

Preface: Should We Be Afraid of Jacques Derrida?
Paul Brienza

Jacques Derrida is a thinker of resistance. By that, I mean that Derrida is a philosopher who inspires fear and consternation as well as a series of broad based conceptual and narratological points that challenge the very structure of Western theoretical discourse. This, no doubt, causes fear. In order to grasp the essential features of this 'fear', one must think of the *Derridean effect*. That is, Derrida argues that the structures of discourse in the West follow particular patterns that are *repetitive* in practice and *dominant* in orientation and scope. At the core of this effect is the idea that *truth* and its attendant discourses of justice and right are not easy matters. In fact, any discourse of truth is full of narrative forms and practices that are inherently rhetorical devices that challenge the simplicity of correspondence theories of truth and knowledge. It is this simple lucidity that is often resisted. The argument against Derrida's approach is that here we have a deconstruction geared to the dismantling of Western forms of knowledge that undermine the whole edifice of 'objective knowledge.' Those who resist Derrida, resist the very idea of the multiplicity truth; they argue that ideas are clear expressions of eternal verities to be found either in the realm of transcendent fixity or in the world of empirical verification. Both of these approaches are, for Derrida, expressions of the *metaphysics of presence*. This he describes as a perspective that seeks to latch onto a stable vision or fully present verity found in the 'authenticity of a spoken voice' over the slippage of a written text full of multiple meanings. The claim is, on the part of his critics, that this shows a lack of concern for truth; that Derrida is attacking the very edifice of 'truthfulness' and its place in our understanding of the world. Yet, is a commitment to truth not a delimited box of appropriate responses and conclusions but a genuine 'openness' to all the paths of truth? If so, is it also clear that truth may lead us down paths that are potentially dead ends? And, if this is the case, could it not be argued that Derrida's desire to question the pretensions of all truth formation are not a thinly veiled commitment to the truth? Does one enhance knowledge by accepting hasty pretensions found in a tradition or by interrogating these very pretensions? If so, then Derrida must be recognized for what he is: a friend and abetter of the truth. To resist Derrida's work may be seen as an attempt to reinforce, reinstate and re-assert the dominate forms of knowledge production. To resist Derrida's style, tone and interpretive nexus must be separated from the 'spirit' of his analyses which are fundamentally grounded in interrogating the truth for truth's sake; to not limit oneself to the rules and standards of traditional discourse; and, to not be fearful of the margins and exclusions of our assumptions and ways of thought.

The papers here assembled take up the challenge of encountering Derrida with a courage of dialogue that is open to the challenges of his questions and that finds this encounter to be one of fruitful philosophical and theoretical expansion. Derrida's significance is to be found in the following pages because of the commitment to dialogue and critical deconstruction not for the sake of simple destruction but to empower the search for truth with a rigour that this thinker's work both expresses and enacts.