



## Of Grammatology

*Jacques Derrida , Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Translator)*

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Jacques Derrida's revolutionary theories about deconstruction, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and structuralism, first voiced in the 1960s, forever changed the face of European and American criticism. The ideas in *De la grammatologie* sparked lively debates in intellectual circles that included students of literature, philosophy, and the humanities, inspiring these students to ask questions of their disciplines that had previously been considered improper. Thirty years later, the immense influence of Derrida's work is still igniting controversy, thanks in part to Gayatri Spivak's translation, which captures the richness and complexity of the original. This corrected edition adds a new index of the critics and philosophers cited in the text and makes one of contemporary criticism's most indispensable works even more accessible and usable.

### Of Grammatology Details

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Author : Jacques Derrida , Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Of Grammatology for online ebook

### Jamie says

Yes Derrida tends to be a bit verbose and redundant. However once you get past the syntax you will find a philosophy that is deep and inherent in our postmodern society. Sometimes I say to myself while reading this, "why can you just use plain clarification like Ferdinand De Saussure?!" Derrida tends to explain the explanations with more confusion.

I will paraphrase the context here in brevity to help clarify. Foot notes, cliff-notes, other books and lectures served me well with the grappling on the theme. Derrida takes Saussure's idea of the use of language as a binary hierarchical system that Speech supersedes Writing by dismantling this system and creating a sort of dissected form of the notion of language. So instead of Speech being on top of writing, writing and speech then infuses its notions side by side and then becomes a non-entity by the use of overturning hierarchy systems: (writing/speech). One does not overpower the other, and both are infused and disassembled in the variations of text.

Deconstructionism is a philosophical form by Derrida that is used through the text of speech and writing. To understand deconstructionism is to know that notions of language is overturned through this process. We know that language itself is arbitrary and the people as a collective give language meaning. An example of symbolic meaning would be red means stop and green means go. Now within most western language there seems to be binary systems: yes/no, stop/go, male/female, good/bad. Derrida through deconstruction takes these binary systems and OVERTURNS them through the dismantling process. Keep in mind though that Derrida DOES NOT replace the system with another, that would then superimpose another binary hierarchy system.

Hierarchy systems and the use of binary notions are very western ideologies. An example of this is the male/female binary system. We are just now through modern gender studies understanding the third gender system called 'inter-sexed', however this is still another compartmentalization. The indigenous however view binary systems in gender for example much differently. The indigenous view gender on a spectrum.

I use Derrida as a one of the pioneers to postmodern studies because of the use of deconstructionism. This idea is being used though contemporary studies in literature. For example 'Indian Killer' by Sherman Alexie is a postmodern study of the idea of 'Indian Reservations'. Derrida is an essential tool for Humanities.

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### Steven Berbec says

How does one write a "review" when the word itself is a "supplement?" To begin writing the review is to say I do not intend on coming back to the text, I do not expect to re-view this book again, so what I am willing to review will "supplant" the "catastrophe" that the text ruptured in my being.

Many have cursed this text (and I'm sure many others before and after) because Derrida evokes a prose that brings many to their wits end. Jacques Lacan with similar complaints about his texts not making sense or being too dense altogether said:

"I did not write them in order for people to understand them, I wrote them in order for people to read them.

Which is not even remotely the same thing . . . People don't understand anything, that is perfectly true, for a while, but the writings do something to them."

It would serve one better if they did not come with a desire to understand and colonize the text and instead allow it to do something: let it breathe, let it draw within ones proximity and give yourself to the song it sings. The text, always reaches out to take hold and dismantle the institutions we articulate and reason for. Instead, open a space for this movement, allow yourself to become inarticulate again. Awaken to passion—"the movement of a birth, the continuous advent of presence...becoming-present of presence."

I cannot write a review, because I am not finished re-viewing the text. Or better stated, there is still more reading to be done. Those who have had their fill of it within one reading have forgotten what it means to read. It isn't done in one breath, or when one chooses they have wasted enough breath. To read, is to labor, to return to the land year after year and be surprised by what has grown, what one has missed while growing, while thinking he was growing only what could only grow.

If one is awake, one will find much here to work with for a long time.

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### **Ellen says**

I enjoyed reading the other reviews on this book and empathized with those who found Derrida unnecessarily dense. His essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," for example, though important, certainly lacks a riveting prose style.

In my own (possibly simplistic) interpretation, deconstruction works--impossibly, of course--at ground zero. It is an attempt to flatten preconceptions. Derrida explains in *Of Grammatology*, how Rousseau's writing subverts the nature/culture binary he tries to promote. In any work, a particular word or concept will be privileged. Rousseau favors the concept of nature and theorizes that natural man, free from the corruptive influences of nature, was basically good. Derrida, bringing in his theory of *supplement* demonstrates how culture "always already" inheres in nature, as writing does in speech.

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### **sologdin says**

no one realizes that there is a significance to the fact that rousseau preferred jerking off to having sex.

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### **Raelene says**

Derrida is difficult. But it's almost the difficulty that makes him worth reading. His prose is multi-layered and at times profoundly performative. This text in particular rewards very careful perusal - an idea essential to his project as a whole. Deconstruction for Derrida is about un-building in order to see the elements of language in pieces and thus be better able to grapple with and understand the connections and significations they make as a whole.

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## Michael says

A definitive classic. Don't let philosophical conservatives deter you from reading this book. It may be a challenge, but it changed the rules and redefined the limits of what philosophy is in the Western tradition. A must read!

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## Jill says

well, i read the first chapter, but i have almost no idea what it said even though i tried very hard to know what it was saying. then i went back to read the translator's preface. thanks for nothing, spivak. i'll keep trying.

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## Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

- a) Revised 40th Anna Edition.
- b) Maybe I really should read it this time. I love this shit.
- c) If you've not read this, don't say "deconstruction".
- d) If you've not read Husserl, don't say "deconstruction".
- e) You like it simple? Derrida does nothing more than continue the Heideggarian project of Destruktion.
- f) If you've not read Hegel, you don't know Derrida. Like all those Lit=Crit folks from Yale you like to talk about all the time.
- g) This has nothing to do with your Empirical Sciences. Your Empirical Sciences are just fine ; until they become imperialistic as they tend to do.
- h) Long essay upon the occasion of the release of this edition by Geoffrey Bennington :: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2yvZ...>
- i) Derrida is so old fashioned now in our hip 2016 that maybe it's now totally okay to start digging him again.
- j) Derrida is a philosopher. Not a 'theorist'.
- k) Like the spoon in the matrix, There is no Derrida.
- l) More than de Man, readers of Derrida should read his friend Levinas too.
- m) I dunno.
- n) Existentialism is dead. So is Essentialism. As Hegel taught.
- o) Also, careful with your dualism, Eugene. You can't do without it.

- p) True, all *is* One ; or, 'was'.
  - q) Also, careful with that Trace, Eugene.
  - r) Wouldn't Derrida agree with Chomsky that language does not evolve?
  - s) Will this alphabet ever be completed? Did it ever have a beginning?
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### **Fergus says**

Do you know that this key study of writing is one of the only works by Derrida available on Kindle? Makes you wonder! Yet this early work is the one that most clearly lays out the thrust of the Derridean strategy - so often misunderstood.

Let me explain.

Jacques Derrida's first book was a study of Edmund Husserl. Why is this important? Because the young Derrida was rallying to Husserl's famous battle cry: "Back to the things themselves!" For Husserl wanted to cut through the rhetoric of the great thinkers and metaphysically uncover the true, basic and unadorned reality that lies underneath all the hundred-dollar words.

So in this book Derrida takes up the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who saw that the language of writing *sui generis* constantly defeats this project. Writing is about 'something' that must forever remain outside of itself - reality. It is a "supplement" (Rousseau's word) to our reality. Hence it is built on a paradox that must remain forever unresolved.

This, then, is the reason for the infamous term "deconstruction" - a tearing down NOT of the beauties and necessary frameworks of civilisation, but of the constant web of outwardly-enforced illusions that enmesh, trap and tie us down in the modern world.

It is a removal of the "beam that is in your own eye."

I'm sure I would have given the book five stars had I been able to understand it all.

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### **Scott Forward says**

"The science of linguistics determines language — its field of objectivity — in the last instance and in the irreducible simplicity of its essence, as the unity of the phonè, the glossa, and the logos. This determination is by rights anterior to all the eventual differentiations that could arise within the systems of terminology of the different schools (language/speech [langue/parole]; code/message; scheme/usage; linguistic/logic; phonology/phonematics/phonetics/glossematics). And even if one wished to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier which would be strictly speaking impossible, since formal identities isolated within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible), it would have to be admitted that the immediate and privileged unity which founds significance and the acts of language is the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonic. With regard to this unity, writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, exterior, doubling the signifier: phonetic. "Sign of a sign," said Aristotle, Rousseau, and Hegel.

Yet, the intention that institutes general linguistics, is a science remains in this respect within a contradiction. Its declared purpose indeed confirms, saying what goes without saying, the subordination of grammatology, the historico-metaphysical reduction of writing to the rank of an instrument enslaved to a full and originally spoken language. But another gesture (not another statement of purpose, for here what does not go without saying is done without being said, written without being uttered) liberates the future of a general grammatology of which linguistics-phonology would be only a dependent and circumscribed area. Let us follow this tension between gesture and statement in Saussure."

It is one of those books that I found almost impossible to read with care. It can be frustratingly convoluted at times but the general point is, I think, an important one.

I remember sitting in a literature of science class and the professor discussing a Greek philosopher, I believe it was Socrates, interpreting the nature of print. The objection stated that writing provides us a snapshot of the dynamic process of dialogue and argument, therefore, if we for instance need elaboration into the argument, we require more than what writing can give us. I think Derrida's point finds its home in this kind of objection, perhaps not to alleviate the objection, but to elaborate on the depths of writing and to provide a questionable backdrop to the idea of it being purely "instrumental".

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### **Giorgi says**

Dear Derrida i must give up

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### **Thom Dunn says**

My claim to have read this MoFo is a flat-out lie. What HAS read ? Who indeed CAN read it ? I couldn't finish page one. Can you help me ?

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### **Jamey says**

I need a bucket. This is the a-hole through which there has flowed a river of anemic pretentious francophilic crap for three decades. Derrida seems to have little of Foucault's erudition and a strange compulsion to make the same empty gestures over and over again. Everything Schopenhauer said about Hegel applies here (that the guy is a charlatan selling his own image in the guise of a new philosophical language). Maybe other books by Derrida are wonderful; I've only read "Of Spirit," "Limited, Inc," and parts of this one. "Limited Inc" was gross.

There are few writers I actually hate. The two I hate the most are Derrida and Allen Ginsberg. Just sit back and watch the resemblances crystallize...

## **Yakut Melikzadeh Akbay says**

This book is based on both deconstruction that Derrida expands and improves here and construction which he performs after untangling the ideas of both Ferdinand de Saussure and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Derrida reveals the paradoxes existing in both writers' works and the way how they stick to binary oppositions and resting everything upon the centre or origin, which, according to Derrida does not exist at all. Later he acquits that side of binary opposition which has always been othered or, as Derrida puts it, 'leper'. He suggests that there is no outside and inside, but there is a whole that is always in need of being broken into pieces and subject to repeated analysis. What is more surprising about the book is the fact that Derrida proposes concerning Saussure's views. He says that Saussure himself was aware that writing does not usurp but supports speech, however, as he was trying to adhere to traditional metaphysical approach, he did not betray his principles. It is like you can't help biting into the forbidden fruit knowing that you commit a sin. This is called 'deconstruction' that most traditional philosophers were afraid to utter before Derrida.

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## **Phillip says**

Derrida's *Of Grammatology* aims to think the structural conditions of possibility which organize the coherence of metaphysical thinking. In this regard, thinking what Derrida labels writing is central. A main point in *Of Grammatology* however, is that Derrida is speaking of two different sorts of writing: that which writing is traditionally understood to be, that is, marks on a page or writing conceived in the narrower sense Derrida will say, but also, and more centrally in terms of the book's thesis, writing conceived of as the practice of positing metaphysical centers as the basis for thought's coherence. This practice of writing will be one fundamentally associated with the West in Derrida's understanding. A difficult point of the book is that the two conceptions of writing, the more traditionally understood form, and writing as the positing of metaphysical centers will become interrelated in the development of the argument and often be in play at the same time.

This relationship appears in considering the contrast Derrida highlights between speech and writing. Here we speak of speech understood as the expression of the presence of the logos, and as "materialization" of the one who speaks in their authentic subjectivity. Speech, as that which the subject both speaks and hears, is in this way understood as immanently in contact with the logos as the transcendental origin of absolute meaning located in the subject. It is the logos which acts as the origin of absolute meaning, or functions as the condition of possibility for intentionality as the origin of meaning. Meaning comes about through the intention to mean on the part of the subject. That is to say, meaning does not emerge within the diversity of the empirical situations in the world but originates transcendently in the logos. If the origin of meaning is transcendental then meaning can be absolute and meaning can only be absolute on the condition of having a transcendental origin. This is what Derrida means by saying that the transcendental origin halts the play of signifiers. Signification will not "play" in the context of absolute meaning because the place occupied by the signifier is absolute or fixed; there can be no movement.

The mistake for Derrida is in believing that speech has this immanent relationship to the logos while writing could be conceived of in contrast as simply a derivative phenomenon, alienated from immanent contact with the logos. This is significant for Derrida for two reasons: firstly that speech and writing cannot be differentiated from each other in terms of their relative proximity with the logos; one being closer to the logos than the other. But secondly, and more importantly, Derrida will argue that there is no "present" transcendental center we could ultimately demonstrate the speech would have expressed, and as such, there

is no difference between speech thought of as full speech as immanent expression of the logos, and writing conceived of as a derivative or a secondary phenomenon relatively alienated from the logos. There is no transcendental origin which acts as the point of emergence for meaning, meaning always emerges within given conditions without possessing a transcendental origin and thus cannot be absolute.

We can see then the relationship between the two forms of writing. Writing conceived of as the positing of metaphysical centers or transcendental presence is at play in the speech/writing structure critiqued by Derrida as far as we posit the presence of a logos acting as the origin of meaning, with speech acting as its direct realization. The implication of this however is that writing in the narrower sense understood as a derivative expression of full speech, a secondary phenomenon relatively less proximate to the logos, owes its coherence as such, to the positing of the logos as transcendently present. That is to say, writing conceived of in the broader sense as positing metaphysical structures is the necessary condition for conceiving of writing defined as derivative. Writing conceived as such, that is writing as essentially derivative phenomenon, has coherence only on the condition that we have already accepted the metaphysical thesis of the logos, which is what Derrida conceives of as writing in the broader sense, that practice essentially characteristic of the Western intellectual tradition.

Reading some other reviews of Derrida's book there might be an important post script to put. There is a frequent idea that Derrida believes that nothing exists, that his point was that the world is just a text and that because he said meanings weren't fixed then that is the way the world is too. Derrida is talking about meaning, not the world. He isn't saying that there is no reality only that we are unable to produce an adequate transcendental picture of it, that in producing a metaphysical picture of it, we misrepresent it in some way. This is of course a big problem for logicians, whose aim it is to determine a discursive structure which will be adequate to the representation of reality. If the logical structure was fully present it would have to be a priori present and further transcendently so, prior to the intervention of a standardized notational system which would be a reduplication of the structure of reality itself. The closest Wittgenstein could come to satisfy this criteria in the Tractatus was to ASSERT that logic is a picture of reality. However Wittgenstein could not demonstrate how logic could actually achieve this pictographic reduplication of the structure of reality, and subsequently, radically revised this thesis, articulating a new position not so distant from that of Derrida's. For Derrida we cannot produce a fully adequate representation, which must necessarily be transcendental or an abstraction of what it aims to represent and hence can never be fully immanent. Reality always escapes in some way as far as we wish to REPRESENT it, our REPRESENTATIONS never quite capture it. The question is a question of the epistemological finitude of our metaphysical representations not with whether the world exists or not.

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## Tyler says

This book gets five stars from me...but this review (which I initially made as a comment to another review), is in response to the Derrida/Searle debate, and the Searle quote that is so often cited as the wooden stake to Derrida's deconstructive heart. Here we go...

Searle willfully misreads Derrida, or at the very least, doesn't take the time to understand his theory properly. The supposed limitation of deconstruction, the idea "that deconstruction deconstructs itself," is a "limitation" that Derrida was certainly aware of, and in fact, is not a limitation at all. Deconstruction must deconstruct itself. If it did not, it could not be articulated or exist in language. If deconstruction was not privy to the very process it describes, it would itself become the very sort of notion that it condemns and says is impossible,

the idea of something "absolutely present outside of a system of differences." Every word/concept capable of being articulated and understood in language can only be understood in a system of differences. This means, essentially, that a word never has a positive meaning derived from itself, but rather, we can only understand the meaning of a word by the way in which it differs from other words. We must essentially rule out everything it is not (to the extent which the finite language system allows) in order to articulate what it "is." The idea of deconstruction is essentially an expansion of this concept. For example, good is privileged over evil, however, good can only be truly understood in the context of evil, by the way in which it differs from evil. If there was no evil, there could be no good, or at least "good" in a sense that we can understand because it would have nothing to compare itself to. It must exist in a system of differences--good "differing and deferred" from evil. In this same way, deconstruction must be dependent on the very thing it critiques in order to exist at all. It's paradoxical thinking, but it has to be. Deconstruction needs logocentrism to exist, and vice versa. The flaw is not in deconstruction, but in our language, and our radical distinction between true and false. Our society privileges truth over falsity (and rightly so), and so, in order for deconstruction to be believed in, it must be said to be true, which immediately makes it privileged, which in turn makes it false, because there can be no privileging. This is not due to the invalidity of deconstruction, but rather to our inherent privileging of truth. Deconstruction itself is neither true nor false, presence nor absence, "but exceeds them both." If deconstruction did not deconstruct itself, it would become something "absolutely present outside a system of differences," the very sort of thing Derrida condemns as being dependent on a sort of creationist theology, something absolutely present outside the system, whose meaning and existence is self-contained and self-referential, only coming from itself. Furthermore, privileging is more complicated than a willful act on our parts, but again, also comes from flaws within the system of language itself. In the beginning of this review, I cited the Derrida/Searle debate. Here, I have already privileged Derrida by placing him first. I suppose I could have written, Derrida/Searle, Searle/Derrida, but even then, I'm still privileging; the set of terms where Derrida is privileged because it comes before the set of terms in which Searle is privileged. The same would happen if I wrote Searle/Derrida, Derrida/Searle. Because we read left to right, there is no way out of this. We have the same problem writing Mr. and Mrs. on an envelope, we can either write Mr. and Mrs. Smith, in that order, or Mrs. and Mr. Smith, if we want to avoid traditional gender hierarchies, but either way, because we read left to right, we inherently have to make a choice which we privilege something, one over the other--we cannot read/view them simultaneously, in one fell swoop in a way that would privilege neither. Again, the flaw is not in deconstruction, but in the language system and the reading structure itself.

As for the claims against Derrida's writing, I personally "like" it, but I won't defend it. He is willfully obscure (although not entirely without a purpose), but that doesn't undermine the validity or importance of what he's saying. To a degree, it was necessary for his writing, at least regarding deconstruction, to be thorough, "repetitive," and obscure, otherwise, people's understanding of it would be too simplistic and reductive. In fact, this tendency to reduce deconstruction to a formula (which is so prevalent among the majority of literary criticism that cites Derrida), is the very sort of thing Derrida was trying to avoid. Again, his writing is frustrating, but it is completely understandable if you're willing to either read very slowly, or go through one or two re-readings. Whether you want to go through that work is another question, but that does diminish the worth of what he has to say.

And as a final note, just so you know, I'm not one of those people who enjoys obscurity for the sake of obscurity or to make myself feel intelligent, I find some of the other French writers to be completely full of hot air, using opacity to cover up either faulty scholarship or to boost their egos (Lacan and Kristeva come to mind). I will also add that I can't stand most people's (ab)use of Derrida, I think he ranks up there with Freud in terms of willful misapplication (although, if I'm being honest, I'm not much of a Freudian). I understand people's hostility to Derrida, on Searle's part, I think it was a bit of jealousy regarding Derrida's "rock-star" status in academia, and for others, I think it stems from the ways in which they see Derrida being misused. I only advise you to read him with an open mind and then decide from there. If you're intelligent (and since you're attempting to read of Grammatology, you most likely are) then you are probably used to

understanding things immediately. However, if you are going to get anything out of Of Grammatology, then you need to humble yourself a bit, slow yourself down, and be willing to accept that you might not get it right away. I assure you, if you're patient and are willing to look up a bit of terminology, you'll eventually get what he's saying.

And one last last thing...I really recommend reading his essays "Differance," and "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" before you tackle this one. They clarify some key concepts that you need to understand Of Grammatology. "Force and Signification" is also useful.

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## **anique says**

Derrida is difficult. I read this to write a paper on Aretxaga's Shattering Silence and found it to be quite illuminating once I read every sentence four times.

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## **Christopher says**

If you were easily impressed by Socrates getting alot of cred simply for being a troll, you'll find alot to love here.

But otherwise, never before has so little of such small impact been said with so many words, expended from the text like the spore cloud of a dying mushroom.

'Postmodernists parade their relativism as a superior kind of humility — the modest acceptance that we cannot claim to have the truth. In fact, the postmodern denial of truth is the worst kind of arrogance. In denying that the natural world exists independently of our beliefs about it, postmodernists are implicitly rejecting any limit on human ambitions. By making human beliefs the final arbiter of reality, they are in effect claiming that nothing exists unless it appears in human consciousness.'

~John N Gray

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## **Gregsamsa says**

This was too hard to understand, therefore it didn't make any sense therefore it is stupid therefore anyone who liked it is stupid therefore I am smarter than anyone who liked it therefore there is a huge conspiracy where well-read educated people are not really either of those things because they responded to this differently therefore definitions of "well-read" and "educated" are totally undermined by therefore being revealed as artificially constructed determinants in the grammar of elite prerogatives therefore the signications they disseminate are illegitimate therefore we need someone to come forward and articulate how this occurs using language that attempts to transcend the dynamic that supports it which therefore will necessarily strain these dictates of conventional sense and will therefore be hard to read here and there and fore and aft.

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## Conrad says

The best way to read this is by skipping Gayatri Spivak's useless and ponderous foreword. The rest is a pretty banal but I guess unique observation on the supplementarity of writing to the spoken word wrapped up in a ton of hackwork. Compared to *Limited Inc*, this, and *Writing and Difference*, Derrida's later works are generally more easily comprehended, like *Work of Mourning*, *Acts of Religion*, etc. Like Foucault, Derrida enjoyed a late but breathtaking conversion to something like liberalism, and ultimately found justice to be the great irreducible (and... indeconstructible?) human need...

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