MĀDHYAMIKA DIALECTICS AND DECONSTRUCTION

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Ph.D. dissertation entitled Madhyamika Dialectics and Deconstruction, being submitted by Mr. **Muraly.C.D.,** is the result of a bonafide research work carried out by him in this Department under my supervision and that no part thereof has been submitted for a degree in any other University.

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Declaration

I, **Muraly.C.D.**, hereby declare that this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an attempt to analyse and compare 'deconstruction' with '*Madhyamika* dialectics', in terms of the broader postmodernist notion of culture. In the realm of intellectual exchange we experience now, as never before, a luxuriating hybridity of ideas and discursive practices which again are resistant to being squeezed into a duelist mould of 'the West and the rest'. This is a period of great cultural ferment which generated an extraordinary vortex of intellectual strife gyrating round a set of ideas and debates including movements such as positivism and psychoanalysis, issues such as social-Darwinism and eugenics, artistic and literary theories associated with symbolism and expressionism, and a variety of cults. A powerful and influential voice at the turn of the century was that of Nietzsche which undoubtedly helped to articulate the growing disillusionment with established Western ideals, not only with Christianity but with whole Enlightenment preoccupations with progress and scientific rationalism, and to motivate the urge to explore new values and world views. In this broad context it is possible to see Buddhism as one of many interacting responses to the unsettling cultural forces that mark the beginning of this turbulent century, and have helped to rouse and amplify a range of contentious issues in a variety of fields.

The universalising aspirations of the Enlightenment period, which did so much to open the European mind to other philosophies, have given way to a fragmenting plurality and to the relativisation of world views; and

the duality of East and West has disintegrated under the combined force of cultural criticism and social transformation. The term pluralism designates the fragmentation of hitherto unified traditions and of the coherent beliefs and values that have derived from them. Its sources are manifold, and include social diversification and disintegration, the rise of political consciousness among hitherto marginalized groups, and philosophical scepticism about the universality of knowledge and values. The globalisation of culture has had the effect of shaping new forms of world interdependence which are not necessarily or uniformly Eurocentric, but which are shaped out of multiple overlapping identities. The present world situation is urgent enough to demand, not merely the silencing of old oppressive voices, nor even just the advocacy of a tolerant plurality of new ones, of vital importance though these are. What is needed in the service of achieving greater mutual understanding between people is, not even the subversion of Eurocentric narratives, but the construction of grander narratives beyond Eurocentric perspectives.

The opening chapter of the present work provides a broad overview of certain divergences in contemporary philosophy. It raises important issues about the social processes in which our experience and emotional development are structured. The basic issue to be addressed in this chapter include the kinds of interconnections between personal meanings and the contemporary social world. In exploring these issues, this chapter ranges widely across core premises of contemporary culture and social criticism. This chapter examines the agitated spirit that became apparent at the turn

of the century which broke out in Europe, a veritable cultural epidemic in which nobody knew exactly what was on the way; nobody was able to say whether it was to be a new art, a new man, a new morality, or perhaps a reshuffling of society. The chapter, further, traces current debates about modernity and postmodernism, examining their social and cultural ramifications for identity. The very speed of progress, the rapid transformation from traditional to modern social and economic formations, the growth of science inspired materialist philosophies, and the ever-slackening hold of ancient religious beliefs and rituals, all of which have combined to breed a mood of discontentment in the midst of comforts and promises of Western civilisation, and to encourage a search for more satisfying and meaningful alternatives.

Second chapter is an expository study of *Madhyamika* philosophy. The great sage Nagarjuna has something to say to an age when the old certainties of both the East and the West, are being busily deconstructed. In this chapter an attempt is made to explore and ascertain the philosophical importance of Nagarjuna's dialectical method in the current problematic situation. He does not begin by taking any particular standpoint, but shows how the sceptical dialectic is used by the Buddha himself as well as by the *Madhyamikas* to develop a criticism of metaphysical realism. Nagarjuna has re-established the Buddhist doctrine and fully brought about its philosophical implications. The doctrine of voidness ('*sunyata*') was a logical extension of the no-soul doctrine. This key Buddhist concept does not imply a denial that the world exists or that

it is merely an illusion, but rather that there is nothing besides fleeting appearances, and contrary to Western expectations does not point to nihilism but rather to liberating insights and a strategy of mental cure and spiritual growth. It has proved to be an alluring concept to a number of contemporary thinkers in the West, and is being deployed in various ways to question prevailing categories and to open up new horizons.

Chapter three is an expository study of deconstruction and its strategies. Here the attempt is made to place deconstruction as a form of philosophical criticism directed against the metaphysical or rhetorical structure of a text or a discourse, or even a theory. The major concern of deconstruction was to read philosophy rhetorically and literature philosophically. It carries three implications. First, deconstruction was considered to be a practice of reading with an aim to show that the philosophical *telos* of truth, reason or logic defined itself against the very writing in which this *telos* was expressed; the *telos* was undermined by the very rhetorical procedures of the writing which sustained it. Second, (following this invitation to treat philosophical discourse as literature) works of literature were themselves to be read in terms of their displacement of the values which philosophy promised, but necessarily derived by refusing to think the foundations of its discourse. That is, literature could be read most fruitfully as a superior kind of philosophising. Third, Derrida's work was itself located within a tradition of thinking which included the major concerns of post-Kantian aesthetics, Nietzsche's destruction of Platonism and the writings of Paul de Man.

And it seems that Derrida's response to the modern paradigm of knowledge is to propose a radical decentering of the subject. The force of Derrida's move from man to language and from Being to writing comes from his deconstruction of the subject, of the self-presence of the conscious subject. It emerges out of his encounter with the Husserl. Derrida contents that language acquires methodological importance in reflection upon human facticity in the same movement that puts the identity of this language in crisis. The paradox places language on the horizon of our age, at what Derrida calls the 'closure' of metaphysics.

Our final chapter is a comparative study. Here a humble attempt is made to compare the philosophical insights of Nagarjuna and Derrida. The hope which leads to this attempt is that several important questions and puzzles discussed in our tradition do seem to coincide to a considerable amount with the current philosophical discourses in the West. The way in which Nagarjuna focuses on the ambiguities and mystification inherent in language and used these in order to substantiate a broad critical perspective is something more than a passing resemblance with Derrida's deconstruction. And the conclusion explores the possibilities of a new culture that would enable us to make a global community.

POST-ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE

CHAPTER I

POST-ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE

Today scholars and intellectuals throughout the world are rethinking the meaning of past verities and developing new theoretical approaches. In response to the changing social, political, philosophical and economic dimensions of the global community, most theorists claim that contemporary societies show a new or heightened degree of fragmentation, pluralism and individualism. Political, economic and cultural life is now strongly influenced by developments at the global level. Mass political parties give way to the 'new social movements' based on gender, race, locality and sex. The 'collective identities' of class and shared work experiences dissolve into more pluralized and privatised forms of identity. 'Think globally', 'act locally', the slogan of the 1960 s, applies to a good number of the new social movements.

In an attempt to begin from where we are, we will mark our point of insertion into the philosophy of our time by evoking theme of the exhaustion or closure of metaphysics. It presupposes some similarity of structure by which the philosophical gestures of diverse thinkers can be recognized as moments in the history of metaphysics. We are at a moment when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

We are in the midst of a great, confusing, stressful and enormously promising historical transition, and it has to do with a change not so much in what we believe as in how we believe. Revolutions of belief are even more elusive, because they take place within human minds. We are changing headlong into a new era: a time of rethinking and rebuilding in which beliefs about belief are shaken as never before, a time in which issues once left to the philosophers - such as the nature of truth - become matters of vital everyday importance to ordinary people.

Postmodernism can be viewed as a crisis within philosophy and the human sciences reflecting a loss of faith in the entire project of modernity and its belief in progress, reason and the power of human consciousness. This is a major transition in human history, a time of rebuilding all the foundations of civilisation, and the world is going to be occupied with it for a long time to come. There exists no standard method for measuring and comparing knowledge within different language games and paradigms. A postmodern world is characterised by a continual change of perspectives, with no underlying common frame of reference but rather a multiplicity of changing horizons.

Postmodernists are loath to define, partly for the reason that it is difficult to avoid giving a modern definition of the postmodern: in fact, virtually any definition of postmodernism will turn out to be modernist. Definitions engage with those very qualities of rationality and objectivity

that postmodernists are at pains to deny. We are living in a world, a world that does not know how to define itself by what it is, but only by what it has just-now ceased to be. 'Postmodern' does not designate a systematic theory or a comprehensive philosophy, but rather diverse diagnoses and interpretations of the current culture, a depiction of a multitude of interrelated phenomenon.

> Postmodern thought has involved an expansion of reason, it has gone beyond the cognitive and scientific domains to permeate those of ethics and aesthetics as well; it has analysed the nexus of power and knowledge, in particular the de individualising of power into anonymous structures.[1]

This is a time of incessant choosing. It is an era when no orthodoxy can be adopted without self consciousness and irony, because all traditions seem to have some validity. This is partly a consequence of what is called information explosion, the advent of organised knowledge, world communication and cybernetics. Through the eighties and nineties more and more people have become familiar with postmodernism – either by taking the high road through *academia*, where its ideas are endlessly pondered in the lecture halls; or by taking the low road through popular culture, where they are reflected in movies, music and fiction. Currently, postmodern though is entering into a new growth phase linked to the explosion of information and communication technologies, the global mass media economy of images, the ever increasing determination of

many men and women to reconstruct traditional ideas about sex and gender.

The advent of information technology assumes that symbolic meaning is disappearing, being replaced by a plethora of floating signifiers where the social is reduced to simulacra. It represents a world devoid of meaning in which there is little hope in the future, whereas for Lyotard the postmodern is the advent of a non-hegemonic political and intellectual strategy. Lyotard defines postmodernism as the rejection of the metanarratives of modernism, or "as incredulity toward metanaratives".[2] A metanarrative is a story of mythic propositions, a story big enough and meaningful enough to pull together philosophy, research, politics and art together and relate them to one another, and above all to give them a unifying sense of direction. He has sited as examples the Christian religious story of God's will being worked out on earth, the Marxist political story of class conflict and revolution, and the Enlightenment's intellectual story of rational progress. Lyotard's view of metanarratives is that they impose restrictive boundaries on an otherwise pluralist, diverse cultural formation: they serve to delimit discourses into recognised units and to exclude or marginalyse voices which do not fit into the dominant groups. What interests him in scientific knowledge, for example, is not the truths or otherwise which science lays claim to, but the processes by which such truths have been validated and the cultural position which science has come to occupy since the Enlightenment.

The roots of modernism may be traced to as far back as the time of Socrates and Plato, who were engaged in just such a project of searching for essential truths, deeper and more durable than those embodied in the myths of their tribal gods. Modernism can be defined as the science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse making an explicit appeal to some grant narrative.

The modern era which we have always equated with all that is new and progressive, has reached the age of retirement. If there is a persistent world view it is one we should have to call apocalyptic; the modernism of the Nineties has a recognisable touch of this, if decadence, hope of renovation, the sense of transition, the sense of an ending or the trembling of the veil, are accepted as its signs. At such times there is a notable urgency in the proclamation of a break with the immediate past, a stimulating sense of crisis, of an historical license for the new. Modernism in its fascination with the new put it on the side of progress, and so connected it up with one of the central ideas of modernity. Modernity which had been defined as a 'break with tradition', itself became a tradition, the tradition of the new. Modernity, according to Baudrillard, bit by bit loses all the substantial value of progress which underlie it at the beginning, in order to become an aesthetic of change for change's sake. At the limit, it merges purely and simply with fashion, which is at the same time the end / aim of modernity.

People in modern civilisation have had a concept of universality – based on the hope / fear that some genius, messiah or a tyrant would figure out how to get everybody on the same page – but no experience of it. It becomes harder and harder to live out a life within the pre-modern condition of an undisturbed traditional society or even within the modern condition of a strong and well-organised belief system. We are living, have been living for the last two decades – and have become actually conscious of the fact since nineteen fifties – through the death throes of modernism and the birth pangs of postmodernism.

As a social and cultural condition described by different theoreticians, postmodernity covers a wide range of phenomena: an architectural critique of modernism and a revalorization of pastiche; a fascination in literary circles for what is perceived as popular kitsch in TV soap operas, Hollywood B films or literary forms like the romance or the murder mystery: literary criticism that emphasises this autonomy of texts in relation to the social reality or the human experience which lies behind the texts; a characterisation of society as post-industrial or post-capitalist, where consumption, electronic technology and representation of reality by the media dominates; the idea that modern society does not guarantee the elimination of material scarcity, social conflicts or ecological disasters and the achievement of democracy; or the critique of the modern ideology that assumes the universality of the individual ego, reason and scientific language.

One of the main themes of postmodern thought is that language is deeply involved in the social construction of reality. It focuses on heterogeneous language games, on the non-commensurable, on the instabilities the breaks and the conflicts. A postmodern individual is a member of many communities and networks, a participant in many discourses, an audience to messages from everybody and everywhere - messages that present conflicting ideals and norms and images of the world. Both language and knowledge do not copy reality. Rather, language constitutes reality, each language constructing specific aspects of reality in its own way. Its focus an language implies a decentralisation of the subject. The self no longer uses language to express itself; rather the language speaks through the person. The individual self becomes a medium for the culture and its language. The unique self loses its prominence.

Postmodernism is not a doctrine or political movement but more an orientation or attitude towards the whole idea of critical inquiry and intellectual life. And it is characterised by its suspicion of grand narratives and totalizing concepts, its deconstruction of all interpretative significance as ideological closure, its debunking of the 'self-identical subject', its euphoric celebration of the particular, the fragmented the indeterminate, and the multidimensional. While modernity took as axiomatic the notion of progress through increasing scientific knowledge, postmodernity eschews such assumptions, focussing instead upon social

practice and the role of context in institutional life. Steiner Kvale observes:.

> Postmodern society consists less of totalities to be ruled by preconceived models than by decentralisation to heterogeneous local contexts characterised by flexibility and change.... There is a critique of the modernist search for foundational forms and belief in a linear progress through more knowledge.[3]

Whereas modernism tried to elevate man into God's place, postmodern theory seeks to destroy or deconstruct the very place and attributes of God. In his work on Nietzsche, Heidegger traces the beginning of the discourse of postmodern thought in Nietesche's transvaluation: " With the downfall of the highest values also comes the elimination of the 'above' and the 'high' and the 'beyond', the former place in which values could be posited"[4]. Drawing on the in sights of Nictrsche, whose extra ordinary foresight positioned him almost a century ahead of his time, the discourse of postmodern thinking begins with a consciousness of deepening crisis, a consciousness that the nihilism which Nietzsche saw, in signs and symptoms, is now unmistakable, too pervasive to be ignored or interpreted away.

Postmodernism is basically a 'mood'. It exists in different disciplines - in philosophy, in architecture, in music, in literature, in politics and so on - in different moods. To answer the question what is

the relation of postmodernism to modernism ? we have to see what modernism is ? The modern world begins with the Renaissance. It is to the people of the Renaissance that we owe the beginnings of modern science and technology, an unprecedented expansion of trade and commerce, the glorious vision of humanism, and a mighty challenge to the medieval authority of faith, announced in the name of a self-validating rationality. Max Weber characterized cultural modernity as the separation of 'substantive reason' expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous regions: science, morality and art. The modern era has been a time of battles between religions, between religions and science, between political ideologies. And although each of these had its own inventory of essential truths, none has been able to gain universal agreement that those truths were all that true. Peter Berger, in his *Facing up to Modernity,* suggests five phenomenon characteristic of modernity:

(a)   abstraction

(b)   futurity

(c)   individualism

(d)   liberation

(e)   secularisation .

Modernity is certainly a consequence of that intellectual-spiritual ferment which is sometimes referred to as the European Enlightenment. The basic idea of the enlightenment was the abandoning of socially held irrational dogmas and beliefs, in order to pursue that which was rational, universal and

readily demonstrable. The overthrow of the authority of tradition and the enthronement of critical rationality in its place were perhaps the central movements in this process. Kant says :

> Enlightenment is the coming out of man from his self imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to serve one's own understanding without direction from another. This immaturity is self-imposed. Reason languishes, not because it lacks understanding; what it lacks is resolution and courage; it is unwilling to serve itself without an external authority. 'Wise up! Wake up! Be bold! Take courage to serve your own understanding.'[5]

The French Revolution of 1789 was a high point in the spread of this intellectual-spiritual as well as political-economic-social ferment in Western society. The process lasted from mid-eighteenth to mid nineteenth century, and is still spreading geographically, encompassing all cultures which adopt the urban – technological – industrial system, with its capitalist mode of production, Calvinist-individualist 'value – system', culture, medicine, communication system, educational system and political-economic institutions, all based on human sovereignty and autonomy.

Postmodernism goes beyond a Kantian split of modern culture into science, morality and art and involves a rehabilitation of the ethical and aesthetic domains. The positivist's split of facts and values is no longer axiomatic: science is a value constituted and value constituting enterprise.

Art is not merely an aesthetic experience, but a way of knowing the world. The postmodern art is characterised by *pastiche* and *collage*. In contrast to the modern architecture, tradition is not rejected; nor is it worshipped as in the new classicism. Elements from other epochs are selected and put together in an often ironical recycling of what is usable as decorum. Postmodern thought focuses on the surface, with a refined sensibility to what appears, a differentiation of what is perceived. It is a willingness to accept things as they are on the surface rather than to search for deeper meanings.

Postmodernism is primarily a response to cultural modernism. Its eclecticism is an acceptance of tradition, or at least of traditions rather than, as with modernism, a defiant rejection of it. Instead of the 'traditions of the new', there is 'the combination of many traditions', a striking synthesis of traditions. Numerous sets of oppositions have been used to characterise the difference between modernity and postmodernity. Among the must common are the following:

Modernity	Postmodernity
1. Belief in emancipation and progress through more knowledge and scientific progress	Decentralised local contexts characterised by flexibility and change.
2. Reality independent of observer	Language as constituting the structures of a perspectival social reality.

3. Objectivity / subjectivity Hyperreality of self-referential signs
   distinction

4. Universal social laws and the Interaction of local networks
   individual self

Advocates of postmodernism have openly attacked modernism as a hegemonic discourse, a structure of control and domination in which discipline was instated by way of rationality itself. 'Enlightenment is totalitarian', declared both Adorno and Horkheimer; with the implication that Nazi totalitarianism was a product of Enlightenment liberalism, whose central thrust is to establish human domination over everything, and to eliminate that which resists such domination. Adorno's *Against Epistemology* was an even more violent attack on the claim of scientific rationality to be resting on several *epistemic* foundations. He raised the question about the basic flow in all epistemology; no epistemology can itself be established by that epistemology. Nietzsche in the last century had decried the Enlightenment as well as its emaciating and freedom smothering rationality, scientism and historicism. Jurgen Habermas, in his widely discussed recent book, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pictures Nietzsche as a postenlightenment thinker:

> Nietzsche's thought represents the entry into postmodernity;
> Nietzsche renounces a renewed revision of the concept of reason
> and bids farewell to the dialectic of enlightenment... this 'farewell'
> to the hopes of the Enlightenment is seen as the decisive European

'turning point' that sets the direction for the divergent 'postmodernist' paths of Georges Bataille, Jaeques Lacan, and Michel Foucault on the one hand and Heidegger and Derrida on the other.[6]

The European dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment, according to Habermas, comes down to the failed attempt of Hegel and the post-Hegelians at a 'dialectical' reformulation and completion of such hopes, and Nietzschean inauguration of 'irrationalism' and there with a complete rejection of such hopes. The great dualities or oppositions of modern social and intellectual life, between reason and unreason, good and evil, normal and insane, free and unfree, are all arbitrarily drawn, not internally or objectively defensible, and so that any exercise of social power based on appeal to be legitimacy of such distinctions is groundless.

Nietzsche, in his *Twilight of the Idols* traces the decline of the instincts and collective goallessness as the achievement of freedom and this appears to the characteristic of modern mass society. He writes :

The entire West has lost those instincts out of which institutions grow . out of which the future grows : perhaps nothing goes so much against the grain of its 'modern spirit' as this. One lives for today, one lives very fast – one lives very irresponsibly : it is precisely this which one calls 'freedom'.[7]

It was Nietzsche who for the first time subjected the entire discourse of human knowledge to a radical questioning that placed tropes at its centre and his re-appropriation of metaphor was in fact a part of his attempt to deconstruct the prevailing metaphysics. The whole of truth, for him, including philosophy and science is composed of metaphors. Behind the desire for knowledge he could see nothing but a veiled desire for power. In language, Nietzsche found "a separate world beside the other world", and a "confidence with which man really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world"[8]. For him, the mastery of the word is not the same as the mastery of the world. The philosphers made themselves believe that they were actually manipulating reality whereas they were merely manipulating words. And they felt that with words they were expressing supreme knowledge of things, even sciences were not exempt from this. He was responsive to the presence of metaphors in the discourse of physical sciences. The very concept of objective knowledge is for from the ideal we have set up for it. However, Nietzsche regarded science as 'the most fruitful possible humanisation of things'. Derrida himself feels that we should look in Nietzsche for a systematic mistrust of metaphysics as a whole, and also for the view that philosophical discourses are formal, figurative and rhetorical, something that has to be deciphered.

Nietzsche stresses the continuity between Enlightenment thought and the prior tradition, but he often notes that modernity is mostly

distinctive in its smug confidence, its ambition to complete the ancient "will to truth" and the identification of the "good in itself". It is this modern insistence on a successful resolution of Platonic and Christian "incompleteness" that makes the failure of such an attempt more prominent and more significant. Modernity's dream of Enlightenment is so extreme, and fails so utterly, that it helps to reveal this dreamlike illusion in all post-Platonic thought, and it allows us a distinct opportunity to understand that failure. David Harvey observes that it was a project aimed at getting all the world's diverse people to see the world in the same rational way . He writes:

> The thinkers of the Enlightenment 'took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends'. The Enlightenment and the twentieth century scientific rationalism that grew out of it - was not only a philosophical effort, then, but an ideology of progress: a belief in "linear progress, absolute truths, and rational planning of ideal social orders".[9]

Understanding of the world is thus a product not of the world as it is, but of textual history (and) if our language conventions are, in turn, dependent on social processes, and these processes carry with them various ideological or value biases, then all scientific writing and all our attempts at objectivity are essentially value - saturated products of social agreement.[10]

At the present time, discourse analysis does not directly contribute to theoretical issues concerning the relationship between language and thinking. Although the concern with rhetoric and argumentation highlights the cultural basis for expressions of rationality in our thinking, the question of thinking itself is largely side-stepped. Outside of psychology the study of language is influenced as much by the language-dominant view expressed by Wittgenstein and the social constructionists as by the cognitive account. It was understandable that psychology as the scientific study of mental life and behaviour favoured the Chomskian individualistic interpretation out of which psycholinguistics emerged. Linguistic sociology, social anthropology and critical theory contributed to, and were influenced by, continuing developments in language . It seems the question of thinking is now replaced by the problematics of text, discourse and a deconstruction of those criteria and social practices which must be in place before you can claim that any 'thinking' or cognitive life exists within an individual. A social constructionist will argue that the structure of language exists 'out there' in the collective conscious of the culture, expressed in the myriad of social practices and

institutions which underpin language as social action. In fact, the whole notion of syntactic structure is a particular language game within a specific cultural context; one of a number of Western cultural ideas amenable to deconstruction.

The rationality of the Enlightenment has, in practice, furnished a pretext for all kinds of domination and exploitation: the rule of the commodity over humanity, the hegemony of mankind over the natural world, the intellectual triumph of instrumental science and empiricist philosophy, the assumed superiority of the present over the past, and the rule of the European possessors of reason over the 'primitive' inhabitants of the 'undeveloped' world. An uneasy sense that enlightened reason is some how complicit with the primitive superstition against which it battles is expressed in numerous literary texts of early twentieth century.

It could be argued that what is often designated as postmodernism is an aspect of the fragmentation of the global system. Here there is a link between the decentralization of capital accumulation, the decline of Western hegemony, the decline of modernism as a strategic identity of self development, and the emergence of multivocality, multiculturalism and of indigenous, Fourth-World movements. There is an interesting parallel among different sets of fragmentations: the fragmentation of knowledge into separate relative fields the disintegration of the evolutionary scheme of social types into a plethora of different cultures which have been interpreted as incommensurable with respect to one

another, the real ethnification of the nation state, both as a result of regionalisation and immigration, the apparent rise of so called narcissistic disorders that might be indicative of the dissolution of individual ego structures. The individual is also subject to changes in conditions of existence which in their turn alter practices of identification and meaning construal.

Foster makes a distinction between the postmodernity of resistance, which seeks to criticise modernity and existing social and cultural conditions, and the postmodernity which celebrates the new social order. Lyotard (belongs to the first group) has questioned the privileged position of scientific rationalism as the dominant form of knowledge in modernity. For him, scientific language is primarily a strategy of power for a conventional division of 'reality' in various fields of specialisation and the negation of other forms of knowledge that exist in society. He rejects the existence of universals and, more specifically, the universal validity of the discourse of Western reason. Postmodernity is the acceptance of cultural differentiation based on the existence of different types of knowledge. The postmodern condition, according to Jameson, is characterised by the 'death' of the autonomous subject and the emergence of new moral ideals and free-floating emotions; the fragmentation of codes and discursive heterogeneity without a clear norm; a nostalgic perception of history which legitimizes pastiche as an aesthetic form; and a conception of reality as the reproduction of simulacra through the visual

power of computers and media which abolishes any sense of alternative collective projects for dominated groups.

Fredric Jameson purports to see postmodernism as the culture of a particular stage of capitalism ('late capitalism'). He says:

'Postmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself. 'Conventionally, and following the analyses of Marxists such as Mandel, Jameson lists features of late capitalism as the trans-national business enterprise, the new international division of labour, 'a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and stock exchanges', new forms of media interrelationship', computers and automation, and 'the flight of production to advanced Third World areas' (together with such social consequences as 'the emergence of yuppies' and 'gentrification on a now-global scale').[11]

Jameson's account of the new stage of capitalism suggests a radically new relationship between culture and society. Late capitalism operates in an environment in which what Bell called 'the game against nature' has been superseded by 'the game between persons'. Its cultural correlate, postmodernism, is according to Jameson 'what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It seems the culture can now hardly be regarded as 'the reflex and

concomitant' of society and the economic system. In the late capitalist stage, culture itself becomes the prime determinant of social, economic, political and even psychological reality. He argues that there has been 'a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realism, to the point at which everything in our social life - from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself - can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and 'yet untheorised sense'. Culture has become 'a product if in its own right'; the process of cultural consumption is no longer merely an adjunct but the very essence of capitalist functioning.

The term postmodernism has been used variability to refer to what are interpreted as major changes in the way the contemporary world can and ought to be represented. It is an umbrella term encompassing post-structuralism, deconstruction, semiosis and intertextuality. The term 'postmodernism' was first used in the sixties by literary critics such as Leslie Fiedler and Ihah Hassan. In the early and mid seventies the term gained a much wider currency, encompassing first architecture, dance, theatre, painting, film and music, and then contemporary culture and society as a whole. At some point in the late seventies, 'postmodernism' migrated to Europe via Paris and Frankfurt. Kristeva and Lyotard took it up in France, Habermas in Germany. Meanwhile, in America the critics had begun to discuss the interface of postmodernism with French post-structuralism, and with that peculiar American adaption, deconstruction.

During the early eighties the modernity / postmodernity constellation in social theory had become hotly contested.

In these debates on postmodernism, either it is said that it is continuous with modernism – in which case the whole debate is specious; or it is claimed that there is a radical rupture, a break with modernism- which is then evaluated in either positive or negative terms. But they may be grouped into four. One, those who see it as a rupture with modernism (Bataille, Foucault and Derrida) and who characterise it in terms of a decentered subjectivity, emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness. Two, those who decry postmodernism because it reinforces 'the logic of consumer capitalism (Jameson), or because it parodies the formal resolution of art and social life, 'while remorselessly emptying it of its political content (Eagleton). Three, those who see it as positive, and welcome it as a truimph of heterogeneity over consensus (Lyotard). And the fourth in which Habermas eschews literary Marxism even as he criticises postmodernists for overlooking political economy and thereby drifting unwittingly into the neo-conservative camp.

Jacques Derrida, widely acknowledged to be one of the most controversial philosophers of the twentieth century, has been acclaimed as a supremely original thinker in our time. It was his rejection of what he calls the 'logocentric' bias of Western philosophy which has generated the strategies of deconstruction. Permeating many disciplines outside academic philosophy, his ideas have gained wide currency in

fields such as literary theory, sociology, feminist studies, psychoanalysis and Linguistics. Derrida's critique of Husserl is a master-piece of analytical work in the philosophy of language. Although an appreciative reader of Husserl, Derrida strongly criticises him for insisting that signification in language is primarily linked to consciousness, intentionality and perception. Derrida's position is based on the belief that there are two radically different ways of understanding language which parallel Husserl's distinction between indication and expression. One can understand language as deriving its 'meaning' from some underlying semantic layer, such as experience, consciousness, or even the Platonic world of Forms. Or one can understand its meaning as self-constituted, brought about by the play of differences between terms, by their repetition, without reference to some field of sub-linguistic guarantees. The alternative to an expressivist or foundationalist account of language is one that treats meaning not as the basis of language but as an effect of language. And such a view of language is understood primarily as *writing*.

Twentieth century philosophy has been dominated by consideration about the nature of language. It is difficult to imagine what life would be like without language. Even if we could visualise such a state of affairs, our imaginations and thoughts would themselves depend upon the language we are brought up with. For most of us, we think in the language we learn as children, and in some curious way it could be said that our thoughts are not truly 'our own'. Language is a system of human

communication using words, written and spoken, and particular ways of combining them; any such system employed by a community, nation, etc. Here the term communication designates the transmission or exchange of information; making or maintaining of social contact, conveying or exchanging information; succeeding in evoking understanding. Within the humanities the study of language is interdependent with our cultural outlook.

In the humanities there are many areas where the study of language has a long tradition. Throughout history, different cultures have sought to understand the relationship between myth, ideas and language as cultural anthropology and psychoanalytic studies have demonstrated. Many key religious propositions have a pronounced reliance on beliefs about the divine nature of language. And of course, debate and controversy regarding the importance of language can be found in many contemporary fields within the humanities. And certain schools of philosophy propose that a philosophical critique of any kind, is first and foremost a critique of language. The studies in language have a significant bearing on cultural developments more generally, for example where academic debates and commentary over postmodernism, deconstruction and post-structuralism find expression in our everyday experience of language – attention to criteria underpinning the language of 'political correctness'.

In the history of Western philosophy, the philosophy of language - including a great deal of its metaphysics – has almost invariably been based on logic rather than rhetoric. In the last part of the nineteenth century and the early part of our own century have witnessed a flurry of activity on the nature and foundations of logic. In fact, there have been two distinct movements - a reinforcement of the philosophy of language based on logic, and the subsequent movement, the overthrow which Derrida speaks of as the closure of metaphysics. Just as the problem of reference is the one which presents the greatest challenge to the traditional logical conception of language, so the problem of logic is the greatest challenge to the conception of language that is found in Derrida. He has shattered the reign of epistemology over our conception of language and metaphysics.

Through a deconstruction of Husserl's distinction between expression and indication, between the 'spiritual' ideality and the 'bodily' reality of communication, Derrida shows that there is no pure internal sphere of self-consciousness and self-presence in which one expresses meaning to oneself without signs. Derrida's goal is to show that consciousness does not produce language, but rather that consciousness is produced by the structure, sign, and play of language ; therefore, there is no inner sphere that is completely internal, completely "ones own". Consciousness is always already invaded by alterity. He argues that the very process that allows for the distinction between the transcendental consciousness (in which expression occurs) and the empirical

consciousness (in which expression is always intertwined with indication), i.e. the process of idealisation, needs signs in order to be possible. And Derrida, in Speech and Phenomena, says:

> Since self consciousness appears only in its relation to an object, whose presence it can keep and repeat, it is never perfectly foreign or anterior to the possibility of language. Husserl no doubt did want to maintain as we shall see, an orginally silent, "pre-expressive" stratum of experience. But since the possibility of constituting ideal objects belongs to the essence of consciousness, and since these ideal objects are historical products, only appearing thanks to acts of creation or intending, the element of consciousness and the element of language will be more and more difficult to discern . Will not their indiscernibility introduce non presence and difference (mediation, signs referral back etc) in the heart of self-presence?.[12]

And further he points out that the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical consciousness does not in fact exist. The difference occurs only in language. In carrying out the critical task of deconstruction, Derrida shows how Husserl's whole theory of language is modernised by a still more fundamental problem - one that leads back to the phenomenological form of experience itself - the problem of time.

According to Derrida, Husserl will radicalise the necessary privilege of the *phone* which is implied by the whole history of metaphysics. By privileging the voice in expression and excluding writing and indicating from consciousness Husserl will necessarily confirm the classical metaphysics of presence. It is the voice which allows Husserl to constitute the second determination of presence, presence as a proximity to self in interiority.

Like Nietzsche and Heidegger, Derrida attacks the 'metaphysics of presence' that he claims has dominated Western philosophy from the time of the Greeks. Based on the logic of identity and non-contradiction, this 'logocentric' prejudice narrowly confines 'meaning' to an origin centred on presence, 'what is' rather than 'what is not'. Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good versus evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. Absence, truth vs. error, identity vs. difference, speech vs. writing, etc. These polar opposites do not stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Therefore, absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is a distortion of truth, etc. That is, the two terms are not simply opposed in their meanings, but are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term priority, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word. In its search for the answer to the question of Being Western philosophy has indeed always determined Being as presence.

In his critique of Husserl, Derrida used not only the Heideggerian view of metaphysics as the interpretation of Being as presence, but also the Saussurean account of the sign. Taking his cue from a more Saussuren view of language, Derrida privileges '*differance*', coining a neologism to suggest not only that which is different, but also that which deferred. Meaning only emerges in a field that has already excluded what is absent. The meaning of an element, according to Derrida, depends on its association with other elements. Ann Jefferson regards the Derridean concept of *differance* as a conflation of Jakobson's distinction between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. Derrida himself has noted that "to differ" is to temporalize which is also a spacing, is space's becoming temporal and times becoming spatial '*Differance*', according to Derrida, is neither a "word" nor a "concept", but the juncture of,

> the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of [neurone] facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the *ontic –* ontological difference in Heidegger.[13]

For Derrida, this realisation has radical consequences. No longer can one rely on the essential stability of signs. A radical 'undecidability' surrounds all signification; there can be no absolute origin or site of meaning. His deconstruction of Saussure's theory of sign was considered

to be both a radical questioning of the human processes of signification and a severe rebuttal of philosophical axiomatic. Saussure had himself began this questioning with his final analysis of language as a differential system of values; Derrida removed the remaining philosophical nostalgia Saussure's project by deconstructing the desire for systematicity. Through his emphasis on *ecriture* Derrida both reinvented the relations and spaces between philosophy and literature and opened up a new field of inquiry into textual processes, these processes exceeding traditional distinctions between the real and the fictional, the historical and the imaginary.

Derrida criticises strongly against the phonocentric bias that privileges speech over writing in the Western philosophical tradition from Plato onwards. The term writing does not in principle involve any claim about the relative ranking of the spoken or written word. His championing of writing is an intervention that opposes itself not to speech but to speech considered to be privileged, as linked by a hot-line to meaning. Derrida argues that in speech there is still 'archi-writing', i.e. an essential difference between distinct (and absent) acoustic signifiers allowing for possible meaning. To announce that speech is a form of writing is simply to deprive it of this metaphysical status, and to assimilate it to the articulatory condition of all meaning, for which the term writing stands. Derrida shows that the scientificity of Saussure's choice of an object of study - which turns out to be 'spoken', languages - rests on his identification of the spoken sound with meaning (thought).

This phonocentrism can achieve the integrity if its object only by treating writing as merely an external, secondary, supplementary addition to the spoken word. In fact, Derrida observes, this exclusion of writing from linguistics is the product of an attempt to draw the boundaries of linguistics in such a way that it be a closed system.

Writing is seen as a danger to the purity of the system of speech. Derrida points out the extraordinary language of contamination, pathology, perversity associated with writing, in opposition to the natural purity of spoken language. This contradiction between writing as empty externality and writing as source of contamination is symptomatic. For Derrida, this ranking is based on the privilege of presence that Saussure as a representative of the logocentric tradition accords to the spoken word. The violence done to our linguistic reflexes by the apparently perverse inversions found in Derrida's discussion of the relation between speech and writing is strictly therapeutic. Its method of deconstruction shows the idea of the general strategy involved.

Most of Derrida's constructive as well as deconstructive essays contain some account of, or at least, a trace of an allusion to, an alternative theory of language, one which can only function as a substitute for the one he is dismantling for those who have managed to shake off the 'powerful desire' to which we have just alluded. Derrida approaches the problem of spatialisation and temporalisation in a more rigorous way. When we talk about the temporalisation and spatialisation

of meaning first we must be sure of what space and time, mean which in turn could be ascertained only after knowing what logos or meaning might be. Derrida observes that the opposition of meaning to its metaphorical signifier is sedimented by the entire history of philosophy.

The term 'trace' refers to writing and it is marked by *differance*. Most of Derrida's concepts, such as reserve, archi- writing, archi – trace, spacing, supplement, pharmakon, margin –mark – march, etc. can be substituted non-synonymously for one another according to contexts. For him, the movement of signification is possible only because of difference. Each element is related to some other element, and keeps within it the mark of past elements, and lets itself be affected by the future once. Derrida says ;

> This trace is related, no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constitutes what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or future as a modified present.[14]

The trace is not a presence, but the simulacrum of a presence and its structure is that of an erasure. For Derrida, it is a double erasure, an erasure that would overtake its substantiality and also an erasure that constitutes it from the outset as a trace. The erasure makes it disappear in its appearance and makes it emerge from itself in its production. He writes in *Of Grammatology*.

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin - within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by non-origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would drive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace.[15]

Derrida points out that Husserl's theory of language, which makes possible the division between the transcendental and the worldly, is based upon a metaphysical dualism between the spiritual or ideal and the physical or sensible. He observes that the opposition between body and soul is not only at the centre of this doctrine of signification, it is confirmed by it, and as has always been at bottom the case in philosophy, it depends upon an interpretation of language. Therefore it is not the determination of man as body and soul, but rather the determination of language as signifier as signified which must first be deconstructed. Derrida turns Husserl's own theory of internal time consciousness against him in order to show that absence and otherness are internal to presence. And he explains Husserl's theory of time consciousness, the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only in as much as it is continuously compounded with a non presence and non-perception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention). For him,

retention, even if it is not identical with representation, has a common root in trace:

> The possibility of repetition in its most general form, that is the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the movement of differance it introduces. Such a trace is – if we can employ this language without immediately contradicting it or crossing it out as we proceed more primordial that what is phenomenologically primordial.[16]

Derrida argues that this movement of the trace, this *differance* within the supposed pure intentionality of self-present consciousness is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it produces the subject. And he deconstructs the metaphysical subject through demonstrating that it is written, in the sense of protowriting. This protowriting which he designates as writing in general and archi-writing, refers to the way in which both consciousness and its internal voice are always already engaged in the movement of trace, i.e. in the order of signification.

Indeed, there is a Derridean scepticism regarding almost all of the priorities which dominate the Western philosophical tradition. Derrida deconstructs the metaphysics of presence through raising the question of

the structure (not meaning) of the sign in general through a mediation on writing. He writes:

> The history of metaphysics, which has in spite of all differences, not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also, beyond there apparent limits, from the pre-Socrates to Heidegger, always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos, the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been – except for a metaphysical diversion that we shall have to explain - the debasement of writing, and its repression outside full speech.[17]

Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, indicates in a footnote that "the prime intention - and the ultimate scope - of the present essay is to reintroduce the difference involved in signs at the core of what is primordial" that is, to reintroduce difference at the core of both speech, (the presence of the subject), and of perception, (the presence of the object). After deconstructing the subject of metaphysics through a mediation on the sign, he turns to the treatment of writing in metaphysics. As Husserl had tried to exclude from consciousness the need for signs, to exclude sensible signifiers from expression, so does the whole of metaphysics exclude writing from the realm of truth.

Derrida is constantly pointing to ways in which the texts are organised according to metaphysically loaded patterns of space and time. He defines logocentrism as the exigent, powerful, systematic and

irrepressible desire for a transcendental signified. A transcendental signified is a meaning which would exist outside any system of signs, and would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign. That is it would regresses in the search for the real meaning. When Nietzsche said that we had not got rid of God if we still believed in grammar, it was just this structure of a privileged first point to a series that he was talking about. Derrida is suggesting that the condition of truth is the possibility of writing. Rather than the inscription of writing (mis)-reflecting the truth - the argument which sets up logocentrism - its possibility is constitutive of truth as such. And he says:

> Writing is not only an auxiliary means in the service of science - and possibility its object - but first, as Husserl in particular pointed out in the origin of Geometry, the condition of the possibility of ideal object and therefore of scientific objectivity. Before being in object, writing is the condition of *episteme*. Historicity itself is tied to the possibility of writing; to the possibility of writing in general, beyond those particular forms of writing in the name of which we have long spoken of peoples without writing and without history. Before being the object of history - of an historical science - writing opens the field of history of historical becoming. And the former presupposes the latter.[18]

The paradox of language is here radicalised to suggest that metaphysics constitute its oppositions by expelling into one term of the

opposition the very possibility of the condition of such oppositions. Derrida calls this general possibility of inscription 'arche-writing'.

Derrida claims that not only writing but also the speech and even thinking involve signs, he reverses the traditional logic of the sign. Writing is still the signifier of a signifier, but so are speaking and thinking. It is through a deconstruction of Saussure's linguistic theory that Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysical concept of consciousness becomes a deconstruction of the metaphysical concept of language. Writing is not an image (graphic representation) of speech, all speech is already writing by its being unmotivated. It is only through this general understanding of writing that speech could be affected by writing in the first place. It permits an initial account of arche-writing as the instituted trace. Derrida writes:

> Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the *graphie* implies the framework of the instituted trace, as the possibility common to all system of signification.[19]

Derrida reads Saussure against himself in order to reorganise the space between philosophy and linguistics in terms of arche-writing. This reorganisation shows that both philosophy and linguistics are derivatives of a movement which constitutes them, but which they disavow in order to appear as such. His description of this movement from within

Saussure both accounts for the trace and accounts for its disavowal, a reinscription which is at the same time a continued reflection of the economy of violence. Gathering a series of remarks and narratives from Levi – Strauss's work Derrida underlines how the anthropologist's ethico – theoretical distinction between primitive and civilised societies depends upon a distinction between speech and writing that is derived from the concepts and values of theology and metaphysics. Derrida points out that Levi-Strauss commits the empiricist error of considering writing only in phenomenal terms. He says:

> From the moment that the proper name is erased in a system, there is writing, there is a 'subject' from the moment that this obliteration of the proper is produced, that is to say from the first appearing of the proper and from the first dawn of language.[20]

The naivety of Leve-Strauss's enterprise – his desires to post an Other in radical distraction to European thought – can be effectively examined and deconstructed through the concept of writing. Levi-Strauss's anthropology, according to Derrida, fails to recognize the originary violence of arche-writing. What we see is a radicalisation of writing in Derrida's writings. Writing, the letter, the sensible inscription has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems conversely to borrow its metaphors.

Derrida argues that throughout our entire epoch, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. He notes that what appears to be an exception, he calls it a metaphysical diversion that we shall have to explain. There remain to be written, according to Derrida, a history of this metaphor, a metaphor that systematically contrasts divine or natural writing and the human and laborious, finite and artificial inscription. In "White Mythology", Derrida addresses himself to the question of metaphor in philosophy. While questioning philosophical concepts for their origin in metaphor, Derrida admits that any final redemption of the concept by the metaphor is impossible, since both of these are autonomous and hence irreducible to one another. Moreover, he notices that there is a fundamental complicity between the philosophical determination of the concept of metaphor and the apparently subversive attempt to challenge philosophy on the ground that its concepts are hidden tropes. Besides this Derrida groups all symbolical or analogical figures including figure, myth, fable and allegory under the heading metaphor. Since it has always been defined as a trope of resemblance; not simply as the resemblance between a signifier and a signified but as the resemblance between two signs, one of which designates the other. His insistence on the notion of resemblance in defining metaphor is instructive against the background of the analytic philosophers argument that a metaphor does not involve any comparison at all.

Regarding the question of metaphor in the text of philosophy, Derrida observes that several thinkers have discussed the metaphoric nature of metaphysical concepts, though there has never been a systematic treating on it. He writes:

Metaphor has been issued from a network of philosophemes which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures, and these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures. This stratum of 'tutelary' tropes, the layer of primary philosophemes (assuming that the quotation mark will serve as a sufficient precaution here), cannot be dominated. It cannot dominate itself, cannot be dominated by what it itself has engendered, has made to grow on its own soil supported on its own base.[21]

It may be argued that the metaphysical concept of metaphor takes its origin in a network of philosophemes which are themselves tropes and figures. Any enquiry into the origin of the metaphysical concept of metaphor will eventually be blocked as soon as it reaches a stage of more primary tropes serving as defining conditions of the metaphoric, of figurality. As the concept of metaphor is constituted by metaphysics, it is impossible for it to dominate itself. Any attempt to build up a systematic treatise on metaphor would be self-reflexive, like forcing a proposition to state that, it itself is true.

What makes postmodernism so distinctive as an approach is that it goes beyond the familiar features to make wide-ranging and, to many people, outrageous claims about the very nature of society and objective reality. It makes assertions not just about a new society or social reality, but about our understanding of reality itself. It moves from history and sociology to philosophical questions of truth and knowledge. It is really more a concept of cultural evolution, based on the belief that the whole human race is involved in a huge learning process. This process is difficult, painful, and conflicted, it cannot be reduced to things simply getting better. It involves learning about learning, discovering something new about our own reality. Ernest Becker described it as one of the great, liberating breakthrough of all time. The postmodern verdict on the Enlightenment project is that it was a brilliant, ambitious effort, but that its filed of vision was limited. Its leaders thought the task of building or universal human culture upon a foundation of rational thought would be easier than it has turned out to be. The universe now seems if not infinite, at least infinitely complex and mysterious. Our eternal truths now appear to be inseparable from the cultures that created them and the languages in which they are stated. The human mind now appears to be anything but a neat thinking machine that - when properly operated - posed right questions and prints out right answers.

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NOTES

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3. Kvale, P.2.

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5. Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment" (article) De. 1783.

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11. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The cultural Logic of Late capitalism* (London, New York : Verso 1992), p. XII.XIX, see also 260-78).

12. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and other Essays on Husserl's theory of Signs,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston; North Western University Press, 1973), p.15.

13. Ibid, p.130.

14. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvestor 1982) p.13.

15. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trns. Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.61

16. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena,* p.67.

17. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* p.3.

18. Ibid, p. 27.

19. Ibid, p. 46.

20. Ibid, p. 108.

21. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* p.219.

22. Derrida, Margians of philosophy p.219.

MADHYAMIKA DIALECTICS : ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER II

MADHYAMIKA DIALECTICS : ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT.

New vistas in philosophy led to novel developments in the fields of ontology and epistemology. The widened view of the human life situation likewise inspired a flourishing movement in the fields of religion and ethics. Philosopher's concern, in recent years, is less that of political activism and more that of detailed critical investigation focusing of contemporary relevance on specific topics. All these developments provided for the works of independent thinkers, and for this reason it would be advantageous to study *Mahayana* Buddhism focusing upon its individual representatives. Hence, here our study would be confined to *Madhyamika* philosophy, focusing our attention upon Nagarjuna its greatest exponent. Nagarjuna is the first outstanding figure in the long gallery of Indian *Mahayana* Buddhists, and the study of his works has many facets of interest. Recent research has shown that he is to be ranked with the greatest names in the history of philosophy. An understanding of his philosophy is necessary for an understanding of the later developments of *Mahayana* schools. Even certain currents in other Indian philosophical systems, especially *Vedanta*, and occasionally *Nyaya* and *Jaina*, cannot be seen in the proper perspective unless one has Nagarjuna and his philosophy in mind. The *Madhyamika* school of thought has a long history. Though a number of scholars have worked on

its philosophy for nearly one hundred years, our knowledge about the significance of this developed form of Buddhism remains less. Chr. Lindtner says:

"Despite an increasing number of modern contributions to the study of *Mahayana-sutras* our knowledge of the historical origins of this developed form of Buddhism still remains meager and fragmentary..."[1]

Our main sources for an understanding of Nagarjuna and his cultural background are his own works and the documents belonging to the tradition in which he was active as a creative writer

The term 'dialectic' refers to the art of philosophic disputation, which prevailed in ancient India. Philosophical thought in ancient times were filtered through the art of disputation and this was as much true of ancient Greece as it was of ancient India. During the post-*Upanisadic* period of Indian Philosophy, the intellectual climate was brisk, critical and controversial. The main topics that came under criticism were the organized religion and ritualism of *Vedic* orthodoxy, the established social codes, moral norms, knowledge and claims regarding the final destiny of man. In fact, no subject was considered too sacred for criticism and refutation. Caraka broadly divided debates into two types - the first is held between fellow-scholars and in a spirit of co-operation but the second in a spirit of opposition and hostility. He further divided the

hostile debate into *jalpa* and *vitanta*. The *Jalpa* is a debate between equals, i.e. two rival parties and the explicit goal here is a victory that may not necessarily coincide with the establishment of truth. The *vitanta* type of debate is more controversial in nature and philosophically more interesting. In this type the debater is engaged in the rebuttal of a position but does not claim to have a thesis of his own. In fact the aim of the debater in this case is to reduce the opponent's position to absurdities. This was obviously the suitable way for the *Madhyamikas*. As Matilal says:

" An honest and fair debate aimed at 'refutation -only' of the opponents thesis is philosophically a more fruitful and powerful concept and certainly it has its adherents".[2]

Buddhism is not a revealed religion and has always been a living and accumulative tradition. It has quite naturally gone through innumerable changes and developments in its long and varied history. It is not a single system of philosophy or a specific dogma set up counter to other dogmas. Instead, it is a path which the historic Buddha walked and which it is possible for any earnest human aspirant also to walk. We find an unbroken thread running form the Buddha's cessation of cravings through the early *Mahayana* praxis of non-attachment to Nagarjuna's denial of all stands. The classical as well as modern interpreters of Nagarjuna have failed to appreciate the reconstructive aspects of his philosophy, even though a steadily increasing amount of papers and

books about Nagarjuna and the *Madhyamika* school testify to a widespread interest this branch of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Indologists do not seem to have still laid the solid foundation required for real progress in these studies in particular. Here, an attempt is made to read Nagarjuna's philosophy in terms of both deconstruction and reconstruction. We may deal only with Nagarjuna's basic philosophical approach , as embodied in his *Mula-madhyamika-karika,* in order to understand his position among the various luminaries that dotted the history of the Buddhist thought.

The scope of Nagarjuna's criticism is not to discover the practical value of traditional Buddhist concepts but to demonstrate that the right attitude to be adopted towards them is one of pragmatic relativism and not one of stubborn dogmatism. He wants to reform, not to reject Buddhist tradition. For him, to be real implies being permanent, independent, numerically one and self-existing. However, neither experience nor logic warrants our assumption of the existence of such a real entity. Hence Nagarjuna is right when he shows the absurdities implicit in all the claims of a realistic attitude. Moreover, since positive existence is unfounded, non-existence, i.e., the negation or destruction of existence, must also be unwarranted. Thus Nagarjuna proceeds along the middle way free form extremes towards his intangible goal: the unorigination of all phenomena.

In the beginning of his *Madhyamaka-sastra* Nagarjuna characterizes the doctrine of dependent origination, the ultimate truth in *Madhyamaka*, by eight negative adjectives which take account of four contradictory pairs of positive characterization : 'Having no cessation, no origination no annihilation, no eternality, no single meaning, no multiple meaning, no arising and no going out of existence.'

Though Nagarjuna was aware of the of various philosophical systems such as Samkhya,Vaisesika, Jaina,Nyaya and Lokayatha, their influence upon the development of his thought virtually comes to naught. We never find any trace of positing these influences from these sources in Nagarajuna's authentic writings. On the other hand it must be conceded that he could not escape the impacts of orthodox Brahmin dialectics, natural philosophy, arts, crafts and sciences which had a indirect influence upon the Buddhist milieu as a whole.

Nagarjuna's writings give an ample evidence of his acquaintance not only with the *sutras* of *Mahayana* but also with the *sutras* of *Vinaya* and *Abhidharma* of *Hinayana*. In the course of time some of the best Buddhist minds contributed to the vigorous development of *Abhidharma*, a development which reached its peak about the time of Nagarjuna with the compilation of the magnificent thesaurus of Buddhist lore, the *Mahavibhasa* of *Sarvastivada*. It was a profound resentment against the prevailing and some what complacent tendency to dogmatism, or 'clinging', among Abhidharmikas that induced Nagarjuna to adopt the

non dogmatic spirit breathing in the *Prajnaparamita-sutras* and regenerate it, as it were, among the renegades. As T.R.V.Murthi says:

> 'The *Prajnaparamitas* revolutionized Buddhism, in all aspects of its philosophy and religion, by the basic concept of *Sunyata*. In them is reached the fruition of criticism that was born with Buddhism. Earlier Buddhism was semi critical: It denied the reality of the substance-soul (*pudgla-nairatmya*) but dogmatically affirmed the reality of the *dharmas*, separate elements. The new phase denied the reality of the elements too (*dharma- nairatmya*)[3]

Nagarjuna was thoroughly conversant with the ancient *Tripitakas* as well as later developed *sutras* of *Mahayana*. Without ever breaking radically with the ancient tradition these scriptures launched new ideas about the nature of the world *(sunyata)* and the foundation of ethical behavior (*karuna*) and in Nagarjuna they found a strong supporter. The most important source of inspiration for Nagarjuna's *magnum opus, Mula-madhyamika-karika* is that group of *Mahayana* scriptures commonly known as *Prajnaparamita-sutras*. Chr. Lindther, in his Nagarjuniana suggests:

> "If one were to condense the tenets of the *Prajnaparamita* literature in to a few sentences it would perhaps amount to this : Their view of the world is that fundamentally all phenomena (*dharma*) are void of substance.... view of the individual is that as a

bodhisattva gradually recognizing this fact one should, accordingly live in the equanimity of universal emptiness, and at the same time, through compassion, devote oneself to the task of liberating all other beings..."[4]

Nagarjuna never changed his fundamental outlook, and so it appears that his writings can be looked upon as an expression of an underlying unity of thought conceived before he made his debate in writing. The authenticity of his writings in regard to style, themes and philosophical profoundity is certainly undeniable. The decisive reasons for the said variety of Nagarjunan's writings is to be sought in the authors desire, as a Buddhist, to address himself to various audiences, at various levels and from various angles. Intellectually he will remain satisfied with nothing less than the omniscience of a Buddha .

There are three phases of *Prajna*, of *sruti* , of *cinta* and of *bhavana*. *Sruti* consists in the correct understandings of the scriptures (agama) - *Sunyatasaptati, Pratityasmutpadahrdayakarika* and *Suhrllekha* are designed to serve that need. *Cinta* is tantamount to well reasoned appraisal of what one has learned from one's study of the Scriptures. Both *sruti* and *cinta* are thus of a discursive or rational order and serve most of practical purposes. The third mode, *bhavana*, consists in meditating upon the results of ones learning and understanding so as to realize them for oneself and integrate them in ones personality.

Nagarjuna's dialectal writings - especially *Mula-madhyamika-karika* , *Suryata saptati* and *vigrahavyavartani*, which may in fact be regarded as exercises in the application of this paramita - vividly display how he assigns a new and major role to *prajna*. For him *Prajna* is at the outset a critical faculty constantly engaged in analyzing the more or less common-sense notions presented to it by tradition or experience. The more

it penetrates them and 'loosens' them up the more their apparent nature vanishes and in the final analysis their true nature turns out to be 'empty', i.e. devoid of substance. At this stage *prajna* has also brought its own justification for existence to an end: by analyzing its objects away it has also deprived itself of an objective support.

It is significant that both the Buddhist and the *Brahmanical* systems establish their real by a critique of causality; this is the central problem in Indian Philosophy. Many *Madhyamika* treatises begin the dialectic by an analysis of causation. If the effect were identical with the cause, there is no production, as nothing new emerges; if they were different, there is no continuity between cause and effect. The *Madhyamika* shows by his dialectics that not only causality but every category or doctrine leads to contradiction. These views appear to give the truth as long as we are not reflective, crtitical. Criticism dissolves their plausibility, and establishes the real as absolute, as devoid of thought - determinations(*sunya*). As Nagarjuna says : If you take entities

to exist by themselves (*svabhavat*), you take them as unconditioned, uncaused.

In the *Mula-madhyamika-karika*, Nagarjuna made an attempt to provide a philosophical basis for the doctrines in the *Prajnaparamitas*. While in the *Prajnaparamitas* we find an attempt to demonstrate the unreality of the phenomenal from the stand point of the nouminal, in the *Mula-madhyamika-karika* the dialectic is employed to prove the unreality of the phenomenal without making any reference to them. As T.R.V. Murthi has point out,

> "*prasanga* (dialectic) is not to be understood as an noumenal proof in which we prove an assertion indirectly by disproving the opposite." [5]

The term dialectics is regarded by most as a philosophical method by which philosophical /metaphysical theses are critically examined and shown to be internally inconsistent. Nagarjuna is committed to no doctrine or systematic belief about reality (*drsti*). The method that he follows in criticizing any doctrine is not to advance some doctrine of his own. In fact, his method is the *reductio ad absurdum*, which in *Madhyamika* is regarded not as an engagement different form the one which it exposes but as the same, recast is a form that allows us to see its absurdity.

Nagarjuna's skepticism about all philosophical positions was actually accused of paradoxicality and therefore inconsistency. Nagarjuna states clearly in his *Vighrahavyavartani* that no one can find fault with the *Madhyamika*, for he has no thesis of his own to advance. He says:

" *Yadi kacana pratijna syan me tata esa me bhaved dosah.*
Nasti ca mama pratijna tasman naivasti me dosah"

-*Vigrahavyavartani*

I have no proposition, no thesis to defend (which may lack any essence). If I had any thesis, I would have been guilty to the faults you ascribe to me. But I do not, hence I have no fault." [6]

The dialectic was directed against the dogmatists and rationalists who maintained a definite view about Reality. By exposing the hollowness of their logic and the self contradictory consequences of their assumptions, Nagarjuna wanted to disprove the claims of reason to apprehend reality.

Nagarjuna rigorously examines all philosophical theories that were held by the thinkers in his time. He insists that in arguing that all alleged real things as void (*sunya*), he is nevertheless advancing no dogma of his own. Candrakirthi puts the whole position very clearly in the *Prajnaparamita* literature thus: By his illogical assumptions, the opponent only contradicts himself, and is unable to convince others.

What could be more convincing them the fact that he is unable even to prove the premises on the basis of which he advances his arguments. Moreover Nagarjuna argues:

"... if the refutations of the opponent were done on the basis of good reason and evidence (in other words, if it followed the model of the first type, and the second type) then lack of a counter thesis or non-establishment of a counter thesis would not be a great drawback. In fact, it would be made acceptable and even philosophically respectable."[7]

Our actions are guided by our inherent beliefs in the values and truths of the concepts that constitute our general conceptual scheme. Metaphysical realism tries to reify such concepts into substantial realities and thereby assign the value we prefer them to have. The *Madhyamika* wants to expose the hollowness, in fact emptiness, of the mechanism of this evaluation, desire and preferences.

Nagarjuna criticizes strongly both the identity theory and the theory of difference as opposing metaphysical dualities. He definitely rejects any of our attempts to form a metaphysical system, any realistic or idealistic or relativistic account of such reality. For it claims that such systems would be internally inconsistent and hence such attempts would have little explanatory value. For him, substance (*svabhava*) is a metaphysical principle. If the "substance" or " own nature" of the effect

were to be found in the cause, production would be rendered meaningless, for there would then be mere self-duplication, not the emergence of a mere prominent factor which is not already existent. Criticizing the theory of substance, which was the basis of the identity theory of causality, he goes on to refute the non-identity theory or the theory of difference. Nagarjuna shows that in the absence of substance or own nature there cannot be other nature. Hence theory of differences of causality would be meaningless unless one can accepts the theory of substance; one can speak of different only if one recognizes identity. Nagarjuna claims that the rejection of the identity theory does not lead to the acceptance of the theory of differences. For him, both are metaphysical theories. Hence he adopted the method of dialectic in the refutation of these theories. Nagarjuna is aware of the antinomical character of reason, and refuses to accept one of the opposites as constituting the nature of the real.

Buddhism has the most voluminous scripture written in many different languages such as *Pali*, Sanskrit Chinese and Tibetan. In Buddhism, *sutra* literature is said to contain the direct, oral teachings of Buddha, while *sastra* contains the scholarly and philosophical elaboration of the direct teachings of Buddha. We can find a close relationship between *Madhyamika* thought and the teachings of the *Prajnaparamitas* (transcendent insight). Murti says :

The *Madhyamika* system is the systematized form of the *sunyata* doctrine of the *prajnaparamita* treatises; its metaphysics, spiritual path (*sat-paramita naya*) and religious ideal are all present there, though in a loose, prolific garb. With the *prajnaparamitas* an entirely new phase of Buddhism begins. A severe type of absolutism established by the dialectic, by the negation of all empirical notions and speculation theories, replaces the pluralism and dogmatism of the earlier Buddhism.[8]

The absolutism of the *prajnaparamitas* became the *Madhyamika* thesis. In *The central philosophy of Buddhism* T.R.V. Murti claims that while the *prajnaparamitas* revolutionized Buddhism, it has also tried to show that there were no ideas in it. He says:

"... they can and do claim to expound the deeper profounder teachings of the Buddha. The fourteen *avyakrta* (not to be explained or analyzed) of Buddha receives their significant interpretation here. The dialectic that is suggested in Buddha is the principal theme here".[9]

The basis of the *Madhyamika* school of Buddhism rests on the perceived discontinuity between the way the world is and what philosophy while engaged in metaphysical speculation thinks the world to be. Three stages of its development can be easily marked. In the first stage there was a systematic formulation of *Madhyamika* philosophy by

Nagarjuna and Aryadeva. The second stage is one of division of the system into two schools -- the *prasangika* and the *svatantrika*, the third stage is one of re affirmation of the *prasangika* school.

After Nagarjuna, the school developed two sub-streams associated with Buddhapalita and Bhavaviveka. The difference was not on any doctrinal level, rather it was on the method of philosophical reasoning to reach the same doctrine, the emptiness as truth. Buddhapalita believes that the philosophical activity of a *Madhyamika* is primarily and predominantly refutative and negative. On the other hand Bhavaviveka was impressed by the logico-epistemological method developed by Dignaga, where philosophical arguments must be fortified with a logical reason and empirical example for their support.

Nagarjuna, in his *Mulamadhyamika karika* attempts to develop a critique of the metaphysics of causation as it was understood by the *Abhidharmikas*. Causation implies that something that was not there before has come into existence. Nagarjuna argues that nothing can originate in this way for none of the four possible alternative holds: (1) something can be self-originating, (2) x can be originating form another, (3) x can be both, or (4) can be neither.

Nagarjuna associate the doctrines of the metaphysical schools with the two concepts *svabhava* (own nature substance) and *atman* (self). His major problem was the *sarvastivada* doctrine of substance. For

Nagarjuna, the problem of substance is the problem of explaining causality and change. These were two basic themes in the Buddha's explanation of existence. Nagarjuna was looking for the original Buddhist tradition. The Buddha's conception of 'dependent arising' was an attempt to avoid introduction of mysterious entities to account for causal relations. Nagarjuna had no objection to the *Abhidharma* formulation of causal relation so long as the relation is not regarded as having a unique nature or substantiality (*svabhava*) in terms of which they are to be related. Similarly, if a causal relation can be established without positing a unique substance and if this causal relation can account for the experienced identity (which is not absolute), then there is no need to postulate absolute difference or otherness (*parabhava*) either. Lindtner, says:

> "Though the Buddhas have spoken of duration, origination, destruction being non-being, low, moderate, and excellent by force of worldly convention, they have not done in an absolute sense. The designations are insignificant as self, non-self and self-non-self do not exist, because all expressible things are, like *nirvana*, empty of own being. Since all things all together lack substance either in causes or conditions or their totality or separately, therefore they are empty. Being does not arise since it exists, non-being does not arise since it does not exist. Being and non-being do not arise due to their heterogeneity . Conceptually they do not endure or vanish."[10]

Nagarjuna was able to confine himself to the philosophical issues, and therefore was able to produce one of the most remarkable treatises ever complied by a Buddhist. By the time of Nagarjuna the metaphysical theories had come to be presented with greater sophistication, so the task was not easy for him. Yet he seems to have risen to the occasion equipped with an extremely analytical mind. The radical and non-substantialist position of Nagarjuna had to face with the dual task of responding to the enormously substantialist and absolutist thinking of the non-Buddhist traditions as well as to those within the Buddhist tradition who fell prey to such thinking. His main argument was that a conception of self-nature or substance cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of "dependent arising" (*Pratityasamutpada*) or the theory, as developed in the *Abhidharma*, that things, events, or phenomena are dependent on causes or conditions. If substance were to arise as a result of causes and conditions, it has to be made. This would be inconsistent with the very definition of substance. If it is not made then it is unique and has no relationship to or is not dependent on another.

Moreover Nagarjuna makes a further claim that if self-nature or substance does not exist one cannot speak of other nature or a different substance, for self-nature of other nature is called self-nature. He observes that if existence were understood in terms of identical substance and difference (otherness), then without these two aspects existence itself would be meaningless. If existence, in this sense, is meaningless, non-

existence is also meaningless. When Nagarjuna abandoned the conceptions of self nature and other nature, he was simply following the Buddha, who rejected the notions of eternalism and annihilationism. Matilal, in his *Logic, Language and Reality*, quotes two verses form the *Madhyamaka karika* to illustrute Nagarjuna's philosophic argumentation:

> The 'own-nature' (of a thing) cannot be generated by causal conditions (*hetus* and *pratyayas*). For, if the 'own nature' is generated by causal conditions, it would be (artificially) created. Now, how could 'own-nature be (artificially) created? For, 'own-nature' is what is non-artificial (uncreated) and independent of others.[11]

Nagarjuna, thus carries this point to its logical extreme: If the nature or essence (of a thing) does not exist, what is it then that will change? And if the nature does exist, what, again, is it that will change. Nagarjuna, being consistent with the attitude of the Buddha, rejects most philosophic positions exposing their inherent contradictions and anomalies and points out that truth is not to be arrived at through such philosophic disputations, for, it is only revealed to the *prajna* or intuitive insight.

Nagarjuna, in his *Vigrahavyavartani* noted the following objection presumably by his Nyaya opponent: the Emptiness is itself empty. The word 'emptiness' is a predicate property; when it is said that every *bhava* is empty, we mean it is empty of its own nature. Nagarjuna claims, this is

truly applicable to all metaphysical statements about reality. But if all such statements are empty, then the statement 'all such statements are empty' is itself such a statement and has to be empty. In fact, Nagarjuna admits as a consequence of his argument that if all such statements are actually empty, it is still unsayable that all such statements are empty. For to say it is, is to falsify it. We have come back to the notion of ineffability in another way.

Nagarjuna's philosophy is a full-fledged and systematic skeptical challenges to a theory of knowledge that tries to articulate a notion of 'knowledge' and knowable by referring to various accredited ways or means of knowing (*pramana*). In fact, there are two distant streams in the philosophic tradition of India: One is illustrated by the *pramana-prameya* doctrine and the other by a total skepticism about the adequacy or validity of such a philosophic method. Philosophers in the second stream - Nagarjuna, Jayaraasi and Sriharsa - used dialectics and *apriori* arguments to repudiate the claims of the *pramana* theorists.

The skeptical dialecticians of India followed a radical method to expose the hollowness of the very concept of knowledge and knowables so that alternative ways of arriving at certainty since reason or sense experience were simply not adequate. What Nagarjuna questioned was the very concept of *pramana*, our standards of proof, our evidence for knowledge. He has developed a very strong and devastating critique of the whole epistemological enterprise itself and therefore his arguments

have a lasting philosophic value. For Nagarjuna, a means is not a means unless it does something and hence if we have the means, we have to make them effective. In order to make them effective, we must know that they are there. He, therefore raises the legitimate question: how, or through what means, do we know that they are there?

The *pramana* theorist, as an answer to Nagarjuna, claims that the means of knowing can also be, or can be turned into the object of knowing. Nagarjuna strongly criticizes the *pramana* theorist's view by saying that if our means is turned in to an end, then to achieve that end we need further means. Nagarjuna, in the *Vigrahavyavartani*, says:

'If the proof of the *pramanas* were by means of other *pramanas* then there would be an infinite regress (*anavastha*). There would be no proof of the first nor of the middle, nor of the last.' [12]

Here we find that Nagarjuna is raising a more fundamental questions about the consistency of the *pramana* doctrine as a whole. He asks whether or not our so called standards of proof form a coherent system, whether our fundamental assumptions are endowed with at least psychological certainty. He maintains that in the long run the concept of the standard proof would be found to be self-refuting or self-stultifying.

Matilal observes that all *pramana* theorists agree, first and foremost but with varying degrees of emphasis, that what exists, or is really there,

can be shown (and is known). The domain of the knowable seems to converge, or coincided with only a few exceptions, with the domain of existents. One view of this ineffability thesis says that what is sensed or directly grasped by our perceptual experience cannot be captured by our use of word or language, for language is a social affair and we can transmit through it, only what is inter-subjectively accessible. The holistic view regards reality as a unitary undifferentiated and indivisible whole. But language necessarily slices this whole into pieces, and thereby becomes responsible for the proliferation of concepts.

It is the *neti neti* method or what is sometimes called negative dialectics which was used for presenting what is ineffable. Constructing a possible description or assigning a possible predicate to the mystical object, the mystic may then go ahead and negate it, and it is believed that if this is done repeatedly with a variety of possible descriptions, the general idea will get across. It was Yajnavalkya who for the first time used *neti neti* as a method in the concluding part of his spectacular discourse on soul or Brahman to his wife Maitreyi, in the *Brahadaranyaka Upanisad.* In fact Nagarjuna had described *tattva* (thatness) or truth in this way.

It brings us to paradoxes and contradictions, for the notion of negation here creates problems for ordinary logical discourse. In fact, negation of the two opposite alternatives may land us in a contradiction, if the law of the excluded middle is seriously entertained. The notion of

negation is one of the fundamental concepts of any conceptual scheme, but it is also one of the most controversial and misunderstood notions across a wide philosophical spectrum. The mystics believe in the instrumentalism of paradoxes which helps us to look beyond the normal domain of discourse. Nagarjuna's pronouncement: I have no thesis to defend is a claim that the statement about the truth of 'emptiness', that any thesis about reality is empty, is itself not an asserted statement. A non-asserted statement may be a very peculiar statement, indeed, it is as good as an unstated statement, i.e., ineffable. The emptiness of all metaphysical theses can be shown, not stated in language. Our natural language possesses unexplored powers and contains unexperimented or hitherto unknown devices, and a creative and ingenious author, a mystic-poet, can easily explore such areas and experiment with such devices. They would then be able to successfully communicate or get the message across.

The emergence of *Madhyamika* dialectic is due to the inherent and inevitable conflict developed between the *atma* and *anatma* traditions, one drawing its inspiration from the *upanisads* and the other from the teachings of Buddha. The *Madhyamika* develops its middle position, which is really no position, by a trenchant criticism of the various systems and points of view, especially of the *Abhidharmika* system. The rejection is done by exhibiting the inherent, but unnoticed, contradiction present in every thesis to the upholder of the thesis on principles and arguments acceptable to him; it is done by *reductio ad absurdum*

arguments. Not only affirmative views, but negative ones and even a conjunction of them are negated by the *Madhyamika* dialectic. Nagarjuna insists that *sunyata* should not be considered as *abhava* or non-existence. To deny the accessibility of the real to thought is not to deny the real, unless we assumed the identity of the real with thought. He argues that the total negation of thought modes is *prajna* (intution). *Prajna* is Absolute, as the Real and the knowledge of it is non-dual, non-different.

Intuition (*prajna*) is not one other mode of knowledge beside thought; if it were so, we should have two alternative modes of knowing. Our thought is inherently incapable of revealing the real; for it looks at it though conceptual patterns, though differentia and distinction; it distorts the real. Reason (*budhi*) is the veil that covers the real and its soul is in the 'is' and 'is-not' attitudes or a combination of them. In fact, to know the real we have necessarily to remove the function of reason. Intuition or *prajna* is very rightly taken as the negation of concepts. The real is not to be brought into existence *de novo*; nor can a knowledge of it be taken as a new acquisition. Misconceptions alone require to be removed, and this is the function of dialectic.

The culmination of *prajna* is *jnana*, or intuitive insight into reality (*tattva*) beyond the duality of existent and non-existent (*asti* and *nasti*). This *jnana* is also the removal of *avidya* which in the final analysis is based on the wrong assumption of existence and non-existence. We are

all aware of the world of plurality in which we live, but not capable to distinguish between an 'objective' and 'subjective' world, i.e. we cannot really isolate 'facts' from judgments. The world of plurality may be regarded as our expression of the world, or the world presented to us in and by language. There is criticism from the West that the Indians do not make a clear distinction between facts and ideas, between ideas and words, they never clearly recognise the principle of contradiction. But we feel this does not always constitute a drawback, for it has advantage as well as disadvantages. The very *modus operandi* of world of plurality is discursive or conceptual thinking (*vikalpa*). The conceptual thinking differentiate the world of plurality into something which is said to exist and something which is said not to exist and hypostatise these as being and non-being (*bhava* and *abhava*).

These are all due to the conscious functions of mind. Subsequently we form ideas, assumptions, opinions, theories or dogmas etc., and this in the end amounts to suffering (*duhkha*). Ultimately, they are all based on the uncritical acceptance of being. *Prajna* helps us to get acquaint with the real status of the world of plurality, which is empty, that it lacks objective foundation. This is achieved by bringing to light that existence and non-existence hypostatised by the activity of conceptual thinking do not pertain to reality. Human understanding according to Nagarjuna, invariably presupposes some kind of spatio temporal or causal relationship. It is the principle of identity and difference which serve as the basis for any specific relationship. Without assuming this dichotomy

no language, no rational discourse, in short, no world of plurality is possible.

The effort which Nagarjuna makes, in the *Mulamadhymika karika*, is to demonstrate that not a single thing or conceptual phenomena can be conceived either as 'one' (as an independent unity) or as 'other' (as absolutely independent of its correlate). For the assumption that anything is one or other faces endless absurdities when confronted with the relentless demands of logic or experience. It would be of little avail to depict how easy it is for Nagarjuna to demonstrate the inherent conflict in discursive thinking (reason) as none of the correlates in the above mentioned categories can be taken as one or other - who would for example maintain that long and short were identical - or absolutely independent. By pointing out that nothing within the domain of experience can be conceived in and by itself independently of something else, Nagarjuna merely intends to call attention to the fact that nothing has 'own nature' (*svabhava*). Actually, he displays the absurdities inherent in the assumption of things of any kind whatsoever. Now Nagarjuna suggests that all theories generated through the operations of conceptual thinking are, in the final analysis, untenable as they impose absurd implications.

It is only a Buddha who has perfected the *dhyana* and *prajnaparamita*, so that he is in unremitting possession of *tattvajnana*. He is the only one to whom the epithet *sarvajna* applies, for, he

experiences the *samata* of all *dharmas*, and their emptiness. The living beings who have fully realized universal emptiness are rare indeed. It presupposes that the practice of *dhyana* and *prajna* has been brought to perfection (*paramita*) by the Buddha. The *bodhisattvas* who are still far from buddhahood may enjoy occasional glimpses of *tattva* since their *prajna* has not yet achieved perfection. And this brings us to Nagarjuna's celebrated doctrine of two levels of reality. Even though the theory of two levels of reality has a cordial function in his philosophy, it does not play an important role in his writings. And this theory cannot be claimed to express different levels of objective reality since all things always equally lack *svabhava*. In fact, they are merely two ways of looking at things, a provisional and a definite.

The enlightenment or liberation is the goal of all the Indian philosophers. They will differ radically, however in the way that goal is conceived and in their prescription as to the means by which it may be realized. In his book of readings on *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, Harold Coward identifies:

> "An important aspects of each of the schools of Indian philosophy is that they regard themselves as *darsanas* or ways of viewing the world that must include a pathway to liberation or release. In Indian thought philosophy cannot be regarded as merely theoretical knowledge. If that knowledge does not also somehow transform one's everyday life in such a way that liberation is

realized, then it is invalidated as a philosophy . Indian philosophy . in this regard is more like the wisdom traditions of the West." [13]

Nagarjuna's thought does not end up in playful nihilism, as is frequently assumed, but rather has a strong ethical dimension. Really the entire universe is nothing but emptiness (*sunya*) beyond all conceptions and limitations. The 'non-discriminated' experience of the *yogin* was so important for the *Madhyamikas* that they considered all worldly reality to be 'conceptual', not empirical, and hence adopted the most effective method of refuting all concepts - the dialectical approach. By adopting this dialectical approach, the *Madhyamikas* were able to uphold the sole reality of absolute (*tattva*). Therefore, the realization of this ultimate reality was presented as the goal of the religious life. However, owing to *avidya* we find ourselves confined in a manifold world of *duhkha*. The begining of *avidya* cannot be accounted for, but it can be abolished by *jnana*. Therefore we should strive to arouse ourselves, and all others form the nightmare of ignorance. The only way to attain this realization is by becoming a Buddha, a fully and perfectly enlightened one.

The *Madhyamika* rejects speculative (dogmatic) metaphysics, not because there is no real that is transcendent, but because by its defective procedure dogmatic metaphysics wrongly understands the transcendent in terms of the empirical modes; it illegitimately extends, to the unconditioned, the categories of thought that are valid within phenomena alone. The *Madhyamika* critique is an attempt to show that it is neither

proper nor justifiable to regard any particular metaphysical system as absolutely valid. In the same vein Murti says:

"The *Madhyamika* dialectic is not refutation, ... Refutation is the rejection of an opponents view by an interested party having a view of his own to establish. A critique is the disinterested analysis of reason by itself." [14]

Nagarjuna's absolute is not void, but devoid of finitude and imperfection. *Prajna* is the state of freedom (*nirvana*). It is also the attainment of Budhahood: *Prajna paramita* is *tathagata*, *Prajna* consummates the moral and the religious ideal; it is spiritual.

Nagarjuna has made a persistent attempt to retain the original teachings of the Buddha. He recognised the fundamental problem of suffering and the implications of the Buddha's doctrine of four great (noble) truths. Nagarjuna has realised the potential and real danger in accepting theories as truths, means as ends, concepts as real entities. If the dynamic nature of reality is not understood, (if the 'own-nature' of things are not understood as empty), then there is no hope for changing anything, no chance of the cessation of turmoil and suffering, and then the revolutionaries, the visionaries and the Buddha's alike can give up all their efforts out of frustration. Hence his significant proclamation: the Buddha's doctrine is understood only if the emptyness of everything is understood.

As a result of a change in the philosophical paradigm on the basis of which peace and harmony has been achieved in the first instance. The Buddha's own proposal for achieving peace and avoiding conflict was the middle path, in theory and practice. On the theoretical side, it was a middle path between extremist viewpoints. In epistemology, it was middle path between absolutism and skepticism; in ontology, between eternalism and nihilism, in ethics, between deontology and emotivism, and in linguistic philosophy, between what may be called realism and nominalism. With the renunciation of such extremes the Buddha was compelled to adopt some form of relativism. An analysis of his epistemology and logic provide no evidence that he claimed the knowledge of any truth which is absolute, on the contrary, he was extremely critical of those who made such claims.

David J Kalupahana observes that the peaceful spread of Buddhism throughout the Asian continent has baffled many historians. Whatever the actual historical circumstances that occasioned the rift between *Theravada* and *Mahayana*, it was widened and deepened for posterity during the second century A.D. Instead of hurling abuse on each other, the two sides should have examined the pragmatic value of each theory in the form in which it was presented. If such an analysis had been undertaken , the ideological rift would have gradually disappeared . Kalupahana says:

"Interentingly, inspite of *Theravada* dependence on Buddhagosa and *Mahayana* reliance on the *Sadharma pundarika*, there is lot of common ground between the two traditions, which some of their adherents are reluctant to admit, tending to overemphasized the differences and downplay the similarities. This common ground resulted from the endeavours of those enlightened teachers – Moggaliputta - tissu who was highly respected in the *Theravada*, as well as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu and Dignaga, venerated in the *Mahayana* - who showed unmistakable signs of being non-sectarian in their advanced years. All were determined to resurrect the teaching of the historical Buddha. Their writings have unfocussed both traditions and served as a thread of continuity between them, despite the unfortunate ideological disagreement that has survived for centuries."[15]

Glyn Richard argues that the *Hrdaya Sutras* epitomise the teachings of the *Prajnaparamita* or perfection of wisdom literature and they express consciously one stage at least of the dialectics of *sunyata* in the puzzling phrase. Form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form. The term *sunyata* has got a comprehensive meaning but it is understood as what we consider to be real is devoid of reality or *svabhava*, own being. That is to say, when phenomena are considered or looked at as they are in themselves they are found to be empty. Here the term 'form' is one of the constituents which, buddhist believe, make up the individual self. Other four constituents are feeling, perception, impulse and

consciousness. To say that form is emptyness is equivalent to saying that the conditioned world, including the self, is devoid of independent being or own nature. Buddhism maintains that there is a distinction between what it calls conventional and absolute levels of truth. The absolute truth, according to Nagarjuna, is not taught without dependence on conventional truth. That is to say, mundane truth and absolute truth are not mutually exclusive; they do not refer to different realms of knowledge.

It is regarded by most as the denying the reality of the conditioned world is an explicit rejection of the *Abhidharma* doctrine of the *Theravada* schools of Buddhism concerning the reality of conditioned *dharmas*. Nagarjuna rejects not only the view of the reality or substantiality of unanalysed elements but also the notion of the reality of analysed elements or momentary *dharmas*. Abhidharma philosophy propounds what has been called 'an analytic theory of emptiness'.[16] It removes the notion of the substantiality of phenomena by a process of analysis that reduces phenomena to momentary dharmas or bursts of existence.

To say emptiness is form is not to say that it is form in the *Abhidharma* sense. Neither does it mean that emptiness is immanent in form like an unconditioned being or absolute permeating conditioned existence. Nor does it mean that emptiness underlies form as a state of not-being. It would be a mistake to assume that the denial of the reality of

form leads either to an affirmation of an immanent absolute or to the acceptance of complete nihilism. In fact,

'*sunyata* cannot be classified as either being or non-being, absolutism or nihilism'.[17] Conventionally it can be said that *prajna* enables one to apprehend the meaning of *sunyata*. In reality *prajna* is *sunyata*; there is no distinction between higher wisdom and awareness of emptiness. The isomorphism of *prajna* and *sunyata* is such that to know emptiness is the same as realizing emptiness.[18]

In *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Murti argues that *Madhyamika* philosophy can in fact be regarded as a systematised form of the doctrine of *sunyata*. It has been described as the heart of Buddhism and a critique of *Abhidharma* realism in the same way as *Advaita* is regarded as the heart of the *Upanisads* and critique of *Samkhya* realism. As the term *Madhyamika* implies, it is the middle way . It is the *via media* between eternalism and nihilism, being and nonbeing. According to Ninian Smart,

"the four fold method of expression (*catuskoti*) used by the Buddha to show the inapplicability of undetermined questions became an integral part of the *Madhyamika* dialectic and a justification of the claim that all views about ultimate reality are inherently contradictory." [19]

Nagarjuna takes the middle way between affirmation and negation and calls it *sunyata*. Though *sunyata* is beyond both being and non-being, it cannot be regarded as a separate distinct entity; it is not beyond in the transcendental sense of the term. *Sunyata* may be regarded as the logical expression of the silence of the Buddha who when asked whether the self exists or not. Nagarjuna's explanation is that the Buddha's teaching was determined by the ability of his hearers to understand and by their general powers of comprehension. It was a step in the direction of *sunyata*. The message of *MulaMadhyamika karika* is that the silence of Buddha and the problem of communication that it represents, is the very basis of the *Madhyamika* rejection of all view points (*drsti*). In fact, Nagarjuna shows the inherent contradiction of all viewpoints and the inability of reason to arrive at a universal paradigm of rationality. By using the *reductio ad absurdum*, Nagarjuna succeeds in pointing out the inherent contradictions and limitations of all view points. It seems, the most important object of the dialectic is to show that there can be no all embracing paradigm of rationality and no final or positive answer to the question on the nature of reality.

NOTES

1. Chr. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the writings and philosophy of Nagarjuna* . (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, 1990),p.260.

2. B.K.Matilal, *Perception:An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: clarendon Press, 1986), p. 88.

3. T.R.V.Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Budhism: A study of the Madhyamika System* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974), p. 83.

4. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana*, p. 261.

5. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Budhism*, p.131.

6. Matilal, *Perception*, p. 48.

7. _____ , *Word and The World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.157.

8. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, p.83.

9. Ibid, p. 83.

10. Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana*, p. 35.

11. Matilal, *Logic , Language and Reality: An Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies* (Delhi: Motila Banarassidas, 1985), p.315

12. Matilal, *Perception*, p.50

13. Harold Coward, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), p.23

14. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, p. 145-146

15. David J Kalupahana, *A History of Budhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuties* (Delhi: Motilal Banarassidas, 1994), p.230

16. Masao Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, Ed. By William R La Fleur (Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 1985), p.93.

17. Glyn Richards, *Studies in Religion: A Comparative Approach to Theological and philosophical Themes* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1995) p. 157.

18. D.T.Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Budhism*(New York: Schoken, 1970), p.98.

19. Cf. Ninian Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 223.

DECONSTRUCTION : ITS STRATEGY AND ETHICS

CHAPTER III

DECONSTRUCTION : ITS STRATEGY AND ETHICS

Jacques Derrida, the Algerian-born French philosopher, is one of the most famous instigators of what is called postmodernism in contemporary philosophy. In 1967, he has made an impressive entry on the French intellectual stage by publishing three major philosophical works: *Speech and Phenomena* (an introduction to the problem of the 'sign' in Husserl's phenomenology). *Writing and Difference* (a collection of essays on the problems of writing in literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and anthropology) and *Of Grammatology* (a sustained analysis of the repression of writing in Western theories of language and culture, and a methodological and theoretical outline of a new "science" of writing). In 1972 came another three important works: *Positions* (a collection of interviews), *Margins of Philosophy* (a collection of essays in / on the " margins of Philosophy, linguistics, and literature), and *Dissemination* (the problematic of presentation and representation in the history of Western philosophy and literature). The importance of his intervention stemmed from the fact that while he endorsed the critical distance from phenomenology that was *de rigeur* for all pan-structuralists - he simultaneously developed a critique of the Saussurean concept of the sign on which 'structuralism' rested. He considers his work political and 'not inconsistent with Marxism'. While maintaining a carefully turned

distance from any particular Marxist or radical texts, he has posed a considerable problem of assessment ever since.

The philosophical importance of Derrida and other postmodern thinkers lies in the fact that they are addressing a situation in which our inherited forms of thought about ourselves – in ethics and politics, and about the non-human in science – are in crisis, can no longer be believed in the way they have been in the past. The issues which were raised by Derrida have acquired increasing political importance in recent years, because of the way in which deconstruction has been enlisted by certain versions of postmodernist theory to mount a full scale assault on the dualistic and hierarchical structures which are assumed to be essential to philosophical reasons. When Derrida says 'literary criticism has already been determined, knowingly or not, voluntarily or not, as the philosophy of literature'[1], he does not use the theory of ideology to identify idealist or positivist readings. The political effectivity of Derrida's works comes under suspicion; he is readily accused of turning everything into a scene of writing, a play of undecidables as elegant as it is reactionary.

As we have already pointed out in the introduction the term postmodernism (and post-modern) has been used variably to refer to what are interpreted as major changes in the way the contemporary world can and ought to be represented. The term, introduced form architecture and art criticism which then passed into philosophy and literary studies, has now became something of a commonplace in the social sciences. Jean

Francois Lyotard, French philosopher, defines postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. He says:

This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimization corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it.[2]

In a renowned programmatic statement he has announced the demise of the great paradigm of scientific rationality and the return of multiple wisdoms, cultures, a relativism of knowledge. Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimization with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy.

Richard Rorty, another early representative of philosophical postmodernism stressed the impossibility of scientific models of progress and argued for 'edifying conversation' among paradigms rather than cumulative development. For Habermas, postmodernism was a dangerously conservative rejection of the incomplete modern project, a capitulation to the apparent failure of the emancipatiory content of that

project. He say: "The breakdown of philosophical subjectivity and its dispersions in a language that dispossesses it while multiplying it within the space created by its absence is probably one of the fundamental structures of contemporary thought"[3]. Moreover, he says it has become customary to transfer to the history of philosophy the concept of a paradigm stemming from the history of science and to undertake a rough division of epochs in terms of " being ",consciousness" and " language".

In architecture, where it first gained currency, postmodernism referred to an active break with the principal tenets of modern architecture and the emergence of new combinations of older styles, the return of concrete as opposed to abstract forms, the active use of kitsch and pastiche. The main motive for postmodern architecture is obviously this social failure of modern architecture, its mythical death announced repeatedly for over ten years. Modern architecture had failed to remain credible partly because it didn't communicate effectively with its ultimate users, and partly because it did not make effective links with the city and history. The death of modern architecture and its ideology of progress which offered technical solutions to social problems was seen by everyone In a vivid way. Due importance may be given to the ideological and social intentions which underlie this history, for they are so often overlooked in the bitter debate with modernists.

The attack on general scientific paradigms has been a central issue in sociology and other social sciences, but it has remained more varied

and perhaps more general in anthropology, where the question of authority and voice are central methodological issues. In sociology, especially cultural sociology, the issue of postmodernism has come increasingly to focus on a characterization of contemporary Western societies, i.e., 'the postmodern condition'. Literary theorists and the growing field of cultural studies have had a significant place in many of these discussions.

Among continental thinkers there is general agreement that reason has to be understood as culturally mediated and embodied in social practice and thus that the critique of reason should be carried out through some form of socio-cultural analysis. At the same time, there is very sharp disagreement among them as to just what form the critique should take. In its most general terms, that disagreement has come to be known as modernity-postmodernity debate in philosophy. Postmodernism may be characterized as an aspect of the fragmentation of the global system. There is an interesting parallel among different sets of fragmentations: the fragmentation of knowledge into separate relative fields, the disintegration of the evolutionary scheme of social types into a plethora of different cultures which have been interpreted as incommensurable with respect to one another, the real ethinification of the nation state, both as a result of regionalisation and immigration, the apparent rise of so called narcissitic disorders that might be indicative of the dissolution of individual ego structures.

The postmodern stress on domination and difference can be interpreted as a necessary corrective, i.e., as a warning that ideas 'rationality' and community can be, and often have been, used to exclude or marginalize. What does not seem to fit with established cultural social, or political forms postmodern strategies of analysis can be deployed to gain critical distance from such forms, to loosen their hold upon us and enable us to see possibilities they occlude, to sensitize us to what has been subordinated or assimilated in the production of order, and thus to serve as an antidote to the deep seated tendency of Western rationalism to repress the order of reason in nature, ourselves other persons and so on. The postmodern, regarded by the most, is the advent of a non-hegemonic political and intellectual strategy; it is not easy to separate political identity from analysis in the discussions of the postmodern. It seems that the advocates of postmodernism have openly attacked modernism as hegemonic discourse, a structure of control and domination in which discipline was instated by ways of rationality itself. Numerous sets of oppositions have been used to characterize the difference between postmodernism and modernism .Among the most common are:

MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM
scientific knowledge	Wisdom (cultural knowledge)
grand theory	relative cultural corpuses
universalisms	particularism
mono-vocality	poly-vocality
symbolic meaning	simulacra
coherence	pastiche

holism	fragmentation
history	histories
rational ego	libidinal self
intellectual	tactile

Although Derrida and Foucault are more commonly appealed to for their deconstruction and archaeology of knowledge respectively, their thought has been insinuating itself into a wide variety of philosophical studies in the past few years. Derrida's most serious attempt at establishing the central idea of his approach to metaphysics is his critique of Husserl. Derrida follows Nietzsche and Heidegger in elaborating a critique of Western metaphysics. The metaphysical tradition of the West is implicitly or explicitly grounded in a "philosophy of presence" - the desire to make present the presence of Being in beings. Derrida terms this disposition to make being present as "logocentrism".[4] Derrida says that Heidegger had recognised in the notion of presence the "destiny of philosophy", and the reference to there Heideggerian deconstruction of presence is a constant theme throughout Derrida's works. In *Of Grammatology*, he starts with an examination of the treatment of *writing* by philosophy, as a " particularly revelatory symptom" both of how the notion of *presence* functions in philosophy and of what this notion serves to repress. He has arrived at this position through a close scrutiny of the philosophical geneoology of linguistics, especially the philosophical treatment of the sign . Derrida demonstrates that from Plato to Heidegger, there is a persistent exclusion of the notion of writing from the

philosophical definition of the sign. Since this exclusion can always be shown to be made in the name of presence - the sign allegedly being most present in spoken discourse - Derrida uses it as a "symptom" which reveals the workings of the "repressive" logic of presence, which determines Western philosophy as such.

Derrida like the later Heidegger, is a post-Nietzschean who sees the very forms of thought we have inherited from the Western tradition as grounded in metaphysical presuppositions, so that even everyday language is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics.[5] It seems, this tradition is now in the process of undermining or overcoming itself and this can only take place utilizing the very conceptuality of the tradition itself. Deconstruction like Nietzsche's philosophizing with a hammer or Heidegger's destruction of ontology is a response to this sense of crisis. It was Nietzsche, for the first time , who subjected the entire discourse of human knowledge to a radical question that placed tropes at its Centre. His reappropriation of metaphor was, in fact, part of his attempt to deconstruct the prevalence of metaphysics. Nietzsche writes:

> What then is truth? a noble army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in   short, a sum of human relations which   became   poetically   and   rhetorically   intensified, metamorphosed, adorned and after long usage, seem to a notion fixed, canonical and binding, truths are illusions of which one has

forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses, coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal.[6]

The whole of truth including philosophy and science is composed of metaphors. Behind the desire for knowledge Nietzsche could notice nothing but a veiled desire for powers. The very concept of objective knowledge is far from the ideal we have set up for it, and he finds the presence of metaphors even in the discourse of physical sciences. Rejecting the traditional dichotomy of spirit and body Nietzsche writes:

"Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage- he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body."[7]

It was the intensive reading of Husserl which led Derrida to perceive certain problems in the way of phenomenological inquiry, problems which had to do with writing, inscription, and what might be called the literary aspect of philosophy. Indeed one of his chief concerns is to break down that rigid demarcation realms which holds that philosophy is autonomous discipline, a pursuit of timeless, self validating truths, having nothing to do with politics and everyday experience. In *Of Grammatology*, he demonstrates that the philosophical tradition is a

search for presentation in representation, an attempt grasp the ungraspable origin of *meaning* Derrida says:

> However the topic is considered, the problem of language has never been simply one problem among others. But never as much as at present has it invaded, as such,   the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method and ideology. The devaluation of word "language" itself and how, in the very hold it has upon us, it betrays a loose vocabulary, the temptation of a cheep seduction the passive yielding to fashion, the consciousness of the avant-garde in other words ignorance - are evidence of this effect.[8]

Derrida elaborates only two basic "epochs" - that of metaphysics and that which arises at the closure of metaphysics. For him, metaphysics began, at some point - though Derrida does not date its *arche*. It is, epistemic spaces and knowledge frame works, where every couple of centuries a new episteme supplants the previous one. Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: The following are some of them:

good	versus	evil
being		nothingness
presence		absence

truth	error
identity	differance ·
mind	matter
man	women
soul	body
life	death
nature	culture
speech	writing

These polar opposites do not, however stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each part is considered as the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, absence is the lack of presence, evil is the fall from good, error is the distortion of truth, etc. They are arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term *priority*, in both the temporal and the qualitative sense of the word. Derrida finds what these hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy and temporal and spatial presentness over distance, difference, dissimulation and deferent. In its search for the answer to the question of Being, Western philosophy has indeed always determined Being as *presence*. The logocentric bias of Western philosophy motivates thinkers to attempt to present the truth, being essence, or logical structure of that about which they think and discourse. The senses of modernity sketched above all had at their heart the attempt to characterize the truth of things. The failure of that understanding is the failure of the philosophy of presence - and the failure of modernity.

It has become customary to transfer to the history of philosophy the concept of a paradigm stemming from the history of science and to undertake a rough division of epochs in terms of "being", "consciousness", and "languages" - a paradigm shift form the philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language. Derrida's critique of Husserl is an analytical work in the philosophy of language. His position is based on the belief that there are two radically different ways of understanding language which parallel Husserl's distinction between indication and expression - (a) language as deriving its 'meaning' from some underlying semantic layer, such as experience, consciousness or even the platonic world of forms, (b) and meaning as self constituted, brought about by the play of differences between terms, by their repetition, without reference to some field of sub-linguistic guarantees. This may be characterized as an expressionist or foundationalist account of language. The alternative one is that which treats meaning not as the basis of language but as an effect of language. On such a view language is understood 'primarily' as writing. Thus Derrida says:

It is because writing is inaugural, in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going no knowledge, can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and, that is, primarily, its failure[9]

Derrida's critiques of Western metaphysics focuses on its privileging of speech over writing. He shows that the speech is given a higher value, for, the speaker and listener and both present to the utterance simultaneously. Derrida's championing of writing is an intervention that opposes itself not to speech but to speech considered to be privileged, as linked by a hot line to meaning.[10] According to Derrida. the belief in the self presentation of meaning which underlying in the Western culture is "*logocentrism*" (from the Greek word *Logos* which has meaning such as speech, logic reason, the word of God). In the discourse of the history of metaphysics, *logos* occupies a variety of contexts. *Logos* is taken to its limits where language itself occupies the place of the indecidable or *hinge* at the edge of the discourse of metaphysics. The history of metaphysics in Derrida's terms is the history of a series of ruptures or breaks:

> A rupture between the originary meaning of being and the word, between meaning   and the voice, between 'the voice of being' and the 'phone', between the call of being and articulated sound: such a rupture, which at once confirms a fundamental metaphor, and renders it suspect by accentuating its metaphoric discrepancy translates the ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism.[11]

Western metaphysics, as the limitation of the sense of being within the field of presence, is produced as the domination of a linguistic form.

To question the origin of that domination does not amount to hypostatizing a transcendental signifier but to a questioning of what constitutes our history and what produced transcendentality itself. Metaphysics pertain as a whole in the form of a metaphor. Writing in the epoch of metaphysics is a sign signifying a signifier itself signifying an eternal variety.[12] Writing is considered by the logocentric system to be only a representation of speech; as a sign writing serves as the signified for a signifier. In the course of his critique, Derrida does not simply reverse this value system and say that writing is better than speech. To announce that speech is a form of writing is simply to deprive it of this metaphysical status and to assimilate it to the articulatory condition of all meaning, for which the term writing stands. The very fact that a word is divided into a phonic signifier and a mental signified, and that, as Saussure pointed out, language is a system of difference rather than a collection of independently meaningful units, indicates that languages as such is already constituted by the very distances and differences it seek to overcome. To mean, in other words, is automatically not to be. As soon as there is meaning, there is difference.

Any possible dialogue between Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggeran ontology, at every point where they are more or less directly implicated, can be understood only from within the Greek culture. For, it is simply that the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium. Husserl argues that Plato was the founder of reason

and a philosophical task whose *telos* was still sleeping in the shadows. Or when Heidegger says that 'for a long time, too long, thought has been desiccated', like a fish out of water, the element to which he wish to return thought is still (already) the Greek element, the Greek thought of Being, the thought at Being whose irruption or call produced Greece.

Derrida's work has been marginal to the dominant concern of present day philosophy. For him, the central question is how can philosophy as such appear to itself as other than itself so that it can interrogate and reflect upon itself in an original manner. The early writings of Derrida tries to elaborate a science of writing called Grammatology. Though he is not in principle committed to a concern for the sort of writing found in books, it is to this area that his work is largely confined. Christopher Norris finds:

> He argues that philosophy is prone - peculiarly prone - to repress or to sublimate its own written character; that in some sense the philosopher may even be defined as the one who habitually forgets that she/he is writing. [13]

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida traces the history and the logic of this repression; from its ancient Greek roots to its latest showings in Husserl, Saussure and Levi Strauss. His effort is not simply to bring back the privilege of writing over speech. He insists that all thanking about language, philosophy and culture must hence forth be conceived within the context of a massive extended writing.

To say that Derrida's work is heavily parasitical on other writings is not just to utter a truth about all writing, but to say something special about his. For him, the very notion of a perfectly adequate science or logy belongs to the logocentric discourse which the science of writing would try to put in question. He argues that it is not possible to show that the belief in truth is an error without implicitly believing in the notion of truth. In the same vein, to show that the binary oppositions of metaphysics are illusions is also to show that such illusions cannot simply in turn be opposed without repeating the very same illusion. In his writings, primarily in *Margins of Philosophy* and *Glas*, he does not just feed off his prey, he hatches his eggs inside their flesh. Sartre once talked about the worm at the heart of Being. The possibility of Derridean inworming lies at the heart of every text. Under the guise of a history we find metaphysics which traces the past to find a *presence*, a point beyond which we need not go in trying to give a foundation to language, to geometry, to knowledge, a point which it may still be possible to reactivate. What Derrida shows is that in each case the theories and models employed are shaped by this theme of presence.[14]

Derridean deconstruction is a vigilant activity of thought not a system capable of summary description.[15] Deconstruction is avowedly 'post-structuralist' in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in a text. It questions the assumption that structures of meaning correspond to some deep laid mental 'set' or

pattern of mind which determines the limits of intelligibility. That is deconstruction starts out by rigorously suspending this assumed correspondence between mind, meaning and the concept of method which claims to unite them.

Deconstruction initially appeared on the scene as a radicalization of Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics. The thought of Derrida is marked by a determination to go beyond Heidegger, which focusses on his mentors refusal to abandon the philosophical quest for meaning, in the form of *seinsfrage* - the question of the 'meaning of Being'. Derrida claims that Nietzsche's distinctive practice of writing has contributed to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the *logos* and those related concept of truth or the primary signified. According to Derrida,

> "we should look in Nietzsche for a systematic mistrust of metaphysics as a whole, and also for the view that philosophical discourses and formal figurative and rhetorical, something that has to be deciphered."[16]

The knowledge and security of which we are speaking are therefore not in the word, rather they are the possibility of our language and the nexus of our world. The structure, although it has always been at work, it has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it

a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. Derrida writes:

> The concept of structure and even the word; 'structure' itself are as old as the *episteme* - that is to say, as old as Western science and Western philosophy and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recess the *episteme* plunges in order to gather them up and to make them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement.[17]

Derrida's challenge to traditional philosophy seems to oppose the philosophical ideal of coherence - the ideal to which theory gravitates - with the effect of deconstruction, which is to discover the heterogeneity of the discursive or textual conditions of theory, the fissures and ambiguities in the conceptual structure of the *episteme*. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says:

> "... the necessary decentering cannot be a philosophic or scientific act as such, since it is a question of dislocating, through access to another system linking speech and writing, the founding categories of language and the grammar of the *episteme*. The natural tendency of theory - what unites philosophy and science in the *episteme* - will push rather toward filling in the breach than toward forcing the closure.[18]

Derrida's conception of language and metaphysics can be seen as following from his denial of meanings which are present before the mind. Such meanings amount to self-interpreting signs, entities which mean in virtue of their very nature. A term for these is *logoi*, and one of Derrida's claims is that metaphysics is logocentric. The thesis of the prevalence of logos reaches its limit with deconstruction. Deconstruction is the vigilant seeking out of those '*aporias*', blindspots or moments of self contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly meant to say and what it is nonetheless constrained to mean.

Deconstruction has come to occupy a dominant place in contemporary continental philosophy. It is concerned with reading and the marked limits of texts. Within this epoch, according to Derrida, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and with the element of the logos. He insists that there is no substitute for the hard work of reading and re-reading texts (his own texts included); that it is pointless to ask what difference means, or indeed what deconstruction amounts to, unless one is prepared (in every sense of the phrase) to find out the difficult way. Deconstruction operates in the differential intermediate zone of textuality so as to elucidate the fabric of the text and its limit condition. It is the dismantling of conceptional oppositions, the taking apart of hierarchical systems of

thought which can there be re-inscribed within a different order of textual signification. What we find in deconstruction is a pretext for breaking with old New-critical ideas of hermeneutic fact and decorum, which exploit such a rhetoric of free-play and limitless interpretative license. Deconstruction traces the places of indecidability, marginality and supplementarility in texts. Furthermore, it investigated the goal and ends of phenomenology as articulated by Husserl on the one hand and by Heidegger on the other, but it also picks up features of semiology and structuralism, psycho-analysis and theories of the subject, literature and literary theory.

Derrida's stress on textuality and writing is not in any sense a break with philosophy, or a declaration of interpretative freedoms hitherto underwent under the grim repressive law of conceptual clarity and truth. He has been widely misunderstood on account of that opposite simplification which sets him up as a craftly rhetorician with not the least regard for philosophic protocols of reason and truth. The most significant effect is that all attempts to keep philosophy separate from literature - to maintain it as a privileged, truth-speaking discourse immune form the vaguaries of writing- are bound to run up against the salient fact of their own textual constitution. We are more interested in the philosophical consequences of deconstruction.

We can find that even when post-modernist thinkers disclaim or ignore practical philosophy, they are deeply concerned with ethical and

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political matters, and that their thinking is in fact prompted and oriented by such concerns. Rorty, Derrida, Foucault..., for instance, gravitate more and more to confronting the ethico-political consequences of their own thinking. They turn in their latter writings to strive with ethical and political questions. In doing so, they move from the empty scepticism of an 'abstract negation' of the Enlightenment tradition to forms of 'determinate negation'. Gasche writes:

"Derrida's aim is not to challange or deconstruct the *regina scientarium* by placing literature and its metaphoric use of language off against this discipline that pretends to dominate all other disciplines" [19]

For Derrida, the entire discourse of philosophy is informed with metaphorical contents of the sensory type. In *Margins of Philosophy*, he writes:

Outside the mathematical text - which it is difficult to conceive as providing metaphors in the strict sense, since it is attached to no determined *ontic* region and has no empirical sensory content - all the 'regional discourses', to the extent that they are not purely formal procure for philosophical discourses metaphorical contents of the sensory type. Thus one does actually speak of visual, auditory and tactile metaphors (where the problem of knowledge is in its elements) and even more rarely which is not insignificant,

olfactory or gustatory ones, But there must be in correspondence to this empirical aesthetics of sensory contents, as the very condition of its possibility, a   transcendental and a formed aesthetics of metaphor. It would lead us back to the *a priory* forms of space and time. [20]

The idea of presence is a very powerful one. Its power rests on the way it combines a spatial and temporal sense, a here and now in a single value. And the appeal to it as an epistemological ultimate has an immediate plausibility.

Christopher Norris observes that Derrida has refused to grant philosophy the kind of privileged status it has always claimed as the sovereign dispenser of reason. For Derrida the philosophers have been able to impose their various systems of thought only by ignoring or suppressing the disruptive effects of language. And he has succeeded in drawing out these effects by a critical reading which fastens on and skillfully unpicks, the elements of metaphor and other figurative devices at work in the texts of philosophy. Deconstruction in its most rigorous form acts as a constant reminder of the ways in which languages deflects or complicate the philosopher's project. Deconstruction, according to Derrida, works to undo the idea - the ruling illusion of Western metaphysics - that reason can somehow dispense with language and arrive at a pure, self-authenticating truth or method. It reveals that though philosophy strives to efface its textual or 'written' character, the signs of

that struggle are there to be read in its blind-spots of metaphor and other rhetorical strategies.

Derrida has no desire to establish a rigid demarcation of zones between literary language and critical discourse, rather he sets out to show that, certain kinds of paradox are produced across all the varieties of discourse by a motivating impulse which runs so deep in Western thought that it respects none of the conventional boundaries. For example, criticism, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology and the whole modern gamut of 'human sciences' - are at some point subjected to Derrida's relentless criticism.

Derrida finds that Husserl begins the *Logical Investigations* with a set of "essential distinctions", a group of operative concepts, that will rigorously and systematically guide his thought to the end. These distinctions have importance, not just because they dictate the course and structural unity of Husserl's own work, but they repeat, in an explicit and cogent way, the very axioms of traditional metaphysics. Derrida will argue even more emphatically that Husserl's thought is precisely the paradigm, the highest and final cause of this tradition. For Husserl and the tradition, the sense of being has always been interpreted as presence, and this interpretation assumes two forms. Something is in so far as it presents itself or is capable of presenting itself to a subject - as the present object of a sensible intuition or as an objectivity presented to thought (the interpretation of being as objectivity) .Secondly, we say that

a subject or self in general is only in so far as it is self present, present to itself in the immediacy of the conscious act (the latter as subjectively). The interpretation of being as presence and self presence entails a series of philosophical consequences and conceptual oppositions that persist to the present day, and nowhere are these consequences more strikingly evident than in the thought of Husserl.

In fact, Derrida is not the first to have criticized Husserl's account of a purified consciousness. Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty made this as measure of their distance from transcendental phenomena. Derrida's distinction is to have undertaken this criticism by an appeal not to the impossibility of bracketing out existence, but the irremediable other - relatedness of the sign, which is the structure of consciousness. He introduces an account of the nature of signs which is thoroughly at odds with the view that they are merely the external forms given to meanings. Signs relate to other signs by opposition, by derivation by a whole play of differences. Indeed, all these horizontal relationships make nonsense of the vertical model of Husserl's which ties signs down to individual meanings. Derrida asserts that meaning is always mediate and never immediate. By mediation he meant not just a deferred presence which finally comes but a permanent state of deferment. It is argued that the play of difference that Derrida substitutes for Husserl's immediacy of presence can never be captured in a system or can never be represented.'[21]

In his critique of Husserl, Derrida used not only the Heideggerean view of metaphysics as the interpretation of Being as presence, but also the Saussurean account of the sign. In fact, with this critique Derrida is attacking the whole tradition in which language is conceived as founded on logic rather than on rhetoric. The disagreement between rationalists and empiricists is about the origin of ideas. What they have in common is the view that signs represent ideas and that an idea is some thing that can stand in semantic contrast or contradiction to another idea. Working within a Heideggerian frame work, Derrida like the later Wittgenstein, focuses attention on this common tradition in order to question its intelligibility, and thus to challenge the cogency of both schools of thought that are based upon it. It is regarded that signs are timeless in the sense that they are not to be located and identified in terms space and time. That signs represent timeless ideas has a number of direct consequences which set problems for Derrida's consideration.

Since a sign is something with physical characteristics and occurs in spatio-temporal contexts, there must be a radical distinction, a distinction in kind, between signs and what they signify. This distinction is most commonly known through signifier and signified. Derrida assumes familiarity with Saussure's terminology and its implications, and a key point in his attack on metaphysics is his attack on the requirement of a logical account of language that a sign be a completely different sort of thing from what it signifies and that the latter not be determined in any manner by the former.

The structuralism involves a method of analysis in which individual elements are considered not in terms of any intrinsic identity but in terms of their relationship within the system in which they function. That is, a system is regarded as constituted by the differences between the elements that operate within it. Structuralism attempts to examine the structure of such systems from a more impersonal or scientific perspectives than that of the perceiving or intending subject. Post-structuralism might be said to be suspicious of the apparent case with which this de-centering of the subject is carried out, and to submit that operation is more rigorous consequences of difference. The first casualty of this is the very possibility of the closed system on which structuralism is predicated.

The structure, although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure - but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. Derrida regards the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture must be thought of as a serious of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center.

Derida asserts that there is no transcendental of privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limits. Derrida writes, "the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and this play of signification infinitely".[22] For him, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The concept of the sign in each of its aspects, has been determined by the opposition throughout the totality of its history. It has lived only on this opposition and its system.

Derrida shows that the scientificity of the Saussure's choice of an object of study - which turns out to be spoken languages - rests on his identification of the spoken sound with meaning (thought). Saussure suggests that language is an arbitrary and conventional system. For him, it is arbitrary because there is no inherently natural reason why the word dog should mean what it does. By conventional, Saussure meant that language is a sign system or code whose conventions are agreed by a particular society so that communication can take place. The production of the meaningful according to Saussure's is the result of a process of combination and selection within a language system which functions through the generation and recognition of differences. For instance, we come to recognize that 'dog' is different from 'cat' through the different meanings or signifieds attached to the different sounds or signifiers. Moreover, he identifies two axes which contributes to this process: the syntagmatic axis and paradigmatic axis. Meaning is produced along with

the syntagmatic axis, as in the sentence through the accumulation of its component parts : I / read / a / book/ yesterday .

Saussure's main contribution to linguistics lay in his distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of language, that is between languages studied either as a complete system working as such at one point of time in a given language community, or language studied in its development, historically. Saussure saw synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of language as complementary:

Speech always implies both an established system and an evolution. At every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past. To distinguish between the system and its history, between what it is and what it was, seems very simple at first glance; but actually the two things are so closely related that we can scarcely keep them apart.[23]

Saussure argues that 'one must sense the opposition between the two classes of facts (those produced by historical and by synchronic investigations) in order to draw out all its consequences'[24] A further very influential distinction of Saussure's was that between *langue* and *parole*- between the whole abstract system which allows for the generation and understanding of utterances, and the actual utterances so generated and

understood by concrete individuals. The distinction has much in common with the Chomskean distinction between *competence* and *performance*.

Saussure's work has been criticized for taking a rather ahistorical view of language, for his linguistics used a humanist notion of society, and supposed that anything social was homogeneous and held in common by everyone, and that such linguistics evacuated history and change. The most important feature of Saussure's work is the theory of the sign. He saw all language systems as composed of various signs to which a concept or an image is attached by association. For instance, the sound d-o-g means a four legged hairy mammal and is different from the sound m-e-a-t or h-a-t which in turn have different meanings attached to them. Languages, says Saussure, is a twofold or binary system and that such a system consists of a code which is conveyed through verbal or visual signs which have agreed concepts or meanings attached. This distinction is expressed by the following related terms: *signifier* and *signified*. The signifier is the particular sound as phonetic configuration which produces the word 'dog' and the signified the concept or images associated with it. Saussure asserts that the language is a system of differences; in language there are only differences. It is this structure of differences in terms of sounds and their related meanings which for Saussure constitutes the way that we know and understand the world which appealed to later theorists, in particular to those which are generally labeled as structuralists and post-structuralists.

Instead of people shaping languages to their own ends, the implication of Saussure's theories lead to the idea that people are shaped or determined by language, as the Heidegger stated, 'language speaks to us'. For Saussurean languages is essentially a social and not an individual phenomenon. The very shared, communicative aspect of language makes this necessarily so:

> The arbitrary nature of the sign explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a   linguistic system.   The   community   is necessary if values that owe their existence   solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up; by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value . [25]

The implications of Saussure's theories are that language constructs the sense of the world as we know it. His theories pointed the way for a rethinking of the nature of language and framed part of a much broader movement which was particularly evident in linguistic philosophy. Some philosophers at this time, Wittgenstein for instance, felt that the great questions which philosophy had traditionally addressed about the meaning of life and which were in effect questions about language, through not usually perceived as such.

The Saussurean semiology led to the structuralism of Levi-Strauss in Anthropology, Lacan in psycho-analysis, Barthes in literary criticism and Althuser in political theory. Unlike existentialism where its philosophy has crept into other fields, structuralism has entered into

philosophical research from related disciplines. Post structuralism can be viewed generally as a development from structuralism, though the two movements do overlaps and show several common areas, Indeed some theorists such as Roland Barthes or Jaeques Lacan can be seen as having both structuralist and poststructuralist phases in their work. It is argued that one of the central tenets of poststructuralism is that whereas structuralism emphasized the underlying structures of meaning in a fairly secure foundational way, meaning in poststructuralism is always temporary and in a state of flux, never stabilized or rooted in any way; Derrida's concept of difference implies this. Barthes' theory of secondary signification anticipates the indefinite chains of meaning where signifieds in their turn become new signifiers, and so on. A text is also caught up in a network of inter-textuality; it may temporarily acquire a particular meaning as a reader interprets or 'activates' it, but this is never more than a particular and rational meaning as a text is caught up in a new and different cultural webs.

In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida asserts that in Western science and philosophy forms of knowledge are structured around a centre, and this structuring process does not normally draw attention to itself. It has become naturalized. Says Derrida: "discourse of knowledge usually refers to a centre, to a point of presence, a fixed origin."[26] He argues that the function of this centre is twofold. It provides a focus and allows knowledge to be organized around a certain truth or revelation which presents itself as sbsolute. It also crucially functions to limit or delimit

the meanings available, to circumscribe or contain the ways in which a text or field of knowledge can be understood, so that any proliferation or free play of meaning is presented. Meaning is contained within the system of knowledge so that a discourse makes or validates its own truth and does not draw attention to the ways in which this is achieved, The key element of this process is, says Derrida, logocentrism, that is the metaphysics of presence or the essential meaning that supposedly exist prior to language and therefore beyond a text, regarded as the central or fundamental to meaning and knowledge in Western culture. That which is central or the *'logos'* (= speech, logic, reason, the word of God) is the term used by Derrida to characterize any signifying system governed by the notion of the self presence of meaning; i.e., any system structured by a valorization of speech over writing, immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and self presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity. Deconstruction involves the dismantling of such an authoritative position.

The term 'deconstruction' signifies a project of critical thought whose task is to locate and 'take part' in those concepts which serve as the axioms or rules which command the unfolding of an entire epoch of metaphysics. Deconstruction is somewhat less negative than the Heideggerean or Nietzschean terms 'destruction' or reversal; for, it suggests that certain foundational concepts of metaphysics will never be entirely eliminated, even if their importance may seem to be effectively diminished. Derrida says: "There is no sense in doing without the

concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics."[27] There is no simple 'overcoming' of metaphysics or the language of metaphysics. Derrida recognizes, nonetheless, that the system of Western thought is finite; it has a finite number of axioms and a finite number of permutations that will continue to work themselves out in a given period of time as particular movements within this tradition, as particular schools of movements in philosophy. In this sense though Derrida speaks of the 'completion' of metaphysics, with regard to the terminal point of 'closure' of the system. For Derrida,

'One does not leave the epoch one closes implying one's confinement to the terms being deconstructed; and that deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work, implying that deconstruction cannot finally escape its own opening movement, while Gasche claims that Derrida recognizes a philosophy's demand for systematically and system function as an unsurpassable and indispensable demand to which anti-systematic thought ... remains profoundly committtted'.[28]

But the work of deconstruction does not consist in simply pointing out the structural limits of metaphysics. Rather, in breaking down and disassembling the ground of this tradition, its task is both to exhibit the source of paradox and contradiction within the system, within very axioms themselves and to set forth the possibilities for a new kind of meditation, one no longer founded on the metaphysics of presence

Derrida's statement that 'there is nothing outside of the text' is an attempt to overthrow the *logocentric* belief, indicating that it is only the text itself which speaks, not some prior and external origin or presence. Centers of meaning can be identified from the 'I' of our own sense of identity, to more collective centers of nationhood. It seems that the Western religion is centered on the idea of God with a series of orbiting sub-centers which function to hold the ultimate centre of being or presence in place. When a centre is questioned or modified, as with Freud's redefinition of the psyche so that the traditional model of the mind and consciousness is displaced by the concept of the unconscious, a new centre is in turn constructed. In fact, it is impossible to think, speak or write without involving some sort of underlying centrism in our discourse. Language has been historically invested with powers of presence; Derrida argues that Plato's privileging of the spoken over the written word was one way of investing language with authenticity, fixing it with a specific origin and thus anchoring it to a particular movement with a certain meaning.[29] For Derrida, meaning is never in fact single or fixed, but constantly proliferating and shifting or slipping, whether it be in spoken or written language.

Derrida's term for conceptualizing how meaning works and which underpins the project of deconstruction is *differance*. It is a neologism combining the two senses of the French verb *differer* -- 'to differ' and 'to defer or postpone' - into a noun designating active non-self-presence

both in space and time. *Differance*, without which no language or meaningful sign can be conceived, is associated very closely in Derrida's work relating to the question as to what makes it possible to transcribe spoken language in writing. What makes writing possible has nothing to do with the meaning of the spoken signs; what makes it possible is rather the pattern of vocalizations, the phonemics of the language. *Differance* is a complex essential characteristic of signs, being composed of (a) an actual *differance* which makes the sign possible, but which can be instituted and understood only in terms of (b) other times and circumstances in which the instituted difference systematically appears. For Saussure the relationship between signifier and signified was a stable one, the system of phonetic and semantic differences worked in a regulated and unproblematic way. But for Derrida it becomes highly problematic: meaning is always in a state of contention and flux. For instance, when we think of 'dog' we are also thinking about what it is not; not a cat, or whatever. It is argued that a particular meaning or value is articulated, the more significant are the areas of difference which surround it. Indeed, Derrida asserts that texts are really about what they appear not to be about, and he searches for weak points, or fractures where the otherness that texts conceal become apparent. In a sense, the subject of *Mansfield Park* is just as much immorality as it is morality, but the immoral remains unmentionable and silent, and by doing so determines the language and behaviour of morality. This kind of fracture which reveals the otherness of meaning, Derrida terms *aporia* (in Greek 'doubt' or 'perplexity'). Some texts, says Derrida, reveal their 'otherness'

and the way in which meaning is constructed and 'centred' self consciously whereby the inherent contradictions on which they are based became apparent. Derrida's other sense of *differance* is different; the idea that meaning is never complete, never fully realized, but always just beyond us, postponed or deferred, is indicated here. Words defined by other words, which are in turn defined by other words, so that we can never come to a point of fully realized, non-regressive meaning.

For Derrida, deconstruction is not a form of textual vandalism designed to prove that meaning is impossible. In fact, the deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or generalized skepticism, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself. It is not the meaning, says Derrida, is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. To 'deconstruct' a piece of writing is therefore to operate a kind of strategic reversal, seizing on precisely those unregarded details (casual metaphors, footnotes, incidental turns of argument) which are always and necessarily, passed over by interpreters of a more orthodox persuasion. Derrida insists that deconstruction keep its eye on the specific differences of logic and sense that mark off one text from another and which also demand some answering awareness of generic distinctions on the readers part.

It is argued that the texts are 'stratified' in the sense that they bear along with them a whole network of articulated themes and assumptions

whose meaning everywhere links up with other texts, other genres or topics of discourse. This is what Derrida calls the 'disseminating' force which is always at work within language, written or spoken. In fact, it is precisely this stratified character of language - the fact that it has been endlessly worked over by specific genealogies and logic of sense - which now demands such a corresponding effort of 'prudent, slow, differentiated reading.

Derrida's stress on textuality and writing is not in any sense a break with philosophy, or a declaration of interpretative freedoms hitherto undreamt under the grim repressive law of conceptual clarity and truth. Deconstruction, as a form of ideological critique has acquired the power to effect real changes in the present institutional structures of power, knowledge, and politics. Derrida thinks of philosophy, not only as a site of institutional struggle, but also as a highly specific discipline of thought whose central texts may indeed be deconstructed; but not given up to any kind of inter-textual or undifferentiated 'free play'.

NOTES

1. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 28.

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3. Jurgen Habermas, *Post-metaphysical Thinking,* Trans. William Mark Hohergarten (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

4. David Hall, "Modern China and the Postmodern West", in *Culture and Modernity: East West Philosophic Perspectives,* ed. Eliot Deutsh (Honolulu : University of Hawaii Press, 1991), p. 57.

5. Derrida, *Positions,* Trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 19.

6. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense" in *Complete Works of Nietzsche,* ed. D. Levi(Lobndon and Edinburg, 1911) Cited in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy.*

7. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* Trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.62.

8. Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak(Delhi: Motilal, 1994) p. 6.

9. Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* p. 11.

10. Ibid, p. 55.

11. Ibid, p. 22.

12. Ibid, P. 15.

13. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana Press, 1987), p. 21.

14. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 12.

15. Norris, *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy*, (London: Methuan, 1983), p. 14.

16. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. XXI.

17. Derrida, *Writing and Differences*, p. 278.

18. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* p. 92.

19. Rodolphe Gasche, *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde (Albane: State University of New York), p. 166.

20. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 227.

21. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 74.

22. Derrida, *Writing and Differences*, p. 280.

23. Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 8.

24. Ibid, p. 83.

25. Saussure, p. 112 (Fontana, 1978).

26. Derrida, *Writing and Differences*, p. 278.

27. Ibid, p. 280.

28. John Sallis (ed), *Deconstruction and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), p. 7.

29. Derrida, *Dissemination*, Trns. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 101.

NAGARJUNA AND DERRIDA: A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT

CHAPTER IV

NAGARJUNA AND DERRIDA: A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT

Scope and aim of comparison: Let me begin with Masson-Oursel's remarks on comparative philosophy; "no one philosophy has the right to put itself forward as co-extensive with the human mind', and hence 'philosophy cannot achieve positivity so long as its investigations are restricted to the thought of our own civilisation".[1] He claims that the comparative method would become the indispensable prerequisite for the development of a true philosophy, and he stands for the view that comparisons are more worthwhile when the differences amongst the traditions in question are greater.

Recent years have witnessed an exponential growth of writings in comparative philosophy. Studies in this genre have also tended to be concentrated more and more on specific concepts and ideas such as the self, causality and scepticism, and on issues connected with epistemology, philosophy of mind and ethics. The scope of comparative philosophy is universal history and cosmos: philosophy has to explain man and his universe, i.e. the nature of man is expressed in history. Indeed man has expressed himself in several ways in the different races and cultures, the true comprehensive philosophy will be one which based on a comparative estimate of the many ways of his expression. Most

civilizations and their cultures raised themselves to the reflective level in its own philosophy. Its own philosophers know more than others about its aims and methods and the values it struggles to uphold. It is true that no culture has had only a single system of philosophy. Non-apprehension of this fact has led to many over-simplifications, false generalizations and unhelpful comparisons.

Human life is same everywhere and the different traditions can aim at and uphold the same values or similar values irrespective of their spacio-temporal limitations. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in an article writes:

> The fundamentals of human experience, which are the data of philosophical reflection, are the same everywhere. The transitoriness of all things, the play of chance, the emotions of love and hate, fear and jealousy, the continual presence of death, the anxiety to overcome the corruptibility of things, to enjoy the fleeting moment – these have determined for each man his life's meaning and value.[2]

The differences between the problems that life presented to men of different cultures and the various ways in which men sought to solve the problems were not due to the men of East being a species of animal distinct from the men of West. But arose because of the life situations – natural, social and political - varied; presented different problems in different ways, and suggested different forms of solutions, and thereby

determining the general trend and interest of much of subsequent philosophy .

It does not mean that differences will be completely annihilated, but they will get secondary preference, and similarities will become more numerous. With the comparative studies we will be benefited by observing how the different traditions face and try to overcome a problematic situation. We can find out the significance of both similarities and difference in results as well as methods of traditions. The highest ideals (and will have to be) are same for all, values unknown to some cultures will be presented to them; and if they are true values (they will) not only be welcomed with enthusiasm, but also demanded with vehemens. While welcoming and demanding some values, the cultures must face the problems which those values create and be prepared for the solutions.

The aim of a comparative study in the cultural synthesis implies not dominance but development, not imposition but assimilation, not narrowing of outlook but its broading and not limitation of life but its expansion. It is necessary on the part of Indian thinkers to reflect and reformulate our world-views and basic concepts and methods, in the light of the global changes, for a much stronger emphasis on 'life-affirmation'. Comparison of traditions enable us to know which aspects of life and which values are considered to be important by each, and how each formulated and solved the problems relevant to those values.

Certainly, the same problems may not have been solved in the same way by all schools of the same tradition. So detailed comparison of traditions involves comparison of schools and systems of the same tradition, and of the concepts of one system with those of another within the same tradition. Both differences and similarities are of value to the one who aims at building up a philosophy which does full justice to the humanity. Comparative studies should recognize the complementary nature of each traditions; and there is much that is common to all, though developed in varying degrees. Each can learn much from the others and widen its scope. And they can be brought together and studied only as philosophies of life.

Sharing Insights: The cultures of both East and West have come to realize that their traditional life and thought patterns are not adequate and that each has to learn from the other. There are many bold thinkers who have sought to build bridges between East and West and thereby to further the cause of understanding between peoples of diverse cultural, religious, and intellectual backgrounds. One such bridge – builder Thomas Merton writes:

> It is no longer sufficient merely to go back over the Christian and European cultural traditions. The horizon of the world are no longer confined to Europe and America. We have to gain new perspectives, and on this our spiritual and even our physical survival depends.[3]

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries witnessed a growing sense of disenchantment amongst educated Europeans with the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment and Victorian faith in progress, accompanied by a fascination with ideas of degeneration and decadence, and a willingness to explore strange new seas of though. The very speed of progress, the rapid transformation from traditional to modern social and economic formations, the growth of science – inspired materialist philosophies, and the ever – slackening hold of ancient religious beliefs and rituals, all of these combined to breed a mood of discontent with the comforts and promises of Western civilization, and to encourage a search for more satisfying and meaningful alternatives. It is a period of great cultural ferment which generated an extraordinary vortex of intellectual strife gyrating round a set of ideas and debates. A powerful and influential voice at the turn of the century was that of Nietzsche which undoubtedly helped to articulate the growing disillusionment with established Western ideals, not only with Christianity but with the whole Enlightenment preoccupation with progress and scientific rationalism, and to motivate the urge to explore new values and world views. The indigenous world views of the West have been seen as simply not working any more, a situation which has led to an extraordinary quest, in the East and elsewhere, for better alternatives.

Any adequate history of Western thought must take into account how philosophical, religious, and pychological ideas from East have been drawn into Western thought from the seventeenth century onwards. In the earlier centuries the encounter with East was confined to a relatively few intellectuals. From the turn of the twentieth century we can witness its effects increasingly amplified over a much wider range of cultural and intellectual endeavours, from popular religious quests to scholarly research. In fact, the traditional philosophies of the East have increasingly been drawn into interaction with Western intellectual traditions, and have helped to rouse and amplify a range of contentious issues in a variety of fields.

The interest in Buddhism which first flowered in the mid-nineteenth century has come to full growth in our own day. And *Theravada* Buddhism, which so appealed to the rationalist and humanist tendencies of the nineteenth century has continued to offer both a spiritual path and an intellectual stimulus to many who firmly rejected the transcendental aspects of the Christian teachings. Hinduism, especially in its *Vedanta* form, has acquired renewed favour and has attained a popularity in our century, which far exceeds that which it elicited in the Romantic period. This revival was largely initiated by Swami Vivekananda who had a powerful impact in his days. In addition to these continuities, the range of Eastern ideas and philosophies with which the West has sought to engage has been greatly widened in the present century. Of the *Mahayana* schools Zen Buddhism has had the most

powerful impact on the West. It was during the inter-war period that the writings of D.T, Suzuki helped to awaken the Western mind to the strange but enticing world of Zen. For some scholars, the encroachment of Indian philosophies on the West represents a phenomenon of considerable historical and cultural importance. Jung says:

> The East is 'throwing our spiritual world into confusion' and pushing us to 'the threshold of a new spiritual epoch'.[4]

And Jacobson, in his remarks on the West's encounter with Buddhism, says:

> A part of the most significant event of our time, 'an event without precedent in the historical development of man', believing that 'the Buddhist orientation has played a central role in humanity's continuing discovery of its organic wholeness'.[5]

And further he insists:

> It is a philosophy which, by dint of its astringent analysis of all conceptual frameworks and prepositions is one of humanity's most persevering efforts to keep from enveloping itself in those linguistic and symbolic system that reduced awareness and understanding to the limits of the tribe, social class, age, race, ethnic background or nation.

Jacobson argues that Buddhism, by its very nature, possesses a self corrective methodology which can release us from the hypnotic grip of mental habits, or parochial patterns and social convention. And which constitutes one of the major resources, therefore, in the struggle of the contemporary world to free itself from the culture-bound astigmatisms of the past. This freeing from 'culture-bound astigmatisms' has proved on the whole salutary and productive, contributing and enriching ingredient to Western cultural life, though as we shall see later it has not proved uniformly liberating and enlightening, and its role in the intellectual life of the West has in some respects come to appear ambivalent and questionable.

In recent times it has indeed often focused on the ideal of global reconciliation, and many thinkers have earnestly explored the idea that bringing East and West together at an ideological level might provide a key to a new world order of peace and reconciliation. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has been a leading exponent of the ideal of intellectual and spiritual convergence, expressing the hope that, with the intermingling of people, races and religion, neighbourhood will now be transformed into brotherhood. In that by means of a cross-fertilisation of ideas and insights, behind which lie centuries of racial and cultural tradition and earnest endeavour, a great unification (will) take place in the deeper fabric of men's thoughts, urging the creation of a world society with a universal religion of which the historical faiths are but branches.

We find enough evidence in Western philosophy in the twentieth century of a growing awareness of alternative traditions and a desire to bring about some kind of fusion of horizons between East and West. And we shall see that a number of thinker have begun to take a serious interest in Eastern ideas and to locate their Western philosophising within a wider perspective. Th. Stcherbatsky, for example, was seeking to build bridges between Buddhism and Western philosophy. He was the first Western philosopher to take seriously the philosophy of Nagarjuna. Western Philosophy in general has increasingly backed away from its claim to global hegemony, and adopted a more critical and complementary vote, so too in its relationship with Eastern thought it has scaled down some of its earlier grand designs and been content with adopting a more modest posture, dealing with individual thinkers, and working towards tightly defined goals. It is facile to merely collect comparisons and constructs list of propositions that appears to be related, because one who knows how to read can mix- and watch theories and categories that are divorced from the processes of reasoning that produced them.

In recent years Nagarjuna has been drawn into comparative studies and into the net of deconstructive discourse. What has proved especially compelling about this second century Buddhist thinker is the way in which he was seen as focussing on the ambiguities and mystifications inherent in language and used these in order to substantiate a broad critical perspective. Nagarjuna's aim is not to convey truths about the world, but to free us from pathological fixations and to provide a kind of

therapy for the diseases of language. *Madhyamika* philosophy is concerned essentially with language, and seeks to emancipate us from the grammatical fictions in which we are trapped. According to Glen T. Martin there is more than a passing resemblance between Nagarjuna's philosophy and Nietzsche's critique of traditional Western ways of thinking. Nietzsche has to be seen as a precursor of the deconstructive discourse. Martin argues:

> Nagarjuna's dialectical analysis of the common categories by which people understand existence carries radical implications, somewhat comparable to those of Nietzsche's philosophy, in which a deconstructive process ultimately leads to the realization that both everyday existence and the categories by which we comprehend it are self contradictory and incoherent.[7]

And he points out that though they differ in purposes due to the historical background; Nietzsche aims at reflecting on and to provoke the transformation of European culture in an age of incipient nihilism, and Nagarjuna's aim was release from the bondage of suffering caused by distortions in our understanding. Their method is equally concerned with the dialectical deconstruction of the central categories by which language reduces us into accepting its thought constructions as realities. And both thinkers converge in their deep practical concern for humanity; they are involved with the question of liberation from bondage.

In both cases emphasis is laid on a person whose spiritual task is disciplined self-mastery and who therefore no longer flows out into a god. Both cherish inner freedom as a high aim. Both bespeak contemplative types which, contrary to appearance, are not fleeing reality but penetrating into it, habiting their vision to a new repore and teaching it to see the true nature of what lies before it. Both ideals recommend a psycho-physical training that aims at de-conditioning the self freeing it from automatic reactivity, draining from it – the poisons of enemity and ressentiment, and providing it with access to life's free flow of quality and the concomitant blessings of freedom, phenitude and gratitude. That is, the critical thrust of their approach is not a form of anti-religious scepticism, but rather opens up unheard of creative possibilities latent within the human situation.

Constructive similarities: The currently favoured idea that our representations are in some sense constructed is a notion anticipated within many philosophical traditions of East. What we find is a rich vein of Indian philosophical thinking which is concerned to deconstruct all categories thereby confronting us with the fabricated nature of all thinking. The link between this approach and postmodernism has been especially underlined in the case of Buddhism, as represented in particular by Nagarjuna and *Madhyamika* school. This school, with its emphasis on stripping away the culturally formed inveilments of language, and on the mind-formed sources of human experience, and with its dialectical method designed to demonstrate the contradictory

nature of all philosophical positions, has benn frequently cited in connection with the so called linguistic turn in recent critical and philosophical thinking, and with the deconstructive discourse associated with Nietzsche and Derrida.

In fact, it is hard enough to find a one-to-one correspondence of a particular view of Nagarjuna with the deconstructive strategy of Derrida. The reason is very clear that the concerns of the twentieth century philosophers may not (and do not) always coincide with the explicit concerns of the ancient thinkers belonging to an entirely different stream of thought. Though the basic philosophical motivation of the classical thinkers might have been very different from those of present day philosophising, several important questions and puzzles discussed in our tradition do seem to coincide with the current problematic discourses in the West. The contemporary issues in linguistics, philosophy of language, and literary criticism, find more than a passing resemblance with our traditional disciplines like Vyakarana, darsana and alamkara. Ongoing discussions in this field will be benefited through an infusion of ancient and age-old problems with the present-day problematic which will certainly enhance our understanding.

As a potential new point of engagement for Indian philosophy with the West, Derrida offers several areas of interest. Harold Coward observes that Derrida's philosophy provides a challenging and creative bridge between traditional Indian and contemporary Western philosophy.

The engagement with Derrida comes as the possibility of promoting a new stage of development. Rather than being left in the position of the endless struggle between alternative absolutes, the engagement of Indian philosophy with Derrida may provoke a deconstruction of these competing absolutes into a condition of ethical inter-relationship. Moreover, the great sage, Nagarjuna, has something to say to an age when the old certainties of both the East and the West are being busily deconstructed.

Nagarjuna's philosophy is anti-metaphysical in one sense. It does not deny the reality 'out there', but it definitely rejects any of our attempts to form a metaphysical system, any realistic or idealistic or relativistic account of such reality. He is committed to no doctrine or systematic belief about reality. The method which he follows in criticising any reality is not to advance some argument of his own against it; instead he proceeds by showing the internal in consistency of his opponents argument. His method is the *reductio ad absurdum*, and it is regarded not as an argument different from the one which it exposes but as the same, recast in a form that allows us to see its absurdity. Both Nagarjuna and Derrida avoid any claim about a determinate reality. Derrida seeks to elicit a sense of a reality that always steps aside from itself. One cannot speak of it, but one can point to the conceptual space it occupies that constitutes the condition of speaking about it, the possibility of a quest.

Nagarjuna rejects the *vedic* identification of language with the divine and he argues that language is conventional. Nor is there a special category of language called 'scripture' that can provide a revelation of reality that is otherwise unattainable. For him, words, even those of the Buddha, must he tested in ones own personal experience before being accepted. And he argues that even the words of the Buddha, like all of language, are infected with a subject – object duality that must be overcome if one is to be liberated from *samsara*. Nagarjuna firmly believes that the release from bondage requires an escape from or a going beyond our ordinary entrapment in language and its distorting subject – object duality.

In India the Buddhist discovery of the constructive role of the subject in knowing has challenged the view of language as eternal. From the Buddhist perspective, language expresses merely imaginary constructions that play over the surface of the real without ever giving us access to it. All language, including the *Vedic* language, is merely a human construction. Although useful for our day-to-day matters, language can give us no knowledge of the real. This view of language find some quite surprising links with the contemporary Western language debate particularly in the deconstruction of Derrida.

Derrida's essay on the "Copula Supplement" clearly represents one of the more radical approaches to language in continental thought. Following Nietzsche and Heidegger, he calls into question the whole role

of logic and grammar as it has related to the question of truth in Western philosophy. Derrida argues that Nietzsche remains more forceful and implicit than others in reminding the philosopher that he remains walled within a given language. Nietzsche determines freedom (freedom of thought) as the movement by which one breaks away from the language and grammar which up until then had governed the philosophical order. Thus he comes to define the law of language or signifier as a slavery which must be broken away from, and at the most critical moment, at the point of reversed for his enterprise, he remains a philosopher. For Nietzsche , Logic is only slavery within the bounds of language. Language has within it, however, an illogical element, the metaphor, Its principal force brings about an identification of the non-identical; it is thus an operation of the imagination. It is on this that the existence of concepts, forms etc. rests. Nietzsche argues :

> Only by means of forgetfulness can man ever arrive at imagining that he possesses "truth" in that degree just indicated. If he does not mean to content himself with truth in the shape of tautology, that is, with empty husks, he will always obtain illusions instead of truth. What is a word? The expression of a nerve stimulus in sounds. But to infer a cause outside us from the nerve stimulus is already the result of a wrong and injustificable application of the proposition of causality. How should we dare, if truth with the genesis of language, if the point of view of certainty with the designations had alone been decisive; how indeed should we dare

to say the stone is hard; as if 'hard' was known to us otherwise; and not merely as an entirely subjective stimulus! We divide things according to genders; we designate the tree as masculine the plant as feminine: what arbitrary metaphors. How far flown beyond the cannon of certainity.[8]

Derrida finds that Heidegger also takes in coming to grips with analogous difficulties. Heidegger, in his *Letter on Humanism*, explicitly formulates:

"........the metaphysics which, in the form of Western 'logic' and grammar, early took possession of the interpretation of language. Today we can but begin to surmise what lies hidden in this process. The freeing of language from "grammar", and placing it in a more original and essential framework, is reserved for thought and poetry".[9]

And elsewhere, recalling that *Sein and Zeit* remained uncompleted:

Here the whole thing is reversed. The section in question was suppressed because the thinking failed to find language adequate to this reversal and did not succeed through the aid of the language of metaphysics.[10]

Derrida contends that language acquires methodological importance in reflection upon human facticity in the same movement that puts the identity of this language in crisis. The paradox places language on the horizon of our age, at what he calls the 'closure' of metaphysics. Language does not simply embody the paradox, however, it brings it to light in the first place. On the one hand, the sign dominates the horizon of contemporary thinking, for, it no longer regarded as a secondary instance which represents or communicates a prior entity; on the other hand, just when it assumes this primary position, it moves into crisis. Since language is largely defined as a medium conveying an instance prior to it, the moment this instance withdraws, the very identity of language does as well.

Following his analysis of the paradox of the sign and the constitutive role of writing, Derrida contends that the epoch of logocentrism is one of phonocentrism. For him, both the possibility and the horizon of metaphysics are predicated on the normative exclusion of writing from the procedures of truth. It shows that the procedures of truth (from the logos of Plato to the 'science' of linguistics) are predicated on the disavowal of inscription. It is through this disavowal that metaphysics constitutes itself in the first place.

One of the most disturbing aspects of postmodernity is its de-centring of the human subject, i.e. representation of the self. For Buddhism, the self is not given by nature but constructed, not stable and

permanent but painfully fractured. For more radically than either Derrida or Lacan the Buddhist way forces the West to confront our cultural and psychological notions of ego, self, and subject beyond the usual alternatives. There have been much attention from the West in recent times towards an alternative model offered by Buddhism, which insists that nothing is fixed and permanent, that all is a flux, most especially human beings themselves. The teaching of all Buddhist schools concerning radical impermanence carries with it the implication that the self is ever-charging, a series of momentary experiences which in turn are conditioned elements within the whole web of interacting phenomena, an idea known as dependent co-origination. What this teaching denies is not the exitence of consciousness, or even self-consciousness, but rather the assumption that there is a permanent entity which lies behind consciousness and which is denoted by the personal pronoun.

The goal of Nagarjuna's deconstructive method (*sunyata*) is a state which, by removing all illusions, seems to open up rather than close down the possibility of a richer and more authentic existence, and which is seen as offering the possibility of deliverance from neurotic habits of mind. It does not imply a denial that the world exists or that it is merely an illusion, but rather that there is nothing besides fleeting appearances, and contrary to Western expectations does not point to angst and nihilism but rather to liberating insights and a strategy of mental cure and spiritual growth. Voidness is in effect an invitation to see that what exists cannot be squeezed into conventional linguistic categories with their

tendency to hypostatise individuality, permanence, and essence and thereby helps to release us from cramping obsessions and obstacles to enlightenment. In the *Hinayana* school voidness is only applied to persons, but in the *Mahayana* tradition all things are regarded as without essence. Nagarjuna taught this as a remedy for all dogmatic views, and as a way of liberation from all bondage, the cycle of rebirth, going ever further and claiming that the concept of *sunyata* itself empty and should not be clung to : these who believe in *sunyata* are deemed incurable.

All belief systems, including Buddhism itself, are illness to be cured. And it has proved to be an alluring concept to a number of contemporary thinkers in the West, and is being deployed in various ways to question prevailing categories and to open up new horizons. Jeremy Hayward, in his *Shifting Worlds, Changing Minds*, says:

A scientist and a Buddhist teacher, sees *sunyata* not as a philosophical abstraction, nor even as a way of combating the residues of a mechanistic paradigm, but as involving a profound existential gestalt switch, a transformation of perception that is said to be like waking up from a dream, a realisation of the extraordinary and profound error that one has been making all one's life. It is he insists, 'an earth shaking experience accompanied by great joy and relief as if an unimaginable burden had dropped, and to be the entry into a new way of conducting one's life'.[11]

In a similar vein Don Cupitt writes:

> Pessimism as an endemic disorder of the age, one which is
> encouraged by postmodernist thinkers who emphasise the
> impermanence of all things, including our most inner selves,
> abandoning us to a world that is no longer a single cosmos, more a
> flux of interpretations, theories, perspectives, meanings signs, and
> as a consequence we Westerners have thrust upon us an almost
> Buddhist sense of universal impermanence.

And he argues that Western intellectual and religious legacies with their typical emphasis on permanence and substantiality, and their belief that underneath the flux of appearance lies an eternal intelligible order of Reason, with all the qualities the heart desires. These logocentric traditions leave us gaping in despair into a black hole once the comforting support of such beliefs has been dislodged. The problem has its source, in our deeply rooted expectations of comforting solutions which in the contemporary world, are no longer forth coming. The way beyond this painful dilemma, Cupitt believes, is to wear ourselves from the need for such comforts by facing the inner capability of their absence, and the *Madhyamika* with its admirably non-realist philosophy can help us to do this.

Madhyamika philosophy offers a diagnosis and cure for the human situation which emphasises, first, the purely artificial nature of linguistic

categories, second, the need to develop a deconstructive practice that works to undo all the opposition and alienation so that they no longer hold us captive, and third, the attainment of a soul healing glimpse of the aborginal ineffable unity of all opposites.

It has often been debated whether Nagarjuna offers any views of his own at all. Nagarjuna, in his *Vigrahavyavartani*, noted the following objection presumably of his Nyaya opponent: the Emptiness is itself empty. The word emptiness is a predicated property; when it is said that every *bhava* is empty, we mean it is empty of its own nature. According to Nagarjuna, this is truly applicable to all metaphysical statements about reality. Having said or argued to show that emptiness is a thesis that refutes all other metaphysical theses, he adds that this is not a thesis. In a way this seems unavoidable in such a philosophical argument. What Nagarjuna teacher is that concepts, dogmas, and rational constructions of all sorts that presuppose the existence of things fail to capture the ultimate truth. The truth must always defeat any attempt to shut door upon it, to give it a fixed and final shape. Those who make a dogma of voidness itself are making a grave mistake. Like Nagarjuna, the deconstructionists expressly, dissociates themselves from theories about things; or rather. in examining theory they seek to transcend theories without offering rival theories.

What ultimately legitimises a proposition about a thing is the meaning it derives from its context. The context is constituted by an

infinite play of differences that cannot be fixed and determined the common sense view that language can unproblematically express the truth of human experience has been radically undermined. Modernist thinkers refused to confirm the sense, offered in earlier writing, that their words were expressing their personal thoughts and feelings or offering objective reflection of reality, instead, they made readers focus on language itself and think consciously about the relationship of words to experience. This questioning of language was taken further by the Structuralist linguistics, which points out that there is always a gap between language and the world, that our sense of reality is produced by the grid of meaning we impose in the continuity of experience. Words do not reflect, they construct our sense of self and the world. Deconstruction has developed this insight to reveal the complicity of language with power structures. Language – the symbolic order imposes its grid of meaning in the form of a system of conceptual differences or oppositions. By this means it continually reproduces reality as a hierarchy of values which certain interests of dominant power. Language is the means by which these hierarchical values seem to us natural and true. It is in the interest of power to impose this ideological perception of reality as the only possible one, the unitary Truth. However, deconstructive theories of language also show us that unitary closed definition is actually impossible. Even the most privileged concept has to depend on its despised for its meaning.

The post-structuralist theory suggests there is a continuous contestation within meaning and within individual identity between repressive social control on the one hand and disruptive excess on the other. Language is the means of imposing unitary definition on things and people, denying the continuous and multiple potential of actuality. However, this repressive of language contains the excess of meaning that constantly threatens to disrupt the boundaries of the defined identities and expose the fiction of any imposed truth.

Nagarjuna's deconstruction of the dualities of language points finally to an experience beyond language, i.e. to a different way of experiencing language and thought. His thought developed as a direct reaction to the *Abhidharma* Buddhist philosophers confidence that we could conceptually know things just as they are. Nagarjuna deconstructed the *Abhidharma* view that one could arrive at absolute knowledge about reality and that this could be the foundation for an ascending meditation to release.

The early schools that Nagarjuna criticised taught that from the standpoint of enlightenment the phenomenal world of change and appearance is unreal; what is real is the transcendent, state of *nirvana*. *Madhyamika* thought declares on the other hand that *samsara* and *nirvana* are coterminous. There is no place or state separate from the world we know, with its chaos, its inconsistencies, its text waiting to be deconstructed. *Nirvana* does not introduce us to some new state; the

difference is simply that enlightenment shows us all the old states (including the states of ourselves) as they really are. *Madhyamika* philosophy rests on the perceived discontinuity between the way the world is and what philosophy while engaged in metaphysical speculation thinks the world to be Nagarjuna is suspicious of any absolute claim made about the nature of reality and equally suspicious of any epistemology or view of language allowing such claim. He argues that the philosopher engaged i such metaphysics is living a sick form of life, infecting others who take him seriously. The only cure for this disease is to demonstrate the utter hollowness men of all metaphysical claims by the deconstructive analysis offered by *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Language as well as logic is considered to be useful for all practical purposes at the empirical or conventional level of truth as long a linguistic distinctions are not projected onto logically.

It has been always a common feature of the *Madhyamika* dialectics that a gap is maintained negatively between language and truth and also between certainty and truth. For example Hegel holds in his dialectic of the object and the subject that the sensation of the bare given falls short of language – 'mere this' is reduced into nothingness and in its place a new object with a new thought content emerges. It is consciousness which gives unity to the object. Nagarjuna maintain that language falls short of immediate sensation of the bare given. The bare given – the object which appears to our sensibility – cannot be conceptually described in its own-being. Our conceptual knowledge is empty and the

dictum what is real is rational and what is rational is real, - is not true. The view that we have a form of language to denote something which is real is wrong, but we infatuously crave for it. For Hegel, contradictions which arise in negation make up the dialectical experience of the truth in negation of negation. Truth combines both the moments of negativity in a dialectical synthesis. There is no such dialectical synthesis or third value in the *Madhyamika* dialectics.

Deconstruction, it has been said, is simply what is the case. If this is true, we must remember that 'what is the cas' is not a given reality, externally different from specific alternatives that are not the case. Derrida insists that deconstruction is neither theory nor philosophy. It is neither a school nor a method. It is not even a discourse nor an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today. Deconstruction has no existence as an activity separate from the phenomena whose nature it recognises, which it deconstructs. When we speak of deconstruction then there is no unique given reality with which we can identity it apart from the phenomenal world itself, which is a text, a structure or seeming structure whose real nature can be recognised to be incapable of consistent characterisation once it is seen for what it is. Reality, or all that can be recognised as such, is not something that comes to be known, having existed previously. It is a construction of knowing.

For both Nagarjuna and Derrida, things are not intrinsically real but exist only in relation to other things. Everything is relative is a

fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. The Buddha sought to formulate this notion with the doctrine of dependent origination, according to which things must be understood as arising in dependence upon each other. They are not absolutes; they are conditioned by causes. Given that one thing is present, another thing arises. Phenomena are not solid and permanent things; they are transient, appearing and disappearing in mutual dependence. Nagarjuna has denied the intrinsic substantive reality of anything and insisted that the very existence of any phenomena is only relative. It is relative to other phenomena, which in turn exists only in relation to others.

For a Buddhist, the phenomenal world continues to hold us up only to long as we are ignorant. When one attain knowledge, see that it is not real and capable of holding us up. The reality of things is an illusion: each thing is held up by something else, when we analyse the chain of holding up completely we find that it is circular, and there is nothing holding up the whole world. Seeing this enable us to understand the truth of the void. Every moment of experience is radically different from all other moments that are constantly arising in the stream of consciousness. Difference is fundamental. For Derrida, even the most basic irreducible state that he calls arche-writing or trace is composed of the movement of difference and contains within itself the potentiality for all oral and written language. This difference permits the articulation of speech and writing and founds the metaphysical opposition between signifier and signified. Difference is therefore the formation of form and the being

imprinted of the imprint . It is all a dynamic movement that has no originary subsisting trace. The trace is simply the basic impulse for movement that composes consciousness and that as a part of its own movement, erases itself. Derrida's thinking has much in common with the Buddhist notion of our experience as a stream of consciousness that leaves behind no enduring trace of its passing.

Within an integrated system of symbols, says Derrida, the essential reality of each element is actually constituted by its relation to the other elements, not by anything intrinsic to it, for in practice its structure can vary a great deal. Only its relation to its content defines it. He argues that no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. Since the phenomenal world is created for us by our concepts, and our concepts by language, the world itself is composed of elements that exist only in relation to each other. And both criticise the logic of binary oppositions, the relationship in question is examined and declared to entail a contradiction or a logical impossibility. The method is one that could be used to discredit any existential proposition that attributes a particular predicate to a particular subject. Wherever a relationship is supposed to inhere between two terms, one of which is primary and the other dependent or secondary, this relationship is systematically dismantled; each term is examined and

declared to be unintelligible except in so far as it turns into a form of the other term.

Nagarjuna deconstructs pairs such as self and non-self, substance and mode, non-causality and all conditionality, permanance and impermanenace, and time and things in time. Whereas *Brahmanism* asserted the substantive reality of the first in each pair and made of the second an illusion or mere seeming. While *Hinayana* Buddhism made an absolute of the second and denied the first, *Madhyamika* recognises that in every pair each term, rigorously analysed, turns out to contain the seed or essence of the other, and thus cannot be made an exclusive absolute. In textual criticism, this logic is repeatedly applied to such pairs as reality and appearance, truth and fiction, signified and signifier, man and women, speech and writing, system and event and metaphor and metonymy. Deconstruction reverses the hierarchical opposition:

The distinction between cause and effect makes the cause an origin, logically and temporally prior.   The effect is derived, secondary, dependent upon the cause deconstruction upsets the hierarchy by producing an exchange of properties. If the effect is what causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not the cause should be treated as the origin, by showing that the argument which elevates cause can be used to favour effect, one uncovers and undoes the rhetorical operation responsible for the hierarchisation and one produces a significant displacement. If either cause or

effect can occupy the position of origin, them origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical privilege.[13] ·

There is thought – the realism of philosophy – and then mediating systems through which thought is communicated. In speech there is already mediation but the signifiers disappear as soon as they are uttered; they do not obtrude, and the speaker can explain any ambiguities to insure that the thought has been conveyed. It is in writing that the unfortunate aspects of mediation become apparent. Writing presents language as a series of physical marks that operate in the absence of the speaker. In writing philosophy Plato condemns writing. Philosophical discourse defines itself in opposition to writing and thus in opposition to itself. For Derrida, this division or self-opposition is not a mistake or accident that sometimes occurs in philosophical texts, rather it is a structural property of the discourse itself.

The similarities which we draw between these two streams of thought are instructive, but it does not designate that the two teachings are really the same thing. The two schools come from widely different cultural milieu, and it is not to be thought that there are no significant differences in outlook or method between them. In an obvious sense *Madhyamika* belongs to a soteriological tradition while deconstruction does not. The application of Nagarjuna's metaphysics to the quest for salvation is to be found in the cultivation of *prajna*; an insight or wisdom that is not specifically a mystical faculty but rather an intellectual

intuition that can break down the barriers between the practitioners consciousness and the ultimate truth. This insight is promoted by the proper realisation of voidness. Nagarjuna employs negation, but does not lead to a theology; nor for that matter does deconstruction, though there has been some discussion whether Derrida is a sort of negative theologian.

For Nagarjuna, language expresses merely imaginary constructions that play over the surface of the real without giving us access to it. However, Derrida sees the dynamic difference that characterises reality as also composing the nature of language itself. It enables language, through its inherent processes of difference, to function as a means of realisation. For Derrida language participates in the reality it manifests. Such participation, according to Nagarjuna, transcends the limits of language. Nagarjuna takes the inherent nature of language in its subject – object conceptualising of all experience to be the major obstacle to the experience of the real. Whereas for Derrida language is the means for the experience of the real, for Nagarjuna language as imaginary construction is the obstacle to be removed if the real is to be seen. Nagarjuna observes that the subject – object mediation of language operates on a level (*vyavaharika*) that is totally, different from the level of the real (*paramarthika*). Language, although it may be functionally useful in the life-world, is devoid of any contact with truth or ultimate reality. Reality can be experienced only when language is completely negated so that the (*vyavaharika*) level disappears leaving *paramarthika* revealed. The real

is utterly devoid of the conceptual constructions of language.[14] However, Derrida does not admit the second level.

It seems the similarities are strong enough at least to suggest the operation of common social or cultural forces in a way that transcends the differences between civilisations. The comparison between *Madhyamika* and deconstruction identifies a field wide open for exploration. It may even come to be seen as a contribution towards the building of a truly global hermeneutic, a new and momentous phase in the long conversation of humanity.

NOTES

1. Masson-Oursel, *Comparative Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926), p. 35 and 33.

2. S. Radhakrishnan, "Philosophy : East and West", April, 1951.

3. T. Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Delta, 1961), p. 80.

4. C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961) p. 249 – 50.

5. N. P. Jacobson, *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: Change and Self – Correction* (Carbondale, Edwardswille: Southern Illinois Uty. Press, 1983), p. 17 – 18.

6. Ibid, p. 18.

7. G. Parker, (ed.) *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 91.

8. Nietzsche, *The complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. II, ed., Dr. Oscar Levy, Eng. Trns., Maximillian A. Mugge, London, 1911, p. 177.

9. Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism: Philosophy in the Twentieth century*; Eng. Trns. William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken, New York, 1962, p.271.

10. Ibid. p. 280.

11. J.W. Hayward, *Shifting Worlds, Changing Minds: Where the sciences and Buddhism meet* (Boston, mass: Shambhala, 1987) p. 211.

12. Cupitt, *The time Being* (London; SCM, 1992), p. 109-10.

13. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction : Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London, Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) p.88.

14. Murti, *The Central philosophy of Buddhism* p. 86.

CONCLUSION

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The present time may be regarded as a new axial age, not only one that is witnessing the end of the great universalising project associated with the European Enlightenment, but also one on which the global fulcrum may be passing from the West to East, and in which the dramatic shift of power from East to West which occurred in the Renaissance period is in the process of being reversed. Western thinkers are trying to widen their cultural horizons with the infusion of our tradition. For, ideas from one culture can interact with and fertilise those of quite a different culture by means of a creative dialogue. The cultures of both East and West have come to realise that their traditional life and thought patterns are not adequate and that each has to learn from the other.

In the twentieth century Buddhism has exerted an increasingly powerful influence over an ever growing number of people in the West, and many have sought therein either a supplement or an alternative to the Christian and Jewish beliefs whose attractions for them have waned. For many it seems that the West has undergone a spiritual crisis, a deeper and more pervasive one than the crisis of faith associated with the Victorian era, in which the loss of Christian belief has often led, not to atheism or agnosticism but to a spiritual vacuum into which the religions of the East, along with other spiritual movements, have been eagerly drawn. Old certainties have decayed, and new substitutes associated with science and with material welfare have proved unsatisfying, and in these

circumstances it is not altogether surprising that many have sought in the Eastern path a way to the renewal and the deepening of the spiritual life.

These recent developments provides an interesting new perspective on our tradition and it attempts to build a creative interface between the world views of East and West. One thinker who has seized upon the vital importance of this interface for critical reflection on the contemporary world is John Gray. The central task of this political thinker's recent writings has been to find a way beyond the failed ideology of traditional liberalism and beyond the universalist ambitions of the Enlightenment project, a path which seeks to avoid the fundamentalism of both left and right, but which can accommodate, even celebrate, a pluralist inspired toleration of cultural diversity. And he argues that the way forward is one which both acknowledges the passing of the Enlightenment project and also confronts the fact that political life is dominated by renascent particularisms, militant religions, and resurgent ethnicities. What may emerge from a renewed encounter between East and West is not a clash of civilisations but a new form of agonistic liberalism in which the rivalrous encounter of ideas and values will form the basis for toleration and mutual co-existence.

The master-myths of polarity and complementarity between East and West may be at last in the process of out-running their usefulness for all kinds of reasons, not least because the twin terms, East and West have lost whatever coherent meaning they may once have had. What we are

witnessing today is a pandemic transformation of ideas and institutions, led by a cultural and political energy which had its origins in the West, but which now extends world-wide in its scope and influence. Ninian Smart, a philosopher of religion, sees the emergence of a global culture, a planetary world which harbours unparalleled opportunities of mutual fecundation and challenge, in which traditional religious loyalties must inevitably give way, not to global blending of identities but to what he calls 'interactive pluralism'. The search for a truly global outlook that might be formed through some kind of synthesis between Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, based on the belief that at the deepest level of human wisdom there is a unity of vision embracing all mankind. It represents a yearning to unite humankind at a time when on the one hand there continues to be tension and conflict between peoples, yet on the other hand the peoples of the earth are in many respects coming closer together. The need to confront the cultural values of the others has evidently become a matter of some urgency in the second half of this century.

Contemporary restlessness concerning cultural identity, the validity of tradition, and the empowerment of repressed voices can be seen as postmodernist. What makes postmodernism so distinctive as an approach is that it goes beyond the familiar features to make wide-ranging and outrageous claims about the very nature of society and objective reality. It makes assertions not just about a new society or social reality, but about our understanding of reality itself. It moves from

history and sociology to philosophical questions of truth and knowledge. The rejection of grand narratives, of totalising world views, and absolute foundations, along with emphasis on fracture, heterogeneity, and incommensurability, mark out postmodernism from the modernist Enlightenment project.

The world of our experiences seems chaotic, disconnected, confusing. There appear to be no integrating forces, no unified meaning, no true inner understanding of phenomena in our experience of the world. That is, we live in the postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain. The postmodern world is a global civilisation, and a civilisation needs to have a few unifying truths and deeper values if it is to function. The single planetary civilisation to which we all belong confronts us with global challenges. We stand helpless before them because our civilisation has globalized only the surface of our lives. But our inner self continues to have a life of its own. The artificial world order of the past decades has collapsed and a new, more just order has not yet emerged. The central political task of this century, then, is the creation of a new model of coexistence among the various cultures, peoples, races and religious spheres within a single interconnected civilisation. In today's multicultural world the truly reliable path to peaceful coexistence and creations cooperation, we must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts than political opinion or convictions. That is, it must be rooted in self-transcendence.

People are discovering the symbolic universe, the socially constructed nature of reality - culture. We are constructing maps that enable us to find something new and different about the powerful symbolic structures that shape our lives. It is central to an emerging understanding of the human condition, and also a central part of a new global culture which is , in a sense, a culture about cultures. When we come to the idea of the self, the proposition that the self in an illusion; a socially constructed reality, seems to contradict plain common sense. It is the point at which it becomes most apparent that there is a very strong similarity between the ideas of postmodern intellectuals and those that have been running through spiritual teachings for centuries - those which we associate with the Buddhists.

For many theorists, the crisis - ridden system of global interconnectedness in which we now live is experienced by people ambivalently - as exciting adventure and terrifying risk, perpetual disintegration and renewal. Modernity is seen as an institutional setting which simultaneously empowers and constrains people, engendering their deepest hopes and fears. For the post modern thinkers changes in social, cultural and political conditions are so far-reaching that it is deemed inappropriate to talk of self-identity at all. They are concerned about changes in the proliferation of generalised communication, the dispersal of economic production and consumption, global, multinational capitalism, the multiplication of new political movements and identities, and the fracturing of knowledge and information. Postmodern society is

a radicalised modernity, a world of disastrous change, dynamism, and intensity. By a perverse kind of internal logic postmodernity breaks up social reality into chunks of experience without reference, structure, or unity. The proliferation of images, messages, signs and codes disseminated through the exhibition of illusions of the mass media has got relevance. For postmodern theorists, this proliferation of images in postmodern social space entails a radical breakdown in our sense of subjective reality. Postmodernity multiplies, dislocates, and disperses the forms of everyday reality. It destroys modern structures of time, space, history, and truth, and replaces them with acceleration and pluralization of brute immediacy. Faced with the multiplication of social reality, the trusted distinctions between meaning and non-meaning, truth and fantasy, surface and depth can no longer be sustained.

Contemporary postmodern social conditions profoundly detail the relationship between self and language, desire and discourse. The dislocations and terrors of postmodern experience leads to a breakdown of the signifying chain itself. The present becomes dispersed, the past and future isolated. The dissolution of self accompanies a transmutation of feelings. It is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings are now free floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria.

It seems what the postmodern mind is aware of is that there are problems in human and social life with no good solutions, twisted trajectories that cannot be straightened up, ambivalence that are more than linguistic blunders yelling to be corrected, doubts which cannot be legislated out of existence, moral agonies which no reason-dictated recipes can soothe, let alone cure. And also it does not expect any more to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without risk, danger and error, but is deeply suspicious of any voice that promises otherwise.

The significance of the postmodern thought rests precisely on the opportunity it offers to the critical theorists to pursue a kind of inquiry to an effect greater than ever before. Modernity had the uncanny capacity for thwarting self-examination; it wrapped the mechanisms of self-reproduction with a veil of illusions without which those mechanisms, being what they were, could not function properly. It had to set itself targets which could not be reached, in order to reach what reach it could. Whereas postmodernity enables us to tear off the mask of illusion, and to recognise certain pretences as false and certain objectives as neither attainable nor, for that matter, desirable. The novelty of the postmodern approach to ethics consists first and foremost not in the abandoning of characteristically modern moral concerns, but in the rejection of the typically modern ways of going about its moral problems, responding to moral challenges with coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations in

theory. The great issues of ethics - like human rights, social justice, balance between peaceful cooperation and personal self-assertion synchronization of individual conduct and collective welfare - have lost nothing of their topicality. They only need to be seen, and dealt with, in a novel way. The kind of understanding of the moral self's condition which the postmodern vantage point allows is unlikely to make moral life easier. The most it can dream of is making it a bit more moral.

The hope which guides this comparative study is that the philosophical crisis in the contemporary West and the classical India can come together in a constructive and critical dialogue. The comparative analysis undertaken has not only identified a large area of sharing insights of Nagarjuna and Derrida, it has also served to highlight distinctions between view points within them. The aim of this dialogue on the philosophical level is not just building of a bridge between the two traditions, but it is also one of a deeper understanding achieved by examining one's own tradition in relation to the other traditions. That is, sometimes through others that we come to know ourselves in a better way.

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