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Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide

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Derrida's Voice and Phenomenon: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide

Description
This work provides a detailed analysis of Derrida's 1967 book, *Voice and Phenomenon*, contextualizing it in the broader history of French receptions of the phenomenological tradition.

Keywords
Derrida, phenomenological tradition

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Introduction

Why Read this Book?

This book is a reader's guide to Jacques Derrida's 1967 classic, *Voice and Phenomenon*, and it is designed to serve a couple of functions. First, its purpose is to historically situate Derrida's text within the overall body of Derrida's work specifically, and within the larger context of continental philosophy generally. But more importantly, its aim is to help the neophytic reader wade through and make sense of a seminal but immensely difficult text in twentieth-century philosophy.

The difficulty of *Voice and Phenomenon* derives from a number of factors. First, Derrida's thought is, in a manner of speaking, parasitic. It arises out of a profound love for and commitment to the tradition of Western philosophy, along with all the problems this tradition has created and encountered. Thus, Derrida's own thought, while highly original and unique, typically takes the form of extended immersions within the thinkers and texts of that tradition, and his own concepts emerge from them. This means that Derrida presupposes of his readers a deep familiarity with these thinkers and their historical roles in that tradition. For instance, in *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida's primary interlocutor is Edmund Husserl, the founder of the school of philosophy known as 'phenomenology', both of which will be discussed further below. So in order to read *Voice and Phenomenon*, one must have at least some familiarity with Edmund Husserl, and with the conceptual framework of the tradition he spawned. A lack in this area makes significantly more difficult any meaningful engagement with Derrida.

Second, *Voice and Phenomenon* is difficult in that Derrida often embraces and explores paradoxical lines of thought in his analyses. This is not for the sake of cleverness, nor does it stem from a rebellious desire to destroy the inherited philosophical canon, as some of his most impassioned critics would argue; quite the contrary, in fact. Much of the thrust of Derrida's argumentation consists in his ongoing demonstration that the philosophical tradition is constituted and defined by its contradictory commitments which, despite their oppositional statuses, are nevertheless both demanded by the language of the texts in which they appear. And his originality comes largely from the fact that, while most other historical commentators would seek to water down or overlook one or the other of these commitments in the name of a presupposed ideological and authorial consistency, Derrida draws out and expands upon both, in the name of fidelity to the language of the text and to the tradition in which the text is situated. Therefore, while a standard work of historical philosophical commentary will seek to demonstrate that a philosopher holds to a specific position, and that therefore any apparent occurrences of claims in support of the opposite position are just that, *apparent*, Derrida's 'deconstructive' (a term yet to be explored) reading will attempt to show that the text of the philosopher does indeed demonstrate a commitment to a specific position, but also, an equally forceful and necessary commitment to its contrary. Thus, while the author might very well wish to be committed to a specific concept or view, at the exclusion of its opposite, the language in which he writes operates with rules of its own, which bind him at the same time to the opposing view, and moreover, that this oppositional element is an essential and constitutive factor in the author's thinking. But this requires that we call into question everything that we have always held to be self-evident regarding authorial intention and the way in which we read a text.

The point in Derrida's analyses is to reveal a differential play of force lying behind the very possibility of meaningfulness generally, and hence all constituted, empirical languages, including the language of our tradition; but this cannot be done successfully without allowing for a certain level of comfort with paradoxical thinking. The twists and turns that Derrida makes through the course of a reading are therefore often quite difficult to follow, and he even creates new concepts in order to *think* these turns (which can thereby augment the difficulty for the uninitiated reader). To this revelatory strategy of analysis that reveals the inherently differential structure of meaning, Derrida gives the controversial name, 'deconstruction'.

Finally, and perhaps most frustratingly for the newcomer, Derrida almost never takes a position himself, at least not in the traditional 'either/or' sense of the term. When we read a philosophical text, we typically want to analyse the arguments and figure out the author's position on any given philosophical question. For instance, which is a more certain ground for knowledge, the mind or the senses? Is the soul immortal or does it die with the body? What ought to be the ground of ethical decisions, their consequences or the intentions behind them? In a standard philosophical text, we want to know the author's *position*, and assess his or her arguments *for* that position, so that we can evaluate whether or not the arguments are valid and sound, and hence whether we have good reason to subscribe to that position also. With very few exceptions, Derrida simply does not write in this way. Typically, when one thinks that Derrida can be pinned down on some point, his line of thought will take an unexpected turn and the would-be position slips away. What Derrida will continue to show throughout the entirety of his work (and *Voice and Phenomenon* is one of the first and finest examples), is that there are fundamental commitments and assumptions hiding behind the ways in which our philosophical questions and binary alternatives are formed in the first place, and hence his work will attempt to revitalise the very act of questioning, and thinking, itself. Thus, like a modern-day Socrates, Derrida is something of a *gadfly*[1] on the back of modernity – unsettling assumptions, posing questions, and never content to rest with any would-be answers that would seek to attenuate the complexity that is an inherent feature of the real world – and because of this point, Derrida's thinking is fecund and exciting, a veritable ocean of possibility. But it can also appear hopelessly frustrating to the first-time reader.

With all this in mind, I shall wherever possible provide the historical and philosophical backgrounds necessary to read *Voice and Phenomenon.* I shall not assume that the reader is familiar with the names and histories of Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Levinas, phenomenology, Martin Heidegger, différance, trace, supplement, etc. Rather, I shall, at the appropriate times, explicate in a comprehensive yet succinct manner, the essentials that the reader needs to grasp in order to approach Derrida's text (beginning, shortly, with a discussion of Husserl). Moreover, I shall endeavour to comprehensibly explicate the necessities for the various paradoxical concepts that Derrida reveals. Thus, I shall help the reader in figuring out just what Derrida's commitments are, revealing the stakes underlying his project, and thereby providing an overarching trajectory that will guide his work throughout his life. When all is said and done, if the reader will grant a modicum of patience and diligence, he or she will possess the tools necessary not only for understanding *Voice and Phenomenon*, but also, I believe, the backbone of all of Derrida's thought, and along the way, a general introduction to continental philosophy. Let us now briefly address the question of *who* Derrida is, and what he is about.

Life and Works[2]

Jacques Derrida is one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, one whose influence continues to extend well into the twenty-first, shattering traditional academic and scholarly boundaries as it disseminates. Derrida is a member of that rare class of philosopher whose works enjoy, for better and for worse, a far-reaching sphere of influence – in the arts, in literary theory, in cinema and in architecture, among other arenas. Both culturally and intellectually, Derrida himself represents a conflux of influences. Jackie, as his parents named him, was born in 1930 into a family of Sephardic[3] Jews in El-Biar, a suburb of Algiers, Algeria's capital city. Algeria is located in North Africa, not far east from where the Gibraltar Strait separates it from the south-western part of Europe, at the intersection of two historically imperial religions, Catholicism and Islam. This, and the long history of oscillating conquests it entails, provides Algeria with a rich mixture of cultural influences. During Derrida's childhood, Algeria was a French province, a result of a period of French conquest stretching from 1830–48, and in 1870, Algerian Jews had been granted full French citizenship. Thus, Derrida's upbringing is an amalgam, informed by aspects of African, Arabic, Christian, Jewish and French culture, along with a dose of American pop culture (the name 'Jackie' was chosen by his parents after American actor, Jackie Coogan; as a young man, Derrida changed his name to 'Jacques' because he thought it sounded more authentically French and more sophisticated). This cultural eclecticism is a fact of which Derrida is later proud, referring to himself as 'the purest of the bastards' (*The Post Card*, p. 84). During World War II, as Algeria fell under the authority of the Vichy government, Derrida faced harsh anti-Semitic aggression, including a year-long exclusion from his lycée.[4] He found solace (as well as an appreciation for the subversive and rebellious side of intellectual life) in the writings of authors such as Albert Camus, André Gide, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Philosophically, Derrida's background is no less diffuse. As a young student, Derrida was fascinated by French literature, and was interested in pursuing a career in literary studies. Through a series of chance events, after hearing on the radio that Albert Camus, who hailed from Algeria, had attained international success after attending the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), Derrida set his sights on this prestigious school. The ENS is an extremely competitive, highly selective French college dedicated to the education of professors and educators in France. Alan Schrift writes, 'In the context of philosophy, and the academic world more generally, without question the most important *grande école* is the École Normale Supérieure', adding:

> Until the middle of the twentieth century, it was a virtual requirement for academic success in France for one to attend the École Normale Supérieure [. . .] and this was particularly true for academic success in a department of philosophy.[5]

Besides Camus, the ENS had been the academic home to generations of French intellectual giants, among them, Jean Hyppolite, Simone de Beauvoir, Henri Bergson, Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Canguilhem, Louis Althusser and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Though it took him three years of study and two tries at the entrance exams to secure a spot, Derrida entered the ENS in 1952, and began his prolonged engagement with Husserlian phenomenology, completing a thesis on Husserl's work in 1954 (*The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, finally published in 1990), publishing in 1962 his own translation of (and 170-page critical 'Introduction' to) Husserl's late essay, 'The Origin of Geometry', and continuing to publish extensively on Husserl until 1967, when he published *Voice and Phenomenon*.

1967 is a watershed year for Derrida, one in which he published not only *Voice and Phenomenon*, but two other groundbreaking texts that set the stage for the project that would come to be known as deconstruction. One is *Writing and Difference*, which collects together many of Derrida's seminal essays on his contemporaries and influences. Many of these essays had originally been delivered in public throughout the early 1960s (often in the presence of the respected figures whom Derrida was critiquing), and had announced to the academic world that Derrida's star was on the rise. The other text of this period is *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida outlines an account of a 'science' of writing which, more accurately, characterises a deep meditation on the very possibility of science itself (or, the 'scientificity of science'), and on the meaning of truth.

Together these three texts introduced deconstruction to the European cultural and academic scene. Of the three, as we shall argue, *Voice and Phenomenon*, the culmination of nearly two decades spent working closely in the phenomenological tradition, is the most important.

In January 1968, Derrida delivered the now-famous lecture titled, simply, '*Différance*', before the Société française de philosophie (The French Philosophical Society). In this lecture he spells out, in brief programmatic language, the structure of argumentation underlying his textual analyses up to that point. Derridean scholar John Caputo playfully says of this lecture that 'for the most loyal deconstructionists', it 'has a status something like the Sermon on the Mount',[6] and he is right, in the sense that it provides a rare glimpse into the theoretical underpinnings of deconstruction, without a prolonged immersion into a specific text or thinker, and so, serves as a constant touchstone for those wishing to grasp the heart of Derrida's thought. The lecture made clear (if it was not so already), that Derrida had fully emerged, and was now officially a mature philosophical powerhouse. 1972 saw another publication blitz by Derrida. He published a second collection of essays and lectures (which included the '*Différance*' lecture), entitled *Margins of Philosophy*. This text reveals a wider body of influences than *Writing and Difference* had – by this time Derrida is focusing more on the work of Martin Heidegger,[7] and demonstrating a much more explicit connection to Friedrich Nietzsche.[8] In addition, some of the essays contained therein (specifically 'The Ends of Man') reveal a more political undercurrent to Derrida's thinking that will mark the whole of his future work. The other two texts from 1972 are *Dissemination* – which contains, in addition to its titular essay, Derrida's most extended discussion of Plato, 'Plato's Pharmacy' – and *Positions*, a short but very important collection of interviews, in which Derrida answers more pointed questions about the strategies and stakes of the deconstructive project.

After this there was no turning back, as Derrida was catapulted to international fame, attaining a level of media and cultural popularity unknown by most academic philosophers. Throughout this decade, Derrida begins teaching in the United States, intermittently holding positions at Yale, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, The University of California Berkeley and The New School for Social Research in New York, and establishing a lifelong relationship with The University of California Irvine, where Derrida's archives are today housed.

Two significant developments occur in Derrida's life and work during the 1970s. First, Derrida's works, from 1974 through 1980, assume a more playful, literary *style*. Given Derrida's own history and comfort in the literary tradition, this might come as no surprise; what *is* a bit surprising, however, is the extremity of the playfulness with which he writes at this time, which incited some of his most ardent criticisms to date. Second, Derrida's work, in publication and in practice, becomes more directly political, and these two developments are intimately connected by the 1974 publication of *Glas*. This text is significant for a host of reasons. The first is that it is Derrida's *most* explicitly literary work of philosophy. The text is divided into two columns, with the left offering Derrida's most extended critical engagement with the German philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel, and the right column dedicated to a reading of French poet and playwright, Jean Genet. The text of each column that opens the book begins, apparently, mid-sentence, and after the fashion of James Joyce's novel, *Finnegans Wake*, each respective column, at the close of the book, loops back onto its own beginning. Each column contains, at times, extended citations of the respective authors, interspersed with Derrida's remarks and interactions, employing varying fonts and sizes of text, sometimes lacing the comments within margins created *inside* the body of text; and each column is thematically related to the other as it progresses. It demonstrates a multiplicity of authorial perspectives, and is cleverly designed to reveal the contamination of the philosophical with the literary, and the literary with the philosophical. Interestingly, however, at no point does the text feel forced or strained to produce its effect. For these reasons, *Glas* is Derrida's most performatively *pure* demonstration of the act of writing which, throughout his earlier publications, he had been attempting to display from within the texts of his interlocutors. Second, it is in this text that Derrida, through engaging with Hegel on the question of the family, begins to address questions of familial relations and responsibility, as well as institutions such as the nation, the state and marriage. (It is also one of the first places where Derrida begins to explicitly address the philosophy of Karl Marx, which he will later examine more completely in *Specters of Marx*.) Put otherwise, Derrida, in the most literarily 'playful' text in his corpus, begins to shift his thinking, and the capabilities of deconstruction, towards a more explicitly political, so-called 'real-world' arena.

Thus it comes as no surprise that it is also in this very same year (1974) that Derrida begins discussing with friends the idea of forming a group dedicated to the preservation and augmentation of philosophical instruction in the French educational system. With Sarah Kofman, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, he organised a preliminary conference, and in 1975, Groupe de recherché sur l'enseignement philosophique (GREPH) was officially established. The focus of the group was to bring together educators at all levels who wished to see the instruction of philosophy expanded, more specifically to the earliest, formative levels of pedagogical instruction, and reciprocally, to fight against increasing administrative and political cuts made to existing positions of philosophical instruction. His involvements with GREPH reveal an activist side to Derrida's philosophical orientation, demonstrating at the same time that deconstruction, contrary to what its detractors might say, is not removed from so-called 'real life', but rather, intervenes and operates wherever institutions hold sway. The same 'deconstructibility' that Derrida demonstrates in textual constructions, he begins to reveal at this time, holds for *all* constructions, political, religious, pedagogical, disciplinary, etc. Derrida's writings from this group involvement are collected in the two-volume *Right to Philosophy*.

Throughout the 1980s Derrida begins to publish more extensively on Heidegger's thought, writing a series of essays and lectures ('Geschlecht' I–IV) on various appearances of difference in Heidegger's philosophy – sexual difference, the difference between the 'natural' and the 'technological', and the difference between 'the animal' and 'man' – and in 1987, Derrida publishes *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, on the matter of Heidegger's use of the word *Geist* ('spirit'), and how it relates to his affiliation with the Nazi party. Then, in the 1990s, Derrida's work trifurcates into three overlapping spheres – the political, the ethical and the religious.[9] In 1989, at a conference at Cardozo Law School entitled, 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice', Derrida delivers the essay, 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority', in which he makes the startling claim, '*Deconstruction is justice*', and, 'Deconstruction is possible as an experience of the impossible . . .' ('The Force of Law', p. 243). Laws are the essential structural elements of any political or governmental systems; but as Derrida attempts to show over a life's work dedicated to the inherently differential (and hence 'undecidable') nature of meaning, both the laws themselves and the specific applications of these laws are themselves constructions which, by their very definition, are always *deconstructible*; or, put otherwise, *pure justice* as such is unattainable. Therefore, it must forever be sought. Deconstruction, he claims, is thus the insatiable pursuit of 'infinite justice' ('The Force of Law', p. 248).

This notion of 'infinite justice' opens nicely onto the religious concerns in Derrida's later writings, demonstrating the essential overlap of these various spheres, as he will argue in *Specters of Marx* (1993) for a 'messianic' structure of experience, but one without a determinate messiah, one that is not the property of any religion, but a structure of pure openness, to what he calls 'democracy to come'. Pure democracy, like pure justice, is impossible, and therefore, it must be relentlessly sought and is always *to come*. At roughly the same time he publishes *The Gift of Death*, one of his only significant interactions with Søren Kierkegaard[10] and with the biblical story of Abraham. Here he analyses the paradoxical structure intrinsic to the notion of 'responsibility' (that responsibility means *both* speaking in one's own voice *and* answering to the demands of one's society), questions of faith and its relation to madness, and its openness to the *wholly other*. This structure of pure openness informs his later writings on animality, hospitality, cosmopolitanism and forgiveness.[11] Through his final years of life, Derrida continues to publish influential and original works. Among them are *The Work of Mourning* (2001), Derrida's collected individual reflections on the deaths of his contemporaries; *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001), in which Derrida articulates the aporetic nature of forgiveness (that pure forgiveness can only apply in the case of the unforgivable, because an act that would be forgiv*able* entails an economic equivocation such that the act can somehow be redressed, or made right); *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2003), where Derrida once again engages with the question of law and the exception, linking the responsibility for this questioning within the inheritance of the philosophical tradition; and *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006 – published posthumously, but based upon lectures and essays that Derrida delivered and published from 1997–2003), in which he aggressively deconstructs the Western tradition's radical distinction between 'the animal' and humankind (a project first opened up in his 1980s Heidegger 'Geschlecht' essays), while at the same time problematising the activist's desire to proclaim a charter of animal rights. This problematisation is not to *maintain* the specificity of human sovereignty over the animals (and he says we must support the motivation behind the demand for animal rights), but rather, because merely extending the concept of 'rights' to animals does nothing to challenge the notion of 'sovereignty' (the problematic concept at root in the mistreatment of animals) at all. In 2002, Derrida was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and he died on 8 October 2004. By way of conclusion, we note that Derrida's thought, from beginning to end, is tied together by a deconstructive reflection on the Western concept of 'sovereignty', a concept of self-identity which posits the unmediated purity of an 'ego', or 'subject', or 'soul' that resides at the core of one's being as *one's lord and master*. This notion of sovereignty, in greater and lesser degrees (psychological, political, ethical, religious, etc.), informs all appearances of the worst violence and injustice. The deconstruction of sovereignty begins with his long study of Husserl, culminating in the 1967 publication of *Voice and Phenomenon*.

Voice and Phenomenon

As we shall demonstrate in Chapter 1, there is not a single aspect of French academic culture that remains untouched by Husserlian phenomenology during the time period that Derrida's thought is maturing. Derrida's engagement with Husserl, however, represents an interesting collision and divergence from the standard bifurcated emphases. While, as Michel Foucault notes,[12] Husserl's reception in France results in two basically distinct streams – one rooted in the subject and one rooted in the scientificity of science (the former resulting in existentialism and the latter largely contributing to the 'movement' known as structuralism) – Derrida's work explicitly brings these two ostensibly distinct lines of interest into communication with each other, problematising each through the lens of the other. As just discussed, Derrida begins working on Husserl in 1949, intensifies his studies when he settles in at the ENS in 1952, and begins writing on Husserl in 1953. He completes a thesis on Husserl in 1954 (*The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*), and in 1962, translates into French Husserl's very late essay, 'The Origin of Geometry', writing a substantial introduction to it. In 1963, he writes a review of Husserl's *Phenomenological Psychology*, and in 1964, he delivers 'Violence and Metaphysics', in which he defends Husserl (and Heidegger) against some of the criticisms made by Emmanuel Levinas (a prominent French phenomenologist) in his work *Totality and Infinity*. In 1965, Derrida writes '"Genesis and Structure" and Phenomenology', also writing in that same year a review of the English translations of Husserl's *The Idea of Phenomenology* and *The Paris Lectures*. In 1966, Derrida writes 'Phenomenology and Metaphysical Closure', a critique of the extent of Husserl's project of the purification of dogmas and presuppositions from metaphysics. And in 1967, he writes 'Form and

Meaning: A Note on the Phenomenology of Language'. Throughout these years Derrida is also working through the texts and writing reviews of prominent Husserl commentators and students such as Eugen Fink, J. N. Mohanty and Robert Sokolowski. In the period between 1954 and 1967, Derrida writes, publishes and speaks far more on Husserl and on the phenomenological tradition, than he does on all other areas and figures combined. This interaction culminates in the publication of *Voice and Phenomenon* in 1967, after which time Derrida will not publish specifically on Husserl again.

The significance of this text should not be underestimated. It is at the same time a closure or completion of Derrida's long engagement with Husserl, a treasure trove of discovery and an opening to the entire future of the project of deconstruction. In it, Derrida brings to a conclusion nearly two decades of research on Husserl's thought, and while he refers to Husserl numerous times throughout the remainder of his life, he does so mostly employing, without revising, the theses he articulates in *Voice and Phenomenon*. At the same time, it is here that he first discovers and puts to work the terms, concepts, structures and strategies that will govern his thought for many years to come: différance, supplementarity, trace, archi-writing and the metaphysics of presence. Of the three 1967 texts, Derrida claims of *Voice and Phenomenon*:

> It is perhaps the essay which I like most. Doubtless I could have bound it as a long note to one or the other of the other two works. *Of Grammatology* refers to it and economizes its development. But in a classical philosophical architecture, *Voice and Phenomenon* would come first: in it is posed, at a point which appears juridically decisive for reasons that I cannot explain here, the question of the privilege of the voice and of phonetic writing in their relationship to the entire history of the West, such as this history can be represented by the history of metaphysics, and metaphysics in its most modern, critical, and vigilant form: Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. (*Positions*, pp. 4–5; translation modified)

It is *through* this culminating work on Husserl that Derrida *becomes* Derrida; it is here that he finds his own voice and articulates the project that he will christen with the name 'deconstruction'. Hence we can echo Leonard Lawlor's paraphrase of Derrida, when he writes that '*Voice and Phenomenon* contains "the germinal structure" of Derrida's entire thought' (*VP*, p. xi).

Conclusion

This book is designed to help the reader work through *Voice and Phenomenon* for the first time. Chapter 1 discusses the historical context of *Voice and Phenomenon*, by first discussing the historical significance of Husserl's work itself, as it emerges against the backdrop of the nineteenth-century 'crisis of foundations', and as it forms and informs the entirety of the French tradition in which Derrida comes of age. Moreover, we shall deal in summary fashion with the key elements of Husserl's thinking that will occupy Derrida throughout the text of *Voice and Phenomenon*. Chapter 2 then goes on to offer an exhaustive commentary on the text of *Voice and Phenomenon* itself, beginning with the indication/expression distinction from the first *Logical Investigation* and concluding with the structure of supplementarity that closes out the book. Finally, Chapter 3 offers helpful advice for those wishing to work further on Derrida, both in *Voice and Phenomenon* itself and on the later writings as well. It provides two glossaries – one defining key terms in Husserl and in *Voice and Phenomenon*; and the other explicating some of the more important concepts discussed in the writings from Derrida's later period. In addition, it points the reader to further secondary literature, as well as providing helpful advice for the person faced with the difficult task of *writing* on Derrida for the first time.

Nonetheless, this text remains a *reader's guide*; it is meant to be read alongside *Voice and Phenomenon*, but is not meant to be a substitute for the act of *reading* the text itself. Out of the generation of thinkers who emerged in France in the 1960s (Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, etc.), none so much as Derrida embraced and emphasised the notion of responsibility. To engage with Derrida's text is to engage with the very meaning of responsibility; we have inherited a tradition – literary, ethical, cultural, metaphysical, philosophical – and it is our responsibility to remain faithful to it. However, as Derrida's reading of Husserl demonstrates, often the most faithful fidelity entails an essential act of infidelity. It is in this spirit that we embark upon our faithfulness to the reading of *Voice and Phenomenon*.

Notes

1. In the *Apology*, Socrates famously declares to his jurors that Athens is a great city which is like a great horse that, because of its size, has become

sluggish; he, Socrates, is the gadfly, sent from the god to annoy the horse just enough to breathe some fight back into it, or in other words, to teach it to care once again for the good of its soul.

2. In writing this section, the following sources have been consulted: Leonard Lawlor, 'Jacques Derrida', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2011edn, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/derrida/> (last accessed 27 November 2013); Benoît Peeters, *Derrida*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Jason Powell, *Jacques Derrida: A Biography* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).
3. 'Sephardic' is a term that means 'Spanish', and is applied to descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula until the Edict of Expulsion, issued by Isabella and Ferdinand, in 1492.
4. A French secondary school.
5. Alan D. Schrift, *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 195.
6. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 2.
7. Heidegger's philosophical contribution will be discussed in a little more detail below, but here we will introduce him by saying that he was a student of Husserl, and, with Husserl, is the most important of the phenomenological thinkers. He rose to prominence in 1927 with the publication of *Being and Time*, a work extending the methodology of phenomenology into more basic questions of the meaning of Being. Heidegger is also quite likely the most controversial philosopher of the twentieth century. In 1933, as Hitler ascended to power, Heidegger quickly jumped in line behind the new regime, and was appointed to the position of Rektor of Freiberg University (the equivalent of a President in the American Academy). His level of identification with the more pernicious elements of Nazi orthodoxy remains a matter of scholarly controversy to this day.
8. Nietzsche is a German philologist from the late nineteenth century, who is *far* more well-known for his work in philosophy than in philology. Born in Röcken in 1844 to a long line of Lutheran ministers, Nietzsche is most famous for: (1) his proclamation that 'God is dead', which is to say, that Western culture, whether it knows it or not, has lost the transcendent absolute as its centre of value; (2) relatedly, the history of the West as one of a progression of nihilism, of life turned against the

living, emphasising the negative, death and self-destruction; (3) his genealogical analysis of the concepts of good and evil, a methodology which is adopted and adapted by Michel Foucault in his archaeological histories of truth systems and genealogical analyses of power structures; (4) his concept of the 'will to power' as the fundamental impulse for expansion, inherent to all life; (5) the *Übermensch* (*Overman*), posited as a *post-human* stage of humanity, having overcome its self-loathing, self-limiting, resentful and self-destructive tendencies; (6) the eternal return, a reassessment of the nature of time; (7) finally, the essential metaphoricity behind all 'truths', which, Nietzsche claims, are in fact *deceptions* which have coalesced and solidified to the point that a culture *forgets* that they were useful *deceptions* to begin with.

9. This is a *bit* of a simplification, as Derrida's work is, all along, concerned with questions in these areas; nevertheless, it is at this time that he makes the concerns explicit, and ties the three together into a series of more straightforwardly linear and argumentative essays and talks.
10. Nineteenth-century Danish religious thinker, who broke sharply with the predominant Hegelian philosophy of his day. Kierkegaard went largely unnoticed as a philosopher during his own life, but was profoundly influential on existentialist thinkers in the early to mid-twentieth century. Derrida frequently speaks fondly of Kierkegaard, but rarely engages closely with his thinking.
11. Many of these topics will be discussed more extensively in the section of Chapter 3, titled 'Aporias: Derrida's Later Concepts'.
12. This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1.