

Chapter 3: DERRIDA, NIETZSCHE, AND THE RETURN TO THE SUBJECT

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# DERRIDA, NIETZSCHE, AND THE RETURN TO THE SUBJECT

MICHAEL A. PETERS

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subject, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? A kind of aristocracy of “cells” in which domination resides? To be sure, an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command? *My hypothesis*: The subject as multiplicity.

Friedrich Nietzsche, # 490, Book Three, “Principles of a New Evaluation,” *The Will To Power*, W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale (trans.), W. Kaufmann (ed.), New York, Vintage Books, 1968, p. 270.

I believe that at a certain level both of experience and of philosophical and scientific discourse, one cannot get along without the notion of the subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions.

Jacques Derrida, from the discussion following “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences,” in *The Structuralist Controversy*, Richard Macksey & Eugenio Donato (eds.), Richard Macksey (trans.), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, p. 271.

## Introduction

Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut argue that “the philosophy of 68” eliminates and leaves no room for a positive rehabilitation of human agency necessary for a

workable notion of democracy. In their Preface to the English Translation of *La pensée* 68, Ferry and Renaut (1990a: xvi) refer to the philosophy of the 1960s as a “Nietzschean-Heideggerian” antihumanism that is structurally incapable of taking up the promises of the democratic project inherent in modernity. Their criticisms are specifically aimed at Derrida and are intended as a path back to a form of humanism, liberalism, and individualism (the doctrine of human rights), which they think, can sustain a notion of political agency required for democracy.

Derrida provides us with resources for understanding and responding to these criticisms. He denies a simple-minded nihilism as it applies to the subject, to notions of political agency, and to the Idea of democracy and he argues that the anti-Nietzschean polemical attack on the critique of the subject is misplaced; that poststructuralism never “liquidated” the subject but rather rehabilitated it, decentered it, and repositioned it, in all its historical and cultural complexity. As he argues: “There has never been The Subject for anyone . . . The subject is a fable . . . but to concentrate on the elements of speech and *conventional* fiction that such a fable presupposes is not to stop taking it seriously (it is the serious itself)” (Derrida, 1995b: 264).

## Derrida, Humanism, and Deconstruction

The American reception of deconstruction<sup>1</sup> and the influential formulation of “poststructuralism” in the English-speaking world quickly became institutionalized from the point at which Derrida delivered his essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” to the International Colloquium on Critical Languages and the Sciences of Man at Johns Hopkins University in October 1966. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (1970: x) described the conference as “the first time in the United States that structuralist thought had been considered as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon.” Even before the conclusion of the conference, there were clear signs that the ruling transdisciplinary paradigm of structuralism had been superseded, yet only a paragraph in Macksey’s “Concluding Remarks” signaled the importance of Derrida’s “radical reappraisals of our [structuralist] assumptions” (p. 320).

In the now classic essay “Structure, Sign and Play,” Derrida (1978a: 279–280) questioned the “structurality of structure” or notion of “center” which, he argued, has served to limit the play of structure:

the entire history of the concept of structure . . . must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center.

Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix... is the determination of being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos*, *arche*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

In this one paragraph, Derrida both called into question the previous decade of French structuralism and intimated the directions of his own intellectual ambitions. The decade of French structuralism, beginning with Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1958) *Anthropologie Structurale*, had its complex cultural prehistory in Nietzsche's critique of modernity, in the development of European structural linguistics, and in early twentieth-century modernism, especially formalism and futurism as it took form in both prerevolutionary Russia and Italy.<sup>2</sup>

The "decentering" of structure, of the transcendental signified, and of the *sovereign* subject—Derrida suggests, naming his sources of inspiration—can be found in the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics (especially, of the concepts of Being and truth) and in the Freudian critique of self-presence (as he says, "the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession" (*ibid.* 280), and, more radically, in the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics, "of the determination of Being as presence" [*ibid.*]). In the body of the essay, Derrida considers the theme of "decentering" in relation to Lévi-Strauss' ethnology and concludes by distinguishing two interpretations of structure. One, Hegelian in origin and exemplified in Lévi-Strauss's work, he argues, "dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign" and seeks the "inspiration of a new humanism." The other, "which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism..." (Derrida, 1978a: 292).

In another well-known essay "The Ends of Man," given as a lecture at an international colloquium in New York two years later (i.e., 1968), Derrida (1982: 114) addresses himself to the question of "where is France, as concerns man?" and he provides an account that interprets the dominant motif of postwar French philosophy as a philosophical humanism authorized by anthropological readings of Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. Sartre's "monstrous translation" (p. 115) of Heidegger's *Dasein* legitimated an existentialist humanism, and even the critique of humanism, itself a major current of French thought in the postwar era, presented itself more as an amalgamation of Hegel, Husserl,

and Heidegger with the old metaphysical humanism. Derrida argues: “the history of the concept man is never examined. Everything occurs as if the sign ‘man’ had no origin, no historical, cultural, or linguistic limit” (p. 116). This statement gives a strong indication as to Derrida’s own motivations and directions: a movement towards an ever clearer specification of the subject in historical, cultural, and linguistic terms and an excavation of the history of the subject.<sup>3</sup>

Derrida reconsiders the *relève* of man in the thought of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger to demonstrate that in each case there is a clear critique of *anthropologism*. In particular, Heidegger’s thought is guided by the double motif of being as presence and of the proximity of being to the essence of man (p. 128). He suggests that if we are not simply to restore the ordering of the system by taking recourse to humanist concepts or to destroy meaning, we face two strategic choices: either “to attempt an exit and a deconstruction without changing terrain, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic . . .,” or “to decide to change terrain, in a discontinuous and irruptive fashion, brutally placing oneself outside, and by affirming an absolute break and difference” (p. 135). And he says, in an oft-quoted remark: “A new writing must weave and interlace these two motifs of deconstruction. Which amounts to saying that one must speak several languages and produce several texts at once” (*ibid.*). What we need to “change the terrain,” he claims finally quoting Nietzsche, “is a change of ‘style’; and if there is style, Nietzsche reminded us it must be *plural*” (*ibid.*).<sup>4</sup>

Derrida has never disowned the subject or its relevance either to philosophical or scientific discourse. He has, however, radically questioned the sovereign subject and the philosophical tradition of consciousness that left its indelible imprint on a variety of postwar humanisms. Inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger, and befriended by Levinas, Derrida has interrogated the humanist construction of the sovereign subject—its genealogy and its authorial-functions—in his attempt to develop a science of writing that both deconstructs and moves beyond “man” as the full presence of consciousness in being. His work has been misinterpreted by those christening themselves anti-Nietzscheans who claim that Derrida (and post-structuralism in general) has “liquidated” or “eliminated” the subject and, therefore, endangered agency and posed a consequent threat to a workable notion of democracy. In this chapter, I briefly review the fierce attacks of the French “neoliberals” on Derrida and I elaborate the way Derrida provides us with resources for understanding and responding to these criticisms.

## Antihumanism and the Metaphysics of the Subject

Luc Ferry and Alain Renault published *La pensée 68* in 1985, poorly translated into English as *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism* (1990a). In the preface to the English translation, Ferry and Renault maintain that French intellectual history since World War II has been dominated by “a critique of the modern world and the values of formal democracy” (p. xi) inspired by Marx and Heidegger that resulted in a common rejection of humanism. They claim that “Nietzschean-Heideggerianism” dates the advent of modern humanism from Descartes rather than from the rise of capitalism and works to “deconstruct” the subject defined as conscience and will, as “the author of his acts and ideas” (p. xii). In their description of the trajectory of French postwar thought, they assert that the critique of modern rationality was intimately bound up with the critique of the subject: Marxism had interrogated the universalism of the Enlightenment, based upon claims of the emancipation of man, in the light of Eurocentrism and European colonialism. When Marxism collapsed, the Heideggerian critique took over. They argue, “the retreat of Marxism has made the presence of Heideggerianism in France more and more visible” (p. xv) and that what happened to Marxism in the 1970s is happening to Heidegger today. In relation to both Marxism and Heideggerianism, they summarize their position thus:

*Whether conducted in the name of a radiant future or a traditionalist reaction, the total critique of the modern world, because it is necessarily an antihumanism that leads inevitably to seeing in the democratic project, for example, in human rights, the prototype of ideology or the metaphysically illusion, is structurally incapable of taking up, except insincerely and seemingly in spite of itself, the promises that are also those of modernity* (p. xvi, italics in the original).

They claim that in their philosophical paradigm—what we can describe as a “French neoliberalism” (for the term, see Lilla, 1994)—it is necessary “to grant a minimum of legitimacy to a reference to the subject which is inherent in democratic thought” (p. xvi) and to bypass the confusion between metaphysics and humanism. It is, they claim, after Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, today more than anything “a question of rethinking... the question of the subject” (p. xvi).

The antihumanism of French philosophy of the 1968 period is tracked out by reference to Derrida’s “The Ends of Man,” Foucault’s declaration in *The Order of Things* of “the death of man,” and Lyotard’s skepticism of anthropologism.

Antihumanism holds that “the autonomy of the subject is an illusion” (p. xxiii) and that the problem that now confronts us, Ferry and Renault suggest, “consists of searching for conditions for what a *nonmetaphysical humanism* might be” that involves “conferring a coherent philosophical status on the promise of freedom contained in the requirements of humanism” (p. xxviii). Ferry and Renault wish to invent a form of modern humanism that is not metaphysical and permits the ascription of universal moral and political judgments and rights without further appeals to essentialist notions of human nature.

In this first attempt, Ferry and Renault dissipate much of their energies by criticizing the Nietzschean-Heideggerianism. While they legitimately question the Heideggerian critique of subjectivity—the meaning of the “metaphysics of subjectivity”—and inquire as to what can replace the metaphysical subject after its deconstruction (see p. 212), there are more rhetorical (and less savory) elements in their attack, which seek to damn Derrida and deconstruction by association with Heidegger’s Nazism or Nietzsche’s “irrationalism” and “illiberalism.”<sup>5</sup> These rhetorical moves aside, there is little sustained engagement with Derrida’s texts and their work seems excessively negative or mired in critique, without positively identifying, beyond the most schematic form, in what “modern humanism” might consist. For instance, toward the end of their book, they argue that “It does not follow that, having established that man is not really... autonomous..., one has to go to the extreme of withdrawing all meaning and function... from the Ideal of autonomy” (p. 211). Or, again, in the conclusion, they indicate that the critique of humanism and of the subject has revealed a “surprising” simplicity, suggesting that a *history of the subject* is yet to be written.

As Mark Lilla (1994) comments in respect to Ferry and Renault,

what they mean by the “subject” is often obscured in their writings, which up to now have mainly been critical and directed against their adversaries. They have yet to develop their own theory of subjectivity or respond to the objections that all such theories inevitably confront. Still it is clear what they wish such a theory of subjectivity to undergrid: a new defense of universal, rational norms in morals and politics, and especially a defense of human rights. (pp. 19–20)

Lilla clarifies that “such a defense would not be based upon the notion of an isolated individual as possessor of rights and, therefore, would not be compatible with classical liberalism” (p. 20). Instead, they appeal to a French republicanism that is to be articulated through a new humanism. To date this project has remained entirely programmatic and schematic and its content has been unfulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

The sorts of criticisms articulated by Ferry and Renault represent a wider set of criticisms against Derrida and, more broadly, post-structuralism for its theoretical antihumanism and its alleged lack of a subject that can provide either for a notion of political agency and resistance or for the ascription of human rights and the workability of democracy. Indeed, strangely it is on the basis of this generalized criticism that liberals of all persuasions (old-fashioned thinkers, feminists, social democrats, and neoliberals) and humanist or disaffected structuralist Marxists and communitarians join hands. This new alliance can be given the generic term “anti-Nietzscheans.” It is, perhaps, most obvious in the work of Ferry and Renault (1991; Eng. Trans. 1997b), who in the early 1990s published a collection of essays with the title *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzschéens*, including essays by Vincent Descombes, Alain Boyer, and Phillippe Raynaud, among others. Yet it is also clear in the more general attack mounted against Derrida by Barry Smith, the editor of *The Monist* and the inaugurator of the infamous letter that sparked what Derrida called “the Cambridge Affair.”<sup>7</sup> In the *Foreword* to a selection of essays edited by Smith (1994), for instance, he claims that the present ills facing American academic life are due directly to Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and others:

Many current developments in American academic life—multiculturalism, “political correctness,” the growth of critical theory, rhetoric and hermeneutics, the crisis of scholarship in many humanities departments—have been closely associated with, and indeed, inspired by, the work of European philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and others. In Europe itself, in contrast, the influence of these philosophers is restricted to a small coterie, and their ideas have certainly contributed to none of the wide-ranging social and institutional changes we are currently witnessing in some corner of American academia.

This set of extraordinary claims are advanced without evidence of any kind; they are, after all, empirical statements rather than analytic ones, and, therefore, in terms Smith would accept, the establishment of their “truth” would necessarily require some historical evidence and analysis.

In the Smith (1994) collection, Dallas Willard (1994: 15) attempting to address the question of causation implied in Smith’s assertions, concludes that to suppose that deconstructionism is *the* cause of the university crisis is a misdiagnosis. Yet he reiterates the charge in Smith’s letter that deconstruction is not a *method* of thought. These are general attacks that do not proceed from a direct criticism of the Nietzscheanism assumed, often unproblematically, to exist as a source and inspiration for Derrida and to account for an antiliberalism in Derrida’s thought (and that of other post-structuralists). The essay “The Decline and Fall of French

Nietzscheo-Structuralism” by Pascal Engel (1994) is a clearer example that echoes many of the criticisms raised by Ferry and Renaut. Engel (1994; 36–37, fn 3) distinguishes between what he calls Heideggero-Nietzscheanism (Derrida) and Metaphysical-Nietzscheanism (Deleuze) and formulates his criticisms in terms of a series of theses said to be the basis of Nietzscheo-Structuralism: there is no such thing as meaning, truth, epistemology (theses 1, 3, 4); nothing exists but forces (thesis 2); consciousness and subjectivity are just effects (of affects) (thesis 5); philosophy creates concepts (thesis 6). Engel (1994: 34) comments upon the “catastrophic consequences in political philosophy” of entertaining these theses (as if Deleuze or Derrida actually holds such crudely stated theses).

The new liberal alliance is also strongly evidenced in an essay by Charles Taylor (1994) on multiculturalism contributed to a collection edited by Amy Gutmann (1994), including Jürgen Habermas, K. Anthony Appiah, Susan Wolf, Micheal Walzer, and others. Taylor, for instance, at one point makes casual and off-hand remarks concerning “neo-Nietzscheans,” referring to “subjectivist, half-baked neo-Nietzschean theories” (1994: 70). He mentions Derrida and Foucault only once and then without reference to specific texts and in derogatory terms.<sup>8</sup> Taylor argues that citizenship cannot be regarded as a basis for universal identity as people are both unique, self-creating individuals as well as bearers of culture. Both qualifications could easily be given a Nietzschean perspective, and, indeed, the question of cultural difference has been most thoroughly theorized, one might argue, by Derrida and a host of other post-structuralists (e. g., Foucault on micropractices, Lyotard on the *differend*, Deleuze on repetition and difference).

Derrida, for instance, constitutes an important place in the history of the subject when he invents the concept of *différance* and plots the linguistic limit of the subject. *Différance*, as Derrida (1981: 8–9) remarks, as both the common root of all the positional concepts marking our language and the condition for all signification, refers not only to the “movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving” but also and finally to “the unfolding of difference,” of the ontico-ontological difference, which Heidegger named as the difference between Being and beings.

Amy Gutmann (1994: 13) characterizes the concern for *cultural* difference and for the public recognition of particular cultures within liberal democracies as one that is forever counterbalanced by the concern for the protection of universal rights, and she translates the issue into the educational sphere as a dispute over the core curriculum and the content of courses when she sets up

the debate in terms of the “essentialists” and the “deconstructionists.” Gutmann (1994: 13–14) suggests that the “deconstructionists” argue:

That to preserve the core by excluding contributions by women, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans as if the classical canon were sacred, unchanging, and unchangeable would be to denigrate the identities of members of these previously excluded groups and to close off Western civilization from the influences of unorthodox and challenging ideas of the sake of perpetuating sexism, racism, Eurocentrism, close-mindedness, the tyranny of truth (with a capital “T”), and a host of related intellectual and political evils.

To construct the debate in this way, as one between the opposite poles of essentialism and deconstructionism, allows Gutmann to safely impugn both and to come out on the side of liberal democracy. The debate over the core or multicultural curriculum is largely a reflection on the philosophy of the subject: essentialist or deconstructionist? There are a number of buried premises in the argument concerning the liberal theory of education and schooling, the education of reason, the shaping of selves, and so on. Gutmann does not make these theoretical connections. Whether she is kind to essentialists I will leave for others to judge. Her take on deconstructionists follows an analogous approach to the problem of agency argument: “deconstructionists erect a different obstacle to liberal democracy when they deny the desirability of shared intellectual standards, which scholars and students might use to evaluate our common education”; “they [deconstructionists] view common standards as masks for the will to political power of dominant, hegemonic groups” (p. 18). Gutmann asserts that such an argument is self-undermining, both logically and practically, for deconstructionism itself reflects the will to power of deconstructionists. Her quarrel with deconstructionism is that, first, “it denies *a priori* any reasonable answers to fundamental questions,” and, second, “it reduces everything to an exercise of political power” (p. 20).

The difficulty is that Gutmann’s “deconstructionists” are faceless; she never mentions Derrida or any theorist in association with deconstructionism. In other words, she sets up a straw man deconstructionism, which alleviates her of the scholarly *responsibility* to read or refer to specific texts, only to fiercely knock it down in the name of liberal democracy. We are entitled, for instance, to ask Gutmann: can Foucault really be considered a “deconstructionist”? Is the “will to power” a motivating concept in Derridean deconstruction or Foucauldian genealogy? Where does Derrida explicitly address the theme of ethnocentrism and what does he say concerning it? Gutmann has homogenized the

differences between those she calls “deconstructionists” and while appropriating the term deconstructionism she has made no reference at all to Derrida’s work. If Gutmann had investigated Derrida’s work, she may have discovered that ethnocentrism and phallogentrism are seen to accompany the logocentrism that defines historically the attempt in the West to determine being as presence and that Nietzsche’s influence, in Derrida’s eyes, has been to free the signifier from the logos.<sup>9</sup>

In the *Preface* to the 1992 French edition, Ferry and Renaut (1997b: vii–viii) suggest that an appropriate retitling of the collection of essays might be “To think Nietzsche against Nietzsche” for they identify Nietzsche as the “inventor of the ‘genealogy,’” the thinker, above all, who inspired the so-called master thinkers of the 1960s, who standing in the shadows of Nietzsche believed that they too could philosophize with a hammer, smashing the last idols of metaphysics and thereby moving beyond humanism. Yet, while they assert that “today nobody believes in Absolute Knowledge, in the meaning of history, or in the transparency of the Subject” (presumably the *thinking* of Nietzsche), it is also the case that “philosophy is not condemned to infinite deconstruction” (the thinking of Nietzsche *against* Nietzsche). They continue: “philosophy renews the ancestral desire for rationality, which the relativism of the modes of thought of difference invited us, too facilely, to renounce” (p. viii).

Only Vincent Descombes’ (1997) essay deals with “Nietzsche’s French Moment” and Descombes’ analysis focuses upon Foucault and Deleuze to the exclusion of Derrida. Descombes generalizing to post-structuralism—(an “unnatural alliance” of Nietzscheanism with orthodox structuralism)—suggests that Nietzscheanism introduces no new principles apart from those of the “modern project” and its “critique of consciousness doesn’t go beyond Cartesian mind philosophy” (p. 90). As he says, “The superior individual is inconceivable outside the idealist philosophy of autonomy” (p. 90).

Ferry and Renaut (1997a) bypass the so-called master thinkers or any one of them to concentrate on Nietzsche in relation to the question of democracy. They distinguish two attitudes to democracy: (1) the development or enlargement of the model of argumentative deliberation in either its theoretical or practical dimensions (Habermas, Apel, Rawls) and (2) the investigation of the possibility of the emergence of a contemporary analogue to a traditional universe through the development of the critique of democratic modernity (Strauss, MacInyre, and the “communitarians”—Taylor, Sandel, etc.). Nietzsche’s case is interesting, they argue, especially in terms of critically investigating the neotraditionalist path because he articulates the critique of democratic modernity

(and the argumentative foundation of democratic norms) while rejecting the neotraditionalist possibility of a contemporary analogue of tradition, in an age characterized by the death of God. This is an interesting and productive essay but one that hardly touches Derrida or Derrida's Nietzsche.<sup>10</sup>

### **Derrida's Response: "The Calculation of the Subject"**

I shall argue that the anti-Nietzschean polemical attack on the critique of the subject is misplaced, for deconstruction and poststructuralism never "liquidated" the subject. Rather it reassembled and reconstituted it, *after* deconstruction. While Ferry and Renault talk of returning to the question of the subject, their critique of poststructuralism and their "non-metaphysical humanism" singularly lacks any resources for doing so. There is in Ferry and Renault's work nothing that might suggest a reworking of the question of the subject in any guise except an innocent, historically naïve, and unproblematic return to a (neoliberal) human agency that chimes with the revitalization of *homo economicus*.

Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) comments in his "Introduction" to *Who Comes After the Subject?*

I did not send my question ("Who comes after the subject?") to those who would find no validity in it, to those for whom it is on the contrary more important to denounce its presuppositions and to return, as though nothing had happened, to a style of thinking that we might simply call humanist, even where it tries to complicate the traditional way of thinking about the human subject (p. 3).

For Nancy, the contributors (including, Deleuze, Derrida, Blanchot, Lyotard, Levinas, Irigaray, Descombes, and many others) do not stand in a "tradition" or belong to a school, but rather "each entertains a complex rapport" to "the Husserlian, the Marxian, the Heideggerian, and the Nietzschean traditions" (p. 3). When Nancy writes of "those who return, as though nothing had happened, to the humanist subject," he clearly has in mind Ferry and Renault.

In an interview with Nancy, Derrida (1995b: 256) disputes Nancy's interpretation of the "liquidation of the subject," and, discussing the discourse concerning "the question of the subject" in France over the last twenty-five years, suggests instead the slogan "a return to the subject, the return of the subject."<sup>11</sup> He begins the interview by briefly tracing the place of the subject in Lacan (the decentering of the subject), in Althusser (its interpellation),

and in Foucault (“a history of subjectivity” and “a return to a certain ethical subject”).<sup>12</sup>

For these three discourses (Lacan, Althusser, Foucault) and for some of the thinkers they privilege (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche), the subject can be reinterpreted, re-stored, re-inscribed, it certainly isn’t “liquidated.” The question “who,” notably in Nietzsche, strongly reinforces this point. This is also true of Heidegger, the principle reference or target of the *doxa* we are talking about. The ontological questioning that deals with the *subjectum*, in its Cartesian and post-Cartesian forms, is anything but a liquidation. (Derrida, 1995b: 257)

The attribution of the “liquidation” of the subject to a Nietzschean post-structuralism—an attribution underlying the polemical attacks of Ferry and Renaut and also of a French kind of neoliberalism—operates polemically to identify its target only by ignoring the time, place, and logical space of the subject, its multiple genealogy within the history of modern philosophy and its active reinterpretation and reinscription. What this tells us is that the *problematique* of the subject, as it has developed in France over the last twenty-five years, cannot be reduced to homogeneity.

Derrida’s response to Nancy in the interview is both complex and detailed, covering extensive territory and raising fresh sources for inquiry. While it may be true to say that Derrida’s discussion focuses upon an explication of themes in Heidegger (and Levinas to a lesser degree) in relation to a certain *responsibility* and the question of the subject, he makes reference to the entire history of the metaphysics of subjectivity, mentioning along the way many of the most prominent thinkers in the last twenty-five years of French philosophy. It is useful to consider Derrida’s (1995b) description of the way in which the central “hegemony” of the subject was put into question again in the 1960s at a point when the question of time and of the other became linked to the interest in Husserl’s discourse:

It was in the 1950s and 1960s, at the moment when an interest in these difficulties [i.e., the dislocation of the absolute subject from the other and from time] developed in a very different way (Levinas, Tran-Duc-Thao, myself) and following moreover other trajectories (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger), that the centrality of the subject began to be displaced... But if certain premises are found “in” Husserl, I’m sure that one could make a similar demonstration in Descartes, Kant, and Hegel... This would have at least the virtue of de-simplifying, of “de-homogenizing” the reference to something like The Subject. (p. 264)

Derrida is turned to Heidegger by Nancy, and he refers to the act by which Heidegger substitutes a concept of *Dasein* for a concept of the subject

simultaneously recalling “the essential ontological fragility of the ethical, juridical, and political foundations of democracy” (p. 266) that “remain essentially sealed within a philosophy of the subject” (p. 266). The question and task, Derrida suggests, is to develop an ethics, a politics, and an “other” democracy—he refers elsewhere to a “democracy to come” based upon Nietzsche’s understanding (see below)—that is, “another type of responsibility” that would safeguard us against the “worst” *antidemocratic* intrusions (i.e., meaning National Socialism in all its forms). As Derrida (1995b) puts it:

In order to recast, if not rigorously re-found a discourse on the “subject,” on that which will hold the place (or replace the place) of the subject (of law, of morality, of politics—so many categories caught up in the same turbulence), one has to go through the experience of deconstruction (p. 272).<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, Derrida suggests that *Dasein*, in *Being and Time*, in spite of the questions it has raised and the spaces it has opened up for thinking, still occupies a place similar or analogous to that of the transcendental subject because it has been determined on the basis of a series of oppositions not sufficiently scrutinized. These oppositions include all the essential predicates of which subjects are the subject and which are ordered around being-present [*étant-présent*] such as “presence to self . . . ; identity to self, positionality, property, personality, ego, consciousness, will intentionality, freedom, humanity, etc.” (p. 274). Derrida locates this responsibility in “that to which one *cannot and should not* submit the other in general”; in the “who” of friendship that provokes “conscience” and, therefore, opens up responsibility (p. 275). This “who” of friendship, he claims, belongs to the existential structure of *Dasein* and “precedes every subjectal determination” (p. 275), referring to both Nancy’s *Inoperative Community* and Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community*. He says clearly:

The origin of the call that comes from nowhere, an origin in any case that is not yet a divine or human “subject,” institutes a responsibility that is to be found at the root of all ulterior responsibilities (moral, juridical, political), and of every categorical imperative. (Derrida, 1995b: 276)

This figure of responsibility can be approached also through Levinas’s understanding of subjectivity of the *hostage* where “the subject is responsible for the other before being responsible for himself as ‘me’” (p. 279).

While the discourses of Heidegger and Levinas disrupt a certain traditional humanism, they remain “profound humanisms *to the extent that they do not sacrifice sacrifice*” (p. 279). In other words, both thinkers tend to be humanists

to the extent that only sacrifice of human life is forbidden, not life in general. Let me quote Derrida (1995b: 281–282) yet again—a tortuous passage but one that rescues (finally) the significance of the title “Eating Well” and casts light upon the remarks above.

If the limit between the living and the nonliving now seems to be as unsure . . . as that between “man” and “animal,” and if . . . the ethical frontier no longer rigorously passes between the “Thou shalt not kill” (man, thy neighbour) and the “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general,” . . . then, as concerns the “Good” [*Bien*] of every morality, the question will come back to determining the best, most respectful, most graceful, and also the most giving way of relating to the other and of relating the other to the self. For everything that happens at the edge of the orifices (of orality, but also of the ear, the eye—and all the “senses” in general) the metonymy of “eating well” [*bien manger*] would always be the rule.<sup>14</sup>

The explication of “who” in relation to sacrifice at once allows Derrida to emphasize the originality of Heidegger’s and Levinas’s discourses while recognizing their humanisms and the way they break from traditional humanism. (He suggests that Heidegger was a Judeo-Christian thinker). At the same time it, allows Derrida to foreshadow the notion of responsibility for an ethics and politics to come that springs from the relation to the other.<sup>15</sup> Certainly it is the case, against Ferry and Renaut and other anti-Nietzscheans, that Derrida does not do away with the subject. He does not “eliminate” or “liquidate” although he does deconstruct the sovereign subject and the history of the subject. For Derrida—as his comment almost thirty years ago should remind us, a comment I have used to open this chapter—the notion of the subject is something one cannot get along without. It is never a question of doing without it so much as “knowing where it comes from and how it functions.”

In relation to the question of democracy, Derrida (1994a: 41–42) resists the temptation to conclude that Nietzsche is an enemy of democracy in general and has nothing to offer in the name of “a democracy to come.” His argument denies a simple-minded nihilism as it applies to the subject, to notions of political agency, and to the Idea of democracy: “Since, in my eyes, Nietzsche criticises a particular form of democracy in the name of ‘democracy to come’, I don’t consider Nietzsche to be an *enemy of democracy in general*.” Derrida suggests that this move is to open up the difference between a notion of democracy, “which while having something in common with what we understand by democracy today . . . is reducible neither to the contemporary reality of “democracy” nor to the ideal of democracy informing this reality or fact.” It is this difference that Derrida indicates he has explored at length in *Specters of Marx* (1994).

Although, as Derrida maintains, one cannot subscribe to all of what Nietzsche has written concerning the democracy of his day, he identified “particular risks in what he foregrounded under the name of ‘democracy’” and “There are at the same time critical and genealogical motifs in Nietzsche which *appeal to a democracy to come*” (Derrida, 1994a: 41–42).

Richard Beardsworth observes that Derrida’s work is distinct from both Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s affirms both technology and democracy and asks the following question:

Although the promise of democracy is not the same as either the *fact* of democracy or the regulative *idea* (in the Kantian sense) of democracy, deconstruction does “hear” *différance* more in a democratic organisation of government than in any other political model; and there are no new models to be invented. If I understand you correctly, your affirmation of democracy is, in this respect, a demand for the sophistication of democracy, such a refinement taking advantage, in turn, of the increasingly sophisticated effects of technology. (Derrida, 1994a: 18)

Beardsworth poses the question in relation to a number of pertinent observations: first, that “democratic institutions are becoming more and more unrepresentative in our increasingly technicized world”; second, that “the media are swallowing up the constitutional machinery of democratic institutions, furthering thereby the de-politicization of society and the possibility of populist demagoguery”; third, that “resistance to this process of technicization is at the same time leading to virulent forms of nationalism and demagoguery in the former Soviet empire,” and; finally that “the rights of man would seem an increasingly ineffective set of criteria to resist this process of technicization (together with its possible fascistic effects) given this process’s gradual effacement of the normative and metaphysical limit between the human and the inorganic” (p. 18).

Derrida responds by contemplating the nature of contemporary acceleration of technicization and the relation between technical acceleration—a product of the so-called technosciences—and politico-economic processes, which relate rather to the structure of decision making. In relation to these two kinds of acceleration, Derrida asks, “what is the situation today of democracy?” His response is worthy of noting:

“Progress” in arms-technologies and media-technologies is incontestably causing the disappearance of the site on which the democratic used to be situated. The site of representation and the stability of the location which make up parliament or assembly, the territorialisation of power, the rooting of power to a particular place, if not to the ground as such—all this is over. The notion of politics dependent on this relation

between power and space is over as well, although its end must be negotiated with. I am not just thinking here of the present forms of nationalism and fundamentalism. Technoscientific acceleration poses an absolute threat to Western-style democracy as well, following its radical undermining of locality. Since there can be no question of interrupting science of the technosciences, it's a matter of knowing how a democratic response can be made to what is happening. This response must not, for obvious reasons, try to maintain at all costs the life of a democratic model of government which is rapidly being made redundant. If technics now exceeds democratic forms of government, it's not only because assembly or parliament is being swallowed up by the media. This was already the case after the First World War. It was already being argued then that the media (then the radio) were forming public opinion so much that public deliberation and parliamentary discussion no longer determined the life of a democracy. And so, we need a historical perspective. What the acceleration of technicisation concerns today is the frontiers of the nation-state, the traffic of arms and drugs, everything that has to do with inter-nationality. It is these issues which need to be completely reconsidered, not in order to sound the death-knell of democracy, but in order to rethink democracy *from within these conditions*. (Derrida, 1994a: 57–58)

Derrida maintains that since technics have obliterated “locality,” the future of democracy must be thought in global terms. It is no longer possible to be a democrat “at home” and wait to see what happens “abroad.” In emphasizing the call to a world democracy, Derrida suggests that the stakes of a “democracy to come” can no longer be contained within frontiers or depend upon the decisions of a group of citizens or a nation, or group of nations. The call is for something new that is both more modest and yet also more ambitious than any overriding concept of the universal, the cosmopolitan, or the human. Derrida distinguishes between a rhetorical sense of democracy as politics that transcends borders (as one might speak of the United Nations) and what he calls a “democracy to come.” The difference exhibits itself in decisions made in the name of the Rights of Man that, he suggests, “are at the same time alibis for the continued inequality between singularities.” He indicates that we need to invent new concepts—concepts other than that of “state,” “superstate,” “citizen,” and so forth—for what he has called the new International (Derrida, 1993). He says:

The democracy to come obliges one to challenge instituted law in the name of an indefinitely unsatisfied justice, thereby revealing the injustice of calculating justice whether this be in the name of a particular form of democracy or of the concept of humanity. (Derrida, 1994a: 60–61)

Elsewhere Derrida (1994b) explains what he means by deconstructing the foundations of international law. While international law is a good thing, it is

nevertheless rooted in the Western concept of philosophy—as he says, “in its mission, its axiom, in its languages”—and the Western concept of state and sovereignty, which acts as a limit. In order to rethink the international order and think of a “democracy to come,” we must deconstruct the foundations of international law and the international organizations built upon it. The second limit is that the international organizations are governed by a number of powerful rich states, including the United States.

Derrida here is attempting “to deconstruct the political tradition not in order to depoliticize but in order to interpret differently the concept of the political.”

So justice and gift should go beyond calculation, which doesn't mean that we shouldn't calculate, we should calculate it as rigorously as possible but there is a point or a limit beyond which calculation must fail ... And so what I tried to think or to suggest is a concept of the political and of democracy which would be compatible, which could be articulated with these impossible notions of the gift and justice. (Derrida, 1994b)

It might be argued that the prospect of a critical pedagogy of difference, of a genuinely multicultural and internationalist pedagogy suitable for the future, is located at the interstices and in the interplay between a “democracy to come” and a “subject to come,” a global subject whose critical function it is to both initiate and interrogate the new International.

## Notes

1. For a clear account of deconstruction and its American reception and mediation (especially at the hands of Paul de Man) as a school of literary criticism, see Rorty (1995). Rorty provides an exemplary account of both deconstructionist theory and the two main lines of (analytic) criticism against Derridean philosophy.
2. See my “Poststructuralism and the Philosophy of the Subject,” Chapter 1, in Peters (1996).
3. Judith Butler's (1987: 175) comment is entirely apposite here: “The twentieth-century history of Hegelianism in France can be understood in terms of two constitutive moments: (1) the specification of the subject in terms of finitude, corporeal boundaries, and temporality and (2) the ‘splitting’ (Lacan), ‘displacement’ (Derrida), and eventual death (Foucault, Deleuze) of the Hegelian subject.”
4. For an account on the importance of Nietzsche to Derrida see his *Spurs* (Derrida, 1978b), and of Nietzsche to poststructuralist thought see Behler (1991), Large (1993), and Schrift (1995; 1996).
5. See, for example, their reference in the preface to the English translation, to Victor Farias (p. xv). They also later became embroiled in the so-called Heidegger affair when Farias's book sparked a debate in the 1980s concerning alleged new revelations of Heidegger's Nazi involvement. See Ferry and Renault's (1990b) *Heidegger and Modernity*.

6. Lilla (1994: 32, fn38) makes the following useful remark:

Ferry and Renaut have made two, not always compatible appeals to previous philosophies of the subject. One is to Kant, and specifically to the *Critique of Judgment*, wishing to avoid the transcendental presuppositions of the First Critique and the rigors of the Second, they have followed the increasingly common strategy of seeking in the Third an "aesthetic" model for reflection on morals and politics... A second appeal is to Fichte, specifically to his earliest work: here they discover a "non-metaphysical" philosophy of the subject that makes room for intersubjective experience and permits a critical analysis of history.

The first appeal might be considered curious in the light of the fact that Lyotard first moved in this direction in the early 1980s to sustain his notion of heterogenous language games. See his essay "Answering the Question; What is Postmodernism?" an appendix to *The Postmodern Condition* (1984).

7. For the full text of the letter and Derrida's response, originally published in the *Cambridge Review* in 1992, see Derrida's (1995a) "*Honoris Causa*: 'This is also extremely funny.'" For a recent and balanced account of the affair, see Joseph Margolis (1994).
8. For a full discussion of this matter see "Monoculturalism, Multiculturalism and Democracy: The Politics of Difference or Recognition?" Chapter 10 in Peters (1996).
9. See, for example, Derrida's (1976: 19) comment: "Radicalizing the concepts of *interpretation*, *perspective*, *evaluation*, *difference*, and all the 'empiricist' or nonphilosophical motifs that have constantly tormented philosophy throughout the history of the West, and besides, have had nothing but the inevitable weakness of being produced in the field of philosophy, Nietzsche, far from remaining simply (with Hegel and as Heidegger wished) within metaphysics, contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood." Derrida begins the "Exergue" to his *Of Grammatology* by focusing our attention on the ethnocentrism that has controlled our notion of writing and addresses the notion further in *Part II Nature, Culture Writing*. This would be an appropriate starting point for Gutmann if she was interested in "deconstructionism" in relation to the question of ethnocentrism. Still the best short commentary, in my view, on Derrida in relation to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Freud is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1976) "Translator's Preface" to *Of Grammatology*.
10. Of all the essays, perhaps, the most interesting and most relevant for my purposes here is Phillippe Raynaud's (1997) "Nietzsche as Educator." Raynaud wants to approach Nietzsche's oeuvre directly rather than through his "French admirers" to ask about the kind of philosophy possible today, Nietzsche's relation to the Enlightenment and his critique of modern ideals. His interpretation is, I think, insightful: "The task for democratic political thinking is analogous to that which I have tried to define for philosophy: as an antidote to the modern spirit, Nietzsche's thought should be taken by modernity as a privileged means for self-criticism. It is in that respect, more than as a master of truth, that Nietzsche is an *educator*."
11. The interview with Jean-Luc Nancy entitled "'Eating Well,' or The Calculation of the Subject" was originally published in *Cahiers Confrontation* 20 (Winter 1989), an issue called "Après le sujet qui vent" (After the subject who comes). All references in this chapter are to the full interview now published in *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994* (Derrida, 1995b).

12. Derrida (1995b: 256) notes, "As for Foucault's discourse, there would be different things to say according to the stages of its development." This remark is important for it reveals the complexity of the question of the subject in the thought of *one* thinker that demonstrates the inadequacy of the generalized description of the "liquidation" of the subject as it applies to the whole of postwar French philosophy.
13. Invoking a certain notion of *responsibility* that is excessive in that it "regulates itself neither on the principles of reason not on any sort of accountancy," Derrida (1995b: 272) suggests that the subject is also "a principle of calculability"—hence part of the title of the interview "The Calculation of the Subject." As he suggests "the subject is also a principle of calculability—for the political (and even, indeed, for the current concept of democracy, which is less clear, less homogenous, and less of a given than we believe or claim to believe, and which no doubt needs to be rethought, radicalized, and considered as a thing of the future), in the question of legal rights (including human rights, about which I would repeat what I have just said about democracy) and in morality" (Derrida, 1995b: 272). Yet, for us to arrive at a notion of responsibility that might carry with it the new possibilities and new meanings for the political and the moral, the calculation of the subject must pass through deconstruction.
14. The translators note (Note 15, p. 475) says: "The phrase in play here, 'Il faut bien manger' (which is also the original title of the interview), can be read in at least two ways: 'one must eat well' or 'everyone has to eat'. In addition, when the adverb 'bien' is nominalized as 'le Bien', there results the sense of 'eating the Good.' It is this multivalent sense that Derrida explores in the succeeding sentences." I shall not attempt to précis Derrida's stunning and surprising "turns" but will simply leave it as an enticement.
15. I think it is useful to refer to the way in which Derrida recognizes how the question of the subject and of the living "who," as he says, is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies. I shall summarize: decisions over birth and death involving the treatment of sperm or ovum, surrogacy, genetic engineering, bioethics, biopolitics, euthanasia, organ removal, and transplant.

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