

Différance

Philosophy 157

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Arbitrary and Differential

- Modern semiology is traced to Saussure
- The system of signs is constituted solely by differences in terms
- For this reason, the units in the system are arbitrary
- The principle of difference affects both the signifier and the signified
- *Différance* is the play of differences giving rise to the system

The Sign as Deferred Presence

- In classic semiology, the sign represents something in its absence
- It defers the moment in which the thing itself is to be encountered
- The sign is based on the deferred present
- It moves toward the deferred present
- So it is secondary and provisional

The Play of *Différance*

- Linguistic differences do not “fall from the sky fully formed”
- They are due to the play of *différance*
- There is no original substance or cause that eludes the play of *différance*
- So there is no presence outside this play
- We are engaged in a circle, with *différance* being no more static than genetic, structural than historical

Is the Sign Originary?

- The sign is something like an originary *différance*
- It is a new occurrence
- But it is secondary to presence
- So it may not be originary *différance*
- This threatens to remove the sign as well as the presence from *différance*

Spacing and Temporization

- A presence is a trace of the past and mark of the future
- A presence is constituted by what it is not
- An interval is needed to distinguish the present, but it thereby divides it and everything thought on the basis of it
- This is “spacing” (becoming space of time) or “temporization” (becoming time of space)
- The originator of this is *différance*

“What is *Différance*?”

- To accept the question as it stands is to take *différance* as derivative from presence
- If a present being such as consciousness delays or differentiates itself, this is not being constituted by *différance*
- Even the subject asking “what is it?” is based on the play of *différance*

Différance in Freud

- Spacing: memory depends on differences in “breaching”
- Temporization: the trace is a deferring or putting into reserve of what is dangerous
- The divisions of the mind are theoretical fictions: one is the other, different and deferred
- The operation of the pleasure principle is deferred under the ego’s reality principle to insure its fulfillment

A Silent Consciousness?

- An objection: even if speech is based on *différance*, might not consciousness be present to itself without engaging in it?
- The privilege granted to consciousness is the privilege of the present
- Husserl’s “living present” synthesizes and incessantly re-assembles traces

Economical and Non-Economical

- On one hand, *différance* is an economical deferring of something held in reserve
- On the other, it is non-economical expenditure with no reserve
- The two cannot be thought together
- This brings to mind Hegel’s treatments of oppositions

Presence and *Différance*

- Presence is found by Heidegger to be a determination of Being
- A determination is the result of *différance*
- Nietzsche held a similar view: the “active moving discord of different forces” is derived from difference
- Different things must appear as *différance* to one another

No Synthesis

- The present and the absent cannot be synthesized in the manner of Hegel
- The “past” has never been present and never will be
- The “delay” is irreducible
- This view is found in Levinas
- It is common to our “era,” delimiting the metaphysics of presence

Différance and Being

- *Différance* shakes the foundation of Being
- It is not a being: it does not govern anything
- Rather, it instigates the subversion of every authority
- Those who desire a kingdom seek to aggrandize it by giving it a capital “D”

Meaning

- *Différance* is the unfolding of Being
- Even the meaning of Being is the effect of *différance*
- It is responsible for beings, through which alone we understand Being
- So *différance* is “older” than beings and the meaning of Being
- The play of trace behind being has no bottom

No Name

- We have found no name for *différance*
- This should be explained by there being none
- Names are the product of the play of *différance*
- We should celebrate this play
- It even explains Heidegger’s saying that being speaks always through language