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Who is the Real Jacques Derrida?

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Who is the Real Jacques Derrida?

James E. Faulconer

Abstract: *Jacques Derrida and deconstruction are frequently invoked, by both admirers and critics, as arguing for relativism, denying stable meaning, and dissolving the possibility of truth. This essay argues that such characterizations misunderstand Derrida's project. Beginning with Nietzsche's diagnosis of the collapse of the metaphysical foundations of Western thought and tracing its development through Heidegger, the essay explains Derridean deconstruction as an attempt to think truthfully and meaningfully without appealing to a metaphysical antecedent. For Derrida, the limits of language do not imply that truth is arbitrary or merely subjective. Rather, meaning is structured in coming to be through difference and deferral and—more important—by an anticipation of truth and justice always still “to come.” Deconstruction therefore functions less as the destruction of meaning than as an ethical practice of attending to what texts, practices, and systems necessarily overlook or exclude in order to think what those exclusions point to. Read in this way, Derrida's thought has unexpected affinities with negative theology, religious hope, and ethical responsibility and may offer Latter-day Saint thinkers useful resources for reflecting on scripture, interpretation, and the limits of human knowledge without either requiring them to become Derrideans or preventing them from doing so.*

My experience in hearing people talk about Jacques Derrida and deconstruction in the Anglophone world has been that the thinking of a friend is often mischaracterized by both sides. What they say about Derrida's views is often unrecognizable as Derridean. As a result, Anglophone proponents and critics of Jacques Derrida both misunderstand his thinking: they agree on a mistaken view of

what deconstruction is and then argue about what that mistaken view implies about meaning, truth, and understanding. This essay addresses that mistaken view, but I will not argue for or against deconstruction or any other theory of meaning. My goal is explanation rather than persuasion to one view or another.

I hope to offer a sketch of Derrida's thinking that explains how the standard Anglophone view goes awry. I want to explain Derrida's thinking so those who deal with it will perhaps do so more accurately, whether friend or foe. Beyond that, I want to explain deconstruction and related thinking in contemporary European philosophy so as to leave room for Latter-day Saints to perhaps use some of these ideas as bases for their theories of scriptural interpretation.¹ I believe that explaining Derrida's thinking about the limits of language and knowledge and, at the same time, the possibility of truth based on what is to come rather than on a pre-linguistic given² may show how that Latter-day Saint use might be possible.

However, since my own thinking about theories of meaning, interpretation, and, in particular, scripture, are more influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, I'm not a Derridean. Though his appeal to the truth as the "to-come" carries significant weight for me, I remain committed to the importance of the pre-linguistic (discussed later). I find the writings of Gadamer and Ricoeur more cogent and applicable to my philosophical interests than Derrida's.³ So, I claim to understand, but I am not a disciple.

I will begin with my *bona fides*, for which I apologize. But I think my academic experience is important to give some weight to what I say here: I began studying European thinking in graduate school in the early 1970s. There I studied Hegel and hermeneutics with several German and French scholars of the time who came to Penn State as visiting professors. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, I took part in five or six multi-week philosophical seminars—the annual Collegium Phaenomenologicum—on European philosophy, directing one of them myself. The major presentations in those seminars were given by almost two dozen of the best-known figures in European philosophy, including Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer. With a group of mostly European philosophers, I helped found a different annual two-week study group for European professional faculty and PhD students, the International Phenomenology Symposium. Both of these seminars—the Collegium Phaenomenologicum and the International Phenomenology Symposium—continue to meet annually. In 1995–96

I was a visiting professor in the Institute for Philosophy at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. In 2000–01 I did research at the library of the *École Normale Supérieure*. I have had collegial relations with Gadamer, Derrida, and Jean-Luc Marion,⁴ all of whom worked with me on scholarly projects. Mark Wrathall (Corpus Christi College, Oxford) is a former student, a friend, an active Latter-day Saint, and one of the foremost Heidegger scholars in the world. Together we organized several faculty paper discussions on the philosophy of religion at Oxford.

Everyone I have worked with knows that I am a practicing Latter-day Saint. Without exception, they have treated me and my faith with respect. Derrida helped me start a journal in the history of philosophy. Gadamer visited Brigham Young University (BYU), as did Simon Critchley more than once. Gadamer loved to tell of taking part in a family home evening while lecturing at BYU. Critchley (a non-believer) called out his smug New York students for mocking Latter-day Saint belief and assuming that Mitt Romney couldn't be taken seriously as a presidential candidate because he is a Latter-day Saint. Shortly afterward, he wrote an editorial for the *New York Times* criticizing those who thought like his students. In it, he referred to his friendship with several Latter-day Saint philosophers and his visits to BYU as grounds for what he said.

If that is too lengthy, I apologize. But it makes my point: I know about contemporary European philosophy in general, about Martin Heidegger and Derrida in particular, and I know about these matters firsthand rather than from secondary sources. Heidegger, Gadamer, Immanuel Levinas, Ricoeur, Derrida, Marion, etc. are not the lens through which I understand the gospel, but broadly speaking, their thinking *is* the lens through which I understand philosophy and the philosophy of religion, something quite different than religion itself. With that out of the way, I turn to deconstruction as Derrida understood it.

Some words become their own worst enemies. *Deconstruction* is among them. Like *existentialism*, *special*, *liberal*, *conservative*, *post-modern*, and many other words in common parlance, its meaning is most often so vague as to be useless. The word *deconstruction* began its most-recognized philosophical life in the late 1960s as a technical term in the work of the twentieth-century French thinker, Jacques Derrida. In the 1970s, it became part of Anglophone literary criticism's vocabulary. From the 60s to the present it has moved from a technical

philosophical term first co-opted by North American literary theorists to a word that pops up in offhand remarks by everyone from advertisers to educators and church leaders of various denominations. Even cake artists talk about creating deconstructed works.

Whatever *deconstruction's* original meaning, placed under the useless umbrella term *postmodernism*, the word has come to often mean “tear down” or “destroy” (usually when the object is something non-material, like truth, morality, or religion). Many in literature—not understanding what Derrida was doing—have used the word, positively and negatively, to mean something like, “playing with texts to show that they have no meaning.” (Cake artists and chefs might be closer to Derrida’s meaning than are those who use the word negatively: trying to show something new by taking apart and rearranging.) “Denying meaning” seems to be the way *deconstruction* is often understood among Latter-day Saint intellectuals generally, just as it is widely understood in North America. There, *deconstruction* is most often understood as a philosophy which teaches that truth and morality are merely relative. I challenge that understanding.

The devil usually gets all the best words, so I have no hope of changing the way the word *deconstruction* is now used in everyday English. We cannot but agree to use words in the way that most people use them. But perhaps showing what the word meant for Derrida will help some understand what it means in his philosophy and why the ills of strong relativism and meaninglessness cannot easily be laid at his feet.

As I said, I am not trying to convince anyone to be a Derridean. I am trying to convince readers not to merely dismiss Derrida based on what critical secondary sources say about him and his influence, or, on the other hand, to assume that what positive secondary sources say about that thinking is accurate. One must understand Derrida’s thinking itself, whether to use him or to criticize him. I hope what I do here will give those interested a background from which to do the needed primary research.

To explain Derrida’s thinking, I will first describe why Nietzsche became such an important figure for twentieth- and twenty-first-century European philosophy. Then I will give some background for Heidegger because of the influence of his thinking on Derrida (via Levinas).⁵ That background will help me explain Derrida’s thinking. Finally, I will give a sketch of deconstruction as Derrida understood it.⁶ I will focus on the relationship between his thinking and religion. At the

end, I will add a brief excursus on Derrida's style, seen as an irritating affectation by many — who are sometimes right.

Before getting to my sketch of Derridean ideas and their background, let me make a sidenote: I believe I often see the thought of Derrida and Michel Foucault connected in criticisms of Derrida, though there is little connection between their ideas. Working with European thinkers for much of the last forty-five years, I rarely heard the two mentioned in the same context. I would not be surprised to see Derrida's name connected to Gadamer, Levinas, or Marion. Their views and Derrida's are related, often overlapping, often disagreeing. The only connection I imagine between Derrida and Foucault in discussions of twentieth- and twenty-first-century French philosophy in the Anglophone world is that Derrida is sometimes charged with being someone who thought that truth is merely socially constructed meaning. That describes Foucault's view: truth is produced historically in discursive practices entangled in power relations. But it is not Derrida's position.

Nietzsche's Critique of the West

Most people have heard the name Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and they know him as an atheist. Many have heard his name used as a marker for the relativism and nihilism of our age. Mostly because of the distortions of his work by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, he is often associated with amorality, egoism, antisemitism, misogyny, and other evils including racism and Naziism. After Nietzsche's 1889 mental collapse, she controlled and distorted his work, profoundly shaping — and often misshaping — early editions of that work to fit her own racist, nationalistic, colonialist, and antisemitic views.⁷ However, in the middle of the last century, Walter Kaufmann's work showed what Förster-Nietzsche's had done to Nietzsche's work, revealing a thinker very different than had been supposed — though still not a thinker whose ideas are unproblematic.⁸

Despite his sister's distortions, most, if not all, of the charges against him have some foundation in his writings, some more than others. Yet none are without complication. Like all of us, Nietzsche's soul was complex. In spite of the difficulties in his work, he is one of the most influential thinkers, for good and evil, of the last 150 years because he diagnosed the spiritual and intellectual disease of the West so well. Whatever dark spots were in his soul, his brighter side reveals more about our darker side.

Nietzsche's critique of Christianity has been particularly important. Ironically, it has probably been more important for theists than for atheists. Many atheists understand his criticisms of religion as just more fodder for what they take to be obvious. But they miss his point, a point more critical of atheism than religion; few atheists have taken up his challenge. On the other hand, his criticism of religion is sufficiently trenchant that, beginning in the twentieth century, most Christian thinkers have felt the need to respond.

Nietzsche makes his criticism of religion in a number of places, but one place in particular makes it brilliantly, a short passage from *The Gay Science* (§125, "The Madman"). There Nietzsche tells an allegory of a madman who, like the fourth-century BC Cynic Diogenes, lights a lantern in broad daylight and runs with it to the marketplace crying, "I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!" Those in the marketplace who claim to be atheists can hardly contain their amusement at this strange figure who is trying to find God when (they assume) everyone knows there is no such being. They mock the madman: "Has he gone lost? asked one. Another asked, Has he lost his way like a child? Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Did he go somewhere by ship, emigrated?"⁹

Nietzsche's story is often taken to be a critique of religion and the idea of God, a tract for atheism. But if we read carefully, it becomes clear that "the death of God" is the death of the West's metaphysical foundation rather than an attack on a divine Being — *unless*, as was almost always the case for millennia, the two are assumed to be the same. Remember that the other characters in the story are atheists, and the madman criticizes *them* for killing God and not acknowledging, perhaps not even recognizing, that they have done so, nor the tragedy that has created. Like Diogenes, the madman has failed to find any honest people among the atheists in the marketplace. They think that getting rid of God is simply a matter of no longer believing in a particular being. But the God of which Nietzsche speaks isn't a being like that. He is not one thing among others, and they have destroyed what he was, namely the foundation for the West's self-understanding.

Thinking about Nietzsche's fable, it is important to keep in mind what Latter-day Saints know: The God in which we believe is certainly not *merely* one being among others of equal standing. He far surpasses any other being in merit and praiseworthiness. But he *is* a being among others rather than the metaphysical foundation for all being. The Latter-day Saint God is not the God of the tradition, so he is not the God whom Nietzsche attacks (nor, I believe, the God whom most

Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship, despite their theologies). It is unlikely that Nietzsche would understand our God, someone among things that already are, who creates the cosmos for those already existing things and gives the cosmos its order. Our God is not the transcendence that gives *all that is* being and structure. Nietzsche's madman is not searching for our God, but for something to take the place of the theological God of the tradition.

So, Nietzsche is not making a point about the status of religion or religious belief, at least not directly. His point is broader than that: Western civilization has had a way of understanding the world that, until relatively recently, had been successful. From at least about the time of Constantine's Edict of Milan, that way of understanding things dominated European thinking. The West, Nietzsche says, has understood the world by assuming a more-or-less Platonic metaphysical foundation that explains everything and, for much of Western history, identifying that foundation with God. The assumption was that there is one thing prior to all creation that accounts for all that is. That one thing was so much a part of our culture that it was taken for granted. It gave meaning and order to our world and experience and was so omnipresent in experience that we seldom thought about it. It was, we assumed, natural, the way things are. However, atheism has destroyed that metaphysical foundation.¹⁰ These God-deniers in the marketplace have killed what previously gave a foundation to human culture and thought in the West. But they will not take responsibility for having done so, for they do not even recognize what they have done.

Perhaps they were right to kill the God who is not God, *God*,¹¹ *but they have done so thoughtlessly*. They don't recognize the importance to Western culture and thinking of the unity that *God* provided. Not seeing the tragedy, they offer no alternative. After *God*'s death they go on as if there were still such a thing, though they argue, often vociferously, about which god is *the* god. (Is it the theological *God*? Is it pure reason? Empirical science? . . .) Instead of continuing those arguments, according to Nietzsche, they should be trying to discover what is to be done in the absence of our culture's metaphysical foundation, in the absence — death — of *God*.

Nietzsche's critique of Western thought is at the heart of much twentieth-century European philosophy, religious or otherwise, especially among those who speak Romance languages. It is certainly at the heart of Derrida's thinking: *In the absence of a foundation that is metaphysically beyond, before, or outside of the cosmos, what alternative*

source of thought and truth can there be?¹² Is there any alternative but some form of nihilism or pure relativism? Despite what many accusers say, for most European thinkers of the last 100 years, the answer is that there are alternatives. Religious thinkers in the Christian traditions agree. For them, the question becomes “If God is not the metaphysical foundation of the cosmos, how should we understand him?”¹³ Many of those in Nietzsche’s wake, both religious and not, begin to think about an answer to that question by turning to the work of Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger

Heidegger’s masterwork and first major monograph, *Being and Time*,¹⁴ pays scant attention to Nietzsche, though he shares with him the question of how to think about a ground for truth. Heidegger takes up Nietzsche in earnest a few years after *Being and Time*, and Aristotle still later. Though not obvious in *Being and Time*, Heidegger shares with Aristotle and Nietzsche the question of how to think about whatever there is that is (“what-is”): How do we understand the verb “to be?” With Aristotle and Nietzsche, Heidegger wants to answer that question without appealing to a Platonic, two-tiered metaphysics with the traditional God, Forms, pure Reason, or such, on one side and the world we inhabit on the other—the first being what makes the second possible and real. That question is central to those usually associated with twentieth- and twenty-first-century French and German philosophy.

Heidegger’s publications are numerous. His collected works are projected to comprise 102 volumes, approximately fifty of which have been published. Of those, I am reasonably conversant with less than ten, but it would be far too much to discuss even one of those ten in any detail here. So, I will first discuss briefly how he understands the possibility of meaning and truth in the absence of God. Then, to explain Derrida better, I will focus on two aspects of Heidegger’s thought: his notion of deconstruction and his thinking about religion.

Meaning and truth for Heidegger

With Aristotle, Heidegger’s basic argument is that there need not be an “ultimate reality” behind the things of our world, a Platonic reality that presumably would provide surety to our claims about this world. Truth and surety don’t require a God; they are always already a function of what-is as it is manifest in the world. What-is is what it is *in* its appearing rather than through some transcendent thing that is prior to

what-is and causes it to show itself as it does. What-is shows itself in events prior to concepts about those events or propositional reflection on them. My pen is what it is in its ongoing "life" in the world rather by supposedly re-presenting a metaphysically ideal pen.

What shows itself in the world does so in lived experience before doing so through what we think or say about that disclosure. I look at my pen and, doing so, I take up what is happening when it discloses itself to me. I don't usually think about my pen's characteristics while I am using it, but — using it — I see its shape and color. I feel its heft and texture. When reflecting on my pen rather than using it, I could make a list of as many such things as I might, but that wouldn't say anything about the actual *appearing* of the pen in its ongoing being a pen in the world. The pen discloses itself as itself when I write with it, carry it in my pocket, use it to hold down papers that the fan threatens to blow about, remember getting it as a present from my wife, or consider giving it to my pen-collecting grandson. It has a history in the world, as itself, as part of a longer history of writing instruments, and as part of my life with it in the world. All those things are together in the appearing of the pen in my experience rather than in thoughtful representations of its characteristics or in its relation to something metaphysically prior to this particular pen. Of course, it does not follow that the various ways of representing or expressing truth are not essential; there is a place for thought about ideals. To see truth as originating in the ordinary disclosures of things in the world is not to say that representation of and thought about those disclosures is unnecessary.

Thinking in this way, for Heidegger there is "first truth" (my term, not his), namely, the event in which what-is shows itself. There is also a second level of truth, what we say to talk about what we find in our experience. At the second level, truth comes in various forms: sometimes in narrative, sometimes in law, sometimes in poetry, sometimes in folk history, other times in academic history, and so on. But none of those can claim to be *the* way of expressing truth. Some, perhaps many of them, are incommensurable with other expressions of truth, but even if incommensurable, at least some are on an equal footing with each other as revelations of truth.

It is important to note, though, that what I am calling, heuristically, first and second truth are not discreet events; like Aristotle's prime matter,¹⁵ they are that which we name to understand theoretically what is in fact not divisible into parts. As terms, first and second truth merely name theoretical entities, concepts we create to help us understand

something but which themselves do not point to anything that exists in itself. In Euclidean geometry, a straight line is such a theoretical concept: there are no straight lines in the world, but the concept and our thinking about it helps us understand things and to live in the world. So, we have an experience, an event of truth, and at the same time, we have thoughts about it or say things about it as a way of not only speaking to others about our experience but also as a way of understanding it ourselves. All of that happens at the same time.

But a caveat: perhaps most often our thoughts about truth and the language we use to talk about it are not direct responses to an event of truth. Instead, our thought and language use the various conventions we have at our disposal for talking about truth: I say what one says in these circumstances; I think about this or that with the concepts I've learned to be appropriate to them. Most of our thinking and speaking about the world uses thought and language within the infinite space opened up by the thought and language we have inherited rather than in a direct response to an event of truth. An important question will be, "How do we experience and talk about first truth rather than only about already given second truth?"

Besides noticing that truth has those two ways of being understood (the disclosure of something and what we say or think about it), it is also important to remember something I pointed out earlier: Truth is ongoing. Truth happens as it continues to manifest itself in the ongoing disclosure of what-is. Truth is an ongoing event more than a static thing. We speak truly to the degree that our language manifests disclosure. Yet there is always a gap between first and second truth, the gap between our experience of life and the world and what we can say about them, the gap exposed in the fact that we can never say our experience or the things in it completely. That gap lies at the heart of Heidegger's and Derrida's questions.

The ongoing character of truth means, Heidegger argues, that first truth is disclosed in human practices and engagement in the world more than in such things as logical or scientific propositions purporting to represent what-is. (To repeat: that is not to say that propositional knowledge is unimportant.) Engagement is more fundamental to truth than representation because engagement is ongoing disclosure rather than static representation. So: "In his earliest works, Heidegger calls for the return to the concretely lived situation in order to retrieve this situation according to the manner (i.e., the 'how' or the mode) in which it unfolds as concretely lived."¹⁶ This is a call to take as

fundamental the event to which the term "first truth" points rather than any theory that subsequently reveals itself in human life as an account of that event.

Heidegger's deconstruction

But how do we make that return? How could any return to the original event avoid the fact that it would be *thought about* the event—or thought about other derivative thoughts about truth—rather than a return to the experience itself? In the summer of 1927, Martin Heidegger delivered a lecture course now published under the title, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, something like a preliminary overview of *Being and Time*.¹⁷ Given the topic of his lectures, Heidegger begins with a discussion of the nature of philosophy and, particularly, of the philosophical movement called *phenomenology*. Borrowing creatively from his teacher Edmund Husserl, Heidegger says that phenomenology is the name for a way of doing philosophy that includes three steps—reduction, construction, and destruction—and he explains that these three are mutually pertinent to one another.

Reduction means stepping back from a *particular* being we have encountered toward the meaning and structure of being (the meaning of structure of "to be" rather than the meaning and structure of *this* being). I may begin with my fountain pen. I want to know its structure in experience and what it means in the world. I make a reduction in thought to articulate something about what-is with the fountain pen as my starting point.

Construction is the work to articulate what shows itself in the reduction. But construction necessarily involves destruction, and Heidegger identifies destruction and deconstruction, *Abbau*,¹⁸ an ordinary German word that translates literally as "unbuild," but more naturally as "analysis." However, "deconstruction" is the most common way it is translated in Heidegger's work and the likely source of Derrida's French term *déconstruction*. The lexical and historical connection of *deconstruction* to *destruction* is obvious, especially post-Derrida, but Heidegger does not mean by *Abbau* quite what we mean by *destruction*. *Disassembly* is closer but not yet close enough.

As Heidegger conceived deconstruction, it was a way to deal with a philosophical problem, namely the fact that all philosophy is second truth that cannot help but depend on previous second truth: "All philosophical discussion, even the most radical attempt to begin all over again, is pervaded by traditional concepts and thus by traditional

horizons and traditional angles of approach.”¹⁹ When we begin to philosophize we cannot avoid using concepts, terms, and tools handed down from those who came before us. We cannot avoid our inquiries being historically and linguistically situated, perhaps determinatively. It seems impossible to think or talk about pre-linguistic experience rather than talk about that experience. But, if we cannot avoid entanglement in the language, tools, and thinking of those who preceded us (as well as our own previous thinking), how can we think about the world-as-it-is — what-is. All thought seems to be mediated by language. We seem unable to begin thinking from a rational zero point, free of any already given concepts, terms, or approaches. So, it may appear that we are forced to repeat the past and its mistakes. How can we ever get to anything new?²⁰

Given much of the current discussion of Heidegger’s work and the work that derives from it in what is loosely called “postmodernism,” it may surprise many that Heidegger’s response is, “No.” We can use inherited concepts, horizons, and approaches against themselves to allow what produced them to show itself again. That is what “deconstruction” means to him. We can deconstruct the tradition we find ourselves in by seeing the problems raised by the terms we have inherited. We use concepts and tools we have inherited against themselves to recover original insights and questions. The point of Heideggerian deconstruction is to help us clear away the unavoidable distortions in history of an original insight so that we wonder anew at what-is. Reawakening wonder through deconstruction will make new language appropriate to that wonder possible, but no language will fully capture the moment of wonder or put an end to the need for deconstruction.

The first truth that we glimpse again by means of deconstruction is primarily disclosed in human practices and engagement with the world rather than in the variety of languages (from logic to poetry, from empirical science to dance) that aim either to represent or help us see first truth. Engagement is fundamental to truth; logically, though not necessarily temporally, response in thought and language comes after engagement. That underlies Heidegger’s thinking about religion,²¹ and discussing that thinking will be more useful for understanding Derrida than a lengthy excursus on Heidegger’s response to metaphysics (a word Heidegger, Derrida, and many others in this family of philosophy use to refer to any metaphysics of a Platonic style, any thinking that relies on God or one of its analogues). If we agree with Nietzsche that

God is not the metaphysical foundation of the cosmos, then philosophy and theology have little or nothing to say about God. They can, however, say something about religion. But what and how?

For Heidegger, since the primary disclosure of first truth happens in our engagements in the world, being religious doesn't mean assenting to a doctrinal system. Instead, it means living a way of being that makes the world as a whole meaningful and that comes from outside oneself. On the one hand, doctrines and things like them may be part of that way of living, but they are not its foundation. On the other, being religious is anything but a merely subjective matter.

What is outside ourselves is a combination of things including the existential history of the community in which we find ourselves, the ecclesial and social structures of the community, its essential texts, the interpretations of the texts we have inherited, and our responses to that history and those texts with their interpretations, and so on. To be religious is to actively inhabit that nexus of meaningfulness as agents. As Wrathall says, to be religious "is to be in the world differently than those lacking religious faith."²² Like such things as "where I am from" and "ethnicity," the religious community of which I am part, with its history, texts, and authorities, shape the world I live in. I am who I am both as an heir of such things and as someone who cannot but respond to them: they give me the world I inhabit and, at the same time, the possibility of using what they have given in new ways. What I am, religiously and otherwise, depends on the world in which I live taken as a whole.²³

Of course, Heidegger's understanding of what it means to be religious leaves out things that are important to Latter-day Saints, in particular revelation and conversion. He speaks of them obliquely in saying that revelation is a lived transformation of one's life. But he consistently steps back from trying to tell his readers how to be religious to asking what it means to do a phenomenology of religion. Heidegger did so for sound methodological reasons: philosophy cannot confirm, deny, or explain revelation, so — as a *philosopher* — he remained agnostic about it.²⁴ Yet I don't think it is too much of a stretch to understand religion in more-or-less Heideggerian terms: It is grounded in human historicity, which includes, for Latter-day Saint understanding, a non-metaphysical God. Religion includes God's acts and intentions in the world as well. For the religious, those acts and intentions are manifested through history as understood religiously, but especially through texts such as scripture and prophetic remarks, revealed

through human beings in a variety of ways but reducible neither to history nor to merely the consciousness of scripture's writers.

In short, the truth of religion is found in its participatory expression (existential and informal before being reflective and rational) of the event of first truth, expression of a realm of human experience through history, narrative, law, poetry, rite, human relations, and so on. It is found only secondarily, if at all, in the second truths produced by rational reflections on first truth.

Derrida

Jacques Derrida agrees that Heidegger's notion of deconstruction gives us a glance at something fundamental. He agrees with Heidegger that our glance always conceals as well as reveals: there is always another side to any appearing, so we never see what-is in its entirety. But, Derrida argues, there is no pre-linguistic entirety. If there were, he says, that would amount to *God* slipping in unnoticed, something behind our experience of revealing and concealing that guarantees them.²⁵ For Derrida, revealing and concealing always go together. In fact, they are the same thing. He argues that Heideggerian deconstruction cannot get us to a first disclosure of truth, not even a glimpse of it, without implicitly reinstating *God*. But if we cannot use a Heideggerian deconstruction of the philosophical tradition to give us at least a glimpse of first truth, how can there be first truth—or any truth—at all? We seem to have arrived back at the same question with which we began.

Derrida finds a place for truth and meaning by inverting both the tradition and Heidegger. Truth is not a revealing and concealing of what is pre-given, though there is a pre-given reality. Truth is the expression of our *desire* for a settled ground for our claims to truth. With Heidegger, he recognizes the historical and cultural situatedness of claims to truth. But unlike Heidegger, he does not think there is anything pre-given that has resulted in those truths. Instead, meaning comes about in the *anticipation* of truth's disclosure—not an individual's anticipation, but the anticipation of truth that we can find in texts, often in spite of themselves.

The fullness of meaning is always “to come” (*à-venir*); for Derrida, a truth claim is a *prefiguration* of truth to come. Final meaning is “impossible”—on analogy with Christ's Second Coming for many contemporary Christians. It exists, but only as something more like a regulative idea—an idea that guides thinking, relying on a concept that can

never be actualized. Derrida argues that truth and meaning require this implicit expectation of/prefiguration of fulfillment as well as the networks of relations among words and phrases in which that desire appears.

For him, the desire for a fulness of truth is implicit in the ways that we speak truth, yet despite that, what we say defers the moment of full disclosure. Language that always implicitly promises to eventually give us clear and distinct access to the truth of what-is (even if it denies it is doing that), never fully succeeds in keeping its promise. The limitations of language and the boundaries of human knowledge make a full disclosure of truth impossible. When we speak truth, rather than revealing it, we are promising that it will come. Language bears witness of it in advance. Consequently, Derrida argues, meaning comes about through difference from and deferral to the to-come rather than through more or less successfully fulfilled intentions directed toward the pre-linguistic given.

Derrida's word for difference and deferral together is *différance*, a neologism suggesting (à la Saussure), first, that the meaning of words and signs is brought about in their relationships of non-identity with other words and signs. In other words, by being in relationships with other words and signs while, at the same time irreducibly differing from them. Second, *différance* suggests that complete, final meaning is always deferred, promised but never fully present in either a word or moment.

Notice that Derrida's understanding of meaning is *not* a claim that meaning is either merely socially constructed or subjective. The fact that final meaning is to-come takes meaning away from those possibilities. For Derrida, *différance* means that any claim to having said everything (including, for example, the claim that meaning is merely an historical construct or merely subjective) can be shown by deconstruction to be unfounded. A deconstruction shows us that something has been overlooked or omitted that is necessary for the text's claim to be true, full-stop. Deconstruction shows that the text implicitly demands the to-come. For Derrida, deconstruction shows us that those omissions — which remind us of the anticipated to-come — are structural to every text or text analogue.

Perhaps Derrida's most well-known example of deconstruction is his deconstruction of writing.²⁶ He argues that Western philosophy privileges speech because it is supposedly closer to thought and treats writing as derivative. Writing, he points out, is not just a copy

of speech. Consider the transcription of a voice mail in contrast to the voice mail itself: The transcription is visible and easily repeatable whereas the voice mail itself is not. In fact, the voice mail only works because it can be transcribed: repeated, cited, and remembered, all features it shares with writing. His argument is that what speech is supposed to overcome—for example, difference from the other person and the need for repetition and mediation—is what speech shares with writing and what makes it function.

Indeed, if writing is sequential and can be repeated, and it can have meaning in the absence of either or both the original writer or the person to whom the writing was intended, it makes sense, he says, to treat writing as more fundamental to truth and meaning than speech—though by *writing* he doesn't mean "decipherable marks on a page." *Writing* names the structures of language that make communication possible: iterability, the lack of a need for the living presence of another person,²⁷ openness to recontextualization (putting a text in a new context can change its meaning), and that the written mark(s) or spoken word(s) are never self-identical (in other words, their meanings depend on their relations to past usages and the meanings of other things in which they are in relation). In this broader sense, as the structures underlying communication, writing is the condition of meaning rather something produced by meaning. That explains the quotation often used to accuse Derrida of strange ideas about reality: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (literally, "There is no 'outside-the-text'").²⁸ In other words, all understandable meaning occurs within iterable structures of difference and reference, within language in a broad sense. Since all existence is in time and space, the to-come is unavoidable. So, the ongoing anticipation of the to-come is structural to writing, describing, and explaining because it is structural to existence and experience.

The inability to say everything is not a failure of language, something to be overcome. Neither is it a point of new-age silliness or old-age magic (though it might be an origin of the latter). It is a consequence of what it means to be at all: it is impossible to say everything about anything. More important, whatever we experience shows that there is still more to be experienced and said, more to-come. The fact that there is more than what I see immediately, an excess *in* what I see, is part and parcel of seeing anything at all. There is always more in what I see than I can name. Kant might have called this fact about the excessive character of perception one of the conditions for the possibility of having an experience at all. To perceive an object is to know—in the

perception itself — that there is more to it. All experience is experience of more, of possibility. The experience of that possibility, the to-come, is at the same time unavoidably reflected in what we say about the world and ourselves.

Once again, my pen is a good example: It is a fountain pen, which puts it into relation with many other kinds of writing instruments and within a history of such instruments. Because fountain pens are no longer used for daily writing, it probably says something about my history and my relations to others: I grew up using a fountain pen; perhaps I also unconsciously see it as a way to say something about my social status or age. Whatever the case with that, my conscious understanding of why I use fountain pens is that I like their feel: their heft, the slide of the ink on good paper. Most obviously, I use my pen because I anticipate a need for writing. All those facts about it go toward giving it meaning in my experience, as I clip it in my pocket or put it away in its case, or as I write a note with it. But as much as I can say these kinds of things about my experience of my pen, I can always say more. Language cannot capture the fulness of that experience, the fulness of what is to-come, something I anticipate but cannot expect to reach.

Most of the time this understanding of the limits of language is irrelevant. For practical purposes I need only say what needs to be said, not everything.²⁹ I write for a particular audience. But once I've published my piece, it becomes public property. Regardless of my intent when I wrote, my writing may be taken up by other audiences or used for other purposes. Regardless of what Wordsworth had in mind when he wrote "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," as we have seen in various sermons, these lines from it have come to have meaning of their own:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!³⁰

That the new meaning, within a Latter-day Saint context, is perhaps

not what Wordsworth had in mind is irrelevant. This language is public, as is its meaning.

Besides making fresh interpretations possible, the to-come character of writing in Derrida's sense means that every piece of writing is open to question. Someone can ask about the effects of my having written for my purpose and audience: Did doing so overlook someone? Does the text push meaning in a direction that I never intended? Are there political, social, or ethical implications of what I have written that I did not see but that should, nevertheless, be considered?

Deconstruction addresses these kinds of questions by examining the words and structures of the text, but not to produce an ideological critique. To answer questions like those above, Derrida does not compare the work to an external standard for what should be done (such as moral standards, scientific standards, or political ideology). Instead, he looks for ways in which the text itself shows what it has overlooked. Deconstruction is a form of *immanent critique*.

For example, Derrida writes about a footnote in Heidegger's *Being and Time* to show that—as a careful reading of the footnote will purportedly see—the book's claims are problematic.³¹ Derrida argues that Heidegger's work undercuts itself, without arguing that Heidegger ought to have written his book differently. Derrida's deconstruction claims to show that *Being and Time* overlooks something, not that it should or could have done otherwise. His deconstruction of Heidegger's footnote reminds us of the to-come structure of Heidegger's work.

Because Derrida is interested in this relation between the text and what the text aims to speak of but cannot fully do, some have compared his work to negative theology.³² After some initial hesitation, Derrida himself made the comparison,³³ though it would be a mistake to say that his work constitutes a negative theology.

To understand why this analogy between deconstruction and negative theology works, consider for a moment what negative theology does. It has two moments. It begins by accepting what positive theology has shown in its attempt to discover and say as accurately as possible the right names and descriptions of the Divine. Paradoxically, the second moment is to show that those names are inadequate. For example, positively one must say "God is just"; it is blasphemy to say otherwise. Nevertheless, once that is recognized, one must also acknowledge that the sentence is inadequate; from the point of view of a claim to have said the complete and final truth, it is untrue. We only

know what justice is by using our own justice as a reference point. Yet God's justice surpasses ours, so much so that some of his acts would be judged unjust by our standards. Thus, one must also say, "God is not just" — being careful not to read that as a straightforward denial of God's justice. It is instead a notice of the incapacity of language.

The negative theologian reminds us of God's infinity by showing us the failure of our affirmative theology. The point is not that what affirmative theology says is useless. It is not that there is no God or that God is not just. The point is that we cannot finish speaking of God, praising him, wondering in awe at his justice and our inability to understand it. We come to a glimpse of understanding when we find ourselves in the space opened by the contradictions between positive and negative theology. So, for the negative theologian, a true understanding of God comes in neither affirmative theology nor in negative theology. It comes in the "third way," the continued praise of God that is opened by the opposition between the two ways, a way that cannot be said except in praise and prayer.

For Christians, the final revelation of God's justice remains to-come; we await the Second Coming. In the meantime, in awaiting the to-come, we must live with language's insufficiency yet praise and pray in its absence.

Derrida is interested in a similar logic of saying and not saying, in the ways in which a text points to but cannot fully reveal the to-come. He is interested in using deconstruction to point to a third way in which texts point toward justice, ultimately a moment of praise and mystery — mystery in the sense of what cannot be said in our anticipation of the to-come.

Deconstruction can also be a matter of showing, not meaning that is only implicitly anticipated in the text's omissions, but also *whom* the text has omitted, *seemingly* overlooked, or forgotten. It may help us see where injustice to particular others hides in the text and bring us to include that recognition in our anticipation of the to-come.

Often our texts fail to recognize and anticipate God, someone with whom, contrary to many expectations, Derrida continued to be concerned. In a text always attentive to his relationship with his Jewish mother and saturated with attention to Augustine, with prayer and confession, and with address to God, he says that he rightly passes for an atheist.³⁴ Yet he also says:

I am addressing myself here to God, the only one I take as a witness, without yet knowing what these sublime words

mean, and this grammar, and *to*, and *witness*, and *God*, and *take*, take God, and not only do I pray, as I have never stopped doing all my life, and pray to him, but I take him here and take him as my witness, I give myself what he gives me, i.e. the *i.e.* to take the time to take God as a witness.³⁵

Beginning in the late twentieth century, at least partly because of the many misunderstandings of his work (misunderstandings for which he suggests he bears responsibility³⁶), Derrida was explicit about his focus on absence and omission as an ethical focus rather than a destruction of truth and meaning.³⁷ Like negative theology, his work is neither nihilistic nor merely playful. It is not merely an exercise in a new kind of literary criticism (though it may have implications for literary criticism). Ultimately, the point of deconstruction is ethical in the Levinasian sense of that word: our unavoidable responsibility to the other person. Deconstruction calls us to the act of remembering, wonder, and praise for the truth to-come. It calls us to a remembering relation to the to-come that we have forgotten—rather than to *descriptions* of what we have forgotten. Deconstruction calls us to the to-come of justice, justice for those overlooked or marginalized—for us, those no longer within the ambit of the to-come. Indeed, though ideas and words and meanings are important omissions, they are not nearly so important as are the unnameable people who are often omitted, excluded, forgotten even when, or perhaps especially when, we are sure that we have included them, when we are sure that justice for them no longer remains to-come or sure that we know what will bring about that to-come.

Deconstruction interrupts the apparent seamlessness of texts and practices so that we have some chance of noticing what makes those texts and practices possible—and the to-come they suggest—even if we can only notice “it” in the trace or spoor that it leaves behind. As Geoffrey Bennington explains: “What we have said about writing and the trace shows that no *autos* [“self-same”] is possible without an inscription of alterity, no inside without a relation to an outside which cannot be simply outside but must remark itself on the inside.”³⁸ In league with Heidegger, Levinas, Marion, and many other so-called postmodern thinkers, Derrida argues that there is no independent self that is not already related to what is outside. The interior of the self is necessarily effected³⁹ by what is outside. And, contrary to those who see in him an advocate of anarchy or simple relativism, Bennington says: “The law one gives oneself retains an irreducible relation to the

law received before the law."⁴⁰ As with his teacher Emmanuel Levinas, for Derrida ethics is the "law before the law." It is there that the anticipation of the to-come arises, in our attempts to deal with others justly, attempts we first notice in language but which reveal the ethical structure of the to-come.

Derrida is not so naive as to believe that any deconstruction or political project will bring an end to exclusion and forgetting, a failure to reveal the to-come. He is not Hegel or Marx for whom the to-come is already here in theory, only waiting to be made manifest in history. Language will never capture what it aims at completely because the things there are, whether words, material objects, persons, human relations, or God, cannot be captured fully—and that is because to think that something could be captured fully is to think of it as static, as no longer to-come, as dead in the strictest sense.

Deconstruction is critical philosophy, using the word *critical* in its philosophic sense: it shows the limits of the text or practice that we are examining so we can see the effects of those limits, that which appears in their to-come. Sometimes meanings are affected. Sometimes someone or some group of people are. Sometimes our relations to God are. Sometimes we may be unsure of what is affected, though we are sure that there are affects. But knowing the limits of a text or practice does not tell us how to respond to those limits. It may cause us to rethink our aims and, as a reasonable result, nevertheless continue with something like the status quo. (The parallel with negative theology is that we may continue to say the same things about God.) Presumably, however, even if we opt for the status quo after deconstructing it, we will have a new understanding of it and a new attitude toward it. We will wear our old clothing in a new way. We may opt instead for something "new" (we may create new theologies or new political structures, for example)—but if we do, we must know in advance that we will unavoidably omit and exclude new groups or persons, or ideas, or whatever. We may be tempted, like the inhabitants of Babel, to build and complete the rational tower that will finally achieve total justice. But, like them, we cannot but fail.

Derrida is not arguing for a new system or approach to philosophical, literary, or ethical problems. The point is not to replace the old theology or politics with a new one that overcomes the mistakes of the old. Neither is he arguing against a new system or approach. Rather, he wants us to "see" our omissions and exclusions and "failures" so we can think through them and decide, so we can act ethically

in response to them.⁴¹ Derrida's work is a work of praise and reverence for others — especially since, with thinkers like Levinas, Derrida believes that the other person, like God, always escapes my grasp and comprehension.⁴² His deconstruction is a praise for justice to-come, a glimpse that cannot say in advance what is to-come but desires and anticipates it anyway.

For Derrida, therefore, though deconstruction mostly deals with texts, it is not a method for criticizing texts, whether written, social, or otherwise. It is not a new literary tool. Deconstruction is an attitude⁴³ one has toward texts and their analogues, especially an ethical attitude (using *ethical* in the sense that Levinas uses it, to denote fundamental relations, not necessarily rules for living in those relations). Deconstruction is an attitude by means of which one injects theoretical and ethical humility back into the claims of texts and analyses. It is the attitude of continuing to re-member, of continuing to praise. In Aristotle's terms, deconstruction is an attitude of continued wonder. In Socrates' terms, it is the moment of ignorance, of what medievals later called "learned ignorance." Deconstruction is a repetitive moment in the continuation of philosophy.

Christians remember covenants via ordinances, sermons, the Christian life, etc. In other words, they remember what it means to be a Christian in their practices, which may include dogmatics, confessional membership, and theology but doesn't require them. Practice, not thinking, is the heart of being Christian.

From a religious viewpoint, one might say that Derrida looks for something like a covenantal relation in texts and philosophy, a relationship to the future that is ultimately unnameable within the text but that opens onto truth, meaning, and responsibility as the anticipated to-come. The parallel of Derrida's work to Christian covenant theology is fascinating and fruitful, though it is outside the purview of this essay.⁴⁴ Briefly, however, consider that not only is deconstruction a matter of remembrance and praise, because its focus is the to-come rather than what has been, it is also a matter of hope and faith. Derrida said: "There is no morality without faith, faith in the other. There is no social experience without bearing witness, without attestation, the recognition of a dimension of trust and faith. This is not a religious point; it is the general structure of experience."⁴⁵ That is not what someone who believes that everything is absolutely relative can say.

In Conclusion

Nietzsche's critique of Western culture and thought, that its metaphysical guarantor has crumbled but has not been replaced, is the background for much twentieth- and twenty-first-century European philosophy: philosophers responding to the absence of God.

Heidegger takes up the question of how to think about the foundation of our relations to each other and to the things of the world without God, arguing that it can be done, but not in the traditional way. As a kind of neo-Aristotelian, he argues that we should see truth as what-is giving itself in human experience over time. Original truth, the truth of disclosure, makes itself manifest in a variety of languages, not just the propositional language of post sixteenth-century philosophy and modern and contemporary science, but also and equally the languages of poetry, law, narrative, myth, and so on. There is truth in language, but it is not expressed fully in any one language, and it has no final expression (at least not in the human world).

Derrida takes up a roughly Heideggerian stance, but insists on what he says Heidegger overlooks: according to Derrida, not only can our accounts never be adequate to the knowledge and acquaintance that they aim for, but if that is true, then we do not *begin* by experiencing an original truth, not even in pre-linguistic experience. Despite that, we continue to write and speak as if that is our starting point. Deconstruction uses the words and concepts of a text or text analogue against themselves to show the places where the impossibility of reaching a pre-existing original truth shows itself. But even though *original* truth—foundational truth—is unreachable, that truth is what all language aims to give us. What we think of as foundational, an atemporal metaphysical truth that we assume comes first, is actually the anticipated but unnameable *to-come*. In speaking and writing, we express our hope and desire for the truth *à-venir*. Hence Derrida's interest in eschatology.

For Derrida, the most important glimpse of the to-come is found in ethics, in our infinite responsibility to other persons. Responsibility, the demand of justice, is not deconstructible.⁴⁶ Deconstruction does not collapse everything into relativism. Things like justice cannot be deconstructed. Following Levinas, deconstruction grounds (though *grounds* is an impossible verb for what the to-come does) ethics in the undeconstructible demand of the other person. And it opens a space for what he calls "messianic thought": responsibility, faith, and hope—for him, without dogma.

There is no question that those in this line of thinking do not hold to a traditional understanding of truth as accurate representation. But it does not follow that they deny there is truth. There are exceptions to that as with Michel Foucault. But Derridean deconstruction is not one of those exceptions, nor is the work of the majority of the other post-Nietzschean thinkers. Whether to respond to the crisis of the West that Nietzsche shouted about with a Heideggerian position, with Levinasian fundamental ethics, with Derridean deconstruction, or some other way of thinking is a question about metaphysics not religion, *unless one refuses to disconnect the two*. Christians, especially Latter-day Saints, have good reason to disconnect them.

As I said in the beginning, many believing religious thinkers have tried to disconnect them. They have taken up Nietzsche's critique and affirmed the possibility of religious belief in one post-Nietzschean or post-Heideggerian way or another, including deconstruction. But I must confess that it is difficult for me to understand how that is possible with a traditional understanding of God: *How can we separate the traditional understanding of God from God?*⁴⁷ Latter-day Saints have an answer, though I wonder how often we unsuspectingly invoke some version of God in our thinking and explaining. Whether we take up Derrida's theoretical position or not, he at least asks us to consider that question.

Western culture is in trouble and, by contagion, so are almost all other cultures. That trouble has been brewing for at least 150 years and, given that politics has involved the reign of blood and horror since Cain slew Abel, since the beginning of human time. It showed itself most visibly in the Roman torture and cruel execution of Jesus Christ, Messiah, the Son of God. That trouble goes much deeper than can be blamed on even the most nihilistic interpretation of deconstruction, much less on Derridean deconstruction.

Whatever the faults of books treating Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices unfairly or criticizing the moral decay of our culture, they cannot easily be attributed to Derridean deconstruction. There are any number of fake heirs out there, trying to lay claim to Derrida's work as the origin of their own and arguing for relativisms of various sorts or, perhaps worse, tribalism. They deserve to be criticized and rejected, but we ought not to believe their claims to a Derridean inheritance unless they can show that they are genuinely related. Those who criticize or praise Derrida should do so directly rather than through

secondary interpretations of his work (like this). Don't make Jacques Derrida the whipping boy.

What does this mean for Latter-day Saints?

Probably not much. Being a Christian is infinitely more important than thinking about being one, though thinking about what it means to be Christian can be helpful. In that regard, reading scripture carefully is more important both spiritually and intellectually than creating theologies of any sort. Yet, in spite of that, some of us get bitten by the theology bug. Is there anything in Derrida for them, any useful and spiritually uplifting antidote to the bug? If there is, I think it is in these points:

- Understanding truth as an anticipation of the to-come, with the ultimate to-come being the Second Coming
- Taking account of the limitations of language and human knowledge: there is always more that can be said and using deconstruction to call our attention to that more
- Including the ethical dimension of the to-come in all deconstructions of practice, scripture, and belief
- Thinking of deconstructive theology in analogy with negative theology, not as revealing previously unknown or improperly understood truths, but, in concert with our positive affirmations about our religion and our acknowledgments of the limits of language and knowledge, opening a space of wonder and praise

Appendix: Derrida's Style

Derrida's style puts some readers off, especially English-speaking readers. That is understandable. Some of what he has said in such places as *Memoires for Paul DeMan*⁴⁸ suggests that, because of its effects in American literary criticism, Derrida began to have second thoughts about the way he wrote. But his playful style is not just perversity. First, it is part of a long-standing and unfortunate tradition among some in German and French universities to lecture in an artificial language that assumes the audience has considerable background for the lecture (for example, knows Hegel and Heidegger as well others). As part of that, there is a close connection between literature and philosophy in France, so philosophers often take a literary approach to

their writing. In that context, Derrida writes in an exaggerated version of much of the French academy. He's part of the club and proving it.

Second, given the premises and goals of a deconstructive reading of a text, we can question the possibility of writing a straightforward essay on deconstruction.⁴⁹ A straightforward work does not recognize the necessity of omission. The original text is comparable to the necessary first moment of negative theology, in other words comparable to a preceding moment of *affirmative* theology. Deconstruction is perhaps comparable to negative theology, a response to affirmative theology. Affirmative theology says God is all-knowing, all-loving, infinitely good and wise. Negative theology then reminds us that we don't really know what "infinite" means when applied to God. Negative theology shows us that, on reflection, whatever we say about God affirmatively leads us into contradiction or unknowing. But affirmative and negative theology are supposed to work together to take us beyond our attempts to talk of God propositionally back toward the experience of God that is prior to language. The text and its deconstruction should take us beyond both the original text and its deconstruction toward the to-come that we can only speak of inadequately.

With deconstruction, Derrida often plays with the rhetoric of response and the idea of response without accusation, aiming to respond questioningly to the problems of the texts he examines and, at the same time, aiming to stretch his audience. He responds to affirmative thought with "negative" thought to show its weaknesses and omissions, *but not to show that it was meaningless*. Serious playfulness is a response to the ultimately ungrounded (though not without an overlooked to-come) seriousness of the tradition.

Third, Derrida wants his readers to work; he does not write for a lazy audience. In a fragment from a long sentence that embodies what it describes, Derrida says of his writing:

I remember having gone to bed very late after a moment of anger or irony against a sentence of Proust's . . . which says: "A work in which there are theories is like an object on which one has left the price tag," and I find nothing more vulgar than this Franco-Britannic decorum . . . I admit that I write with the price on, I display, not so that the price be legible to the first-comer, for I am for an aristocracy without distinction, therefore without vulgarity, for a democracy of the compulsion to the highest price, you have to pay the price to read the price displayed.⁵⁰

Many who write about Derrida's work, both affirmatively and negatively, do so without paying the price. They do not want to read deeply and widely from the European traditions. They do not want to learn other languages. They do not want to begin their deconstructive work with the background of careful scholarship. They want to skip the first moment of deconstruction's negative theology and deal with only the second. Others depend on someone else's account of Derrida's work (such as this one), or they remain committed to the Enlightenment ideal of complete, rational explanation without confronting the problems of that commitment. In either case, such people are unable to read the price tag of Derrida's work. I believe this expectation—perhaps too high an expectation even for the philosophically educated among those in his seminars in Paris—has made it relatively easy for readers, whether friend or foe, to misconstrue his writing and thought.

Yet Derrida's style is not only a consequence of being part of an academic elite in France. Nor is his writing the result of it being deconstructive work, which is only explicit in its practice. As Derrida sees it, his style is also a result of the excessive character of events and things themselves. The excessive character of what-is—its to-come character, the openness and possibility of what-is more than a set of determinate qualities—means that there is always play in things, experiences of things, and descriptions, the kind of play one finds in a steering wheel, looseness and variability, give and take more than joyfulness or silliness (though the latter are not impossible). The straightforward text cannot but have some play in it. No text, even a deconstructive one (perhaps *especially* a deconstructive one) can avoid it. Language is like that; things themselves are like that.

Unfortunately, however one accounts for Derrida's style, the result has been that some believe his work to be *only* a matter of play, just a matter of doing whatever one wishes with the text and, therefore, anything but a matter of praise and wonder. Among those who believe this, some take Derrida's writings to be a sign of his genius and others see it as a sign of his derangement. Both are wrong. However playful it may appear at first glance, genuine deconstruction cannot be a matter of mere playfulness.

Mere playfulness shows us only emptiness, rather than traces of the absence of meanings, persons, and God—rather than the metaphysical "failure" of our texts and the resulting anticipation of the to-come. Rather than calling us to remembrance of the to-come, mere playfulness suggests that there is nothing to await, in other words, that

we ought not to strive for justice if we have not found a sure ground for it, or if we discover that absolute justice is impossible. Mere playfulness is like simple atheism rather than negative theology. Like negative theology and unlike mere playfulness, Derridean deconstruction is always a matter of serious purpose and careful attention to the text or matter in question.

Thus, it is not enough to object to Derrida's style as obfuscatory. It may be opaque, often intentionally so. Sometimes unnecessarily so. However, for the most part that opacity is a matter of richness and fullness, a reflection of the richness and fullness of that which it tries to talk about. Surely neither poets nor religious people are generally committed to the idea that *all* language should be propositionally clear and distinct. I doubt that even many empirical scientists would be committed to that. If one is to object to Derrida, one must object to the *theory* of his style, a theory rich in antecedents and implications. Dismissal will not do.

To underwrite what I've said about Derrida's writing, consider this long quotation from an interview:⁵¹

I learned a lot from my teachers. . . . This instruction was very hard and heavy, very demanding according to classical norms. I was trained in those very classical norms. And probably people who read me and think I am playing with or transgressing norms – which I do, of course – usually don't know what I know: that all of this has not only been made possible by but is constantly in contact with very classical, rigorous, demanding discipline in writing. . . . The fact that . . . I am at some level true to this classical teaching is essential. . . . When I take liberties, it's always by measuring the distance from the standards I know or that I've rigorously been trained in. (5)

Deconstruction questions the *thesis*, theme, the positionality of everything. (8)

We have to study the models and the history of the models and then try not to subvert them for the sake of destroying them but to change the models and invent new ways of writing – not as a formal challenge, but for ethical, political reasons. (9)

I wouldn't approve of simply throwing literary texts into disorder. First, deconstructing academic, professional discourse doesn't mean simply destroying the norms or

pushing these norms to utter chaos. I'm not in favor simply of disorder. (10)

I start with the tradition. If you're not trained in the tradition, then deconstruction means nothing. It's simply nothing. (11)

I think that if what is called "deconstruction" produces neglect of the classical authors, the canonical texts, and so on, we should fight it. . . . I'm in favor of the canon, but I won't stop there. I think that students should *read* what are considered the great texts in our tradition. . . . Students could develop, let's say, a deconstructive practice – but only to the extent that they "know" what they are "deconstructing": an enormous network of other questions. (11)

I'm in favor of tradition. I'm respectful of and a lover of the tradition. There's no deconstruction without the memory of the tradition. I couldn't imagine what the university could be without reference to the tradition, but a tradition that is as rich as possible and that is open to other traditions, and so on. (12)

I think that the people who try to represent what I'm doing or what so called "deconstruction" is doing, as, on the one hand, trying to destroy culture or, on the other hand, to reduce it to a kind of negativity, to a kind of death, are misrepresenting deconstruction. Deconstruction is essentially affirmative. It's in favor of reaffirmation of memory, but this reaffirmation of memory asks the most adventurous and the most risky questions about our tradition, about our institutions, about our way of teaching, and so on. (20–21)

Consider also that in an essay by Geoffrey Bennington explaining Derrida's work,⁵² Derrida appends to the bottom of each page a series of reflections in response to what Bennington has written. Derrida's reflections are autobiographical, including reflections on his relation to his mother that take the form, among others, of a response to passages from Augustine's *Confessions*, perhaps his favorite book. One cannot write or remember in this explicit way without the benefit of a long history of autobiography, confession, philosophy, literature, art, religion, and so on. Without a kind of obscenity, one could not write about one's mother and her death and, at the same time, insist that texts don't matter, that words do not signify.

Beyond my attempts to explain Derridean deconstruction, the above excerpts from Derrida's work suggest that either deconstruction

has been much misunderstood or Derrida has never explained himself well. Having read many of his works, I think the first alternative is the better explanation (without ignoring that the second also plays a role). In fact, though I am neither Derridean nor anti-Derridean, I think that with my explanation and with what Derrida says in that interview in mind, his work changes its character, moving from playful, irritating, but nonsensical texts to playful, irritating, demanding, and sometimes profound texts.

With a long list of antecedents in Christian history and Christian philosophy, Derrida sees writing as an aid to memory (but one that is both a remedy to forgetfulness and a poison to metaphysical thought):⁵³ its purpose is to help us remember what is always nevertheless forgotten, what only too easily slips out of our grasp, whether what we forget are those with whom we live, or God—that which continues to be to-come. Derrida writes to nudge us to remember, and what we remember is always not only something inherited but, more importantly, the to-come that shows itself in what we have inherited as part of our anticipation of truth. As texts of memory, anticipation, and praise, Derrida's works move from being texts on the margins of literary criticism and philosophical interests to being texts that ask about *our* margins, about what is outside us, about what we have forgotten and, perhaps to our peril, ignored.



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Notes

1. The religious use of contemporary European philosophical thought appears to be possible. We see it among non-Latter-day Saint theologians who work within the post-Heideggerian philosophical turn in Europe and whom we would probably recognize as believing in God and, in most cases, as committed practicing Christians (often Catholics). To name a few: Jean-Luc Marion, Immanuel Levinas, Jean-Yves Lacoste, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Paul Ricœur, Richard Kearney, Michel Henry, John Milbank, John Panteleimon Manousakis, Kevin Hart, Merold Westphal, Robyn Horner, and Graham Ward. There are others, such as Catherine Keller, John D. Caputo, and Peter Rollins, who understand themselves to be believers, but whose thinking might be difficult to square with what most consider to be belief in God.
2. The pre-linguistic given is something supposedly available to us prior to interpretation through language or concepts.
3. If interested, see James E. Faulconer, "Paul Ricœur on Scripture," in *Remembrance and Return: Papers in Honor of Louis C. Midgley*, ed. Ted Vaggalis and Daniel C. Peterson (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2019), 59–75, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ifb/22/; and James E. Faulconer, "On the Literal Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts*, ed. Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, Boyd J. Peterson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 47–57.
4. Gadamer, a non-practicing but believing Protestant, was a student of Heidegger, whose understanding of religion I will discuss later. Marion was a student of Derrida, who was a student of Immanuel Levinas, an Orthodox Jew. Marion is now an *immortel* of the *Académie Française* in recognition of his work in the philosophy of religion. He is a devout Catholic.
5. Biographical notes about two of the main players in this essay:
 - (1) Tragically, in the 1930s Heidegger associated himself with the "Blut und Boden" (blood and soil) of National Socialism, joining the party and sometimes acting shamefully. After World War II, he distanced himself from Nazi philosophy by publishing several earlier lectures, some of them revised to mark that distance. For an excellent, balanced discussion of Heidegger's Naziism, see Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 153–64.
 - (2) There are also questions about Derrida being a signatory to a 1977 petition, *Lettre ouverte à la Commission de revision du code penal pour la révision de certains textes régissant les rapports entre adultes et mineurs* ("Open Letter to the Commission for Revising the Penal Code Regarding the Revision of Certain Texts Governing Relations Between Adults and Minors"). This has been depicted as a petition supporting pedophilia; the petition's title suggests as much. However, because the French laws governing sexual issues, regarding which this letter called for reforms, were complicated, it isn't easy to parse the relationship of any particular signatory to the petition's demands. One of the petition's primary claims was that French law in sexual issues was outdated and overly punitive. Many signatories took that as their reason for signing once having done so became notorious.

Nevertheless, the demand that consent between parties involved in sexual relations be the standard, rather than age, was part of the petition. So, some claimed to have understood a reduction of inappropriately harsh penalties as the goal of the petition. They later said they were asking for certain legal reforms; they did not intend to support the sexual exploitation of children. Yet others went further, insisting on decriminalization of sexual acts between consenting adults and minors—a view that is deeply problematic today and was hardly unproblematic at the time. Michel Foucault publicly argued in support of allowing sexual acts between consenting adults and consenting minors. See Michel Foucault, “Sexuality and Moral Law,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 278.

Derrida’s relationship to the letter was and is murky: he acknowledged signing the petition but he neither apologized for doing so, clarified his understanding of the petition’s purpose, nor repudiated it. Neither did he explain his thinking regarding the petition’s various demands. Perhaps the closest thing to an explanation is his reflections on how signing something relates to responsibility: Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 307–30; Derrida, “Signature Événement Contexte,” in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 365–93, archive.org/details/margesdelaphilos0000derr/page/366/mode/2up. Note that this essay was published in French in 1972, prior to the publication of the petition. He and I never discussed the petition or its themes.

The disconnect between the politics of philosophers and their thought is hardly new. It started at least with Plato, who tried, quite unsuccessfully, to reform the government of Syracuse according to his political theories. For millennia philosophers have often been on the wrong side of politics: theoretical intelligence rarely yields either practical, political, or religious intelligence.

Nor do biographical details offer us much for the best way to understand a thinker. Levinas knew only too well the horrors of Naziism, having lost in the death camps every member of his extended family except his wife and daughter, who were concealed in a convent in Orléans. He refused to set foot in Germany after the war, saying: “Heidegger has never been exculpated in my eyes from his participation in National Socialism.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 41, archive.org/details/ethicsinfinity00levi/page/40/mode/2up; “Heidegger ne soit jamais disculpé à mes yeux de sa participation au national-socialisme,” Levinas, *Éthique et Infini: Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 38, archive.org/details/ethiqueetinfinid0000levi/page/28/mode/2up.

Yet Levinas also said Heidegger’s *Being and Time* “is one of the finest books in the history of philosophy,” Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 37; “*Sein und Zeit* . . . C’est un des plus beaux livres de l’histoire de la philosophie,” Levinas, *Éthique et Infini*, 33; and “In Heidegger there is a new way, direct, of conversing with philosophers and asking for absolutely current teachings from the great classics,” *Ethics and Infinity*, 43; “Chez Heidegger, il y a une nouvelle manière, direct,

de dialoguer avec les philosophes et de demander des enseignements absolument actuels aux grands classiques," Levinas, *Éthique et Infini*, 41.

I'm unable to say anything about how Derrida understood his signature on the 1977 letter. But I can say something about his character in his interactions with me and others around me, and—more importantly—I can say something about how to understand his thought.

6. Parts of what I say cannibalize an essay on deconstruction that I wrote sometime before 2010. It circulates in various places and versions on the internet though I no longer feel to claim it.
7. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and her husband, Bernhard Förster, were German nationalists and antisemites who went so far as to establish an Aryan colony in Paraguay. Not surprisingly, it failed.
8. Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
9. My translation from the original German: "Ist er denn verloren gegangen? sagte der Eine. Hat er sich verlaufen wie ein Kind? sagte der Andere. Oder hält er sich versteckt? Fürchtet er sich von uns? Ist er zu Schiff gegangen? Ausgewandert?" Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "Der tolle mensch," in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* ("La Gaya Scienza") (Leipzig, DE: Verlag von E. W. Fritzsche, 1887), 153, archive.org/details/bub_gb_LNEuAAAAYAAJ/page/n161/mode/2up.
10. On Nietzsche's view, many of those he addresses may profess belief and believe that they believe in God. But they are nevertheless atheists because their belief was merely that, only *belief* in the metaphysical God rather than life in a world structured by that God.
11. From here on, I will use *God*, the word *God* with a line through it, to refer to the metaphysical god and its analogues in such things as pure reason or scientific law and *God* to refer to the one God, except in quotations.
12. The answer is only "obviously none" if we beg the question by assuming that there cannot be truth without a metaphysical foundation/*God*.
13. For Latter-day Saints the first question ("Is there an alternative?") is a genuine question to which we answer yes. But given what we are taught about God, the answer to the second question ("Is nihilism the only alternative?") depends on what one means by *nihilism*. If it means "the belief there is no meaning," then clearly we are not nihilists and would answer no. But if *nihilism* means "the disbelief in *God*," then—oddly—we may be nihilists of a sort. See my unpublished essay, "What Does Nihilism Affirm? In Praise of Naivete," (lecture, Pembroke College Oxford Seminar on Faith and Reason, March 2017, drive.google.com/file/d/1Nuhl3jfTWrOX-1AngNh54dpe-1SCCaQ3/view) for an argument for a form of religious nihilism.
14. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), archive.org/details/beingtime0000heid_j2i5/mode/2up; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle an der Saale: Niemeyer, 1927).

15. Aristotle, *Physics*, 192a31-b8, archive.org/details/aristotlephysics0000tran/page/94/mode/2up.
16. Brian Rogers, "Traces of Reduction: Marion and Heidegger on the Phenomenon of Religion," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 2 (June 2014): 187.
17. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie, Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt, DE: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975). *Basic Problems* is a transcription of the 1927 lecture course.
18. Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 23; *Grundprobleme*, 31. He first introduces *Abbau* in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §6, but his discussion in *Basic Problems* is clearer.
19. Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, 22; *Grundprobleme*, 31: "Alle philosophie Erörterung, auch de radikaliste, neu anfangende, von überkommenen Begriffen und damit von überkommenen Horizonten und Hinsicht durchsetzt ist."
20. For Heidegger, this problem is only apparent. Historicism and relativism are mistakes consequent on the representational thinking of modernism. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume 2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), especially section 16.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger's assistant in Marburg for three years in the 1920s, explains this well in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1989), archive.org/details/gadamer-truth-and-method. See my review of that book: James Faulconer, "Recovering Truth: A Review of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*," *Mormon Review* 2, no. 3, *Times and Seasons* (blog), web.archive.org/web/20120508193050/http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2010/09/mr-recovering-truth-a-review-of-hans-georg-gadamer-truth-and-method/.
21. My thanks to Robert Metcalf (University of Colorado, Denver) for his unpublished essay, "Thinking Beyond the 'Philosophy of Religion' with [William] James and Heidegger." He helped me better understand Heidegger's thinking about religion. The most relevant text is Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*, ed. Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly, and Claudius Strube, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 60 (Frankfurt, DE: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995). This is a transcription of lectures given in Freiburg in 1920–21.
22. Mark Wrathall, "The Phenomenology of Religious Life," unpublished manuscript.
23. This might not rule out cultural relativism. There are cultural differences that are relevant to how we understand what is true, but the kind of absolute cultural or personal relativism that most find untenable is made impossible by Heidegger's understanding of the openness revealed by deconstruction rather than historical or other kinds of determinism. Truth comes to us through events that make personal or cultural experience possible. We can glimpse truth in those events entangled in history and culture, but not created merely by them.
24. In a private discussion with Gadamer (July 1991), I asked about Heidegger's

religion. He reminded me that shortly after their marriage in 1917 Heidegger and his wife, Elfriede Petri, became "house Christians," people who practiced their faith in private rather than in an institutional church, and that both were buried as Catholics. Gadamer had been Heidegger's assistant and was confident that Heidegger continued to think of himself as a practicing Christian. We know little about Heidegger's religion, but it is doubtful that he was an atheist.

25. See Jacques Derrida, "Ousia and Grammé: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 29–67; Jacques Derrida, "Ousia et grammé: note sur une note de Sein und Zeit," *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 31–78, archive.org/details/margesdelaphilos0000derr/mode/2up.
26. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), Part 1, 6–73; Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 15–108, archive.org/details/delagrammatologi0000derr.
27. Derrida, *Grammatology*, 158; Derrida, *Grammatologie*, 227.
28. Notice that Derrida's claim is not the simple and obvious claim that all truth has a context. It is, rather, that all truth is constituted by context, as well as other structures.
29. For an interesting, relevant discussion of this, though anything but a Derridean one, see Jerry A. Fodor, *The Elm and the Expert: Mentalese and Its Semantics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
30. William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807), 2:150–51, archive.org/details/poemsintwovolume00word/page/150/mode/2up.
31. Derrida, "Ousia and Grammé," 39–40.
32. In, for example, Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991).
33. See, for example, the two essays, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy," and particularly the second on Pseudo-Dionysius, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in Jacques Derrida, *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992), 25–71, 73–142; Jacques Derrida, *D'un ton Apocalyptique Adopté Naguère en Philosophie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1983); and Jacques Derrida, "Comment ne pas Parler: Dénégations," in *Psyché: Invention de L'autre*, vol 1 (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987), 55–595.
34. Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 155.
35. Derrida, "Circumfession," 155.
36. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), throughout; Jacques Derrida, *Donner la Mort* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1999), archive.org/details/donnerlamort0000derr/page/n9/mode/2up.

37. This ethical focus most clearly shows the connection of Derrida's thought to that of Levinas. For example, see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Derrida, *Donner le Temps. 1, La Fausse Monnaie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991); Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Derrida, *L'autre Cap* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991); Derrida, *Gift of Death*; and such essays as "Foi et Savoir: Les deux sources de la 'religion' aux limites de la simple raison," in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *La Religion* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996).
38. Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 253–54.
39. *Effected* rather than *affected* is the word I intend.
40. Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, 254.
41. Derrida, *Gift of Death*, may be the best example of this aspect of his thinking. There he reads Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* alongside the biblical story of Abraham to argue that absolute responsibility is unavoidable, requires responsibility to a particular other, cannot be fully justified to others, and always involves risk: there is no rationalizable guarantee that one has made the right decision.
42. The other person is always absent from any merely rational system, if for no other reason than that any embodied, material being, especially a living one, escapes complete rationalization in virtue of its temporality—in religious terms, in virtue of its ability to repent.
43. Here *attitude* has a meaning like that when we speak of the attitude of an airplane wing and its orientation to the air through which it moves.
44. Those interested should begin with Hart, *Trespass of the Sign*.
45. Private discussion with Derrida at the École Normal Supérieure in Paris, 1 March 1996.
46. "Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," (lecture, Cardozo School of Law, October 1989), fswg.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/derrida-force-of-law.pdf.
47. I do not intend to demean the work of the Christian theologians I have named and others like them. All are smarter and better educated than I. Their work is fascinating and often yields incredible insights. Nevertheless, I have yet to see one who I think has reconciled the God of the Bible with the rejection of God. Perhaps some variation of mysticism is the only possible result.
48. Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cécile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), archive.org/details/memoiresforpaul0000derr/page/n5/mode/2up.
49. I do not believe the chestnut that if you can't explain what you think to a child you probably don't understand it yourself. Disciplines have their own vocabularies for good reasons and it should be possible to "translate" what is written in

those languages and make them accessible to an educated layperson. But most of Heidegger's and Derrida's work had educated academics as its audience, not educated laypeople. I have used some of their technical vocabulary as a shortcut, and I hope that I have each time given an explanation of that vocabulary. My intention has been to write for educated laypeople who care about these issues.

50. Derrida, "Circumfession," Period 12, 62–63.
51. Gary A. Olsen, "Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation," *Journal of Advanced Composition* 10, no. 1 (1990): 1–21, jstor.org/stable/20865695?seq=1.
52. See Derrida, "Circumfession," throughout, but especially in Periods 1–10.
53. In philosophy, the discussion of the double-face of writing begins with Plato's *Phaedrus* (274c–275a), dn720706.ca.archive.org/0/items/phaedruslysisand02platuoft/phaedruslysisand02platuoft.pdf. Derrida follows Plato's lead in *Of Grammatology* and in "Plato's Pharmacy."

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