

1-1-1991

Chapter VI. Jacques Derrida

Raoul Mortley

Bond University, Raoul_Mortley@bond.edu.au

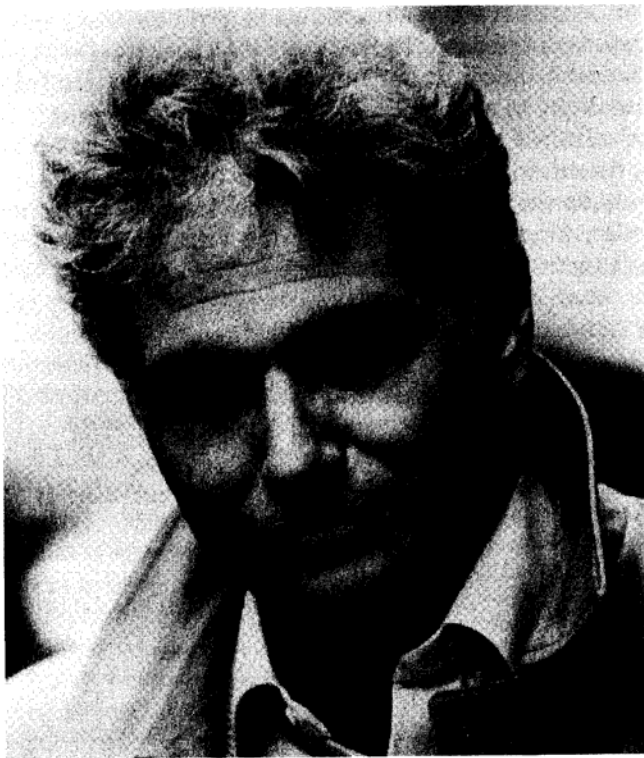
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Recommended Citation

Mortley, Raoul, "Chapter VI. Jacques Derrida" (1991). *French Philosophers in Conversation, by Raoul Mortley*. Paper 7.
http://epublications.bond.edu.au/french_philosophers/7

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JACQUES DERRIDA



Jacques Derrida was born in Algeria in 1930. His early work, Plato's Pharmacy, published in three sections in the journal Tel Quel, was to establish a style and a set of concerns. More orthodox philosophical papers, such as Differance, establish the intellectual grounds for the course which he now pursues. His links with French institutional life have been as innovative as his thought: he was a founder of the International College of Philosophy in Paris, and is presently attached to the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Boulevard Raspail, Paris. He is a critic of institutions, yet demands the standards and continuity which flow from them. Derrida looks towards German philosophy more than any other, and clues to his programme may be found in Heidegger, Hegel and Husserl. The major concern of his work is meaning and its relation to text: semiotics is particularly associated with his name, and this involves a theory of symbols, signs and meaning. His work has also been associated with the critique of the idea of the author.

RM: You've been active in the Group for Research into the Teaching of Philosophy (GREPH). You know, I'm sure, that philosophy is not taught at all at the secondary level of education in Anglo-Saxon countries. I don't know whether it is because philosophy is considered dangerous, or destructive, or too difficult, but, whatever the case, philosophy is not part of the secondary school curriculum. And, with the assistance of this research group, you are proposing to extend, even in France, the teaching of philosophy, which is already quite widespread by the standards of other countries.

JD: Yes. The paradox here is that the Group was established in 1975 at a very specific point in the history of philosophical education in France. This said, in spite of the narrowness of this particular context, the aims of the Group are not restricted to France only. With regard to France, our concern in 1975 was to ensure that philosophical education in French high schools was safeguarded and protected, and also extended: France is one of the few countries to provide teaching in philosophy at high school level, but we wanted to see it taught *before* the final year. And we wanted to analyse the reasons behind the fact that for a very long time, in France and elsewhere, it was thought that philosophy could not be taught to students below the age of 16 or 17. And we wanted to analyse the presuppositions or prejudices, of a philosophical or socio-political nature, which lay behind this opposition to extending the teaching of philosophy to younger age-groups. These ideas are very old. Nevertheless the concerns of the Group were not limited to France itself. And the whole teaching of philosophy at university level, in the industrial

world in general, was our concern. So the work of the Group was partly concerned with the French context and partly not. We did note that the activities of the Group were of great interest to philosophers from other countries: this was a pleasant surprise for us.

RM: I'm sure that would have been the case. Am I right in thinking that the teaching of philosophy at the secondary level in France is very much historical in orientation? You don't give a problem to the student to discuss as such, but you go at it through the study of the great philosophers and systems of thought.

JD: There is a debate over that very question within the French education system. Normally the programme for philosophy classes is couched in terms of general questions: action, thought, knowledge, ontology, ethics and so on; these issues are laid down. But it is true that many teachers insist on the need to study these issues on the basis of historic treatments: and I'm of that view myself. You can't settle these questions, in the absence of, not an historicist approach, but an historical approach, by taking into account the history of the problem, without allowing this process to become a doxography, a recital of opinions. The historical dimension is important. But there is a debate over this in the French teaching body.

RM: This way of doing philosophy on the basis of historical texts is perhaps characteristic of French philosophy in general. . .

JD: Of continental philosophy in general, I'd say rather.. German philosophy, and Italian philosophy, are both more historicizing than Anglo-Saxon philosophy, I would imagine.

RM: I sometimes have the feeling that the great philosopher is the person who is incapable of being a good historian of philosophy, who crushes completely the philosophical sources which he reads. Would you agree with that?

JD: Not really. The great philosopher - this question of the great philosopher is also a difficult one, and in the GREPH we are in fact attempting to enquire into the means by which philosophers are legitimized as great philosophers. How does one become a minor philosopher, or how does a text become a major writing? Major texts have certain privileges, minor texts are dropped; these are issues which are very significant to us. In my view, what are called great philosophers are those who

have a very clear relationship to the history of philosophy, in some cases a relation of violence, since these are people who ill-treat the history of philosophy, so to speak. They use force to integrate the philosophers of the past into their own teleological schemas. Aristotle did this, Hegel did this, Kant also in a certain sense. So I think that 'great' philosophers are sensitive to historic treatments, not as classical historians of philosophy, respectful of what they read, but in a mode of thought which does violence, in the best sense of the word. Heidegger is historical in a sense, although this leads him to conclusions which are difficult for classical historians of philosophy to accept. So there is a problem there. But I wouldn't say that great philosophers are indifferent to the history of philosophy.

RM: Returning to the schools, and the fact that philosophy is not taught before the final year in France: what are held to be the explanations for this? Is it because philosophy is thought to be too hard for younger pupils, or too dangerous. . .?

JD: I think it *is* considered to be dangerous, though this may not be admitted. People do not say explicitly that philosophy is dangerous: they say that it is too difficult, that it is inaccessible to insufficiently trained minds, but in my view it *is* considered to be dangerous. Not just for political reasons, as has been said now and then, but one has the feeling that the nature of philosophical enquiry is 'transgressive', in relation to various norms and rules which are considered to be necessary for adolescents.

Looking at the question of level, since it is also said that philosophy is too difficult, and people like me and those in the GREPH think that philosophy should be taught earlier in the curriculum, it is true that teachers now are complaining, much more than previously, of the lack of training in language, logic and rhetoric of the pupils of today in comparison with earlier times. Philosophy teachers say that it is more difficult than it used to be because the pupils are coming to us with a lack of cultural training, weakness in the use of language, which makes the teaching of philosophy even more difficult than it once was. And I think that this is true to a certain extent, and that the same thing is true in other countries. The paradox is that we are asking that philosophy be taught earlier, whereas there are those who are asking that it be taught even later. At

17 or 18 they are not supposed to be sufficiently mature: their interest in philosophy, their use of the language, their logical ability, their rhetorical capacity are said to be inadequate.

RM: And on the ability of philosophy to corrupt people, am I right in thinking that French philosophy is associated in the public mind with anti-clericalism? It could therefore be thought dangerous.

JD: I don't think so. Probably some people see it that way, but I don't think that one can say that French philosophy in general is anti-clerical. Though it might be so to some people. They would say that philosophy is dealing with questions about God, ethics and politics in such a way as to disturb or pervert the established moral order, or even religion itself. I don't think this is true, but it is probable that this is the concern which is present.

RM: If we can move to your own thought: the idea of deconstruction, this is a term which is now much travelled, particularly in the United States, and which will no doubt travel further still. I would like to give you an example drawn from Plotinus for your response: Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, says, in order to explain his notion of abstraction and of apophatic thought (according to which elements are removed from an idea to find its real kernel), that it is as if a sculptor before a block of marble begins to remove, through his art, bits of stone, piece by piece. In the end he finds the beauty of the form of the statue within the stone, by a process of removal. It's a type of negation, but one can scarcely call it negation: for him it's *aphairesis*, or abstraction. . .

JD: 'Subtraction' is also used.

RM: Yes. If I advocated this as a means of explaining the idea of deconstruction, would the analogy appear adequate to you?

JD: No. Though I am very interested in that, and in Plotinus, and I feel certain affinities between my own work and some Neoplatonic themes. One would have to be very careful about this however. Nevertheless the image you used, the image of abstraction or subtraction, which aims to restore an internal beauty or being which is hidden beneath appearances which must be removed, does not seem very close to what I am doing with deconstruction. First, deconstruction is not negative. It's not destructive, not having the purpose of dissolving, distracting or subtracting elements in order to reveal an

internal essence. It asks questions about the essence, about the presence, indeed about this interior/exterior, phenomenon/appearance schema, all these oppositions which are inherent in the image you used. The question is about this logic itself. On the word 'deconstruction', which in my mind was intended to translate a word such as *Abbau* in Heidegger – *Destruktion* in Heidegger is not a negative word either – it's a matter of gaining access to the mode in which a system or structure, or ensemble, is constructed or constituted, historically speaking. Not to destroy it, or demolish it, nor to purify it, but in order to accede to its possibilities and its meaning; to its construction and its history. And on this I don't think that the image as you presented it is at all analogous. This said, what there is in Plotinus of the movement beyond being, for example the *epekeina tes ousias* which gathers up in Plotinus a certain tradition of Platonic ideas, the issue of moving beyond being, is something which interests me greatly. I think that deconstruction is also a means of carrying out this going beyond being, beyond being as presence, at least. So this whole tradition of thought which goes from the expression *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond being, from Plato's *Republic* through Plotinus to a certain Heidegger, this whole tradition lies behind the notion of deconstruction though it is not absolutely coextensive with it.

RM: Plotinus also speaks about presence, the mode of being present, somewhat in Heidegger's manner; the word *paresti*, for example. The word dissemination: what's the force of this term as you use it?

JD: The intention of this term is to emphasize the force of multiplication and dispersion, or of difference, a force which doesn't allow itself to be gathered or totalized. It is not purely multiplicity, but in any case it's a difference which doesn't allow itself to be entirely brought together, totalized. And moreover it is a principle of multiplicity which is not merely polysemy: I distinguish in a number of places between polysemy and dissemination. Polysemy is a multiplicity of meaning, a kind of ambiguity, which nevertheless belongs to the field of sense, of meaning, of semantics, and which is determined within the horizon of a certain grouping, gathering together. Aristotle says that a certain degree of

polysemy is acceptable, provided that it is possible to distinguish between different senses, and that the unity of meaning can be established. Dissemination is something which no longer belongs to the regime of meaning; it exceeds not only the multiplicity of meanings, but also meaning itself. I attempt to read the movement of this dissemination in the text, in writing; it can't be dominated by either the semantic or the thematic field.

RM: Dissemination means a kind of scattering. . .

JD: Which also bears a relationship to the generative, the seminal. . .

RM: Yes, the seminal, and the dis-seminal in dissemination? Dis?

JD: The difference in the seminal, not in the semantic. . .

RM: There's no essence in a text, which hides itself mysteriously? An essence to be found, as the ancient allegorists thought, perhaps?

JD: I wouldn't say that there's no essence, but the essence is not the last word of the text. There's always a surplus established, a dissemination, in relation to the hidden meaning or the essence of a text, reserved within a text.

RM: And what is the role of the author in relation to this polysemy?

JD: The author can't hope to constitute himself as author by *mastering* this polysemy. The term 'author' suggests someone who produces his text, who brings it together within themes, theses, senses. From the perspective of dissemination, I would not say that there are no authors, but whoever bears the name 'author', to whom the legitimate status of author is accorded, is someone who is himself determined by the text, and is situated in the text or by the text. He's not in the situation of the creator god *before* his text.

RM: If we can talk about difference now: as is well-known, you've suggested another term, that difference should be written with an 'a'; can you hear the difference as it's pronounced in French?

JD: No, it can be read but not heard.

RM: That's an interesting thing in itself. It's an active notion, *différance*, isn't it? The term labels a process which takes place: there's nothing passive about it. So there's a type of linkage which takes place.

JD: In the texts which deal with this, I do emphasize that difference is productive; but also that it's neither active nor passive. It is more of the order of what is called the middle, in Greek grammar, neither passive nor active. It deconstructs in fact all the philosophical opposites which are based on this polarization of active and passive. *Différance* is neither passive nor active.

RM: But doesn't the -ance ending in French bear an active sense, like *souffrance*, or suffering - the participial form made into a noun?

JD: *Souffrance* is not an act though: it's the middle way.

It's a way of forming a noun on the basis of the present participle: *mouvance*, *souffrance*, these are neither activities nor passivities. This is why I have this form of the word; this grammatical form appeared to me more appropriate to suggest what I wanted to suggest with the term 'difference'.

RM: Since difference provides for a kind of re-attaching between things, in a way it could be said that difference no longer has any connection with difference with an 'e'. Here I'm thinking of the classic problem of the same and the different, from Plato's *Sophist* onwards: difference with an 'a' seems to take us in the direction of the same, in contrast with difference with an 'e'. The separateness of things seems somewhat mitigated.

JD: I think that you're right to say that difference, with an 'a', veers towards sameness. To take an example, the classical question of nature versus culture: saying that the relationship between the two is one of difference, with an 'a', means that culture is *only* nature differed (*différé*), with a delay, with this detour via a delay. This is what I call the economy: economy is in a way an idea based on sameness, the *oikos*, that which remains within the 'home' of the same. But I would stress another dimension of difference, which is, by contrast, that of absolute heterogeneity, and therefore of otherness, radical otherness. The term 'difference' can't be stabilized within a polarization of the same and the different. It's at one and the same time an idea rooted in sameness, and radical otherness, an otherness which is absolutely radical. So I'd say that difference can't be enclosed either within the same, or the idea of the radically other, about which nothing could be said. It's an enigmatic relation of the same to the other.

RM: For the English speaker there is some difficulty with the word *différer*: it is ambiguous, and perhaps it is one of those undecidable words. There is the differing aspect, to be different in the ordinary sense, but there is also the sense of *différé* as 'broadcast' . . .

JD: It's untranslatable: you have in English to 'defer', or 'delay', 'postpone'; but differing in the sense of being distinct is also part of it, and the two don't go together directly into English. And this highlights the indissociability of what is said, and the language: untranslatability. There is a difficulty in isolating the sense independently of the language.

RM: Yes, and the notion of time is important with this term, isn't it? It has the sense of putting something off, and so difference produces in the reader a degree of expectancy.

JD: Yes, but here again I'd prefer to remove difference, subtract it, from any structure of opposites. So the temporal aspect, which I have emphasized, is there, but the temporal can't be opposed to the spatial. I often talk about spacing, but this is not simply space as opposed to time, but a mode of producing space by temporalizing it (*en le temps-poralisant*). Temporization, to temporize, means waiting or expecting (*attendre*), postponing or delaying. Temporizing is spacing, a way of making an interval, and here again with the idea of difference the ideas of spacing and temporization are inextricably linked. So time is not given priority over space.

RM: This reminds me of the Thomist idea of relation, which is defined as a movement *towards*. *Ad*, towards, the preposition itself practically becomes the relation. Difference in the Thomist system is the condition for the relation: it provides the space for the relationship to take place.

Turning to the question of desire, what *is* the role of desire in your system of thought? I ask the question because your idea of difference is relational and it goes somewhat in the direction of sameness. And when one looks at the idea of desire in, say, Hegel, or in the Platonic tradition with the idea of *eras* in the *Symposium*, and in the Augustinian tradition above all - Augustine is a great desirer - there is often a link with the idea of lack, and here one thinks of Lacan as well: in your thinking about the matter there seems to be no suggestion of desire as the result of lack, or as lack in operation.

JD: Yes, that's true. What bothers me with the use of the word 'desire', and I have often tried to avoid it, is that where the word appears in writers such as Lacan, and well before him too, it tends to be defined as part of the structure of the subject: of the soul, the psychological or psychoanalytic subject as we have it in Freud or Lacan. My concern was to develop a difference whereby desire was not seen as a matter of consciousness. If there is desire, it is *because* there is difference. This psychologism, this anthropologism bothered me. I have nothing against it in itself, but it is the idea of difference which interests me, and it is neither psychological nor anthropological. It's not tied to consciousness nor the unconscious nor to the psyche. . .

RM: Is it phenomenological?

JD: No, not that either, and in fact I attempt to put deconstructing questions to Husserl's phenomenological method, based on the idea of difference. So the idea of difference is neither psychological, nor anthropological, nor phenomenological, nor ontological, in a certain sense. Further, in the way that desire is used, as you noted a moment ago, there is a link established between it and the idea of lack or negativity. Deconstruction is not tied to the idea of lack nor to that of negativity: it is not dialectical either. For this reason I have always been most cautious with the word 'desire', though of course I consider that everything has to be explained by desire; but you can't give an account of desire without basing it on difference. There would be no desire without the Structure of difference.

RM: So difference is the more fundamental?

JD: Yes, but the word fundamental bothers me, for the same reasons.

RM: At times desire is presented as a kind of motor which explains everything, if there's a rupture between this and that, as in the myth of Aristophanes, something has to. . .

JD: But it is a motor which is situated within the psyche, or at any rate within the subject, the consciousness or the unconscious, and that appears to me to be not radical enough. An account of this desire has to be given.

RM: So the analysis of desire must go beyond the subject. In your *Plato's Pharmacy* you show that Plato held the written word in contempt, if I have understood you correctly, and that

he held in high regard the spoken word or thought. And you show that his contempt for writing is more or less constant in western thought, and you talk about the sense of scandal that Plato seemed to feel over the fact that the word should undergo an incarnation in writing. I found the language you used here of great interest: 'the disgraceful intrusion', the 'scandal' of this event as Plato sees it. Further, there is said to be a kind of father-son relationship between the thought word and the written word. Could you comment on your language at this point?

JD: I wouldn't say that Plato feels contempt for writing. He himself practised writing, and what he says about writing in the *Phaedrus* is not solely hostile: he fears a certain kind of writing, that which is irresponsible, removed from the responsibility of the person who speaks, that which is emancipated from the father of the text, and which cannot respond on its own behalf. It is the abandoned word, that of reminding, rather than remembering, in Plato's words. It is the written trace for which nobody can take responsibility, the orphan; but there is a writing in the soul which is closer to the word, and Plato has nothing against this. He is not hostile to this writing. This said, the trial to which writing is subjected in the *Phaedrus* is regularly reproduced in the history of western culture, which is after all a writing culture. And from this there springs a series of paradoxes which I attempt to study: for what is to be feared is a dead repetition, a repetition of the word cut off from its source, and the question is whether this separation is inevitably damaging, or whether it can be avoided. Is there something in the structure of the word itself, a writing, which can be gone through, repeated immediately, and which can have the status of writing even in the oral form? These are the paradoxes which I attempt to consider in *Plato's Pharmacy* and elsewhere. But in *Plato's Pharmacy* I don't simply try to establish an opposition between word and writing, by claiming that Plato is for the word, and against writing. There are more complex things at stake in the scene concerning writing.

RM: And the word *pharmakon* with its two possibilities: in a sense Aristotle's school was more favourable to writing and took the initiative towards the establishment of libraries. They helped constitute the library for the Ptolemies in Egypt. And so do you consider it a prejudice or a tendency of western

thought which gives preference to . . . is it to the spoken word, the vocalized word, or rather to silent thought, to internal thinking which could be verbalized?

JD: It's more than a prejudice: a prejudice is something that can be corrected or criticized, whereas this is something rooted in the very structure of western thought, which is tied to a certain type of writing, phonetic writing, which represents the spoken word by inscribing phonemes, and which is therefore a kind of signifier of a signifier. In a non-phonetic kind of writing the situation is entirely different: in this case letters are supposed to represent phonemes which themselves represent thought. So writing is doubly served, doubly instrumentalized: hence its servile character, on this view, and the threat of evil and negativity which can seem to be inherent in writing. But of course moving to phonetic writing represented great progress in the history of signs and the economy of communication: the west has always been programmed by what was without doubt progress in this area. So it's more than a prejudice, and because of this paradox there have been many contradictions and negations in the way writing has been treated in the course of the history of philosophy. Leibniz, for example, put forward systems of thought which were distinct from writing and which did not involve the alphabet, which could, in an economical way, designate simple ideas, and so he proposed a universal system which was not tied to the word. But behind this lay a whole set of ideas about the single thought, the philosophy of the mark or sign, which, if we had more time at our disposal, could be shown to belong to the same tradition.

RM: And the image of father and son in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the word and the writing: this masculine imagery is interesting. Do you think there has been a kind of masculinism at work in the structure of philosophy itself? I'm not talking so much about the social role of women in philosophy, or the fact that they have been excluded, although that no doubt contributes. . .

JD: It's not unrelated: even without doing the sociology of the history of women in the west, I think that the fact that there have been few women philosophers cannot be formally dissociated from this phallogocentrism which we touched on a moment ago, and I have attempted to show that logocentrism,

or phonocentrism, which is proper to western metaphysics, is also a form of phallogocentrism. That's why I created the term 'phallogocentrism', to refer to one single structure of thought which both gives priority to logos and the voice, the *phone*, and to the masculine position in philosophy. I think this can be demonstrated, though it would be difficult to do it improvising here and now, but I've tried to highlight a connection between the statement of masculinity, the placing of a man in a hierarchical position over woman, politically, sociologically, philosophically, and ontologically as well, the connection between that and logocentrism. I think it's the same experience, the same history.

RM: And the Stoics also talk about the spermatic logos, and when you know that at the same time the Greeks believed it was the sperm alone which created life, whereas the woman merely provided the matter or the place for the life to grow. . . this becomes an image of great importance.

JD: Absolutely: the idea of form in Aristotle, for example, is regularly linked with the male.

RM: What is logocentrism exactly?

JD: Logocentrism, to put it in summary form, is an attempt which can only ever fail, an attempt to trace the sense of being to the logos, to discourse or reason (*legein* is to collect or assemble in a discourse) and which considers writing or technique to be secondary to logos. The forms which this has taken in the west are of course influenced by Greek philosophy. There is always, of course, the European ethnocentrism to bear in mind: it's not exactly the same thing as phonocentrism, though the two are often linked. You can have phonocentrism without logocentrism: for example, in non-European cultures the sense of the authority of the voice can be found, a kind of hierarchy which places the voice above writing. This is a thing which can be found elsewhere than in Europe. European phonocentrism expresses itself in logocentrism, by subjecting everything to the authority of the logos or the word. It's not a matter of creating an opposition between graphocentrism and logocentrism, or of overturning the hierarchy, but of questioning the very idea of hierarchy, of that particular hierarchy.

RM: In your view everything that's written is a sign: the word graphism is used, to avoid I suppose the idea of the simple

word, to say something broader than that. Is there a category of words which have no other reference, which are what they are, having only the one meaning?

JD: Univocal? Well of course the critique of logocentrism is also a critique of the sign: it provides a critique of the signifier/signified distinction which has established itself in the western tradition, in the writings of Saussure. I'm not talking about a critique of Saussure in general, but of a certain Saussurean approach to the concept of the sign, and the subjection of the signifier to the signified, which led me to suspect the structure itself of the concept of sign. There are two possible tacks in the deconstruction of this matter: the first consists in recalling certain necessary characteristics of the sign. There is no thought without signs; Saussure said something of this kind. But secondly one can recognize within the concept of sign the characteristic mark of logocentrism. So there's a critique of the idea of the sign. This is why I prefer to talk about 'mark' or 'trace' rather than 'sign': with the idea of trace, the distinction between signifier and signified is no longer at all possible, and the distinction of the authority of the word, the unity of the word, is called into question. So in reply to your last question, I would say that there is no word in natural language, which carries in itself, in its connotations at least, a zone of symbolism which is irreducible. No word is absolutely univocal, transparent, whether it's the transparent representation of a sense or a signified.

RM: So this plurivocity has to be accepted, or assumed in your view?

JD: Yes, though I don't know about the need to assume that this is a sort of ethical rule; whether you assume it or not, it's there. It's there, and even if you don't want to assume it, it dictates your discourse irrespective of your wishes.

RM: What is the ideal form of philosophical discourse? In the Anglo-American philosophical perspective the ideal is often seen - there is an ideal I think - as the development of a purely philosophical rational language, purged of contradictions, and above all of ambiguities - a computer language, if you like, an apodeictic language. What do think of this ideal?

JD: Oh, I think that in the best of circumstances it's only an ideal: in fact it's an ideal which is inaccessible, and I'm not sure that it's a good ideal for philosophy. You mentioned

computer language, language which is absolutely decidable. I don't know whether thought is of that order: the type of thought in which decidability in the computer sense is dominant would still be thinking. Nevertheless there is a history of computers, of an increasing complexity in computer science: what can be said is that what's called thought is not reducible to computers as they are constructed at the moment. Computers are in the end relatively simple, despite their apparent intricacy, but I don't want to make this into an attack on calculation, on machines: that would be a little too obvious.

RM: What is the future of philosophy?

JD: I have no simple answer to that. I'm not among those who say that philosophy is finished. Even when I talk about the closure of logocentrism, and the closure of metaphysics, I make a distinction between closure and end: I think that the conclusion that philosophy has reached its conclusion, come to its term, is a very dangerous thing and a thing which I would resist. I think that philosophy has, *is*, the future, but for the moment it has to give its consideration to that which has enclosed it, a set of finite possibilities. What does this finitude consist of? What is this finite element in philosophy? We have the feeling that philosophical discourse is exhausted, that it can only reproduce itself in different forms, in different combinations. What does this closure consist of? This is an opportunity for thought; it's nothing like death, or the end, but an opportunity. And if this is called philosophy, then I think that philosophy not only has a future but that it *is* only if there is a future, if non-anticipatable events lie ahead. What interests me here is the event, and the event is such only insofar as it cannot be programmed and therefore anticipated. That's what provokes thought. And that's what provokes philosophy.

RM: And of course you don't think that philosophy is an élite activity, which should be locked up in institutions. But what is the role of philosophy in society?

JD: I think that often, as a matter of fact, philosophy *is* reserved for élites: in any case it is not sufficiently accessible, available to the general populace, open, so an effort must be made to shift it, to move it to certain institutions, to *certain* institutions. I don't think it should be thought that philosophy can be

done outside institutions, in the wild so to speak. We need philosophical institutions to guarantee the tradition, the transmitting of skills, to learn to read traditional writings which are not immediately accessible; so institutions are necessary. One can't think philosophically without institutions. This doesn't mean that every institution is good, and that we have to content ourselves with the institutions at hand. My own relationship with institutions is very complex, with the result that what I do can appear in some respects to be anti-institutional, but this is rather a matter of working against a certain state in which institutions find themselves.

RM: You're willing to recognize that institutions have made some contribution to the history of philosophy?

JD: Absolutely: they're indispensable. Philosophy *is* an institution in a certain sense.

RM: What are you working on at the present time?

JD: For the last two or three years my teaching has been on the question of nationality, and philosophical nationalism. I'm trying to examine the way in which philosophy has linked itself to national self-expression, from the political, institutional, and linguistic point of view. Otherwise, I'm working on the notion of *chora* in Plato, the idea of place, the site, and the way in which this passage of the *Timaeus* is resistant to Platonism, perhaps even to Plato himself. And I link this question of 'place' to that of the city and of the nation, which I mentioned a moment ago. Otherwise I'm keeping on with the reading of Heidegger, and I'd like to bring out a book on Heidegger, which will also be linked to these issues, to the reading of Plato via Heidegger, to the reading of the *chora* through Heidegger.

RM: Yes, there is a kind of *chora* in Heidegger too, isn't there?

JD: The last writings of Heidegger are in effect a topology of being, so there's a conception of place, not of place in being, but of the place of being. Moreover when he alludes to Plato's *chora*, that of the *Timaeus*, it seems to me that Heidegger is somewhat reductionist: I'm not very satisfied by his reading of the *Timaeus*, nor of the question of place, and that's the area I'm working in.

RM: There's a very strong idea of the *humus*, a kind of foundation, in Heidegger, although he doesn't always want to admit it: he wants to dispense with it in relation to his idea

of truth, for example, to dispense with the idea of truth as a foundation of sorts. You've always got the impression that with Heidegger there is a kind of soil, or earth. . .

JD: Yes, there is the soil, and the earth element, but at the same time there's also the idea of *Abgrund*, abyss, the bottomless. I think that it is too limited to take Heidegger's philosophy as a philosophy of foundations. There's a questioning of the idea of foundation which is rendered possible by the experience of the abyss, *Abgrund* and *Ungrund*.

RM: And are you able, on the basis of Plato's *chora*, to make connections with this set of ideas - of nation, and race? Because in the *Timaeus chora*, or place, is presented in the context of physics, and cosmology and so on.

JD: Well *chora* can have the very concrete sense of the place of one's birth, one's native land, village. . .

RM: But in the *Timaeus* it's specifically. . .

JD: Yes, that's right. And so I relate that extraordinary scene in the *Timaeus* about this place which is not simply one place among others, the place in which the demiurge himself inscribes the copies of the paradigms, to the use of the word *chora* in other passages in Plato.

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