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Derrida For Beginners



Synopsis

In 1966, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture at Johns Hopkins University that cast the entire history of Western Philosophy into doubt. The following year, Derrida published three brilliant but mystifying books that convinced the pollsters that he was the most important philosopher of the late 20th Century. Unfortunately, nobody was sure whether the intellectual movement that he spawned - Deconstruction - advanced philosophy or murdered it. The truth? - Derrida is one of those annoying geniuses you can take a class on, read half-a-dozen books by and still have no idea what he's talking about. Derrida's 'writing' - confusing doesn't begin to describe it (it's like he's pulling the rug out from under the rug that he pulled out from under philosophy.) But beneath the confusion, like the heartbeat of a bird in your hand, you can feel Derrida's electric genius. It draws you to it; you want to understand it... but it's so confusing. What you need, Ducky, is Derrida For Beginners by James Powell! Jim Powell's Derrida For Beginners is the clearest explanation of Derrida and deconstruction presently available in our solar system. Powell guides us through blindingly obscure texts like *Of Grammatology* (Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure, Lévi Strauss, and Rousseau), "Différance" (his essay on language and life), *Dissemination* (his dismantling of Plato, his rap on Mallarmé), and Derrida's other masterpieces (the mere titles can make strong men tremble in terror - *Glas*, *Signsponge/Signsponge*, *The Post Card*, and *Specters of Marx*.) Readers will learn the coolest Derridian buzzwords (e.g., intertextuality, binary oppositions, hymen, sous rature, arche-writing, phallogocentrism), the high-and-low lights of deconstruction's history (including the DeMan controversy), and the various criticisms of Derrida and deconstruction, including Camille Paglia's objection that America, the rock-n-roll nation, isn't formal enough to need deconstruction. The master, however, begs to disagree: "America is Deconstruction" - Jacques Derrida

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Customer Reviews

Derrida is my favorite philosopher. I don't think that his 'Deconstruction' is holistic necessarily but the gist of it explains the inherent problems of doing philosophy better than anything else I've read. Unlike the greats of Science who simplify complex ideas (i.e.. Stephen Hawking, Richard Feynman), the guru's of philosophy take fairly straight-forward ideas and shroud them with such mysterious sounding proprietary language that their work becomes nearly impossible to decipher. Derrida is no exception. This is a shame because his underlying message is brilliant...and really not not all that abstract. So until philosophers realize that less words does not directly translate to less intelligence, we should be very glad to have commentators like Jim Powell around. "Derrida For Beginners" concentrates on developing the key concept of "differance" and defining the necessary Derridian terminology used to communicate its meaning. The book clearly defines, "binary opposites", "texts", "logocentrism" etc.. and has plenty of diagrams to help you get the idea. While I can't say the artwork did much for me, the cartoon setting does force the message to be carried across succinctly...no babbling. The first book I read after failing miserably to tackle "Of Grammatology" was "Derrida" by Christopher Norris. While his was an excellent introduction..I will say that after I read "Derrida for Beginners" I went back and read most of Norris' book again and got a lot more out of it. Try this: read "Derrida for Beginners" as many times as needed until you have all the words in bold print at your fingertips..then, read Norris' book "Derrida". With this few hours of investment, do some online searches and read some of the commentaries and criticism of Derrida. You will be surprised at how badly he is misunderstood by so many who have studied him a lot more than you, and should feel good about your knowledge in comparison. Of course you then need to get humble again so start reading "Of Grammatology". :)

[1] It's not any more embarrassing than being caught with a copy of "Sandman," "Sin City," "Watchmen," or any of the other more high-brow graphic novels ("comic books," as they're known around the house in their t-shirts and underpants), not to mention kicking back with a collection of the complete "Calvin & Hobbes." Even the great Einstein needed a little brain-candy from

time-to-time, I'll bet.[2] Derrida himself might have approved the concept--the unorthodox method of using a combination of text, image, and humor in as "degraded" and "marginalized" a medium as the comic book to present a discipline as unorthodox as deconstruction which champions the marginalized.[3] You can always pretend your reviewing it for your gifted four-year-old who's taking an Introductory Post-Structuralism seminar at the super-exclusive preschool where the little egghead is enrolled.[4] "Derrida for Beginners" actually does give you a solid basis for understanding the key components of deconstruction--a platform from which to launch, if you choose, a further exploration of this complex discipline. As an overview of Derrida's entire body of work, you are much better oriented to the difficult terrain than if you were to start off cold reading "Of Grammatology," let's say.[5] Chances are really good that no one who sees you reading this book has any idea who Derrida is and would therefore be reluctant to poke fun at you. After all, you may only have a comic book knowledge of Derrida and deconstruction, but that's more than your altogether ignorant interlocutor possesses.[6] This book is titled "Derrida for Beginners," not "Derrida for Dummies," or an "Idiot's Guide to Derrida." So right off the bat, you can feel a lot better about yourself. You're not sitting behind a book announcing you to every passerby as either an idiot or a dummy. You're simply a beginner. Like a beginner at swimming, or sumi-e, or mountain-climbing. There's nothing shameful about being a beginner. Furthermore, the implication here is that Derrida isn't a subject for idiots or dummies, no matter how dumbed down.Be proud. You're taking on a subject those intellectual Cro-Magnons slunk behind their Grishams and Dan Browns wouldn't take on for another thirty or forty-thousand years.[7] It's a fun, fast, clever, informative read--who cares what other people think, anyway? Most of them are ill-informed boobs who can't think as it is. Deconstruct them! While they're snickering, this book will show you how.[8] Come on, help me out here. Ten reasons for anything are a lot. Deconstruction invites participation from the reader; actually, it presupposes the unavoidable input of the reader. You're not just passively reading this list, but in the act of reading you're altering it as well. So you take number eight and I'll move on to reasons nine and ten.[9] You don't have to be "seen" reading this book at all. Read it in a closet, with a booklight. Or in the bathroom. Provided you're regular enough, and the plumbing is okay, you should have the basics of deconstruction down in about a week.[10] Deconstruction as a discipline, and Derrida as a philosopher, are important, not only in themselves, but in the influence they've had on subsequent thought. Much of what we see today in the arts, in literature, in academia, in politics, even in pop culture, bears the pawprints of deconstruction whether you realize it or not. It's always better to realize it...and this book, festooned as it is with silliness and fun, will very seriously help you do just that.

Before I read this book, all I ever hear of Derrida is that he is so hard to read. Upon reading this, I realized where this could be true. This beginners book is very well written and made Derrida's work simple to understand. Although one may need a basic knowledge in linguistics and Sassure, one does not need it all together to comprehend some of Derrida's work. Author Jim Powell gives a concise look into the dense writings of the linguist which I not only found easy, but exciting - enough to make me want to go out and read some of the material that is written about. Along with an explanation of Derrida's work is also a brief biography which gives on an idea where he is coming from. Highly reccomended! One of the best beginners book to date.

This book is concerned with making accessible the often inaccessible Derrida. Derrida's philosophy will help you develop a healthy sensibility and cynicism for 'knowledge' and 'representation.' Do not be fooled by the 'for beginners' title; it is not simply an introduction, it is a hands-on intepretation of several his 'major' works. The book has any value for anyone interested in learning about the world in which we live.

I thought that the book was excellent. I would think that anyone who read it would be able to tackle texts like Dissemination etc. There are so many bad introductions to Derrida around that this book came as a refreshing surprise. I felt that it gave a very good coverage of Derrida's work.

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