

ETHICS AT THE LIMIT OF REASON

RICOEUR AND DECONSTRUCTION

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The manner in which deconstruction has recently articulated itself as a philosophy of limit opens discussion as to the broader question of the nature and extent of any philosophy today at the limit of reason. Turning to this broader context and repeating this celebrated Kantian theme allows a contrast between deconstruction and other possibilities of philosophy today at the limit, thereby revealing the sense in which deconstruction can be considered a philosophy of limit. It is my working hypothesis that the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, precisely as a philosophy at the limit,¹ offering itself in a relation to the tradition different from that of deconstruction, provides a rich and positive account of alterity, and at once takes account of the positive elements of deconstruction.² This will be shown by (1) reflecting on the very basis of the commitment of these two forms of philosophy to sense and meaning, (2) by comparing these two differing developments of philosophy as attentive to its limit, and (3) by taking into consideration extensions beyond this limit initiated by Kant and brought to culmination by Ricoeur. It is precisely the tension between limit and extension, so fundamental to Ricoeur's philosophy, that allows his recent ethics, cast against this backdrop, to take place within the polarity between ethical foundations and the moral principle of obligation.

And it is in the context of such an ethico-moral philosophy that we must attempt to confront the challenge from deconstruction. If such a challenge is to be accepted in its extreme formulation, the question must be posed regarding the sense in which any ethical philosophy can be considered worthwhile, since it would seem that to deconstruct ethics or to engage it in a deconstructive or "clotural reading" involves a fundamental style of thinking at odds with such a project. Indeed, even the philosophy of Ricoeur is submitted to this sweep of deconstruction.

Let us turn now briefly to explore the notion of limit.

I do not pretend to treat exhaustively the problem of philosophy at its limit, end, closure or interruption,³ but merely to shed light on the problem by turning briefly to reflect further on this notion of limit, showing how the positions of Ricoeur and deconstruction fit into that context, thus contrasting these two recent efforts toward ethics or against ethics.⁴ In focusing on philosophy at the limit, we can bring together and correlate two distinct senses of limit, one emerging from Kant's transcendental idealism, the other from Peirce's view of secondness within interaction. Here we follow the lead of Drucilla Cornell's account.⁵ The designation of deconstruction as a philosophy of limit in the first sense is somewhat an extrapolation of the Kantian sense of limit.⁶ Drucilla Cornell's recasting of this designation has the positive effect of exposing the "quasi-transcendental conditions" establishing a system as a system, showing that this very establishment implies a "beyond" which is excluded. The system and any determination of meaning allow closure and exclusion at the expense of openness. Hence, deconstruction as a philosophy of limit at the end of metaphysics challenges us to be open to the excluded, thus affording us a "golden opportunity" rather than a crises of termination.⁷ Cornell renders deconstruction as a philosophy of limit that is open to the beyond, to unimagined possibilities, and hence as a call for a radical transformation of the present. This can perhaps be seen to be the other side of the closure.⁸ Deconstruction, then, questions traditional philosophy's ability to get at the "beyond" in its discourse, i.e., in its saying of what cannot be Said.

The second sense of deconstruction as a philosophy of limit attempts to incorporate C. S. Peirce's notion of secondness in his own opposition to Hegelian idealism. As Cornell says, by secondness Peirce indicates "the materiality that persists beyond any attempt to conceptualize it." That which is given limits the projected interpretation—i.e., reality is not completely interpreta-

tion, thus opposing idealism. This notion of limit is no longer the one placed by reason, but rather arises from the “other”—i.e., perhaps from the Kantian unknowable *x*, but in a far more positive sense than that of Kant. For this Peircean notion of Secondness attempts to get at the other and thus overcome Kant’s noumenal and phenomenal distinction. It is the precise sense of limit entailed here as emerging from the “other” that restricts interpretation. It can be seen that, for Kant, the limit is placed by reason on the use of the categories in experience for knowledge, while for Peirce, the limit derives from the “other” as given which limits our interpretation. There is, however, another way of understanding deconstruction as a philosophy of limit, entailing the relation between limit and closure. By passing to the notion of closure we come to a favorite thematic focus of deconstruction, one used as a favored critique levied at metaphysics and also at the philosophy of Ricoeur.

In making the transition from limit to closure, we must recognize that, according to some, the word “limit” carries the same force as closure for Derrida,⁹ thus bringing us again to the depiction of deconstruction as a philosophy of limit, but with a sharper focus on a certain aspect of deconstruction. Here we follow Simon Critchley, who coins the phrase “clotural reading” to depict the kind of activity of closure as distinguished from end, and to distinguish a trivializing of deconstruction with the phrase “deconstructive reading,” which some deconstructionists adamantly eschew. Clotural reading entails producing a dislocation within a text, dividing it along the split axes of belonging and not belonging to the metaphysical or logocentric tradition. This clotural structure is “provoked” by a reading in which two clashing lines of thought open up within a text. The “clotural reading” has two moments that vary according to the text that is being read, in which first a general pattern can be delineated: a repetition of the text’s internal exigencies through an act of “commentary”; and second, “within and through this repetition, an ellipsis, or moment of alterity, opens up within the text which allows it to deliver itself up to a wholly other reading. It is important to understand that this moment of alterity, as the ellipsis within the text, is grasped only through the textual repetition, thus revealing the need for a double reading. The ellipsis is the space within repetition.”¹⁰

Thus, rather than the case that any reading is possible for a “deconstructive reading,” as some opponents of deconstruction like to contend, the process is rigorous, involving a serious repetition that resuscitates the original impetus or exigency of the text and at once, by serious work, brings to the fore the ellipsis that leads to an entirely other reading, but one making the closure emerge into view. Such a reading puts one in the throes of the closure of the metaphysical tradition and epoch, caught in the midst of both and being part of each at once, and thus bringing about an interruption. Hence, this kind of reading is more serious than that usually attributed to deconstruction, and can be recognized as situating such reading “in relation to the closure of the history of metaphysics.”¹¹ It is Critchley’s contention that such reading is the context for the emergence of the ethics of deconstruction: for such a reading of a text provokes the suspension of decision between the two alternative readings.

This clotural reading can be seen as a philosophy at the limit in both senses above. First, the sense of limit in relation to the residue in creating a system is similarly found in the creation or reading of a text, so that the logocentrism expressed by such a text is precisely what demands, from the first repetitive reading, that the ellipsis come to the fore, requiring a deconstruction of the text in terms of the alterity that is latent in it. Such a text, created or read, implies a “beyond to it” precisely of what it excludes, at the expense of openness, according to the standard script of deconstruction. Secondly, the alterity or the other is precisely what defies any interpretation or conceptualization, because it lies beyond any such attempt. Thus Critchley is correct in taking closure as another expression for limit.

In a cursory and summary fashion, we may say that recent writers on deconstructive ethics, such as John Caputo, Drucilla Cornell, and Simon Critchley all, attuned to the Derrida-Levinas dialogue, put obligation at the heart of deconstruction, but Caputo, following Derrida’s hesitation, rejects ethics in favor of a poetics of obligation, while Critchley and Cornell, following Levinas, hang onto the term in their own rejection of virtually the same ethics that Caputo rejects. For my part, I would at least partially agree with these efforts, appropriating a positive contribution of deconstruction after a critique. What is more, I believe that they have pointed to some-

thing essential to any responsible attempt at an ethics today. However I want then to move on to a further extension of ethics following Ricoeur, who can be seen as likewise influenced by Levinas, but who develops in an entirely different way what can be called an ethico-moral view. We will see that the obligation or duty at the heart of the deconstructive enterprise is not something to be lost sight of, even if it requires an extension beyond any usual or typical sense of ethics. But it is not to be seen as self-sufficient, and it must be tied to something that needs to be brought into a more positive frame of philosophical mind. Before turning to Ricoeur as offering an alternative to deconstruction, we must explore the very basis for deconstruction itself and for this alternative way of believing. In doing so, we will reflect in a Jamesian way.¹²

Logocentrism, especially in its philosophical and scientific expressions, can be seen to contain a latent and subtle affirmation in common with deconstruction. It can be seen that all expression of meaning, even of systems, all discovery in knowledge and thinking, and all value, spring from a will to believe or a certain faith that we can arrive at a logos, knowledge, and unconcealment, that make sense, and that values can be grasped and sought. At this point, deconstruction and its opponents are within the same commitment of belief and are on the same level of discourse, for both affirm this coming to logos.¹³ It is here on this common ground that deconstructionists have come to what might be called a quasi conversion, a complete change in their way of looking at the whole enterprise of emerging meanings and values, so that the post-Copernican revolution now becomes a post-critical conversion.¹⁴ At this point, following the faith in the sense of logos, there is a complete about-face or transformation in attitude, giving rise to a further interpretation of the logos according to which it is incapable of doing justice to the unfathomable abyss. This entails a closure of sense, an effect that loses its fluidity. It is at this point that deconstruction attempts to dismantle the status of the logos and knowledge within the initial will to believe in the process of making sense.

Deconstruction, then, entails more than cognition in our will to believe in cognition. There is a further commitment to the belief in closure intrinsic to such logos, to the priority of this closure over sense, and to the priority of the flux. Thus,

deconstruction brings excess baggage to the will to believe in logos and cognition, constituting a priority of the nonlogocentric. The ultimate issue, then, is that the will to believe of deconstruction, while initially affirming the logos through which one must pass, reveals a commitment to the priority of a concomitant closure, to its absolute status in relation to the abyss, and therefore to a nonlogocentrism. Protesting that its opponents have not grasped their thinking, it is clear that the very protestations of deconstructionists reveal an underlying prejudice, as absolute in its claim as it is illusive and unattainable: a belief in the undecidable, the unexpressible, the abyss. It is best to reply to this with an alternate belief, one which makes sense out of sense, while at once seeing and admitting its limits, but with an openness beyond the initial limit. This limit, then, while initially a certain kind of closure entailed in the coming to light of logos, is likewise an openness to its own very source for constant and ongoing renewal in a process of interpretation. Its openness consists both in bringing to light, and, at once, openness toward renewal in its rich source, thus, in its own way, taking into account the closure of limit.

In turning now to the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur as a viable and positive alternative to present day deconstruction, several preliminary points must be clarified: first, how this philosophy fits into the option just discussed, and, second, how this philosophy at the limit relates to limit as we have interpreted it. Turning to the first point, we may say that Ricoeur's entire philosophy is attuned in a special, unique way to the openness, fullness, and richness of existence, where concrete sense is expressed, something to which he often in the past has alluded to in terms of the surcharge or fullness of sense and of existence. What is more, although his thought is anchored in such a richness and abyss, he never wavers in his faith in or option for making sense out of experience and existence, but a sense ever attuned to the creative process and to the ongoing re-creation that subverts all thinking, knowledge, action, and interpretation. Thus, in turning to a more explicit development of Ricoeur's position in terms of these foci and questions, we will be able to shed more light on our issues as we go along and reveal a contemporary philosophical thought sophisticated enough to encompass the problems issuing from deconstructive thinking without buying into the belief in the priority of the closure intrinsic to

logos. It is my contention, as a working hypothesis, that this thought is far more appropriate to the issues focused upon, making sense where deconstruction deconstructs. One has the feeling throughout that Ricoeur is addressing something that resonates with our own experience and with our reflections on that experience, and thus provides a fitting alternative, not oblivious to closure or to the need for constant openness and reinterpretation. I have to affirm, however, that his thinking, although accounting for the positive element of deconstruction, differs from deconstruction on vital points, such as its anti-logocentrism.¹⁵ I shall now turn to reflect further with Ricoeur on these issues, beginning with a focus on the second point mentioned above, that of limit.

It seems to me that both senses of limit obtain in his philosophy. As will become clear throughout the discussion on his philosophy, Ricoeur clearly appropriates the Kantian limit placed by reason on the use of the categories in experience for knowledge. Ricoeur remains, however, strict with regard to the Kantian sense of limit against any tendency to Hegelian totalization, yet he appropriates the Hegelian sense of freedom as actualization against Kant's too formal sense of this notion. Next, in the second sense of limit, he sees double meaning expressions as modes of access for which Kant did not allow explicitly. Ricoeur allows this use of indirect language, i.e., symbols, metaphors, and narrative, as ways of expressing the boundary, and as an indirect way of access to the so called noumenal. Such an approach does not at all claim to constitute knowledge, but it does afford a way to think, not within or without, but at the boundary.¹⁶ Thus, from the vantage point of the limit as boundary one can advert to both sides, while the limit confines one to what is within the limit. For Kant the limit, in the sense of boundary, can be transgressed, but not as knowledge. In this context, we can remember that it is precisely here that both Cassirer and Heidegger, in spite of their essentially different readings of Kant, agree on the fact of a positive reading given to the transcendental dialectic of Kant, placing them both close to our project here. It is perhaps here with the combined notions of limit-boundary that even Kant himself allows a bit of an opening to the limit's closure. However, there is still an ambiguity here as to whether and to what extent this is really a limit stemming from

the other in Peirce's sense seen above. Indirect expressions, especially symbols, are Ricoeur's way of extending beyond the Kantian limit. Furthermore, his proposed changes to Kant's view of reflective judgments, productive imagination, and the schematism, now seen in a full philosophy of action which requires a hermeneutic, will be the path to fulfilling our second sense of limit, for Ricoeur, clearly, in his later writings, comes to grips precisely with the other as other.¹⁷

When referring to Ricoeur's thought as a philosophy at the limit, however, it would be a distortion not to acknowledge his correlate or extension (*Erweiterung*) beyond the limit and Ricoeur's basic extensions of Kant's own later extensions, to which deconstruction does not advert. Thus, for Ricoeur, in contrast to deconstruction, limit and extension are correlated. There are two contexts relevant for our discussion where Ricoeur extends upon Kant's own extensions:¹⁸ first, by regarding freedom in its connection to the law in practical philosophy in relation to theoretical philosophy, which receives a practical extension beyond its limitation within the antinomy of pure reason; and, second, in drawing upon the *Critique of Judgment*, by means of the reflective judgment, which "performs, precisely, an extension of judgment."¹⁹ Now we turn to Ricoeur's pursuit of the movement of these extensions beyond Kant.

First, Ricoeur admits reproaching Kant for having constructed his second Critique on the model of the first one, by applying to the practical field "the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, without taking into account the structures proper to human action."²⁰ Ricoeur is here referring to his critique of Kant in terms of the latent receptivity found in the structure of human action with which he has ardently disagreed since the Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary and Fallible Man, and which he develops so well in *Oneself as Another*.²¹ Ricoeur's critique of Kant and his own contemporary vision reveal a harmony between man and nature, overcoming the modern antinomy between freedom and nature by means of an enriched nature in man and man in nature. His adjustment in the Kantian doctrine of the antinomy between nature and freedom can be summarized this way: first, sensibility must be capable of a relation to willing as a motive for decision that inclines without compelling; second, a rational

principle must be capable of touching me in a way analogous to that of sensible goods. As is well known, for Kant, respect is a *sui generis* feeling of subordination of the will to a law without any other intermediary influence on sensibility, so that, in respecting its own rationality, the will receives nothing, but spontaneously produces the feeling of respect in itself, thereby restoring sovereignty to reason.²² Ricoeur, however, observes: "Respect, as a practical feeling, posits a limit to my ability to act." Thus he is still close to the Kantian context of respecting humanity as an objective end, as an end which I should never act against.²³ In expanding the function and role of respect to parallel that of the transcendental imagination in the cognitive synthesis, though, Ricoeur also changes the role of duty from the strictly Kantian role. Rather, for him, the relation between motive and project is far more inclusive if liberated from such a Kantian ethical *a priori*. In a way that entails the possibility of man as bodily comportment, Ricoeur considers desire to be a motive or a value and not only a cause.²⁴ Such spontaneities can incline without compelling the will and thus serve as a basis for decision without mitigating active freedom as human and receptive. Given this experiential focus, he dispenses with the need to postulate freedom as a cause in the strictly Kantian sense. Indeed, for him the whole of the voluntary in all three of its moments must be receptive to the involuntary as already human and therefore as liberated from a causal language that is reductive as regards motives, our powers of action, and life itself. Lived nature, which includes the weddedness of man to nature both within and outside himself, the lived body, and lived existence all reveal a freedom in being-in-the-world that does not separate man from the lived world and lived nature but, rather, bespeaks a unity of existing man with the world and within himself.

Second, because of this, Ricoeur considers the formalism of duty to be introduced too early, as a "consequence of the dualism between the principle of obligation and the fact of desire."²⁵ The third point to which Ricoeur turns now, following from the two already spelled out, is that his claim for the primacy of the teleology of living well is due to his assignment of a positive place to desire in the structure of human action. It is important to see that he does not interpret this desire as a replica of sensible receptivity in the theoretical order.

Fourth, Ricoeur suggests that his analysis of semantic innovation in metaphorical and narrative contexts enlarge the field of the third Critique, but at the cost of a "refusal to distinguish between reflective judgment and determinant judgment, a refusal expressed in the recognition of the function of redescription or, better yet, of refiguration, performed by all the innovating and, in this sense, poetic forms of discourse. One can legitimately see in this function of refiguration an extension of the Kantian theory of productive imagination beyond the region assigned to it by the theory of reflective judgment."²⁶

Ricoeur's philosophy of limit and extensions must now be put in confrontation with deconstruction's critique of the closure latent within his own philosophy, which would preclude his own development of ethics in *Oneself as Another*. This confrontation will include this critique of Ricoeur, a response to that critique, and Ricoeur's own critique of deconstruction, which in turn makes possible his own philosophy of narrative and his later development of an ethico-moral position.

Deconstruction (here, especially through the work of David Wood) challenges Ricoeur's attempts to address time and narrative, proposing that there might be other ways in which language resolves the aporias of time if the closure of language and of time is interpreted differently or is deconstructed.²⁷ It is clear that deconstruction has opted for a view of metaphor, and, indeed, of language as such, that calls for an interruption rather than a synthesis, within a view of language as a system of signs. Wood asks: "Is not Ricoeur putting a brave face on time's reassertion of its power to disrupt all attempts at conceptual domestication?"²⁸ Wood wants to interpret Ricoeur's attempt as one in which the "presumption of synthesizing thought is confronted by a power that exceeds it,"²⁹ and thus runs up against the limits of the power of narrative to tame time. As he says: "might it not be that narrative is committed to the possibility of a certain closure of meaning, which will inexorably be breached."³⁰ Wood further proposes that phenomenological and cosmic time are two discrete and autonomous dimensions of the real, and not two partial models of the real. By extension, the same critique, in a more general way, could be made of Ricoeur especially in the context of his ethico-moral position in that he can be taken as operating within the closure of language,

tradition, institutions, etc., following the clotal reading discussed above. He is therefore in need of being deconstructed in terms of the ellipsis to be found necessarily, according to the belief of the deconstructionist, in his texts, by means of the double reading.

What Wood and deconstruction focus upon here are the two pivotal points relevant to the difference between Ricoeur's as a philosophy of limit and that of deconstruction: the treatment of time and that of sign. And it is to these that one must turn in order to fathom the differences in these philosophies at the limit. For, on the one hand, deconstruction is committed to the discreteness of time, arising out of its interpretation of the living present, and to a diacritical view of signs in language, while Ricoeur, in contrast, and assuming a different will to believe, accepts a phenomenological priority of time and a semantic priority in language that requires a place for the word and not just for signs in diacritical relations. We must pursue further these two points; first, the lived present and then sign.³¹

Derrida (and Wood seems to follow this interpretation) puts the nonperception and nonpresence of retention on the same side as that of reproduction, thus placing an alterity within the living present. "The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace."³² Thus deconstruction has wedged a separation into the center of the living present, making two alien and discrete parts out of the duration of the "thick now," thus making it possible for Wood to critique Ricoeur's so called "taming of time." This view of the broken living present, resulting in a discreteness of time, underlies a view of sign that reinforces this critique of Ricoeur's so called closure.

For deconstruction, the meaning of the sign emerges from its difference from other signs. The signified can itself become a signifier, thus showing the collapse of the radical distinction made by de Saussure between signifier... signified. The meaning of a sign, rather than being immediately present as Husserl and de Saussure thought, is constituted by a "tissue of differences," a network of referrals, and every so-called simple term is marked by the trace of another term. Hence a sign already differs from itself before any act of expression. Thus no particular sign can be considered to refer to any particular signified, a sign

cannot have a unique meaning (it is undecidable), and the system of signifiers cannot be escaped. That we cannot escape the system of signifiers and that no particular sign can be considered to refer to any particular signified leads to the conclusion that there is no presence to meaning in the usual sense within language; no presence to consciousness or to things. Rather, meaning transpires in the "play that is the web of language."³³ Thus, deconstruction (for Derrida) can be seen to deny the accessibility of the present and of presence. For everything transpires within language constituted by the network or system of signifiers. There is no escape from the system of signifiers. This entails a view of language from which meaning, in a different sense from that of any usual semantics, emerges. For deconstruction begins with the subordination of semantics in the traditional sense to syntax and the development of a view of syntax quite different from its usual sense. From such a syntax, as the root of the formal dimension of language, the semantic dimension emerges. Therefore Derrida subscribes to a new and far more radical sense of syntax than that of syntax as form in contrast to content. Rather, for him, syntax is the condition making meaningful language possible and, at once, is itself productive of the semantic dimension of language. This has been referred to as a "syntax of syntax" from which the "formal syntactic properties can be syntactically composed and decomposed"³⁴ This reduction to syntax liberates the signifier from the "oppressive regime"³⁵ of presence as immediacy and at once ties it to the time flux over against structure or meaning. For if syntax is prior to semantics and there is a "syntax of syntax,"³⁶ then the flux of syntax, the diachronic, is in no way tied to or subordinated to semantics or to meaning, or to the structure of the system of language. Rather, it generates a kind of meaning in the very positioning of such words as "green is or," thus moving away from structuralism in favor of the flux underlying meaning and language. It has lost, however, the continuity and depth of lived time. At this point, in the context of a response to the critique of deconstruction, we must turn to Ricoeur's richer and more viable account of language and time, the possibility of whose account rests on a completely opposed view of sign and the living present.

In turning to language, Ricoeur could be considered to critique deconstruction's initial move

into language in the same way as he did that of structuralism. In brief, the project of linguistics that leads both to structuralism and deconstruction is misdirected inasmuch as language as discourse, the saying of something to someone, is lost. Further, it often overlooks the fact that semiotics as sign theory cannot move to the level of the sentence as the basic unit of meaning. As Ricoeur says: "The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum or its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of its words. A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign."³⁷ Each stage—word, sentence, and text—is a new stage requiring a new structure and description.

Ricoeur's insistence on taking language as discourse is based on a radical disagreement with Ferdinand de Saussure's fundamental distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, which does not leave room for language as discourse. Ricoeur's disagreement with this distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*, more radical than the critique of de Saussure by Derrida regarding signifier and signified, emerges in his attempt to go beyond the opposition between semiology and the phenomenology of language. Ricoeur considers the unity of language (*le langage*) to be fundamental to both, unifying them in a hierarchy of levels: "To think language (*le langage*) should be to think the unity of that very reality which de Saussure has disjoined—the unity of language (*la langue*) and speech (*la parole*)."³⁸ Thus, in order to overcome the opposition by an interarticulation in language, Ricoeur bases his view on a unity of language that does justice to both the semiology which takes *la langue* as an object, as well as to a phenomenology of speech. His intent is to avoid that initial separation between language (*la langue*) and speech (*la parole*) as a false dichotomy. The new unity must at the same time allow for the possibility of viewing language as an object of science and, at the same time, also allow for the event of communication. The unity he has mentioned surpasses the opposition between these aspects of language, thereby making possible a way of interarticulating them.

The new unity of language on the side of semantics gives the primordial role in language theory to semantics rather than semiology and syn-

tax, especially in the restricted sense of deconstruction. There are several reasons for understanding this unity to be on the side of discourse, function, and semantics. First, all roads lead from semantics in the sense that all sciences of language presuppose, at least implicitly, the semantic function. Further, by putting the unity on the side of semantics in the sentence, both sides of the antinomy or opposition can be articulated; and, finally, by putting the unity in the sentence, an articulation of the hierarchical levels of language is seen to make sense. This hierarchy of levels, in spite of a break within them, makes possible the interarticulation of various approaches. The break, constituted by the system of signs of semiology (including that of deconstruction), reflects the different ways of considering the sign and the transition from semiology to semantics.³⁹

The same signs can be considered from two distinctively different points of view: one focusing on the relation of the sign to the system of signs, the other focusing on its function in the sentence. To oppose sign to sign is the semiological function, whereas to represent the real by signs is the semantic function. And the first function serves the second. The sign is "meaningless" in the semiology of structuralism and deconstruction. On the other hand, the sign is word in semantics. "Words are the point of articulation of the semiological and the semantic in each event of speech."⁴⁰ We will now turn to Ricoeur's view of time underlying signs and words.⁴¹

Ricoeur picks up on two central points of Husserl's account of inner time-consciousness overlooked in deconstructive interpretations: first, Husserl's inner time-consciousness is a continuum containing continuance, a fact that Ricoeur quite correctly makes central, and, second, the fact that the overall problem that is addressed and that retention solves is that of duration as such.

Ricoeur insists that the "now" for Husserl cannot be considered a point-like instant, which is precisely what deconstruction wants to do. Ricoeur sees Derrida as stressing the "subversive aspect of this solidarity between the living present and retention as regards the primacy of the Augenblick, hence the point-like present, identical to itself."⁴² While Ricoeur takes into account Husserl's "strong sense" given to the distinction between the present and the instant, he is firmly opposed to placing the nonperception of retention

on the same side of otherness as that of recollection since retention is seen in phenomenological description to be essentially different from recollection. Retention is continuous with perception, while recollection in the “strong sense” of the word is a nonperception. A similar critique could be levied against Derrida’s interpretation of retention as nonpresence. For Ricoeur’s interpretation agrees that the nonpresence of retention is not to be equated with the nonpresence of second memory or recollection.

In picking up on the wrong side of the tension between the living present and the instant in Husserl’s ambiguous treatment, Derrida has focused on the flux of time as discrete and represented or repeated. For Derrida, “signification is formed only within the hollow of difference: of discontinuity and of discreteness, of the diversion and the reserve of what does not appear.”⁴³ Difference can thus be held to make signification possible because of the interval that separates the present from alterity. In this way nothing precedes difference.⁴⁴ What becomes clear is that if we begin with discreteness, the only alternatives are either pure identity or dire alterity. If one rejects, as Derrida rightly does, the alternative of pure identity, then his deconstructive stance is the logical conclusion. What has been lost in favor of this superimposed discrete time is the lived time as the sense of human concrete existence, which, as such, is continuous, has duration, and moves as a whole. Further, we must realize that the instant as such does not exist since it is an abstraction from the continuum or, at best, as Husserl uses the term, merely the occasion within the continuum for the beginning or starting point of something in an experience. In addition, Ricoeur’s account of the temporal context for understanding language undercuts Derrida’s pseudo alternatives of signs or presence, for the temporal span of the present is neither pure identity nor pure alterity. The very present, as thickened by retentions and protentions, “intends” the future in light of the past. Since the very function of the present is to mean and the very nature of presence requires signs, language and signs are inseparably intertwined with time.

Thus, it is clear that the critique by deconstruction of Ricoeur’s so called closure makes sense only if one ignores or disagrees with Ricoeur’s view of the semantic priority in language and continuity in time.⁴⁵ Ricoeur does not allow

for an ellipsis, which itself absolutely presupposes a priority of the flux and a dethroning of semantics, but, rather, only for a sort of imbalance due to the fullness of meaning in experience and existence. His belief, however—and admittedly it is only a belief as is that of deconstruction—favors making sense in making sense, values in evaluating, and responding to the face of the other responsibly and personally.

Ricoeur’s alternative to Derrida’s semiological reductionism and to taking the flux of time as discrete on which it is founded provides a viable alternative that does not succumb to the facile orientation of Saussure’s basic distinction, or to Derrida’s collapse of signs to the relations of differences within the system. Rather, Ricoeur is able adequately to account for duration and continuity in the living present as the basis for language as discourse and for trace.

With the above limits of sign, time, and trace it is not surprising that with the loss of the semantic there is likewise a loss of ethics. In contrast, due to his expansions on the Kantian philosophy at the limit, and in the light of the view of semantic priority and the thick now, Ricoeur is able to interarticulate the moral, as encompassing the articulation or actualization of the ethical aim in norms characterized at once by a “claim to universality and by an effect of constraint”⁴⁶ with the “ethical” as encompassing the aim of an accomplished life. This attempt to interarticulate an ethics of the good and a morality of right brings the Aristotelian and Kantian traditions together by means of his critique of Kant which allows a framework from the teleology of desire. Following from his critique of Kant’s practical reason and freedom, and from the expansion of Kantian themes, Ricoeur is able to turn in a positive way to a priority of the teleological, putting into place the evaluative element of Aristotelian ethics to subtend the moral imperative of Kant and deconstruction.

In conclusion, we have responded both positively and negatively to the underlying limit of deconstruction. As to the positive element of deconstruction, Ricoeur’s recent dwelling on alterity of cosmic time, his addressing the alterity of Levinas in the tension which he sees between Husserlian inwardness and Levinas’s exteriority⁴⁷ reveal the alterity which the face to face actualizes beyond interiority. Thus, he has clearly appropriated a certain positive element of decon-

struction, but without succumbing to its closure. And he has gotten beyond the negative dimension of the priority or deference given to closure intrinsic to logos; and to any reduction to a naive view of time and sign in relation to language. The fundamental point at issue here is whether the deconstructive turn in moving against such elements provides a view of time and of the sign in language able to sustain anything about saying something to someone. Further, it seems that obligation and responsibility, even as taking place in the collapse of reason, and without why, must be constituted in lived experience, just as any meaningful communication involving language must have continuity to sustain a viable view of language to

which the notion of the trace is so important, and must presuppose a semantic dimension able to carry, even indirectly, the message of the discourse. It is precisely the priority of the semantic and the continuity of time that allow a meaningful sense of philosophy of limit. What is needed is not merely a delimiting of sense as closure but a reaching through sense, taking account of the tension between the fullness of sense and its various levels of articulation, which does not succumb to the closure in a reduction to the virtual and empty sign. In contrast to deconstruction, Ricoeur's priorities, as seen, do allow for saying something to someone and for a viable ethical framework for reflection today.

ENDNOTES

1. Ricoeur used this expression decades ago.
2. This essay in a sense defends deconstruction against the accusation that it amounts to skepticism and relativism by attempting to decipher a positive element in its deconstructive, negative stance toward cognition and to clarify its existential sense, thus leading to a point at which central questions must be posed in terms of its allegiance to flux and its categorical affirmation of the unnameable and of the alterity that can never be excluded from, nor included within, logocentric conceptuality, as well as in terms of its opposition to logocentrism. The point of agreement to be established seems to be missed by some of the more ardent critiques of deconstruction. It is from this one point that further analysis, both sympathetic and critical, will emerge.
3. An extensive study of limit, boundary, end, rupture and closure would require a thorough study of the question of the end of philosophy for Heidegger, a revisiting of the question of limit-boundary and end in Kant, as well as how Heidegger, especially in his later writings, comes to the center of focus for deconstruction and postmodern thinking. Robert Bernasconi makes an insightful beginning of the formulation of this question in "Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics," in Richard A. Cohen, ed., *Face to Face with Levinas* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986); see also such authors as John Sallis, and his works of the past few years; John D. Caputo, especially *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), p. 1; *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); *Against Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). See also Bernasconi's *The Question of Language and Heidegger's History of Being* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1985); Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 55–74; "Overcoming Metaphysics," in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row 1973); and Heidegger's remarks on Cassirer at the end of the fourth edition of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 169–85.
4. It is my contention, to be defended in another place, that we must move beyond the myopic way of facing limit, end, imagination, etc. of the early Heidegger of Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, where its general direction is set in relation to Kant, for the present state of much of recent continental philosophy, especially in North America, is the grandchild of the early Heidegger, much as the later Heidegger is the child of the earlier.
5. Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1. Cornell's interest in renaming deconstruction a philosophy of limit is not the same as ours, for she is primarily interested in deconstruction, thus renamed, in its relation to law: "Indeed, the significance of understanding justice as the limit to any system of positive law is the first reason I am renaming deconstruction as the philosophy of the limit" (*ibid.*, p. 2).

6. It is worth noting here that for Kant the limit is from an act of reason, limiting knowledge to experience and preventing any transcendent use of categories of understanding. However, it is also necessary to remember that for Kant metaphysics is possible in general by focusing on the limit-boundary concepts and not going beyond that: e.g., his use of theology. Thus, with Ricoeur, such a metaphysics gets new life through the semantic structure of the symbol and indirect expressions, also cast with a Kantian framework. But now, ethics at the limit gets a full sense, and can actually do something more than deconstruction. It is indeed a philosophy, here, an ethics, at the limit of reason.
7. Cornell, *The Philosophy of Limit*, p. 70. We will briefly explore the notion of the end of metaphysics a little further on in this essay.
8. As Caputo puts it so well, "Cornell has laid to rest, definitively I would say, the popular nonsense . . . that deconstruction is some sort of skepticism or even a pernicious nihilism." Caputo, in a blurb on back of Cornell's book in paperback.
9. Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), p. 87. Bernasconi agrees with Critchley here, emphasizing that Derrida, in 1967, prefers closure to end, since, for him, there is no "sudden passage" beyond philosophy.
10. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp. 88–89.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
12. William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings*, ed. H. S. Thayer (New York: New American Library 1970), pp. 186–209.
13. In fact the critical philosophy of modernity arose in the attempt to check and limit reason's self-assurance, especially in the context of the success of science. When once these have been attained to some degree of sophistication (e.g., in science, in philosophy), we can be thrown back to reflect on the precognitive and prephilosophical level, and need to discover and to account more explicitly for that very level within the scope of the enlightening process itself.
14. It might be worth recalling the role, for Kant, of the *Critique of Judgment* in establishing a strictly limited basis of the Critical philosophy in reflective judgment, in purposiveness, and all to which that leads—all outside any knowledge claims. And this is the presupposed element for all empirical science, the transcendental conditions of which have been established in the first Critique.
15. For a full treatment of these points, see: Patrick L. Bourgeois, "Trace, Semiotics, and the Living Present: Derrida or Ricoeur," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 9 (August, 1993): 44–63; "Semiotics and the Deconstruction of Presence: A Ricoeurian Alternative," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (1993): 361–79; and "The Instant and the Living Present: Ricoeur and Derrida," *Philosophy Today* 35 (1993): 31–37.
16. We must further consider Kant's strict use of limit and going beyond it as such. The notion of limit for Kant is that within which something is circumscribed or contained. One can stand at this limit (*die Schranke*) as a boundary (*die Grenze*), which has a positive dimension of the "beyond" added to limit as *die Schranke*.
17. Following Lingis's translation of *Totality and Infinity*, Other with a capital O translates *autrui* (the personal other, the you) and other translates *autre*. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 24–25, translator's note.
18. See "Reply to Patrick L. Bourgeois," in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois, Open Court, 1995), p. 567.
19. There is a third important extension for Ricoeur not able to be treated here: "one would have to specify in what sense the philosophy of religion, without in any way enlarging the critique . . . proposes a sort of enlargement under the heading of the regeneration of moral will and hence under that of the restoration of the power of free action." Ricoeur refers here to the function of limitation exercised in this work, which continues within the limit of reason alone, yet the limitation exercised here is said to be in a "different manner from that of the three Critiques."
20. Ricoeur, "Reply to Patrick Bourgeois," p. 568.
21. One can find a threefold receptivity unfolded by Ricoeur: one, of the receptivity in the fact of the moral law; second, the feeling of respect; and third, radical evil. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966); *Fallible Man*, revised trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).
22. Ricoeur, *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, p. 131.
23. Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1976), p. 199.

24. Ricoeur develops these points throughout *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* and recently, more clearly in *Oneself as Another*, Study Three.
25. Ricoeur, "Reply to Patrick Bourgeois," p. 568.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Cf. "Introduction: Interpreting Narrative," in David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1–19.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
31. For a full treatment of these points, see note 16.
32. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison and Newton Garver (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 85.
33. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 19.
34. Rodolphe Gasche "Infrastructures and Systematicity," in John Sallis, ed., *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 11–12.
35. John Caputo, "The Economy of Signs in Husserl and Derrida: From Uselessness to Full Employment," in *ibid.*, p. 105.
36. Gasche, "Infrastructures and Systematicity," p. 12.
37. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 7.
38. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 77.
39. This break and the transition are discussed in the following text: "Moreover, these two sciences are not just distinct, but also reflect a hierarchical order. The object of semiotics—the sign—is merely virtual. Only the sentence is actual as the very event of speaking. This is why there is no way of passing from the word as a lexical sign to the sentence by mere extension of the same methodology to a more complex entity. The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of words. A sentence is made up of signs, but it is not itself a sign" (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 7).
40. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 93. We will now turn to Ricoeur's view of time underlying signs and words.
41. For Ricoeur's turning to ethics from his critique of Heidegger's sense of time, see: Thomas P. Hohler, "From Being to Ethics: The Time of Narration," *International Studies in Philosophy* 27 (199X): pp. 21–43.
42. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 283, note 12.
43. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p. 69.
44. Derrida, *Positions*, p. 28.
45. For fuller treatment, see note 16 above.
46. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.
47. He may be too severe in his critique of Levinas.

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