

What is Difficult to Think Today

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Being unfamiliar with the works of Sylvia Wynter, I hesitate to say much about her work. In fact, "The Ceremony Found" is the first text by Wynter I've read. Certainly, I am more than sympathetic to the values and ideas expressed in "The Ceremony Found." I am also sympathetic to certain aspects of her argument, like the role of performativity and the criticisms of nature and biology, stressing the hybrid. In particular, I think she is right to associate what she is doing with deconstruction (p. 242). The "we" that we are now, *homo oeconomicus*, is constructed and therefore it can be deconstructed. However, I think there are aspects of Wynter's argument that do not correspond to deconstruction. Prior to presenting these aspects of Wynter's work that seem, so to speak, "un-Derridean," I want to acknowledge that I realize her text refers to many other sources than Derrida. I also want to acknowledge that my outlining of these un-Derridean aspects do not amount to any sort of criticism of Wynter's ideas. Derrida's thought is by no means the measure of all thinking. Wynter is an original and independent thinker. By outlining these un-Derridean aspects, I hope only to illuminate how the two texts we've selected intersect and diverge.

So, here are the aspects. First, there is Wynter's call for a return to the origin (p. 241). In Derrida, one can find nothing like this call to the origin. In fact, from the beginning of his career to the end, he relentlessly criticizes the idea of origin, especially when that origin is conceived as nature. In "The Ends of Man," his criticisms of teleology run parallel to his criticisms of archeology. In particular, in Derrida's discussion of Heidegger, the proper or authentic of humans is a kind of origin. Second, there is Wynter's call for "fully conscious agents" (p. 194). Of course, one needs to think only of Freud to find this call perplexing. But in "The Ends of Man," we see Derrida's criticisms of Hegel. For Hegel, according to Derrida, "consciousness is the truth of man to the extent that man appears to himself" (Margins, pp. 120-21). But it is this connection between self-appearance and truth that Derrida is criticizing. Third, and this is the most important, there is Wynter's call to do away with the opacity that covers over the origin (p. 242, and 225). With this call, Wynter's is very close to Derrida. Deconstruction wants to lay bare what precedes the construction, what the construction covers over. But the structure to which deconstruction returns contains irreducible opacity, essential non-presence, and structural unconsciousness. Because this opacity is structural, essential, and irreducible, there is no simple way to exit from "the impasse of the West" (p. 229). Like Wynter (p. 202), Derrida wants an exit to "a certain outside" (Margins, p. 133). But there is no simple exit. Because there is no simple exit, Derrida describes deconstruction at the end of "The Ends of Man" in terms of two strategies. Deconstruction is not a method. It is always a strategy, which carries with it certain risks, to find exits from the constructions, especially metaphysical constructions, which confine us.

Strategies are required because of what Derrida in "The Ends of Man" calls "a profound necessity" which makes the two ends of man, humanism and beyond humanism, inseparable (Margins, pp. 131, 136). At this stage of his career, Derrida frequently use the word "la prise," "the hold," to refer to this necessity (Margins, pp. 123-24). This "hold" or profound necessity is at the bottom of Derrida's criticisms of archeology and teleology. To use Heidegger's ontological language, we can say that, although it is the *transcendens* pure and simple, being must be expressed in beings; being never appears as such, neither at the origin nor at the end. Or as Derrida says in "The Ends of Man," "Being, which is nothing, is not a being, cannot be said, cannot say itself, except in ontic metaphor" (Margins, p. 131).

It is easier to understand this necessity through two phenomenological insights, insights on which Derrida elaborates in "Violence and Metaphysics." The two insights are deeply connected. First, there is the insight into experience in general. In order for me to have access to any thing, any one, any animate being, or, most generally, any other, that other must enter into my sphere of experience. But, when the other enters into my sphere of experience, I endow that other with meaning. In other words, I classify the other under some sort of general category. This classification is an essential necessity. I cannot understand any other, I cannot have any access to any other without this endowment of meaning. As Derrida says in "Violence and Metaphysics," this necessity makes the other be the same; this homogenization of alterity is what Derrida calls "fundamental violence." Second, there is the insight into the experience of others. The insight is that, when I have access to any other, that access is mediated. In other words, and to put this second phenomenological insight as simply as possible, I cannot jump inside your head and think your thoughts. My only access to what you singularly are is through gestures and language. I think that this recognition of essential mediation is a tremendous phenomenological insight, the implications of which we don't yet completely understand. Due to these two phenomenological insights, we are now confronted with a complicated necessity. At once, in experience, I have access to you, I make you be present or be in presence for me (and even violate your singularity thereby), and yet my access never reaches far enough to completely bring you into presence. Something of you is always hidden and secret, maintaining your singularity and alterity. Because of this essential non-presence, it is as if my only access to you is spectral. You're never completely there, as if you've gone away, already dead.

This double necessity - two essential necessities, presence and non-presence, is the necessity at the heart of "The Ends of Man." In "The Ends of Man," the double necessity is very "equivocity of the end" (Margins, p. 134). The necessity holds together man and the superman. The necessity holds together both the death of man and the truth or being of man. If one wants to exit from man, make him die (as the epigram from Foucault suggests), if one wants to exit from this presence of man, make him absent, then one finds oneself engaged in the teleology of being and truth, which always mean presence or presencing.

One finds oneself held back in presence. This necessity even holds together proximity and distance. If one wants "to change terrain," go to "the other shore," if one wants to go farther out than the near and the familiar, then by reaching this distant shore one brings it near. We're caught again (*la prise*). The same necessity determines the relation of inside and outside. And finally the same necessity determines the relation of metaphysics and what lies beyond metaphysics.

With metaphysics, we have returned to the two strategies of deconstruction. The first strategy of deconstruction is Heidegger's (cf. *Margins*, p. 126). It does not change terrains. It uses the concepts and the words of metaphysics, making what is implicit in them explicit. It uses the "stones of the house" against the edifice. But then, by using the same metaphysical concepts, like "the dignity of man," it risks being held back within the closure it is attempting to deconstruct. The second strategy (which Derrida seems not to identify with anyone in particular) is an abrupt change of terrain, an absolute break and difference. This would be the creation of concepts and words never before seen in the history of metaphysics. But here too there is a risk, or, more precisely, a naiveté in relation to language. The fact that one cannot speak without using the word "being" - one cannot even form a sentence without the copula - this fact pulls one back inside metaphysics. Of course, Derrida's own version of deconstruction interweaves these two strategies, constantly trying to avoid the risks of each one. Derrida even describes this interweaving as an "economy" of "two eves" (an economy which is really an an-economy) (*Margins*, p. 136). He concludes "The Ends of Man" therefore by saying that "Perhaps, we are between the two eves, which are also the two ends of man" (*Margins*, p. 136). These two eves or two ends are the doubleness of the profound necessity. Because of the double necessity, because of this "hold" on every movement to the outside, "what is difficult to think today is [LRL: and still for us today] is an end of man which would not be organized by a dialectic of truth and negativity, an end of man which would not be a teleology in the first person plural" (*Margins*, p. 121).

One final comment: "The Ends of Man" is presented in 1968, and published in *Margins of Philosophy* in 1972. At this point in his career, in the Sixties and through the Seventies, Derrida aims deconstruction at metaphysical hierarchies. It is only later that he will aim deconstruction at injustice, as for instance in his 1989 "Force of Law." However, we should not ignore the "preamble" to "The Ends of Man." In the "preamble" of "The Ends of Man," Derrida speaks of the form of democracy, both the form and democracy itself. We know that later in his career, as for instance in *Rogues*, Derrida will return to the form of democracy, a form that seems to welcome all kinds of content, even the opponents of democracy. By allowing him to speak out against the Vietnam War - free speech being an essential part of democracy, this is nevertheless an illusion or a kind of *trompe l'oeil* of democracy. We should note that in the "preamble," as part of this discussion of democracy itself, Derrida uses the very words - "blindness" and "naiveté" -- that he uses at the end for the

two strategies of deconstruction (Margins, p. 112). So perhaps it is incorrect then, even at this early period of his thinking, to say that deconstruction aims solely at metaphysical hierarchies. Already, it seems to aim at political injustice. Perhaps this is why Wynter found this conference so “penetrating” (p. 216).