

DERRIDEAN OVERTURES OF WITTGENSTEIN CRITIQUE

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On Derrida's understanding, a critique of logocentricism is a critique against what he calls the metaphysics of presence. This provides the main bulwark against which much of Derrida's writings are directed. This also presents us with the initial mode of deconstruction which Derrida has originally sponsored within philosophy. The point that philosophy is the primary target of Derrida's critique brings his deconstructive project very close to Wittgenstein whose critique of language has dealt a direct blow to the foundationalist conception of philosophy. Granted this, the task of the present paper is to see how Derrida's critique of logocentricism has certain bearings on Wittgenstein's critique of language.

The attempt to bring Derrida's deconstruction in relation to Wittgenstein's critique entails an attempt to show how Derrida's project endorses an antifoundationalist perspective. This could be shown by bringing the interpretations of Richard Rorty and Henry Staten which suggest certain levels of agreement between the two philosophers of different traditions and focuses.

Rorty's interpretation of Derrida, from a Wittgensteinian perspective of pragmatism, attempts to bring out the Davidsonian negative element in Derrida i.e., the denial that there is language.¹ Whereas Staten's is an attempt to make use of Rortian reading of Derrida so as to make a positive attempt to bring Derrida in conformity with Wittgenstein. Staten tries to show that Wittgenstein's treatment of language is similar to

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Derrida's concept "the play of signifiers."²

Rortian reading of Derrida's deconstruction, as the strategy of textual analysis, suggests that for Derrida, philosophy is "a kind of writing."³ The antirepresentationalist perspective, from which Rorty approaches Derrida, enables him to locate the functioning of philosophy at the same time, a *negative* as well as a *positive* or more literally, a deconstructive as well as a constructive, strains of thought in Derrida's thinking.

Rorty's understands that the fundamental thrust of Derrida's deconstructive strategy is "to debunk Kantian philosophy generally." When Derrida says that ""there is nothing outside of the text," he is taking the side of the tradition of dialectical (or negative tradition) of philosophy which began with Hegel's *Phenomenology* by rejecting the general metaphysical tradition of Philosophy exemplified by Kant. Kant was holding the view of Platonic realism, according to which truth is the result of and vertical relationship between representation and what is represented." Derrida also warns us against taking his "grammatology" as new research programme which aims to do something constructive and progressive, even when he speaks of the systematic transformation of general semiology in his *Of Grammatology*. So Rorty is of the view that Derrida himself conceived his work as fundamentally a *negative* one.⁴

Rorty, while endorsing this *negative* thrust of Derrida, points out that there is a positive side, which he calls as the *bad* side, of Derrida's work. The bad side lies in its tilt towards a constructive programme of a kind of philosophy of language where Derrida falls back upon the same grid which he wanted to overcome. Rorty finds there is an ambivalence in Derrida's project with regard to the possibility of a "philosophy of language." This bad side within Derrida's deconstruction works against its negative intent.

With his deconstructionism what Derrida suggests is that philosophy is just another "kind of writing." It does not have a privileged status over other non-philosophical writings with regard to the access to truth or reality. It is to show that philosophy is not a special kind of discourse of

knowledge Derrida attempts to deconstruct what he calls the concept of *episteme* and logocentric metaphysics, from which all the western Methods of analysis, explanation, reading, or interpretation are evolved. The critique of the Western metaphysics which Derrida calls as the project of "the deconstruction of the great totality," is a matter of getting rid the notion that language is an attempt to present something nonlinguistic.⁵ With this, Rorty finds, Derrida is taking the Wittgensteinian doctrine which Sellars calls "psychological nominalism." This doctrine says that "all awareness is a linguistic affair to the extreme."⁶

The bad side of Derrida treats language as something that all encompassing and unconditioned, and explains it through the concept of "trace" which is posited as something unknown reality. While Rorty wants to treat the transcendentalist notion of trace as the bad side of Derrida's work, there are interpreters like Norris who look Derrida's work as the *positive* programme. And Norris endorses it by saying that this is where Derrida, in his textual analysis, shows deconstruction works on the assumptions of logocentricism. Therefore, Norris criticises Rorty's negative reading of Derrida by saying that for Derrida "philosophy is not just a kind of writing"⁷.

However, Rorty has further reiterated the negative stance of Derrida's work by invoking the transformation taken place in Derrida's work, i.e., by invoking the transformation taken place in Derrida's manner of doing philosophy, which also endorses Derrida's antifoundationalist stand. There also Rorty finds Derrida's similarity with Wittgenstein. To him, Derrida's moving away from the academic or "standard rules of philosophy manner" of his early work is more similar to the manner of the later Wittgenstein.⁸

Henry Staten's *Wittgenstein and Derrida* is one another attempt to bring Derrida's deconstruction in relation to Wittgenstein's critique of language. Staten's objective of bringing Derrida's project into relation with Wittgenstein's critique is to suggest an Anglo-American context within which deconstruction makes philosophical sense. And Staten further says that his attempt is, to some degree, parallel with that of Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.⁹ While Staten shares Rorty's

antirepresentationalist, antifoundationalist stance to bring deconstruction in the Anglo-American context, Rorty also refers to Staten's work which presents Derrida as *French Wittgenstein*. Rorty even points to Staten's remark that the deconstructive critique of language could even be phrased as a denial that there is language so as to find justification for his negative interpretation of Derrida from Wittgensteinian pragmatic perspective.¹⁰

As an attempt to read the philosophical bearings of deconstruction Staten reads Derrida as an ally of Wittgenstein. So he finds that Wittgenstein's treatment of language is similar to the kind of functioning of language that is involved in deconstructive practice. Thus according to Staten, Wittgenstein's deconstruction consists in his critique of language which suggests for a denial that there is language. And it is such a view of language that Derrida developed as his concept of "the play of signifiers."

As Staten sees, Wittgenstein's counter thrust is typified in his methodology of later philosophy. It is a method which inevitably turns against itself. On the one hand, Wittgenstein tries to loosen up crystalized patterns of philosophical language in order to force real thought. And to subject to the most radical perplexities, for which there would have ready-made answers, but have to forge new language sequences. On the other hand, Wittgenstein finds that the philosophical patterns which forestall the necessity for real thought as the sources of endless perplexity and unrest. Wittgenstein's method desists such patterns because they do not correspond to the true complexity of the facts.¹¹

Thus the movement of deconstruction in Wittgenstein is that the movement of his language which renews the restless perplexity arises from the inadequate forms of language. It is this deconstructive impulse in Wittgenstein that Staten wants to highlight. That the method of Wittgenstein is one which necessarily passes to new paths. And it is this movement towards new paths which has been characterized by Derrida as "disseminations" (One of the textual strategies).

Wittgenstein's linguistic method is both textual and critical and more precisely, it is a method of destabilization. As Staten puts it, Wittgenstein's

method is critical. It is a way of attacking another style of language, the traditional style of philosophy.

The style of the traditional philosophy is characterized by the pursuit of "essence" of the world. Staten counterposes Wittgenstein's early account of essentialism as found in the *Tractatus* with his later style of non-essentialism, which he characterises as *accidence* of language. And he interprets that it is a method in which he characterises as *accidence* of language. And he interprets that it is a method in which there is certain confrontation between language and philosophy. Thus, in the later Wittgenstein, we can see that the critique of philosophy is given in the form of critique of language. In the later philosophy, we can see how the "ordinary language" can be used in philosophy unlike in the case of the critique of formal language which typified the earlier philosophy of Wittgenstein. This proves that the critique of language is a unifying thesis, though its focuses are different, within Wittgenstein.

The deconstructive movement in Wittgenstein develops against the primal scene of philosophy of the *Tractatus* where naming appears as an "occult process." According to the *Investigations*, naming appears as a *queer* connexion of a word with an object" (PI - 38). Contrarily, now the investigation is directed at what is already in plain sight. That is, the spatial and temporal phenomenon of "ordinary language." They are called "as Penelope and Circe" signifying respectively the home to which language has to be returned, and as the seduction of the play of surfaces Wittgenstein's introduction of the German word '*Verwendung*' (use), which according to Staten, signifies a *per-verting* or turning language from its normal use.

Along with the emphasis on "use", Wittgenstein rejects the "holiday" or "idleness" of language, because for him, philosophical problems arise when language goes on a holiday. Language can get perverted to the extent that one can say that it is the atrophy (*atropos*) of language. This is what gets explained in Wittgenstein's use of "seeing as" aspect of language. In the part II of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein says, "There are here hugely many interrelated phenomena and possible concepts." Ac-

cordingly an arbitrary cipher will reveal various "aspects." It will look like a childish script, a letter in a foreign alphabet, or a calligraphic flourish, according to the fiction one sounds it with.

Rule-following is the another deconstructive motif in Wittgenstein. As Staten finds, though Wittgenstein has not developed the ramifications of the idea of rule-following, it is an important fact about the emergence of something new. When something is really new it will look bizarre to the old point of view. We cannot know at the time of emergence of an individual variation whether it is an incipient possible form of life or revision of some branch of an existent form of life. So far given as a possibility only, which will have to be filled out now, further consequences filled in and so on. If we say, "perhaps parallel lines can meet," we have only a crazy-sounding. Suggestion that everything depends upon how it is worked out.¹³

Wittgenstein's point here is that among the two intelligent human beings who receive the same training, one grasps rule in natural way and the another in a deviant way. Wittgenstein is interpreted to explain that deviant responds naturally in a way that differs from his own. He sees things differently. However, Staten, against Specht and Tugendhat who think that language or meaning is reducible to a set of rules, reports by saying that the concept of rule does not explain anything in the *Investigations*. This is what conveyed in the passage follows :

And is there not also the case where We play and - make up the rules One where we alter them - as we go along (PI. 83).

For Wittgenstein therefore, rules provide no explanation. This proves that Wittgenstein's method is not one method but involves different kinds of methods. And none of this is the method followed in the *Investigations*. It is a clear pointer to the deconstructive motif, in the later Wittgenstein.

Besides the attempt to relate Wittgenstein's critique of language to Derrida's deconstructive critique of textuality, Staten has also taken the methodological character of Wittgenstein's practice as a form of what Derrida calls deconstruction. In this respect, Staten's reading of Wittgenstein

differs fundamentally from that of Rorty's, for he pays a special attention to the problem of the materiality of signifier, in which Rorty and other philosophers in general do not take much interest. Staten's aim is to disentangle the deconstructive style of discourse as it has been developed within the discipline of philosophy. This is particularly traced in the case of the tradition of analytic philosophy and Wittgenstein is unique among Derrida's predecessors in having achieved, in the period of beginning with the *Blue Book*, a consistently deconstructive standpoint.

In the case of both Wittgenstein and Derrida deconstruction is generated by an intense, sustained confrontation with philosophy, and the language arising out of this confrontation remains marked by its relation to the language of philosophy. He takes deconstructive standpoint as rather like a lateral displacement, or method of writing philosophy.

Thus there seems to have a great complementarity between taking deconstruction itself as part of the analytical tradition and taking deconstruction itself as having its early origination in Wittgenstein. By suggesting that foundational notion of philosophy as an impossible enterprise, Wittgenstein has pronounced the end of philosophy with utmost rigour than any of his predecessors. As an answer to the question what should be done with philosophy afterwards, Wittgenstein has anticipated deconstruction by telling us that philosophers were those who were supposed to be engaged with the primary task of dissolving philosophical problems. This should be taken as the way in which Wittgenstein wants to understand his therapeutic treatment of philosophical problems as the form of philosophy understood as critique of language.

NOTES

1. Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida A Transcendental Philosopher ?" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Philosophical papers, Vol.2, by R. Rorty, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

2. Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida*, Basil Blackwell, 1985.
3. R. Rorty, "Derrida Philosophy A kind of Writing," in *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980*, by R. Rorty, The Harvest Press, Sussex, 1982.
4. R. Rorty, *COP* (pp. 90-109).
5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. by Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1976,p.46.
6. R. Rorty, *COP*, p. 99.
7. Christophor Norris, "Philosophy as Not Just a Kind of Writing : Derrida and the claim of Reason" in *Redrawing the Lines: Analytic Philosophy, Deconstruction and Literary Theory*, Ed. by Dasenbrock, Read Way, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.
8. R. Rorty. *Op. cit.*, Vol,2, 1991, p. 128.
9. H.Staten, *Op.cit.*, p.xiv.
10. R. Rorty, *Op.cit.*, Vol,2, P. 128.
11. H. Staten *Op.Cit.*, p. 64.
12. H. Staten, *Op.cit.* 79.
13. H. Staten, *Op.cit.* 101.