

QUINE, DERRIDA, AND THE QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHY

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Analytic philosophy has dominated the philosophical institutions of the English-speaking world throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. It maintains that dominance in part through a rigorous, institutionally enforced effort to mark out precisely and carefully what is, and what is not, deserving of the name *Philosophy*. In the hands of its most sensitive practitioners (Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, and others), this effort partakes of an introspective and admirably inquisitive spirit, even if it does not always produce admirably heterogeneous results. For less catholic writers, however, and for those less concerned with interrogating the terms of their effort consistently and directly, it can come to seem highly (even, at times, pathologically) defensive, unable to bring into awareness the terms of its own repressed contents. Almost uniformly, when analytic philosophy seems most constituted by, and most defensive in the face of, its repressed, two words occur: Derrida and deconstruction.¹ While there is no doubt that analytic philosophy's notion of deconstruction is a caricature, there is also little doubt that something in Derrida's work, something yet to be determined, occupies the position of what might be called the repressed Other of analytic philosophy.

Among the most frequent critiques offered by analytic philosophers of Derrida and deconstruction is that what Derrida writes, while it may be of some passing, idiosyncratic, or literary interest, is resolutely not philosophy. The most constitutive and perhaps most authoritative figure in analytic philosophy is the American philosopher W. V. Quine, and one suspects that Derrida's name lurks behind a wide range of relatively vague attacks in Quine's work on "wrong-headed philosophy," such as this one from his 1987 *Quiddities*:

A question of tolerance closely parallel to the religious one recurs at a less consequential level in the teaching of controversial subjects such as philosophy. There should be a balanced representation of rival philosophies, it is urged. True enough, if one is concerned only with the history or sociology of philosophy; correspondingly for the history and sociology of religion. But if one

pursues philosophy in a scientific spirit as a quest for truth, then tolerance of wrong-headed philosophy is as unreasonable as tolerance of astrology would be on the part of the astrophysicist, and as unethical as tolerance of Unitarianism on the part of the hell-fire fundamentalist.²

It is clear enough that Derrida does not pursue “philosophy in a scientific spirit as a quest for truth,” if only in the sense that he wonders explicitly whether any of the substantive terms in such a statement can be held stable long enough—according to a notion of stable meaning that emerges largely from philosophy itself—to produce significant results. (And for Derrida it is not only the words *philosophy*, *science* and *truth* that would come under scrutiny, but the interesting juxtaposition of philosophical and theological discourses highlighted by the multiply inflected terms *spirit* and *quest*.) But surely that is not enough to declare unequivocally that what Derrida does is not philosophy. Nor does Quine provide sufficient grounds with his cleavage between “philosophy . . . as a quest for truth” and “history or sociology of philosophy”—a cleavage that is both crucial and almost entirely unexamined in mainstream analytic philosophy.

While we can argue about whether Quine truly has Derrida in mind in *Quiddities*, it is painfully clear elsewhere that he considers Derrida not to be, in the requisite sense, a philosopher. This is made most apparent in Quine’s signature (again, not an uninflected term for Derrida), along with those of eighteen other world philosophers, of an infamous May 1992 letter to the London *Times* objecting to the granting of an honorary degree to Derrida by Cambridge University.³ The letter, signed principally by Professor Barry Smith, editor of the generally analytic journal *The Monist*, insists that Derrida must not be granted an honorary degree because his work “does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigor.” In case they misunderstand this charge as arising principally from Derrida’s “written style that defies comprehension,” readers of the letter are instructed: “when the effort is made to penetrate [Derrida’s style] it becomes clear . . . that, where coherent assertions are being made at all, these are either false or trivial.”⁴

However inaccurate these charges, they fail even more fully to strike at the substance of Derrida’s project than may first appear. For one of the main parts of philosophical practice that Derrida scrutinizes time and time again in his writings is precisely the power and propriety of such notions as *rigor* and *coherence*:

the question that is often raised on the subject of deconstruction is that of argumentation. I am reproached—deconstructions are reproached—with not arguing or not liking argumentation, etc., etc. This is obviously a defamation. But this defamation derives from the fact that there is argumentation and argumentation, and this is often because in contexts of discussion like the present one [a panel discussion on deconstruction and pragmatism] where the propositional form, a certain type of propositional form, governs . . . argumentation is clearly essential. And what interests me, obviously, are other protocols, other argumentative situations where one does not renounce argumentation simply because one refuses to discuss under certain conditions. As a

consequence, I think that the question of argumentation is here central, discussion is here central, and I think that the accusations that are often made against deconstruction derive from the fact that its raising the stakes of argumentation is not taken into account.⁵

If it is fair to equate what Quine et al. term “coherent assertion” with what Derrida calls “a certain type of propositional form,” then it is critical to Derrida’s work to call into question the very idea of “coherent assertion,” and as such its history and power, the role it plays in the institutional construction of what we today call philosophy.

This suggestion militates against one potential tactic in any defense of Derrida against the charge that he is not a philosopher. That tactic would be to isolate some elements of Derrida’s writing, and to show that the assertions made in them are in some useful sense both coherent and nontrivial. No doubt this has been done more than once, and profitably so.⁶ But to my mind such accounts used as defenses of deconstruction give up too much to begin with. For it is not at all clear—in fact, it is demonstrably misleading to suggest—that Derrida means to be advancing a philosophical project in the sense that a writer such as Quine does so explicitly.⁷

1. INSTITUTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

It is nevertheless tempting, perhaps unavoidably so, to argue that Derrida’s assertions are not at all false or trivial; there is indeed a fair amount of scholarship, to say nothing of textual interpretation, leading in this direction. But even more fundamentally the charge of the *Times* letter raises the question of the assertorial status of Derrida’s writing itself. In the first flush of deconstruction’s American advent, many of Derrida’s champions, at least on occasion, saw fit to reiterate a series of arguments, derived most directly from *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, “Différance,” “Signature Event Context,” and other early works, that were said in some way to comprise Derrida’s “doctrine.” I don’t want exactly to deny that those arguments are Derrida’s doctrine, or that Derrida does write, with some frequency, as if those arguments are genuinely his. But few readers of Derrida would disagree that there are many other works where it seems far more problematic to locate a doctrine or set of philosophical assertions or arguments to which Derrida directly and obviously subscribes. And though this quality has been remarked often enough—and very often by detractors, under the names *opacity* or *obliqueness* or *obscurantism*—Derrida deserves our sympathy enough to seek out another possible way of reading his texts.

Such a way of reading is, perhaps unsurprisingly, widely available (though it is rarely consulted by Derrida’s critics). I am thinking here most directly of what has emerged from the so-called *ethical* reading of Derrida, associated especially with

a cluster of works by Simon Critchley, Gayatri Spivak, Geoffrey Bennington, John Caputo, John Sallis, Drucilla Cornell, and others.⁸ This approach suggests a new reading of Derrida as philosopher, of making out Derrida's intervention into the Western discursive practice that goes under the heading *philosophy*. One of the most significant things about this reading of Derrida is that it returns to the notion of philosophical doctrine in general, where it asks about the relationship between the activity we call philosophy and the production of what we call philosophical doctrine. This is to raise what I shall want to think of as a profoundly historical question, one that points at the operation of our conceptual and concept-generating apparatuses though and in us as parts of history.

For if philosophy as it is (currently) constituted in the West is in part an effort to escape history, it is also—perhaps even always already—nothing less than an articulation of the embeddedness of our concepts and our conceptual apparatus in history. This, then, is the question of philosophy in the most profound sense: the double awareness that is needed to make use of our analytical-philosophical concepts (an activity which on this view seems inherently to tend out of history) while at the same time implicating our concepts and knowledge-producing activities within the history that, in the end, constitutes their entire substance. As Derrida says in an interview conducted during the “Cambridge Affair,”

The question of knowing what can be called “philosophy” has always been *the very question* of philosophy, its heart, its origin, its life-principle. Since this gesture, which is originally and constitutively a philosophical gesture, is both repeated and examined in everything I write, since my work would have no sense outside its explicit, recurrent, and systematic references to Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and several other authors (whether in the canon or not), references made over a period of thirty years, the motives of those who wish to deny that my work is “philosophy” must be sought elsewhere. That is their problem, not mine. Most often, I think these inquisitors confuse philosophy with what they have been taught to *reproduce* in the tradition and style of a particular institution, within a more or less well protected—or rather, less and less well protected—social and professional environment.⁹

Instead of expressing philosophical positions, Derrida uses the texts and positions and the history of philosophy to open questions in our practice, in our language—to allow an openness about critical and “central” issues (such as language, logic, meaning) to persist, even to expand.

Remarkably, the texture of Derrida's opening these questions looks quite similar, in tenor, to some moments in Quine's writing: that is to say, Derrida sees potential question-opening (i.e., deconstructive) material at very similar loci to the ones on which Quine focuses. But where Quine sees in these loci the straightforward substance of philosophical inquiry, Derrida hesitates to add the institutional imprimatur. Crudely, and granting too much to an Anglo-American idiom, we can say that both Quine and Derrida recognize that our language and

our reference are underdetermined by the evidence; and while Derrida takes that observation to open questions about the historical, constitutive, linguistic nature of philosophical practice—to increase the space for reflection and discussion, in other words—Quine immediately forecloses those possibilities (as even a quick reflection on his philosophical career shows). The open question of reference, as we shall see, leads to the very much closed question of science—even if, for formality’s sake, Quine admits that even that question, on some sort of unheard-of and not-easily-imaginable evidence, might be reopened. For Derrida the question remains open, and it is the primary responsibility of philosophers not to answer the question, but to keep it open.

Derrida’s reliance on a relatively general set of views regarding language is complemented by the persistent attacks of his philosophical critics on this aspect of his work. But the connection between the various gestures he makes at or in language and his more global perspective on the place of philosophical discourse in culture has not been clearly addressed. While it is his position on language that Derrida’s philosophical critics most often attack—a position that, I will argue, consists in large part of a refusal to take for granted or as natural or given any of the qualities of our linguistic practices—it would seem rather to be Derrida’s relentless historicization and contextual questioning of the rights (institutional and otherwise) of philosophy that would appear to be most disturbing.

From this same perspective—one in which very little about language as such is in fact known, but strong opinions in many directions are clearly held—the historical nature of philosophical discourse seems far more clearly provable than does any particular position one might take on language as such. That is to say that Derrida’s perspective in general can be most easily questioned when he writes about language, precisely because almost any position about language can be questioned. It is far harder to question his historical “thesis.” Indeed, the desire to escape history lodged firmly in analytic philosophy is among its most unquestioned tenets. It is also what analytic philosophy would most like to dismiss out of hand about deconstruction. It is therefore a convenient sort of shell game to attack Derrida’s “philosophy of language,” such as it is, and to use that attack to dismiss “deconstruction,” without once even raising the question of Derrida’s principal line of thought about philosophy.

This is only part of the story. Derrida repeatedly argues that he does not “do” deconstruction, but instead that deconstructions happen, that they are always already in the process of happening. He suggests that some discourses and cultural contexts are more or less resistant, at least on their surfaces, to the deconstructions that are present (or active) within and through them. In particular he suggests that philosophy as it is currently constituted is institutionally resistant to the deconstructions present in (or active in) itself. Further, he

suggests that language as a medium and as a subject of philosophy constitutes a particularly charged locus of deconstruction.

In particular, then, language. And not just language, but the slippages, polysemies, indeterminacies of language, the irretrievability and instability of meanings, are some of the phenomena Derrida picks out to show how many of our discourses deconstruct themselves. It should come as no surprise, then, that Quine's writings on meaning express a nearly isomorphic view of language to the one we can find in Derrida: that is, that Quine's and Derrida's writings hover consistently around the same linguistic phenomena. Nor is it surprising that Quine's project in general demonstrates the total resistance to that auto-deconstruction contained in the discourse of which he is a part. That is to say, Quine's philosophy is precisely constructed to contain the deconstructive energies liberated by his philosophy; his systematic philosophy demonstrates an institutional mastery over deconstruction that his linguistic philosophy in fact releases. Quine's work is thus an ample enactment of exactly the deconstructive operation in philosophy about which Derrida writes.

2. QUINE ON LANGUAGE

Quine's position on language is expressed in part through the best-known of his theories, the Indeterminacy of Translation (IT) thesis.¹⁰ The IT thesis is, at bottom, a thesis about how we interpret and understand, philosophize about, intersubjective communication: about our access to the mental contents of our social coevals as expressed and explained through their verbal behavior. Our common-sense intuition is (supposed to be) that our German friend means just the same thing we do when she says "Schnee ist Weiss" and we say "snow is white." But this apparent ease disguises a fundamental indeterminacy, one that comes out most clearly when we try to construct "manuals" for translating one language wholesale into another without benefit of pre-existing contextual guides ("radical translation"). In the first full explication of the IT doctrine, Quine writes:

The thesis is then this: manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose.¹¹

Quine's illustration for this thesis has become one of analytic philosophy's most familiar scenes: given no prior contact with the language of a "native speaker," the linguist lacks any factual basis on which to discern that the "native," on repeatedly seeing a rabbit and uttering the phrase "Gavagai," means *rabbit*, or

undetached rabbit part, or *rabbit stage* (a “brief temporal segment” of a rabbit).¹²

Though it violates some of our most cherished common-sense ideas about how language operates, the doctrine has been taken most seriously by analytic philosophers for nearly half a century. In part that is due to the tight connection of the IT doctrine with other aspects of Quine’s system. Two of these concern us in particular here. The first is, as I have indicated, the most direct support of the IT doctrine: Quine’s resistance to intentionalist semantics. The second concern, more broadly, is the enmeshment of both of these arguments about language (the IT doctrine and the related argument against intentionalist semantics) in Quine’s views about the purpose of philosophy and the functions of natural science.

On the semantic front, the IT doctrine is said to support, or complement, or be a consequence of, Quine’s views on analyticity. In the first of his essays to address directly philosophy in general (rather than the somewhat more rarefied world of logic, where Quine’s work began), the 1951 “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” it is analyticity that Quine takes as his prime critical target. Quine contends there that “modern empiricism has been conditioned in large part by two dogmas. One is a belief in some fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic . . . and truths which are synthetic.”¹³ Through a procedure that Samuel Wheeler has likened to a deconstruction of this distinction (though whether that characterization is fairly applied is open to question), Quine begins by showing that the canonical definition of analyticity—true by virtue of the inherent meaning of the analytic truth’s terms—is circular, and that other attempts to define analyticity suffer from an analogous defect.¹⁴ Underlying this line of reasoning, an earlier version of the views on meaning we saw in the IT doctrine appears:

For the theory of meaning a conspicuous question is the nature of its objects: what sort of things are meanings? A felt need for meant entities may derive from an earlier failure to appreciate that meaning and reference are distinct. Once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the primary business of the theory of meaning simply the synonymy of linguistic forms and the analyticity of statements; meanings themselves, as obscure intermediary entities, may well be abandoned.¹⁵

While this abandonment does nothing to resurrect analyticity in Quine’s eyes, it does help to restabilize empiricism. And it is here that the significance of the connections between Quine’s views on meaning and his larger philosophical system becomes clearer: for Quine’s more general project is to show that the “considerations which guide [each man] in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic”¹⁶

Less hermetically, for Quine the very project of philosophy is undertaken in the spirit of a branch of empiricism he calls naturalism, which consists in

the rational reconstruction of the individual's and/or the race's actual acquisition of a responsible theory of the external world. It would address the question how we, physical denizens of the physical world, can have projected our scientific theory of that whole world from our meager contacts with it: from the mere impact of rays and particles on our surfaces and a few odds and ends such as the strain of walking uphill.¹⁷

Philosophy and natural science are not clearly distinct aspects of this enterprise. Indeed, in Quine's most triumphant moments they come to seem almost the same enterprise entirely:

if the theoretical scientist in his remote way is bound to save the eventual connection with non-verbal stimulation, the philosopher in his remoter way is bound to save them too. True, no experiment may be expected to settle an ontological issue; but this is only because such issues are connected with surface irritations in such multifarious ways, through such a maze of intervening theory.¹⁸

It is in the context of philosophy as part of natural science that we come to understand the full weight of Quine's resistance to the intentional idiom. Quine sees philosophy as a task that seeks to develop (or uncover) a satisfactory "conceptual apparatus," and

the terms that play a leading role in a good conceptual apparatus are terms that promise to play a leading role in causal explanation; and causal explanation is polarized. Causal explanations of psychology are to be sought in physiology, of physiology in biology, of biology in chemistry, and of chemistry in physics—in the elementary physical states.¹⁹

These elementary physical states occupy a privileged position in Quine's ontology (or perhaps his epistemology, perhaps both). While Quine admits that every aspect of physical science may be subject to revision, physics itself (which may include whatever "fundamental" science might replace) nevertheless deserves special, highest place in Quine's view of human knowledge. Talk of meanings, while it may have heuristic value, nevertheless fails because meanings themselves cannot be considered objects of physical science: "knowledge, mind and meaning are part of the same world they have to do with . . . they are to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science"; and "I would not seek a scientific rehabilitation of something like the old notion of separate and distinct meanings; that notion is better seen as a stumbling block cleared away."²⁰ As Christopher Hookway succinctly puts it, "for Quine, the physical facts are all the facts. The canonical notation is adequate if it can regiment all

the claims made in a finished physical theory; translation is indeterminate if correctness of translation is not fixed by physics.”²¹

Quine’s commitment to a profoundly physicalist view of inquiry leads him to a bifurcated view of meaning in its most intimate context. On the one hand, Quine is careful to point out, in a justly famous phrase, that “radical translation begins at home.”²² Hookway glosses the phrase this way:

When . . . I begin to think about my own verbal behavior in theoretical or semantical terms, I am forced to admit that, here too, indeterminacy reigns. Philosophical reflection upon my own verbal behavior, concerned with hunting out semantical rules and ontological commitments, requires me to make use of translational notions. I then recognize that the intentional content of my own psychological states is subject to indeterminacy: semantical and intentional phenomena cannot be incorporated within the science of nature as I would wish.²³

But this strong skepticism toward one’s own semantic practice is countered by a comforting assertion of the status quo. Quine writes that he does not “advise giving up ordinary language, not even mentalistic language”;²⁴ elsewhere he points to the “persistence” of his own “vernacular use of ‘meaning,’ ‘idea,’ and the like, long after casting doubt on their supposed objects.”²⁵

It seems fair to suggest that insofar as language use is a critical part of our social being, meaning as such is one of the cardinal, if under-analyzed, notions on which we rely. Quine’s writing, while it calls into question the very existence of that common-sense notion, at the same time gives us some kind of hook on which to hang our common practices: meaning is entirely evanescent in some ultimate sense, but it is also ineffable in the contexts of our linguistic and social interactions.²⁶ As such, while Quine sees philosophy itself as a part of, or continuous with, natural science, he also affirms that one task of philosophy can be to efface almost entirely a crucial element of our everyday social and mental experience. The fact that Quine allows for the heuristic value of the notion of meaning must be seen in its full ambiguity, for I would suggest, as I will discuss in more detail further on, that Quine’s writing remains vague about where the line can be drawn between the philosopher who uses the notion of meaning instrumentally in her everyday social interactions, and the philosopher who, while doing philosophy in her professional guise, now altogether jettisons meaning as a term with any significance or utility whatsoever.²⁷

3. DERRIDA ON LANGUAGE

In speaking of Derrida’s views on meaning we enter vexed territory. For where it is quite possible to extract from Derrida’s work a viable “theory of meaning”—one that, as I have suggested (and as no less a major philosopher than Hilary Putnam has directly argued), is not in general incompatible with the

one we have just outlined in Quine—it will be central to my larger argument to insist that the extraction of such theories is in a crucial sense antithetical to Derrida’s “project” as a whole.²⁸ It would be wise, then, to take this portion of the argument in the appropriate sense: for we will be describing Derrida’s theory of meaning only to suggest that we make a mistake in reading Derrida for “theories.”

This is not to suggest that there is no value in trying to set out Derrida’s philosophical “positions,” most especially because of the role such explications play in the institutions of philosophy, and not least because of the necessity of so doing for providing entry points into the Derridean corpus. But it is nevertheless wise to notice that even the best of these explications press very heavily on only a limited number of works by Derrida, chiefly some of the essays that appear in *Margins of Philosophy* and *Writing and Difference*, on some parts of the *Grammatology*, and on a few essays such as “Limited Inc. a b c,” and “Des Tours de Babel.” Unlike Quine, where the works we have relied on (including *Word and Object*, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” *Ontological Relativity*, *Pursuit of Truth*, “Facts of the Matter,” and others) constitute most of his major writings, it is not at all certain that the works on which one necessarily relies to outline a Derridean theory of meaning are, in fact, the “central” or “major” or even most “representative” of Derrida’s writings; or, to put it another way, it is clear that many of Derrida’s “major” writings (e.g., *Glas*, *The Post Card*, *Parages*, *Psyche*) are not explicitly engaged in the construction of a “position” on language as such.

Gordon Bear summarizes the central argument in Derrida’s writing on language as follows: “since every linguistic expression can be used in contexts which are unusual or out of the ordinary, no linguistic communication is ever successful.” Bear expands on this thesis—itself sounding remarkably like an extreme restatement of Quine’s Indeterminacy of Translation thesis—by means of three propositions:

(I) every meaningful mark-type is *iterable*.

So: (II) every token of a meaningful mark-type is characterized by a *dissemination* which is both

(II-a) irreducible to univocality, and

(II-b) irreducible to regulated polysemia.

So: (III) There can be *no successful speech act*, no successful linguistic communication.²⁹

The crucial part of Bear’s argument comes in the inference from II to III, since as Bear rightly notes I and II, taken together, suggest only that “whenever we communicate we might be misunderstood.” The argument for the inference to III

is lodged in opposition to a “familiar picture of communication” that Bearn says has three stages:

At the first stage, someone—the sender—has a thought, sometimes a vague or otherwise confused thought, but sometimes a perfectly univocal thought. Suppose it is. At the second stage hoping to communicate this thought to another, the sender puts the univocal thought into spoken or written words. At the third stage, the other person—the receiver—gathers from the words sent either the thought the sender sent or some other thought, or else, in special circumstances, nothing.³⁰

Although the terms are not quite the same, this seems very close to the view of meaning that Quine’s entire system militates against. It is unsurprising then that Bearn’s restatement of Derrida’s view that “no linguistic communication is ever successful”—wherein, I would suggest, words like “linguistic” and “successful” are not carefully defined enough to carry the weight Bearn puts on them—comes out as: “if thinking, imagining, intending, and so forth, rely on language for their determinacy, then the various significances of a word which are aloft in spoken and written language will not be grounded by the turn inside, the turn to the gaseous realm of thought.”³¹

That this most careful reconstruction of Derrida’s views on language is almost a word-for-word rehearsal, if in Derridean rhetoric, of the IT thesis is no small part of my point. As we saw earlier, Quine is adamantly opposed to the view that there exists a realm of mind-independent entities called “meanings” that can determine the sense of propositions humans utter or write. The indeterminacy Quine foregrounds in the Gavagai scene, we recall, has the consequence that “the intentional content of my own psychological states is subject to indeterminacy.”³²

Does this mean that Quine and Derrida say “the same thing”? Surely not. It does suggest that there is a similar operation or phenomenon informing both Quine’s and Derrida’s writings. Something more of this operation can be brought out by examining what must be one obvious consequence of both Quine’s and Derrida’s positions on meaning (though notably one that is repeatedly held against Derrida, and rarely at all against Quine). That is, namely, the charge of self-refutation: that the indeterminacy of meaning necessarily implicates one’s own statements, which by dint of one’s own thesis are said not to have determinate meaning, and which therefore should be dismissed to begin with by their own lights.

We have already seen that Quine recognizes the potential for such self-contradiction in his philosophy, in the reference to the “persistence” of his own “vernacular use of ‘meaning,’ ‘idea,’ and the like, long after casting doubt on their supposed objects.”³³ Few of Quine’s commentators make much of these remarks. The analytic philosopher Graham Priest, however, in a volume dedicated to exploring self-contradiction in a wide range of contemporary philosophy,

characterizes Quine's views so as to make them sound remarkably like a dismissive summary of what Derrida's views are alleged to be:

If ["radical translation begins at home"], then it is true just as much of Quine's own utterances as those of others. It follows that his utterances have no determinate sense: whatever sense he would like us to attach to them, they do not, as such, mean that. . . . Yet clearly Quine does succeed in expressing views about meaning that *do* have determinate sense.³⁴

Further on, Priest characterizes Derrida's thought in almost exactly the same way:

We take Derrida to be advocating a certain view, namely, arguing against presence, the determinacy of sense. Yet, if he is right he is not advocating anything with stable and determinate sense at all. What, then are we supposed to make of what he says if there is nothing *as such* that he says? Or, to put it the other way, given that he does express certain views (those that I have summarized), he is expressing something . . . that, if he is right, cannot be expressed.³⁵

In a context other than a defense of Derrida, the claim that there are self-contradictory elements to Quine's views on meaning would be nothing more than an arguable philosophical thesis. Yet on the heels of an institutional critique of Derrida that accuses him of propounding views that either are radically apart from common sense, or are entirely self-contradictory and therefore dismissible, it must be something close to scandalous to find that the most institutionally authorized figure out of that institution has views that can be characterized in precisely the same way.

4. HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, MEANING

To say that both Quine and Derrida express a certain skepticism toward meaning and that this, in turn, informs the views both of them have about language, comes too close to suggesting that they have the same views or are, at root, advocating the same philosophical system. That would be quite wrong. But what it does show is that, at bottom, it is not precisely the views that Derrida is willing to entertain about meaning, or about language, that make him the target for so much of analytic philosophy's ire. Instead, the real object of contention is the direction in which Derrida takes his observations, the context within which those views receive expression. At the same time we cannot lose sight of the fact that, rather than understanding and engaging with the entirety of Derrida's project, analytic philosophers choose to focus on a segment of Derrida's views that comes dangerously close to sounding like their own views.

What is at issue, I want to suggest here, are precisely the interconnections between language and communication, on the one hand, and the practices and institutions of philosophy on the other. These interconnections are what give the

lie to those dismissive critiques of Derrida that find his views on language (texts, meanings, etc.) incomprehensible or trivial; for Derrida rarely if ever, in his own texts, expresses philosophical positions on abstract topics such as language without situating them directly and profoundly in historical and institutional—philosophical—contexts. Indeed, it can be argued that the whole of Derrida's work is precisely devoted to the self-conscious exploration of the historicity of such philosophical concepts read back through, and against, the philosophical corpus that has produced and nurtured them, and that this project must always be undertaken in the context of Western philosophical history. It is all too easy to see how scandalous that observation has been in the fifty years that analytic philosophy has held institutional sway in the United States and England.³⁶

As we have seen, Quine is dedicated absolutely to the view that philosophy is a task of the purely rational mind, that philosophy's history is relevant only insofar as it informs a project that is continuous with natural science, and especially with physics. Philosophy's task is to allow the philosopher to operate as a kind of human instantiation of the laws and theories of science, to see the world through the absolutely neutral eyes of a science that aims toward, even if it never reaches, perfection.³⁷ This context, even Quine's partisans admit, is never questioned or even fully analyzed in Quine's work; it is accepted as background and, occasionally, fleshed out in minimal detail.

Derrida, on the other hand, is resolutely interested in precisely these larger grounding questions that Quine for the most part avoids. This surfaces most clearly in Derrida's persistent emphasis on the historical nature not just of philosophy as an institution but of the language within which, and of which, philosophy is constituted:

if we consider the history of philosophy as one great discourse, a powerful discursive chain, is not that history immersed in a reserve of language, the systematic reserve of a lexicology, a grammar, a set of signs and values? And once this is so, is not the history of philosophy limited by the resources and the organization of that reserve?³⁸

Derrida's emphasis has escaped the notice of his philosophical critics, though it has informed his work thoroughly early to late. I am thinking in particular here of the essays making up *Margins of Philosophy* and the as-yet untranslated *Du Droit à la philosophie* (*The Right to Philosophy* or *The Law of Philosophy*).³⁹ Though Derrida's work in general has always been explicitly engaged with the historical nature of philosophical discourse, these two works in particular (along with Derrida's insistent attention, throughout his works, to philosophers such as Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) foreground the issue, and it is telling how resolutely they have been ignored by philosophers (especially analytic philosophers) in their supposedly damning critical reconstructions of Derrida's thought.⁴⁰

A parallel and in many ways related theme in Derrida's works on (of) philosophy is the constitution of philosophy's Other. This concern appears nowhere more brilliantly in Derrida's writing than in the very first essay of *Margins of Philosophy*, "Tympan":

Ample to the point of believing itself interminable, a discourse that has *called itself* philosophy—doubtless the only discourse that has ever intended to receive its name only from itself, and has never ceased murmuring its initial letter to itself from as close as possible—has always, including its own, meant to say its limit. In the familiarity of the languages called (instituted as) natural by philosophy, the languages elementary to it, this discourse has always insisted upon assuring itself mastery over the limit.⁴¹

Through language in particular, both its medium and its object, philosophy erects an institution of inquiry which it then names "natural," which it ties to the institution of science as such, and which then we are to read as disconnected from the historical discourse that has produced this linguistic institution. This process in no way invalidates philosophical reason *tout court*, but it does resist the project of neutral philosophical reason whose very history deconstructs it. Decades prior to any "Cambridge Affair," Derrida asks,

What is the specific resistance of philosophical discourse to deconstruction? It is the infinite mastery that the agency of Being (and of the) proper seems to assure it; this mastery permits it to interiorize every limit as *being* and as being its own *proper*.⁴²

He fleshes out this answer in part by asserting that

the particular sciences and regional ontologies are subordinated to general ontology, and then to fundamental ontology. From this point of view all the questions that solicit Being and the proper upset the order that submits the determined fields of science, its formal objects or materials (logic and mathematics, or semantics, linguistics, rhetoric, science of literature, political economy, psychoanalysis, etc.), to philosophical jurisdiction. In principle, then, these questions are prior to the constitution of a rigorous, systematic, and orderly theoretical discourse in these domains.⁴³

One could scarcely ask for a more direct explication of what is at stake in the contest between Quine's project and Derrida's. Indeed, this view of Derrida's helps us to see what he means when he says that discourses deconstruct themselves: for Quine's philosophical writings clearly evidence just the sort of resistance to "questions that solicit Being and the proper" by an implicit reference to the "determined fields of science, its formal objects or materials." In other words, though Derrida nowhere conducts a direct examination of analytic philosophy at all, his work seems to have precisely adumbrated how and even why analytic philosophy will have resisted the recognition of its own deconstruction,

and at the same time suggest the reasons why Derrida's writings and persona will have been cast as the Other of analytic philosophy.⁴⁴

5. LANGUAGES, INSTITUTIONS

Which brings us to language, to philosophy, and specifically to "the question of philosophy" from which I take my title. Throughout his works, Derrida emphasizes a series of general problems in discourse and language that structure Western philosophy:

To analyze "philosophic discourse" in its form, its modes of composition, its rhetoric, its metaphors, its language, its fictions, everything that resists translation, and so forth, is not to reduce it to literature. It is even a largely philosophical task (even if it does not remain philosophical throughout) to study these "forms" that are no longer just forms, as well as the modalities according to which, by interpreting poetry and literature, assigning the latter a social and political status, and seeking to exclude them from its own body, the academic institution of philosophy has claimed its own autonomy, and practiced a disavowal with relation to its own language, what you call "literality" and writing in general; it thereby misrecognized the norms of its own discourse, the relations between speech and writing, the procedures of canonization of major or exemplary texts, and so forth. Those who protest against all these questions mean to protect a certain institutional authority of philosophy, in the form in which it was frozen at a given moment. By protecting themselves against these questions and against the transformations that the questions call for or suppose, they are also protecting the institution against philosophy.⁴⁵

Rather than suggesting that its current instances are inherent in some kind of universal cognitive activity named *philosophy*, Derrida emphasizes the ways in which our philosophy is entrenched both in our languages and our institutions, and the ways in which those languages and institutions serve both to provoke and to restrict what activities can be named by the term "philosophy" (and carried out in institutions under that name).

This phenomenon is not just part of philosophy; it is inherent in the very attempt to define philosophy itself, as Derrida suggests again and again in *Du Droit à la philosophie*:

Le nom de philosophie se trouve ainsi soumis à une sorte de torsion qui le replie vers un lieu excessif, débordant, inépuisable. Il s'y reconnaît sans reconnaître, il s'y trouve chez lui et hors de chez lui: la chose ou le concept «philosophie», à savoir ce que ce mot intitule à un moment donné et dans des discours déterminés, reste toujours inégal à la responsabilité qui, en son nom, porte au-delà de son nom ou des noms disponibles pour lui.⁴⁶

The name of philosophy submits to a certain twisting that doubles back on itself in excess, overflow, inexhaustibility. It is acknowledged without acknowledgment, it is both at home and homeless. The thing or the concept "philosophy": to know what one is entitled to claim the word means at a given moment and within a determined discourse, always remains unequal to the responsibility that the name itself carries beyond the name or names available to it.

Derrida illustrates these phenomena most explicitly in a breathtaking and, to his English readers, relatively unknown essay called “Languages and Institutions of Philosophy.” In the first two sections of this essay, with which we shall be concerned here, Derrida meditates on Descartes’ decision to write and publish his *Discourse on Method* in French, when the authorized philosophical language of his time (the *Discourse* was first published in 1637) was Latin. Among other topics, Derrida urges us to think carefully about the role of the state in the establishment of “official” languages for various discourses, including philosophy; and he presses especially hard on the assumption—critical for any readers of Derrida himself in English—that philosophy consists in translatable ideas or positions that can be expressed independently of any particular language. This latter assumption is said to rest upon the deeper assumption that there is a universal philosophical language, a universal language of philosophical method:

it is often tempting to think about it: all the specific philosophies of method, all the systematic discourses on the concept of method, from Plato to Bergson, from Spinoza to Husserl, by way of Kant, Hegel, or Marx, could only have been written by combining the types, the characters, coded in a permanent language; they would have exploited philosophemes already constituted and caught in a language of philosophy, of method in philosophy, being content to operate permutations and substitutions in it: an essentially rhetorical actualization of a kind of philosophical grammar over which individual philosophical acts would have no control.⁴⁷

The steps are clear from this position to one in which particular languages, histories, concepts stand in marginal relationships to the grander project of “natural reason,” the discovery of clear truths already coded for us into a clear, readable text of the world.

From this perspective, we can see with additional clarity both the deconstructive aspects of Quine’s writing and the resistance to deconstruction in it as well. For Quine too expresses a strong, if ultimately *syntactic* (i.e., formal), resistance to the establishment of extra-linguistic truths and concepts, which escape immanent instantiations in particular human languages and instead can be expressed either in eternal, extra-human (Platonic) ideas or in private, mentalistic ones. From this direction, Quine’s work would seem to lead directly toward a questioning of the role and function of philosophical reason, as an expression of particular languages, as an attempt to reason abstractly about concepts that can only be expressed uncertainly across linguistic divides. But Quine counters this critical element in his philosophy by his reliance on a notion of objectivity, even if it is “stimulus objectivity,” in the world around us.⁴⁸ Where Derrida shows us the deferrals locatable in the handed-down language of which our discourses consist, Quine points forward: toward the ever-improving, ever-more-truthful posits of an unfinishable physical science. This physical science plays the role in Quine’s philosophy—and analogous roles in the work of other

analytic philosophers—of stopping the inquiry into the historicity of language and of philosophical practice just where it threatens to become an inescapable part of philosophy (as it clearly is for Derrida). Thus the project of “natural reason,” of reason abstracted absolutely from history and from actual human contexts, lives on, within the discourse and the institution that should, above all, be aware of the need to critique it.

In the beginning and early-middle phases of his career, from “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” through *Word and Object*, Quine takes up the force of philosophy precisely by opening (some of) its deepest questions. Yet as the institution of analytic philosophy and Quine himself as institutional avatar develop, this questioning is rapidly replaced by an institutional determination of philosophical *right* (not that such a determination was not present to begin with), a replacement of any essentially philosophical activity (that is, the further opening and reopening of questions) with the rehearsal and refinement of a given philosophical system whose main purpose is to forestall the opening of a question. What is most ironic, but from a deconstructive standpoint most telling, is that this system is itself constructed around a set of kernels that themselves suggest not the ready ease of systematization but rather the persistent presence of the question as the foundation of what we in the West call philosophical.

One place where Quine’s and Derrida’s writings touch most closely is in their respective discussions of the crucial role played by the grammatical particles in our understanding of language. In a discussion of the IT doctrine in what is perhaps his most gnomic essay, “Ontological Relativity,” Quine writes that

Our individuating of terms of divided reference, in English, is bound up with a cluster of interrelated grammatical particles and constructions: plural endings, pronouns, numerals, the “is” of identity, and its adaptations “same” and “other.”⁴⁹

Later, he explains that

Within the parochial limits of our own language, we can continue as always to find extensional talk clearer than intensional. For the indeterminacy between “rabbit,” “rabbit stage,” and the rest depended only on a correlative indeterminacy of translation of the English apparatus of individuation—the apparatus of pronouns, pluralization, identity, numerals, and so on. No such indeterminacy obtrudes as long as we think of this apparatus as given and fixed. Given this apparatus, there is no mystery about extension; terms have the same extension when true of the same things. At the level of radical translation, on the other hand, extension itself goes inscrutable.⁵⁰

It is hard to read these passages carefully, closely, and to truly comprehend without deconstructive understanding what Quine is saying in them about our conceptual practices, and in particular about the conceptual practice to which we give the name philosophy. Quine in these passages locates in the most foundational aspects of our language—the grammatical particles, the copula—an

indeterminacy that should, in principle, restrict the meaningfulness of all philosophical theorizing to the parochial language in which particular philosophical statements are couched.

Where Quine studiously sidesteps the enormously problematic issues raised by these consequences of his theory, Derrida has, from the beginning, brought them front and center. To Derrida, the linguistic conundrums of the philosophical enterprise itself are implicated at every point in the very act of philosophizing.⁵¹ One of the places Derrida makes this clearest is in a brief discussion of how the word deconstruction itself can be translated:

the difficulty of *defining* and therefore also of *translating* the word “deconstruction” stems from the fact that all the predicates, all the defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even the syntactic articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this definition or to that translation, are also deconstructed or deconstructible, directly or otherwise, etc. And that goes for the *word*, the very unity of the *word* deconstruction, as for every *word*. *Of Grammatology* questioned the unity “word” and all the privileges with which it was credited, especially in its *nominal* form. It is therefore only a discourse or rather a writing that can make up for the incapacity of the word to be equal to a “thought.” All sentences of the type “deconstruction is X” or “deconstruction is not X” *a priori* miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts “deconstruction” is precisely the delimiting of ontology and above all of the third person present indicative: *S is P*.⁵²

Derrida maintains a certain ambiguity in his work between the meaning of the word “philosophy” and of the word “deconstruction”: at times it seems as if he means the terms to be coextensive, especially when he describes philosophy in terms other than those in which it has been frozen.⁵³

One way of cashing out Derrida’s implicit view of philosophical history would be to suggest that most of the major philosophical epochs in the West are inaugurated by theses or positions that radically call into question some aspects of so-called common sense. cursory examination of the major names in philosophical history demonstrates this easily enough: from Plato’s forms through Descartes’ cogito, from Hume’s views on causation through Kant’s categorical imperative, all the seminal positions of major philosophers challenge some of the most deeply held beliefs of their times. Yet Derrida’s work goes further, in the name of a philosophy that, in the end, must be surpassed by its own questioning. For not just language, but even the handed-down nature of culture and context must be called into question by whatever we call philosophy:

Is there a “metaphysics” outside the Indo-European organization of the function “to be”? This is not in the least an ethnocentric question. It does not amount to envisaging that other languages might be *deprived* of the surpassing mission of philosophy and metaphysics but, on the contrary, avoids projecting outside the West very determined forms of “history” and “culture.”⁵⁴

For Derrida, the movement of philosophy always consists in the raising of some questions on this order, especially in and of language. Quine's writing obeys the letter of this rule precisely. Derrida goes further: he suggests that the responsibility of philosophy is to keep these questions open, to resist the institutional reification that maintains the appearance of opening some questions just by closing others. For philosophy to affirm its responsibility, it must become habituated to the question that dwells within—which may mean learning to resist *philosophy*, the linguistic and institutional approbation that confirms and bestows its name upon itself.

It is a characteristic move in Derrida's writing to find the origin in the end, the main matter to the side, the body in the preface. So it may come as no surprise, when reflecting on the ultimate ends of deconstruction, to find at its "origin" a curious prefiguration of the philosophical questioning to come. Trolling in the very earliest of Derrida's writings, we note a strong interest in logic (especially of the Husserlian variety, Husserl being of course the one of the three "Big H" philosophers to have had some impact on Anglo-American practice) and in the instantiation of logic in language. Among the very marks of this interest is the 1964 translation into French (from a still-unpublished English original) of a survey of new developments in the theory of logic, which suggest that all is not well in the pursuit of stable meanings according to the orthodox view of philosophical-linguistic analysis. The revolutionary views of the author of this survey, W. V. Quine, are hardly known in France; in fact the essay is among the first of Quine's works to appear in French (see Quine, "Les Frontières de la Théorie Logique").⁵⁵ Thus not only Quine's views on the indeterminacy of translation, but the analytical power to read through them, despite them, in a foreign language for the very purpose of translating them into one's own, to call into question the logical orthodoxy that would, in turn, call deconstruction itself into question—what would be the ethics, the responsibility of locating at the very heart of deconstruction the figure, the signature, of Quine himself?

New York City

NOTES

- 1 Examples abound throughout the analytic literature. One particularly egregious and revealing instance of recent vintage is found in the latest book by the philosopher of mind Stephen Stich, which is surprisingly titled *Deconstructing the Mind*. Stich's earlier work had something like a deconstructive relationship to mainstream analytic philosophy: his "eliminativism" (a position similar to that held by Quine himself) questioned the handed-down nature of the philosophical/conceptual apparatus regarding questions of mental structure. But his new work actually includes an explicit repudiation of the former deconstructive analysis, under the name "deconstruction." In the book's title essay, Stich writes: "For some years now, deconstructionism has been a

pretentious and obfuscatory blight on the intellectual landscape. But buried in the heaps of badly written blather produced by people who call themselves ‘deconstructionists’ there is at least one idea—not original with them—that is worth noting. This is the thesis that in many domains both intellectual activity and everyday practice presuppose a significant body of largely tacit theory. Since the tacit theories are all but invisible, it is easy to proceed without examining them critically. Yet once these tacit theories are subject to scrutiny, they are often seen to be very tenuous indeed; there is nothing obvious or inevitable about them. And when the weaknesses of the underlying theories has been exposed, the doctrines and practices that rely on them can be seen to be equally tenuous. If, as I would suggest, this process of uncovering and criticizing tacit assumptions is at the core of deconstructionism, then eliminativism is pursuing a paradigmatically deconstructionist program. However, if I am right, the eliminativist deconstruction of common-sense psychological discourse has itself tacitly assumed a dubious package of presuppositions about the ways language and ontology are related. So if the goal of eliminativism is to provide a deconstruction of the mind, one goal of this chapter is to deconstruct that deconstruction.” Stephen Stich, *Deconstructing the Mind* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 9. This passage has more than a touch of protesting too much about it. If deconstruction truly is a “pretentious and obfuscatory blight,” why title one’s book after it? Why organize that book around “one idea—not original with them” that on examination turns out to be “at the core of deconstructionism”—an idea that looks, on Stich’s construal, quite a bit like the central thesis of the logical positivists (Carnap et al.), who thought all metaphysical problems were problems of language (a position Quine largely shares)? The persistence of such examples lends credence to the view that on that ground, at least, analytic philosophers sense the presence of something highly attractive, as well as something quite disturbing, in deconstruction.

- 2 W. V. Quine, *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), “Tolerance,” 209.
- 3 Letter to the London *Times*, Saturday 9 May 1992, signed by Barry Smith and eighteen others, including Quine; reprinted in *The Cambridge Review* 113 (October 1992): 138–39. The letter is also reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Points . . . Interviews 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 419–21, which is the version referred to in this essay. Cambridge did, in the end, grant the honorary degree to Derrida.
- 4 Letter to the London *Times*, 9 May 1992, reprinted in Derrida, *Points*, 420.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, “Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,” in Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau, and Richard Rorty, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 86.
- 6 See especially Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), and Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Samuel C. Wheeler, III, “The Extension of Deconstruction,” *The Monist* 69 (1986): 3–21, and Wheeler, “Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson,” in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 477–94; Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Andrew Benjamin, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy: A New Theory of Words* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Gordon C. F. Bearn, “Derrida Dry: Iterating Iterability Analytically,” *Diacritics* 25 (Fall 1995): 3–25; Graham Priest, “Derrida and Self-Reference,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994): 103–11, and Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Barry Allen, “Difference Unlimited,” in *Working through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 5–27, and Allen, *Truth in Philosophy* (Cambridge,

- Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993). Perhaps the most elegant of these demonstrations is Christopher Norris, "Supplementarity and Deviant Logics: Derrida contra Quine," *The Philosophical Forum* 29 (Winter 1998): 1–27, which in one sense seems to me to analyze precisely the inverse of the pattern I examine here.
- 7 Geoffrey Bennington is especially strong on this point in "Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)" (1988), in *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 11–60.
- 8 For Simon Critchley, see *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992). For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among her many readings of Derrida, see especially "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's 'Limited Inc.'" (1980) in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 75–106; Spivak, "Responsibility," *Boundary 2* 21 (Fall 1994): 19–64; and Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992): 770–803. Also see Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), which includes Derrida's "Circumfession," Derrida's "Passions," and Derrida's *Du Droit à la philosophie*; Bennington, *Legislations*, and John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).
- 9 Jacques Derrida, "Honoris Causa: 'This is also extremely funny,'" 1992 interview with the editors of *The Cambridge Review*, trans. Marion Hobson and Christopher Johnson, in *Points*, 410–11.
- 10 Quine's writing on the IT thesis can be found principally in *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), *Pursuit of Truth* (1990; rev. ed., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), *From Stimulus to Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), "Facts of the Matter" (1977), in *Essays on the Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, ed. Robert W. Shahan and Chris Swoyer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 155–69, and "Three Indeterminacies," in *Perspectives on Quine*, ed. Robert Barrett and Roger Gibson (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), though it recurs throughout his writings. On semantics, in addition to these works, see Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays* (1953; 2nd. rev. ed., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), "Meaning and Translation" (1959), in *Challenges to Empiricism*, ed. Harold Morick (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1972), 70–95, "The Problem of Meaning in Linguistics" (1951), in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 47–64, and "Comment on Quinton," in *Perspectives on Quine*, ed. Barrett and Gibson, 309.
- 11 Quine, *Word and Object*, 27.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 51. For a direct investigation of the cultural context implied by the anthropological-colonial setting of the Gavagai story, see my "Quine's Ambivalence," *Cultural Critique* 38 (Winter 1997–98): 5–38.
- 13 Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," 20.
- 14 See Wheeler, "Extension of Deconstruction."
- 15 Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," 22.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 17 Quine, *From Stimulus to Science*, 16.
- 18 Quine, *Word and Object*, 276.
- 19 Quine, "Facts of the Matter," 168–69.
- 20 Quine, "Ontological Relativity" (1968), in Quine, *Ontological Relativity*, 26; and Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, 56.

- 21 Christopher Hookway, *Quine: Language, Experience and Reality* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 212. For more on this line of argument, see Thomas G. Ricketts, "Rationality, Translation, and Epistemology Naturalized," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 117–36; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), especially part 1; George D. Romanos, *Quine and Analytic Philosophy: The Language of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983); Susan Haack, "The Two Faces of Quine's Naturalism," *Synthese* 94 (1993): 335–56; Roger F. Gibson, Jr., "Translation, Physics, and Facts of the Matter," in *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine: The Library of Living Philosophers*, Vol. 18, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), 139–54; and Miriam Solomon, "Quine's Point of View," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1989): 113–36.
- 22 Quine, "Ontological Relativity," 46.
- 23 Hookway, *Quine*, 211.
- 24 Quine, "Facts of the Matter," 168.
- 25 Quine, *Word and Object*, 210.
- 26 See especially Richard Rorty, "The Indeterminacy of Translation and of Truth," *Synthese* 23 (1972): 443–62, and Andrzej Zabłudowski, "On Quine's Indeterminacy Doctrine," *Philosophical Review* 98 (1989): 35–63, for discussions of the stability of the distinction Quine makes between the "everyday" notion of meaning and his more technical notion.
- 27 This point is made forcefully in Rorty, "Indeterminacy of Translation and of Truth."
- 28 For Putnam, see "A Comparison of Something with Something Else," *New Literary History* 17 (1985): 61–79, and *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), chap. 6.
- 29 Bearn, "Derrida Dry," 3, 11.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 32 Hookway, *Quine*, 211.
- 33 Quine, *Word and Object*, 210.
- 34 Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 218.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 240.
- 36 The only direct critiques of analytic philosophy's ahistoricism are those of Joseph Margolis; see especially his *Historied Thought, Constructed World: A Conceptual Primer for the Turn of the Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), "A Biopsy of Recent Analytic Philosophy," *The Philosophical Forum* 26 (1995): 161–88, and, more tangentially, "Politics of Predication," *The Philosophical Forum* 27 (1996): 195–219. John McCumber, "Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era," *Diacritics* 26 (1996): 33–49, offers some interesting proposals that specifically address some of the reasons that analytic philosophy may have developed the way it has.
- 37 For more on this line of thought from the analytic perspective, see Ricketts, "Rationality, Translation, and Epistemology Naturalized"; Romanos, *Quine and Analytic Philosophy*; Lars Bergström, "Quine on Underdetermination," in *Perspectives on Quine*, ed. Barrett and Gibson, 38–51, and Bergström, "Quine, Underdetermination, and Skepticism," *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993): 331–58; and Gibson, "Translation, Physics, and Facts of the Matter."
- 38 Jacques Derrida, "The Supplement of Copula: Philosophy before Linguistics" (1971), in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 177.
- 39 Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* was published in English translation in 1982, though many of its parts appeared in English in the mid-1970s, and it appeared in French as *Marges de la philosophie* in 1972; it is comprised of essays published as early as 1967, the year in which Derrida came to international attention. *Du Droit à la philosophie* appeared in France in 1990, though again many of its constituent parts appeared in English and in French much earlier.

In the late 1980s, an English volume comprising many of the essays that would eventually make up the French *Du Droit à la philosophie* was repeatedly indicated as forthcoming in 1990 from Harvard University Press as *Institutions of Philosophy*, edited by Deborah Esch and Thomas Keenan. That volume has never appeared. Some parts of *Du Droit à la philosophie* are, however, available in English translation: especially relevant for this essay are “The Age of Hegel” (1977), in *Demarcating the Disciplines: Philosophy, Literature, Art. Glyph Textual Studies 1*, ed. Samuel Weber (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3–43; “The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils,” trans. Catherine Porter and Edward P. Morris, *Diacritics* 13 (Fall 1983) 3–20; “Languages and Institutions of Philosophy,” trans. Sylvia Söderlind et al., *Recherches Sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry* 4 (June 1984): 91–154; and “Sendoffs” (1982), trans. Thomas Pepper, ed. Deborah Esch and Thomas Keenan, in *Reading the Archive: On Texts and Institutions. Yale French Studies*, ed. E. S. Burt and Jean Vanprée, 77 (1990): 7–43. Also see Derrida’s “Once Again from the Top: Of the Right to Philosophy” (1990), interview with Robert Maggiori, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points*, 327–38, and “Of the Humanities and the Philosophical Discipline: The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitical Point of View (The Example of an International Institution),” trans. Thomas Dutoit, *Surfaces* 4:310, Folio 1 (1994), n.p.

- 40 On this point see Christopher Norris, “Limited Think: How Not to Read Derrida,” *Diacritics* 20 (1990): 17–36.
- 41 Jacques Derrida, “Tympan,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, x.
- 42 Derrida, “Tympan,” xix.
- 43 *Ibid.*, xx.
- 44 It is true that, in “Signature Event Context” (1971), in *Margins of Philosophy*, 307–30, and in “Limited Inc. a b c,” trans. Samuel Weber, *Glyph* 2 (1977): 162–254, Derrida does discuss Austin’s (and Searle’s) version of speech-act theory directly. But it has never been clear that speech-act theory, which eschews to some degree the logical idealization of language at the heart of analytic philosophy in favor of the Wittgensteinian analysis of “ordinary language,” has been fully accepted by analytic philosophers. The figure of the Other is critical to the recent “ethical” reading of Derrida. See especially Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*; Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*; and, among Derrida’s many works on the subject, “At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am” (1980), trans. Ruben Berezdivin, in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11–48, and “Psyche: Inventions of the Other,” trans. Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 25–65.
- 45 Jacques Derrida, “Is There a Philosophical Language?” (1988), trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Points*, 218.
- 46 Jacques Derrida, *Du Droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 36 (author’s translation).
- 47 Derrida, “Languages and Institutions of Philosophy,” 94.
- 48 On the kinds of objectivity found in Quine’s writing, see Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*; Ricketts, “Rationality, Translation, and Epistemology Naturalized”; and Putnam, “Why There Isn’t a Ready-Made World” (1981), in Putnam, *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 205–28, and “Why Reason Can’t Be Naturalized” (1981), in *Realism and Reason*, 229–47.
- 49 Quine, “Ontological Relativity,” 32.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 51 In addition to the works directly discussed here, “Des Tours de Babel,” trans. Joseph F. Graham, in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 165–205, features a long, explicit discussion, via Walter Benjamin, of translation that bears careful attention in this context.

- 52 Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend" (1987), trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 274–75.
- 53 Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, chaps. 2 and 3, is especially clear on this point.
- 54 Derrida, "Supplement of Copula," 199.
- 55 According to the authoritative bibliography, which was "compiled by W. V. Quine," in *Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, ed. Hahn and Schilpp, 669–86, "Les Frontières de la Théorie Logique," trans. Jacques Derrida and Roger Martin, *Les Études Philosophiques* 2 (1964): 191–208, was only the second work by Quine to appear in French. The first is a longer essay that excerpts some of Quine's more critical material on reference and meaning from the *Word and Object* period: "Le mythe de la signification," *La Philosophie Analytique*, Cahiers de Royaumont 4 (Paris: Minuit, 1962), 139–69, which Quine himself apparently translated.