

# Living in Doubt: Derrida's Absence in Cavell's Acknowledgment

I promise nothing complete; because any human thing supposed to be complete, must for that very reason infallibly be faulty.

--Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

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Before the tragedy of September 11, 2001 before that traumatic welcome to the new millennium, before the collapse of the "dot-com" financial markets bubble, and before the interrogated election results of 2000, the impeachment of President Clinton on the grounds that he had perjured himself while giving testimony under oath before a grand jury served to highlight a discussion on our "postmodern" condition and the problem of a supposed relativization of truth. This study is yet another commentary on the question of certainty, particularly as posed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida and his American contemporary Stanley Cavell. It will be shown how both philosophers leave us with the possibility of responding positively within the doubts posed by skepticism and postmodernism.

Over the course of the last decade, "postmodernism" has filtered the very air of our national discourse. Perhaps I was not alone in the 1990s in speculating that President Clinton might be described as America's first postmodern president in that he was our first leader who acknowledged and used (overtly) some of the premises associated with deconstruction. President Clinton's now-famous sentence "It depends on what the meaning of 'is' is," elicited a response from the Republican investigator David Schippers that is reminiscent of postmodern theory's more virulent detractors. Mr. Schippers' summation before the House Judiciary Committee (December 10, 1998) included these assertions:

That single declaration, ... points out his attitude and his conscious indifference and complete disregard for the concept of truth. ... He also invites --invents

convoluted words or phrases in his own crafty mind. ... You would never know his secret mental reservations or the unspoken redefinition of words. And even if you thought you'd solved the enigma, it wouldn't matter; he'd just change the meaning to suit his purpose.<sup>1</sup>

I quote Mr. Schippers at length because his words so powerfully engage the debate regarding postmodernism's arbitrary relativization of truth. Here is how the American philosopher J.R. Searle summarizes deconstruction in his article "The World Turned Upside Down": "The deconstructionist wants to ... undermine logocentrism, ... [so that] understanding [is] a form of misunderstanding, and that what we think of as meaningful language is just a free play of signifiers or an endless *process* of grafting texts onto texts" (171).

As examples of attacks on attempts to question our certainty with regard to the meaning of words, this pair of quotes, from the same decade but from unrelated contexts, serve to illustrate the view of postmodern academic work as a pernicious influence on public discourse. The attention given to President Clinton's unabashedly nuanced language (which I think can possibly be disassociated from his being caught in an outright lie about sex) and his lack of moral restraint in his married life coincided with deconstruction's having become a staple in the Humanities departments in universities across the United States. Consequently, the field of Humanities had (and continues to) come under attack. John R. Searle, for example, concludes his article on deconstruction by stating that in "English Departments and other modern language departments in American universities" deconstruction's "very intellectual weaknesses seem to be a source of popularity" (180). These attacks on the Humanities and the dearth of "objectivity" attributed to the Liberal Arts made their way out of the academy to become a staple in the opinion pages of mainstream newspapers. I wish I still had the article, but I was very impressed with a syndicated op-ed piece published in one of the Albuquerque (New Mexico) papers in which the writer compared the "lack of rigor that has become acceptable in America's Humanities departments" with the grounded, "absolute" results to be attained in "business, science, and sport."

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<sup>1</sup> This is quoted an on-line transcript from CNN's web site at  
<http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1998/12/10/transcripts/Sshippers.3.html>

These allegations of “lack of rigor” and “moral relativism” have given rise to the phenomena of postmodernist theory (in general) and Jacques Derrida’s work (in particular) being associated with many of our current social ills, from the President’s, for some, liberal definition of truth and falsehood, to the nihilism that led to the massacre in Columbine Colorado (which happened to come on the heels of the Clinton impeachment debacle). The most direct accusation of nihilism that I have found over the course of this investigation is not unrelated to that massacre which purportedly took place in celebration of Hitler’s birthday. A footnote in Gayatri Spivak’s article titled “Responsibility” states:

Since many positions against deconstruction are based on hearsay, this [that the phantom of subjectivity cannot be warded off] is the most common accusation brought against it. In the *New York Times Book Review*, for example, Walter Reich casually remarks that the denial of the Holocaust owes something to “a number of current assumptions, increasingly popular in academia, regarding the indeterminacy of truth.” (27)

Spivak’s article was one of many I have found that address the ethical and political issues surrounding Derrida’s work, and it is a fascinating exposition of Derrida’s call to responsibility, followed by a demonstration of the place and need for a deconstruction of “the violence of Reason itself, [which drives] the continually differentiating textile of meanings into the shortest route to Truth” (54). In fact, Spivak’s paper, which begins with a discussion of Derrida’s paper *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1989), like most of the papers addressing the ethical dimensions of deconstruction, bases its ideas on Derrida’s own responses to the accusations of the moral indeterminacy of his project.

The question remains however (at least in the mainstream media), whether Derrida’s ideas --under the rubric of “postmodernism”-- are a cause of a moral breakdown in society because they would rob us of any way “of distinguishing genuine knowledge from its counterfeits” (Searle 179), or whether the freeing of language “from the scientific and rationalistic encapsulations” (Coward 117) can indeed have “a fundamental ethical impact on our human relationships” (107).

To begin the discussion, I would like to return briefly to the infamous massacre in Colorado. As I mentioned earlier, much of the discussion of this tragedy centered on the lack of “ values ” in today’s society, and this lack is sometimes attributed to “ current assumptions ... regarding the indeterminacy of truth. ” In contraposition, and as a way to work towards Derrida’s ideas, I would like to cite a letter from a friend of mine in Colorado who could not help but draw the opposite message from the tragedy.<sup>2</sup> He writes:

I’ve found it very interesting to see how strong the [Christian] “ born agains ” seem to be in [Littleton], and the notion here that these mass murderers had kind of been possessed by or were in league with satanic forces. I wonder if their mental illness was not in some ways a reaction to what they felt was inaccessible, namely power and respect within this community that was in league with everything that is good. After all, if they couldn’t fit in with the community of the All-Good God, what was left to them in this polarity but satanism. It seems pretty clear to me how, in a sense, satanism can only exist in the presence of the monotheistic religions. The polytheistic religions do not seem to have deities that are the absolute embodiment of evil. It seems that people who worship these extreme polarities like god-satan or war-peace, etc. must be extremely unbalanced and very dangerous. (Mark Schlaefel)<sup>3</sup>

I cite the passage at length because I want to emphasize the currency of the question regarding the deconstruction or reconstruction of (in this case) “ basic Christian values ” in our society. One of the common ways to summarize Derrida’s project is to say that “ the deconstructionist is on the lookout for any of the traditional binary oppositions in Western intellectual history, ” [e.g. god-satan, peace-war] and

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<sup>2</sup> This was an e-mail, sent on april 28th, 1999, written by a former philosophy major who graduated in 1982, before Derrida had become a staple in U.S. academic life. To my knowledge he has not read Derrida.

<sup>3</sup> There is a certain correspondence here with Giovanna Borradori’s comments on an aspect of Derrida’s thoughts on the monotheistic traditions in the West: “ Continuing in the *religio*, Derrida sees another salient aspect in the fact that it contains the prefix ‘ re-, ’ a mark of repetition and self-reference, ‘ a resistance or a reaction to dis-junction to absolute alterity ’ [ *Faith and Knowledge* Derrid]. Derrida sees the presence of the prefix ‘ re- ’ in both *re-legere* and *re-ligare* as etymological evidence for his argument that religion in the Abrahamic definition tends to resist true openness toward the other ” (155).

wants to “undermine these oppositions” (Searle 171). As we go on to discuss some ramifications of the skepticism involved in challenging these metaphysical categories, I think it is worth emphasizing that, in spite of Derrida’s painfully abstract language in his earlier work, the issues are part of an actual dialogue taking place in contemporary American life.

In fact, part of the impetus behind this comparison and recapitulation of Cavell’s and Derrida’s explorations of the issues of certainty stems from the change of regime in the United States and some consequences of the current administration’s quest for certainty. On the one hand, President Bush’s religious and dichotomous rhetoric, replete with now-famous phrases like “this is a battle of Good against Evil” and “You are either with us or against us,” could almost serve as a caricature of the binary oppositions to be undermined by deconstruction. On the other hand, to use terms more aligned with the work of Stanley Cavell, the ongoing tragedy of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq could be described as the inability to live with doubt; that is, the jealous pursuit of certainty whose consequence is violence. The United States Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, addressing the NATO ministers in Brussels several months before the invasion of Iraq, laid out the case for war in these tragic terms:

There are things that we know, and then there are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we now know that we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don’t know. ... That is, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. ... Simply because you do not have evidence something exists does not mean that you have evidence that it doesn’t exist.<sup>4</sup>

And as we all know, this absence of evidence of absence of the means to inflict death on a mass scale, and the administration’s urgent desire for security, meant that the conquest and violent physical search of Iraq was inevitable. Cavell’s analysis is certainly pertinent here, for he says in his introduction to *Disowning Knowledge in Six*

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<sup>4</sup> This citation is from a re-publication at [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org) of Howard Zinn’s article “An Occupied Country” from *The Progressive* magazine (October 2003).

Plays of Shakespeare that “tragedy is the working out of a response to skepticism” (5). And in language that seems written to describe the philosophy behind the taking of Iraq, Cavell goes on to say that:

“With his ‘jealousy,’ Othello’s violence studies the human use of knowledge under the consequence of skepticism. This violence in human knowing is, I gather, what comes out of Heidegger’s perception that philosophy has, from the beginning, but, if I understand, with increasing velocity in the age of technology *conceived of knowledge under the aegis of dominion*, of the concept of a concept as a matter, say, of *grasping a thing*. (9; emphasis added)

Othello, however, after learning the error in his desire for certainty, repented, although it was too late to undo the results of his violence; the spokesmen of dominion in the U.S., in spite of what now could indeed be called the evidence of absence of weapons of mass destruction, have shown no such willingness to acknowledge the violence of their search for certainty as a tragic response to skepticism. In contraposition to this lack of acknowledgement, I am suggesting a reexamination of ways to live with and learn from doubt. The ideas of Derrida and Cavell, particularly when examined side by side, may perhaps offer a treatment of the intuition that even “the best case of knowledge shows itself vulnerable to suspicion” (*Disowning Knowledge* 7).

Keeping in mind Gayatri Spivak’s warning that, “Nothing but an intermediary question can be posed and left suspended in the space of an essay” (58), I would like to assert that an important feature of Derrida’s work is his insistence on “absence,” which I want to align with Cavell’s use of “skepticism” regarding (particularly) the knowledge of “other minds.” Both writers take this absence, or lack, as a call to responsibility, or a call to respond, although in Derrida’s earlier work this call is “somewhat masked by the initial emphasis ... on questions of epistemology and metaphysics” (Kearny 31).

If we look at Derrida’s earlier writings, it is not difficult to find discussions of absence, many of which lend themselves to the kind of sound bites that are used to support the accusations that postmodernism is “a nihilism that is unconstrained by

rules ” (Wyschogrod xiii). For example, in “ Structure, Sign, and Play ” Derrida says, “ The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author ” (287). Taken out of context, phrases like this are often used to ridicule his work, but what Derrida is discussing here is, simply, Levi-Strauss & warning or recognition that any society & *myths* have no author or concrete subject; although Derrida does go on to use this to make his point that the origins of language, and consequently any totalizable meaning in language, is grounded on “ play ” and is therefore “ missing ” (289).

The question of decentering the binary oppositions is also predicated on a kind of absence. The conclusion of Derrida & “ Signature, Event, Context ” includes a relatively succinct explanation of deconstruction which includes the phrase, “ There is no metaphysical concept in and of itself, ” and it is here that we can glimpse an intimation of what was later to be described as a (more or less) explicit ethical project:

Very schematically: an opposition of metaphysical concepts (for example, speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination. Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture ... practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general *displacement* of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes. (329)

Harold Coward, in his book *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, attributes to this overturning and displacement a fundamental ethical project because “ For Derrida ... the logocentric tradition of Western metaphysics ... is totalitarian because ... [it] restrict[s] [language] to a particular one-sided structure of meaning ” (106). Spivak, among others, would agree with Coward here, and many critics then go on to explore how the absence of an absolute determinancy in truth or knowledge can be seen as leading to “ a call to respond ” (Borradori, Coward, Gasché, Kearny, Spivak, Wyschogrod, etc).

“ Absence ” in opposition to “ presence, ” is one of the binary oppositions prioritized for discussion. “ Presence ” has been analyzed as including the valorization

of speech over writing. This subordination of writing has been founded on the assumption that if we face each other in speech, we must be present and acknowledging each other, and thus, speech is where meaning is most fully present. One of Derrida's many moves to challenge this foundation of "presence" in speech is elaborated in the essay "White Mythology" where (simplistically put) he problematizes any full presence of meaning in scientific discourse because it is impossible to weed out (a metaphor) the use of metaphor in scientific or philosophical texts. Derrida says, "And what more urgent task for epistemology and for the critical history of the sciences than to distinguish between the word, the metaphoric vehicle, the thing and the concept?" (261). Though, if I read the article correctly, Derrida concludes that this urgent task is impossible. Absolute meaning, even in the sciences, (or even when speaking face to face) is impossible because metaphors are always standing in for something which is absent. "This supplement of a code which traverses its own field, endlessly displaces its closure, breaks its line, opens its circle, and no ontology will have been able to reduce it" (271).

Even as various proponents of deconstruction have described the ethical call to respond as a consequence of Derrida's epistemological skepticism, I think it is instructive to look at an American contemporary of Derrida's use of skepticism. As we have noted, much of Cavell's work parts from the "intuition ... that our fundamental relation to the world is not one of knowing" (*Philosophical Passages* 49). Which is not to say exactly that Cavell is privileging skepticism, and he certainly isn't accused of nihilism the way Derrida has been. Rather, much of Cavell's work deals with Wittgenstein's philosophical therapy regarding skepticism. In the article cited above titled "What Did Derrida Want of Austin?" Cavell says, "On my view of Austin's and Wittgenstein's work, they understand skepticism and metaphysics as forms of intellectual tragedy" (61), and Cavell sets out to explore what can be garnered from this tragedy. Cavell warns us that much of the "tragedy" surrounding skepticism comes from a desire for certainty. In the essay on King Lear titled "The Avoidance of Love" he states, "In the unbroken tradition of epistemology since Descartes and Locke ... the concept of knowledge ... becomes fixed to the concept of certainty alone" and this certainty "is found to hang upon what can be said to be 'present' (emphasis added) to the senses" (*Disowning Knowledge* 94). And, continuing, in a phrase that sounds

strikingly Derridian, Cavell says, “ [the skeptic] finds that [the world] vanishes exactly with the effort to make it present. ” Or, to paraphrase, because we cannot always trust our senses (or our language), the desire to confirm knowledge as certainty is futile and leads to tragedy.<sup>5</sup>

How do we learn that what we need is not more knowledge but the willingness to forgo knowing? For this sounds to us as though we are being asked to abandon reason for irrationality.... Whereas what skepticism suggests is that since we cannot know the world exists, its presentness to us cannot be a function of knowing. The world is to be accepted, as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged. (95)

This idea of acknowledgment is central to Cavell’s work, and could be said to be the term which sums up his ethical project associated with the tragedy of skepticism. In particular, “ skepticism about other minds ... stands as exemplary of skepticism in general ” (Mulhall 11), and Cavell explores the issue of the problem of other minds in a very clear analysis of the 1930s “ Comedy of Remarriage ” *The Awful Truth*.

This film takes as its point of departure the moment when the couple -- Gerry and Lucy -- find themselves confronted with their lack of knowledge about each other, and this direct confrontation with unexpected possibilities breaks up their marriage. Condensing Cavell’s essay almost out of existence, I would say that this couple’s first direct confrontation with skeptical doubt is frightening, but as more and more possibilities come to light, the characters are able to learn that marriage can be a “ festive existence ” (*Cavell Reader* 175), and their marriage is saved. Or, to return briefly to Derrida, “ We must conceive of a play in which whoever loses wins, and in which one loses and wins on every turn ” (“ Différance ” 20). Which is to say that, according to Cavell’s exposition of this film, the couple wins by losing their certainty regarding one another’s minds which returns the freedom of play (the positive side of skepticism) to their marriage.

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<sup>5</sup> The example given in Cavell is from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, but I think the tragedies of a positivistic quest for certainty are multiple. Gayatri Spivak’s example is especially poignant She describes in detail the World Bank’s desire to control (hence own and thus certify) the flood waters in Bangladesh, which would do violence to the local people’s means and way of living

In short, Cavell's discussion of skepticism leads him to the conclusion that we can use our lack of certainty to force us into an ethical posture of acknowledgment; that the fundamental insight of the skeptic (regardless of what may be provable as true or false) is that "certainty is not enough" (*Cavell Reader* 64). He says, "It is not enough that I know (am certain) that you suffer --I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word, I must acknowledge it, otherwise I do not know what ('your or his') being in pain means" (68).

In the context of married life and acknowledgment, it was instructive to read Derrida's discussion of the final Yes of Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Ulysses Gramophone" 1987). "Ulysses Gramophone" is notoriously dense and circuitous, and while Rodolphe Gasché's exposition on the ethical aspects of Derrida's article in the final chapters of his book *Inventions of Difference* is still incomparably dry and abstract compared to Cavell's writing on *The Awful Truth*, it is more accessible (indeed, it is written as a clarification) than Derrida's. And Gasché's conclusions are strikingly reminiscent of what I have tried to show Cavell as concluding:

Yes as a response to the call upon the Other to say yes to the speculative *yes* of reconciliation is one such instance of undecidable infrastructural *remaining* ... [Yet] Without the possibility of slippage, no response to the call to *say yes to yes* is thinkable to begin with. (225)

I would paraphrase this passage as supporting the connection in Derrida's thought with Cavell's regarding the necessity of doubt or play for responsible communication. For example, when confronted with statements of Derrida's like "there is no experience of pure presence, but only chains of differential marks" (*Margins* 318) one must ask oneself, "What is the epistemological point Derrida is making?" I think we have been seeing the answer over the course of this study, which would be, in part at least, that the Other is never purely knowable. And to go back to the abstract language of Gasché, we can see that Spivak (or Cavell) is not alone in drawing an ethical conclusion from this absence of pure presence:

the relinquishing of the responsibility for control and mastery is testimony to a desire to open writing [or marriage] to unforeseeable effects, in other words to

the Other. It is a function of a responsibility for the Other --for managing in writing a place for the Other, saying *yes* to the call or demand of the other, inviting a response. (230)

Over the course of this investigation, it has been interesting to see the relative consensus that various critics have come to regarding the ethical dimension of what I'm calling Derrida's skepticism or absence of certainty regarding the presence of other minds. For example, Derek Attridge writes in his introduction to *Acts of Literature* that "there has always been an ethico-political dimension to Derrida's writing, manifesting itself particularly in a respect for otherness, ... Responsibility for Derrida is not something we simply 'take': we find ourselves summoned, confronted by an undecidability which is also always an opportunity and a demand, a chance and a risk." (5). At the same time Kearny, basing much of his essay on a published interview with Derrida from 1982 (*Deconstruction and the Other*), states that:

deconstruction's obsession with alterity is compatible with an ethics of "increased responsibility." Indeed, it might even be said that it serves as some kind of philosophical *condition* for it. For to safeguard the other from all logocentric strategies to objectify and reify is to guard the other as an irreducible locus of address and response--arguably the *sine qua non* of all ethical discourse. (47)

These examples of a taking up of the question of responding to alterity can be elaborated through a brief discussion of Gayatri Spivak's article called "Responsibility." In the first part of this article, she discusses the impossibility of purely escaping complicity with dangerous ideas or institutions. This discussion is centered around Derrida's presentation on Heidegger. She says, "deconstruction can not not acknowledge complicity with Heidegger" (27). The point being (to simplify almost criminally), that even in the case of a man who was a Nazi, it would be irresponsible to utilize the binary oppositions when regarding the relation of the man to his work or deconstruction's debt to him.

The second half of the paper describes the Greens-organized conference in protest to the World Bank's "Flood Action Plan in Bangladesh." In this section, which is a

brilliant performance of the ineffable, infinite, problematic of responsibility in dealing with the other (in this case the “ subaltern ” Bangladeshi spokesperson representing the community that would be most directly affected by the diversion of the flood waters), she describes the “ complicity of the Green Party and the World Bank ” (52), just as she had reminded us of the complicity or contamination by Heidegger of academic deconstruction.

Once again, I think the point is well taken that whatever we are attempting to do, there is always a slippage which subverts the oppositions, even when we consider ourselves certain to be on the “ good ” side. Spivak makes it very clear that this is not to say that there is nothing good to be done. She emphasizes that “ Knowing that responsibility in its setting-to-work can never reduce out the unilaterality of subjectivity, we still compute how the form[s] of complicity ... are ‘ not equivalent ’ ” (52). In the context of *différance* and the absence it implies, Derrida also insists that:

I will not conclude from this that there is no relative specificity of the effects of consciousness, or the effects of speech (in opposition to writing in the traditional sense), that there is no effect of the performative, no effect of ordinary language, no effect of presence and of speech acts. It is simply that these effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them term by term, but on the contrary presuppose it in dyssemtrical fashion, as the general space of their possibility. (*Margins* 327; emphasis added)

I align Spivak’s and Derrida’s words here to continue to refute the assertion that deconstruction can be associated with a nihilism that may lead teenagers to commit mass murder or justify a president’s lies. On the contrary, this essay has intended to show how there is a strong current of encouragement in both Cavell’s and Derrida’s treatment of the issues of doubt and certainty (absence vs. presence). Cavell warns us that the world disappears exactly when we try to grasp it as certain. Rather, it is certainty that is totalitarian. If we doubt that we can know completely, then according to both Cavell and Derrida, it is more likely that we will respond responsibly to the call of the other, who, whether as text or as human being must be acknowledged as a partially absent presence. There is always risk in this (in life); responding or acknowledging the other is simply “ a setting-to-work. ” As Cavell reminds us in his

treatment of King Lear, “ What we do not now know is what there is to acknowledge, what it is I am to make present, what I am to make myself present to ” (*Disowning Knowledge* 116). Derrida, in his interview with Giovanna Borradori, insists that democracy itself implies this same

exposure to what comes or happens. It is the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event. (*Philosophy in a Time of Terror* 120)

Derrida & view of the (impossible) project of democracy reads very much like Cavell & discussion of what he calls “ The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage. ” As Mulhall puts it, these films chart a couple & “ capacity to overcome threats internal to their marriage, ... and so depict marriage as constituted by a continuously renewed willingness to remarry ” (167). More succinctly, Cavell says he takes “ our films to be proposing a comic Yes ” (194); which, again, is part of Derrida & discussion of the humor in *Ulysses*. Derrida insists that Joyce & humor is not only farcical but also affirmative, with Molly & Yes serving as the virtuoso performance of this affirmation. He describes this affirmation “ as the yes-laughter of a gift without debt, light affirmation, ... that reveals and names the cycle of reappropriation and domestication ... in order to contrive the breach necessary for the coming of the other (*Acts of Literature* 295). We see then that these philosophers are offering a perspective from which to regain the “ festive ” or the “ play ” in the face of what we can never completely know. Living in doubt, as Stanley Cavell might say, is to choose to turn from tragedy to comedy.

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Derrida argue that what the light metaphor represents, the promise of clarity, and objectivity, is exactly what makes Western metaphysics problematic. In. As absence in a positive way at the very least on par with light. When. Daoists come to a point which cannot be argued further, when they speak of. Able as the light and the source of light, than to live with darkness or the threat of. absence itself. Darkness makes people afraid, it represents danger, the incomprehensible. Focusing upon Stanley Cavell and the philosophical lineage that he continues from Emerson, Nietzsche, Thoreau and Wittgenstein, this paper examines Cavell's interest in the menace and power of scepticism as key to understanding the everyday as a lived experience. As an introduction Keywords: to this particular part of Cavell's work for many Geographers, the paper puts Cavell in relation to more Everyday Scepticism familiar approaches to the everyday, including de Certeau, critical Human Geography, non- Stanley Cavell representational theory, affect theory, psychoanalysis and pragmatism. Derrida on Translation - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or view presentation slides online. Derrida on Translation and his (Mis)reception in America â Derrida on Translation and his. (Mis)reception in America Emmanuelle Ertel\*. The influence of Jacques Derrida's work in America is vast and. multifold. Since 1966 and his talk, Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences, given at a now quite famous symposium at Johns Hopkins University,<sup>1</sup> Derrida's thought has been affecting an ever growing number of disciplines in the United States, and the reception of his work in this country has been, especially since the mid eighties, the focus of numerous. Jacques Derrida (/É'dÉ'rÉ'dÉ™/; French: [É'ak dÉ'Éida]; born Jackie É%lie Derrida; July 15, 1930 â October 9, 2004), born in Algeria, was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, which he analyzed in numerous texts, and developed in the context of phenomenology. He is one of the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy.