

THE SELF-DECONSTRUCTION OF THE LIBERAL ORDER

Jean-Pierre Dupuy
École Polytechnique and Stanford University

Deconstruction as an all-encompassing reading method

The world of ideas is a lot like the world of men. It has fighting for territory, cut-throat competition, struggles for prestige and recognition, jealousy, fear, and mutual fascination. Of course, when it is theories, hypotheses, conjectures—i.e. abstractions—which slaughter each other, it is not the same as if it were men.

This is precisely one of the most important and famous theses defended by Karl Popper throughout his writings. The transition from violence to critical reason was an evolutionary leap forward. This leap was made possible by the emergence of a descriptive and argumentative language, and then of a particular form of society, the "open society." In the animal kingdom, theories or visions of the world are in a sense incorporated in the organism or the genetic system. Those which are bad, inaccurate or poorly adapted are ruthlessly eliminated through the destruction of the organism that carries them. A human being, especially the citizen of a society that permits critical and rational debate, has the ability to criticize his or her own theories, to maintain a distance from them, in the highly autonomous world of productions of the mind—the "third world" in Popper's terminology—theories shown to be erroneous disappear without their elimination implying that of their author or promoter. The eliminative function of violence is thus replaced by the eliminative function of rational criticism (see Popper 1979, 240). In his rationalist optimism, Popper goes so far as to suppose that a society that assigns a sufficient place to rational critical discussion will succeed in eradicating violence.

I will not discuss this thesis here, but touch upon what it implies for the world of ideas. If men succeed in exorcising their violence by projecting it into the world of ideas, this "third world" must bear traces of the violence it has inherited. This is in fact what Popper explicitly states: "The art of argument is a peculiar form of the art of fighting—with words instead of swords . . ." (1983,6). The reference to Hobbes is significant. Imre Lakatos compares the popperian conception of the "third world" to the hobbesian state of nature when he writes,

in Popper's ruthless society of theories, where the law is the (shortlived) survival of the fittest, a theory can become a hero only through murder. A theory becomes testworthy on presenting a threat to some extant theory; it becomes "well-tested" when it has proved its mettle by producing a new fact that realizes the threat and liquidates a rival. (380)

It is from this perspective that I would like to speak of deconstruction. As Andrew McKenna has aptly shown, there are deep similarities between Derrida's deconstructive reading of philosophical texts and Girard's interpretation of myths. And my aim here is to focus on the founding myths of a society known in principle for being deprived of such myths: ours. The name deconstruction has chosen for itself expresses well enough the charge of violence within it, even if "deconstruction" appears insipid compared to its source, the heideggerian *Destruktion*. What is to be deconstructed or destroyed? The pretension of the Logos to affirm itself as complete and self-sufficient, the ambition of philosophy to have immediate access to pure truth (*aletheia*), the illusion of mastery on the part of human beings who put themselves in the place of God, etc. In their "deconstruction of Western metaphysics"—the intellectual enterprise launched by Jacques Derrida and his numerous epigones in the wake of Heidegger—the deconstructionists systematically debunked the concept of Logos which, like the bourgeois ridiculed by Marx in *The Holy Family*, "swells up to the point of taking himself for an atom, that is to say a being devoid of any relation, sufficient unto himself, without needs, absolutely complete, in a state of complete felicity."

One should not, however, denounce deconstruction too quickly as a "post-modern" form of resentment—resentment which bespeaks a secret fascination for the apparent autonomy of the Other, and which cannot rest until it has demystified it. Things are much more subtle, as Derrida is the first to show. For the fascination first exerts its power in the other direction. The term

that affirms its self-sufficiency and its completeness is the very same one that is filled with fascination for what threatens or denies its autonomy. It thereby reveals that it is in need of that Other and, therefore, that it is not autonomous. Even before it is deconstructed, the philosophical text deconstructs itself.

Take the especially revealing example of philosophy and writing. Philosophy seeks to convince itself that it can communicate with truth directly, without benefit of a mediator. It therefore can only devalue or deny the medium by which it must nonetheless express itself: writing. But when philosophy (in the form of Plato's *Phaedrus*) seeks to express the self-authorized "truth" to which it has access, it can only refer to the metaphor of writing. The kind of truth Socrates has in mind is, he says, "the sort that goes together with learning and is *written in the soul* of the learner." The banished object reveals itself as necessary to the constitution of the very *polis* that banishes it—one recognizes the vicious logic that Derrida calls the "logic of the supplement."

In a study that is complementary to this one (1990), I have attempted two things. On the one hand, I have tried to characterize *formally* the figures embodied by the logic of the supplement; on the other hand, I have shown that these figures are indeed, albeit subtly, those of violence, envy, fascination, and resentment. I must content myself here with a rapid and inadequately supported presentation of some of my theses.

The logic of the supplement is described by many, including Derrida himself, as the "reversal of a hierarchical opposition." This expression is deceptive. It evokes simple vengeance, as in the following line of reasoning: "If philosophy declares itself infinitely superior to writing, we'll take it down a peg by exposing it as just another literary genre." Christopher Norris makes the acute comment that part of the success of deconstruction in the literature departments of American universities comes from being perceived there as a sort of "revenge of literature upon philosophy" (23).

But deconstruction operates much more subtly. It is not reducible to the reversal of simple hierarchies, putting the last in the place of the first and vice-versa. Vincent Descombes has pointed out clearly the double game played by Derrida. To be sure, he reverses the hierarchy between philosophy and writing by showing that the former is irremediably subject to rhetoric; but he simultaneously maintains the primacy of philosophy over writing by asserting that the order of reason is absolute and cannot be transcended. The double hierarchy that results would seem to be one hierarchy too many. Deconstruction claims to keep both, thanks to the vague notion of "undecidability." As a matter of fact, the logician will have seen something like this before. A

pair of terms each presenting itself as hierarchically superior to the other is known to him as a "tangled hierarchy." Escher's famous "Drawing Hands" provide a graphic illustration of what is meant by this concept (Fig. 1). This figure is paradoxical because it is static. With the inclusion of time in the

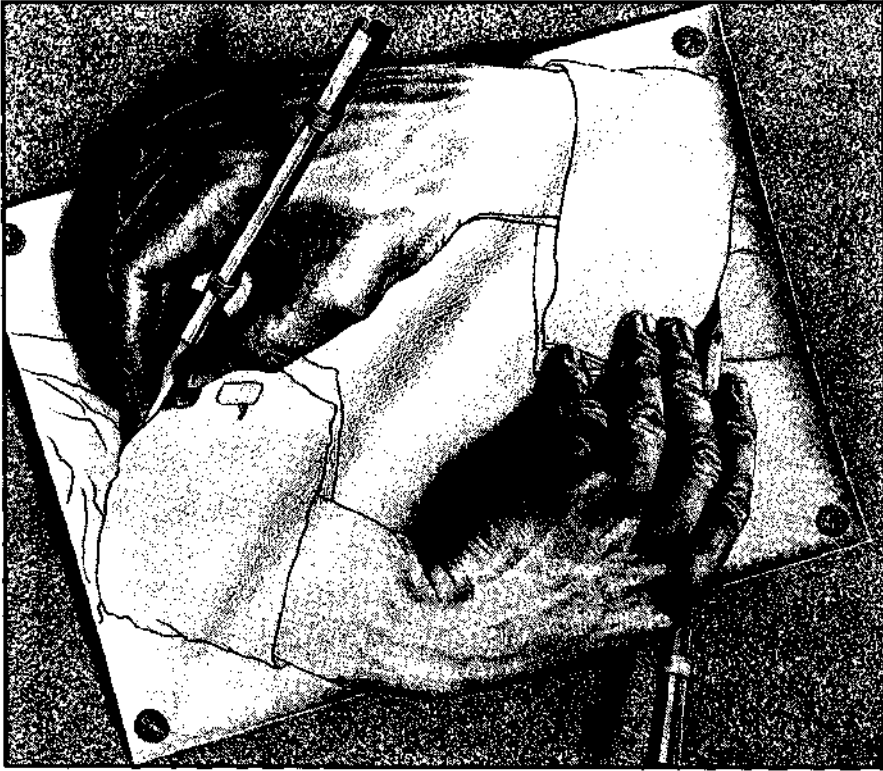


Fig. 1. Escher's "Drawing Hands"

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picture, the paradox resolves itself through a wild oscillation between the two terms. Between the operator and the operand, the program and the data, the cause and the effect, the metalanguage and the language, there is a continuous reversal of levels, in which each in turn sits on the higher level, then on the lower, and so on—not unlike two rivals, each alternately gaining the upper hand for a short time without ever completely defeating the other. This figure is indeed that of violence and vengeance. But it is not yet that of deconstruction.

Let's not forget what we have seen—that before any deconstruction, there is a self-deconstruction. The tangled hierarchy is not the figure of deconstruction, but that of thought itself. Take the opposition between literal and figurative meaning. Classically, the latter is treated as a derivation of the

former, which is thus set at the top of the hierarchy. Can we say that deconstruction consists of reversing or tangling this hierarchy by asserting that metaphoricity was always present, from the start? This would be to neglect the fact that philosophy itself was the first to carry out this reversal. And it reverses the hierarchy in precisely the domain that it relegates to second place: writing. As we have seen, when philosophy needs to describe the direct access to truth that constitutes its privilege, it resorts to metaphorical writing; and the writing that it devalues is literal writing. Therefore, in the realm of *Logos*, the literal takes precedence over the figurative; in the domain of writing, which is itself secondary, the figurative is above the literal. That which is superior at a superior level becomes inferior at an inferior level. The hierarchical opposition is thus inverted *within itself*, according to the following schema:

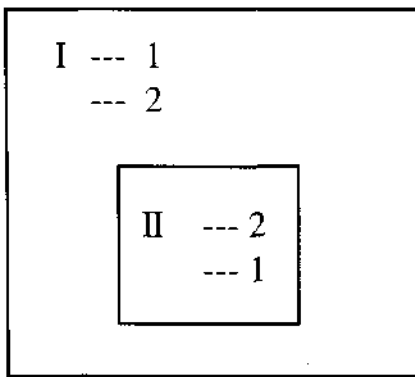


Fig. 2. Here I, the superior domain, is *Logos*, and II, writing. 1 represents the literal and 2 the figurative.

This figure is that of self-deconstruction. It is, like Escher's "Drawing Hands," a tangled hierarchy, but of a different type. There is however a relation between the two. Suppose we were to film the oscillation engendered by these hands, using a camera prone to afterimage. In each image, one hand would dominate the other, but the viewer would perceive superimposed the faded trace of the previous moment when the dominated hand was dominant and vice-versa. Each image is a figure of self-deconstruction. The entanglement of the hierarchy is like the recollection that the vanquished was once the victor and could be the victor again. It betrays a feeling of fascination mixed with fear *vis-à-vis* the vanquished. The possibility of that reversal is *contained* within the encompassing hierarchy.

What, in these conditions, is the nature of the deconstructive gesture? I suggested in the aforementioned paper that it consists of the reversal of a figure of self-deconstruction—of the reversal of a hierarchy already entangled within itself, as illustrated in Fig. 3. We see how sophisticatedly abstract human passions can become when they inhabit the world of ideas.

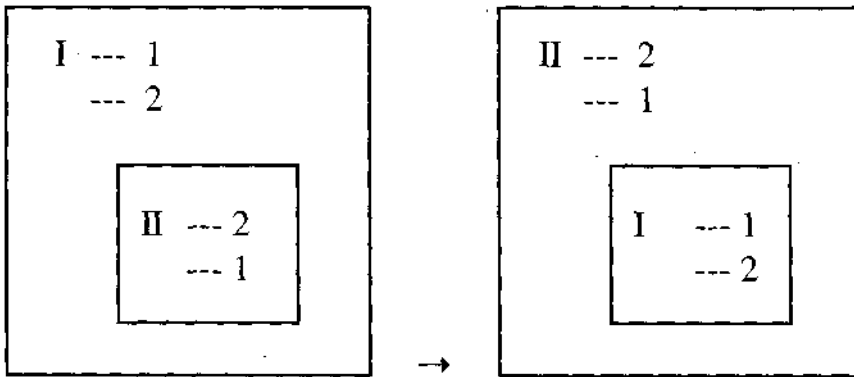


Fig. 3

I would like to illustrate the preceding schemas with two examples from an intellectual history of Anglo-Saxon liberalism on which I have been working for several years. One of my theses is that this tradition conceptualizes the social order founded on the market as if it were never far from decomposition into disorder and panic. At the very moment that the liberal thinkers posit the self-sufficiency of civil society, they cannot help referring, even if only through denial, to that which undermines the order from within. (It is easy to see that the mechanism of denial and the logic of the supplement are closely related.) Put another way, what I have here termed self-deconstruction is at the heart of the liberal order.

My two examples are located at the two extremities of the tradition under consideration, one at the origin, the other at the present moment. The first concerns the birth of economics in the work of Adam Smith and, more particularly, the relationship between Smith's system and Bernard de Mandeville's. The second concerns John Rawls's attempt to construct a moral philosophy that can stand as a viable alternative to the doctrine now dominant in Anglo-Saxon culture: utilitarianism. Two extremely important moments, then, when a new way of thinking is elaborated and asserts itself through opposition, not without falling into the traps of what René Girard calls "negative mimesis." In what follows, I am going to take up very briefly analyses which I have developed elsewhere in much greater detail (1992). I am simply going to reread my previous writings through the lens of deconstruction—a strange exercise yielding strange results, as I am the first to admit.

Mandeville and Adam Smith

At the very beginning of the eighteenth century, in his famous *Fable of the Bees*, Bernard de Mandeville provoked a scandal by enunciating the central

paradox of economic liberalism: it is "private vices" which produce "public benefits." The traditional virtues of temperance and moderation merely create an impoverished society, one in which scarcity leads to disorder and impotence. On the contrary, the liberation of the human passions—envy, covetousness, appetite for luxury, pride, and above all the most selfish one, vanity, defined as the love and pursuit of praise—makes it possible to develop industry and commerce and, by generating affluence, to produce a happy, well-ordered, and stable society.

Some fifty years later, Adam Smith, a moral philosopher by profession, published his great treatise *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). This book examines the major systems of moral philosophy and devotes a long chapter to Mandeville's, condemning it as "licentious" and "wholly pernicious" in that it "take(s) away altogether the distinction between vice and virtue." In essence, Smith's principal complaint against Mandeville is that the latter played on words. What he called private vices are in fact moral sentiments that remain perfectly virtuous when maintained at a reasonable degree and become vicious only outside certain bounds. Take what Mandeville called vanity: this for him is anything referring to the sentiments of other people. Now, Smith says, the "love of virtue" and the "love of true glory," which are the two "noblest and best passion(s) in human nature," also refer to other people's sentiments—if not to what they are really, at least to what they should be if the other person were an "Impartial Spectator," applauding only what deserves applause. Vanity begins only when we desire and seek from others praise that we do not deserve. Thus, even if there is "a certain remote affinity between them," insofar as both involve the presence of other people, the "love of true glory" and vanity could be equally branded as vices only through rhetorical sleight-of-hand (308-10). We cannot seem to get far from our point of departure: once more, we find philosophy defending itself against the pitfalls of writing.

Smith's biting criticism of Mandeville is understandable when we recall that Smith is heir to what has been dubbed the "sentimental revolution" occurring in Scotland at the start of the eighteenth century, in reaction against the "cynics" of the seventeenth century—chiefly Hobbes. The "cynics" held that everything in man, including pity, is motivated by selfishness. Mandeville fits right into this tradition. In contrast, the optimistic view of human nature promulgated by the "Scottish Enlightenment" emphasizes men's natural disposition towards compassion, benevolence, and pity. Francis Hutcheson, Smith's mentor at Glasgow, taught that there is in humanity an innate tendency towards "universal benevolence," and his ethical system derived all

the virtues from this irresistible propensity for compassion. Smith himself, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, depicts the moral and social world as resting on a single principle: sympathy.

At this point we need to take time out. Everything that I have said up until now is, to my mind, perfectly accurate. And yet, if I were to stop here, it would be utterly incomprehensible from the point of view of the history of Thought as it is usually written. Isn't Adam Smith known as the founder of political economy, that system in which individuals impelled by self-love pursue their self-interest, contributing to the common good only unconsciously and unintentionally, as if an 'invisible hand' automatically realized collective harmony? And most of all, isn't Mandeville generally presented as Smith's far-sighted forerunner?

This problem, which German philosophy has christened "*das Adam Smith Problem*" is that of the apparent inconsistency between *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* with its cornerstone of sympathy, and *The Wealth of Nations* with its central concept of self-love. The solution generally admitted today is to preserve the consistency of the theories by claiming a "specialization" of domains—in the sphere of moral sentiments, sympathy reigns supreme; in that of the economy, selfishness has the field to itself (see, for example, Dumont 1977, 83). I recently proposed a new solution, which also preserves the consistency of the theories, but on a basis quite distinct from that of "specialization." I am now able to formulate this solution in terms of "self-deconstruction," as I will try to demonstrate briefly here.

The first error to be rooted out is that of confusing sympathy with benevolence, and self-love with selfishness, a dual misconstruction that leads to the judgment that sympathy and self-love are incompatible. Now, it is possible to show that in Smith's text, self-love is in reality the reflexive modality of sympathy—and, since we are in a Girardian milieu here, that Smith's self-love is nothing else than what Girard has called "pseudonarcissism" in his own deconstruction of Freud's concept of narcissism.

Sympathy is the impulse that causes us to imagine ourselves in another's place and thereby to experience sentiments in accord with that person. When this takes place, we morally approve the other person's conduct; without it, we disapprove. In the case of an actor, the accord he perceives between the spectator's sentiments and his own is essential; he adjusts his conduct to maximize it. He imagines himself in the place of the spectator imagining *himself* in his own place. And he sympathizes with (approves) his own conduct only insofar as he perceives that the spectator also sympathizes with it (approves it). The means of reflexivity is the gaze of the spectator. Sympathy

is in the end a form of imitation or contagion of sentiments, but contrary to what the theatrical metaphor suggests, it is not the spectator who imitates the actor, but the actor who imitates the spectator.

But who is this spectator? Let's not forget that sympathy requires the help of the imagination. The actor, not having access to the real sentiments of the spectator, puts himself in the latter's place via his imagination. It matters little, then, whether the spectator is actually present. When the spectator's position is empty, the actor occupies it by an imaginary duality—he observes himself as would an "impartial" spectator. This is the conscience, which Smith also calls "the man within." In this context, self-love is a virtuous passion, in no way to be confused with selfishness. We love ourselves only to the extent that the "Other" (the impartial spectator) loves us, or, to the extent that we can sympathize with the fact that "he" sympathizes with us. Self-love then assumes the form of a stoic virtue, of self-command, of controlling one's passions in such a way as to win the sympathy of the "man within."

This is the heart of the criticism that Smith addresses to Mandeville—the presence of the Other is not sufficient to turn virtue into a vice. And yet, this is the point at which his system self-deconstructs. For suppose that instead of the "man within," there were a "man without," a flesh-and blood spectator, and that the actor were more desirous of being praised and admired than of *deserving* praise and admiration. The actor would know that there are more expeditious ways of winning praise. Self-love here takes the form of self-interest, of the economic motive, the desire to improve one's material condition, to increase one's wealth. Not because the riches acquired would be in themselves a source of satisfaction—Smith has no words harsh enough to express his scorn for this notion—but because they would have the property of attracting to their possessor the sympathy of those who lack them. These people mistakenly attribute virtues to wealth that it does not have. But it is because they are mistaken, and because they covet it, that in the end they are *not* mistaken. Wealth indeed has the virtues with which it is credited, but only because it *has been credited* with them. It is this fools' game, a giant variation on the theme of sympathy, that generates the *Wealth of Nations* and what we call the economy—but not without causing grave harm to morality.

This last point haunted Smith all his life, leading him to include, in the last edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, just before his death, a new chapter significantly entitled "Of the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by this disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect persons of poor and mean condition." Through a detailed textual analysis, I have shown how Smith ended up, despite himself, with a

system which is essentially the same as Mandeville's: a mixture of self-love and envy produces public prosperity.

How is this possible—how can sympathy, which joins sentiments together, engender envy, which implies sentiments in conflict? Quite easily, through the following mechanism. Self-love, as we saw, is reflexive sympathy, turned back upon itself. Applied to relations with "objects," this principle gives us: "I only judge an object "desirable" insofar as the man without judges it so; in order to desire this object, I need to display it to attract the desire of others." I succeed thereby in garnering the sympathy of my spectators (and in feeding my self-love) but this sympathy cannot be distinguished from its opposite: envy.

Let me sum up. In the sphere of moral sentiments, sympathy is the fundamental principle. Envy, its negation, is born out of a deviation of this general principle, when the attention directed to other people goes beyond its proper bounds (this is the criticism addressed to Mandeville). In the devalued sphere where the moral sentiments are corrupted and the economic motive emerges, the hierarchy is reversed and envy becomes the dominant principle. But this economic sphere, relegated to a secondary level, is not a specialized zone where general principles no longer hold; it too is governed by the principle of sympathy. What we are dealing with, then, is indeed the reversal of a hierarchical opposition *within* itself. That is the figure of self- deconstruction.

The astonishing thing, of course, in the context of the history of Thought, is that it is *economy* that occupies the secondary domain, the devalued one where the dominant hierarchy is reversed. A singular way to usher in the new discipline of economics! What Smith did in *The Wealth of Nations* (as did later economists in their turn) was to reverse this tangled hierarchy, putting economy at the top. That complex figure that we have christened "the deconstruction of a self-deconstruction" (that is to say, the reversal of a tangled hierarchy) thus was necessary before economic thinking and behavior could occupy the hegemonic position we find them in today.

Justifying sacrifice

I will be even briefer in my treatment of the book by John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. In spite of its austere and abstract nature and its great moderation, it is a work of polemical intent. In the very first paragraph, Rawls writes, "My guiding aim is to work out a theory of justice that is a viable alternative to these doctrines which have long dominated our philosophical tradition." The principal enemy is named at the outset: utilitarianism.

The stakes of the battle are defined on the same opening page: "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many."

Each of these sentences contains an implicit critique of utilitarianism. The latter seeks to render as large as possible the overall utility obtained by aggregating individual utilities. If the sacrifice of somebody's life, liberties, or basic rights increases the overall utility, utilitarianism asserts that it is right and rational to consent to this. The rawlsian theory of justice makes the opposite assertion, in the name of a kantian-type categorical imperative: each person must be treated as an end, and never simply as a means, even if it be in the service of something like a general interest. From the outset, then, we know what pits Rawls's theory against utilitarianism: the question of the rationality and justice of sacrifice.

I cannot amplify here on the procedural nature of the rawlsian theory of justice nor on the content of its principles, except to recall the following. In the deliberations about the principles of justice, the individual participants are deprived of any knowledge of what differentiates them among themselves: their position in society, their particular conception of the good, etc. Being possessed of the same rationality and the same knowledge of the general facts of life in society, they all arrive at the same decision. Unanimity is automatically guaranteed by the "veil of ignorance." As to the principles of justice on which the contracting parties reach agreement, they are determined by the following structure. Injustice is defined as those inequalities which are not to everyone's benefit. As a consequence, all social values (in descending order of priority: liberties, opportunities, economic values) must be apportioned in such a way as to render as good as possible the lot of the worst-off, then of the next-to-the worst-off, etc.

We notice two things right away. First, that these principles are indeed compatible with the principle of unanimity (also known in economics as the Pareto principle or efficiency principle): if a social transformation improves the lot of some without hurting others, it satisfies justice and efficiency. Next, that these principles do indeed incorporate an antisacrificial logic: they give absolute priority to the worst-off, precisely, that is, to those who would otherwise run the risk of being the sacrificial victims. These two traits distinguish the rawlsian theory of justice from utilitarianism: as a free and rational individual, each person has the same value, and yet, that does not lead

to dissolving his individuality in a sort of common pot, where some can be sacrificed for the greater good of others.

Unfortunately, this elegant edifice is undermined by self-deconstruction. First, let us ask in what way utilitarianism furnishes a rational foundation for sacrifice. The anti-utilitarian authors who make this accusation need to depict situations in which the harm done to some really *does* contribute to a greater good for others. Even a superficial examination of the literature will show that they always resort to the same type of example. Thus Robert Nozick, laying bare the logic of a hypothetical utilitarianism of human rights, argues that

a mob rampaging through a part of town killing and burning will violate the rights of those living there. Therefore, someone might try to justify his punishing another *he* knows to be innocent of a crime that enraged a mob, on the grounds that punishing this innocent person would help to avoid even greater violations of rights by others, and so would lead to a minimum weighted score for rights violations in the society.
(28-9)

So it is again with Bernard Williams, inventing, in his celebrated critique of utilitarianism, a case with the same structure as *Sophie's Choice* (98-108). (She must decide which of her two children will go to the gas chamber, the other will be saved; if she refuses to choose, both will die.)

These situations are what I call "sacrificial situations." It is true that the utilitarian principle, applied to these situations, justifies the sacrificial solution. But none of these authors seems to have realized that the utilitarian principle is not alone in this respect. The principle of unanimity brings one to the same conclusion. In the case of *Sophie's Choice*, with the sacrificial solution one child dies and the other lives; if the sacrifice is refused, both of them die. Now, the principle of unanimity is a *minimal* principle of rationality. Its self-evidence is difficult to deny, as is made manifest by the declaration of Caiaphas to the high priests and Pharisees, as recorded in the Gospel of John: "You understand nothing. You do not see that it is better that a single man die for the people and that the nation as a whole does not perish" (18:14).

Since the rawlsian principles of justice are compatible with the principle of unanimity, they too, like utilitarianism, would justify the sacrificial solution in a sacrificial situation. Where, then, is the opposition between utilitarianism and Rawls's theory? How can one say that the former justifies sacrifice, and the latter does not? Rawls's answer is surprising: his theory does not apply to

sacrificial situations. It is an "ideal" theory that is only valid for a society already governed by the rawlsian principles of justice!

This seems to be a shocking circularity, and the method employed by Rawls to compare the principle of utility and his own principles seems to be extremely unfair. Utilitarianism is accused of favoring sacrifice in cases which rawlsian theory excludes from its own field of application; were it applied there, its principles would also justify sacrifice. And all this on the pretext that utilitarianism, unlike Rawls's theory, claims to be universally applicable!

But we need to take a closer look. Once more, we are not dealing with a contradiction or a logical inconsistency, but with a form of self-deconstruction. The apparent circularity of Rawls's argument is justified if one keeps in mind the evolution of his ideas on interpreting his own theory. At the time of the publication of his book (1971), it was still a matter of furnishing a rational foundation for a theory meant to be universal in scope: "We should strive for a kind of moral geometry." Today, Rawls deems the moral philosopher's task to be more one of revelation than of foundation. It is a matter of organizing the basic ideas and the principles that *already* exist implicitly in our considered judgments and in our convictions on justice and injustice. (Hence the importance assigned to the concept of a "reflective equilibrium.")

In this perspective, the great merit of the *Theory of Justice* is to reveal that the ethos of "democratic" societies rests on an exclusion: the exclusion of those sacrificial situations precisely which the *Theory* excludes from its field of application. To put this another way: what the *Theory* excludes from its field of application is in fact constitutive of the *Theory* and is an integral part of it. The *Theory* tells us at least as much by what it rejects as by what it affirms.

The form of the self-deconstruction can now be discerned easily. The *Theory* sets out to demonstrate the superiority of antisacrificial reason over sacrificial reason; in the domain of the sacrificial situations that it excludes, its principles establish the opposite hierarchy. The excluded domain is not, however, a separate, "specialized" one, since the fact of its exclusion is an integral part of the *Theory*. What we are dealing with, then, is the reversal of a hierarchical opposition *within* itself.

Is there any reason to deconstruct this self-deconstruction, by reversing it? Isn't it already the reversal of a previous tangled hierarchy that set sacrificial reason above antisacrificial reason, while *containing* the reverse hierarchy within itself? This leads us straight to our conclusion.

One last remark concerning the liberal order. It asserts that it has nothing to do with the unleashing of envy and with sacrifice, but it is haunted by them.

The liberal order discloses that it *contains* disorder, in both senses of the word 'contain'—it has it within itself, and it holds it back. The tangled hierarchy between order and disorder is built into the liberal order.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to summarize what I have written in the paper complementary to this one (1990), regarding the necessity of going further in the direction of a deconstruction of deconstruction itself.

It so happens that the highly complex figures of self-deconstruction and of deconstruction that I have tried to analyze were familiar to me long before I became interested in the philosophy of Derrida. I encountered them in two domains completely different from this one, where they had a radically opposite meaning. The first was in the theory of self-organizing systems (cf. Atlan), and the second was in the anthropology of Louis Dumont (1980; see "Postface: Toward a theory of hierarchy"). In both of these, tangled hierarchy—as the reversal of a hierarchy within itself—is treated as autonomy. Whereas, for deconstruction, a tangled hierarchy is supposed to indicate the impossibility of achieving autonomy or self-sufficiency of any kind.

This radical divergence in the interpretation of a single abstract schema ought to give any red-blooded researcher the desire to get to the bottom of the question. But in order to get there, two conditions must first be met. It is necessary to be able to identify behind a theoretical discourse the logical forms that structure it. It is also necessary to pursue the work simultaneously in two fields as different *a priori* as deconstruction and dumontian anthropology. Now, it is hard to see the deconstructionists satisfying either of these. First because they are at war with the concept of Logos, and are not likely to submit to the rigor of formalization. Second, because their bias in favor of writing ("everything is discourse") too often leads them to cut themselves off from the forward movement of the sciences. Thus we seem doomed to continue in this absurd situation, where the same form is seen by some as representing autonomous totality, and is used by others to deconstruct any pretension to autonomy and totalization.

The form I characterized above as being "self-deconstruction" is the same one Dumont calls "hierarchy," in its etymological sense of "sacred order." Hierarchy is the relation that links an encompassing level (the social totality) to an encompassed level (the individuals who make up this totality). Hierarchical societies are holistic societies, dominated by religion; they give priority to the whole over its constituents. Now, Dumont shows that a hierarchy is always reversed within itself ("the encompassing of the contrary"). Thus in Indian

society, the Brahmin is above the king because he represents the sacred, the encompassing level. But in areas that the hierarchy places at an inferior level, we find the king above the Brahmin. As Dumont writes, the Brahmin is above the king because it is only at inferior levels that the king is above the Brahmin. We recognize here the form of tangled hierarchy proper to self-deconstruction.

Now, I have shown that in these hierarchical societies, the so-called rites of reversal, such as the carnival, realize precisely a reversal of the tangled hierarchy. They thus embody a deconstruction of a self-deconstruction. But this reversal of the tangled hierarchy is obviously an integral part of the hierarchical order. In less abstract terms, the carnival does not endanger the social order, for the blurring of class differences it allows is limited within a well-defined time and space. The tangled hierarchy reverses itself within itself. It is therefore a self-deconstruction of hierarchy in Dumont's sense. In this context, deconstruction appears as the "carnival" of philosophy. It still belongs to the cultural, the religious, the sacred, the symbolic. Illuminated by Dumont's anthropology, its form bears witness to this: the hierarchy is tangled, but within itself; there remains an encompassing level and an encompassed level. The scope of the destruction carried out by deconstruction is no greater than that of the destructive acts mimed in a ritual or on the stage of a theater.

To say that the hierarchical order deconstructs itself is to say that it *contains* within itself the crisis that undermines it. There is therefore no difference on this essential point between traditional societies subject to a religious order and the liberal order of modern societies. Disorder is contained within order.

An authentic deconstruction would entail deconstructing deconstruction by reversing the order between order and disorder—by placing the disorder or the crisis first. This would mean leaving behind the world of Dumont's or Derrida's tangled hierarchies, which preserve an order and an orientation, and returning to the pure, undifferentiated violence evoked by Escher's "Drawing Hands." In this way there would finally stand revealed the full polemical charge concealed behind the abstract forms sometimes adopted by productions of the mind.

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