
This work in the philosophy of language calls into question so profoundly the kind of discourse one is accustomed to employ in book reviews that any speaking about it, unless itself within the "language of difference," runs the risk of being self-vitiating forthwith. Specifically, the book issues a sharp indictment against, and studiously avoids, summary language. This is also the language of introductions and conclusions, and the book does not have an ordinary preface or introduction but begins simply with "A Beginning." In the conclusion ("DifF6rance without conclusion"), conclusions are proscribed as dangerous for human beings (by reinstating the dominance of presence), and, on the surface at least, everything is left undecidable. The final line of the book is thus what replaces the conclusion in the language of difference: "Non-therefore, non-hence, non-purpose seam . . ."

The review most appropriate to this book would perhaps then be one long preterition. Or perhaps a disclaimer should be issued that every word in the review is written "under erasure." Such is the radicality of this language of difference.

Now the book does follow a certain well-defined course. First there is a discussion of Nietzsche, then of the early Heidegger, and then of Foucault, with the final word given to the later Heidegger. The progress is thus from the beginnings of a transvaluation of the language of identity and the metaphysics of presence (*Beyond good and evil*), to a "de-struction" of that language (*Being and time*), these preparing the way for the non-metaphysical discourse of Foucault (an aggressive language of difference) and for the gentle poetic discourse of the later Heidegger's language of releasement.

The book clearly cannot be said to argue for the superiority of a certain position — after all, such concepts as argumentation, superiority, and position are left far behind in the language of difference. And yet, surely, the author lets it be well known where he stands. There is a strong plea made to throw off the language of identity, the language of the
metaphysics of presence, along with its violence and repression. And an appeal is made on behalf of the language of difference, a non-metaphysical discourse where the goals of presence, timeless order and ultimate truth no longer rule, a thinking not dominated by polarities and hierarchical oppositions, an idiom where release of the previously repressed and freedom from resentment are finally possible.

The readership of the Journal in hand will no doubt tend to question this characterization of the difference between traditional and post-modern thinking. In the first place, whence this violence and repression that are said to be part and parcel of the metaphysical tradition? Perhaps the author’s most telling statement on the issue is the following:

In metaphysical traditions, a person wants to know what is real and what is not real. One feels obligated to find norms for judgment. One feels acutely the danger of despair if ultimate reality and meaning are threatened. These desires and feelings do not develop in the language of difference. . . . One feels the exhaustion of traditional ideas and a sense of happiness in a new and freer, less certain flow of words, thoughts, and expectations. (p. 7)

Allusion is obviously being made here to the idea of God, a metaphysical idea par excellence. There can be no doubt that this idea has in fact led to the most cruel kinds of violence among peoples as well as to violence, in the form of repression, within individuals. But, just as obviously, this is a one-sided view. As regards the passage just quoted, is it not possible that the less repressive course is to come to terms with the danger of despair and the threat mentioned rather than choose the happiness offered?

On the level of principle, concerning the book’s characterization of the two discourses, one might wonder if it is not itself engaging here in oppositional, hierarchical thinking. The author is, of course, more subtle than to allow himself to fall into such a trap unwittingly, and, as has been mentioned, in the end everything is indeed left undecidable. Perhaps a nagging question still remains, however: does a strict commitment to the language of difference not undercut a book’s very possibility as a book? I.e., do not the writing and publishing of a book, acknowledging the assistance of family and friends, hoping that others will read it and understand it, etc. issue from an implicit acceptance of a certain traditional, metaphysical values? To put it more provocatively, the question would be whether there can be a book stemming consistently from the language of difference in view of the fact that “book,” in its full scope, has