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Deconstruction does not aim to provide answers. It does not seek to prove an objective truth or to support any one particular claim to justice over another. For this reason, deconstruction itself is indeterminate. In *Force of Law* Derrida concedes that deconstruction is 'impossible'. The 'happening' of deconstruction is not going to lead to a determinate outcome. It will not reveal the one true meaning of justice that can be embodied in law. Rather, deconstruction requires first and foremost the relentless pursuit of the impossible. What is 'happening' is not the pursuit of an answer which marks the end of the inquiry, but rather the ongoing questioning that keeps our minds open to the idea that there may be alternative views and understandings of the meaning of justice. When seen in these terms, it is not a method but simply a way of reading, writing, thinking and acting. Rather than seeking an endpoint or a solid conclusion, the means cannot be distinguished from the end. The ongoing process of questioning is the end in itself. It is about negotiating the impossible and the undecidable and, in so doing, remaining open to the possibility of justice.

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inSilizce**Are the following statements TRUE or FALSE according to the passage?**

- 1) If there is one thing that deconstruction does not do, it is definitely not aiming to offer answers. T / F
- 2) Deconstruction can, in fact, verify an impartial truth or support any one specific statement to justice over another. T / F
- 3) The pursuit of the impossible is not a futile commitment for those following in the footsteps of Derrida. T / F
- 4) Law may have to seek to find one true meaning of justice or answer which marks the end of the inquiry. T / F
- 5) Derrida most probably would support the Machiavellian statement "the end justifies the means". T / F
- 6) Even amid the ambiguity and relentless search for the impossible, the deconstruction adherents do not find it impossible to reach. T / F
- 7) The primary aim of the author is to inform about what deconstruction is and its implications in various fields like law. T / F

Deconstruction by its very nature defies institutionalization in an authoritative definition. The concept was first outlined by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* where he explored the interplay between language and the construction of meaning. From this early work, and later works in which he has attempted to explain deconstruction to others, most notably *the Letter to a Japanese Friend*, it is possible to provide a basic explanation of what deconstruction is commonly understood to mean. Three key features emerge from Derrida's work as making deconstruction possible. These are, first, the inherent desire to have a centre, or focal point, to structure understanding (logocentrism); second, the reduction of meaning to set definitions that are **committed** to writing (nothing beyond the text); and, finally, how the reduction of meaning to writing captures opposition within that concept itself (différance). These three features found the possibility of deconstruction as an on-going process of questioning the accepted basis of meaning. While the concept initially arose in the context of language, it is equally applicable to the study of law. Derrida considered deconstruction to be a 'problematization of the foundation of law, morality and politics.' For him it was both 'foreseeable and desirable that studies of deconstructive style should **culminate** in the problematic of law and justice.' Deconstruction is therefore a means of interrogating the relationship between the two.

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Are the following statements TRUE or FALSE according to the passage?

- 1) Among the things that deconstruction does challenge is authoritative definition. T / F
- 2) Derrida attempted to explain deconstruction to others in his early work. T / F
- 3) One can reach a basic explanation of what deconstruction is through *the Letter to a Japanese Friend*. T / F
- 4) If we had a desire to have a centre, or focal point, to structure understanding (logocentrism), deconstruction would be possible. T / F
- 5) An avid follower of Derrida most probably would look for definitions beyond the text. T / F
- 6) According to the author, while the concept of deconstruction originally emerged in the context of language, it is hardly pertinent to the study of law. T / F
- 7) **The underlined phrase "committed" in the text is closest in meaning to ----.**
 - A) attributed
 - B) enthusiastic
 - C) assigned
 - D) peculiar
 - E) loyal
- 8) **The underlined phrase "culminate" in the text is closest in meaning to ----.**
 - A) trigger
 - B) stop
 - C) end
 - D) bear
 - E) try
- 9) The author is neutral in his stance to deconstruction and formal in terms of language. T / F

Derrida takes as his starting point the assertion that modern Western philosophy is characterized by and constructed around an inherent desire to place meaning at the centre of presence. Put simply, what this means is that philosophy is driven by a desire for the certainty associated with the existence of an absolute truth, or an objective meaning that makes sense of our place in the world. Derrida terms this desire 'logocentrism'. Its effect is the placing of one particular term or concept, such as justice, at the centre of all efforts at theorizing or **interrogating** meaning. The term becomes the core around which meaning is constructed, the reference point that determines all subsequent knowledge. Derrida highlights how logocentrism assumes the existence of set and stable meanings that exist to be discovered. The way in which this term—the logos—is made known is language, the translation into words of a concept or a way of thinking. This is described as the 'metaphysics of presence'—the way in which we make present the objects of our thought. The logos represents nature, which is something different from the instituted form embodied in language or in text. Crucial therefore is the idea of a rigid separation of the origin of meaning (the abstract idea of justice, for example) and the institutionalization of that meaning in 'writing' (or law).

Are the following statements TRUE or FALSE according to the passage?

- 1) Language is the source of logocentrism. T / F
- 2) Derrida believes that a desire for the certainty associated with the existence of an absolute truth is not uncommon in modern Western philosophy. T / F
- 3) A rigid separation of the origin of meaning (the abstract idea of justice, for example) and the institutionalization of that meaning(or law) is paramount to Derrida school of thinking. T / F
- 4) **The underlined phrase "interrogating" in the text is closest in meaning to ----.**
 - A) attributing
 - B) explaining
 - C) conveying
 - D) inquiring
 - E) acquiring
- 5) The representation of nature in the form of logos is not the same as the instituted form embodied in language or in text. T / F

For Derrida, it is this logocentrism, and the idea of the exteriority of meaning, that opens up the possibility of deconstruction. He examines how the natural 'origin' of meaning and its 'institution' in writing cannot be so easily separated. Rather than nature (justice) and institution (law) existing independently of each other, Derrida suggests that nature itself is constructed only with reference to the institution. So rather than law being a direct embodiment of justice, how we understand both justice and law is determined by the interplay between the two. This is a rejection of the rigid separation that makes the quest for certainty possible — of the very idea that justice exists as a prior objective standard to be discovered. By reading law as reflecting or embodying the natural origin of justice, what is ignored or concealed are all the other possible interpretations of justice that are not embodied or encapsulated in the law. In this way writing defines nature, as well as reflecting it.

The idea of deconstruction is therefore concerned with countering the idea of a transcendental origin or natural referent. It refutes the notion that it is possible to transgress the institution in order to discover something beyond — the existence of an independent origin. This idea is famously encapsulated in the phrase 'There is nothing outside of the text', which is often used to summarise Derrida's work. For Derrida the origin does not exist independently of its institution, but exists only 'through its functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences...' In his own words, Derrida terms this phenomenon 'différance', and it is this idea that forms the basis of deconstruction. Différance refers to the fact that meaning cannot be regarded as fixed or static, but is constantly evolving. It arises from the constant process of negotiation between competing concepts. Rather than pursuing the truth of a natural origin, what deconstruction requires is the interrogation of these competing interpretations that combine to produce meaning. The act of institution—or writing—itself captures this constant competition between the differing possible interpretations of meaning within the institution. The effect of the translation of thought into language is therefore to

inscribe différence into the structure of meaning. It simultaneously embodies the desired meaning as intended by the author, and the constraints placed on that meaning through the act of interpretation of the text. In this regard, meaning is defined equally by what is included in the institution and what is not. At any one time, one concept will be dominant over the other, thus excluding the other. However while the idea of exclusion suggest the absence of any presence of that which is excluded, in fact that which is instituted depends for its existence on what has been excluded. The two exist in a relationship of hierarchy in which one will always be dominant over the other. The dominant concept is the one that manages to legitimate itself as the reflection of the natural order thereby squeezing out competing interpretations that remain trapped as the excluded trace within the dominant meaning.

In *Positions* Derrida explains how the first task of deconstruction is to overturn the hierarchy. This is necessary to highlight the 'conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition'. It emphasizes the dominance of one particular way of thinking over others, and belies the idea of fixed meaning, overturning, and therefore exposing, the existence of the binary and destabilizing previously fixed categories of understanding. However this is only the first stage. Derrida emphasizes how to remain in this phase is to remain within the oppositional structure, allowing the hierarchy to re-establish itself. If deconstruction is limited to the simple inversion of binaries, then inquiry remains trapped 'within the closed field of these oppositions'. What this means is that instead of making any real change to structural conditions, what is happening is simply swapping the positions of dominant and subordinate, allowing the same conditions to persist. In order to move beyond this dynamic, and to break open the structure itself, a second stage is necessary. This second stage is where the indeterminate element of deconstruction becomes visible. Rather than resting with the inversion of the binaries, and by extension accepting a different manifestation of fixed meaning, the second phase requires us to step outside the oppositions, to remain in search of new meanings, not by repeating ideas but by

analyzing how ideas are framed, how arguments are made. Speaking at the Villanova Roundtable, Derrida described this as searching for the 'tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within [the] corpus'. It is only through this element of endless analysis, criticism and deconstruction that we can prevent existing structures of dominance from reasserting themselves.

In this context, deconstruction is concerned not with the discovery of 'truth' or of distilling correct conclusions, but rather with the process of questioning itself. It is a process characterized by uncertainty and indeterminacy. For this reason, Derrida explains, deconstruction is not a 'method', and it cannot be transformed into one. One cannot 'apply' deconstruction to test a hypothesis or to support an argument. Rather it is an ongoing process of interrogation concerned with the structure of meaning itself. As explained in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', for Derrida deconstruction is neither analysis nor critique. It is not done with a particular aim. It is not a search for a 'simple element' or 'indissoluble origin'. The consequence of this is that its value is not linked to any subsequent reconstruction. As discussed above, it does not exist to take apart one structure to replace it with another, but exists simply to reveal the inner logic of that structure so as better to understand it. This has led to the charge that deconstruction is insufficiently concerned with questions of justice and ethics. Derrida is clear, however, that although deconstruction is not primarily concerned with advocacy or activism, nor is it nihilistic or anarchic. It does not reject the need for law and institutions, but rather seeks to work within those structures to reveal new possibilities. It consists of dismantling not institutions themselves, but rather 'structures within institutions that have become too rigid, or are dogmatic or which work as an obstacle to future research'.¹¹ Deconstruction is therefore an affirmative force that opens up possibilities that have been suppressed by virtue of the dominance of one particular way of conceptualizing justice.

Finally, deconstruction is not an act or an operation. Rather, it is something that happens, something that takes place. It takes place everywhere. It does not require deliberation or consciousness, but rather its potential exists within our structures of meaning. It is interested in exploring and revealing the internal logic of ideas and meaning. It is concerned with opening up these structures and revealing the way in which our understanding of foundational concepts is constructed. This is internal to meaning itself and not dependent on external factors. What this suggests is that the possibility of deconstruction exists within the structure of meaning itself, within the structure of différance, and is not something to be found and applied from the outside. It is primarily concerned with understanding ideas, not with their application.