, Derrida brings in an idea crucial to his writings—the idea of difference. Heidegger sought to explain the difference between beings and Being, which he claimed philosophers had forgotten.³² Derrida, however, shifts the focus from Being to difference. He writes that the difference between beings and Being has been forgotten and has no trace, for the trace has been erased. Yet he does not want to think of difference in terms of absence and presence, or limit it to the difference between beings and Being.³³ In fact, he writes that difference is “‘older’ than Being itself”³⁴ and “‘makes the opposition of presence and absence possible.’”³⁵ Just as play allows the sign to operate, difference allows for the presence of Being.

Derrida introduces a new spelling. As he explains in an interview, *différance* has a letter *a* that can be seen in writing but that cannot be heard.³⁶ Différance combines the ideas of differing as “putting off until later” and differing as being “other.”³⁷ It is like a joint or a break.³⁸

³⁰ Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism*, 11-12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³² Frederick Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche*, vol. 7, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1963), 437-438.

³³ Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē*,” 65-67.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26.

³⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 143.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 8.

³⁷ Derrida, “Différance,” 7-8.

³⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 65,69.

Derrida relates difference to “the *arbitrary character of the sign* and the *differential character* of the sign,” which he calls the foundation of Saussure’s semiology.³⁹ In his lectures Saussure had said, “The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by the sign the whole that results from associating the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*.”⁴⁰ Derrida uses Saussure’s structuralist ideas for his own deconstructive purposes.

Thus, as David Richter explains, words and letters have no absolute meaning, but have meaning only through their relationship to different words and letters, deferring to those absent words and letters. Difference is “the black hole in the middle of the system of language, the principle of absence that makes things happen.”⁴¹ Difference is more movement than content.⁴² For example, Derrida reads Plato to examine the “slidings” of his text.⁴³ Both the play of the sign and the trace in metaphysics relate to this principle of difference.

Furthermore, in a qualified sense this black hole of difference is the origin of meaning, history, and truth. Derrida’s deconstruction requires the opposition of contrary ideas, such as presence and absence, and then the two opposite ideas both fall apart, with only the trace of nothing remaining. He writes, “*The (pure) trace is difference*.” The trace retains “the other as other in the same,” having both contraries at once.⁴⁴ Difference is “ceaselessly differing from and differing (itself).” He explains that difference would be the origin and the end, except that

³⁹ Derrida, “Différance,” 10.

⁴⁰ Saussure, “Nature of the Linguistic Sign,” 843.

⁴¹ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 828-829.

⁴² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, “*The Father of Logos from Plato’s Pharmacy*,” trans. Barbara Johnson, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 3d ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 931.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62.

he has deconstructed those ideas already.⁴⁵ Yet in this qualified sense, differance is the origin of meaning, history, and truth.

Point Zero

In an essay titled “Cogito and the History of Madness,” Derrida attempts to locate the beginning of meaning. In his view, reason and madness (or unreason), split off from a common source that had no opposite but had all contradiction within itself.⁴⁶ This moment before the split is an example of differance, the black hole of combined contraries differing from itself and differing to itself.

Derrida responds to his teacher Michel Foucault’s book *History of Madness* and to its references to Descartes. Derrida argues that Descartes’ *Meditations* consider the possibility of insanity.⁴⁷ He writes, “The Cogito escapes madness only because at its own moment, under its own authority, it is valid *even if I am mad*, even if my thoughts are completely mad. . . . Whether I am mad or not, *Cogito, sum.*” Derrida calls this moment the “zero point at which determined meaning and nonmeaning come together in their common origin.”⁴⁸ Meaning and nonmeaning come from the same source. An “act of force and a prohibition” against madness silenced it and “open[ed] history and speech.”⁴⁹ This other moment, the moment of silencing, the moment when man gave reason a privileged position, is the “origin of history” and “the condition of the

⁴⁵ Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē*,” 67.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 38, 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

tradition of meaning.”⁵⁰ Compare this force to the structure and center of language that presupposes the meaning that it enforces. Just as the center attempts to halt the freeplay of signs and their meaning, this forceful act of history attempts to silence nonmeaning.

Supplements

Here we must define a new term that Derrida uses—the supplement. A supplement adds an addition and fills a lack, as Derrida explains in a discussion of signs as supplements.⁵¹ The addition marks a lack. If we return back to the ideas of being and presence, even presence itself has a lack. In *Speech and Phenomena* Derrida writes, “The supplementary difference vicariously stands in for presence due to its primordial self-deficiency.”⁵² Derrida thinks he can deconstruct ideas such as presence because they have a lack and flaw in themselves. He deconstructs from within. In his book *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes, “Reason is incapable of thinking this double infringement upon Nature: that there is a *lack* in Nature and that *because of that very fact* something *is added* to it.”⁵³ He responds to Rousseau’s idea that sexual perversion can be a “supplement.”⁵⁴ As David Richter summarizes, in Derrida’s writing “it is no longer clear which [perversion or non-perversion] is dominant and which is marginal.”⁵⁵ Derrida’s deconstruction not only takes ideas apart, but also turns them around.

Deconstruction works from within. For example, in a discussion of human sciences, Derrida writes, “It is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status

⁵⁰ Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 42.

⁵¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” trans. Bass, 289.

⁵² Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 88.

⁵³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 149.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 141-157.

⁵⁵ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 828.

of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself.”⁵⁶ Derrida explains that metaphysics and its deconstruction form a circle. He writes, “There is no sense in doing without 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 can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.” He follows with the example of the sign, which he uses as a deconstructive tool, but which nevertheless seems to imply a signifier.⁵⁷ Deconstruction faces this challenge, but Derrida has a solution.

Bricolage

Derrida’s solution is *bricolage*, an idea which he credits to the structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida explains that Lévi-Strauss attempted to “separate *method* from *truth*” and “to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value he criticizes.” Derrida writes of *bricolage* as “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined.” He explains that the tools are only used as long as they are helpful, and are thrown away if “other instruments appear more useful.”⁵⁸ Thus, with the help of temporary tools, Derrida defends his deconstruction of metaphysics.

⁵⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” trans. Bass, 282.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 284-285.

Historical Critique

Historically, Derrida's theories enjoyed influence in the 1970s and 1980s,⁵⁹ especially in the United States.⁶⁰ For some people, however, his theories proved a disappointment. David Richter writes, "Many scholars, initially struck by the power of deconstruction, found that, no matter how inventive the path, each venture led invariably to the same vista."⁶¹ Nevertheless, deconstructive theory still lives. Richter explains, "While the messianic atmosphere has dissipated, its utility has persisted. The primary use of deconstruction today is as a tool for breaking down binarisms and problematizing fields of discourse with seemingly fixed categories."⁶² Although deconstruction continues, its promise has diminished.

Internal Critique

But is deconstruction true? Derrida's theory has internal inconsistency. George Steiner writes in *Real Presences*:

The deconstructive discourse is *itself* rhetorical, referential and altogether generated and governed by normal modes of causality, of logic and of sequence. . . . The central dogma, according to which all readings are misreadings and the sign has no underwritten intelligibility, has precisely the same paradoxical, self-denying status as the celebrated *aporia* whereby the Cretan declares all Cretans to be liars. Immured within natural language, deconstructive propositions are self-falsifying.⁶³

Derrida contradicts himself.

The theory of *bricolage* fails to explain adequately this internal contradiction. Derrida attempts to distinguish between tools and truth, but metaphysics is not a purely formal tool, but

⁵⁹ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 835.

⁶⁰ Kandell, "Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74."

⁶¹ Richter, ed. *The Critical Tradition*, 836.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 837.

⁶³ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 129.

rather has content which must be evaluated for truth. Derrida cannot logically use premises, reach a conclusion, and then discard his premises as mere tools.

External Critique

Furthermore, deconstruction contradicts the external facts. As John Warwick Montgomery writes in proposition 2.38 of *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, “The very possibility of arriving at knowledge of the world requires the assumption that a relation of agreement, fit, or correspondence exists between true assertions about the world and the nature of the world as it actually is.”⁶⁴ Such deconstructionist ideas as the trace of nothing, “produced as its own erasure,”⁶⁵ do not fit with the facts of what exists in the world. What facts, indeed, can be found before the history of facts? Derrida’s attempts to look back before point zero, before the “origin of history” and “the condition of the tradition of meaning,”⁶⁶ are an exercise in futility. Derrida can never succeed in finding something older than history and truer than truth. Dr. Montgomery writes, “Only by listening, observing, and subordinating ourselves to the facts of the world will we have any chance of understanding it.”⁶⁷ Derrida’s theory does not adequately account for the facts of the world.

One such discrepancy between the facts and deconstruction is the idea of *différance*. In a review titled “The World Turned Upside Down,” John Searle writes:

The correct claim that the elements of the language only function as elements because of the differences they have from one another is converted into the false claim that the elements ‘consist of’ (Culler) or are ‘constituted on’ (Derrida) the *traces* of these other elements. . . . The system of differences does nothing whatever to undermine the

⁶⁴ John Warwick Montgomery, *Tractatus Logico-Theologicus*, (Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2005), 44.

⁶⁵ Derrida, “*Ousia and Grammē*,” 65.

⁶⁶ Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness,” 42.

⁶⁷ Montgomery, *Tractatus*, proposition 2.561.

distinction between presence and absence; on the contrary the system of differences is precisely a system of presences and absences.⁶⁸

Relationships of difference can exist between sounds and meanings because those sounds and meanings actually exist. The sounds and meanings are not absent.

Furthermore, in an exchange with Louis Mackey in response to Searle's earlier article, Searle continues, "Authors who are concerned with discovering truth are concerned with evidence and reasons, with consistency and inconsistency, with logical consequences and explanatory adequacy, verification and testability. But all this is part of the apparatus of the very 'logo-centrism' that deconstruction seeks to undermine."⁶⁹ Because of Derrida's deconstruction of truth, serious philosophy must reject his claims.

Just as Derrida distorts the facts about difference, his theory of the freeplay of signs distorts the facts about freedom. Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes, "Freedom with no constraints is empty. True creativity requires certain forms and boundaries. We would not be able to say anything new, for example, unless we used the resources of a structured language that preceded us."⁷⁰ Although Derrida does attempt to deconstruct philosophies from within those philosophies and in one sense uses them as resources, in a contradictory sense he also wishes to discard this heritage of resources as soon as possible. His freedom is not a freedom in the context of reality.

⁶⁸ John R. Searle, "The World Turned Upside Down," review of *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, by Jonathan Culler, *New York Review of Books*, 30, no. 16 (27 October 1983).

⁶⁹ John R. Searle, "An Exchange on Deconstruction," *New York Review of Books*, 31, no. 1 (2 February 1984).

⁷⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), 435.

Ideological Critique

Furthermore, Christianity offers a strong response to deconstruction.⁷¹ Perhaps structuralism's attempts to create a system of meaning apart from God led to Derrida's theories. Yet if God is present, the situation changes drastically. George Steiner writes, "The issue is, quite simply, that of meaning of meaning as it is re-insured by the postulate of the existence of God. 'In the beginning was the Word.' There was no such beginning, says deconstruction; only the play of sounds and markers amid the mutations of time."⁷² Derrida himself seems to admit that God's presence would counter deconstruction. He writes, "Only infinite being can reduce the difference in presence. In that sense, the name of God, at least as it is pronounced within classical rationalism, is the name of indifference itself."⁷³ If God is present, then *différance* does not have supremacy.

Gene Edward Veith, Jr. offers an excellent Christian response to deconstruction in his book *Reading between the Lines*:

Deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida stress the arbitrariness of language, the lack of a 'transcendental signifier' that can ground language in objective reality. . . . The deconstructionists emphasize that if there is no God, there can be no transcendent meaning. We Christians are quick to agree, but if there *is* a God, as we believe, then meaning *is* grounded in Him and only in Him. Moreover, we assert that God became flesh in Jesus Christ, who is the Word, the *logos* underlying all of existence, accessible to us in the form of a written text, the Holy Bible, the unique Word of God. The Postmodernists may be right that language constitutes reality, but Christians must insist that it is God's language which constitutes reality.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The limits of this paper do not allow for a full presentation for the evidence for the Christian faith, but interested readers can find such evidence in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

⁷² Steiner, *Real Presences*, 120.

⁷³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 71.

⁷⁴ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Reading between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* ("Turning Point Christian Worldview Series"; Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1990), 209.

The Christian response to deconstruction does not face the same internal and external criticisms that deconstruction faces. Christianity does not need to find a way around history, meaning, and truth, because they consistently fit with the beliefs of Christianity. Christianity does not need to ignore the external world. In fact, the historical incarnation of Jesus Christ, God come to earth as man, establishes a firm correspondence between the world in which people live and the belief Christians have in God and his Word. As an investigation of the facts shows,⁷⁵ not only does Christianity explain the facts of the world, but also the facts of the world point to Christianity. Christianity, not deconstruction, offers a strong answer to the questions of reality, truth, and meaning.

⁷⁵ The limits of this paper do not allow for a full presentation for the evidence for the Christian faith, but interested readers can find such evidence in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999).