

LANGUAGE AND CONTINGENT AXIOMS OF RELATIVE KNOWLEDGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON NAGARJUNA'S ŚŪNYATĀ AND DERRIDA'S DECONSTRUCTION

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One of central teachings of Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE) is Śūnyatā, which is a doctrine that asserts the transcendental nature of Ultimate Reality. It declares the phenomenal world to be void of all limitations of particularization and eliminates all concepts of Dualism. Hence, the concept of “emptiness” does not mean nonexistence, but rather it denotes interdependent co-arising, impermanence, and non-self. As per the Śūnyatā doctrine, no phenomenon has an eternal substance. According to Nāgārjuna's teaching no objective reality lies outside language. Hence, past, present and future do not operate coevally. Nāgārjuna categorically demonstrated that there is no reality prior to language; reality has to be understood as a linguistic construct. The knowledge people produce should be understood in a relativistic framework and Nāgārjuna rejects the atomistic view that single words bring pieces of reality. Nāgārjuna's thinking also paves the way to reject structuralistic and logocentric view of the language; putting signs or words as the centre of a system is inherently flawed as there is no universal truth to a signifier, no meaning outside of the signs and their perceived meaning by the user or context. Jacques Derrida (July 15, 1930 – October 9, 2004) who developed a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, rejected the binary structure of language, and explained that meaning goes beyond the simple opposition of signifier/signified. Jacques Derrida's critical outlook over the relationship between text and meaning claimed contradictions are neither accidental nor exceptions; they are the exposure of certain "metaphysics of pure presence", an exposure of the "transcendental signified" always-already hidden inside language. Derrida wanted to deconstruct polarities that are derived by the language. Derrida came up with a concept named Différance which is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other, that takes into account the fact that meaning is a question not only of synchrony with all the other terms inside a structure, but also of diachrony, with everything that was said and will be said, in History, difference as structure and deferring as genesis. Derrida is critiquing of Western thought as it is based on a hierarchy of binary oppositions: man/woman, birth/death, good/evil/ speech/writing, etc. In all such binaries, the left side of the slash Derrida sees as superior, favored, or privileged over the right, which is relegated to an inferior or subordinate position. Both Derrida and Nāgārjuna pointed out that meaning given derived by the language is contradictory and not bring pieces of reality. Views of both Derrida and Nāgārjuna are not logocentric, not 'absolute. All in all, both of them resort to the fact that language is limited to conventional truth and cannot represent ultimate reality.

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