8 The Foundation of Deconstruction: Generalities at Play

In Part II, we critically evaluated a series of fundamental elements in Derrida's philosophical analysis of language. Questions were raised for each element, questions relying for impetus and argumentative direction on the viability of certain cardinal metaphysical notions. The issues involved might be called regional criticisms since their effect derives from a series of delimited metaphysical concerns. But another dimension pertinent to Derrida's deconstructive response to linguistic concepts emerges if we stand back from the immediacy of Derrida's analysis and pay attention to backdrop considerations which play into the substance of his more explicitly focused critiques. These considerations, duly developed, have important consequences for the basic intelligibility of being as presence as perhaps the fundamental element in Derrida's thinking, at least with respect to lessons learned and applied from the history of philosophy. Furthermore, as we shall see later in this chapter as well as in Chapter 9, the development of these questions raises commensurately important concerns for the cogency of deconstruction as a philosophical methodology.

8.1 Dimensions of Totality

If being as presence has permeated the history of metaphysics to the extent that Derrida claims, then it would be not only consistent but also prudent to investigate whether Derrida contoured his critique of standard linguistic concepts so that the deconstructive motion active in Derrida's thought itself replicates or even merely incorporates aspects or phases of being as presence. The assumption grounding this inquiry is that Derrida himself continued to be a product of the history of metaphysics even as he was in the process of formulating techniques to confront critically that history. As a result, the investigation pursued in this chapter will proceed along guidelines set by being as presence itself, that is, along conceptual parameters marked by extreme generality and comprehensive scope.

In order to appreciate and understand the extent to which Derrida must activate metaphysical considerations to establish his appraisal of language, consider, perhaps as a fundamental challenge to the committed advocate of deconstruction, that Derrida's critique of linguistic concepts depends on the implied existence of a totality characterized by at least three determinate dimensions. These dimensions—Temporality, Context, Meaning—are not merely nascent representations of abstract possibilities; we will

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95 See sources cited in Ch1n2 for Derrida observing the historical and philosophical necessity of remaining within metaphysics even while intending to move beyond its limits.
show that each dimension must be fully actualized in order to justify the conclusions Derrida explicitly draws. Furthermore, these conditions taken as a set also mirror the stipulated character of being as presence, assuming we grant that equivalent totality-considerations are necessary as preconditions for both investigations. This mirroring function has especially significant consequences, as we shall see.

The modality of possibility, i.e., its lack of theoretical limitation, provided the impetus and foundation for the criticisms raised in Chapter 7 against Derrida’s concept of iterability. However, additional dimensions of possibility undergird Derrida’s formulation of deconstruction as a programmatic approach to interpreting language especially with respect to the various guises and functions of language in philosophical and literary texts. Derrida’s position requires that these dimensions, once identified and their import fully appreciated, move from what could be the case to what must be the case. The initial dimension of this totality revolves around a relation between possibility and time.

**TEMPORALITY:** All dimensions of time as traditionally demarcated coalesce in one instant or as one duration of determinate bounds insofar as these designations ground the temporality of a given context.

It is readily possible to imagine the linguistic sequence “Please bring me a glass of water” occurring in various contexts, including not only widely diverse variations on a given natural and technological setting but also similarly distinct variants in psychological states of the speaker and person so addressed. Each imagined state of affairs would result in variance of reference and meaning as emerging from occurrences of an identical linguistic sequence within their respective contextual environments. But in order for this set of complex imaginary possibilities to come to actualization, it would be necessary to collapse any temporal differentiation relative to discretely distinct possibilities within the set.

The event comprising the request for a glass of water happens during a certain segment of time. The same event can, however, be imagined as happening at some point in the past—same linguistic sequence, different, perhaps very different contextual surroundings—result: different meaning. Or the same event can be imagined as happening at some point (or points) in the future—same linguistic sequence, different, perhaps even more different contextual surroundings—result: again, very different meanings. But to have these different possibilities impinge on the meaning of the linguistic sequence announcing the request at this point in time presupposes the superimposition of all past time and all future time on this time. Thus if different instances of the same word appear in different times, then Derrida’s position assumes that all of time relative to the existence and use of that word, both past and future, coalesces at a given instant or, alternatively, within a continuous and undivided duration. This temporal confluence is a necessary and decidedly metaphysical condition for the claim that no instance of a word in a given context can be assigned a definite meaning and a definite instance of what Derrida has termed transcendental signification.
Derrida’s theoretical pronouncements when he develops foundations of deconstruction implicitly hinge on a notion of time in which limits cannot in principle be introduced. But introducing temporal limits is surely a necessary condition not only for the possibility of distinguishing between and among events but also with regard to situating the human capacity for participating in these events. If a speaker could be consciously aware of or even just actively believed in such an all-engulfing temporal universality, the upshot would be complete paralysis of discourse—it would be impossible for the speaker to focus on a single intended meaning congruent with and arising from the circumstances facing the speaker at this moment in time, and in the company of these individuals and entities at this moment in time.

**CONTEXT:** All (metaphysical) features of all (possible) contexts are superimposed on the specific content of a given context.

Furthermore, linguistic sequences do not occur in a setting characterized only by time. Time is one feature underlying the utterance of a linguistic sequence but it is one of a set of factors. Another is space. Yet another might be called materiality, a general term including everything composed of any kind of physical matter. These features coalesce into contexts, spatio-temporal settings which include material things (things defined in a very wide sense).

Recognizing these additional factors is vital since their existence with respect to a given linguistic sequence has consequences for Derrida’s approach to language, in particular the principled rejection of fixed meanings as well as determinate and stable signified elements. Thus another necessary condition to sanction deconstruction’s denial of determinate meanings is not only that all time must coalesce into an instant or a single indivisibly continuous duration but also that all possible contexts relative to the occurrence of a given linguistic sequence must be, in fact, superimposed on the specific boundaries of the context within which the given linguistic sequence is uttered.

Consider again the request for a glass of water. Another context in which that same linguistic sequence could occur is a stage play where fulfillment or rejection of the request is immaterial because of, say, an impending turn in the dramatic action. The performers are fully aware that they are only acting with respect to this request whereas two persons in the extra-theatrical lifeworld know just as well that such a request is not a linguistic exercise guided by the intent to pretend a course of action for a sitting audience in a building shaped and constructed for precisely that purpose. In sum, one factor situating awareness of the difference is the undeniable facticity of the surroundings. Thus to contend as Derrida’s position does that (a) the staged instance of the linguistic sequence is just as real in its own way as (b) an actual occurrence of that sequence and therefore that no privileged meaning for that sequence can be determined presupposes that (c) the context underlying and informing (a) above must be incorporated into the contextual setting of (b) so that the distinctive meaning of the linguistic sequence in (b) is necessarily compromised. But such incorporation requires that (a) and (b)—separate contexts defined by unique spatio-temporal considerations as well as diverse sectors of materiality—become indistinguishable from one another.
It is possible, i.e., imaginatively possible, to move from identification and description of the features of a given context to complex and highly diversified variations derived from the set of original elements. As imagination becomes more and more energetic in engendering expansive contextual scenarios, the boundaries of the original context are extended into the outermost reaches of imaginative possibility. But, and this point is crucial, such extension exists only in the imagination. To engraft a purely imagined extension onto a context exhibiting its reality in a perceived spatio-temporal setting occupied by extralinguistic entities and permeated by agents occupied with personal and interpersonal concerns is to insert an entirely distinct realm—one existing only in the imagination—within a dimension of reality which, as such, is and can remain divorced from the vagaries of imagined scenes in imagined worlds.

This foundational dimension of reality is the lifeworld. When an imagined insertion is pursued and embraced for theoretical reasons, the investigator has adopted a form of inquiry with a structural impetus so comprehensive and precise as to overwhelm the demands of immediacy. For immediacy is an integral element in the fabric of the lifeworld as actually lived by its inhabitants. We observe then that Derrida's theoretical concerns overpower his appreciation for the requisite and immediately recognizable here and now, the radical character of the moment, when decisions are made, whether right, wrong or morally neutral, and life becomes joyous, tragic, or just continues in humdrum fashion.

The individual speakers involved in (a) and (b) above can discern the difference between their respective contexts; to deny such discernment on their part beggars belief. The claim here, against Derrida, is that his concerted skeptical conclusions concerning distinct meanings and referential content presupposes metaphysical considerations which, if implemented, would necessarily collapse apparently undeniable features in the lifeworld—e.g., that asking for a drink of water after running a race occurs in a location other than that where a character in a play might make precisely the same request without any intention that the request be satisfied (given, e.g., certain circumstances in the plot).

The point is not that a given linguistic sequence might be uttered in very different contexts thereby resulting in very different meanings for that same sequence; the denial is that (a) the individuals involved in these contexts are always and necessarily subject to a kind of deconstructive indeterminacy as to what these meanings might be and (b), more fundamentally, that these contexts, quite apart from the degrees of awareness of the individuals residing within them, exist without exhibiting their own spatio-temporal fabrics which as such cannot be dismissed because of an interest in posing a theoretical conclusion aimed at establishing a fundamentally skeptical linguistic indeterminacy.

Derrida's treatment of language is defined by a relevant parallel the effective range of which spreads over two distinct but related dimensions. An essential factor in his denial of a transcendental signified is the fact that the context asserted to underlie any given linguistic event can be restricted only by an arbitrary and temporary
gesture. Now the notion of context when applied to a linguistic event includes the spatio-temporal circumstances surrounding the words resident in that event. As we have often noted, the speaker of language does not do so in a metaphysical vacuum; nor do words on a page of a literary text function irrespective of a set of circumstances metaphysically contouring the import of those words. It follows that the denial of the relevance of context for a linguistic event must incorporate this set of given metaphysical circumstances and then, necessarily, extend the range of this incorporation until it is not possible to delimit a context which can be taken as stable and definite, the underlying ground for fixed reference and meaning. But in order to secure as a theoretical fact that any such delimitation of a context is not feasible, this extension must span the limits of reality. For if the spatio-temporal factors defining a context were not so extended as to encompass totality, then it becomes theoretically possible to indicate a set of factors which could for a given linguistic event remain fixed and stable—just “negotiable,” as Derrida admits—and thereby serve as the metaphysical foundation for a context which was itself fixed and stable. However, Derrida insists that no such context can be so identified.

This conclusion may be restated as follows: a context must include someone using language, whether spoken, written or thought, and a set of spatio-temporal conditions which circumscribe the production of that language. These conditions will also include whatever material or tangible entities populate the space-time contoured by these conditions. But since, according to Derrida, it is never possible to establish a given context by stabilizing that context into something resembling a unity, the only way to ensure that this possibility can never in fact be so actualized is to extend the range of all metaphysical components of any immediately given context—or, per Derrida, what appears to be an immediately given context—to the outermost limits of whatever could function as an element with respect to such metaphysical components. Thus, any context is and must be effectively bounded by totality in order fully to justify the claim that no single context can ever be structurally limited as a factor in determining what could be asserted as “the” meaning of a given linguistic utterance which occurred within the boundaries of that context.

Notice what follows: totality must be to some degree present to the immediacy of a given context in order to guarantee that the limits of that context are, in fact, only apparent. Each context must therefore effectively exist in the presence of totality, so to speak. For without the limits of totality being present in this way to each and every apparently distinguishable context, it would be possible, as just noted, to situate a context so that its limits were indeed determinate. And again, with determinate limits in place, it becomes theoretically possible to accomplish what for Derrida cannot in principle ever be accomplished—determining a fixed and stable meaning of a given utterance or written sentence.96

96 At PS, 144, Derrida claims the necessity to “negotiate” in order to reach an approximate context in the usual sense. By contrast, however, Derrida appeals to the “stable” contexts established in his own work in a variety of sources (cf. Ch5n67): LI, 79, 81, 157; 1992a, 64.
MEANING: All future meanings of a given linguistic sequence insofar as these meanings are rendered possible by alterations in future contexts in which that sequence could appear are superimposed upon the initially determinate meaning of that sequence as that instance of the sequence occurs in any one given context.

The third presupposition can be taken as implied by the analyses of Temporality and Context but its importance deserves special emphasis. The possibility of multiple meanings for a given linguistic sequence can be readily imagined but analysis of this possibility reveals that it is itself a residual effect drawn from the confluence of all contexts in each of which a given linguistic sequence or sequences occurs as well as the collapse of any sustainable divisions or separations in the movement of time. Only if all possible meanings of a given word are present simultaneously is it possible for Derrida to assert that, in point of deconstructive fact, no instance of a word or ordered group of words in a given context can be assigned a definite meaning. Such meanings are little more than temporary resting points amidst the ongoing flux of perpetual indeterminacy which grounds Derrida’s implicitly situated metaphysics deployed as an affective foundation to justify the possibility of deconstructive conclusions.

8.2 Convergent Totalities: An Isomorphic Play

In Part I, we established various senses in which being as presence functions with respect to totality understood as a metaphysical ultimate. But it is now apparent that an implicit appeal to totality also underlies Derrida’s more restricted critique of individual concepts pertaining to language. The triple dimensionality just introduced is a diverse partitioning of a single totality. This totality spans as well as underlies the narrative accounts detailing the aggregations of theory which, for Derrida, constitute the interpretive schematic known as deconstruction.

The absence of theoretical stability with respect to referentiality and meaning in all linguistic dimensions is a foundational consequence for deconstruction. This absence has been described in the accounts of pivotal components of deconstruction presented in Part II of this essay. However, the justification of this consequence depends on accepting givens of decided metaphysical function including the undifferentiated unity of time in tandem with the contextual dimension—that is, the possibility of a settled demarcation of events and spatio-temporal limits. As traditionally understood, these limits control the import of discourse of any kind according to boundaries established by singular contextual demarcations. Of course, for Derrida there can be no such demarcation at least in terms of providing theoretical certainty or precision. This denial is the ultimate ground establishing why deconstruction rests on a unity of all possible contexts, each of which encroaching on all the others, a continually overlapping process which does not cease until it is all-englobing and comprehensive in every possible sense and dimension of reality. The spatio-temporality defined by
limits of a given context seemingly derived from the ineradicable difference between
the durational present of that context and its respective past and future in inextricable
conjunction with regions of space expands until its unlimitedness parallels that of any
and all unbounded contexts. Indeed, the use of the plural, “contexts,” is for Derrida’s
purposes misleading since the explicit plurality denoted by the plural form of the
word exists as a plurality, as a multiplicity of distinguishable contexts only for the
sake of convenience on the part of speaker or writer.

We have seen Derrida admit that metaphysics as a precondition for all such
thoughtful endeavors intending deconstructive results cannot be done away with
completely (Passage 4F). However, it may fairly be asked: to what extent does reliance
on metaphysical considerations affect the formulation of deconstructive principles
and strategies as well as the subsequent application of those principles and strategies
to given philosophical and literary texts?

The answer is straightforward: the same kind of totality framework contours (a)
being as presence with respect to the history of metaphysics and (b) the structural
foundations allowing Derrida to conclude that meaning, reference, the transcendental
signified and context are in principle impossible to determine with any degree of
certainty or inherent limitation. Thus a delicately poised isomorphism exists between
the unity underlying the conjunction of the conceptual configurations inherent in
Derrida’s notion of being as presence and the unity underlying the set of conditions
which must obtain in order that Derrida’s deconstructively motivated writings on
language, both their ideational structure as well as their emergence when applied to
texts, can accomplish philosophically what he claims they accomplish.

The resulting isomorphic unity is an environmental totality inflected with
diversifications and oscillations between and among elements which fall under the
circumscribed scope of the respective individual totalities. However, this congruency
does not debar a pertinent difference between the two global perspectives. Although
totality is dominant in both phases of Derrida’s thought, the unity grounding being
as presence basically arises from textual considerations in that its invariant effect
originates from the history of metaphysics, from written accounts which purport to
disclose how being should be understood. Derrida derived the notion of being as
presence by reading various texts appearing in the history of metaphysics, reflecting
on that material and then drawing conclusions about the assembly of texts so read.

To this series of textually based metaphysical systems, Derrida added the
distinction between sameness and identity, then formed the concept of différance
as the animating force controlling the history of metaphysics and limiting its sole
dimension of sameness to being as presence. By contrast, the foundational unity
for the deconstructive approach to language is itself fully metaphysical insofar as it
relies on an omnipresent temporality and a commensurately present set of contexts
lacking an effective limit. If this italicized phrase is too hard-edged and historically
conditioned, replace it with the following, more nuanced but referentially equivalent
description: “configured in ways employing terms and directions of thought either
indistinguishable from or fully compatible with much traditional metaphysical thinking."

In this respect, Derrida has contributed addenda to the history of metaphysics even as he proclaims, while developing deconstruction, that it constitutes an assemblage of attitudes and strategies that is independent of or at least to a degree separate from that history. Of course, deconstruction is not theory for the sake of theory. Deconstruction names an approach to a critique of traditional concepts animating the structure of language and a series of techniques for reading texts, whether in language typified as philosophical or literary. To the extent that the latter dimension of deconstruction—its application to given texts—admits of formulation in something like a theoretical setting, that setting reflects the general and abstract factors which control and direct the critique of language proper.

It is, however, important in the present context to be fully aware of the fact that the isomorphism just described represents only a threshold perspective concerning the extent to which deconstruction depends on metaphysical considerations. Once a more detailed description of the scope of this dependency comes into view, crucial consequences follow regarding the cogency of deconstruction as a conjoint set of theoretical gestures with common interpretive goals.

In the next section, I will illustrate the extent to which three concepts fundamental to western metaphysics are endemic, seemingly of necessity, to Derrida’s formulation of deconstruction’s basic notions and strategies. Once these accounts have been developed, I will then explore potential ramifications regarding whether or not or at least the extent to which deconstruction as formulated by Derrida’s texts remains a viable philosophical procedure. These ramifications arise, again, on condition that deconstruction stands as a unified theory broached to accomplish determinable ends.

8.3 “Formal” Entities and the Texts of Deconstruction

A point of interpretive strategy: since Derrida uses “form” and cognate notions often and in various contexts, we briefly indicate how “formal” will inflect the interpretation of Derrida’s texts argued at this point. The appeal is to the frequent appearance of this term throughout the history of metaphysics and to emphasize the malleability of predication and coordinately abstract status of common referents of “form” and “formal.” Subsequent analysis in this essay concentrates on a series of such terms. Thus unity, sameness and difference—the same set of fundamental notions that grounded Chapter 3 and its analysis concerning the structure of being as presence—

97 Derrida denied that deconstruction was a method and that it was possible to codify its practices into a set protocol. See: Kearney, 155-6; LI, 141; N, 101-2, 103; Derrida 1987, 262. Despite Derrida’s insistence in this regard, a number of his advocates try to do exactly that in greater or lesser degrees of specificity: See Wood, 3; Caputo 1997, 77; Hill, 117-8, Naas 2003, 161-2; Harvey, 25, Gasché 1989, 3/4.
are typically described as “formal” in the sense that they apply indiscriminately and without any theoretical residue to many distinct things and types of things, and that they do so in ways which convey significance when these realities are viewed at a certain level of abstraction.

That formal factors derived from these terms—unity, sameness, difference—explicitly propel as well as implicitly contour pivotal junctures in Derrida’s texts regarding both the theory and practice of deconstruction will become evident if the reader of Derrida observes the rhythm and detail of Derrida’s argumentation. But noticing that such terms animate Derrida’s work does not by itself discursively identify their exact status and function. By “status,” we mean a determination specifying whether students of Derrida should understand the import of these terms, employed variously by Derrida, according to second-order discriminations such as degree of formality, nominalism, or some other alternative as yet unspoken in philosophical analysis and reflection. The contention then is that how the student of Derrida and deconstruction decides to interpret the status of these terms will have implications of great importance.

We now describe some of the most manifest ways in which specific metaphysical elements dictate the flow of Derrida’s version of deconstruction; we will also sketch preliminary lines of commentary and criticism based on these accounts. The intertwining metaphysical themes at work in this broadly comprehensive context will be more fully and precisely appreciated and understood if we approach their analysis gradually. Although each of the metaphysical elements identified in this chapter has a variety of diversifications within the long and variegated history of metaphysics, the accounts ascribed to these elements are sufficiently developed to stand as representative of that tradition.

After articulating a number of settings in which unity, sameness and difference function integrally in advancing the ends of deconstruction, we will pose this question: if unity, sameness and difference—all three as a conjoint set and each taken as such—are indeed necessary to the texts required in order to formulate and apply deconstruction, should this trio of fundamental realities and their conceptual indicators be abstracted from the letter of Derrida’s writing, considered as isolated and independent elements in their own right, and then also be subjected to deconstructive analysis?

8.3.1 Unity

The Aristotelian maxim that unity (like being) can be said in many ways is a useful entry into the relevance of what might appear initially to be a concept too vague to be relevant. In Chapter 3, we noted the unity exhibited by the history of metaphysics in the sense that it had a beginning, an “organic” duration and a termination of the sort

98 At Metaphysics 1040b16-20, Aristotle asserts that unity, like being, can be said in many ways.
Derrida describes as “closure.” If we approach deconstruction as a set of approximately stable interpretive techniques, then unity also applies to the history of metaphysics in the sense that this history encompasses a collection of texts with a determinate number of members. There is only one history—one series of texts, constituting western metaphysics.99 The fact that some works may or may not be apocryphal (e.g., several dialogues attributed to Plato) does not tell against this strict sense of unity. A given work will or will not belong properly to the history of metaphysics; whether a given work is or is not apocryphal bears on epistemological concerns relative to what is known about the work, not on the status of the work as such. That decisions may have to be made concerning whether or not to include a given work within that series of texts does not affect the unique unity of that set insofar as it represents, when finalized, the sum total of western metaphysical thought. Thus if the history of metaphysics is in any respect broader or more inclusive than that collection of texts circumscribed according to Derrida by being as presence, then the closure of metaphysics, a feature of the organic history of metaphysics which is crucial for Derrida’s overall position, may not in fact be the case.

This sense of unity is important to bring into the open because it establishes a limit to any inquiry which attempts to respond to “the history of metaphysics.” If a work with philosophical intent is written to summarize and speculate about “the history of metaphysics,” that work must be in significant respects other than that history. An interpretive distance must exist between “the history of metaphysics” as a finished and complete set of texts and whatever thesis a work about that history maintains in conjunction with the articulated justification of that thesis.

This distance presupposes a second sense of unity, i.e., deconstruction itself as “other than” this unity. The textual constitution of deconstruction must be understood as a programmatic unity of integrated elements which transcends all differences exemplified by the various systems constituting the history of metaphysics. This medley of interpretive techniques remains a unity; it is also stable, indeed it is invariant in that its regulative strictures—e.g., the question of appropriate strategy with respect to opposition if one opposite has been privileged throughout history over its counterpart—always remains the same regardless of the content and divergent character of a given metaphysical system. This unity thus establishes a perimeter of limits regarding the extent of deconstruction’s effects on its subject.

99 Recall Derrida explicitly saying that there is “only” a single history of metaphysics. See Ch. 1, Passage 1A.
8.3.2 Sameness as Self-identity

Unity also has a useful and important heuristic dimension when the context of concern is focused on ways to approach the status of formal realities as they function in Derrida’s texts on deconstruction.¹⁰⁰

The primary distinction between the unity of the history of western metaphysics and the unity of *différance* is one of sheer size and internal complexity, but it is crucial to a critical understanding of both elements in Derrida’s thinking that they be approached, initially, as unities. *Différance* can be construed according to a traditional structural template as a whole of parts. Thus sameness and identity–parts–cohere with one another in Derrida’s analytic account of *différance*–a structural whole.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, *différance*, with its special sense of sameness, is essential to the theoretical formation of being as presence. The following question emerges: how are (a) the sameness of *différance* and (b) deconstruction–an aggregation of techniques formulated to function in ways other than everything metaphysical collected under the stanchion of being as presence–congruent with one another? An answer to this question, if it can be secured, will go far in showing what Derrida borrowed from the history of metaphysics while in the very process of establishing a methodology of correlated gestures (all, presumably, with the same goal collectively in view) precisely to “deconstruct” and ultimately thereby disclose what has been hidden during that very history.

In his account of *différance*, Derrida distinguished between sameness and identity but without developing the distinction in order to clarify their use, especially in settings marked by high generality and extensive application. But the self-identity pertaining to sameness as an integral component in the articulation of *différance* must be distinguished from identity as a concept which, according to Derrida, is not equivalent to sameness. We saw in Chapter 3 how it is vital to recognize the difference between identity and self-identity as well as the complexities involved in determining the respective properties

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle provides useful direction at *Metaphysics* 1018'b 8: “Clearly, therefore, sameness is a unity of the being either of more than one thing or of one thing when it is treated as more than one, i.e., when we say a thing is the same as itself; for we treat it as two.” The question becomes whether Derrida’s sameness in the context of being as presence operates in this way–when the “doubleness” of sameness is generated only because we treat a single thing “as two”–or whether Derrida intends sameness to differ substantively. A Platonic Form is the same as itself (formally, by the principle of identity) and an Aristotelian form is the same as itself (for the same reason) but it does not follow that a common sameness applies to both types of formal reality. However, this commonality is precisely what Derrida discerns, its scope encompassing the totality of western metaphysics and with all constitutive differences inflecting that totality fully preserved. Part I of this essay demonstrated the challenges involved in coherently eliciting this commonality.

¹⁰¹ Derrida’s denial that *différance* is a concept understood in any standard or traditional sense of the term does not obviate the necessity of distinguishing between sameness and identity (i.e., as parts) in order to comprehend how *différance* functions (i.e., as a whole of these parts). This point will be discussed later in Chapter 8.
of each, especially when self-identity is predicated of sameness (and to anything else). Self-identity is necessarily predicated of sameness within différencé in order to guarantee that this sameness, and by extension différencé itself, functions in the same way throughout its application to the entire history of metaphysics.

Derrida contends that différencé drives being as presence and that différencé as such does not exist in the same way as any concept resident in the history of metaphysics; therefore, différencé should not be approached as just another addition to the storehouse of traditional metaphysics’ notional entry points. But Derrida’s reader has only to observe and itemize all that différencé does with respect to the formal and systematic structuring of the history of metaphysics to appreciate that Derrida’s denial of conceptual status to différencé is without explanatory merit. It does not matter how we style “différence” in terms of second-order vocabulary, i.e., whether it is named a “concept” or some other sortal designation. It also does not matter if we allow “différence” to remain unique in all respects—it is and remains a mark serving a designated function within Derrida’s texts, although apparently it is inappropriate if not damaging to the integrity of “différence” as a vehicle of epochal import to interrogate “différence” as such in order to determine a discernible structure. This procedural inappropriateness may be acknowledged, but the crucial point regarding Derrida’s project still stands. What différencé actualizes within the theoretical confines of deconstruction policy statements is the crucial factor. For if what différencé produces throughout the history of metaphysics does indeed remain the same, then this commonality testifies to Derrida’s implicit acceptance of sameness as, with respect to the formulation and application of deconstruction, an instance of self-identity. If so, then Derrida’s sharp distinction between sameness and identity in this context no longer can be maintained since the sameness of différencé must remain identical in a number of crucial respects in order that différencé, through sameness, can generate what Derrida claims that it generates.

What evidence has Derrida provided that différencé as he has formulated its structure and effects should—and, indeed, does—remain resolutely the same as itself throughout its engendering function with respect to the history of metaphysics as the subject of deconstructive agency when that same history is replete with differentiation, variation, and dissimilarity as far as its content is concerned? Derrida employs this “formal” approach to sameness, thereby presupposing its self-identity, in at least five distinct senses:

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102 For development of this claim, note again the discussion of différencé in Chapter 4 of DFL.
8.3.2.1 Systemic Différance

Différance as systemic is constituted by a set of distinguishable elements—e.g., sameness and difference. But elements of this plurality are related to one another as a unity named différance. This unity functions as one pivotal component in the application of deconstruction and, as such, remains the same throughout the history of metaphysics. As time, culture, political realities, circumstance, doctrinal specification vary throughout metaphysics' long history, différance remains self-identical with respect to elements of its structure, sameness and difference, the logical priority of these elements relative to one another, and its unvarying application to the variegated writings found in that history.

It does not matter what period in the history of metaphysics or what system during that period comes under scrutiny, the application of the gestures of deconstruction will result in, for example, the denial of both a transcendental signified as well as a stable sense of context. This consequence does not vary throughout the complete interplay between the history of metaphysics and deconstruction; therefore, with respect to substantive conclusions elicited from deconstructive principles, sameness prevails.

8.3.2.2 Functional

Sameness is the key element in différance and the grounding formal notion for establishing being as presence; therefore, presence stands as the one and only uniform element throughout the history of metaphysics. As such, presence illustrates another dimension of sameness, e.g., it extends over all possible dimensions of space-time insofar as space-time has been integrated within given metaphysical systems. Sameness also encompasses all explicitly asserted features in all the metaphysical systems which constitute the history of metaphysics. Sameness functions in a precisely self-identical way throughout this welter of complexity regarding the generation of a single outcome—being as presence—the dismantling and penetration of which is the unifying goal of deconstruction.

Any and all variations in metaphysical systems regarding the content of the structure of space and time remain subject to analytical entry into those variations provided by common components of deconstructive agency. These components, listed above under the “systemic” heading, always function in the same way throughout the history of metaphysics even if results of their application differ in content.

8.3.2.3 Experiential

In this context, the pertinent parallel is between sameness of being as presence and sameness linking perception and imagination—something must be common to those two distinct modes of consciousness in order to justify, in the application of deconstructive strategies, the ready transition from one mode to another mode with
equal force in terms of evidentiary effect. Only if the two modes of experience are, in some way not indicated in Derrida’s texts, the same will an appeal to both modes be equivalently relevant to the point concerning the indeterminacy of contexts.

The tangency between the elements typically separated by difference (i.e., perception and imagination) will generate a condition similar if not identical to the presence which, for Derrida, has permeated the entire history of western metaphysics. The limits of the perceptual adjoin the limits of the imaginative with an intimacy of such degree that experience and entities existing solely—or seemingly so—in the former realm inevitably and necessarily slide into a parallel level of existence in the latter realm. Furthermore, this experiential sameness remains identical to itself throughout the entire sequence of metaphysical systems. Imagination and perception continually intersect in order to ground the unvarying denial of contextual unity and stability of a given context. This denial obtains regardless of the complexity or simplicity of circumstances surrounding a given context and regardless when in the history of metaphysics or in the domain of common experience an inquiry might be initiated to secure such stability as a necessary condition for grounding the other elements. Derrida rejects this stability.

Sameness must also apply to time as an unstated factor in deconstruction when it is situated in the experiential phase of justifications in the critical analysis of concepts pertaining to language. (The following discussion supplements the account of temporality featured at the outset of this chapter.) When, for example, the unity of a concept is denied because perceived objects apparently delimiting a context can become imagined objects extending and removing those limits, then the same time must underlie and ground both the perceptual and imagined experiences. If the time underlying the experience of perception and the time correlative to the experience of imagination were somehow distinct from one another, then it would not be possible to argue for the lack of limits of a concept in the manner just described since there would be no guarantee that perception and imagination shared a common spatio-temporal environment.

That this is a major metaphysical assumption about time as a resident sameness is demonstrated by attending to the temporality of an imagined scenario. The shifts and disruptions in tempo commonly characterizing an imagined state of affairs suggest strongly that time animating the sphere of imagination may operate very differently from time when the grounding experience is perception in its immediacy. Therefore, Derrida’s position also requires ascription of sameness predicated of time; such predication is necessary to concluding the inherent indeterminacy of contexts.\footnote{Derrida maintained early in \textit{Writing and Difference} that the question of a revamped understanding of imagination was a prerequisite for developing “deconstructed” positions in relation to their encrusted counterparts within the history of metaphysics—WD, 4; see also WD, 7. Eva Brann’s majestic \textit{The World of the Imagination} may serve as a point of departure for investigations in this area. Brann’s fundamental approach to the imagination is in several ways thoroughly traditional. She says in her}
8.3.2.4 Applicability

Instances of a basic relation typically named “opposition” appear often throughout the history of metaphysics and Derrida’s texts present various lists of such opposition as objects of interest and concern. Furthermore, deconstruction as applied frequently confronts these instances and reconfigures their relation in various ways.

Once distinct components of a given instance of opposition are related to one another as opposites, the difference between the two components duly established as that of opposition must remain the same throughout a given duration of historical time. Thus if matter and form (one example among many) differ from one another and are also construed as opposites, then this difference must be preserved as a difference even if the particular instances of matter and the particular instances of form vary over given segments of historical time. If this kind of difference would cease to remain the same, e.g., the positions of two philosophers both of whom appealing to matter and form in their metaphysics, then any strategy to subvert or overturn a dominant opposite by way of inference derived from a generalized sense of opposition becomes impossible for the simple reason that no such generalized opposition would endure and thus exhibit a mode of existence capable of becoming subjected to the application of deconstructive strategy.

In general, opposition as a unique referential indicator ceases to exist unless it encompasses a complex web of structural stability. The two components in question (i.e., as opposites) would perhaps be related to one another but not necessarily linked with the kind of strict directionality within a common area of reference justifying the claim that the two components are opposites of one another. Thus the difference between the two poles of every instance of opposition must remain the same; the relation between the respective weight of each dominant pole (if such dominance indeed obtains) with respect to its coordinate opposite must remain the same and do so throughout the history of metaphysics. If either of these two designations were to become reversed in order of opposition or to have this order fluctuate through history, then deconstruction would be unable to pinpoint a target for purposes of dissembling the dominant opposite (since, simply stated, it might not be the dominant opposite) or even initiate an analysis at all (since the relation of opposition might no longer be in play).

This single conceptual configuration, opposition, must necessarily retain its unity throughout the history of metaphysics as well as throughout the pressure
placed on that history by deconstruction in its quest to reorient, or at least to throw into question, the direction of privilege traditionally stamped on the given instance of opposition.

In summary: To the extent that deconstruction aims its instruments of analysis toward assumptions encrusted within a highly diversified array of particular instances of opposition in order to achieve critical and credible results, to that extent deconstruction depends on the unvarying reliability and sameness of opposition construed according to a strictly defined set of abstract conditions. Opposition in this sense is a metaphysical primitive which must be taken as the same throughout all its appearances, regardless of the subject matter deployed oppositionally. It will be observed that this sameness also extends to all substantive conclusions derived from the application of deconstructive strategies.

8.3.2.5 Modality
Deconstruction depends on the implicit juxtaposition of a kind of possibility which becomes, given Derrida’s approach to being as presence, indistinguishable from totality as actualized. Thus the omnipresence of presence with respect to difference, that is, the effective denial of difference when applying deconstructive strategies procedurally nullifies any distinction between possibility and actuality with respect to any single occurrence of written or spoken language. As a result, the deconstructionist can appeal to anything that has, is, or will happen linguistically in order to dislodge the intent to impose limits on any of the traditionally stable concepts in the analysis of language. All sectors of possibility remain the same throughout the application of deconstructive agendas in the sense that anything that has or will occur with respect to linguistic usage is always a legitimate source of evidence to justify the dismantling of an apparently established core of meaning.

8.3.3 Difference
As shown at the outset of this chapter, the advocate of deconstruction must deny that traditional and seemingly unassailable differences obtain within each of three dimensions of this totality—the difference between and among distinct sectors of time, the difference between perception and imagination with respect to the existence of contexts, the difference between referential entities and meanings derived from a given context and related but distinct referential entities and meanings derived from other possible contexts. This variegated interplay of denials results in a kind of Heraclitean indeterminacy, a veritable maelstrom of undifferentiated unities on which in their collective totality Derrida’s various criticisms of standard theoretical apprehensions of linguistic concepts depend.
There are, however, various senses in which *difference as such* must stand by itself as a formal requirement in order to establish fundamental features of the deconstructive agenda. It is therefore essential to detach difference from the connection Derrida assigns to it as a feature of *différance* and to recognize that difference exercises a series of crucial roles apart from its function within the theoretically determined confines of *différance*. We discuss three such roles.

### 8.3.3.1 Textuality

Derrida frequently uses “marks” as a preferred term referring to basic elements of language, e.g., to words whether taken individually or as components in sentences and propositions. Thus the differences between and among all the letters comprising an alphabet, the differences between and among all the individual words comprising a given work (and of course a given passage excerpted from that work for deconstructive consideration), and the fact that the totality of, e.g., Plato’s texts differ from the totality of Aristotle’s texts with respect to the “marks” constituting both sets of readings—all these brute empirical characteristics illustrate, irreducibly so, the fact of difference. Even if the ultimate philosophical import of both sets of texts (using Plato and Aristotle as examples) is ultimately governed by *différance* and subsumption of all given textual differences under sameness, the statement of this import derives from an extensive array of words and propositions requiring as an empirical necessity the fact of difference in order that this language exists according to traditional formats thereby becoming open to deconstructive interest.

The Platonic Socrates says about written words that “they go on telling you just the same thing forever” (*Phaedrus*, 275d–Hackforth’s translation). The sameness to which Socrates refers depends in part on the fact that the words in question, as written, will always remain the same orthographic units, “marks” in Derrida’s vocabulary. Even if one wanted to contend that exactly the same words when used as elements in texts can admit divergent readings, these readings will derive from the same set of original words; the divergences in question are produced by readers’ reactions to those words, not by words as orthographic units themselves. In this respect, all words upon entering into existence within a given text and being accepted as such by scholarship remain the same forever. The factor of difference taken in a purely formal sense is necessary to establish the possibility that language as an articulated phenomenon exists at all, since a passage from a Platonic dialogue (or, obviously, from any text) will always be determined as that passage only through the same set of primitive, empirically defined, textual differences.

### 8.3.3.2 Interpretation

Consider a text, e.g., a Platonic dialogue. It is a hermeneutical truism that one and the same text can generate many divergent readings. But all readings of the same text as
divergent presuppose identity of the original text. If that text were to vary over and above its orthographic sameness, then it would be premature to assign difference to distinct readings since such divergent results need not in fact be divergent if each reading was based on what amounted to a different text. This is an obvious fact about the structure of texts but it is worth mentioning given Derrida’s frequent appeal to words appearing in textual situations “already” and continually “splitting” or “dividing” themselves in a variety of ways, especially with respect to the possibility of establishing a fixed meaning in a given context.

It would be possible at least theoretically to interpret diverse texts of any two philosophers in such a way that the respective meanings of these texts, once conjoined, would be the same. But such interpretation would have to go far regarding the extensive ranges of traditional meanings ascribed to the different texts in order to transform those meanings into a unified message. The possibility of such compressed if arguably reductive interpretation raises the question whether or not deconstruction will allow a difference between justified and unjustified readings of a given text. If “anything goes” is not a legitimate maxim of interpretation according to canonic deconstruction, then it seems necessary that at least some readings of texts offered in the name of deconstruction must be disallowed. It follows then that there is difference separating a justified from an unjustified deconstructive reading of a given text. How precisely the distinction between justified and unjustified will be drawn in this context is irrelevant; the point is the necessity of contrast between the two possibilities. And it is this contrast which at a fundamental level of formal intelligibility “difference” establishes and preserves. We will encounter in Chapter 9 a striking example of irreducible difference animating a strictly interpretive context; Derrida’s participation in this exercise in difference will have far-reaching implications for the ultimate cogency of deconstruction.

8.3.3.3 Formality
Derrida claims with aphoristic force that those who have not recognized the priority of différance over difference have been “left far behind” (P, 101n13). The point is that in terms of ultimate philosophical priority, différance for Derrida is prior to difference, not vice versa. But against this thesis, we note: (a) difference as such must remain self-identical and impregnably so, i.e., difference itself cannot become subject to difference, especially within the confines of différance. For if difference were to metamorphose into anything other than itself, then the predication of difference to all distinct elements of a given metaphysical system would not be

104 See LI, 144-5 on the “anything goes” possibility for applied deconstruction. For a discussion of limits with respect to the application of deconstructive gestures and resulting interpretations of texts, see DFL, 165-6.
possible. The result would be the loss of the unique character of that system in terms of (i) the relation of its elements with respect to each other within that system as well as (ii) the difference between that system and all other systems, since none of the other systems would also be able to preserve their internal structure in such a way as to maintain their own individual identity.

It is necessary then that (b) difference function as a logical primitive in order to preserve a distinction between, e.g., the Platonic and Aristotelian views of reality, or any other view put forth in the history of metaphysical speculation. Only when this difference obtains with respect to the content of the history of metaphysics in its entirety can Derrida formulate différance in order to generate by this notion a theoretical consequence regarding that history–i.e., being governed in its entirety by being as presence.

As a purely formal principle of regulation, difference as such is necessary in order to distinguish between identity and sameness within the structural limits of différance. Derrida can postulate this distinction as applicable to différance as a single, unified operator with a specific function in relation to the history of metaphysics only because he could assume that difference as such is free to penetrate a conceptual configuration of his own design and to establish “spacings” between and among its elements. Thus, the very possibility of différance explicitly stated as a key notional component in deconstructive strategies depends on difference, not the other way around as Derrida would have it.

8.4 The Clash of Isomorphic Totalities

For Derrida, being as presence epitomizes an epoch in western thought. It may fairly be said, however, that its primary function in the overall context of Derrida’s work is more strategically negative than affirmative in that it forces attention on what has been overlooked or suppressed during that epoch. By contrast, deconstruction is mainly affirmative if viewed as an ensemble of gestures for realizing and perhaps even articulating what being as presence has concealed.

If, however, we examine more closely the just-concluded exposition of components involved in the confrontational play linking being as presence with deconstruction, a consequence of considerable weight emerges. The totality dimension driving being as presence rests on the sameness, i.e., the unifying core of différance, which justifies predication of the one name, “being as presence.” Although Derrida’s notion of différance explicitly contains an application of difference, that is, between and among distinct metaphysical systems within the entire history of metaphysics, this is a dimension of difference with, given the sweep of history, what might be termed inherently vanishing effect. For as the movement toward the totality of the history of metaphysics–and, for Derrida, ultimate closure–commences and continues, all differences gradually become reduced so that when closure is in fact realized, difference
has become attenuated to the point where its function as a source of distinction between and among entities as well as between and among experiences of entities is rendered null with respect to potential insight into metaphysical considerations. Derrida did indeed insert as a structural feature of being as presence the possibility of degrees of presence (a claim not developed). But there is an undeniable sense that the history of metaphysics insofar as it culminates in a closed and apparently exhaustive process of systematic thought just is “being as presence.” Sameness and the unitary functioning of being as presence triumph over difference.

As soon as Derrida announces that the history of metaphysics must be read as marked by closure, being as presence—the single name for the entire history of metaphysics—will, it seems, affect if not determine the ultimate revelatory capacity of every moment within that history. With the advent and work of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) and after closure has rounded out the history of metaphysics, the diversified strategies proper to deconstruction have appeared, but not without their statement arising on the basis of serious and sustained foundational activity on the part of its originator. Time in all its dimensions, all apparently limited contexts extended into all possible dimensions, meanings and referents extended in all possible dimensions: we demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter that these three totality-features are and must be in place as a set of necessary conditions in order to ground perspectives on additional metaphysical formations in such a way that Derrida can maintain the conclusions he wishes to draw on seminal topics in his treatment of language—transcendental signified, contexts, negation and iterability.

Furthermore, it is evident upon examination that realities underlying the theoretical configurations characterizing the basic gestures of deconstruction are classic instances of elements found throughout the history of metaphysics—unity, sameness, difference. It follows immediately that if Derrida’s deconstructive reading of that history is correct, all these realities are permeated with being as presence. The reason: being as presence pertains necessarily to the entire history of metaphysics and therefore to every constituent element defining that history—including, of course, unity, sameness and difference, however they may be or have been configured when inscribed within a given metaphysical system.

This ontological fact, so to speak, has crucial consequences. For it may be inferred that the totality Derrida closes off when he reads the history of metaphysics and pronounces upon its deep structure with respect to being as presence is isomorphic with the totality he implicitly depends on when he discourses analytically and normatively on the structure of language by appealing to dimensions of unmistakable metaphysical import, in particular dimensions characterized by totality-considerations. In other words, in order to establish the possibility of the critique of meaning and signification in his analysis of language, Derrida must have in place—albeit deployed according to varying senses of implicitness—a structure fully metaphysical at its base and in all necessary respects isomorphic with that attributed to the full sway of the history.
The Foundation of Deconstruction: Generalities at Play

of metaphysics emergent in and through being as presence. However, and the point bears repeating: the concepts standing as the foundation for this structure are, if Derrida is correct and his position is consistent in this regard, thoroughly impregnated with being as presence.

The result is a single isomorphically structured totality marked by the clash of diametrically opposite consequences: (a) one closed system with respect to the articulation of the structure of being throughout the history of western metaphysics interlocking with (b) an assemblage of viable concepts and realities necessarily continuing and open-ended in its applicability—in a word, deconstruction. This assemblage is collectively aimed at analyzing the structure of language as well as texts written in light of that structure and, Derrida assures us, providing precisely the means to disclose what the language of metaphysics has epochally and pervasively concealed.

The fundamental question arising from this clash of opposite destinations concerns the inferences which follow given the inescapable fact that although opposed in the direction of their effects, both destinations—being as presence and deconstruction as a methodology—result from appeals to and derivations from the same basic realities. Why should the array of Derrida's deconstructive criticisms be accepted if the vehicles by which these criticisms are asserted are themselves exactly what Derrida's position is intended to throw into question? To use Derrida's own language, it appears imperative that the foundations of deconstruction should be “shaken” with just as much energy and rigor as those foundations animating the history of metaphysics: the reason—they are, in fact, the same foundations!

8.5 Self-reference: Deconstruction and Interpretive Limits

As we have just shown, unity, sameness and difference are necessary to the very formulation of the elements of deconstruction. If so, then this functionality must be recognized and the elements so named must be extracted and considered on their own, formal factors essential to the utterance and expression of deconstruction as a methodological gambit. But this identification and subsequent isolation establishes unity, sameness and difference as yet another appearance embedded in a seemingly radical if not “monstrous” (Derrida's descriptor) setting of classic instances of abstract concepts and realities. Therefore, given the narratives advancing the gestural content of deconstruction—a configuration of texts spread out over a number of years in the history of Derrida as a writer (not to mention a variety of attempts by others to follow Derrida's lead)—the advocate of deconstruction must fully appreciate how the details of deconstructive arguments exemplify difference, sameness and ultimately the predication of unity. Another consequence follows, with even graver import. The advocate of deconstruction must also and necessarily determine and justify how such abstractions are to be understood by themselves, as isolated phenomena, since these abstractions structure the formation of Derrida's discourse and deconstruction
generally, however pliant and variable and resistant to the blandishments of metaphysical concepts its presentation at the level of theory may appear to readers’ eyes.

Consider *différance*. If Derrida depends on *différance* as a necessary factor in the existence and effectiveness of deconstruction and if *différance* itself possesses a unified function, then the question becomes whether the requisite formal characteristics of *différance* can be—and should be—abstracted from *différance* and then be made subject to inquiry in their own right. The following argument shows that the answer is in the affirmative. It is necessary that *différance* as described in Derrida’s texts functions in the same way throughout the epoch of western metaphysics. In a word, *différance* as such, taken as a self-contained theoretical unity, exhibits sameness; indeed, without sameness as one of its formal properties guaranteeing uniformity of function, *différance* would not be *différance*.

It follows that Derrida has imported a certain understanding of sameness with respect to formal characteristics—thus sameness must retain its structure over vast amounts of time encompassing extensive changes in cultural and political modalities. As a result, sameness must exhibit self-identity, it must remain identical to itself. The sameness of *différance* also retains its structure when its objects—systems comprising the history of metaphysics—generate considerable diversity. These implications elicit and accentuate the self-identity of sameness as an integral component of deconstruction. If this claim is granted, the following question seems unavoidable: must all the available devices of deconstruction also and necessarily be directed at evaluating sameness, a formal property of *différance*, given that this sense of sameness—an exemplification of self-identity which, as a formal reality, is capable of extraction from that to which it can be applied—stands as a necessary condition for the very existence of deconstruction in the first place?

The answer is yes. In fact, all these theoretical approaches to and borrowings from unity, sameness and difference—however they might be ultimately formulated in their foundational function for the emergence and stability of deconstruction—should themselves all become the target of full-fledged deconstructive investigation. The reason: the foundational status of these three components locates them both individually and as a set squarely within the history of metaphysics. And since it is the primary purpose of deconstruction to break down the hegemony of realities of this sort insofar as they have stood as the dominant features of western metaphysics, there is no apparent reason why deconstruction should not also be aimed at the foundational elements which underlie the very possibility that deconstruction itself can emerge as something of putative theoretical value and as an aggregation of techniques evocable in language.

Important implications follow either way—whether deconstruction does or does not investigate these realities. If deconstruction remains silent in this respect, then it appears impossible to avoid the implication that there are privileged senses of unity, sameness and difference; in its silence when facing these realities, deconstruction has run up against the limits of its own effectiveness. If, by contrast, deconstruction does
address the status of its own foundational notions, then the successful disassembling 
force of deconstructive inquiry will obviate the very possibility that deconstruction 
as a set of interpretive approaches embodying sameness and difference can even be 
formulated and expressed in language, much less applied to extant philosophical 
and literary texts. The very attempt to state anything of a deconstructive cast, whether 
theoretical or applied, would collapse upon its own self-destructive import.

These implications are crucial in critically addressing the cogency of deconstruction 
if it is taken, as some on the current scene certainly do, to be a viable approach to 
pursuing the philosophical enterprise. But given the concerns detailed above, how 
viable is that approach? At one point, Derrida expressly admitted that deconstruction 
can be directed against itself, so it is clear that Derrida was aware of this dimension of 
his own position. 105 What is perhaps not clear is the extent to which an articulated set of 
self-referential implications bear on the very possibility of deconstruction itself.

8.6 The Integrity of Deconstruction

We have argued that metaphysical considerations pertinent to deconstruction are 
discernible when deconstruction is advanced as a coherent theoretical posture 
characterized by a determinate conceptual scheme. If this interpretive approach is 
feasible, then metaphysics is presupposed in two senses: first, as the source of an 
implicit series of embedded and interlocking positions and assumptions necessary 
to justify the deconstructed critical evaluation of traditionally defined and developed 
linguistic concepts (Chapters 4-7 above); second, as a conceptual field yielding a 
range of concepts necessary to develop a concatenation of gestures standing as 
methodology for a mode of reading which intends to unearth the concealed import 
of philosophical and literary texts (shown earlier in Chapter 8). These revealments 
serve as prerequisite for establishing a “monstrous” retelling of basic and traditional 
metaphysical and philosophical principles.

The following are facts about deconstruction as it emerges from Derrida’s texts: 
a  the articulation and discursive rhythm of its gestures depend on general terms;
b  these terms are not explicitly identified as functional in this respect;
c  these terms are not themselves subjected to deconstructive treatment.

The fact that Derrida’s texts leave the status of general terms in a state of 
unanalyzed givenness opens his overall position to criticism on several fundamental

105 Derrida admits that texts advancing deconstruction as a program of analysis can themselves be 
treated according to these specifications—see Kearney, 155-6; Derrida 1992, 46, see also in this regard 
LI, 141. For discussion, see Harvey, 43, 96-7; Jürgen Habermas 1987, 185; Berman, 24; Hobson, 22, 24; 
Naas 2003, 28, 77; Norris 2012, 82; Daylight, 50, 60. None of these secondary sources pursue to any 
extent implications of this self-referential contextualization.
levels, with decisive influence on the cogency of deconstruction both as theoretically formulated as well as in its practical application to existing texts.

Indeed, this position generates a pair of inconsistencies identified below as “internal” and “external.” It may be observed that such opposition, so bluntly posed, stands as a ripe target for deconstructive discussion and dismemberment—and immediate rejection on grounds of programmatic irrelevancy. The challenge therefore is determining whether deconstruction can explain away this opposition (and attendant implications detailed below) without succumbing to the fallacy of begging the question, for the point of this internal/external rubric is precisely to demonstrate that deconstruction cannot coherently even initiate much less execute a response to such a challenge.

**8.6.1 Internal Inconsistency**

Deconstruction relies on general terms for both its theoretical formulation and practical application to texts. However, the primary stated purpose of deconstruction as a mode of philosophizing includes disassembling such general terms—the dominant conceptual “givens” that have contoured and animated the history of metaphysics, presumably wherever these terms exist in the canonic texts of metaphysics and however philosophers thought to deploy them. Thus deconstruction is unstable regarding the lack of explicit recognition of its own reliance on general terms; the statement of deconstruction in Derrida’s texts lacks an appropriately justified theoretical base and therefore that statement as itself a textual given is incompatible with the stated goals of deconstructive analysis.

Furthermore, once these general terms have been explicitly brought into view, deconstruction becomes internally inconsistent, a much more potent objection than the initial condition of instability just posed. Let deconstruction do its work on unity, sameness, difference. If these terms are in fact analyzed and deconstructively shaken and exploded in accordance with the stated purpose of deconstruction, then deconstruction as explicitly formulated destroys itself even as a mere possibility, as an aggregation of terms potentially applicable to texts (regardless of authorship) and with a determinate significance for a contemporary audience. Deconstruction implodes by virtue of its own self-referential rigor. But if deconstruction indeed breaks down the very realities which allow deconstruction to come into existence as a theoretical stance—if deconstruction is self-referential—then it seems that deconstruction necessarily and virulently sows the seeds of its own destruction, at least if deconstruction is consistent and complete in its application to the subject matter the hegemony of which has ultimately engendered the need for deconstruction in the first place. Every attempt to formulate, that is, to put into words and propositions Derrida’s thoughts on how to read texts, disintegrates and vanishes into a string of logical incompatibilities while in the very act of postulating those formulations.
In general then, the extent to which deconstruction as theoretical excursus depends on concepts of high generality—unity, sameness, difference—is the extent to which deconstruction becomes either inconsistent, since its very utterance as a theory of interpretation embodies dimensions of these three realities which individually and collectively must remain identical in structure and therefore impervious to any critical reflection or, at best, unstable and incomplete if its development as a theory does not address the specific character of these generalities.

8.6.2 External Inconsistency

The problems just identified pertain to deconstruction within its own ambit as an aggregation of theoretical pronouncements. But deconstruction so formulated does not appear in Derrida purely in its own right, as a self-contained vehicle for reading and interpreting the “meaning” or content of anything literary appearing within that tradition. Deconstruction in fact emerges from a much broader conceptual context. This context comprises the juxtaposition of (a) being as presence emergent as a derivation from the history of metaphysics and (b) the ensemble of abstract realities—unity, sameness, difference—drawn from that very same history and also necessary as foundational elements in order to articulate deconstruction as a theoretical gesture.

The purpose of being as presence within Derrida’s thought is not only to stand as a single, all-embracing characteristic (with various modes of application and individual systematic differences) accurately describing the entire western tradition of metaphysical reflection but also to suggest seminally that something significant has been missing, overlooked or distorted throughout this history, even up to the point where Derrida’s texts complete the closure of that history. However, the array of concepts functioning as the foundation of deconstruction as an articulated position is itself drawn from the history of metaphysics. The realities referred to by these concepts are therefore necessarily affected by being as presence since it is axiomatic for Derrida that being as presence pertains to the entire history of metaphysics.

The concerted attention to being as presence as a structured response to the history of metaphysics must therefore be taken in conjunction with the tacit dependence on a series of general terms, all cardinal concepts instantiating being as presence. But it now becomes evident that this confluence produces an arresting methodological tension, indeed a tension which upon analysis becomes logical incompatibility of massive proportion. Derrida cannot consistently hold that the history of metaphysics is inherently repressive and then extract and exploit elements derived from precisely that repressiveness in order to justify through conceptual configuration a Heraclitean skepticism issuing from his philosophical approach to the structure of language. For if being as presence, although necessary to the history of metaphysics, encapsulates a closed and therefore in some respects a deficient system, how can Derrida appeal to basic characteristics of that very system in order to ground tacitly the pivotal stances
he takes on the structure of meaning and reference in the sphere of language? Derrida’s texts concerning the fundamental elements of deconstruction rest on the same kind of foundational substructure supporting the advancement of his own positions regarding language as the targeted and traditional foundationalism permeating the history of metaphysics which these very positions purport to deconstruct. But it appears logically incompatible (a) to affirm that a certain commonality proper to the nature of being once identified and brought into the open should be overcome and then (b) to embrace, even if implicitly, this same commonality in order to justify a related series of skeptical conclusions concerning the structure of language.

Bluntly stated: Derrida critically evaluates the history of metaphysics in its entirety, then uses aspects of that very history for his own substantive ends with respect to formulating positions concerning the structure—or, perhaps, the inherent lack of structure—of language itself. Can Derrida have it both ways?

Until this fundamental incompatibility as well as the other issues raised in this chapter are addressed and resolved, I maintain that the edifice of deconstruction rests on an unstable foundation at best; consequently, any results tendered in its name become commensurately suspect if these results are said to be inspired by deconstructionist gestures rather than through independent inquiry (with an implicit or indeed explicit reliance on a set of in many respects traditional metaphysical and logical concepts and principles).

8.6.3 Being as Presence and Deconstruction: The Question of Priority

The logical proportionality of the two problems just presented warrants a brief comment. Even if the first, internal inconsistency could be resolved, the second, external inconsistency remains in full force, with an implication which affects the fundamental cogency of Derrida’s entire project. Assume that (a) the required formal terms necessary to formulate deconstruction as a coherent ensemble of interpretive gestures are identified and then (b) subjected to deconstructive examination. If this program of analysis can establish the import of unity, sameness and difference in such a way that each of these terms retains sufficient structural integrity to display a measure of formal stability, the implication would be that deconstruction, directing itself against its own inherent formal characteristics, would not necessarily become self-destructive in this very process.

True enough, this kind of result seems to run counter to the general tenor of what deconstruction does, since the application of whatever devices of deconstruction are deemed pertinent in this matter would not only establish stability but would in fact be mandated to seek such stability as a necessary condition for deconstruction’s very existence in language as well as for the maintenance of that existence throughout its duration as a viable philosophical vehicle of inquiry. From this perspective then, deconstruction requires foundationalism in order to be in a position to undercut
foundation. However, that reservation to one side, it remains the case that the joint appeals to revitalized and restated senses of unity, sameness and difference would continue under the aegis of being as presence—unless, of course, it is possible to reach a realm of insight and language for the articulation of these insights which can function in the requisite senses somehow apart from being as presence and its fluidly ongoing epochal legacy.

A final thought in this context: In a typically taut, epigrammatic fragment, Heraclitus is credited with writing that “the path up and down is one and the same.” Deconstruction preserves this spatial contrast but with divergent results: break down the sacrosanct concepts and realities that have controlled the history of metaphysics in order to open up what has been concealed or distorted throughout that history by the uncompromising sameness of being as presence. But this contrast is only apparent (as, indeed, it is for Heraclitus), since embarking on the way down eventually leads the same practitioner of reflection to the way up—until, if the seeker continues the cyclical journey with sufficient energy and perseverance, the way up ineluctably slides into, yet again, the way down....

The way down for the deconstructionist penetrates into the depths of metaphysics but does so through gestures and techniques resting atop a series of fundamental realities; as a result, going deconstructively “down” into the concealed core of metaphysics only leads the explorer back “up” again into the region where the same fundamental realities appear out in the open in the sense that the realities implicitly present during the journey down now have emerged as they have been explicitly thematized by the epochal metaphysicians of the past. Thus Heraclitus’ “one and the same” names the uniform content of the pertinent principles marking both deconstruction itself as well as deconstruction’s intended object. The circular motion marked in Fragment 60 may appear repetitively uninformative but if that motion is situated hermeneutically along the most fundamental level of deconstructive activity and the foundational realities presupposed as necessary for that activity, this fragment becomes the source of an illuminating perspective on the necessarily interpenetrating structure of these two discursive phenomena.

8.7 Deconstruction, Presence and the Play of Consequences

The pair of inconsistencies described above emerge from a contrasting internal/external interpretive base. The implications drawn raise serious questions about the cogency of deconstruction both by itself and, in an even more pronounced sense, when the

106 Heraclitus, Fragment 60. See Kirk and Raven 1957, 189.
canons of deconstruction are conjoined with Derrida’s insistence that we read the history of metaphysics as theme and variations on being as presence. But additional problems arise if we consider separately the elements serving as the primary focal points throughout the critical treatment of Derrida advanced in this essay and apply these perspectives to contexts juxtaposing deconstruction and being as presence.

8.7.1 The Ontologizing of Language

We argued in Chapter 4 that the ontologizing of language rests on a joint denial of difference and overextension of sameness in the relation between language as such and extra-linguistic domains. Even if stringently qualified, the dictum “There is nothing outside the text” leads inevitably to many intractable difficulties. Thus it seems evident that if the import Derrida assigns to language, especially writing, were implemented within the contexts of practicality defining the ordinary lives of people, indeed even those who spend time philosophizing about reality and language, the upshot from all involved in coping with the implications from this principle would be vigorous testimony calling attention to Derrida’s excessive theoretical zeal. A passage from the conclusion of the *Cratylus* reinforces this concern: “Whether there is this eternal nature in things, or whether the truth is what Heraclitus and his followers and many others say, is a question hard to determine, and no man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names” (*Cratylus*, 440c–Jowett’s translation). Most if not all advocates of Derrida would quickly reject the initial moment in this thesis—that there is an “eternal nature in things”—redolent with foundationalist conviction as this metaphysical pronouncement appears to be. However, the passage also maintains that the other alternative derived from Heraclitus is equally difficult to substantiate if, as Socrates claims, we put the education of our minds “in the power of names,” that is, names understood as all the words used to identify things in our experience of these things, whether that experience be mundane in its practical scope or grandly philosophical in purpose.

Derrida was quoted as admiring the metaphysical sayings of Heraclitus.\(^\text{107}\) If, however, connections between words and things are as intimate as Derrida would make them, then the argument of the *Cratylus* gives reasons to question whether, as just noted, either Heraclitus or Plato could justify a systematic metaphysics if the only evidence was based on the “power of names.” If a fundamental difference is granted between language and whatever language can refer to, then whatever measure of power the philosopher ascribes to language in relation to extra-linguistic reality will

\(^{107}\) David Wood 1988, xi.
always be marked by distance of some sort between the two sectors of existence. Many of Derrida’s positions—e.g., on the continually shifting boundaries of contexts and similarly mobile identities of supposed “transcendental signifieds”—certainly lend themselves to a Heraclitean worldview, assuming that anyone philosophizing according to those core positions would want to make a theoretical (and, of course, historically conditioned) pronouncement in that regard. But if metaphysics pitched in such global terms is set aside, we may repeat the point that even if we grant the stipulated sense of the word “writing” as Derrida argued that sense in *Of Grammatology*, it remains unclear what has been gained by this move with respect to winning insight into, speaking in a broadly generalized way, the reality of the objects so signified.

What is clear are consequences derived from the denial of unity and stability when this denial is considered with respect to the import of *différance* and the status of a context. For Derrida, the unity of a word with divergent meanings justifies the conclusion that contexts as a certain kind of reality cannot display an equivalent unity. It might be thought that divergently constituted contexts relative to the use of the same word in both contexts entail that such words exhibit divergent meanings—that is, that a word of this sort should be receptive to this divergence because the difference in context will, given the complex metaphysical surroundings which define any context, mandate a difference in meaning. But Derrida reverses the priority—terminological unity controls (in fact, denies) contextual unity in any and every case (with exceptions indicated by Derrida—see Chapter 9), including the resultant stability such uniformity would establish for determining fixed reference and meaning. Thus, the evolution of a word in terms of a sequence of diversified meaning throughout that word’s history dictates what can and cannot be relevant and real as far as contexts within which that word may appear. For Derrida, the “power of names” is of such proportion that it overwhelms and negates all the affects the elements characterizing a given context have in determining the meaning of words—and without some determinate measure of stability in meaning, it is not obvious how words can exercise any semblance of “power” over anything extra-linguistic. As we have demonstrated, such a reversal has serious and arguably unsustainable consequences.

Furthermore, Derrida’s denial of the *moment* as a feasible element in metaphysical thinking depends in part on the ontologizing of language—he wants to move away from the present, the moment, insofar as the present serves as focal point, if not the paradigmatic constituent of being as presence. There will be no “moment” as a matter of metaphysical fact if an occurrence of language, whether spoken or written and ostensibly taking place “right now,” must be deconstructively linked to all other occurrences, past and future, in order to ensure the possibility that the given occurrence can become and is meaningful.\footnote{Derrida denies in various contexts the philosophical viability of the notion of “the moment”: see *WD*, 14, 263; *MP*, 58; *OG*, 159; *SP*, 61, 623; *PS*, 6; *N*, 23. See also *DFL*, 250n9.} Is there a way to save the conceptual integrity of “the
moment”–and thereby insert a wedge against Derrida’s ontologizing of language–so that it receives due attention from the perspectives of both metaphysics as such and the relevance of the moment to language? I argue in Chapter 9 that the answer is in the affirmative, a response Derrida has invited in part by reason of his vigorous if not vitriolic response to John Searle in the matter of reading and interpreting John Austin’s theoretical treatment of speech acts.

8.7.2 Particularity, Signification, Concepts

The collective force of différance as a gathering and summation of statements defining the history of metaphysics, working in tandem with being as presence as a phenomenon circumscribing that entire history, renders it theoretically impossible (on pain of inconsistency) for Derrida to propound a substantive account of particularity. Furthermore, the same problem arises when deconstruction and its emphasis on flux and change denies the existence of a stable transcendental signified. Note the correlative consequences for Derrida’s position: (a) the inability to enunciate a fixed stance concerning the metaphysical character of individual entities mirrors (b) the denial that a stable transcendental signified can be secured through philosophical means. It follows from Derrida’s promulgation and adherence to deconstruction that neither a particular as such nor a cognitive correlate to a particular can be recognized and articulated as components of a philosophical system.

Consider the reversed direction of movement characterizing this implication–the inability to formulate particularity from within the theoretical domain defined by différance as well as the omnipresence of being as presence moves from (a) the totality, the history of metaphysics, to (b) a given part of that totality–i.e., the traditional interest metaphysics has in stating properties of particulars. By contrast, the denial of the transcendental signified originates from within experience and extends, necessarily for Derrida, outward to the limits of experience as contoured by perception and imagination working in concert with one another, both avenues of experience collaborating to support the rejection of a limited cognitive object which can stand as transcendentally stable. Although the directions driving the implication are reversed, the point to be made is identical–either way, Derrida loses even the possibility of any theoretical hold on particularity, whether as such (in the manner of metaphysics in its standard practice when dealing with the theoretical structure of extra-mental entities) or as the object of linguistic and cognitive concern (in the guise of what Derrida has designated as the transcendental signified).

The fundamental gap in Derrida’s metaphysics of individual entities parallels the imposed insistence that particularity cannot be secured as it plays out, or would have played out, in linguistic contexts regarding the conjunction between referential object and its counterpart as transcendental signified. The implications are considerable. This joint instability where neither obtain, i.e., particularity in extra-linguistic
regions or the existence of a transcendental signified in the cognitive realm, renders it difficult if not impossible to envision theoretically the formation of concepts. If it is a characteristic of concepts to “pick out” certain features of intended objects (the content of these objects understood very broadly) and then to “hold them together” for purposes of examination and utility, how can such cognitional stability be consistently approached and deployed given that the conditions for achieving such stability cannot coherently coexist with the deconstructive drive for investigative variableness and indexical flow?

Stating facts about the world depends on language and its ability to connect via extra-linguistic media to specific referential realities, then move in the opposite direction, as it were, in order to initiate a conceptual response to that referentiality. Words framed as propositions go “out” to refer to determinate extra-linguistic reality, then this entire relation goes “in” and funds a pertinent cognitive evocation and realized identity. Derrida’s deconstruction denies both components; how then can concepts be formed?

If the pursuit of philosophy requires concepts, then a critical evaluation of this effective denial that concepts can be fashioned and function in discourse is to ask: to what extent does unity of an entity as object of a potential fact depend on unity of a word or words referring to or describing that entity? Whether an entity will bifurcate itself either from within or due to external provocation does not seem to involve anything regarding language we employ when in the presence of this entity. The *Cratylus* is again pertinent–whatever entities do with respect to their own structure is independent of what words referring to those entities may do, especially given the unbounded vagaries of discourse. The deconstructionist must show that putative dimensions of difference within words when referring to entities somehow reflect diversifications proper to the entities themselves. In brief, the advocate of Derrida must do metaphysics. It remains a question whether undeveloped reliance on gestures taken from deconstruction alone is sufficient to accomplish this end. In the face of such pursuit, philosophy would become either a very different type of activity from what it has been historically or, at the other extreme, it would dissolve its apparent possibilities aimed at explaining realities and issues in the world into expressions of discourse approximating what is now named rhetoric (on which more below).

### 8.7.3 Opposition

Heraclitus and Derrida both appeal in different yet commensurately basic ways to opposition but it is perhaps worth wondering whether either thinker reflected on the structure of opposition as such—for in its traditional formulations, the concept of opposition is inherently complex, presupposing as elements the secondary notions of difference, plurality, generic identity and relationality. And yet opposition taken as a concept also exhibits underlying unity in several
distinct senses—unity of each of the opposites considered as such as well as the relation between the two opposites which must be ordered to preserve any emphasis in importance of interest emerging from either opposite relative to the other. Opposition as a uniformly ordered concept displays a palpable sameness of function establishing it as a bedrock organizational instrument for millennia of philosophical (and, indeed, non-philosophical) thought. But as such, opposition must function structurally with unvarying stability; if it does not, then as noted earlier any consequence deconstruction might infer from a given instance of opposition cannot be asserted as problematic since this apparent difficulty derives from an intended structure lacking sufficient weight and integrity to remain standing long enough to engender such elements of thoughtful and critical response.

Deconstruction assumes that opposition does indeed exhibit this kind of structural regularity and stability. The uniform approach deconstruction takes to opposition renders this conceptual configuration to be a gambit of singular penetration, a locus of especially fertile interpretive possibilities. Indeed, the advocate of deconstruction may appeal to substantive and decidedly variegated results generated by its application to instances of opposition—e.g., Derrida’s discoveries as described in Of Grammatology of realms of latent significance in Rousseau’s texts. One might object, however, that commensurately “jumbled” results can be achieved in assessing contexts defined by opposition without resorting to deconstruction in order to achieve these results. But caution is necessary in pursuing these quests.

Concepts readily deployed along a span of opposition often serve as proximate source of one of the more common logical mistakes. Almost any comprehensive logic textbook will discuss informal fallacies bearing such names as “black and white thinking” with the implication that a careful student of phenomena will appreciate that reality as such, i.e., the complete continuum underlying conceptual end points characterized formally as “black” and “white,” contains much that is “grey,” existing between the extremes set by this kind of starkly drawn opposition. Assume that one of deconstruction’s cardinal strategies is to reverse the privileged opposite and then to reinvestigate issues governed by this reformulated instance of opposition. It is not clear whether a thorough reexamination of a given instance of opposition would not, at some point in the survey of what the pair of opposed concepts had been taken to mean and what had been inferred from that pair in its original and sustained deployment, have discovered the same kind of reoriented perspective on the phenomenon (or phenomena) under scrutiny. In sum, if deconstruction is replaced by an elementary course in informal logical fallacies, there is no reason to believe that the same analytically directed results will not accrue.

This suggested approach to the potentially problematic construal of opposition considers the conceptual structure of opposition strictly in terms of individual instances which may but need not assume problematic proportions; it does not propose to construe opposition as such, wherever pairs of concepts may appear as so related throughout the history of metaphysics, as a monolithic notional block which guarantees distortion
of its elements regardless what those elements might be. A Wittgensteinian motto drawn from standard practice in *Philosophical Investigations* may be appropriate here: the strategy embodied in the above approach adopts an attitude of “Look and see” just what exactly has been embedded in each of the opposed elements taken individually and with respect to one another within the deployment of the relation of opposition. Even if upon investigation it should happen that one opposite dominates its counterpart, it would appear premature to assume that the fact of domination as such automatically invalidates this priority; again, look and see why the dominance has been the case, then proceed with pertinent implications and revisions as required.

Proponents of deconstruction will respond that its treatment of opposition is considerably more vigorous and expansive than that provided by the rudimentary guidelines presented in elementary logic and its recognition of the tendency for opposition to generate informal fallacies. Thus the exploration of a reversed direction of dominance is only one of and indeed not the most radical option available to a deconstructive treatment of opposition. Derrida is clear when he contends that the ultimate goal of deconstruction with respect to an individual instance of opposition—if not to the employment of opposition in general regardless of the content of the opposed elements—is to reject the range of reality covered by the scope of the opposites taken as a comprehensive unity and to replace that range with a completely new and apparently innovative identification and description of “what is there.” Thus the very notion of opposition itself is to be deconstructed, then displaced entirely; the aim is not merely to engender a revision limited to reversing the direction of dominance displayed by the opposed elements as originally formulated.

If, however, deconstruction’s objective is to recast the matter of concern completely outside the scope of opposition, then the feasibility of this speculative gambit depends on negation, complementary classes, and articulation of totality with respect to negation and class diversification. The deconstructionist faces an approximate overhaul of another series of fundamental metaphysical considerations especially as these components play into the restated scope of philosophical relevance once a creative resolution of the original skewed oppositional setting has been secured.

A traditionalist in this area of philosophical methodology and analysis might respond variously to this more commanding statement of purpose: first, whether the dominant opposite remains in control throughout some segment of the history of metaphysics is an empirical matter, that is, the continued dominance depends on the

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109 Aristotle details various different senses of opposition in Chapter 10 of Book V, the “Philosophical Lexicon” of the *Metaphysics*, 1018a 20-25. For examples of Derrida’s concerted interest in opposites, see *SP*, 134, 148-9; *MP*, 63, 1512, 325, 329-30; *WD*, 229, 244, 282-3; *P*, 41, 90; *LI*, 34, 67, 68-9, 93; Derrida 1992, 51. For discussion of the centrality of opposition for Derrida, see Harvey 113-4, 116; Stocker, 43-4; Rorty 1989.
career of the instance of opposition through the passage of time and circumstance. Furthermore, if deconstruction could re-examine the relation of opposition with respect to a given instance of dominance, there is no reason to believe that only deconstruction has the means to achieve this interpretive approach. Even if the deconstructionist insisted on excising the given instance of opposition as a prelude to replacing its scope with a revamped account of the pertinent matter covered by that instance, it still seems open to an independent investigator to secure the same results without embracing any of the occasionally arcane strategies embodied by canonic deconstruction. After all, if the referential features in Derrida’s notion of protowriting do not exist as intended by that formulation, then opposition as such, a deployment of entities as reflected in a certain turn of language, becomes at most a purely theoretical arrangement of concepts with respect to their objects. So construed, opposition exists relative to epistemological and linguistically-oriented patterns of arrangement but it does not follow that the stipulated patterns have an equivalent hold on the extra-linguistic realities these patterns identify. “Opposition” is a powerful name in the annals of human cognition; the question is whether entities deemed “opposites” have been accurately and usefully categorized by the mere imposition of that name.

Opposition as a concept with its own identity is constituted by factors all of which unite in gathering and configuring diverse realities. This identity must remain the same in order to establish opposition as a fixed element capable of allowing its instances to become the subject of deconstructive analysis. But such structural configuration and constancy elevate opposition to a level of foundational significance so that it too, opposition as such, should also become subject to deconstruction. The advocate of deconstruction must surely recognize the range of complex and powerful assumptions that fund the notion of opposition and make them just as much an object of inquiry—formal abstractions underlying the framework contouring the specific content of instances of oppositions—as those instances themselves.

Furthermore, if the theoretical justification for the metaphysical foundation of deconstruction turns out to be unstable, what impetus justifies the factor of reversibility in the context of opposition? Why should deconstruction’s attempt to dislodge and invert the relationship of priority pertaining to members in a given instance of opposition be granted the requisite theoretical force to accomplish this end? In general, why should opposition as carrier of stipulated relations and, implicitly, of potential insight into its concealments be taken as a “given” in its appearances throughout the history of metaphysics? The question is not whether an opposite not currently privileged should become privileged after all, a frequently

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110 For an exposition and critical assessment of several attempts to codify or normalize the practices of deconstruction, see DFL, 161-8.
sought end in deconstructive application; rather, more fundamentally, it is whether opposition should be considered as privileged in terms of its status as one of the primary targets of deconstructive treatment.

### 8.7.4 Logic, Self-reference and the Rise of the Rhetorical

We demonstrated earlier in this chapter the logical incompatibility—pitched at an especially high theoretical level—permeating Derrida's thought, i.e., the apparent inconsistency emerging from conjoint criticism and espousal of the same metaphysical elements. However, this logical crux is a problem only if the student of Derrida cares to observe the canonic rules of correct critical thinking. If there is no concern for these rules, then one is free to play philosophically but to do so in a predominantly pejorative sense, that is, to create a variety of word constructs and present them to the philosophical world (and anyone outside that world who cares) as self-justifying ventures. These constructs when fashioned as exercises obeying few if any formal rules for rightness will succeed or fail with respect to staying power on the philosophical scene depending on degrees of popularity granted by audiences with similar interests and an equivalent lack of concern for what might appear to be mere logical niceties and groundless adherence to purely formal configurations. One may wonder, however, whether any of these hybrid creations will find a viable and justified place within the extra-deconstructive domain of philosophical inquiry.

The extent to which deconstruction depends on a metaphysical base itself subject to sustained and serious if not destructive criticisms is the extent to which deconstruction loses its relevance as a doctrine capable of being embraced and applied by the student of either (or both) philosophical or literary texts. In fact, the logical inconsistency resulting from the confrontation between being as presence and metaphysical considerations underlying the promulgation of deconstruction reduces the philosophical enterprise, to the extent that the practice of philosophy presupposes integration with the project of deconstruction, to species of rhetoric. The modes of language produced may engage certain audiences in terms of an emotive response or perhaps, with sufficient modification, even as a point of departure for additional reflection. But regardless how provocative this discourse may become, such language by itself will not be enjoined to satisfy seemingly necessary requirements for formal rightness or adequacy with regard to either pressing practical demands in the extra-philosophical domain of public life or to the concerns of that large sector of the philosophical community which does not subscribe to Derrida in particular or deconstruction in general. Philosophers (e.g., Plato and Aristotle) have analyzed rhetoric as an object worth serious and sustained discursive discussion. At least by tradition, however, rhetoric and philosophy in its many diverse modes differ in their ends and are not equivalent forms of language. Presumably this separation should be preserved to benefit the integrity and purposes of both endeavors.
8.7.5 The Primacy of Difference

Earlier in this chapter, we detailed a series of contexts in which a purely formal difference is necessary to engender the possibility of formulating pivotal features of Derrida’s program, especially regarding deconstruction as an ensemble of distinct yet correlated strategies. This section now enumerates implications derived from a denial of the priority of difference—a denial which, as seen on several occasions, Derrida makes explicit.

8.7.5.1 Difference and the Possibility of Coining “différance”

There is and must be a fundamental distinction—in a word, difference—between (a) the import of the technical term *différance* standing as one and only one element within deconstruction as an aggregation of functionally unified strategies and (b) difference insofar as it characterizes the distinction between any one word and any other word in a given natural language. For if such a distinction were lacking, then *différance* becomes indistinguishable from any other word in terms of its lack of necessarily precise referential capacity when it is used propositionally, a consequence required by the application of canonic deconstruction. *Différance* itself cannot fall under the conforming sway of *différance* because then its structural comprehensiveness, covering as it does the entire history of metaphysics, is threatened with compromise either in the present or at some point in the future. In short, *différance* would provide conditions for the deconstruction of “*différance*” itself. To put the point in scholastic terms—*différance* in act would eliminate even the possibility that *différance* could be potentially and coherently formulated. If “*différance*” exercises force and direction within Derrida’s thought, there must first be a difference between the possibility that *différance* could exist and all discourse other than *différance*, especially when the discourse in question constitutes the history of metaphysics.

8.7.5.2 Difference and the Possibility of Discerning “Being as Presence”

“Being as Presence” Difference is necessary in order to separate (a) being as presence in its role of governance with respect to the history of metaphysics and (b) the aggregated techniques comprising deconstruction. Without difference functioning in this context, being as presence could not have been formulated (as something different from the total history of metaphysics). Furthermore, “closure” of the history of metaphysics presupposes the difference between reading the history of metaphysics, circumscribed as it has been by being as presence, and recognizing this unified totality from an “other,” different philosophical perspective. Thus difference must obtain between the history of metaphysics insofar as closure pertains to that history as a uniform progression of texts and deconstruction as an interpretive approach
which is and must be in some measure outside that history in order for an observer to appreciate that it can be construed as, in point of philosophical fact, “closed.”

\section*{8.7.5.3 Difference and the Possibility of Formulating Deconstruction}

If deconstruction is self-referential, then Derrida’s presentation of that position in his own texts must be kept separate from the implications of that very position. However, this separation entails a series of assumptions which, individually and collectively, assume foundationalist status. The most fundamental of these assumptions is, again, that difference must precede différance.

This priority is necessary in order to establish the possibility that deconstruction as a diagnostic instrument for detecting metaphysical excesses can be posited in the first place and remain safeguarded from its own leveling activity, much less to be implemented as a uniform array of techniques aimed at potentially revelatory analysis of other texts, whether literary or philosophical. Anything substantive and deployed in a format intended to be other than the history of metaphysics must differ from (a) that history as one organically whole sequence of thought as well as (b) every single instance of thought within that sequence. If difference does possess this degree of independent and autonomous stability, difference will formally block the implications of deconstruction, assuming the relevant mechanisms were proposed to apply to its own bedrock conceptual elements. It follows then that the difference marking the distinction between deconstruction with its full complement of specialized vocabulary and everything written in the language of metaphysics which that position is intended to deconstruct cannot itself be an instance of différance. Without this difference firmly in place, deconstruction as such—a unified position with a limited number of elements as well as a determinate function—becomes just another moment in the history of metaphysics, just another extension of being as presence.

In sum, difference must be kept separate and also recognized as privileged, a “greatest kind,” in order to preserve the integrity of deconstruction as a set of potentially realizable theoretical gestures. Even if it were possible according to some configuration of deconstructive techniques to salvage and preserve every necessary general term in order to ground the possibility that deconstruction can be articulated as a theory, at least one of these terms, difference, must be embraced metaphysically in order to preserve distinctions within the formulation of deconstruction as an ensemble of words intended to realize ends marked by discernibly theoretical characteristics. Difference in these contexts becomes equivalent to sheer otherness in a sense stated by Aristotle and anticipated by Plato. It is ironic that a position concerning an especially basic element of logic and advanced by the principal progenitors of the grand sweep of western metaphysics must remain necessarily in place in order that a thinker, living at the culmination of this epoch and announcing its “closure,” should be capable of formulating the theoretical stances intended to make that very announcement!
8.7.5.4 Difference and the Possibility of Preserving Logical Rightness

The advocate of deconstruction must accept the privileged status of difference in order to formulate the principles of deconstruction. The question becomes whether deconstruction when applied according to its own canons will countenance endorsing the traditional, formal principles that establish and control logical rightness. Consider the principle of contradiction. As we have seen, Derrida once encapsulated formal logic as, “itself an interpretation.”\textsuperscript{111} If this evaluation is not ironic and is duly pressed, would it follow that the principle of contradiction is also “an interpretation” of consequences following the proffering of a set of propositions characterized formally in certain ways? For example, two positions derived from the history of metaphysics are, when juxtaposed, logically divergent to such an extent that the resulting consequences cannot be held in the mind as significant. The two positions are, in fact, contradictory. To assert that the proposed juxtaposition exists “outside” the domain of contradiction and all other logical principles is a doctrinal gambit which cannot succeed. This gesture of defense only locates the conjunction in a conceptual context impossible to assimilate or even to approach for purposes of thoughtful investigation, at least for anyone aware of the relevant structural feature of formal logic—from a contradiction anything follows.\textsuperscript{112}

If, however, the application of deconstruction and the regulative function of contradiction are indeed compatible with one another, it will be necessary in order to preserve the efficacy of the principle of contradiction to endorse the unique status of its components when embodied in this principle. Thus all formal elements constituting the principle of contradiction must remain intact as purely formal elements existing independently of the sway of différance and its effects on metaphysical notions. The advocate of deconstruction must both presuppose and impose an application of difference which must remain the same as itself and which also cannot be affected by any investigative sortie deconstruction might make in its direction. Deconstruction must therefore endorse difference as a foundational and constant element inherent in the formulation of the principle of contradiction—an instance of precisely the kind of element deconstruction intends to explode—because difference is necessary in this purely regulative context.

\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Ch1n19. For Christopher Norris 2012, 79, Derrida considers it “well beyond the pale of rational acceptability” to renounce the principle of contradiction. Norris frequently emphasizes Derrida’s dependence on classical logic in order to enable deconstruction to arrive at legitimate results—Norris 2012, 83, 128, 131, 132, 138, 142-3, 147, 148. If this dependency is as intimate as Norris claims, then the necessity to deconstruct the formal principles which underlie the mechanics of classical logic becomes even more vital. Norris does not consider possible repercussions insofar as his firm endorsement of contradiction and related concepts and axioms of classical logic pertains to the practice of deconstructive analysis of general terms.

\textsuperscript{112} For discussion, including the proof regarding logically necessary implications from asserting or allowing a contradiction, see DFL 246-9n6.
The problem for deconstruction is determining how to distinguish between the formal realities underlying the possibility of formulating the theoretical gestures comprising deconstruction insofar as they derive from the history of metaphysics, from which it would follow that these realities are permeated by being as presence and insofar as they, functioning as formal necessities with respect to the preservation of formal logic and its regulatory functions, are themselves impervious to deconstructive analysis. In fact, if certain “formal” realities command this kind of existence when they animate concepts and principles of logic, it requires an argument—not merely a simple denial—to show that they cannot also extend this independence into substantive metaphysical dimensions and patterns.

In view of the above contexts and their associated implications, we must grant that difference functions as a primitive, a greatest kind. In this respect, difference must be more fundamental than *différance* as a necessary condition for preserving all the distinctions itemized above. Derrida’s subsumption of difference under *différance* contributes to the weakening of difference regarding its necessity in preserving deconstruction as well as *différance* itself from self-referential effects—that is, inherent dislocation and, ultimately, complete disintegration.

### 8.8 Deconstruction and “Making a Difference”

Early in Part II of *Process and Reality*, Alfred North Whitehead refers to the crucial importance of the “endeavor to interpret experience in accordance with the overpowering deliverance of common sense....”\(^\text{113}\) Just prior to this claim, Whitehead had mentioned almost as if it were self-evident the difficulty modern philosophy faced and faces of “describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal,” since these traditional instances of opposed pairs do “violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes....”\(^\text{114}\) The rejection of such seemingly fundamental oppositions (many others fall away as well for Whitehead) situates Whitehead’s process philosophy side by side with deconstruction in not only questioning the legitimacy of these opposed approaches to understanding reality, regardless how ingrained they may seem to be in the philosophical mind, but forthrightly replacing them with alternatives.

Common sense says that we live in the moment. Derrida often inveighs against appeals both to “common sense” and to the “moment” but at this juncture of the essay,

\(^{113}\) Whitehead, 50. Derrida frequently dismisses the philosophical relevance of “common sense” and “ordinary life.” See, e.g., WD, 307n3; LI, 91; Derrida 1992, 42. (But cf. Ch10n134 for a contrasting view from Christopher Norris).

\(^{114}\) Whitehead, 49.
I submit that we read and internalize Whitehead’s guidance. Thus, the interaction of this agent with this object and this person at this instant at this place and at this time collectively embody an “overpowering” set of data. Our experience is continually characterized—or “delivered” in Whitehead’s terminology—through the intersection of these multiple phases of reality. Of course, the moment does not happen by itself, a purely temporal snapshot. Moments occur within complex metaphysical frameworks and, as Whitehead so spiritedly observed, the immediacy of our lives as lived—that is to say, our lives!—transpires in such settings.

Derrida too lived in the moment and vividly displayed this mode of temporal existentiality through some of his most passionate theoretical writing. The moment in question involved a particularly sharp critical reaction by a particular contemporary philosopher of note to a particular position, one of pivotal importance in Derrida’s canon of principles. Derrida reacted in a certain way to this criticism and his “actions,” in writing, received extensive justification in order to deliver to the readers of this writing a firm and fixed grasp of Derrida’s “purposes.” Derrida had had “hopes” that fellow professional seekers of wisdom would have greeted these purposes with greater “sympathies.” But at least in this one instance, Derrida’s audience was not enthralled by what he had written. The reader will have observed that all the quoted words earlier in this paragraph are from Whitehead’s perceptive list of basic human experiences; all find exemplification in the texts from Derrida to be considered in Chapter 9.

This appeal to the relevance and power of the moment will be situated in Chapter 9 within a broader context of Derridean proportion. As we saw in Chapter 6, Derrida challenged the history of western metaphysics with a densely developed concept, what he referred to as “trace.” We offered in that chapter an introductory account of the scope of trace deployed against the backdrop of the more familiar (and, presumably, more riddled with the effects of being as presence) notion of negation. In order to extend the earlier account, we will add in the next chapter the breadth inherent in the concept of possibility, in particular the latent possibilities in Derrida’s notion of trace. This line of inquiry will demonstrate that other considerations must also come into “play”—a term functioning partially in Derrida’s quasi-technical usage and partly according to its customary idiomatic sense—in order to establish the possibility that Derrida’s vigorous response to the challenges of the moment are not inconsistent with his, Derrida’s, canonic versions of the conceptual foundations of deconstruction. For example, is there a way to address the questionable status of particularity from within Derrida’s own texts, especially with regard to the fact that those texts espouse the gestures of deconstruction? This question becomes relevant if not crucial given the demands of the moment. If a response to a reaction occurs in the moment, it is a particular agent who experiences that reaction; furthermore, what has provoked that reaction is also circumscribed within a set of particulars designated with decided metaphysical focus and contour. Without a vibrant sense of richly articulated particularity, the moment is merely an undifferentiated flash, or at best a flutter of evanescence.
The ultimate wedge concept Derrida exploited while he lived in a philosophical moment of high drama, a moment aimed at restoring the credibility of his position, is difference. Not “difference” as a derivative of différance but difference as underlying an approach to a barrage of criticisms which for Derrida were blatantly unjust. In a context contoured by often virulent dispute, we must appreciate the fundamental and seemingly “dry” dimension of difference in Derrida’s writing. Although individuals will idiomatically say (in English) that they strive to “make a difference” in life, considering difference from the perspective of fundamental metaphysical considerations allows us to realize that we do not “make” a difference at all, nor do we locate difference under something else (i.e., différance) as a phase in a program of thought intended to achieve a speculative goal. Rather we, with Plato, acknowledge difference as a “greatest kind,” a formal element necessary as a precondition separating the rush of reality into singualrs and plurals, and ultimately for establishing at least a semblance of order in discourse about what so exists.

Is there room in Derrida for such recognition? Chapter 9 addresses and answers this question—in a word, yes. The discussion therein will embrace provocative and fertile claims and positions drawn from Derrida’s work on being as presence as well as deconstruction understood as a unified series of techniques for reading texts.