

AGAWA CANYON INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH

FIGURING THE PHALLOGOCENTRIC ARGUMENT WITH RESPECT TO THE CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

by

W. A. BORODY

"Acrobats have always been more Einsteinian than Newtonian. But little matter, for the secret to order, the secret order, in art and science, is balance."

A Smoother Pebble, A Prettier Shell (1996)

-Ken Stange

In contemporary literary and philosophical works concerned with gender, the term "phallogocentrism" is commonplace largely as a result of the writings of Jacques Derrida, the founder of the school of Deconstruction, which is considered by many--the academic left as well as the right--to constitute an essential aspect of the discourse of modernity.¹ Although Derrida and his followers eschew all attempts to categorize the anti-essentialist philosophy of Deconstruction in a traditional context (i.e., in terms of either scepticism, relativism, or nominalism), one can, for the purposes of discussion, refer to Deconstruction as a philosophy of "indeterminateness" and its opposing school of philosophy as a philosophy of "determinateness." According to the school of Deconstruction, indeterminate knowledge is "aporetic", i.e., based on contradictory facts or ideas ("*aporias*") that make it impossible to determine matters of truth with any degree of certitude; determinate knowledge, on the other hand, is "apodictic", i.e., based on facts or ideas that are considered to be "true" ("the way they really are") from one perspective or another (eg., the scientific, historical, literary, etc.).

As we near the end of the twentieth century, Deconstruction continues to exert a considerable influence on the study of the humanities in the West, and much of this influence is a result of the implications of the phallogocentric argument, which is premised on the claim that the West has been, and continues to be, both culturally and intellectually subjugated by "logocentrism" and "phallogocentrism." Logocentrism is the

term Derrida uses to refer derogatively to the philosophy of determinateness, while phallogocentrism is the term he uses to describe the way logocentrism itself is genderized by a "masculinist (phallic)" and "patriarchal" agenda. Hence, Derrida intentionally elides the two terms phallogocentrism and logocentrism as "phallogocentrism." According to Derrida and the Deconstructionists, phallogocentrism deleteriously obliterates a genuine respect for anything other than what is given the "stamp of approval" by the authority of phallogocentrism itself; this deleterious obliteration of otherness, in turn, is thought to have fostered the denigration of both the philosophy of indeterminateness and the feminine. As Steven Daedalus in James Joyce's *Ulysses* views history as "the nightmare from which I am trying to awake," so too does Jacques Derrida view phallogocentrism as the nightmare from which he is trying to awake.

In this paper I discuss the phallogocentric argument specifically as it relates to the Greek (i.e., Athenian) philosophical influence on the development of Western culture. This discussion is necessarily framed by a caveat: a full reckoning of Derrida's argument would have to include a discussion of the Jewish and Christian influences as well as the Greek. With this caveat in mind, I examine the phallogocentric argument as it is nascently described by Derrida in his first major work on the subject, *Grammatology* (1967) and as it is more fully developed in his other writings, such as *Différance* (1968), *Plato's Pharmacy* (1972), *Spurs* (1978), and *The Post Card* (1980). Since I am concerned with the appropriateness of this argument as a paradigm for understanding the Hellenistic origins of the Western philosophical tradition, I sketch out three examples from classical Greek philosophy that call into question the validity of this argument. I maintain that the phallogocentric argument is defended by Derrida in a twofold manner: one epistemological and the other ideological. Epistemologically, the argument critiques the traditional epistemological and genderological underpinnings of the correspondence theory of truth (i.e., "logocentrism"), an argument that owes much to Heideggerian phenomenology, Nietzschean anti-rationalism and Neo-Freudian (i.e., Lacanian) psychoanalysis. This epistemological aspect of the argument consistently underlies all of Derrida's writings since *Grammatology*. Ideologically, in an all-too-familiar manner, the argument also serves as a self-aggrandizing rhetorical strategy promoting the assumed solitary uniqueness of the author's philosophical perspective, in this case, the doctrine of aporetic indeterminateness. In its ideological capacity, the argument functions as a meta-narrative that "figures" or "tropes" all of the Western philosophical tradition in a messianically denunciatory manner as "phallogocentric"-- in much the same manner, and for many of the same reasons, as the new-world colonialists troped native culture as "savage."

As the millenium draws to a close, a disheartening fact remains embedded in the cultural horizon of the West: it appears as if very little has changed concerning the age-old methods of denouncing and demonizing the other. In the case of the school of Deconstruction, it is even more disheartening since Deconstruction construes itself as a philosophical and cultural project dedicated to the affirmative acknowledgement of "otherness." Hence, circumspection is called for when one assesses the significance of the Deconstructionist's ideological denunciation of its most radical other, i.e., phallogocentrism. Indeed, in spite of its salutary contributions to the understanding of certain deeply hidden philosophical presuppositions and prejudices in Western culture, the school of Deconstruction has, no doubt, contributed significantly to the emergence of

the contemporary predilection for a moral discourse that rests, first and foremost, on "denunciation."²

I) PHALLOGOCENTRISM

a) LOGOCENTRISM: THE APODICTIC WAY OF KNOWING

Phallogocentrism is a neologism coined by Derrida to capture the exclusionary and dictatorial dominance of logocentrism and phallogocentrism in the West. More specifically, logocentrism is described as the "privileging" of *logos* wherein the term "*logos*" is used metaphorically to refer to an appeal to an objective reality: an objective, stable, unambiguous foundation of our understanding of reality, such as the Platonic concept of "the idetic realm", the Aristotelian concept of "being" or "reality" (*ousia*), or the Christian concept of God.³ Derrida also refers to this logocentric appeal as a "metaphysics of presence": "metaphysics" in the sense of "theoretical belief in" and "presence" as either Being, God, or the Idetic Realm. Derrida coined a third term to refer to logocentrism: onto-theology, "the system functioning as the effacing of difference."⁴ The etymology of the term "onto-theology" serves Derrida's purposes well since it captures two of the more significant "metaphysics of presence" in Western civilization: God from the Jewish tradition and Being from the Greek.

In all logocentric epistemologies, argues Derrida, a false one-to-one "correspondence" ("*homoiōsis*" or "*adaequatio*") is established between the knower and the known. This false correspondence rests on an erroneous belief in a stable, objective source of truth, which simply does not exist according to Derrida.⁵ The only possible truth, he maintains, is the truth of indeterminateness, which, according to the logic of indeterminateness, cancels itself out as mode of truth. Thus, "truth" is only used "strategically": truth is always "under erasure" as ~~truth~~. Meaning is not constituted by an a priori, epistemological correspondence between the knower and the known, a correspondence that is generally thought to rest on a pre-existing, semantical congruity between "words" and "their referents," i.e., between "signifiers" and "signifieds." Rather, all possible meaning is generated out of the "lack of correspondence" between the knower and the known, which is a result of the a priori, semantical incongruity that exists between "words" and "their referents." Derrida has coined the term "*différance*" to characterize his theory of meaning: in any relation between a signifier and a signified, one discovers (à la Saussure) an infinity of differences rather than a simplicity of identity (à la Aristotle).⁶ Hence, all meaning is simply a "play of differences," a "bottomless chessboard."⁷

In Derrida's writings, the notion of "meaning" is replaced by or, as he would say, "displaced by," a notion of "deferral," the continuous "deferral" of all possible meaning. At one point in *Grammatology*, Derrida claims that this continual "deferral" is actually a result of "the temporalization of lived experience": all meaning is generated out of the experience of the Now, the present moment, which itself harbours a fundamental ambiguity in terms of the individual's ability to establish an exact difference between the past, the present and the future.⁸ The "now" is, for Derrida, the source of all indeterminateness--of the whole series of links, chains and systems of *différance* and deferral. Herein, however, I will not rehearse further the exposition of indeterminateness as found in *Grammatology*, except to point out that Derrida does not consider his own

doctrine of indeterminateness to be another form of "logocentrism." According to Derrida, his doctrine of indeterminateness or *différance* is not "a philosophical discourse, operating according to principles, postulates, axioms or definitions, and proceeding along the discursive lines of a linear order of reasons. In the delineation of *différance*, everything is strategic and adventurous." ⁹

b) PHONOCENTRISM: PRIVILEGING SPEECH OVER WRITING

As a corollary of his critique of logocentrism as based on an assumed identity between the knower and the known, Derrida argues that logocentrism necessarily entails "phonocentrism," the privileging of the spoken word (*phōnē*) over the written word (*gramma*): speaking over writing (*legein* over *graphein*). The term "phonocentrism" is used by Derrida in both a literal and metaphorical sense. Literally, it denotes the epistemological significance that has traditionally been attributed to speech due to the natural immediacy that exists between speaking and hearing as well as the intersubjectively shared *presupposition* of an "externally based" context of meaning that facilitates co-understanding and dialogue. Raised to a philosophical doctrine within the development of logocentrism, phonocentrism assumes, says Derrida, the "absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning."¹⁰ In *Grammatology* Derrida cites numerous textual examples in an attempt to prove that in the Western tradition, speaking has, quite literally, been privileged over writing. Writing has been conceptualized as a mere "supplement" to speaking, a vicarious "after-image" of the spoken word--the "spoken word" that is shot through and through with a "metaphysics of presence." In his characteristic style of writing, Derrida says that the "system of writing in general is not exterior to the system of language" since "the division between exterior and interior passes through the interior of the interior or the exterior of exterior..." ¹¹ In other words, it is impossible to separate writing from speaking, or from "language" itself: only a "bad abstraction," claims Derrida, can separate the two.

In Derrida, "speaking" as "the authority of speech" is a metaphor for logocentrism. The term "writing," *écriture*, on the other hand, is employed by Derrida in a technical manner as a *metaphor* for indeterminateness. In this metaphorical conception of *écriture* as the "voice" of indeterminateness, Derrida adopts a semiological view of reality that reduces all questions of truth and meaning to an a priori "sign-system" of semantical self-referentiality. In the semiological view of the world, reality itself is understood as the Great Text, a Galilean "Book of Nature" wherein the world is understood semiologically as a grided matrix of infinitely interconnected meaning-connections that lack any foundation in a subject or object as a reality outside of the matrix: "*the sign system*" becomes a Protagorean "measure of all things." Hence, the often quoted sentence from Derrida's *Grammatology*: "there is nothing outside of the text" (*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*).¹² According to Derrida, therefore, all speaking is, metaphorically understood, writing since every instance of inscribing a connection between a signifier and signified is, in fact, an example of establishing *différance*, i.e., semantical indeterminateness, rather than self-identity, i.e., semantical determinateness. In "the logocentric West," therefore, writing qua indeterminateness has been, he claims, marginalized due to a fear

of its subversive nature: "such is the situation of writing within the history of metaphysics: a debased, lateralized, repressed, displaced theme..."¹³

c) PHALLOCENTRISM: DECONSTRUCTION AS DE-PHALLICIZATION

Phallogocentrism, like phonocentrism, also follows from logocentrism. Derrida links the logocentric privileging of apodictic determinateness over aporetic indeterminateness with the privileging of the masculine over the feminine. Logocentrism is described as essentially phallogocratic, patriarchal and masculinist. *Écriture* qua indeterminateness, on the other hand, is genderized as feminine. Derrida's most explicate critique of phallogocentrism occurs in *Plato's Pharmacy*, a sustained interpretation of Plato's dialogue the *Phaedrus*. In *Plato's Pharmacy*, Derrida puts Plato, and by implication the whole of the Western philosophical tradition, on the couch. Plato, maintains Derrida, "sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality,"¹⁴ a metaphysics which is essentially phallogocratic. Derrida's phallogocratic interpretation of the *Phaedrus* involves a neo-Freudian reading of Plato's intention in linking semantical determinateness with the phallogocratic privileging of the male.¹⁵ In the *Phaedrus*, argues Derrida, Plato identifies his concept of logos, a metaphorical "living logos," with the life-world of classical Athens, i.e., with the patriarchal/phallic world of the supremacy of the male, especially the father, whose spoken word functions as the Law within his domain. In privileging the spoken, living logos, Plato therefore privileges a so-called "paternal position."¹⁶ As a result, he figures writing (qua indeterminateness) as patricide, as the displacement of the privileging of the male, ultimately the father. Derrida psychoanalytically interprets Plato's fear of this displacement as an Oedipal fear of castration.

Plato is, maintains Derrida, at pains in the *Phaedrus* "to denigrate" writing in an effort to uphold and protect the patriarchy as it is structurally inscribed in the text of the phallogocentric philosophy of determinateness, and as it is unconsciously inscribed in the male psyche as a fear of castration. Plato therefore discusses "writing" as a *pharmakon*, both a drug and a poison. In this metaphorical genderization of logos as paternal, "the desire of writing is indicated, designated, and denounced as a desire for orphanhood and patricidal subversion. Isn't this *pharmakon* then a criminal thing, a poisoned present?"¹⁷ Plato is ever on the alert "to dominate" in this paternalistic manner the obviously feminine "ambiguity" of writing by substituting clear-cut, dualistic, apodictically determined, masculinist oppositions: "good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance."¹⁸ In *Plato's Pharmacy* Derrida's argument rests on the assumption that the text of philosophy can be feminized through a process of emasculatory auto-castration. Derrida describes his feminized alternative to Plato's castration-fearing, phallicized *logocentrism*, "as a certain outside of castration (a fall with no return and with no restricted economy) which could no longer be taken up and comprehended with the logocentric, sublimating field of talking truth, law, signification, full speech..."¹⁹

The French feminist thinkers of the school of *écriture féminine* share Derrida's phallogocentric reading of "all of Western metaphysics". For example, in a work that weaves in and out of a psycho-philosophical, stream-of-consciousness style of writing characteristic of many of Derrida's works, Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975) decry the "dual, hierarchical oppositions" set up by the

traditional phallogocentric philosophy of determinateness, wherein "death is always at work" as "the premise of woman's abasement," woman who has been "colonized" by phallogocentric thinking:

Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallogocentrism--bringing to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial--that threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural, by conjuring up from femininity the reflections and hypotheses that are necessarily ruinous for the stronghold still in possession of authority. What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble.²⁰

According Cixous and Clément, this crumbling will take place through a Derridean anti-phallo/logocentric philosophy of indeterminateness, through a "feminine practice of writing" that "is impossible with an impossibility that will continue, for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogocentric system..."²¹ Like the French feminist writers, Derrida attempts to open philosophy to the voice of the Other, in this case the feminine Other, which philosophy and phallogocentrism have always "shut out." Throughout *Spurs* and the *Double Session*, for instance, he figures indeterminateness vulvically as the hymen, which characterizes "the general law of textual effect," i.e., *écriture*, rather than the Law of the Phallus, i.e., the desire for determinateness. Although Derrida, in accordance with his aporetic philosophy, ultimately denies--puts under "erasure"--any *fundamental* difference between "the masculine" and "the feminine," his ideological critique of Western culture as phallogocentric depends on such a fundamental distinction. Although he claims that "*Il n'y pas une femme*"²² and that "there is no truth in itself of the sexual difference in itself, of either man or woman in itself,"²³ he himself undermines this "undecidability" by premising his ideological position on the identification of "*le système et l'économie de la vérité*" with "*l'espace phallogocentrique*."²⁴

II) PHALLOGOCENTRISM TROPED: PATHOLOGIZING THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Derrida tropes phallogocentrism as the miasma that has had, and continues to have, a pathological effect on Western culture and philosophy. Employing a secularized messianism as his historiographical paradigm for understanding the legacy of Western culture, Derrida speaks of the closure, *clôture*, of logocentrism, a logocentrism that has existed "always and everywhere." He speaks of "signs of liberation all over the world"²⁵ and of the "death of speech," i.e., the death of the logocentric philosophy of determinateness. As the figure of "philosophy itself," logocentrism has functioned, believes Derrida, as a "system" that has effaced all semblance of the significance of difference and otherness. He describes his own philosophy of aporetic indeterminateness as the "death" as well as the "resource" of logocentrism. Deconstructionist *écriture*, he prophesies, will messianically "dislocate" logocentrism. Derrida trans-historicizes his

philosophy of indeterminateness--Grammatology or Deconstruction--as the only, historically only, philosophy that has ever existed, not only in the West, but in the world; he claims that "all concepts hitherto proposed in order to think the articulation of a discourse and of an historical totality are caught within the metaphysical closure that I question here..."²⁶

Derrida's messianism of indeterminateness has its roots in nineteenth-century figurings of the Western tradition, notably in the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment found in Nietzsche's critique—a critique that has continued to echo well into the twentieth century, especially in the extremely influential writings of Martin Heidegger, Derrida's philosophical mentor. During the late thirties and early forties, Heidegger espoused a strident and zealous Nietzschean critique of Western civilization, conjuring up the best that modern Western philosophico-messianic critiques of the Enlightenment can muster. In a critique of the Idetic Theory in Plato's *Republic*, Heidegger claims that he has uncovered the conspiratorial source of an insidious philosophical pathology: with Plato, Truth as pure *Unhiddenness* (*Unverborgenheit*) undergoes a perversion in its very nature and is turned into a conception of Truth as pure *Correctness* (*Richtigkeit*), i.e., a pure epistemological and ontological identification of the knower and the known. Heidegger does not mask the fact that his criticism of Plato is a passionately revamped, phenomenological rendering of Nietzsche's attack on Western culture as a product of Greek rationalism. In the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche figures Greek philosophy as subjugated by "*Sokratismus*," the *Sickness* (*Krankheit*) of Socratic rationalism that has undermined Western philosophy and culture.²⁷ Nietzsche's jackboot denunciation of *Sokratismus* has had a profound influence not just on continental thinkers such as Heidegger, but on all twentieth-century philosophical and literary responses to the philosophy of Socrates and Plato--especially in Derrida's figuring of the Western tradition as *phallogocentric*.²⁸

Derrida's trans-historicizing, messianic reading of Western culture and philosophy as phallogocentric obfuscates the fact that the Western tradition has been a site for a continually rich contestation between the philosophies of indeterminateness and determinateness. Like Heidegger and Nietzsche, Derrida superimposes his modern rancour over the excesses of Enlightenment rationality onto the whole of the Western tradition. In what follows I would like to present three arguments against this reading of Western philosophy with respect to classical Greek philosophy, briefly acknowledging the positions of three Greek philosophers: Plato, Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus. What emerges from the following consideration of Greek philosophy is a fact about the early Western philosophical tradition that Derrida simply ignores: among the Greek philosophers there was a serious and continuous debate about the merits of a philosophical discourse that rests on a radical *skepsis*. Within the parameters of the patriarchal culture of the Greeks, *logos qua determinateness* did not essentially characterize the horizon of the male Greek's intellectual world. Contrary to the claims made by Derrida, Heidegger and Nietzsche regarding the Greek *fixation* with rationalism/logocentrism, the Greek philosophers celebrated the openness of a philosophical discourse that acknowledged the very real theoretical and practical implications of the struggle between both knowing and not-knowing, between apodictic determinateness and aporetic indeterminateness.

Since Greek philosophy is so infused with the philosophy and practice of indeterminateness, and since this concern with indeterminateness is carried on within the confines of an inherited, patriarchal cultural milieu, one is led to question the role of gender and its connection to the pursuit of philosophical self-understanding in the very origins of Western culture. One discovers in Greek male-based philosophy and theatre the radical critiquing of both determinateness and indeterminateness. Only a very watered-down version of Greek philosophy can be subsumed under a *sui generis* of "phallogocentrism": such a critique completely elides the cultural and philosophical dynamism of Greek thought.²⁹ And why this elision? Quite simply because Derrida's form of sceptical-relativism is too dogmatic in its defence of aporetic indeterminateness, too invested in the significance of a Post-Cartesian *cogito* seeking unindubitability and, finally, too self-aggrandizingly dismissive of the radically other, in this case, apodicticity. Troping the Greek origins of the Western philosophical tradition as phallogocentric obscures the existence of a radically human preoccupation with an openness to both the aporetic and apodictic ways of knowing--a preoccupation that consumed the Greek "male" philosophers. Indeed, the examples of Plato, Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus seriously call into question the veracity of the phallogocentric argument.

III. THE PHALLOGOCENTRIC ARGUMENT AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY: PLATO, ARISTOTLE AND SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

a) PLATO: METHEXIZING INDETERMINATENESS

In his introduction to *The Post Card*, Derrida criticizes the impatience of the "bad reader" of his works, "the reader in a hurry to be determined, decided upon deciding (in order to annul, in other words to bring back to oneself, one has to wish to know in advance what to expect, one wishes to expect what has happened, one wishes to expect (oneself))."³⁰ In reading this description of the 'bad reader' one is struck by the remarkable similarity between Derrida's own reading of Plato and his description of the bad reader.

With respect to interpreting Plato's essential philosophy as just another form of so-called "logocentrism," Derrida's prioritizing of the idetic theory (better known as the Theory of Forms or the Theory of Ideas) as the mark of "Platonism" fails, first and foremost, to acknowledge the advancement of the theory itself in the context of the dialogical format of Plato's writings. The dialogues are, by and large, aporetic and maieutic. The idetic theory as it is advanced in the *Republic*, and elsewhere, has its roots in philosophical speculations concerning the nature of mathematics and geometry. In the context of the passionate Greek interest in and appreciation of science, the idetic theory offers an eloquent defence of an account of the nature of reality as knowable in an apodictic manner, an account that has clearly definable modern analogues. For instance, the phrase "the structure of DNA" translated into the language of the *Republic* would be, quite simply, "the *idea/form* of DNA." Insofar as certain dialogues of Plato advance and defend the idetic theory of scientific truth in light of other theories, such as the theories of indeterminateness, one must recognize and address the inner complexity of the

advancement of this theory in light of its context, i.e., the dialogue genre. The specific dialogues in which this theory is defended are, it must be emphasized, offered as philosophical perspectives on a specific topic. For example, the *Republic*, a dialogue in which Socrates proposes the idetic (Derrida: “logocentric”) theory to account for both the empirical and ethical worlds, concludes with a *myth*. At the end of the *Republic* (arguably one of Plato’s best and, at the same time, worst dialogues), after a long defence of an idetic conception of justice, Socrates exhorts his readers to consider another philosophical possibility: a cosmic form of justice that may lie beyond idetic comprehension.

The dialogue genre is premised on a radical appreciation of the openness of philosophical discourse. In spite of Plato’s obvious allegiance to the idetic theory, Plato himself casts this theory in an aporetic context, in the context of the dialogical openness of philosophical self-understanding. The results of the dialogues remain tentative, whether the topic is scientific, ethical or religious. One of Socrates’ interlocutors in the *Euthyphro* says of this dialogical and aporetic dialectic: “For whatever statement we advance, somehow or other it moves about and won’t stay where we put it (11b).”³¹ Philosophically, one cannot interpret the Platonic writings in terms of an either/or, i.e., in terms of either a philosophy of determinateness or indeterminateness, as Derrida insists. Plato ought to be read as an exponent of the *dialogical*, not the *logocentric*. In the dialogue format, one is invited *in medias res*. The dialogue is open to the Other, both intra-textually, as a dialogue between various points of view, and extra-textually, i.e., as a dialogue with the reader. A thinker such as Plato, who offered such strong and dogmatic philosophical perspectives, nevertheless consistently chose a dialogical format through which to express himself--no doubt to situate the significance of philosophical self-understanding in the individual, in this case, the reader.

With respect to Derrida’s claim that “Plato’s philosophy” is *phonocentric*: this is the weakest--and most implausible--argument in Derrida’s writings, resting as it does on philosophical doublethink. Now, even overlooking the fact that Plato is a writer, Derrida’s interpretation of the criticism of writing that occurs in the *Phaedrus* completely neglects the context in which this criticism occurs. The *Phaedrus* is an extended ethical criticism of all rhetorical forms of political and philosophical discourse that are carried out for purely personal gain, whether such discourse is written or spoken. Written works, however, come in for more serious criticism than spoken presentations because it is easier, claims Socrates, to deceive others in a written work. In the passage from the *Phaedrus* that Derrida claims is proof that Plato’s view of philosophy is quintessentially “phonocentric,” Socrates is engaged in an ethical critique of sophistry of the kind defended by those speech-makers whose only aim is narcissistic self-interest and self-gratification at the expense of others. Contrary to the claims made by Derrida that Plato purposely denigrates writing because it represents indeterminateness and the feminine, Socrates is, in the *Phaedrus*, depicted as criticizing both writing as well as speaking when the only motivation behind such writing and speaking is the deceit of others solely for personal gain. In spite of his scepticism concerning both written and spoken discourse, Socrates describes himself in the *Phaedrus* as “a person who is sick with the love (*eros*) of discourse (*logos*) (228c)”; he describes how he can be enticed by “written works” (*logos* in *biblios*) as much as animals can be enticed by their favourite foods (230d).

Throughout the *Phaedrus*, Socrates, in spite of his scepticism, plays on the sense of pleasure, *eros*, that he finds in discourse, whether written or spoken.

Throughout the Platonic corpus, both writing and speaking are objects of suspicion, as Socrates says in the *Protagoras* when he discusses the "wealthy" and "famous" sophists of the day: "...these people who make their living by hawking learning from city to city and selling their wares to whoever wants to buy say that everything in their stock is good, but perhaps even some of them, my dear fellow, might not know whether what they are selling is good or bad for the soul (313c)."³² In the *Apology*, Socrates identifies his own manner of speaking and philosophizing as operating according "to chance" (*tuchē*) (17C) and not according to a formulaic, predetermined form of speaking (*paraskeuē*). Throughout the *Apology*, Socrates emphasizes that his own mode of speaking is guided by an ethical commitment to honesty and truthfulness--not a desire to "bewitch," "impress" or "subjugate" others. In the *Timaeus*, in a discussion concerning the long-standing Egyptian practice of keeping written chronicles, "writing" is praised and the Greeks are criticized for not engaging in enough writing (23b). Throughout the *Apology* Socrates expresses his faith in a mode of knowing that is neither spoken nor written: a psychic (*daimonion*) way of knowing engaged in by oracular seers. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates is described as choosing to spend the last moments of his life neither in writing nor speaking, but in prayerful *silence* (117e). In the *Seventh Letter*, if we can take it to be genuine, which it certainly appears to be, Plato claims that the entire aim of his teaching cannot be "laid out" in either *writing or speaking*; his philosophical position, he claims, does not admit of being spoken (*rheton*) as do other forms of knowledge, nor will it ever appear in "book form" (*suggramma*) (341d). If Derrida were to acknowledge Plato's ethical criticism of a *certain* kind of writing and a *certain* kind of speaking, he would have to acknowledge that his phonocentric criticism of Plato is simply not justified on the basis of the dialogues themselves.

If one links "determinateness" (logocentricity/apodicticity) with the "phallic," then Plato's writings can only problematically be genderized as "phallogenic." Plato's "philosophy" is inscribed in the literary genre of the dialogue, in an open invitation to the Other, the reader. The dialogue qua text incorporates a discourse that is, in principle, "unfixed" by a particular philosophical position. In spite of the excesses of Socrates' victories when refuting his interlocutors' philosophical positions, and in spite of the obvious bias in favour of the position of Plato (especially in the defence of the apodictic basis of the idetic theory and the ethical imperative regarding personal integrity, i.e., *arete*), the dialogues remain fundamentally aporetic. In the dialogues, the apodictic, when it is argued for or sought, is circumscribed by aporetic tentativeness. In other words, in the Platonic corpus one finds a commitment to an epistemological and hermeneutical fluidity that is absent in Derrida's completely dogmatic construal of the aporetic as complete *différance*/indeterminateness. In fact, the question concerning the ontological "methexis" or "participation" of the idetic realities ("Forms" or "Ideas") in the empirical world that vexed not only Plato also but his commentators is a much larger issue in Plato's writings than is usually thought: **the primary "methexis" actually concerns the methexis of the apodictic in the aporetic, and vice versa—a "methexis" that is "inscribed" in the text of the Platonic dialogue-format itself.** Furthermore, this fluidity between the aporetic and the apodictic in the Socratic/Platonic "text" necessarily undermines the genderized figuring of this teaching as essentially "phallogenic." In

fact, according to Derrida's own contextualizing of the gendered nature of Plato's philosophy, i.e., its contextualization in a patriarchal framework wherein indeterminateness is identified with the feminine and determinateness with the masculine, the Platonic apodictic/aporetic "text" would have to be "sexed" or "genderized" as ambiguously involving the masculine as well as the feminine, or the phallic as well as the vulvic.

Certainly, with respect to gender, Socrates is figured at times as a veritable Achilles-likened *andre* whose penchant for using the terms "woman" and "womanly" in a derogatory manner is familiar to all readers of the dialogues. Such derogatory feminine genderizations are unfortunately replete in Plato's dialogues. Wolstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's use of similar derogatory feminine genderizations could just as easily have been applied to Plato; it took approximately another two hundred years before the kind of attention Wolstonecraft paid to *Émile* would be applied to a work such as the *Republic*. On the other hand, however, more constructive feminine genderizations of both philosophy and discourse are also common in Plato's dialogues. Socrates describes his own philosophical technique as *maieutic*, which he says he learned from his mother; he describes his own teacher in the *Menexenus* as a woman, Aspasia. He tropes philosophy in numerous dialogues as the feminine, as a woman. He lauds a woman for revealing a teaching about the true nature of philosophy in the *Symposium*; he argues for the equality of the sexes in the *Republic*. In his love of logos, he compares himself to one of the female dervishes who is a devotee of the goddess Cybele. Granted, some critics argue that these salutary feminine figurings are simply *male* "(mis)appropriations" or "(mis)representations" of the feminine and are, therefore, irrelevant to the basic issue of Plato's essentially masculinist figuring of philosophy. However, while such an "appropriation of voice" argument certainly has some merits, when used in a *carte blanche* manner it reduces all philosophical discourse to the confines of a repressive, hermeneutical *apartheid* between the sexes. In defence of the more *positive* "feminine figurings" that appear in Plato, and in opposition to a *carte blanche* application of the "appropriation of voice" argument to Plato's writings, one could argue that Plato *at times* spoke with a tongue that transgressively overlooked the patriarchal specificities of his culture and his sex, and for this creative imaginativeness he should be applauded, not criticized. Furthermore, in terms of transgendering, Socrates is described as bisexual in significant passages in the dialogues. Greek culture during this period was rooted in an openly celebratory appreciation of sexuality--heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual. Plato's particular intellectual milieu appears to have been essentially bisexual and homoerotic, a fact that has only recently been openly acknowledged by the community of scholars whose area is the social and intellectual history of classical Greek culture. It could be argued that in the openly sexualized context of Greek philosophical culture the particular manner in which the Greek male philosophers (especially Socrates and Plato) were open to an epistemology and hermeneutics founded on a fluidity between the apodictic and the aporetic is directly related to the open sexuality of their lives, which puts into play a more complicated and ambiguous reading of the connection between Greek patriarchy and philosophy than Derrida's phallogocentric argument addresses.

n
o
w
with
respect to
Derrida's Interpretation
of Plato, of this *Speculation*
there should be no doubt: Plato
did in fact have a *PHALLUS*: However,
whether *IT* was **VERY LARGE**
or whether it was
very very small, **USED**
FREQUENTLY or
infrequently, whether *IT* was
"Pure Greek" or contained
some "EgyptianAdmixture"
as NIETZSCHE *SUSPECTED*
(*Nietzsche*, that inveterately
addicted, obsessive-compulsive
m a s t u r b a t o r, according to
His "EX," Richard Wagner)
Or *indeed*, whether or not
PLATO'S Pubic Hair was
blonde, brown or black, *we*
MAY NEVER KNOW.

Whether or not there was a
S I G N I F I C A N T
d i f f é r a n c e
between Plato's "LITTLE HEAD"
and his "BIG HEAD," however,
is a Question that demands
serious attention. Now, according
to Derrida's Crypto-Freudian
p h a l l o g o c e n t r i c
reading of Plato, there is no
différance with respect to the
~~two~~ **heads of Plato.** Thus, when
Leonard Cohen describes Janis
Joplin as given him head on an
unmade bed, we assume, if we

accept Derrida's basic interpretation of Plato,
that Janis Joplin and Leonard Cohen were simply discussing Derrida on an unmade
bed in the Chelsea Hotel at about the same time that Derrida was writing about

PLATO'S PHALLUS

In conclusion, the term "phallogocentric" can certainly be used to describe Plato's thought: his thoughts are the thoughts of a male with male preoccupations who expressed himself in and through a male-dominated society in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens. The symbolic, sexual, and cultural associations related to the dominant male/phallic power structure were no doubt psychologically inscribed in the dynamics of Plato's intellectual life. However, this psychoanalytical "phallogocentric" paradigm offers only a limited heuristic applicability. It fails to address the reality of the dialogical nature of Plato's writings--writings that embody a radical appreciation of the apodictic as well as the aporetic ways of knowing. It also fails to address the very real complexities and ambiguities in the way gender is at play in the Platonic writings, i.e., in terms of the masculinized, feminized, and trans-genderized figurings of both philosophy and discourse. If one wants to *neo*-Freudianize Plato with traditional, patriarchal conceptions of sex/gender-essentialism, then one ought to describe Plato's genderized approach to philosophy and discourse as polymorphously discursive, but *essentially* "phallogocentric": no, this is the claim of the reader too in step in agenda.

b) ARISTOTLE: DEBATING INDETERMINATENESS

If anything corresponds to Derrida's conception of logocentrism in Aristotle, it is Aristotle's establishment of the principle of noncontradiction as inscribed in the very nature of Being itself. The principle states that a thing cannot both be and not be in the same way, at the same time, in the same place, etc. It is meant to establish a complete *homoiōsis*, correspondence, between the knower and the known, i.e., a complete semantical determinateness in the nature of Being itself.³³ In Book IV of the *Metaphysics*, which contains Aristotle's most sustained defence of the principle, Aristotle is at pains to acknowledge the implications of this principle in light of the dominant philosophies of indeterminateness (*a-oristia*) of the day, i.e., the philosophies of Heraclitus and Protagoras. Aristotle is very critical of the doctrine of indeterminateness; but he is no Avicenna, who argued that those who doubt the principle of noncontradiction ought to be beaten until they acknowledge that there is in fact a difference between being beaten and not being beaten. Aristotle is genuinely concerned with the philosophical implications of the doctrine of indeterminateness, a doctrine that he finds not only in the dogmatic and systematic philosophers such as Heraclitus and Protagoras, but also in the scientifically minded thinkers such as Anaxagoras and poets such as Homer:

What results from all this, however, is most distressing. For if those who most of all have observed what the truth *may be* [my rubrics] (and these are the ones who seek and cherish it most) have such doctrines and say these things about the truth, should we not expect beginners in philosophy to lose interest in it? For to seek the truth would be but to chase birds in the air.³⁴ (1009b)

Aristotle's primary criticism of the school of indeterminateness concerns its inability to account for the common semantical basis on which humans in fact carry on meaningful intersubjective discourse. Aristotle defines a human being as "a living being possessing logos." He argues that if human beings cannot be described as

intersubjectively sharing a common basis in discourse (*logos*), they should not be described as humans, but as "plants" (*ta phuta*), which lack *logos*. Furthermore, according to Aristotle, humans are beings who realize themselves in the community of others, i.e., in the discourse-based life-of-the-polis, which characterizes the difference between humans and other creatures. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that intersubjectivity is actualized on account of the sharing of a discourse that grounds the possibility of *dialogue*, which, in principle, acknowledges the Self as well as the Other. In other words, the existence of a meaningful context grounding dialogical intersubjectivity is itself proof that there must be some determinate or apodictic basis for an understanding of the reality of things.

However, it ought to be noted that there are also other very significant aspects of Aristotle's philosophy that do not exactly "fit into" a radically dualistic way about thinking of the difference between the apodictic and aporetic ways of knowing. For instance, Aristotle's conception of the fundamental concern of philosophy rests on a form of knowledge that is neither completely apodictic nor aporetic. Although he establishes a fundamental connection of identity between *ousia* and *logos* through the principle of noncontradiction, Aristotle nevertheless emphasizes that it is possible to know "Being as Being," Being unfigured by particular forms of *logos*, such as the historical, mathematical, metaphorical, cultural, etc. Moreover, Aristotle is at pains in his *Nicomachean Ethics* to defend an ethical theory that rests, on the one hand, on a fundamental belief in "the Good" while, on the other hand, on a coterminous belief that ethical decisions are solely individual concerns relative to the particular situation in which one finds oneself. Further examples of the complexity in Aristotle's philosophy concerning the difference between apodictic and aporetic ways of knowing could be brought to bear in order to address the deconstructionist's figuring of Aristotle's philosophy. However, this very cursory acknowledgement of Aristotle's basic position concerning indeterminateness leads one to suspect that a strictly dogmatic logocentric/phallogocentric reading of Aristotle is askew.

c) SEXTUS EMPIRICUS:

DOGMATIZING INDETERMINATENESS

The myriad forms of Greek philosophical indeterminateness are nowhere more dogmatically expressed, and nowhere closer to the position of Derridean indeterminateness than in the Pyrrhonian scepticism of Sextus Empiricus. Pyrrhonian scepticism is no mere "marginalized" aspect of the Greek philosophical tradition; it carries on the various forms of scepticism found in Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Protagoras, Socrates, etc. Sextus Empiricus carries on "the great debate" of Greek philosophy, which he describes as a debate between the *dogmatikoi* and the *skeptikoi*, i.e., those who believe in a possibility of truth and those who do not. This existence of this debate would go unacknowledged if one were to accept the phallogocentric interpretation of Western philosophy and culture.

When Sextus Empiricus describes the Pyrrhonian philosopher as a mere "chronicler" who simply "chronicles" *the way things appear*, he disavows any semblance of a belief in

an objective truth, a so-called "metaphysics of presence." When he claims that language is simply a site of continual contestation, an infinitude of aporias, he is disclaiming the possibility of semantical, apodictic determinateness. When he claims that the fundamental concern of philosophy ought to be a "letting-go" (*epochē*) of the desire for apodictic determinateness, he is turning away from those who consider themselves to have a stake in some *dogmatologia* or other. When he claims that the object of the philosophy of indeterminateness is *ataraxia*, tranquillity or equanimity, he is setting himself apart from other Pyrrhonian *skeptikoi* of the period.

Sextus Empiricus shares with Derrida the semiological and subjectless/objectless interpretation of language as a matrix of semantical *différance*. Sextus describes the aporetic nature of language with a collection of terms that were strategically employed by the Pyrrhonian skeptics more than two thousand years before any of the *postmodern* deconstructionists appeared on the scene with an interest in indeterminateness.³⁵ In one mere sentence so typical of his writing style, Sextus Empiricus describes the essential nature of language as constituted by dissimilarity (*hē anomoiotēs*), variance (*hē diaphora*), contrariety (*hē antipatheia*), divergence (*to asugkraton*), discordance (*to asunarmoston*) and conflictuality (*to machomenon*).³⁶ How can one even begin to entertain seriously the criticism of Greek philosophy as "logocentric" and as "always and everywhere" constituted by a fixation with semantical determinateness and yet seriously consider the import of the philosophy of Sextus Empiricus, and the school of Pyrrhonism? As well, with respect to Sextus Empiricus' thematizing of the *complete* "letting-go" of the apodictic way of knowing, what can we say about the genderization of discourse in mainstream Greek philosophy according to the presuppositions lying behind the phallogocentric argument?

GREEK PHILOSOPHY:

DENUNCIATION, SCEPTICISM, AND THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN

This brief discussion of the essential doctrines of three Greek philosophers in light of Derrida's phallogocentric argument clearly indicates the degree to which Derrida's critique of the origins of the Greek philosophical tradition is flawed. I indicated at the beginning of this paper that Derrida's denunciatory interpretation of the tradition has more to do with psychology than philosophy; I indicated that Derrida had certain motivations for figuring the Western tradition in this manner. These motives, I contend, appear to spring from Derrida's mimicking of certain elements within his own cultural milieu that encourage denunciation, especially within the socio-political sphere. The act of denouncing or demonizing the Other has been a very important technique of elevating one's own Self over the Other. The major political events that have shaped global culture in the twentieth century have more or less depended on one form of denunciation or another, one Meta-Denunciation or another. In spite of the major advancements in the area of basic economic subsistence and human rights in some parts of the world, so much of the social and political landscape of the twentieth century has been dominated by the

effects of the ideology of denunciation. With his *carte blanche*, denunciatory troping of Greek philosophy as essentially phallogocentric, Derrida is speaking from within a modern tradition of denunciation that certainly has a claim to legitimacy, but a legitimacy that is ethically bankrupt.

The existence of the discourse of scepticism is certainly a *sine qua non* of democratic states. It was no accident that Protagoras, who was one of the greatest of the classical Greek sceptics (and much admired by Socrates and Plato), was a close confidant of the democrats Pericles and Aspasia. Whether in 1960 C.E. or 460 B.C.E., radical forms of scepticism must exist as a coterminous aspect of democratic culture. I agree with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak when she sees in Derrida's philosophy the positive political value of making built-in political problems more visible. What Spivak is talking about, however, is a fact common to all forms of scepticism in democratic states, not just to Derrida's aporetic indeterminateness. Along with the cultivation of a culture of scepticism, a modern democratic state must also depend on the pursuit of apodictic determinateness both in the sphere of science and ethics. Derrida's view of the theoretical and practical significance of scientific (i.e., apodictic) knowledge is regressively antithetical to the appreciation of the human being as a citizen of the modern world--and not just the human world, but the natural world as well. In his ideological critique of phallogocentrism, Derrida cogitates solely from within the confines of a mutated form of Cartesian rationalism: a fundamentalism of unindubitability intolerant towards anything thought to have an independent existence outside the sphere of the human *cogito*. This is nowhere more evident than in Derrida's attitude towards science, especially the natural sciences. For example, an acknowledgement of the radical cultural and psychological implications of the *Origin of Species* is [(absent)] in his writings, as it tends to be in the majority of the works by French "postmodern" writers,³⁷ even though the "world view" advanced in the *Origin of Species* has had an influence on modernity that is as important as, if not more profound than, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Clearly, while Derrida's writings are shaped by Nietzschean and Freudian figurings of the origins of Western culture, Derrida does not seriously address these origins in terms of the natural world, e.g., in terms of the perspective of the "natural sciences," forms of knowledge that are concerned with *something other* than just the human world and *something other* than a purely aporetic, indeterminate way of knowing. I take this apodictic argument one step further, and argue that modern democratic states must depend on an apodictic ethics and politics: a doctrine of human rights must be apodictic and determinate in relation to the culture with which it seeks to conform.³⁸ There must be a specific, apodictic and determinate relation between certain indispensable rights and a civilized, modern state. Derrida's sceptical relativism, though a necessary element for the discourse of modernity and democracy, offers only "half the picture" concerning what it means to be a citizen in the modern world.

If **Xanthippe** had philosophically engaged the **women** of Athens

as did

...**SOCRATES THE MEN**...

if the

LAW

of

the

vulva

vulva

vulva

the

vulva

βουλφα

vulva

vulva

vulva

V U L V A

vulva

vulva

HAD BEEN AS IMPORTANT A

cultural signifier

as the

Law of the **Phallus**

WOULD A

"LIVES AND OPINIONS OF THE EMINENT FEMALE PHILOSOPHERS"
HAVE INCLUDED ACCOUNTS OF

**APODICTIC AS WELL AS APORETIC
GNOSIS ?**

However, of this we may be sure:

Paglia's claim (a claim that is in complete agreement with the phallogocentric argument--and which thus makes strange bedmates of Paglia and Derrida) that "if civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts" contradicts the lives of those few Greek WOMEN we know about who did in fact have the opportunity to pursue intellectual and artistic possibilities, e.g., Aspasia, Hipparchia, Pamphila, and Sappho. One does not need to be a Deconstructionist or an exponent of *écriture féminine* to understand the significance of what lies

**UNVOICED IN THE TEXT
OF
THE VOICED**

CONCLUSION

THE GREEK FIGURING OF PHILOSOPHY WITH THE MASKS OF DIONYSOS



As we enter the twenty-first century we stand before an abyss, the same abyss before which the human being has always stood: the complete Unknown and the possibility of the end of “the human.” Humans are on the verge of both “making” humans through cloning technology and “creating” artificial anthropoids through the “mixing” of silicon technology and biology, i.e., cyborgs. Questions about the origins of the Western tradition, e.g., whether or not it is essentially phallogocentric, seem to pale before such specifically modern questions concerning the ethics of cloning humans or creating cyborgs. Nevertheless, even in such a specifically modern ethical debate one is confronted by the significance of the past. Both forms of knowledge, the apodictic and the aporetic, have brought modern Western (and global) culture to this particular point in its technological development. Engaging in apodictically-based, scientific inquiry has always depended on a cultural aporetic-openness towards the radical and transgressive nature of scientific inquiry. Both as a form of knowledge and as a cultural activity, science “spawns in the empty palm” of the aporetic, in this case the openness to the Unknown. The Greek philosophers were steeped in the dialectic between the apodictic and the aporetic. Renouncing such a dialectic through a fundamentalist denunciation of the significance of the apodictic way of knowing will only make us less able to confront the reality of our modernity. The Greek philosophers welcomed the confrontation with the aporetic and appreciated the mystery of the Unknown mainly because they were, at the same time, grounded in the cultivation of the apodictic.

In conclusion, one must acknowledge that Greek philosophy emerged and existed within a patriarchal cultural context. Although Greek culture openly enjoyed celebrating the pleasures and realities of human sexuality--heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual--almost all of the “fabric” and “texture” of Greek philosophy was restrictively “male-based.” Hence, the “classical” Greek contribution to the discourse of philosophy will always harbour a regretful absence, a silence that will forever remain a fundamental aspect of the matted Urtext of Western culture. While acknowledging the significance of the depths of this absence, one can, perhaps, still learn a simple, though telling, lesson from the male Greek practice of philosophy, which I would like to illustrate with reference to the reproduction (pictured above) of a well-crafted Roman copy of a Greek mosaic depicting a dialogically engaged group of male philosophers.³⁹ For me, the most intriguing aspect of this mosaic is the bordering, which consists of a Dionysian motif of comic and tragic masks. The bordering bespeaks the way the Greeks themselves thought of philosophy, and why the artist or patron chose to figure the practice of philosophy with the metaphor of the Dionysian mask. Within the context of fifth-century B.C.E. patriarchal Greek culture, the Dionysian theatre cultivated a full efflorescent disclosure of the vicissitudes of human existence, allowing both the tragic and the comedic to be openly celebrated as revelatory of the human spirit. In the Dionysian approach to life--and here I use the term “Dionysian” as the Greeks might, not in its modern Nietzschean appropriation--“*logos*” qua rationality always exists in a fragile world horizoned by *moira* (“fate” or “destiny”), the indeterminateness of life itself. Likewise, Greek philosophy, within the confines established by an inherited patriarchal social system, cultivated the appreciation of a radical dialogical openness that celebrated the richly polymorphous nature of human wonder, acknowledging the significance of the apodictic as well as the aporetic ways of knowing. In a hubristic, messianic zeal to stand outside of, and yet at the very pinnacle of, human history, Derrida and the school of Deconstruction lose sight

of the rich dialogical openness of the “text” of classical Greek philosophy,
a text that the phallogocentric argument only
partially

undresses



ENDNOTES

A first draft of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Ontario Classical Association held at Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, in April of 1997. I am grateful to the members of the audience for their observations and suggestions. I would like to thank Susan Mooney, Ken Stange, and Donna Jowett for their close and critical reading of the first draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Catherine Cook for her editorial and intellectual support, and for her much-appreciated, infectious eros for the writings of the poet Christopher Dewdney.

¹The scholarly reception of Derrida and Deconstruction has been incredibly varied. In North America, Derrida's more significant influence has been in the field of literary criticism; see Hans U. Gumbrecht, "Déconstruction Deconstructed: Transformationen französischer Logozentrismus-Kritik in der amerikanischen Literaturtheorie," *Philosophische Rundschau* 33, (1986), pp.1-35. Acting as a one-man bulwark against *all* criticisms of Deconstruction in the English-speaking world, Christopher Norris discusses the doctrinal philosophy of Deconstruction in terms of what I describe in this paper as a "school" of philosophy; see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992). John Ellis in his *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) attacks deconstruction as vehemently as Norris defends it. Much of Ellis' criticism appears to have been written as an ad hominem criticism of Derrida as an example of what Ellis views as the stereotypical 60's Parisian intellectual snob: anarchic, tyrannical, bohemian, authority-bashing, self-authorizing, etc. Ellis' "60's interpretation" of Derrida restates the basic argument in Luc Ferry's and Alain Renault's *La pensée 68: Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), a polemical response to the "anti-humanisme" of a "constellation" of French thinkers (e.g., Foucault, Lacan, Lyotard, Bourdieu, Derrida, etc.) who have "decentered the subject" in one way or another. According to Jürgen Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987) Derrida's philosophy entails an "esoteric mystification of the aesthetics of subjectivity," which "has at most the stimulus of charlatanry" (p.184). Contrasting Derrida's "subject-centred reason" (*subjektzentrierte Vernunft*) to his own "communicative reason" (*kommunikative Vernunft*), Habermas claims that Derrida completely misreads the emancipatory project of modernity due to his prioritizing of the aesthetics of subjectivity. This "aesthetic" interpretation of Derrida is held by many others, hence the references to deconstruction as "Derridadaism," "the Orientalizing of the text," and so forth. Camille Paglia, in her usual style, stridently dismisses the "diarrhea prose" of Derrida's "masturbation without orgasm" deconstructive philosophy. Paglia describes her weariness over watching "American academics down on their knees kissing French bums" when America already has Warhol, Oldenburg, Elvis Presley, Aretha Franklin and, especially, Norman O. Brown. Her solution to the problem: "Let's dump the French in Boston Harbor and let them swim home." See C. Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture : Essays* (New York: Random House, 1992), pp. 210 - 232.

There are those who are willing to allow a “just call me Jack” reading of Derrida. For instance, Gary B. Madison in his preface to a collection of timely essays, *Working through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) maintains that only Derrida's “uncritical epigones” hold that the meaning of texts are “purely and simply undecidable”; citing a passage from Derrida's *Positions*, Madison claims that Derrida's appeal to certain “protocols of reading,” for instance, justifies a reading of Derrida's texts as meaning something *decidable* (p.2). At times, Derrida openly presents such a reading of himself, unabashedly bringing through the back door that which he consistently denies at the front door, i.e., objectively shared referents of meaning, whether they be the “protocols” mentioned above, or philosophical concepts, such as the concept of the “subject” in the Western tradition; see, for instance, Derrida's opening statements to the university audience in “Talking Liberties,” *Films for the Humanities* (Princeton, 1996).

The Deconstructionists bolster their denial of scientifically based objective-truth through an appeal to chaos theory, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, quantum nonlocality, etc. Such an appeal is severely attacked in recent works on the subject; see, for example, Paul Gross and Norman Levitt, *Higher Superstition: the Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Alan Sokal brought this particular postmodern “relativism vs. realism” debate to the attention of the general reading public with his caricature of the Deconstructionist's position regarding the philosophy of science in “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” *Social Text* 46/47, Nos.1 and 2, Spring/Summer, 1996.

The most recent original development of Deconstruction as a philosophy is an intricate history of Greek philosophy that has been written solely from the perspective of the phallogocentric argument; see Barry Sandywell, *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason: Logological Investigations*, Vol. I-II (New York: Routledge, 1996).

² One could refer to this aspect of Derrida's philosophy as the “Phallogocentric Affair,” in order to imply that, in many respects, Derrida himself was complicitous in the denunciatory motivations lying behind the so-called “Cambridge Affair,” in which a group of sixteen “academic” philosophers mounted a public campaign opposing Derrida's receiving of an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University in 1992. This international collection of scholars jointly signed a petition that appeared in the *Times* (London). The arguments this group mounted against Derrida were similar to the charges that were brought against Socrates: Derrida *corrupts* “reason, truth and scholarship,” and *does not believe in* what most philosophers in so-called “leading departments of philosophy throughout the world” believe in. However, good sense prevailed and the fellows of Cambridge University voted in favour of granting the degree on June 11, 1992; for a discussion of the “Cambridge Affair,” see Jacques Derrida, *Points...Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. E. Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 399-421.

³ See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 23.

⁴ *Of Grammatology*, p. 23 (my italics). The term “phallogocentric” does not appear in *Grammatology*. Although “logocentrism” is not consciously genderized in *Grammatology*, it is tabooized as “ethnocentric” (i.e., as Western). The term

“phallogocentric” continues to be used by Derrida in his writings, although he now prefers “*carno-phallogocentrism*.” See Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: ‘The Mystical Foundations of Authority,’” *Cardozo Law Review* 11, nos. 5-6 (1990), p. 953.

⁵ Throughout *Grammatology*, Derrida bases his argument on the “privileging of logos” in a semantical, rather than epistemological context, i.e., in terms of the relation between a signifier and signified: “a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal verity, eternally thought and spoken in the proximity of a present logos” (p. 15). I choose to categorize this semantical conception in its traditional context as a variety of the “correspondence theory of truth.”

⁶ The term “*différance*” is a neographism coined by Derrida. There is no phonic difference between the French word “*différence*” and Derrida’s neographism “*différance*.” Derrida exploits this neographism as a metaphor for his attack on the “identity” foundationalism of logocentrism and phonocentrism. In Derrida’s writings the term *différance* also stands for the aporetic philosophy of indeterminateness itself. See Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 3- 27.

⁷ *Margins*, p. 22. The game metaphor is also employed in numerous places in *Grammatology*.

⁸ *Of Grammatology*, p.65.

⁹ *Margins*, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Of Grammatology*, p. 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹² *Of Grammatology*: “Yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general” (p. 158).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 76.

¹⁵ I use the term “neo-Freudianism” in the context of Derrida as a synonym for “Lacanian” Freudianism. Lacan’s turgidly expressed psychoanalytical philosophy functions as the *template* through which Derrida offers his Nietzschean-inspired etiology of the pathology of the Western cultural psyche. A host of technical terms that Derrida employs (deferral, displacement, supplement, etc.) are an essential aspect of this *template*. In his earlier writings Lacan defends an orthodox view of Freud’s “one sex theory”; women, says Lacan during this period, learn how to “play the game” of the Phallus--they learn “the masquerade.” See “The Signification of the Phallus (1958)” in Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), pp. 281-292. Lacan’s innovation within psychoanalysis centers on his use of linguistics (mainly on Saussure, who “was not available to Freud”) to theorize about the manner in which the Phallus is inscribed in the very structure of the unconscious. In the sixties Lacan’s interest focused more intensively on the nature of sexual difference and its relation to “the Law of the Phallus” in terms of his interest in

language and linguistics; during this period he modified his one-sex theory by developing a more philosophical view of the *ambiguity* of feminine sexual identity: while the masculine represents “the determinate,” “the one without another” and “rationality,” the feminine represents “the indeterminate,” “the Other” who (in the phallic system) is the “not at all.” See the collection of Lacan’s essays on the topic of sexual difference in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, ed. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, trans. J. Ross (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) .

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.75-94.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁹ *Dissemination*, p. 26.

²⁰ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wang. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 24 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 65.

²¹ Ibid., p. 92. Although French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray employ Derridean gender strategies in their writings, North American feminists who are sympathetic to Derrida’s project are nevertheless more sceptical of what they construe as his appropriation of woman’s voice; for example, see Sally Robinson, “Misappropriations of the Feminine,” *SubStance* 59 (Fall 89), pp. 48-70. Robinson, for example, sees in Derrida’s view of sexual difference a continuation of the “phallogocentric/hom(m)osexual textual economy”:

But she [woman] is sought by Derrida in a textual economy that is mobilized by a male desire to define and appropriate the feminine position as a way out of the phallogocentric dilemma. The affirmative woman becomes a privileged, even a transcendental, signifier in that Derrida’s project in *Spurs* is to define a feminine space as a deconstructive lever, and then to appropriate that space for himself and Nietzsche. The place of enunciation remains the same; the male subject displaces himself, in an attempt to de-phallicize his own discourse, but he remains in the position of the subject who knows. The feminine is appropriated in order to mark the masculine with heterogeneity; what might appear as gender fluidity or the deconstruction of binary (sexual) oppositions is actually a reconstitution of the masculine hegemonic position, this time in the guise of “feminized” masculinity (p. 52).

Robinson’s arguments are re-echoed by Kelly Oliver who claims that Derrida, through the “autocastration operation” that he thinks feminizes philosophy, is simply replaying the old game “of identifying with woman and the feminine by emasculating himself” so that, ultimately, “he won’t have to face a feminine other.” See Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy’s Relation to the “Feminine”* (New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 49. Spivak finds in Derrida’s “feminization” of the practice of philosophy the male understanding of “his own mistake,” and she does not “regard it as just another example of the masculine use of woman as instrument of self-assertion,” although she, as a woman, finds it necessary “to go somewhere else with it.” See Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman,” *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 173.

²²Jacques Derrida, *Spurs/Éperons*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) p.100. This *completely* aporetic indeterminateness with respect to sexual difference has established a gulf between deconstruction and some politically involved forms of contemporary feminism: “If gender is simply a social construct, the need and even the possibility of a feminist politics becomes immediately problematic. What can we demand in the name of women if ‘women’ do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do?” See Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *SIGNS*, 13, 3:405-36, p. 420. Spivak, however, expresses a more sympathetic reading of the political implications of Derrida’s philosophy: “It is not just that deconstruction cannot found a politics, while other ways of thinking can. It is that deconstruction can make founded political programs more useful by making their in-built problems more visible. To act is therefore not to ignore deconstruction, but actively to transgress it without giving it up.” See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Feminism and deconstruction, again: negotiating with unacknowledged masculinism,” *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ed., Teresa Brennan (London: New York, 1989) 206-223, p.206.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 96. Explicit gender identifications of the aporetic with the feminine/vulvic and the apodictic with the masculine/phallic appear throughout *Spurs*; for example: “That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth—*feminine*” (p. 55). “For it is the man who believes in the truth of woman, in woman-truth. And in truth, they too are men, those women feminists so derided by Nietzsche. Feminism is nothing but the operation of a woman who aspires to be like a man. And in order to resemble the masculine dogmatic philosopher this woman lays claim—just as much claim as he—to truth, science and objectivity in all their castrated delusions of virility” (p. 65).

²⁵ *Of Grammatology*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99. In *White Mythology: Metaphor in the text of Philosophy*, Derrida racializes phallogocentrism as the mythology of the white/Western man, a mythos of logocentrism/Reason that can only be overcome through an acceptance of the philosophy of indeterminateness. The most explicit description of the messianic troping of the Western tradition is found in the article “Tympan” (1972), wherein phallogocentrism is described as a “philosophical power/mastery” that is twofold: phallogocentric, i.e., “hierarchical,” which Derrida identifies with such philosophers as Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Husserl and Heidegger; and logocentric, i.e., “enveloping,” which he identifies with such philosophers as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel. The philosophy of aporetic indeterminateness “skins” the phallogocentric system, leaving a skeleton. But even this skeleton must “*be destroyed*” in its “essential familiarity” (p. xxi).

²⁷For an interesting discussion of Nietzsche’s “complete denunciation and total condemnation of the modern world,” see Pierre-André Taguieff, “The Traditionalist Paradigm – Horror of Modernity and Antiliberalism,” in *Why We are Not Nietzscheans*, eds. Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, trans. Robert de Loaiza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 158-224. In the preface to the 1991 French edition of this work, Ferry and Renault claim that “it is together with Nietzsche that we have to think against Nietzsche”; however, the title of the book is a misnomer, given the perspectives of most of the contributors, the majority of whom, as Nietzscheophiles of sorts, offer

sympathetic *reevaluations* of the significance of Nietzsche in light of his role in the shaping of the discourse of modernity. Although in this paper I am critical of Nietzsche's kitschy messianism and shoddy philosophical shamanism, I remain an inveterate, albeit wearied, admirer of both his life and writings.

²⁸ For example, one finds this same interpretation of Socrates in Levinas' "egological" critique of Socrates' "imperialistic" way of thinking: "This primacy of the same was Socrates' teaching: to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing, or to be free. Freedom does not resemble the capricious spontaneity of free will; its ultimate meaning lies in this permanence in the same, which is reason." See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis (Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969), p. 43.

Genealogically, one can trace Derrida's negative critique of Western rationalism as "logocentric" through Heidegger's critique of *Richtigkeit* and Nietzsche's critique of *Sokratismus*. The sphere of Unhiddenness in the case of Heidegger, and of the Dionysian in the case of Nietzsche, (re)appear in a metamorphosed manner in Derrida as the sphere of Indeterminateness (*différance*).

Jean Graybeal discusses some of the feminine associations inherent in such Heideggerian notions as "Source, Mystery, the Call, Night, etc.," although she neglects to discuss the central motif in Heidegger, i.e., Openness/Unhiddenness; see, Jean Graybeal, *Language and the "the Feminine" in Nietzsche and Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). The vulvic genderizations of Unhiddenness as the Opening are opaque in Heidegger's writings, and it remains questionable as to whether Heidegger was self-conscious of this genderization. Insofar as he was reading the *Tao Te Ching* with Asian scholars during his so-called *Kehre* period, no doubt in an attempt to understand his conception of Unhiddenness in light of the Taoist notion of the Tao, he certainly would have been aware of Lao Tzu's genderization of the Tao (qua Emptiness) as feminine.

In a nascent manner, by identifying the Apollonian with *Sokratismus*, Nietzsche genderizes the Apollonian as masculine. In spite of his notorious statements about women and the *eternal womanly*, Nietzsche genderizes his critique of rationalism by figuring the Dionysian as *feminine*--as the Primordial Oneness (*das Ur-eine*), the original Mother (*Urmutter*) who offers redemption (*Erlösung*), thus rising "to celebrate the reconciliation of her prodigal son, man." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Doubleday: New York, 1956), p. 23. Employing amniotic and marine metaphors with which she psychically and symbolically identifies herself, Luce Irigaray engages in her own appropriation of the Nietzschean conception of the Dionysian as feminine. Irigaray argues, however, that Nietzsche's male idealization of the Dionysian rests on a usurpation of the feminine, a form of matricide that "reabsorbs" everything "into the (male) same," resting as it does on "a love that knows no other." See Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian Giull. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). In spite of her antipathy towards Irigaray, Paglia (see *Sex, Art*, p. 244) shares Irigaray's proto-Nietzschean gender-essentialism, except that Paglia *celebrates* the difference while

Irigaray, in spite of her “*ethics* of sexual difference,” more often than not appears to dismiss it.

²⁹ Although modern cynics may balk at the significance of the *emergence* of political egalitarianism (*isonomia*) among the Athenians--since it was restricted to Athenian male citizens--one cannot deny that, in the patriarchal and imperialistic context of Athenian culture, this practice of egalitarianism at play in the emergence of *demokratia* opened up two dimensions of cultural life: on the one hand, a level of *indeterminateness* or freedom (i.e., *eleutheria*) in terms of the individual and, on the other, a *determinate* concern for maintaining the political significance of this freedom at the level of the *polis*. The phallogocentric argument completely elides as insignificant the emergence of this albeit restricted *isonomia*.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 4.

³¹ Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler. Loeb Classical Library, Voll. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 41.

³² Plato, *Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library, Vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 109.

³³ The principle of noncontradiction was part and parcel of Greek philosophical currency prior to Aristotle. Plato, for instance, often employs this principle, especially in the *Republic*. In Aristotle it operates as a metaphor for the apodictic as much as *différance* operates as a metaphor for the aporetic in Derrida.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library, Vol. XVII (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 187.

³⁵ Derrida might add: “Before Sextus Empiricus was, I am.”

³⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 26.

³⁷ The triad of Marx-Nietzsche-Freud has coloured much of the post-war intellectual scene in France. As an example of the [(absence)] of which I am speaking, Ferry’s and Renault’s *Why We are Not Nietzscheans*, which contains seven articles by leading French scholars whose area is the philosophy of postmodernism, especially Nietzscheanism, lacks a *single* reference to [(Darwin)], although Nietzsche was himself profoundly affected by the theory of evolution, which is particularly noticeable in his writings after *The Birth of Tragedy*.

³⁸ In a strangely serious, revisionist defence of Deconstruction, Christopher Norris claims that Derrida’s philosophy of aporetic indeterminateness has nothing to do with the philosophy of the post-modern “sceptical-relativists” who critique science on the basis of an anti-realist epistemology, “denouncing ‘truth’ as a species of rhetorical imposture.” See Christopher Norris, *Against Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 21. According to Norris, Derrida is *not* an anti-realist; in fact, because of his “utmost rigorousness,” Derrida shares in the scientific quest for “truth.” Forget erasure, claims Norris: Derrida really has something else in mind when he defends aporetic indeterminateness:

Rather, he has in mind the commitment to those values of conceptual rigour, clarity and truth—to the quest for ‘absolute ideal objectivities’ in thought and language--

which has been the single most characteristic feature of the Western philosophical tradition from Plato to the present (p. 121).

According to Norris, the anarchical post-modern anti-realists (represented, he claims, by the admirers of Lyotard and the exponents of *écriture féminine*) ought to be summarily purged from Deconstruction since they expound *false versions* of Derrida's teaching. The Stalinizing of Deconstructive Theory is typical of Norris' defence of Derrida: it is a fine example of the hermeneutical and ethical limits of a posture of "double gesture."

³⁹This first-century B.C.E. mosaic is from Boscoreale, near Naples, and is presently in the Museo Nazionale, in Naples. Art historians are divided over the identity of the characters in the mosaic: some maintain that the mosaic depicts Plato and his students in the Academy while others maintain that it depicts the Seven Sages illustrated in numerous Roman mosaics.

---*finis*---