

grasped the point he was making about Austin, but did so in a manner that com-
 Searle. This seems to be because Derrida was arguing that Searle had not really
 of Austin, and Derrida in turn responded with an essay ('Limited Inc.') that irritated
 acts'.²⁶ Searle wrote a piece ('Reiterating the Differences') criticizing Derrida's analysis
 an account of the English philosopher J. L. Austin's (1911-60) theory of 'speech
 sopher, John Searle. In an essay entitled 'Signature, Event, Context' Derrida offered
 marked most famously by his dispute in the late 1970s with the American philo-
 relationship to the institution of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which was
 are a number of reasons for this. There is, for instance, the matter of Derrida's
 be numbered amongst the most controversial of post-war European thinkers. There
 Jacques Derrida, whose name is inextricably associated with deconstruction, must

3 Derrida, Deconstruction and the Question of Ethics

time an adequate understanding of the nature of the debate between Levinas and
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 (2001 Bloomsbury, Oxford)

prehensively cited and yet at the same time (at least from Searle's point of view) distorted the intentional meaning of Searle's own arguments by recontextualizing them. The significance of Derrida's gesture derives from the fact that Austin's work makes a great deal of the role both of intentionality and literal language in securing the meaning of words. But, Derrida argues, neither pure intentionality nor the 'literal' meaning of words plays a fundamental role in securing the generation of meaning. In addition to such matters we must also pay attention to questions about the context of utterances, and this is linked to what Derrida terms 'iterability' – a complex notion to which we shall return in due course. I do not propose here to consider in detail the Derrida-Searle dispute, although I will in fact shortly turn to some of Derrida's comments in connection with this as a means of clarifying his philosophy. One thing that can be said is that the dispute has contributed in its own small way to fostering the continued Analytic-Continental division within philosophy that I discussed briefly in the introduction to this volume.²⁷

Derrida's name is controversial for a number of other reasons that are worth mentioning here. Foremost amongst these is that he is a thinker who has sought to challenge a number of what he argues to be deeply rooted presuppositions that dominate the practice of philosophical enquiry. It is this challenge, or rather the importance attributed to it by some of Derrida's readers, that in its own turn led in the late 1970s and early 1980s to his being taken up in the first instance by a readership that one would not immediately define as 'philosophical', at least not in the institutional sense that is associated with this word. In the English-speaking world, the readers who initially responded positively to Derrida's work sprang largely from the ranks of literary studies, and it is this association with the study of literature that has done much to ensure the continued relevance of his work in contemporary philosophy.

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phenomenon of structuralism, which itself gave rise to a form of literary criticism in the 1970s.³⁰ Again, therefore, there is good reason to suspect that Derrida's reception on the part of the literary academic community might have been further enhanced by this fact. Let us, however, leave the question of academic divisions to one side and instead consider Derrida's work in its philosophical context. By adopting this approach we shall be able to see how his writings relate to the philosophical questions that we have so far examined, and this will lead us back to the question of ethics. Since I have already mentioned it, let us begin with the phenomenon of structuralism.

3.1 *Structuralism*

Although associated in one of its forms with a variety of literary criticism, the methodology that goes under the name of structuralism has in fact been employed in a wide range of fields. There is, for example, the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–), and structuralist approaches have also been developed within the field of the social sciences. Likewise, thinkers such as the French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–90) developed a structuralist version of Marxism in the 1960s.³¹ Althusser's importance in relation to Derrida should not be underestimated. Not only was Althusser an immensely influential figure within the French academic scene of the 1960s, but as 'cainan' at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (rue d'Ulm), he supervised Derrida in preparation for his *agregation*. Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Derrida's work, like that of other near contemporaries on the French scene,³² has its own very particular involvement with structuralism. However, while influenced by many of the central tenets of structuralism, Derrida's thought springs from the questioning of some of its central presuppositions. Although the term was coined by the Russian formalist theorist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), structuralism is generally traced back to the writings of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). Saussure's most famous work, the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), which was compiled from students' notes taken from lectures given between 1907 and 1911, seeks to construct what he regards as a scientific account of the process of signification, i.e. how words present meaning. He terms this science 'semiotics', or the science of signs. On the Saussurean conception, all language (the definition of which includes forms of communication other than simply spoken language, i.e. all kinds of signs) is susceptible to being analysed in terms of a structural system of relations. In turn, Saussure argues that the meaning of any individual word is determined by this structural relation, not by way of any direct referential function that the word might have. According to this view, we do not arrive at an understanding of what a word or any other sign means by way of what it refers to. A sign is held to possess a meaning as a direct consequence of its relationship to the other words with which it is associated. To put the matter bluntly, meaning is regarded as resulting from the *difference* that pertains to signs, and this difference is secured first and foremost by way of reference to their relation to one another. Additionally, Saussure contends that language in general can be articulated in terms of one fundamental distinction: *langue* and *parole*. Within this model, *langue*

constitutes the fundamentally *structural* element of language. *Langue* is the structurally organized network of possible meanings that have to be in place at any given time if a speaker is to utter a sentence. *Parole*, in contrast, is a term that denotes the use of these elements as they are actualized within any individual utterance (i.e. speech).

One notion that is central to structuralism is that of binary opposition. This effectively states that all meaning is ultimately determined by a relationship of opposition that inheres between different signs (good/bad, light/dark, etc.), and this oppositional structure exerts a determining force on the constitution of meaning. For a thinker like Jakobson this relationship of opposition makes up the fundamental structure of all language. This notion, which is not strictly speaking Saussure's, led to the development of critical approaches associated with structuralist literary criticism. What marks out the structuralist project, be it that of the textual analyst, of the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, or the structural Marxism of Althusser, is a commitment to the view that it is possible to decode with scientific validity the organization of meanings which are to be found in written works or social relations alike. This amounts to a commitment to the view that it is possible to construct an objective and universal account of meaning that can, in turn, be used to reveal the particular meanings hidden within texts or social relations and codes. Structuralism, therefore, seeks above all to elucidate the objective conditions that constitute all linguistic and social relations. As such, structuralism claims to be regarded as an objective science. The emphasis on structure has led many exponents of structuralism to take a critical stance toward humanism. The main reason for this is not difficult to grasp: if meaning is a matter of nothing more than the causal relationship between signs that pertains within any given structure, then issues of human agency, of individual or shared interests, of community, and so forth, are susceptible to being either ignored or accounted for within the confines of the structural-causal framework of analysis that the structuralist adopts. A number of criticisms of the structuralist approach are possible. We might be tempted to accuse the structuralist approach of producing a reductive account of the notion of agency, in so far as subjectivity might well be a rather more complex matter than the mere result of structural forces. Equally, the adequacy of the structural metaphor might be questioned in terms of its applicability to the process of the generation of meaning. Is meaning, after all, the result of a 'process', or is there something rather more complex at work here?

3.2 Derrida and the limits of structuralist thought

For Derrida, too, there are problems with the structuralist enterprise. His criticisms of structuralism in fact in some ways allow him to be counted amongst those who are called 'poststructuralist',³³ although this is not a term that is necessarily helpful in understanding Derrida's work. In the first instance, it is possible to mount an attack upon the purported 'objectivity' of structuralism's methods. This point, amongst others, is made by Derrida in his essay 'Force and Signification', which aims at both decoding the significance of structuralism and questioning its central presuppositions.³⁴ According to Derrida, structuralism can be understood as springing from

'an anxiety about language - which can only be an anxiety of language, within language itself' (p. 3). This form of anxiety, however, is no mere historical accident; it cannot be reduced in significance to a sign of its own times. The structuralist enterprise, Derrida claims, presents us with the insight that we must turn toward the analysis of language itself as a means of uncovering the 'origin of history . . . [of] . . . historicity itself' (p. 4). Structuralism, however, is not synonymous with this anxiety. For, structuralism can, in principle, be subjected to the critical scrutiny of the historian of ideas. If such criticism were to be offered at some time in the future what might be concluded? Perhaps, Derrida muses, the pursuits of the structuralist will come to be regarded 'as a relaxation, if not a lapse, of the attention given to force, which is the tension of force itself. *Form* fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself. That is, to create. That is why literary criticism is structuralist in every age' (pp. 4-5). Structuralism can be defined as the privileging of the formal conditions governing meaning over the creative conditions that give rise to it. The attention to form, as a kind of 'movement of diminished ardor', defines what must always remain essential to the structuralist enterprise. But there is more. For, Derrida argues, what the 'structural consciousness' also attains is the exposure of its own constituted nature. The structuralist insight both seeks to convey the objective totality that goes to make up the structure of meaning, and yet at the same time exposes its own limitations in the very act of doing so. It is a 'reflection of the accomplished, the constituted, the constructed. Historical, eschatological, and crepuscular by its very situation' (p. 5). This kind of reflection presents us with a totality that can be all the more easily perceived, in the sense in which one can survey and analyse the structure of a building without paying any attention to those who might live or work in it. The formal elements of the building, its structure, are thereby exposed in the form of a whole that can be interpreted independently of the lives of those who may be situated within it. By the negation of force, structuralism offers us an insight into the constituted and constituting conditions that operate in the production of meaning and history. Derrida himself, by way of clarification, offers us the metaphor of a deserted city to illustrate this point:

Thus, the relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized. Somewhat like the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art. A city no longer inhabited, not simply left behind, but haunted by meaning and culture.

Meaning is rendered as something ghostly by the structuralist perspective. The disengagement of the living force of meaning that structuralism must enact in order to reveal the objective conditions that its aspirations toward the status of a science demand thereby produces an uncanny result. But what is at stake here? What does the demand for this kind of objectivity imply? According to Derrida, we can conclude that this itself shows structuralism to be determined by something that it cannot account for, something that in fact is the precondition of the kind of illumination and insight that the structuralist viewpoint offers us. In illuminating the structural and hence formal component of meaning to us, the structuralist model also at the same time conceals the force that makes this illumination possible.

This notion of a simultaneous unveiling and covering up (a theme that we might note has its precursor in Heidegger's analysis of the significance of traditional metaphysics in the opening pages of *Being and Time*) is central to Derrida's account of the structuralist enterprise. However, the notion of force that is at stake within the context of Derrida's discussion should not be confused with the creative force of an expressive individualism. 'Force' here does not imply an expressive overflowing, still less a mode of intentionality. Force, as Derrida wishes to consider it, cannot be *thought*, in the sense of being conceptualized. It is not the thought of force (i.e. its conceptualizable aspect) that is at stake here, but force itself understood as 'the other of language without which language would not be what it is' (p. 27). Force, in other words, is for Derrida something that produces meaning as language. But it is not itself purely 'linguistic' in nature. Nor is force merely 'empirical', i.e. the product of social and historical factors – hence Derrida's argument that an analysis of structuralism must bring with it reflections on the nature of historicity itself, the condition of possibility of the historical, which is force. In fact, what is at issue here is in part a matter of ontology. Structuralism presupposes that it can offer us an illumination of the formal conditions of the production of meaning presented within texts (literary or otherwise) or other social forms. But in order to do this these formal conditions must be conceptualized as *fixed*. A structure is always a form and a form is always frozen. Because of this, structuralism must ultimately be indebted to a traditional ontological mode of understanding. This understanding is in fact concealed in the very act of the structuralist writer's revealing the formal conditions of meaning that inhabit the structure of a written work or cultural practice.

Although the object of Derrida's interest in 'Force and Signification' is the French writer Jean Rousset's fine book: *Forme et Signification* ('Force and Signification', 6), an analogous point can be made by way of reference to the Saussurean conception of *langue*. In conceptualizing language primarily in terms of structure, as *langue*, Saussure must assume that it is possible to take a kind of 'snapshot' of those formal conditions that govern the nature of meaning and in doing this reveal what is essential about it. But the very notion of meaning as being wholly structural and formal in nature ignores the fact that meaning also changes. In so far as it does change, meaning is not 'in itself' structural. In metaphysical terms, we could say that the structuralist account presupposes the very thing that Nietzsche castigates when he attacks 'metaphysical philosophy': it presupposes that stability is both an ontological norm and a defining feature of objectivity. Derrida's point is a similar one. The structuralist conception of meaning requires that the totality of a structure can be revealed. But the possibility that such a totality can be revealed is not something that can be shown to be the case. We can, indeed, envisage ourselves gazing at the world of human existence from the structuralist point of view: we can imagine a city devoid of its inhabitants, so that the city's formal pattern is revealed all the more clearly to us. But cities, of course, are not quite like that. What makes a city a city is the fact that it exhibits signs of life, that it changes: parts are added, parts are demolished as a result of various human acts or natural catastrophes, etc. Any particular representation of a city's structure necessarily construes a moment in its history as a unity, which it is not. In the same way, meaning is not a structural totality. In order for words and signs to make sense it may be true that they must exist in some kind of structural

relation to one another. But this relation is not given to us, and no more is it given to the structuralist analyst, as a unified whole. In short, the word 'meaning' is not equivalent to the word 'structure'.

Something else follows on from the structuralist belief that its gaze is capable of surveying a totality. It is this: in order to conceptualize something as a totality one must, at the same time, commit oneself to the view that one can also grasp the organizing principle that governs the structure of that totality, and grasp it in a very particular manner: the notion of structure refers only to space, geometric or morphological space, the order of forms and sites. Structure is first the structure of an organic or artificial work, the internal unity of an assemblage, a *construction*: a work is governed by a unifying principle, the *architecture* that is built and made visible in a location' (p. 15). Structuralism, like Cartesianism, is transfixed by an architectural metaphor. This means that it must always articulate the problem of meaning in terms of spatial concepts: architectures, constructions that occupy locations in space. It is the power of this metaphor that makes structuralism susceptible to 'confusing meaning with its geometric, morphological, or, in the best of cases, cinematic model', and it thereby 'risks being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically' (p. 16). Structuralist thought, Derrida is arguing, is seized by a metaphor when it takes the substitution of the image or the formal pattern (e.g. 'geometry' or 'morphology') to be equivalent to the metaphorical 'play' that is an essential component in the generation of meaning. The cinematic model is the 'best of cases' here because with it at least some acknowledgement of the fluidity inherent in the production of meaning, of the play of force, is implicitly acknowledged. Derrida is arguing that we need to be suspicious of the claim that the word 'meaning' can be equated with the metaphor implied by the word 'structure'. The point, for Derrida, is that meaning is at work *when metaphor operates*, when the substitution of one word for another occurs. But this substitution, this *movement of metaphor*, is not something inherently structural, for, necessarily, what is fluid is not fixed or frozen in form. What Derrida terms 'force', or the 'play' inherent in meaning, 'is the other of language' (p. 27) in so far as it is the case that language indeed announces itself to us as a kind of structure. But this structure has as its precondition that which escapes the limits imposed by any concept that seeks to encompass a structural totality. One does not approach the question of force and meaning by thinking it as a *concept*, which would be to reduce it to something that can be decided upon once and for all, and in so doing to enmesh it within the formalized mode of thinking that takes structure to be the defining feature of reality. To do this would be to remain within the guiding metaphorical tendency within Western metaphysics that asserts the primacy of form over force. Such a move is characteristic of the Western tradition of metaphysics because it is this tradition, Derrida contends, that thinks in a manner that privileges structure. By way of support for this argument we need, perhaps, only to think of the work that the foundational metaphor does for Descartes's epistemology, or likewise of the formalized conception of the transcendental subject that Kant presents in the first *Critique*.

Privileging structure is for Derrida a characteristic of the Western metaphysical tradition not merely in so far as it allows us to talk about the 'foundations' of knowledge, etc., but also because the structural metaphor foregrounds the role of the

image in thought. The Western tradition, Derrida argues, cleaves to the representational notion of thought: thought as image, as the equivalence of image to truth. Again, such a mode of conceptualization tends to ignore the problem of force. If we were to seek to *think force* by presenting it as a structural concept, as a form, then what this implies is that we must, at the same time, seek to throw light upon force, to *illuminate* it. But understanding force in terms of form alone, as something that can be grasped within the metaphorical imagery of structure, is precisely to fail to grasp it: 'To comprehend the structure of a becoming, the form of a force, is to lose meaning by finding it . . . The meaning of meaning is Apollonian by virtue of everything that can be seen' (p. 28). In other words, meaning, if taken as force, is becoming. But attempting to condense a becoming into a structure is immediately to lose what makes a becoming what it is. Put simply, *force cannot be seen*: it is not susceptible to being articulated as that which can have light thrown upon it, as something that can be envisaged within the language of spaces that the structural mode of thinking requires in order to function. The Apollonian element that Derrida alludes to, which is in fact a reference to a thesis presented by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*,³⁵ is always already a matter of form. But meaning, as we have seen, is for Derrida not simply a question of form. Meaning, we might say, is not simply about the relations that inhere between words situated within a structural totality. It is something that also involves a becoming that is distinctly non-structural. It is this becoming that escapes the structural metaphor, and which any analysis of meaning that highlights the role that structure plays must cover up at the very moment that this metaphor is deployed.

The question of metaphor turns out to be one of Derrida's central concerns not only in 'Force and Signification' but elsewhere.³⁶ If, for him, the structural metaphor conceals an unacknowledged force of becoming upon which it depends, it also pays testimony to a central presupposition of European philosophical thought. We have already alluded to this presupposition in relation to the role of the representational image within philosophical discourse. This presupposition establishes a metaphorical relationship that is itself the basis of metaphysics: it is 'the metaphor of darkness and light . . . [that is] . . . the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics' (p. 27). This metaphor is a 'founding' one in at least two senses. First, it is a 'photological' metaphor, and as such it privileges the notion of the representational image as the production of light, where 'light' is equivalent to 'truth'. Western philosophy, in other words, is a way of thinking that envisages truth as a matter of the throwing of light upon a world composed of entities in order to reveal them as they are. The light in which the world is thereby bathed is the light of representational thought. Second, the photological metaphor is a founding one in the sense that 'it is a metaphor.' The Western metaphysical tradition, then, is anchored in a metaphorically determined understanding that legitimates its own particular mode of thought. This mode of thought is what Derrida calls a 'heliocentric metaphysics', a metaphysics in which force is sundered by the power of the representational image, in which intensity gives way to the primacy of representation. Structuralism presents us with a paradigm case of this metaphysics in so far as it is a 'tributary' of this stream of thought. We are, Derrida holds, faced with a tradition that shies away from thinking in terms of intensities and forces, a tradition that must cover them up

in order to reveal them, for 'How can force or weakness be understood in terms of light and dark?' (p. 27). More follows from the adherence to the founding metaphor of European metaphysics. Above all, perhaps, we can single out the belief that transparency and singularity are of the greatest value in thought. In other words and speaking metaphorically, what is true must be both 'transparent', 'clear', a product of light, and at the same time 'univocal', i.e. one not many. Thus, heliocentric metaphysics offers us an all embracing ontology: an account of truth as transparency, of truth as the product of the light of reason that is thrown onto the realm of Being in order to illuminate it.

What, though, is Derrida's position with regard to this metaphysics of meaning? The first thing to note is that Derrida does not in any way propose its abandonment. The appropriate critical response to this metaphysics does not of itself legitimate the embracing of an ontology of pure becoming, which a thinker like Deleuze pursues. One does not, in other words, aim at leaving metaphysics behind. True, we 'must', says Derrida, aim at attaining some kind of 'emancipation' from this metaphysics. But we cannot be emancipated from metaphysics in the sense of entering into a line of thought that would fly out of it, for this 'would be meaningless and deprive us of the light of meaning' (p. 28). This is because the history of thought is, for us, the history of Western metaphysics. We cannot abandon this history without at the same time abandoning the possibility of meaningful discourse that it has bestowed upon us. Instead, what we can and *must* do is resist this metaphysics from a standpoint that is situated firmly within it and which acknowledges that fact as the condition of its possibility. It is the pursuit of this project that characterizes what Derrida calls the 'deconstruction' of metaphysics. Deconstruction, in its simplest terms, may be described as a turn away from the structuralist mode of thought that Derrida holds to be characteristic of Western metaphysics. This metaphysical understanding is a mode of thinking that, in order to *think* of structure at all, must also maintain its commitment to a purely theoretical and disembodied conception of enquiry, to a model of thought conceived of as the roving gaze of an incorporeal spectator floating above the structure of the existent, of Being. From the standpoint of deconstruction, however, such a perspective is always open to question, for all enquiry occurs in the context of the structure it inhabits and from which there is no easy means of escape. In this, Derrida is taking up some of the lessons of Heidegger's criticism of metaphysics, as well as his argument that thinking occurs essentially *in* and *as* its world. However, in its own turn, Heidegger's emphasis on the role of Being, his claim that the presence of Being is essential to all thought, is also subjected to Derridean criticism. It should be clear by now why I have chosen to begin a discussion of Derrida by referring to his essay 'Force and Signification'. Derrida's comments on structuralism offer us a path that leads into his approach to the *practice* of philosophical thought. Moreover, there is an ethical position at stake from the outset with regard to Derrida's discussion of Western metaphysics. This ethics shows itself at the conclusion of 'Force and Signification', which is marked by a kind of prescription, an ought: we *must*, Derrida tells us, seek to criticize metaphysics from within its own domain. As we shall see, the nature of this 'must' is not to be taken simply as a matter of mere compulsion, in the sense that one 'must' eat in order to survive. True, if the history of metaphysics is in any sense *our history* then if we are to criticize metaphysics we

must do so from within its own domain, for that is where we are situated. But there is also an 'ought' contained within this kind of talk. If we must criticize metaphysics at all it is because we *ought* to do so, it is because we are in some sense ethically obliged to engage in this kind of criticism. Deconstruction is the enactment of this ethical imperative, and as such it rests upon a conception of the ethical. What kind of conception this is we will discover in due course. The discussion of this ethics will finally lead us back to Levinas. For the moment, however, let us provisionally note that what Derrida is proposing under the rubric of 'deconstruction' is a taking leave of an ontology of Being, a critical departure from the tradition of Western metaphysics, of which structuralism is a paradigm case. Yet, as we will see, this taking leave remains in many ways faithful to that metaphysical tradition.

3.3 *The question of metaphor is a question of cultures*

According to Derrida's conception, as we have seen, what is termed 'heliocentrism' is a language that is founded on the metaphors of light and darkness. In such a model, 'light' is taken as a metaphor for 'truth' and 'darkness' as a metaphor for 'error' or 'untruth'. This heliocentric language is one that, Derrida argues, has grounded Western philosophical discourse. We might say, then, that this language essentially characterizes philosophical discourse as it is practised within the European tradition. The import of this analysis 'comes to light' (as one might put it if one is speaking within this discourse) in a wide range of philosophical contexts. For instance, when Aristotle writes of metaphor in his *Poetics*, he defines it as a process of substitution wherein something is given a name that belongs to something else. For Derrida, such a definition can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, this definition of metaphor is just that: it is a philosophical thesis that puts forward a claim about the nature of metaphor. On the other hand, though, 'it is also a philosophical discourse whose entire surface is worked by a metaphoricity'.³⁷ The definition of metaphor that Aristotle offers is only possible because it takes place within a discourse that itself is riven with metaphor. In line with his argument concerning the heliocentric nature of metaphysics, Derrida's point here is that metaphor is a necessary component within *any* philosophical discourse. If this is the case, then the very act of offering a definition of metaphor within philosophical discourse must itself rest upon the metaphorical workings that are at play in the language that is being used to define metaphor as such. In order for a definition to be offered, the play of metaphor within language must be a condition of possibility for the definition's being constructed in the first place. But, as Derrida argues with regard to heliocentrism, this metaphoricity remains hidden within philosophical discourse.³⁸ In turn, a series of oppositions can be (and indeed have been) constructed within philosophical language that in equal measure depend upon and suppress the role that metaphor plays in philosophy. Above all, this suppression occurs at the level of the analysis of the nature of truth and meaning. Thus, Derrida argues, metaphor, which is an essential component of the everyday use of language, is traditionally separated off from the use of literal or fact-stating language that philosophy relies upon in order to elucidate concepts of truth and meaning (a case in point is the example of speech act theory, cited in

section 3 above, which takes the literal meaning of words to be primary). If truth is taken to be what is said in literal language, in a language that purportedly refers in unproblematic fashion to how things are, then it must be the case that this language functions in a manner that is different in kind from the way in which metaphorical language functions.

On such a view, literal language is not prey to the kind of substitution wherein one word is used to stand in for another word, as occurs with metaphor. A literal meaning is, in this case, always taken to be the *proper* meaning of a word, and this propriety signifies the consonance between a word and that to which it refers. Derrida's point, however, is that this privileging of literal language ultimately relies upon the metaphorical propensity that is inherent in everyday language, and it is this everyday aspect of language that a philosophy which privileges the literal must suppress in order to construct the notion of the literal as the true. Thus, 'meaning proper', so to speak, is taken to be equivalent to the articulation of the literal relations that inhere between language and the world of sensory experience, while metaphor is relegated to a secondary role in so far as it is taken to be something that is rendered possible in the light of the fact that the capacity of words to refer to things (literal language) is already secured.

Metaphor . . . is determined by philosophy as a provisional loss of meaning, an economy of the proper without irreparable damage . . . a history with its sights set on . . . the circular reapropriation of literal, proper meaning. This is why the philosophical evaluation of metaphor has always been ambiguous: metaphor is dangerous and foreign . . . but it is in complicity with what it endangers, is necessary to it in the extent to which the de-tour is a re-turn guided by the function of resemblance . . . under the law of the same.³⁹

Western philosophy has generally taken metaphor to be conceptualizable within the framework or 'economy' of literal language. This privileging of literal language pays testimony to the fact that truth is taken as the equivalence between word and thing, i.e. truth is regarded as the true *representation* of something by a word. Yet, metaphor is, at the same time, necessary to this conception. The reason for this is that in order to fix the literal meaning of a word or phrase we must first presuppose the 'movement of meaning', i.e. the process of metaphorical substitution that is supposed to be subservient to the fixing of literal meaning.

Derrida's point is that metaphor is not some mere accident within what he calls 'the text of philosophy'.⁴⁰ Rather, metaphor is essential to this text. What is at stake here is the relationship between philosophical talk and everyday language and the extent to which philosophers would like to distance what they say from the vicissitudes and ambiguities of this everyday, metaphor-ridden language. If, however, this assertion of distance is questionable, that is, if philosophers must always already find themselves caught up in so-called natural language in order to philosophize at all, then we are obliged to consider in a critical manner the implications of 'the usage of natural language as philosophical language'.⁴¹ We are, in other words, obliged to consider that philosophical concepts are not purely 'philosophical', but are essentially contaminated by the mode of everyday speech. Foremost amongst these

implications is a cultural and historical matter. This is because the privileging of the literal over the metaphorical occurs within the *Western* metaphysical tradition: 'Metaphysics – the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos* [i.e. discourse], that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that [which] he must still wish to call Reason.'⁴² Where we can argue that metaphor does not have a history as such, in so far as metaphor is a feature common to the languages of all cultures, the *concept of metaphor* does have a history that is culturally specific.⁴³ The history of the *concept* of metaphor is the history of the culture that typifies Western metaphysical discourse. This is the heliocentric discourse which equates universal Reason with 'natural light' (for instance, the 'clear and distinct ideas' of Descartes's epistemology, which sets the 'light of Reason' as the standard of certainty and truth). This discourse has displayed a tendency to regard the languages of other cultures as primarily figurative, as metaphorical rather than rational – and in this way it has tended to regard other cultures as being divorced from the discourse of the true.⁴⁴ Derrida's reading of heliocentric metaphysics thus takes us from the domain of the 'philosophical' text into a domain of historico-cultural (and hence political) relations. A critical analysis of heliocentric thinking, then, necessitates a critical analysis of the historical and cultural dimension of philosophical language and concepts.

3.4 *Heliocentrism is a phonocentrism*

If the culture of heliocentrism places metaphor at one step from the truth attainable by way of literal language it can also be characterized in other ways. Perhaps the most significant amongst these ways is linked with what Derrida refers to in 'Force and Signification' as the notion of 'acoustics' (p. 27). Acoustics, of course, is a word that concerns sound. Here, more specifically, the acoustical concerns the role allotted to the spoken utterance within philosophical discourse. In so far as heliocentrism prioritizes the role of form over force it likewise places emphasis upon the role of the speaker (or, we could say, the subject: a formally characterizable entity who is in possession of specifiable attributes like intentionality, will, dispositions, rationality, etc.) in the production and securing of meaning. In Derridean terms, meaning is taken within heliocentric metaphysics as something that can be equated with the living presence of the speaker who 'uses' language intentionally. Heliocentric metaphysics, therefore, is also a 'metaphysics of presence', since it holds that the proper meaning of words is ultimately linked to the intentions, and hence living presence, of a speaker/subject. On this view, the Western metaphysical tradition is not simply dominated by a hierarchical metaphors of light versus dark or truth versus error. It is also a tradition that takes truth to be a matter that essentially concerns the expression of a speaker's true intentions by way of language.

We could turn to the example of structural linguistics once more to illustrate this point, and in particular to Derrida's account of Saussurean linguistics as it is presented in *Of Grammatology* (1967).⁴⁵ Saussure offers a theory that not only privileges form over force and literal over metaphorical language. In addition, the Saussurean

account privileges the notion of 'speech' over 'writing' in its determination of the nature of meaning. Again, Derrida holds that this is a view that typifies the Western metaphysical tradition and, as with the structuralism of Rousset in the essay 'Force and Signification', Saussure's linguistics has for him the status of a paradigm instance of Western metaphysical thinking. On the kind of view that characterizes this tradition, Derrida claims, 'writing' is always regarded as a 'supplement', that is a kind of unnecessary or derivative and accidental side effect of living speech. What the Saussurean account of the nature of language and meaning does, according to Derrida, is to engage in 'the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originally spoken language' (*Of Grammatology*, 29). Writing becomes regarded as the mere adjunct of speech when it comes to the analysis of meaning, whereas speech, in contrast, bears all the defining features that characterize authenticity, originality, etc. As such, speech grounds the concept of truth. If we were to turn to the example of Plato's dialogues, truth, Derrida could argue, is presented by Plato as a matter that can only be arrived at through the exchange of speech that occurs between *living* interlocutors who have the characteristics of will, intentionality, etc. (in the *Gorgias*, for instance, between the figures Socrates and Gorgias).⁴⁶ In the living exchange of the dialogue what is at stake is truth, and truth is arrived at by each interlocutor subjecting their views to the interrogation of the other. In such a situation there is no room for error, for each speaker can ensure their intended meaning is communicated by answering the questions of the other speaker, by correcting misunderstandings, etc. The dialogue is a form that holds the priority of living speech, of psycho-acoustics, to be a defining characteristic of all language. On such a model, language is a *vehicle* of thought. Much is presupposed by this view – for instance, a division between thought and language, and the contention that language is a kind of neutral 'material' that can be manipulated by the living speaker in order to communicate his or her beliefs, intentions, and so on. Acoustics, as 'that which ties sense to sound, the "thought-sound"' (p. 36) presupposes meaning to be essentially a matter of intentions: it is a 'phonocentrism' – the privileging of the spoken over the written. Derrida also refers to this as a 'logocentrism': a discourse which holds that living discourse (*logos*) grounds sense or meaning: 'the sense of being as presence . . . logocentrism . . . [is the] . . . epoch of full speech' (p. 43). 'Logocentrism' is therefore a term that Derrida uses to signify the 'metaphysics of phonetic writing . . . which was fundamentally – for enigmatic yet essential reasons that are inaccessible to a simple historical relativism – nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism' (p. 3).

Recalling the arguments put forward in 'Force and Signification' we can note once more that, for Derrida, the stakes of the metaphysical tradition are essentially linked to the question of culture, to the view that one culture has priority with regard to establishing the nature of meaning and hence truth. The 'phoneticization of writing', that is, the rendering of the significance of writing in terms of living speech, marks this cultural epoch. Likewise, we could add that no simple historical relativism will suffice to articulate the nature of this epoch, for that would presuppose that we can be liberated entirely from it, which we cannot be. However, the main point to grasp here is that the Derridean account of Western metaphysics is ultimately staking some very large claims. Above all, Derrida's contention is that the metaphysical

tradition which takes living speech to be a defining feature of truth has dominated philosophical thought since its inception, and has a lineage that can be traced from Plato to Hegel, and even from the pre-Socratic thinkers to the work of Heidegger.⁴⁷ Amongst other things, Derrida is therefore providing a critical account of 'the history of (the only) metaphysics, which has . . . always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos', i.e. to the discourse presented in the form of the living presence of 'full' speech. It is this metaphysics which can be defined as the *one and only* metaphysics that has thought of truth as linked essentially to the presence of a living speaker, that has opposed the concept of speech to that of 'writing'.

3.5 Speech and writing

According to the Western metaphysical tradition, writing is best regarded as something that is parasitic: a non-essential element in the production and determination of meaning and truth, and a mere 'vehicle' for thought. From this it is clear that for Derrida the key philosophical problem is 'the problem of language' (*Of Grammatology*, 6), at least in so far as the Western tradition has always comprehended the meaning of language as a matter that exclusively concerns intentionality. However, the metaphysical privileging of living speech over writing is no mere accident of history; it is not some contingent matter. This is because the priority that has been given to 'acoustics', Derrida argues, does not depend upon the existence of some kind of freely made 'choice' that could have been avoided if only some other option had been selected. This priority 'responds to a moment of *economy* (let us say of the "life" of "history" or of "being as self-relationship")' (p. 7). There is, in other words, an economy of relations of force that has had a decisive role in constituting the metaphysics of opposition that is a defining feature of heliocentrism/phonocentrism, in so far as it thinks by way of the oppositional structure inherent within terms like 'light-dark', 'truth-error', etc. This oppositional thinking, Derrida tells us, 'has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world-origin, that arises from the difference between the worldly and the non-worldly, the outside and the inside, identity and non-identity, universal and non-universal, transcendental and empirical, etc.' (p. 8). The 'world', as a philosophical *concept*, is already determined in a manner that endows it with significance by an *economy of meaning* that is founded upon opposition. It is this economy that tends to 'confine writing to a secondary and instrumental function' (p. 8). Against this, Derrida's point is that what has been designated by the term 'writing' is *not* secondary. Writing, as he will redefine it in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere, has an equal or even primordial role in the production of meaning and also philosophical discourse. The text of *Of Grammatology* thus allots itself the task of announcing the 'death of speech' as it has been traditionally understood, i.e. speech as the foundation of meaning. For, Derrida argues, 'the concept of writing exceeds and comprehends that of language.' This is because language is always already, in a very specific sense, writing (p. 37).

What, we might ask, is Derrida seeking to do? First, he is obviously challenging the metaphysical view implicit within Cartesianism: the view that meaning stems from a self-reflective mind that can be isolated from its physical or historical context.

In this regard, at least, Derrida has much in common with many other thinkers (Hegel, Nietzsche, Horkheimer, or Adorno, to name but a few). However, Derrida's challenge is articulated at a very specific level: 'Now we tend to say "writing" . . . to designate not only physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription, but also the totality of what makes it possible' (p. 9). 'Writing, in other words, is used by Derrida to designate the *condition of possibility of meaning*. There is a move in Derrida's argument that pays testimony to a certain kind of 'Kantianism': he is presenting us with a conditions of possibility argument. However, the condition of possibility that makes spoken language possible is not a formal *a priori* condition in the sense in which Kant elucidated the notion in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Rather, the condition of the possibility of formalizable conceptual thinking, Derrida is arguing, rests upon the metaphorical 'play' that is an inherent feature of the production of meaning. This, then, is a move that is designed to both undercut and demonstrate the limitations of the phonocentric tradition of the West. According to phonocentrism, the voice is ultimately wedded to the mind such that thought expresses itself 'naturally' *through* speech (p. 11). Hegel, for example, 'demonstrates very clearly the strange privilege of sound in idealization' (p. 12). Even Heidegger, a thinker who openly challenges Western metaphysics, remains trapped within this model in so far as he thinks of Being as presence. Hence, the Derridean introduction of writing as an essential precondition of speech questions the purportedly 'natural' status of the relation that is assumed to inhere between thought and language. Languages, when it is no longer considered merely as 'speech', does not find its essential precondition in the intentions of a speaker, in their presence. Speech itself is rooted in the possibility of inscription. This condition of possibility is in turn articulated by Derrida in terms of what he variously calls the 'trace', the logic of the 'supplement', or 'différance'.

3.6 *The trace and différance*

The trace, the supplement, différance: none of these 'words' yields a simple definition. Indeed, given Derrida's project, we are perhaps not entitled to expect him to provide a simple or formal definition of the 'movement' of meaning that is alluded to by these terms. How, after all, could what makes meaning possible be defined as such and thereby given a meaning? That said, in *Of Grammatology* Derrida does offer the following observation concerning the trace: it is 'the absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the *différance* which opens appearance and signification . . . no concept of metaphysics can describe it' (p. 65). Discussing the trace, therefore, takes us at least to the limit of metaphysical discourse – albeit not outside it. Meaning, we can say, is founded upon this movement of différance. And it is différance which is 'the origin of presence itself' (p. 63). 'Différance' conveys an essential ambiguity and 'undecidability' that is inherent in the production of meaning.⁴⁸ Meaning is not a matter that merely concerns so-called 'literal' language. Rather, meaning is produced by a process of simultaneous differing and deferring. The substitution of an 'a' for an 'e', which transforms 'différance' (meaning to differ, in a spatial sense) into 'différance' (meaning to defer or delay, on the level of temporality – but also to be distinct) cannot be detected when spoken. It is hence a means of indicating the limitations of

prioritizing spoken language over written inscription. We can say that differance, which Derrida tells us is 'literally neither a word nor a concept',⁴⁹ pays testimony to the concern with force that is highlighted in 'Force and Signification'. Meaning involves 'movement', and this movement never comes to a final resting-place in so far as its condition of possibility is deferral, non-presence, etc.

The trace is a movement of differance that constitutes the condition of possibility of thinking. Without the trace there is no sense, no signification, no speaker, no thought as such. Yet, at the same time, the trace is none of these. Rather, it indicates a fundamental possibility of repetition (what, in the essay on Austin's speech act theory, Derrida calls 'iterability') that is inherent in the production of meaning. This is a possibility that cannot be derived from the notions of consciousness or presence, or from their purported opposites (unconsciousness or absence).⁵⁰ The trace has nothing to do with speech or the oppositional logic upon which the metaphysical account of meaning as residing in living speech rests.

The trace, in fact, is 'irreducible' (*Of Grammatology*, 70). It is neither an object of empirical experience (we cannot 'encounter' the trace as a thing-like entity), nor is it a formal *a priori* structure. As the '*origin of sense in general*', however, we can say that the word 'trace' indicates for Derrida an 'arche-phenomenon' which itself gives rise to phenomenality, i.e. to a sensible 'world' that is composed of entities. This occurs through the movement of differance. In turn, this movement is 'the formation of form. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint' (p. 63). What we are faced with is something analogous to what Derrida discusses under the name of 'force' in relation to structuralism. The trace is not 'opposed' to anything, since it is a term that does not signify a determinate concept. But it is that 'which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc., [and] belongs to the very movement of signification' (p. 70). This being the case, the trace is open to being interpreted as a kind of 'arche-writing': it is the already inscribed condition of possibility of living speech that opens up any possible relationship that thought can have with what is other than it. The trace, we might say, is what allows meaning to be articulated as structure. It allows us to speak of the human and the non-human, of the living and its other, of what is 'inside' (the self-reflexive moment in which we say 'I think') and what is 'outside' (the phenomenal world of experience, other cultures). To put the matter another way: if language involves a process of signification, that is, if language involves the putting of names to 'things', then the trace is the very process of *signification* that makes this possible. In this sense, 'signification is *a priori* written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a "sensible" and "spatial" element that is called "exterior".' The trace, therefore, indicates that meaning itself is, in a very particular sense, always already *written before it can be spoken*.

3.7 Deconstructing Rousseau's Essay on the Origins of Language

'Writing', in this sense, does not have to be literally 'inscribed', i.e. it is not necessary to think of writing as the mere putting into written form of something that has already been thought, spoken, and hence lived. Indeed, Derrida argues, although

Western metaphysics can be essentially characterized by way of its regarding writing as a merely 'parasitic' activity that rests upon the dispositions, intentions, etc. of living subjects, it has in fact always *needed* writing in order to define itself in this way. One example of this discussed in *Of Grammatology* is the theory proposed by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) in his *Essay on the Origins of Language*. In this text, and in a manner that is characteristic of much of his thinking, we find Rousseau arguing for the view that human language first arose out of the instincts and dispositions of primitive humans. For Rousseau, a cry is first always a cry of pain, and as such it is a direct expression of an authentic and natural inner feeling. According to Rousseau there was originally a 'natural' language, and it was only on the basis of this natural language that a more complex and abstract linguistic competence (including metaphorical language) was rendered possible. Speaking like Derrida, we can say that 'natural language', on Rousseau's view, is an authentic language of unmediated self-presence. Only once this was in place, along with more abstract linguistic ability, was writing finally possible. But writing itself, for Rousseau, betrays something rather sinister. For writing only intervenes in human life when the personal social bond that binds people together dissolves and is replaced by the impersonal and inauthentic relation that characterizes civil society. If we were to turn to another of Rousseau's works, the *Discourse on Inequality*,⁵¹ we find that civil society, which is characterizable in terms of the rule of law in order to protect the institution of private property, is regarded as the harbinger of an era in which the natural happiness that is associated with life enjoyed both in a 'state of nature' and in the more 'primitive', tribal forms of society that gave way to it is replaced by a mode of human existence that is both artificial and unjust. The freedom that accompanies the collective life-style of purportedly primitive peoples is, for Rousseau, undercut by the instituting of property ownership, and this gives rise to a society in which people are no longer able to enjoy their natural freedom. Law, the formal and *written* legislation that ensures the rights of property ownership, turns out not to have the function of protecting all who are subject to it, but only ensures the rights of the minority who are already the possessors of goods. Writing, therefore, is not merely parasitic upon living speech, it is also an essential and defining characteristic of a corrupt form of social organization: of Western, or Northern, civilization.

Derrida's point, however, is that Rousseau's account in fact always presupposes writing in order to get off the ground in the first place. In chapter 10 of the *Essay* Rousseau draws a distinction between languages of the South and languages of the North in a manner that reflects his distinction between primitive/natural and civilized/unnatural societies. Primitives, who are Southerners, are defined as natural and passionate people; their speech is 'lively, sonorous, accented, eloquent';⁵² Northern speech, in contrast, is one that involves 'emphatic articulation'; their language is 'dull, harsh, articulated, shrill, monotonous'. So, Derrida notes, we are presented by Rousseau with a distinction between 'accent' (South) and 'articulation' (North). Of these, the Southern propensity to accent is linked to their capacity for natural expression. The word 'accent' implies the role of the voice of the Southerner as an unmediated expression of their inner feeling. 'Articulation', in contrast, is an unnatural and artificial characteristic: it implies a knowing ability to use speech and the predominance of grammar and other artificial aspects of language are essential to

it. In turn, Northern culture is *not* to be regarded as one of natural expression, for within this culture what was once the foundation of natural expression (the voice) has been subverted by the use of writing, which institutes an artificial relation between people: living speech is replaced by dead writing. Thus, Derrida notes, 'Writing is at the North: cold, necessitous, reasoning, turned toward death' (p. 226). Articulation is a harbinger of the dominance of writing. Moreover, once underway, this 'fall' from the innocence of unmediated speech increases continually, for the more articulated language is the more rigorous and forceful (the more rational) it becomes. Writing, according to Rousseau, usurps natural language. Living speech has been invaded by dead writing, by a language that is fragmented into parts, that has become punctuated, subjected to 'rules' of grammar and presentation. But, says Derrida, the point about Rousseau's argument is that he cannot himself denigrate writing without at the same time invoking it, above all without invoking writing in such a way that it becomes essential to his conception of language. In describing the way in which natural speech is invaded by writing Rousseau *shows* us that the origin of language must be found not in speech but in writing itself. This is because language, as Rousseau defines it, would not be 'language' at all if it were not also situated in relation to writing. Rousseau wishes to persuade us of one thing, but he ends up showing us something else. Articulation, the ability to use speech, presupposes something more than simple passions, for when one is articulate one already has an ability that transcends the mere expression of immediate feeling. If one is able to 'articulate' this is because language is never simply a matter of the voice expressing a feeling; it is also already a matter of language being broken up into sounds and words, etc. In order to engage in speech one must first have the power of articulation at one's disposal. But this power is *not* to be subsumed within the characteristics that define living speech. On the contrary, Derrida argues,

Articulation is the becoming-writing of language. Rousseau, who would like to say that this becoming-writing comes upon the origin unexpectedly, takes it as his premise, and according to it describes in fact the way in which that becoming-writing encroaches upon the origin, and arises from the origin. The becoming-writing of language is the becoming-language of language. He declares what he wishes to say, that is to say that articulation and writing are a post-originary malady of language: he says or describes that which he does not wish to say: articulation and therefore the space of writing operate at the origin of language. (p. 229)

The above argument is typical of Derrida's deconstructive approach. Rousseau wishes to tell us one thing, but he shows us the contrary to be the case. The hierarchy of terms that Rousseau must resort to, which valorizes what is 'natural' and denigrates what is 'unnatural', is itself shown to be dependent upon the whole of its range. What is natural could not be defined as being 'natural' at all without what is 'unnatural'. Derrida thereby shows us that the 'inferior' term in Rousseau's discourse is *at the same time essential to it*. What is taken by Rousseau to be a mere supplement (writing) turns out to be a condition of possibility for his talking about language at all. As such, writing, too, lies at the very origin of language.

A deconstructive reading, then, shows how a hierarchy of terms turns out to depend as much upon the purportedly 'inferior' term as the valorized one. By way of

[What is called *ornamentation* (*parerga*), i.e. what is only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of the object, in augmenting the delight of taste does so only by means of its form. Thus it is with the frames of pictures or the drapery of statues, or the colonnades of palaces. But if the ornamentation does not itself enter into the composition of the beautiful form – if it is introduced like a gold frame merely to win approval for the picture by means of its charm – it is then called *finery* and takes away from the genuine beauty.]³⁴

Derrida, however, is intent on demonstrating how Kant 'imports' a specific analytic mode, 'a table . . . [or] . . . border into the analytic of aesthetic judgement' from the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁵⁵ The autonomy that ought, in principle, to define Kant's own discourse on aesthetics in the third *Critique* is itself surrounded by a frame (that of the first *Critique*) that invades it. In turn, the third *Critique's* autonomy becomes nature of knowledge but *not* of the aesthetics of taste, instead of being regarded as little more than an undesirable addition to the aesthetic object discussed by the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, reveals itself as a necessary constituent in the formal structure of the aesthetic phenomenon. What is on his own terms supposedly extrinsic to matters of taste and aesthetic evaluation (namely, logic and reason) is surreptitiously introduced by Kant in order to classify aesthetic judgements. As a result, Derrida argues, 'a logical frame is transposed and forced in to be imposed on a nonlogical structure, a structure which no longer essentially concerns a relation to the object as object of knowledge.'⁵⁶ As with Rousseau's *Essay*, then, Derrida seeks at hand are in fact essential to it. Kant's aesthetic discourse is deconstructed by showing how the formal conditions of rationality, which ought on Kant's own account to have nothing to do with the aesthetic, are in fact constitutive of it.

From the above readings of Rousseau and Kant it is clear that, for Derrida, deconstruction involves the critical placing in question of hierarchies of value. There is, one might say, an inherent *overturning* of values inherent in deconstruction – but this is so only in a limited sense. At first glance, we might be tempted to argue that deconstruction involves nothing more than the wholesale unravelling of conceptual orders as they present themselves within Western metaphysical discourse. As such, deconstruction would concern itself with nothing more than the destruction of metaphysical thought. In one particular sense, of course, deconstruction does do this, in so far as every deconstructive reading is a form of critical engagement with the dominant presuppositions of Western metaphysical discourse. In the 'Parergon' essay Kant's formalism, a feature shared by him with the structuralist enterprise, is targeted – and this, we have already seen in 'Force and Signification' is characteristic of Western philosophical discourse. But, in the same way in which Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, proposes the 'destruction' of Western metaphysics as an actualization of what is already contained within that tradition (its 'radicalization', if you like) so Derrida, too, takes a similar approach to this issue. This is a matter that will cause us to return to the question of the ethical, and in particular to the thought of Levinas. However, it may be useful here to offer some further thoughts on the nature of deconstruction as a prelude to these matters.

Deconstruction has been taken to signify many things. Most obvious amongst them and, I would argue, most obviously *mistaken*, is the view that deconstruction is no more than a kind of strategic intervention, a strategy. On such a conception, deconstruction would be a form of critical debunking of the values implicit within any theory. A deconstructive reading would, on this view, set out to criticize a dominant set of values (such as the prioritizing of speech over writing, the West over the East, or of the human over the animal, etc.) in the name of an alternative standpoint that defines itself by way of its being antithetical to these values. We might describe this as the 'This is how the world looks from here' approach. The problem with such a view, however, is that it involves both a pure instrumentalism and a form of empiricism. In other words, a deconstructive reading would simply be in place to serve the purposes of a particular perspective and would amount to little more than a mere 'tool' of empirically determined perspectives. In turn, we would end up with readings of philosophical and other problems that take a 'methodological' approach of invoking difference or the trace in order to destabilize the hierarchy of meaning within particular texts as if such terms were there simply to serve the purposes of that criticism. As such, deconstruction would have nothing whatsoever to do with ethics. At best, we would be presented with a deconstruction that is exclusively concerned with questions of power, and hence with a certain and rather narrow conception of politics.

Why, then, is such a view of deconstruction questionable? First, we could say that the reasons that one might offer for providing a deconstructive analysis could only ever be a matter of contingency. This, however, is an untenable view if we are to take seriously Derrida's claim in *Of Grammatology* and elsewhere that issues of difference, the trace, the logic of supplementarity, or of iterability, are never merely 'contingent' matters. It is worth recalling that what is called 'history', Derrida tells us, is linked essentially to the development of Western metaphysics (i.e. to the increasing power

of European culture), and there is nothing 'accidental' in this. Nor is there any simple means of escape from this metaphysical discourse. Deconstruction, in other words, does not purport to stand 'outside' metaphysics, but springs from elements inherent within the metaphysical tradition itself. One essential component of this tradition, moreover, is the kind of discourse that concerns ethics, and Derrida's view of deconstruction is linked in a fundamental way to this problem. We can see this in two important respects. First, in the context of Derrida's discussion of the thought of Levinas. Second, in relation to Derrida's comments concerning that infamous exchange with John Searle in the late 1970s, which are to be found in the 'Afterword' to the volume *Limited Inc.* (1988).⁵⁷ Let us begin with the second of these.

3.8 *Deconstruction and ethics*

The 'Afterword' to *Limited Inc.* has a subtitle that is significant: 'Towards an Ethic of Discussion'. From this we can infer that in this piece Derrida wishes to offer some observations concerning the rights and wrongs that both arise out of, and ought, to govern discussion.⁵⁸ In other words, Derrida is immediately staking a claim that there are right ways and wrong ways of conducting oneself when one engages in critical debate. Derrida's 'Afterword' is important for other reasons, though – above all, because here he offers some observations concerning the nature of deconstruction, including addressing the issue of its aims. Equally significant, in this essay Derrida also affirms his relation to the Western metaphysical tradition, albeit in a very particular way.

What, to reiterate the question, is deconstruction? Derrida tells us at least one thing: he tells us what it is *not*. Deconstruction is not, he argues, a form of relativism – it does not involve affirming the view that anything goes, that all questions concerning the nature of truth or value are pointless questions. Moreover, deconstruction is not a form of 'skepticism, empiricism, even nihilism' as some of its critics have argued (p. 137). It is not a scepticism because it does not assert the absolute impossibility of knowledge. It is not an empiricism because it does not assert the priority of (even socially mediated) 'experience' over and above all else. It is not a nihilism because it does not argue for the destruction of all ethical values. At the same time, deconstruction spurns absolutism in so far as it operates 'without claiming any absolute overview'. As such, the word 'deconstruction' does not denote a unified methodological approach to philosophical problems. It is not, in other words, a 'method' that can be applied. It is better taken as a form of critical engagement that arises from the context in which it finds itself situated. It is not enough, in other words, to simply invoke a word like 'différance' in order to perform a deconstructive analysis of a philosophical or other kind of text, for that would be converting difference to a methodological principle that is contextually autonomous. The adequacy of such principles is precisely what is in question from the Derridean standpoint. To the extent that there is no methodology of deconstruction there is therefore 'no one, single deconstruction' (p. 141). Deconstruction, we can say, involves a kind of pluralism. Because of this pluralism deconstruction is not inherently 'political', if by the term 'political' one means that it always involves the advocacy of one particular politics

over all others (for example, the contention that all political issues are issues of power and nothing else). No determinate political agenda can follow from deconstruction. The politics of any deconstructive reading depends upon the *context* in which it is articulated.

The notion of context is central to Derrida's claims concerning the nature of deconstruction. If we can talk in any manner at all about questions concerning, for instance, scientific objectivity or truth, this is because what is referred to by these words has arisen 'only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language)' (p. 136). It is within the context of such conventions that terms like 'objectivity' and 'truth' have taken on a specific meaning and value and, Derrida says, 'imposed' themselves. That they have been generated in this way 'does not in the slightest discredit them', for effectively the context in which such notions arose is a limitless one in so far as we cannot adopt any perspective that would place us outside this context. Meaning, in turn, is rooted in the incessant contextual slippage that is at play within history, and the role of deconstruction is to attempt to 'to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualisation'. Again, we may recall here the point Derrida makes in 'Force and Signification' concerning the role of force within the 'movement' of metaphor. Deconstruction is an attempt to show that the concepts at our disposal are inherently context-related, yet at the same time governed by absolute conditions that make the ultimate determination of meaning irreducible to any *particular* context. Derrida's account of his own relationship with the Western metaphysical tradition is significant in respect of this. For, he tells us, not only is there no simple means of escape from that tradition, but we should not, he argues, undervalue the importance of tradition. Indeed, traditions, Derrida tells us, should be the object of 'jealous conservation' (p. 141).

We can note, therefore, that neither metaphysics in itself, nor the values that pertain to the metaphysical tradition, are ever actually abandoned by Derridean deconstruction: 'it does not renounce (it neither can *nor ought to do so*) the "values" that are dominant in this context' (p. 137, italics added). Deconstruction does *not* abandon notions about which, from *Of Grammatology* onwards, Derrida is critical. On the contrary, it actively requires them in order to be what it is. Such a requirement, though, is not one rooted in mere necessity – it is not a 'must' in the sense of compulsion that is at stake here. In other words, the deconstructionist is not simply compelled to acknowledge notions of truth, value, etc. In addition, there is an ethical requirement that these be acknowledged. The deconstructionist *ought* to recognize the importance of the value of truth, of the value of illumination over and above obfuscation (to speak within the terminology of heliocentrism). If this is the case, then deconstruction ought, in some sense, to conserve these values even as it opens them up to criticism:

[L]et it be said in passing how surprised I have often been, how amused or discouraged, depending on my humour, by the use or abuse of the following argument: Since the deconstructionist (which is to say, isn't it, the skeptic-relativist-nihilist!) is supposed not to believe in truth, stability, or the unity of meaning, in intention or 'meaning-to-say', how can he demand of us that we read *him* with pertinence,

precision, rigor? . . . The answer is simple enough: this definition of the deconstructionist is *false* (that's right: false, not true) and feeble; it supposes a bad (that's right: bad, not good) and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine . . . [T]he value of truth (and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more strangled contexts . . . [W]ithin interpretative contexts (that is, within relations of force that are always differential – for example socio-political-institutional – but even beyond these determinations) that are relatively stable, sometimes apparently almost unshakable, it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy. (p. 146)

Derrida's writings, in so far as they are of necessity situated within the conventions that govern Western discourse, remain faithful to it. This compulsion, however, is not of itself a bad thing. The fact that Derrida's writings acknowledge this compulsion means that they embrace an ethical imperative and recognize the value of doing so. We can only make sense so long as we speak (and also write and read) with good faith, i.e. so long as we take the conventions that determine the value of truth as being valuable precisely in so far as they govern our own speech, writing and reading. Derrida may be adopting a position that seeks continually to draw our attention to the role of metaphor, of force, difference, etc. in the production of meaning. But at the same time he insists that we must acknowledge the priority of convention in determining the ethical regulation of speech and writing.

It likewise becomes clear from the 'Afterword' that Derrida conceives of the nature of his deconstructive analysis of Western metaphysics, and above all of the notions of the trace, of difference, of the *parergon*, of supplementarity, etc., as being presented within a philosophical discourse that owes a great deal to Kant's example. Deconstruction, he tells us, organizes its 'theoretical space' in a "quasi"-transcendental manner' (p. 127). The problems with which Derrida's deconstructive readings occupy themselves cannot be reduced in their significance to the context of their production. There may be nothing 'outside' the context, but the nature of context itself is enigmatic and approachable only from a perspective that does not seek to reduce the notion of context itself to something determinate, but rather acknowledges its essential undecidability. Derrida may spurn the idea of creating a 'metalangage', yet at the same time he is seeking to allude to an *a priori* structure of possibility that inevitably pervades the construction of meaning. The question of this structure of possibility is not an empirical issue, since it is not a matter that can be reduced to any particular time or place, to any given form of experience – indeed, it is not 'given' by way of any mode of unmediated experience (p. 119). Nor, however, does this structure of possibility that Derrida alludes to spring forth readily-made in the shape of a Kantian formalism composed of the pure intuitions of time and space. This should come as no surprise, since we have noted that on Derrida's view no structure is ever given in a manner that can be elucidated independently of context: there are no 'pure intuitions' just as there is no pure meaning irrespective of context. What we are faced with, rather, is an irreducible and enigmatic relation between the two: context 'determines' meaning, but the nature of context itself is never completely decidable.⁵⁹ For this reason, meaning itself is ultimately irreducible and involves an essential undecidability.

We can note from his advocacy of a quasi-transcendentalism that Derrida's relationship to the classical philosophical tradition is one that seeks to keep in play what he regards as its most important insights, for example the 'all or nothing' logic that is employed in conceptual analysis: 'not only do I find this logic strong, and, in conceptual language and analysis, *an absolute must*, it must (and this "it must" translates the faithfulness of my love for philosophy) be sustained against all empirical confusion' (p. 122). To this extent, Derrida remains a self-avowed 'classical philosopher' (p. 125, cf. also p. 130). Returning to the issue of ethics and politics, however, it is clear that ethico-political questions are, for Derrida, implied within every theoretical formulation (p. 135). This, we might say, is because all theories are constructed within a context, and all human contexts are composed of interests. To this extent we can never escape from the problem of ethics, or from the interrelation between ethics and politics. The two are linked, therefore, but at the same time the one cannot be reduced to the other, for what is 'political through and through . . . is not only political' (p. 136). Ethics is essentially linked to the conventions and practices (the ways of doing things) that go to make up any particular context, but it is not simply reducible to this dimension. Rather than being simply overturned by it, the notion of what we can call here 'right understanding' (which allows Derrida to draw the distinction between false, not true, and bad, not good, readings of his own writings) is precisely what is at stake within any deconstructive reading. Such right understanding is constantly threatened by the very tension between meaning and context that Derrida seeks to elucidate in much of his work. Thus, good faith, lucidity, rigour, etc., are all characterizable as 'positive values'. But such values are, by their very nature 'contextual, essentially limited, unstable, and endangered' (p. 147). It is for this reason that 'the essential and irreducible possibility of *mis*-understanding or of "*infelicity*" must be taken into account in the description of those values said to be positive.' Deconstruction, we can infer, pays attention to the essential instability and undecidability that is an ever present (and hence an *a priori*) condition of all meaning. Context is both a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of meaning, and it is the very instability of context, its irreducible unpredictability in so far as there is no *one* context, that bestows upon meaning the particular and inherent instability that is peculiar to it. There is, in other words, an inherent *tension* within the notion of context itself: it both yields meaning, and is a condition of its reiteration and its transformation. This movement, this instability and undecidability is what Derrida tries to capture when he writes of the trace, the supplement, difference, or iterability.

In turn, if we follow Derrida's argument one stage further, it is clear that there is within the notion of contextual undecidability itself a kind of 'unconditionality' that remains independent of any particular context (p. 152). The very word 'unconditionality' is significant here, for 'I use [it] not by accident to recall the character of the categorical imperative in its Kantian form.' Kant's categorical imperative, to recall, states that one ought to do the right thing irrespective of the particular context in which one is situated. It states that when faced with a moral dilemma one ought to act in such a way that it could consistently be willed to become a universal law (i.e. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'). In formulating this, Kant draws the distinction between a purely instrumental

conception of action ('If you want such and such a thing, then do such and such an action') and an ethical one. The injunction not to kill, for instance, is a good example of how the categorical imperative works: not killing is ethical requirement that ought to be acknowledged independently of what one may want.⁶⁰ Derrida's conception of deconstruction involves affirming this kind of unconditionality, i.e. it affirms an ethical mode of thought as being implicit to the nature of deconstruction. Unconditional affirmation, in this sense is something that arises independently of any particular context and 'from an injunction, a law, a responsibility, that transcends this or that determination of a given context' (p. 152). Such unconditionality, Derrida argues, appears as soon as any context is opened up, and it must be articulated within that context in terms of the strategic, political or ethical issues that arise within it. The question of unconditionality thus concerns the limit of any particular context and also 'defines the injunction that prescribes deconstructing' (p. 153). In other words, the unconditionality that transcends contextual specificity is a kind of 'ought': it is an ethical imperative, and this imperative is what drives deconstruction to engage in critique.⁶¹ What we have here, then, is a Derridean conception of the ethical. And it is one that allows him to take a stand – to state unconditionally, for example, that apartheid is wrong (p. 152), or that 'good faith', 'rigour', etc., *ought* to be a condition of intellectual engagement and debate. It is because such things are endangered, unstable, etc., that Derrida values them. Also, it is because of this that the project of a work like *Of Grammatology* can be summarized as setting out to show that the presupposition that meaning is already secured by intentionality and hence the presence of the speaker is a misguided one: 'To make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words "proximity", "immediacy", "presence" . . . is my final intention in this book' (*Of Grammatology*, 70). In so far as deconstruction places in question key philosophical presuppositions concerning the fixing of meaning it performs an inherently ethical role.

3.9 *Derrida contra Levinas*

What, then, of Levinas in relation to this? We can begin by noting that Levinas is the subject of a long piece by Derrida included in *Writing and Difference*, 'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas'.⁶² In this essay Derrida both expresses an admiration for Levinas and at the same time engages in a criticism of his conception of ethics as transcendence. What is it, though, that divides Derrida from Levinas? This question can be approached in relation to *Of Grammatology*, where Levinas's work is alluded to in the context of Derrida's conception of the trace and, above all, terms of the response of these two thinkers to the work of Heidegger. What is at stake in the notion of the trace is, Derrida claims, something that is linked to Levinas's 'critique of ontology' (*Of Grammatology*, 70). But it is linked to Levinas's critique in a manner that is 'reconciled' to a Heideggerian intention'. If Derrida seeks by way of the trace to make enigmatic notions that, he feels, have all too often been accepted within the metaphysical tradition as if they were unproblematic (i.e. presence, immediacy, etc.) he nevertheless believes that this is only possible if it is done in a manner that remains faithful to the metaphysical

tradition in some important ways. Like Heidegger, Derrida aims, in effect, to mobilize this tradition against itself, to undermine the Western tradition from within and thereby to radicalize it. Levinas, in contrast, seeks to question the entire metaphysical tradition with a view to overcoming it by leaving it behind him. Levinas takes Heidegger's attack on metaphysics one step further, arguing that constructing a fundamental ontology on the basis of entities is the first and defining mistake of the European tradition, and that the conceptual and logical relations that inhere within such a view must be exposed in their insufficiency. The question of the difference between Levinas and Derrida thus resolves itself into the question of the relation between the 'outside' and 'inside' of the Western tradition – whether it has an 'outside' at all. For Derrida, the outside 'is' the inside (*Of Grammatology*, 44ff). Therefore, there is no question of breaking free of the inside, for there is nowhere else to go, no radically exterior 'place' that is available to thought.

Derrida's essay 'Violence and Metaphysics' develops this point, and it does so right from the outset. So, Derrida begins the essay by ruminating on the fate of philosophy – on the heritage of the philosophical tradition as it is inherited from Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, all of whom dwell, in one way or another, on the end of philosophy. The word 'end' as it is used here has two senses: on the one hand it concerns the purposes of philosophizing, on the other it concerns the demise of philosophy.⁶³ A number of issues arise from this: What is the relation between philosophy and history? What is the future of philosophy? Will philosophy die? Such questions, Derrida says, are ones that, although not necessarily 'philosophical questions' in the usual sense, are 'the only questions today capable of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers' ('Violence and Metaphysics', 79). As such, philosophy can be defined as 'the community of the question' concerning the very possibility of philosophizing (p. 80). Once again, then, we can note the Kantian aspect of Derrida's approach: philosophy is characterized in terms of its aiming to think its own condition of possibility, its own *a priori*. If we were to object that questions of this sort are nonsensical, that in asking philosophy to account for itself in this way we are asking for what cannot be accounted for, Derrida has an answer: 'The impossible . . . has occurred: there is a history of the question' (p. 80). It is philosophy's ability to ask the question of its own possibility that makes it what it is. And what philosophy is, in this regard, is a mode of thought that is fundamentally bound by an ethic, by an 'ought': philosophy *ought* to address this issue about itself. This may sound rather grand, but one in fact needs to be modest about the matter: 'A community of the question about the possibility of the question. This is very little – almost nothing – but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and *duty* of decision. An unbreachable *responsibility*' (p. 80, italics added). 'Duty' and 'responsibility' are what characterize philosophy today. Philosophy, for Derrida, takes its place in the world first and foremost as an ethical mode of thought: it concerns the relationship between thinkers (philosophers) and the limits of what they can think. Their duty is to pay attention to these limits. Paying attention to these limits, refusing to think in terms of an already secure future for philosophical thought, is the *duty* of philosophy itself and of those who practice it. This is the end of philosophy in the two senses already mentioned.

The central point about such an ethics is that it is always mediated by the metaphysical tradition. If philosophy has an ethical duty to ponder its own limits this is because of a movement that is essentially intrinsic to it – even if philosophers have not always recognized this fact. According to Derrida, Levinas is a thinker who both alludes to this limit and at the same time ignores the condition of his being able to allude to it. In so far as Levinas's 'great book, *Totality and Infinity*' ('Violence and Metaphysics', 84) points to the essential problem of philosophical discourse, which is its entrapment within the Greek ontological tradition, his is a mode of thought that 'can make us tremble . . . this thought . . . no longer seeks to be a thought of Being and phenomenality . . . this thought summons us to a dislocation of the Greek logos [of Greek philosophy], to a dislocation of our identity, and perhaps of identity in general' (p. 82). For Derrida, then, Levinas propels us into thinking the limits of Western metaphysical and ontological discourse. If Heidegger identifies European thought as a tradition that has its roots in Ancient Greek ontology and argues for the internal transformation of this tradition, Levinas summons us to question the very presuppositions of this tradition. Levinas must, it follows, oppose this tradition with something, and it is what Levinas opposes to the Western tradition that Derrida finds questionable. Levinas's is 'a thought which . . . by remaining faithful to the immediate, but buried nudity of experience itself, seeks to liberate itself from the Greek domination of the Same and the One'. We need not rehearse Levinas's arguments in detail again to grasp Derrida's point: Levinas seeks to liberate thought from the Greek metaphysical tradition, from the tradition which thinks of experience in terms of the relation between the self and objects in its world. Yet, Derrida notes, Levinas nevertheless seeks to define his own thought as metaphysics, which is 'a Greek notion': the ethical relationship in general is asserted as being self-supporting, as requiring no further foundation (p. 83). This being so, is it not the case, Derrida asks, that Levinas's thought can be questioned in a number of ways? Let us have a look at these ways, taking them in reverse order so to speak, by starting with the last of Derrida's observations: that the term 'metaphysics' is itself always already a Greek one.

Levinas seeks to articulate a pure form of exteriority in the shape of the relation between the Same and the Other:

Ethics, in Levinas's sense, is an Ethics without law and without concept, which maintains its nonviolent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws. This is not an objection: let us not forget that Levinas does not seek to propose laws or moral rules . . . but rather the essence of the ethical relation in general . . . But why does Levinas return to categories he seemed to have rejected previously in attempting this very difficult passage beyond the debate . . . ?' (p. 111)

Levinas's thought does not, it follows, offer a *theory* of ethics: it is not a theory about the nature of right and wrong. Rather, it is 'an Ethics of Ethics'. How though would any particular, practical morality arise from this? Only, perhaps, by this Ethics of Ethics 'negating and forgetting itself'. If Levinas is driven to articulate this meta-ethics, however, then he ends up doing so in terms that are essentially Greek: by invoking the notions of 'metaphysics' and 'transcendence'. For Derrida, what can be

gleaned from this is the fact that *Levinas's thought is driven by a peculiar necessity, a necessity imposed upon it by the very ontological tradition he casts 'does it [Greek philosophy] hide . . . some indestructible and unforeseeable rest of the Greek logos? Some unlimited power of envelopment, by which he attempts to repel it would always already be overtaken?' (pp. 111–12). What might ask, is the 'power of envelopment' that Derrida speaks of here, a power entraps all who seek to escape it? It is, in fact, something that is linked to none than the problem of metaphor, in which we have already seen Derrida has interest. The problem of metaphor here is the problem of the power of the *metaphor* of Western philosophical discourse within which, Derrida argues, even as he to overcome it, Levinas remains trapped. If, then, the Other for Levinas is understood as that which is radically *exterior*, that which transcends the same a rule of self-identity, he must still, *in the act of articulating this* (in his very *language*) effectively acknowledge the necessity and envelopment of the tradition he is tioning. What must be acknowledged is that 'it is necessary [for Levinas] to infinity's *excess* over totality in the language of totality; that it is necessary [for to state the other in the language of the Same' (p. 112). Thus, Derrida argues seeking to *think* exteriority in the form of the Other Levinas must remain s within the metaphorical workings that govern the philosophical language of W Greek discourse, for the very notion of an 'Inside–Outside structure' is gener that tradition, as is the 'spatial metaphor' that this structure implies.*

If Levinas aims at finding a non-violent means of expressing the transe of the ethical, for Derrida such violence *has already occurred*, for it is inters within the very language that Levinas must resort to in order to argue his Likewise, Levinas's emphasis on the face of the Other succumbs, Derrida arg this same point. If the face of the Other does not reside somewhere that is ir outside the same, then 'The entire Metaphysics of the Face would collapse' (Here, too, there is an inherent violence functioning as a condition of the fac Other being opened up to the self (the same). In so far as the heliocentric me ical tradition throws light upon the world by way of its unconscious employ the metaphors of light and dark, this necessarily involves a kind of on violence being enacted in relation to the Other in order for it to announce it turn, if Levinas would illuminate the Other for us, if he would *show* the et this way, then this, too, involves opposing heliocentrism (light) with light: movement of metaphysical transcendence is history, it is still violent for . . . is violence. Metaphysics is *economy*: violence against violence, light again philosophy (in general)' (p. 117). Here we can see a reassertion of the Derrida that light itself (the light of philosophical discourse) embodies an ethics that not be ignored, and cannot be escaped from so easily. The ethical, it follow Derrida located not '*outside*' philosophy (whatever kind of non-place that m but within the tradition that is philosophy.

Derrida's other main point against Levinas is that the metaphysics of embodies an empiricism. This is because the experience of the 'nudity of (to recall Levinas's phrase) is, Derrida argues, presented by Levinas as an un mode of experience (pp. 82–3). If the Western metaphysical tradition is b by a metaphysics of 'outside' and 'inside', it is also bounded by the ontol

implies. The logic of this ontological distinction invades even the discourse of empiricism: 'As Hegel says somewhere, empiricism always forgets, at very least, that it employs the words to be. Empiricism is thinking *by* metaphor without thinking the metaphor *as such*' (p. 139). If we apply this point to Levinas, then we would say that he employs a metaphysical language haunted by metaphor but refuses to acknowledge the metaphoricality inherent within that language itself. In this sense, for Derrida, Levinas presupposes the very preconception of Being that he castigates Heidegger for cleaving to in order to ground the project of fundamental ontology. Levinas's articulation of 'Ethico-metaphysical transcendence therefore presupposes ontological transcendence' (p. 141). What, then, has Levinas achieved with regard to the empiricism of which Derrida speaks? According to Derrida, he has effectively radicalized 'the aim which has more or less secretly animated all philosophical gestures which have been called *empiricism* in the history of philosophy. He does so with an audacity, a profundity, and a resoluteness never before attained. By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverts it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics' (p. 151). Empiricism, Derrida notes, has been designated as a non-philosophy since Plato, but Levinas's rethinking of it effectively 'contests the resolution and coherence of the logos (philosophy) at its root, instead of letting itself be questioned by the logos' (p. 152). To, put the matter rather differently, in Levinas 'experience' reasserts its right to challenge the philosopheme of identity that underpins classical epistemology and ontology.

But this achievement, Derrida claims, does not amount to an escape from the Greek ontological heritage. All thinking, as we have already noted, is inexorably trapped within this heritage: 'It was a Greek who once said "If one has to philosophize, one has to philosophize; if one does not have to philosophize, one still has to philosophize (to say it and to think it). One always has to philosophize"' (p. 152). We can note, then, that Derrida's criticism of Levinas is not an unreserved one, for it is full of a kind of admiration. Yet, Levinas's promulgation of the ethical as the transcendence of the same by the Other is, for Derrida, something that remains questionable. This should come as no surprise, since philosophy, on a Derridean conception of it, gains its dignity from the recognition that it is bound, by its own internal logic, to a duty to ask about the condition of its own possibility. Deconstruction itself pays testimony to this duty, and it is a duty that Levinas's thought questions in the most radical manner.

We need not end here. For Levinas has a response to these objections. This response is to be found in the essay 'God and Philosophy'.⁶⁵ Levinas, I think, needs to be given his due, so let us conclude this discussion by briefly noting some of his thoughts on the matter. That Levinas's essay is a reply to Derrida is evident from the opening sentence: '"Not to philosophize is still to philosophize"'. The philosophical discourse of the West claims the amplitude of an all-encompassing structure or of an ultimate comprehension. It compels every other discourse to justify itself before philosophy' (p. 167). Levinas, of course, will dispute this Derridean point (the point with which 'Violence and Metaphysics' concluded). First, Levinas argues, if it is the case that philosophical discourse is as all encompassing as Derrida implies, then it should be able to 'include God, of whom the Bible speaks – if this God does have a meaning'. We should recall here that for Levinas God signifies 'a putting of

the Infinite into thought' (p. 174) in such a way that it transcends the identity the 'I think'. In so far as it does this, thought of God challenges the ontological thematization characteristic of Western philosophical thought. Equally, in so far as God is a transcending of the same, he also transcends the philosophy of identity that characterizes the ontology of Western philosophical discourse. However, Levinas argues, philosophy, if it is to discuss God, will necessarily recuperate him to the notion of Being 'as an *entity* par excellence' (p. 168). In other words, the transcendence that is thought in the form of God is destroyed by conceptualizing the divine as an entity. Thinking about God, the God of the Bible, is one mode of thought that philosophy must master by recuperating it to itself – the metaphysical ontology of Being. Equally, from a philosophical standpoint one could also dismiss the God of the Bible as nonsensical: one could say that such a God cannot be thought at all in a meaningful way. However, the point of both such approaches to the question of divine is that philosophy, in staking its claim to master another kind of discourse, reveals itself to be an imperialism of meaning. Philosophy, to put the matter simply, thereby presupposes that all meaning is quantifiable in philosophical terms. 'The problem thus posed . . . is whether the meaning that is equivalent to the essence of being, that is, the meaning which is meaning in philosophy, is not already a restitution of meaning.' In other words, meaning, in Levinas's view, is *not* exclusively philosophical. The encounter of the Same with the transcendence of the Other is strictly reducible to the philosopheme of meaning that Derrida presupposes it to. Moreover, this encounter may be an 'empirical event', but this does not mean that we know what the 'empirical' means in this case: 'the empirical event of obligation another is something we cannot remain indifferent to' but at the same time 'it is impossible to fix limits or measure the extreme urgency of this responsibility' (p. 174). The relation of transcendence has a meaning that is not itself quantifiable in philosophical terms. This is because this kind of responsibility does not derive from a pre-given structure or metaphysics, as Derrida claims. To say that it does would be to say that a pre-given structure of meaning (the said) is always present when one speaks to others (the saying): 'In addressing the Other in language one *gives* them' (p. 183). But, Levinas argues, 'saying' has to be differentiated from 'the said'. The said may be conceptual, it may fix identities, etc. But saying does not of itself so, nor can it be shown that it does in an *a priori* fashion, as Derrida's approach implies: 'Saying opens me to the other before saying what is said, before the utterance in this sincerity forms a screen between me and the other.' 'Saying', in this sense, is never something that can be decided upon in advance in the way in which the said can be. In so far as language occurs within the domain of saying it 'loses' superfluous and strange function of doubling up thought and being'. 'Saying', then, does not operate according to a pre-established relation between speakers that is already conceived of as *entities*, that are already thought of as thing-like. 'Saying' already pays testimony to a responsibility that binds speakers together in a mutual relation that *precedes* what is said.

How does saying, then, relate to experience – to the kind of 'empiricism' Derrida talks about in relation to Levinas? Saying, to be sure, signifies, but it is a way of signifying prior to all experience . . . it does not testify to a prior experience [of the face of the Other], but to the Infinite which is not accessible to the uni-

of things-in-themselves. Again, however, Derrida appears here to be on the verge of propounding a notion of mediation that falls within the categories of classical semiology that he wishes especially to resist. If undecidability (the movement or play of difference) is ultimately determined by the limits of contextual applicability,⁷⁶ it is itself mediated by contextual forces as the condition of its possibility. Thus, identity becomes the precondition of non-identity's being postulated at all. Since, however, Derrida does not feel compelled to work this problem through in terms of, for example, the dialectical interplay between identity and non-identity, the empirical and transcendental polarities that underpin difference return to haunt it, and so render it an abstract and unmediated idealism.

This is not to underestimate Derrida's contribution to a critique of transcendental modes of analysis – nor his insight into the problem of metaphor in philosophical language. Certainly, a movement away from concepts of origination in order to give a turn to non-identity is not, I think, to be gainsaid. Much of what is interesting and valuable in the thought of Nietzsche, the Frankfurt School, or Levinas is due to the fact that they attempt something similar. But such a turn is only a viable proposition if one is prepared to take history itself not as something that is 'opened' by difference, but as an open-ended mode of concrete experience that is not determined in advance by the categories of the Western tradition. Like Heidegger and Levinas, Derrida seeks to think the limits of this tradition, and the ethics of deconstruction springs from this engagement. But it is not clear that the kind of ethical commitment that Derrida derives from philosophy's self-reflection upon its own conditions of possibility can fulfil the requirements he makes of it. As Levinas argues, philosophical meaning is not the *only* kind of meaning.

4 Anti-humanism and Ethics

Whatever the differences that separate Levinas from Derrida it is clear that both thinkers offer us reflections on the nature of ethics that engage with the problem outlined by Heidegger's reaction to Sartrean existentialism in the 'Letter on Humanism'. If the development of epistemology from Descartes to the Frankfurt School marks a move away from notions of 'immediate experience' and a de-contextualized conception of subjectivity in favour of a conception of knowledge that stresses its socially mediated aspect, so too the accounts of the ethical that Levinas and Derrida present spun the purportedly primary role of subjectivity in such matters. If Levinas embraces an empiricism, as Derrida points out, it is an essential aspect of this empiricism that it articulates the nature of the ethical not in terms of the immediate self-awareness of the subjective ego, but by way of an encounter with what is Other as a mode of transcendence. So, too, Derrida offers us reflections on the nature of ethics that devolve from the role that writing (in its extended sense), metaphors, contextuality, and the philosophical tradition play in determining the nature of the ethical relation. In this regard, Levinas and Derrida are thinkers who represent a move further away from the Cartesian tradition of epistemology that was outlined in chapter 1, above. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Levinas or Derrida, an

important point emerges from our encounter with ~~these~~ philosophical questions – by no means always only 'philosophical' in nature. Philosophical questions – also concerning problems of ontology or matters of language and metaphor – also connotations that are necessarily cultural, ethical, and political. Whatever their differences with regard to Heidegger, or indeed with one another, Levinas and Derrida share with Heidegger a common strand of anti-humanism that embraces a way from the subject as the benchmark standard for enquiry into philosophical problems. Of course, of the thinkers we have discussed it is not only Heidegger stands as the initiator of this move, but also in important respects Hegel and Nietzsche. Thus, the Hegelian dialectical analysis of history in terms of the development of Spirit effectively devolves priority away from the subject and into an unfolding dialectic of Spirit that grounds notions of subjectivity. Equally, Nietzsche who is by no means an Hegelian but who nevertheless advocates a certain 'Hegelianism' with regard to questions about the nature of reality (i.e. an attitude that stands with regard to questions about the nature of reality constituted by his becoming over being), also regards the subject as something constituted by his conditions and as an untenable foundation upon which to base an account of nature of knowledge. Whereas Levinas and Derrida in their respective ways in discussion about the nature of ethics from an anti-humanist perspective, Heidegger work remains significantly quiet about this matter. With the advantage of his hindsight we might be tempted to say that there is good reason for this. Heidegger, as we have already briefly mentioned at the end of chapter 3, is a thinker whose own personal history is compromised by an entanglement within the and political morass of Nazism. What, though, of the political ramifications of humanism? This is one question that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Varieties of this approach are most famously associated with thinkers like Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73).
- 2 In the twentieth century a number of variants on the basic utilitarian methodology have been developed as a way out of such a problem. I do not propose to discuss these here, however.
- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. H. J. Paton (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972), p. 67.
- 4 Plato, *Theaetetus*, tr. M. J. Levent, revised Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis: Hackett, 152 a).
- 5 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, tr. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1980). All further references are given in the text with page number.
- 6 It should be added that Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), tr. Hazel E. Franke (London: Routledge, 1996), suggests a rather more antagonistic relationship between individuals than is implied here (in part derived from Sartre's reading of the slave dialectic discussed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). This is coupled with an account of subjectivity that concentrates on the role that 'nothingness' plays in the constitution. It is an account that has a somewhat Kantian aspect, in that Sartre holds that human freedom is constituted by the negativity of 'nothingness': 'what determines me is like a hollow in the middle of what I shall call my empirical plenitude' (

However, in this work, too, Sartre embraces an approach that cleaves to a humanistic philosophy of consciousness, in that he holds that human beings make themselves what they are through the activity of living.

Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Central to Sartre's analysis is an account of the 'pre-reflective cogito'. He is critical of Descartes's argument that the 'I think' typifies the consciousness of thought. For Sartre, the claim 'I think, therefore I am' rests upon a more fundamental state of consciousness which exists prior to the act of reflection upon it, since 'Strictly speaking, no fact of consciousness is this consciousness' (p. 100). In this sense, the 'I' of the 'I think' is always transcended by an impersonal pre-reflective consciousness that overflows it. It is in this sense that the notion of consciousness forms the fundamental basis for Sartre's articulation of the nature of human existence.

Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 217–65. All further references are given in the text with page number.

Another example of the contrast between Heidegger and Sartre is furnished by the following passage from Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: 'A geological plication, a storm do not destroy – or at least they do not destroy *directly*; they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings. There is no less after the storm than before. There is *something else* . . . there must be a witness who can retain the past in some manner and compare it to the present in the form of *no longer* . . . In order for destruction to exist, there must be first a relation of man to being . . . It is necessary to recognize that destruction is an essentially human thing and that it is man who destroys his cities through the agencies of earthquakes or directly, who destroys his ships through the agencies of cyclones or directly' (p. 9). What Sartre means is that only humans are able to recognize cities, ships, etc., as things that can continue to exist or be destroyed. In this sense, it is *we* who 'destroy' them, not the world of empirical events.

Being and Time, p. 255. See chapter 3, section 1.15.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, tr. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 37.

What disappoints Levinas about the later Heidegger's work is 'the disappearance in it of phenomenology properly speaking' (Ibid., p. 42).

Levinas's discussion of the other covers both the personal and impersonal connotations of the word. Thus, following Alphonso Lingis's translation of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas talks of the 'you', the 'Other' ('*autrui*') and the 'other' ('*autre*').

Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). All references are given in the text with page number.

Levinas thus transposes Heidegger's analysis of Being as transcending all notions of Being on to the self-other relation.

One should note that the question of Levinas and gender has been raised by some of his readers. Amongst them, Luce Irigaray has argued that Levinas views woman as nothing more than as a negative image of man rather than as being truly Other. Jacques Derrida has also developed a similar line of argument. For discussion of this issue see Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 140. See also, Tina Chanter, 'Reading Hegel as a Mediating Master: Lacan and Levinas', *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998). See also essays by Derrida, Irigaray and others in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (London: Athlone Press, 1991). For a brief discussion of Irigaray see chapter 5, below.

19 *Ipse*: Latin for 'self'.

21 What Levinas refers to in *Ethics and Infinity* as 'a rupture of being' (p. 87).

22 Ibid., pp. 100–1.

23 Emmanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Séan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 174.

24 A contrast could therefore be made between the Levinasian understanding of and the reading of the Hebraic semiotic offered by Deleuze and Guattari (discuss chapter 3).

25 'God and Philosophy', *The Levinas Reader*, p. 179.
26 See J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (1955) (Oxford: Oxford University

his theories in the 1950s, and his ideas have been taken up and developed by a lot of people working in different disciplines (for example, philosophers, linguists, literary theorists, and psychologists). The main thing to grasp concerning speech act theory is that Austin holds that we can formulate distinctions between different kinds of utterances according to the different functions they perform. Hence, he argues that the act of uttering words, although a complex matter, is susceptible to being analysed in terms of the functions of particular types of word. Austin then provides an analysis of the functions of everyday language use, and argues that the most fitting language analysis concentrates on everyday language use, and argues that the most fitting language analysis is that which is used in *as direct and literal a manner as possible*. By way of illustrating the limitations of a positivistic account of meaning, we have already discussed positivism in the context of Adorno and Horkheimer's thought, so all we need to do to recall that such a theory argues for the view that all meaningful sentences or propositions are ultimately to be understood as descriptions of states of affairs (what is called 'constative utterances'). This being the case, positivism holds, it follows that sentences are either true or false. The point for Austin is that this is a *reductive* account of meaning. It is a reductive account because some linguistic expressions convey meanings that are neither true nor false but are nevertheless meaningful. Such expressions Austin calls 'performative utterances'. Performatives are the kinds of utterance people use when they do things like make promises, issue warnings, declare a ship etc. (e.g. 'I promise I'll give you my ticket for the game', 'Look out!', 'I name this ship HMS *Pinfold*'). Performatives, it follows, do not pertain to truth conditions in the same way as constatives. Performatives, it follows, do not pertain to truth conditions in the same way as constatives, for example, is neither true nor false: it is either kept or broken. Performatives, it follows, are conventional, in other words they are either appropriate or inappropriate.

Austin, though, does not rest content with the constative/performative distinction outlined above. Rather, he then blurs the distinction by seeking to demonstrate that constatives can have a performative status, and *vice versa*. On this view, *all* utterances are susceptible to being defined as speech acts, since any utterance that makes a commitment concerning a matter of fact can be recast in the form 'I hereby assert that...'. In other words, all propositions can be viewed as speech acts. Searle, in his own turn, has sought to develop Austin's work by articulating a model that stipulates that speech is specific to different kinds of speech act. Thus, for Searle, a promise can be characterized as of necessity involving some future action. In addition, a promise must concern something that the person who is promising would not simply do; it must not make a promise, and must also account for the intentions of the one making the promise. (See John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)).

- 27 For a brief and perceptive discussion of Derrida and Searle see Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana, 1987), pp. 177ff.
- 28 By way of example, Nietzsche is without doubt a 'literary' philosopher – and was hardly considered a philosopher at all in some quarters in good measure because of this (see P. Sedgwick, 'Nietzsche as Literature/Nietzsche as German Literature', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 13, Spring 1997, pp. 53–71). Likewise, although I have chosen not to discuss his work in this volume, the nineteenth-century Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) might be cited as another example of a 'literary philosopher'. Thus, Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, edited by the pseudonymous 'Victor Eremita', includes the diary of 'Johannes Climacus', the ruminations of a man intent on seducing a young woman through the exploitation of social conventions. The diary itself is, we are told, a transcription of the original made by one 'A', a friend of Johannes. What the reader is thereby presented with is a profusion of authorial layers whereby the reader is continually distanced from the purportedly original author of the text. Kierkegaard's philosophy, which ultimately aims at persuading the reader of virtues of an anti-institutional Christian faith, is thereby presented in the most 'literary' of fashions (see *Either/Or*, tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987)). For a discussion of this text see Dennis A. Foster, *Confession and Complicity in Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 29 It should be noted that 'critical theory' in this sense is not to be confused with the critical theory developed by members of the Frankfurt School (discussed in chapter 2, above).
- 30 For an introduction to structuralist critical analysis see T. Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977).
- 31 For a discussion of Althusser see chapter 5.
- 32 For instance, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault, both of whose work is discussed in chapter 5, below.
- 33 Poststructuralism is a movement that covers fields as diverse as cultural theory, literary criticism, political theory, and sociology. Poststructuralism emerged from a reaction against perceived weaknesses in structuralist theory – particularly the claims to 'scientific' status that structuralists made for their theories. This rejection of scientific methodology is paradigmatic, since poststructuralists argue that it is not possible for any theory to claim objective status. In other words, no theory can claim the right to being regarded as a 'master narrative' or 'metanarrative' that exists independently of the context in which it is situated. In place of one single master narrative (such as is offered by the Marxist account of socio-historical development) the poststructuralist advocates a pluralism on all fronts, whether 'methodological', or in matters of ethics, politics, etc. Some aspects of this are evident in Derrida's work, although his maintaining of a modified form of transcendentalism does not fit in well with the views generally associated with poststructuralism. Of recent thinkers, some of the writings of French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard might be called poststructuralist – although his name is more usually associated with the term 'postmodernism' (see the discussion of him in chapter 5). For a detailed discussion of poststructuralism see Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism* (London: Methuen, 1987), or Robert Young, *Unfolding the Text: a post-structuralist reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).
- 34 Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference* (1967), tr. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). All further references are given in the text with page number.
- 35 *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) was Nietzsche's first book. In this work Nietzsche offers what at the time was regarded as a shockingly original interpretation of the significance of Greek culture, and principally the Greek tragic form of art, as the sublimated expression of the inherent violence of Greek cultural life. Nietzsche introduces the aesthetic categories of the 'Apollinian' (or 'Apollonian', depending upon your preferred spelling – the Nietzsche himself uses the term 'Apollinisch') and the 'Dionysian' as fundamental to a reading of the significance of Greek tragedy. The Apollinian represents a form imposed limitation placed on artistic expression and is, in Walter Kaufmann's words, 'the form-giving force, which reached its consummation in Greek culture' (Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 128). In contrast, the Dionysian represents violent and chaotic force becoming. Nietzsche argues that these violent forces were sublimated through Apollinian element to engender the production of the Ancient Greek tragic form. Contrary to some interpretations that have been offered of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche does not in fact privilege the Dionysian over the Apollinian. The two are locked in a reciprocal relationship: the form-giving power of the Apollinian is only rendered possible by virtue of the chaotic force of Dionysian becoming, but the latter in its turn is only rendered presentable by way of the Apollinian process of 'structuralization'. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Wagner's music is invoked as a contemporary expression of aesthetic synthesis, and thereby represents a possible avenue for the rejuvenation of contemporary German culture, and with it the possibility of a cultural achievement to that attained by the Greeks. Nietzsche was, however, to become disenchanted with Wagner within a few years – the text of *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878) marks the beginning of this.
- 36 See, for example, Derrida's essay 'White Mythology', in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972) (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), pp. 209–71.
- 37 Derrida, 'White Mythology', pp. 232–3.
- 38 In his analysis of Aristotle, Derrida goes on to argue that Aristotelian philosophy of language is permeated by the metaphors that characterize heliocentrism (see 'White Mythology', pp. 248 ff.).
- 39 'White Mythology', p. 270.
- 40 Ibid., p. 209.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid., p. 213.
- 43 Ibid., p. 264.
- 44 See 'White Mythology', pp. 266–7 for the discussion of Descartes. The problem of cultures is alluded to by Derrida in the context of texts like Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language*: 'And "the genius of the Oriental languages" is to be "vital figurative"' ('White Mythology', p. 269).
- 45 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). All further references are given in the text with number.
- 46 See Plato, *Gorgias*, tr. Donald J. Zayl (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).
- 47 Thus, Heidegger regards Being as a determining presence that constitutes the horizon and hence meaning, of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. See chapter 3.
- 48 See Derrida's essay 'Difference', in *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 3–27.
- 49 Ibid., p. 3.
- 50 See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signification*, tr. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 88.
- 51 See, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, tr. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).
- 52 Passages from the *Essay on the Origins of Language* are all quoted from *Of Grammatology*, p. 225.

- 53 Jacques Derrida, 'Paregon', in *The Truth in Painting*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 17–147, p. 57.
- 54 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, tr. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 68.
- 55 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 69.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988). All further references are given in the text with page number.
- 58 Since *Limited Inc.* contains the essay on Austin mentioned at the beginning of our discussion of Derrida ('Signature, Event, Context'), a synopsis of John Searle's reply, and Derrida's notorious riposte to that piece, we can note that the ethics of discussion in question concerns not least the rights and wrongs of academic exchange.
- 59 How, after all, could it be? For, in order for this to be the case one would need to have a perspective that transcends all notions of context in order to decide upon the nature of contextuality in an exhaustive manner, i.e. to attribute the word 'context' a specific and thus determinate sense. Derrida's point is that contexts are always, by their very nature, undecidable because of this.
- 60 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Lewis White Beck (New York: Garland, 1976).
- 61 Derrida notes in this connection that he has usually rejected putting matters in this way (i.e. resorting to the language of the categorical imperative) because such a form of presentation is intrinsically linked to the key philosophical presuppositions that his writings set out to deconstruct.
- 62 See *Writing and Difference*, pp. 79–153. All further references are given in the text with page number.
- 63 Thus, we can note, Hegel thought of philosophy as something that would cease to be necessary when the stage of Absolute Spirit is arrived at; Nietzsche dwells frequently on the 'prejudices of philosophers', arguing that the goal of the classical tradition, in the shape of platonism, must be abandoned. Likewise, for Marx, the end of philosophy is to change the world, not merely to describe it, and in changing it successfully philosophy must pass away. Finally, the later Heidegger, we have already seen, thinks of 'genuine thought' about Being as something that must be bought at the cost of ceasing to think in terms of the constituent disciplines that make up philosophy in its academic guise (recall that, for Heidegger, the Greeks did not call genuine thinking 'philosophy').
- 64 See also Derrida's discussion of Levi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology* for another version of this argument.
- 65 Immanuel Levinas, 'God and Philosophy' (1978), in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 166–89. All further references are given in the text with page number.
- 66 I.e. the transcendental unity of the self that must, according to Kant, serve as the formal precondition of the possibility of experience (see chapter 1).
- 67 See Peter Dews, 'Nietzsche and the Critique of *Ursprungsphilosophie*', in *Exceedingly Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 68 See, for example, the opening sections to *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968).
- 69 *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 20.
- 70 Ibid., p. 26.
- 71 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1989), B3.
- 72 Jacques Derrida in discussion with Raoul Mortley (1991), p. 99.
- 73 Ibid., p. 100.
- 74 *Limited Inc.*, p. 136.
- 75 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A236–60/B295 315.
- 76 In other words, 'there is nothing outside the context' (*Limited Inc.*, 136).