

Heidegger on Destruction

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Abstract:

In this paper I will examine Heidegger's move to set out the task of philosophy as the destruction of metaphysics to move into the realm of ontology, or an inquiry into the being of Being. I will read destruction in various Heidegger texts and point out its problematic as suggested by Derrida, that every instance of the destruction of metaphysics is in fact a repetition of it as it borrows entirely from the structure of metaphysics it sets out to destroy. The impossibility of the distinction between the transcendental and empirical is its own possibility as difference between the transcendental and empirical distinguishes and separates nothing, hence Heidegger's anti-metaphysics and post-representation is no different from the transcendental idealism he destroys. Derrida thus rescues the phenomenological project by discovering the quasi-transcendental, that which is neither transcendental nor empirical, as the condition that allows the thinking of both through iterability and difference.

Keywords: Derrida, Heidegger, Transcendental, Empirical, Quasi-transcendental

Heidegger writes that the task of philosophy is the destruction of the history of ontology:

We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being- the ways which have guided us ever since.¹

Written in 1927 in *Being and Time*, this notion of *destruction* of ancient ontology may be illuminated further what Heidegger writes of the end of philosophy in his 1964 essay "The End of Philosophy and the task of thinking."² Originally presented at a conference in France in 1964, this essay was subsequently published in French in 1966 in a collection entitled *Kierkegaard Vivant* (Paris: Gallimard 1966) and translated into English in 1969. Heidegger's project in these texts is to rethink philosophy by pronouncing an end or destruction of traditional metaphysics

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. New York, Harper 1962, 44

² Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the task of thinking" in *On Time and Being*. trans. Joan Stambaugh, Chicago, University Of Chicago Press. 2002.

and rethink the task of thinking that takes the form of *aletheia*, or unconcealing of truth. The question we will first concern ourselves with is this *destruction* of *ancient ontology*. What does the destruction of the tradition entail and what are its implications?

Firstly to analyze the paragraph, *task* refers to the task of *destruction* which means putting aside or dismantling merely historical assertions of the history of philosophy and metaphysics. To *destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology* means to overcome metaphysics by moving beyond philosophy as realism and idealism, which are primarily epistemological, into philosophy as ontology, which involves a primordial grasp of philosophy as the disclosure or unconcealing of Being. As Heidegger has argued, destruction is not liquidating but putting aside and dismantling assertions about philosophy which are merely historical. The task of philosophy is now to overcome metaphysics, taking the question of Being as our clue, for Heidegger's interest is moving beyond the mere metaphysical assertions about philosophy to move into ontology- which is a more primordial grasp of Being and the essence of Dasein as temporality and being-towards-death as well as the hermeneutics of facticity and an awareness of Dasein's comportment to the world as worldhood, which relates Dasein to objects as equipment and ready-to-hand rather than present-at-hand. The primordial experiences which have determined the ways of Being are the experiences of worldhood as care and anxiety, and boredom. Dasein experiences being-in-the-world and thrown-ness with the disclosure of this state through moods such as angst and boredom, in which Dasein experiences a sense of alienation and inauthenticity or discomfort with Dasein's thrown-ness in the world, or being-in-the-world.

Primordial Experiences which determine the Nature of Being

Heidegger argues that in spite of all our interest in metaphysics, the question of the *meaning of Being*, or "the *nature of Being*", has been overlooked and neglected. The "*primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being- the ways which have guided us ever since*" refers to the disclosure of Dasein's thrown-ness or being-in-the-world through moods such as angst and boredom. In anxiety or angst for instance, Dasein experiences a sense of alienation, or "not being at home" in the world, angst is directed towards nothing specific but is encountered as a general sense of dread directed towards "nothing" but "being-in-the-world". In angst, Dasein experiences anxiety about Dasein's state of thrown-ness and experiences a sense of inauthenticity in one's involvement in the world. Dasein normally overcomes this by "fleeing" towards further immersion in the world or becoming one with the "they" in order to overcome one's sense of alienation. Angst or anxiety is thus a state of disclosure of one's thrown-ness or being-in-the-world through an experience of inauthenticity and alienation from Dasein's involvement with the world, or the "they". The other mood that Dasein experiences is boredom, which is elaborated in the next section.

Phenomenology of Boredom

In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger posits the fundamental attitude and comportment of Dasein as boredom. In his exposition of this fundamental mood of Dasein, Heidegger posits that boredom is a characteristic of the object while dependent on the subject for attribution, thus conflating subject and object in the act of perception. Heidegger also

radicalizes Husserl's notion of intentionality in suggesting perception is an affect, and effect of, thing perceived. It is mutually implicated in the object, and the object infects the subject with the perception of boredom in other words. This phenomenology of boredom thus immerses Dasein in the world by infecting, and being infected by, the fundamental mood of boredom. Heidegger's phenomenological method of conflating subject and object, perception and thing perceived, comes close to Derrida's contamination of the transcendental and empirical. However while Heidegger seems to unite transcendental and empirical, or collapse transcendental-empirical difference, Derrida posits the relation between the two as one of difference with repetition, or differance. Derrida's move differs from Heidegger's thus in not being an empirical psychology but a metaphysics which is extended to include absence and differance. Rather than privileging the empirical over the transcendental, Derrida posits the quasi-transcendental as the spacing, trace and limit which enables the thinking of both transcendental and empirical and hence performs a meta-phenomenology rather than a reversed phenomenology like Heidegger.

Destroying Ancient Ontology and the task of philosophy

Heidegger writes in *What is Philosophy* that destruction does not mean destroying but dismantling, liquidating, putting to one side the merely historical assertions about the history of philosophy³. The *task* of philosophy is now designated by Heidegger to overcome the history of metaphysics, which has trapped philosophy in representational thinking

³ Martin Heidegger. *What is Philosophy*. trans. Jean T Wilde and William Kluback. Lanham, Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, 1956, 73

and Platonism. In place of metaphysics as representation or *logos*, Heidegger writes that philosophy should be an inquiry of the being of Being, thus moving philosophy beyond metaphysics into the realm of ontology. The history of metaphysics, or *ancient ontology*, has to be overcome as it inaccurately creates a division between ideal and real, subject and object. Heidegger argues that these are conflated in Being. Being is the founding condition of possibility and ontological ground for both. The *end* of philosophy signals the *end* of metaphysics as *ancient ontology*, or representational thought which presents a perfect correlation between essence and existence, concept and reality, because these are conflated in Being. Being is the ground of possibility for thinking both. Essence and existence are united in Being. As Heidegger argues in *The End of Philosophy*:

If the questions raised are thought through even thoroughly, the illusion of being as a matter of course, in which the distinction of *essentia* and *existentia* stands for all metaphysics, disappears. This distinction is groundless if metaphysics simply tries again and again to define the limits of what is divided, and comes up with numbering the manners of possibility and the kinds of actuality which float into vagueness, together with the difference in which they are already placed.⁴

Heidegger argues that the distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* that has held throughout the history of metaphysics presents an illusion and becomes groundless as both are united in Being. Being is the ontological ground of both and thus precedes both.

Heidegger argues that metaphysics has sustained itself through an illusory distinction between *whatness* and *thatness*,

⁴ Martin Heidegger. *The End of Philosophy*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, 3

or ideal and real. Heidegger argues that Being, or thatness, makes possible the essence of Being, or whatness, hence metaphysics has proceeded along failed presuppositions. In Being, whatness and thatness are united, Being translates as the ontological pre-condition that determines both. Truth as metaphysics, which has sustained itself through the illusory distinction between whatness and thatness, has thus approached its end. Heidegger argues that the task of thinking becomes to rethink truth as *aletheia*, or the disclosure of Being as truth. Truth has to be rethought as the unconcealing of Being as *aletheia*, rather than as a concealment as the Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle have interpreted it. Heidegger's conflation of essence and existence in Being does nothing to alter the fundamental structure of metaphysics which he borrows from and thus affirms. Rather, Derrida's notion of iterability, traces the condition of possibility for the production of both through the distinguishing trace of difference. This goes beyond Heidegger's collapsing of this distinction into the singular Being in examining the meta-conditions in which essence and existence are produced. An inversion or negation of metaphysics repeats it by borrowing its ontological structure and vocabulary, according to Derrida. Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics is thus a repetition of metaphysics in every sense of the word as a negative metaphysics remains a form of metaphysics, repeating its structure and vocabulary. In showing that metaphysics and post-metaphysics share the same ontological vocabulary, Derrida demonstrates that there is no difference between metaphysics and Heidegger's post-metaphysics. Heidegger names the essence of Being as existence, but this is merely a reversed metaphysics which repeats the ontological structure of metaphysics, just as conflating existence and essence in Being borrows from the ontological structure of metaphysics and

thus remains metaphysics. Heidegger requires the transcendental to be excluded and accounted for on empirical grounds in order to maintain his situated realm of Being. Heidegger thus excludes the quasi-transcendental, or transcendental-empirical difference, which is precisely what he needs to maintain his philosophy. Were there no quasi-transcendental or written mark, it would be impossible to designate as Heidegger does, a pure realm of empirical signs. Heidegger thus needs to acknowledge this quasi-transcendental that he needs in order for his empiricism to function and thus inscribe his phenomenology in a more powerful way as Derrida would suggest.

Overcoming metaphysics and the End of philosophy

Still on the "*destruction of ancient ontology*", Heidegger writes in *The End of Philosophy* that metaphysics is something to be overcome. Heidegger argues that metaphysics has been the ground of misunderstanding by preventing access in experience to the essence of Being. This essence of Being is something that itself allows the overcoming of Being, it is an acknowledgement of the temporality, facticity, and thrown-ness of Being. While metaphysics has been thought to be the truth of being, it translates as the oblivion of Being, namely, it destroys and prevents access to the disclosure of Being as *aletheia*, of Being as fundamentally situated and thrown in the world. The history of metaphysics becomes something to be overcome, as this past binds us to an erroneous conception of truth as an idea, or essence that is concealed. Heidegger argues that metaphysics has entered its *end* with the disclosure of Being, or *aletheia*, as truth in place of truth as metaphysics. In every instance of this description however, Heidegger repeats metaphysics by borrowing from its terms as something to

be overcome, destroyed and denounced, and thus proceeds to re-inscribe it entirely within its language. Heidegger thus does not escape metaphysics but is doomed to repeat the metaphysics he sets out to destroy by repeating its entire structure and ontological terminology.

Heidegger writes that metaphysics is in decline and is approaching its *end*, as the earth informed by metaphysics has become desolate. This is evident from the events of the last century. This decline marks the oblivion of Being as metaphysics, as the truth of metaphysics has met its desolation. Heidegger argues that metaphysics has been an illusion that sustained reality and is now approaching its *end*, in place, truth needs to be rethought as the unconcealment of Being as *aletheia*. In this disclosure of Being, the essence of Being in its facticity, thrown-ness, temporality is revealed and the metaphysical past of Being meets its oblivion.

As previously stated however, this so called overcoming of metaphysics becomes repetition of metaphysics in every sense as it designates metaphysics as something to be overcome and destroyed. It thus proceeds entirely within its terms rather than proceeding to new territory. While emphasizing in place facticity, thrown-ness and temporality as the essence of Being this radicalization of intentionality merely subverts or reverses the existing metaphysical structure and thus repeats it as an empirical rather than transcendental idealism. Far from escaping metaphysics, Heidegger thus repeats it in every sense by being bound to the language of metaphysics in designating it as something to be overcome and destroyed. As Derrida argues, a negative metaphysics remains a form of metaphysics and is no different from metaphysics because it borrows entirely from its vocabulary and ontological structure. Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics is hence, a repetition of it

rather than any true departure or overcoming of metaphysics. In showing post-metaphysics repeats the ontological vocabulary of metaphysics, Derrida demonstrates that Heidegger's inversion of metaphysics is repetition, and hence, paradoxically, affirmation. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-empirical differentiation as well as the condition of impossibility for designating an exclusive sphere of empirical signs. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity. Hence Heidegger's exclusion of idealism depends on the possibility of distinguishing the transcendental and empirical through the quasi-transcendental. Were there no written mark or quasi-transcendental, Heidegger would not be able to distinguish the transcendental and empirical and reduce metaphysics to anthropological empiricism. Heidegger hence suppresses difference and the quasi-transcendental as the true conditionality of metaphysics. Heidegger requires the exclusion of the transcendental to maintain his anthropological and empirical realm of Being. Empirical thus only exists in relation to the transcendental through iterability and difference.

The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking

In the "End of Philosophy and the task of thinking", Heidegger writes that philosophy as metaphysics has reached its end. This refers to metaphysics that thinks beings as being in the manner of representational thinking, which presents the ground of being as an absolute presence, as the transcendental making possible as the ontic causation of the real, as the transcendental making possible of

the objectivity of objects. This ground of being as presence has reached its completion and perfection as metaphysics has fulfilled itself as a form of Platonism and all its subsequent reversals of it in Nietzsche and Marx's thought have signalled that metaphysics has entered its final stage. Heidegger thus thinks of the end of philosophy as the completion and fulfillment of metaphysics, which has simultaneously exhausted itself in its fulfillment and is thus undergoing reversal and destruction in its final stages in the thought of Nietzsche and Marx. What Heidegger fails to note however that is that the destruction of metaphysics borrows entirely from its terms. A reversed Platonism is still a Platonism, just as a destruction of metaphysics remains metaphysics even if only in a negative sense. Heidegger, in his task of destruction, thus repeats metaphysics entirely by proceeding from within the bounds of its language, terminology and ontological structure which he merely negates and thus paradoxically affirms.

The Shift from Metaphysics to Ontology

In *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, Heidegger contests the philosophical enframing of world-view strictly in terms of science. This is part of Heidegger's move away from *ancient ontology* which philosophy must *destroy* to arrive at the *primordial experiences which determine the nature of Being*. The problem with such a philosophical enframing according to Heidegger is its circularity in trying to justify ontology with theory- in other words, metaphysical axioms are being used to justify themselves in a circle, the problem that this gives rise to is ontological difference, or the institution of a gulf between the transcendental and empirical. Heidegger questions the separation of existence and

essence, arguing that the problem with philosophy that is strictly critical idealism or critical realism is its one-sided world view, in other words, both idealism and realism are circular and one-sided in failing to grasp the fundamental ontological difference between the transcendental and empirical. In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that both realism and idealism fall short of truth, which rather than being located in either realism or idealism, is defined as *aletheia*, or the unveiling of truth through the disclosure of being. For Heidegger being-in-the-world or ontology precedes essence, thus critical idealism and the phenomenological reduction fails to grasp being- the essential whatness and existence of a thing. Heidegger seeks to free phenomenology from the logical prejudice of theory in radicalizing phenomenology by returning to concrete existence.

Heidegger's phenomenology, in place of intuition, privileges corporeality, embodiment or being-in-the-world. Heidegger criticizes Husserl for his Cartesianism, emphasizing the situatedness or thrown-ness of being. This radicalizes Husserl's theory of intentionality in returning to the things themselves and performing a reverse bracketing of intuition in its place. We will see with Derrida a middle ground, as he posits the quasi-transcendental, which is neither transcendental nor empirical but the economy of both the transcendental and empirical and the difference between them. Heidegger collapses the transcendental-empirical difference by suggesting that being precedes both essence and existence, in them the two meet and are conflated. Being is the ground of both the transcendental and empirical. Heidegger collapses subject-object difference by suggesting that consciousness essentially belongs to being-in-the-world or concrete existence. This of course, will be eventually critiqued

by Derrida as the privileging of transcendental subjectivity and presence.

In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger reinforces his notion of philosophy as ontology, or a destruction of *ancient ontology* and a movement towards philosophy as the being of Being, by defining philosophy as a philosophy of extant being-in-the-world. These are the *primordial experiences determined by the nature of Being* previously discussed. Heidegger reads Kant's postulation that existence is not a predicate as a claim that collapses transcendental-empirical difference, being simply is, and is defined by its extant nature or its existence. Being is the foundation or ground of predication, it is a pre-condition or condition of possibility, rather than a property, and therefore cannot be relegated to transcendental pronouncements of its nature to determine it. The copula demonstrates this simple whatness of being and is an assertion or foundational condition of possibility of existence rather than a transcendental property which can be predicated. Heidegger questions the phenomenological reduction as it fails to acknowledge being-in-the-world, or thrown-ness, and collapses into a one-sided privileging of the transcendental.

For Heidegger being-in-the-world is disclosed or unveiled through the equipmental nature of perception, or the experience of objects as ready-to-hand rather than present-at-hand. The Senegal African for instance fails to recognize the lectern for what it is because it is alien to him in its equipmental nature. This demonstrates that the world is disclosed through its instrumentality to human beings. Phenomenology must thus recognize this fundamental thrown-ness, or being-in-the-world, and read objects as a disclosure of being-in-the-world rather than merely present-at-hand, because this is how we fundamentally experience objects, not as transcendental entities but

in an equipmental relation to ourselves. Heidegger questions the separation of perception from thing perceived, for Heidegger perception is the disclosure of the extant nature of thing perceived. In his statement on intentionality, Heidegger argues that perception is directed outwards toward the object and is the unveiling of the thing perceived, rather than separate from it.

This of course, is at direct odds with Husserl's separation of immanent and transcendent perception. Heidegger collapses subject-object difference in positing the two not as separate substances, but rather that they belong to being and perception as the disclosure or unveiling of being. Being thus unites transcendental and empirical or collapses transcendental-empirical difference in Heidegger's emphasis on ontology over metaphysics. Rather than separate consciousness from the world as Husserl did, Heidegger posits both as co-existent in the concrete existence of Dasein.

Derrida will not collapse subject-object difference to conflate them into Being. Rather Derrida posits the relation between ideal and real as difference, a difference that distinguishes nothing, and separates nothing, as the transcendental is nothing outside the empirical. Derrida thus builds on Heidegger's collapsing of the distinction to posit the difference as a paradoxical difference which is not a difference, but a sameness. Derrida thus builds on Heidegger's destruction or collapsing of subject-object difference to develop his deconstruction, which affirms the paradoxical nature, and aporia, of the relationship between the transcendental and empirical.

In *History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger's examination of intentionality and categorical intuition posits that perception is not separate from thing perceived, but that the two are fundamentally related in the act of perceiving, the intending of an object is

thus a disclosure of its being or existence. Heidegger thus conflates transcendental and empirical in his definition of perception as the disclosure or unveiling of being. Derrida will extend Heidegger's observations, not by conflating perception with thing perceived, but by highlighting the relationship of repetition. Perception is the iterated of thing perceived. The difference between transcendental and empirical, is the condition of possibility of perception. Rather than conflate the transcendental and the empirical into the singular entity of being thus, Derrida stresses the fundamental relationship of repetition with a difference or iterability. Heidegger suggests that perception is a disclosure of the extant nature of being, and thus conflates perception and thing in his notion of being and its unveiling or disclosure. He thus collapses the transcendental-empirical distinction by framing it in different terms- being, which is transcendental, is disclosed through the empirical in the form of perception, and Heidegger does not posit the two as separate substances like Husserl.

Heidegger disputes metaphysics or critical idealism, seeking to *destroy ancient ontology*, to return to the things themselves, or being-in-the-world, as discussed earlier, to the *primordial experiences determined by Being*, with an emphasis on ontology and being. Heidegger's *destruction* of metaphysics or *ancient ontology* was a call to return to truth as disclosed in being, or *aleathia*, which is the disclosure of truth as being rather than through any transcendental metaphysical form. The problem with a transcendental theory of truth for Heidegger is that it is mere knowledge of ideas, and not an ontological grasp or unveiling of truth. This involves the disclosure of Being and facticity as being-in-the-world rather than a hypostasized metaphysical realm. In *Being and Time*, he calls this essential condition thrown-ness, or Dasein, being there. Being is disclosed

in its relation to worldhood, through the disclosure of things as ready-to-hand rather than simply present-at-hand, again this is the equipmental nature of objects making themselves apparent to Dasein. This sense of worldhood is one of the senses of the *primordial experiences which determine the nature of Being*. This emphasis on worldliness is essentially an anthropologic return to the material realm, though Heidegger hypostasizes this realm by naming it the realm of Being. Heidegger's phenomenology marks a fundamental shift in its emphasis on the situated-ness of perception or being-in-the-world, this thrown-ness is at direct odds with idealism as it is a swing to the other end of the intentional scale in prioritizing the empirical object and its situatedness. In this sense he disputes the transcendental and seeks what Derrida, in the *Ends of Man*, sees as an anthropological solution in positing Being or the Human as absolute. Derrida's solution to the transcendental-empirical conundrum differs from Heidegger's, in that he does not dispute the transcendental. Rather he finds a mid-point and meeting ground between the transcendental and empirical. This he does through his positing of the quasi-transcendental, or the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical, and the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical is coined as difference, a nothing that separates the transcendental and empirical that remains a difference rather than performing an inversion of metaphysics only to repeat it as Heidegger does. The quasi-transcendental is the condition of possibility that grounds metaphysics as the space between the transcendental and empirical which belongs to neither but forms the conditionality of thinking both through the movement of difference and the trace. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-

empirical differentiation as well as the condition of impossibility for designating an exclusive sphere of empirical signs. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity.

The distinction between “Ready-to-hand” and “Present-at-hand”

Heidegger defines the “present-at-hand” as something alien to Dasein’s character and Dasein’s sense of utility. As Heidegger puts it: “Ontologically existential is tantamount to being-present-at-hand, a kind of Being which is essentially inappropriate to Dasein’s character.”⁵ The present at hand is thus alien to Dasein’s notion of his Being and existence, which conceives of things in relation to himself as ready to hand.

As Heidegger states: “The essence of Dasein lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not “properties” present-at-hand of some entity which “looks” so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that. All the Being-as-it-is which this entity possesses is primarily Being. So when we designate this entity with the term ‘Dasein’ we are expressing not its “what” but its Being.”⁶ Dasein thus appropriates objects not in terms of its “whatness” or “presence-at-hand” but in terms of its being, which is related in terms of its equipmentality, or ‘readiness-to-hand’.

Heidegger further writes that “All entities whose being “in” one another can thus be described have the same kind of

Being – that of Being-present-at-hand- as Things occurring within the world. Being-present-at-hand “in” something which is likewise present-at-hand. And being-present-at-hand-along-with (Mitvohardensein) is the sense of a definite location-relationship with something else which has the same kind of Being, are ontological characteristics which we call “categorical” they are of such a sort as to belong to entities whose kind of Being is not of the character of Dasein.”⁷

Being present-at-hand is thus a thing which Dasein does not conceive a relationship to in terms of his Being, and existence, we can take certain objects, for instance, an inanimate stone, rock or starfish, which we do not conceive a relation to in terms of function and utility, and thus these objects become merely present-at-hand. Being ready-to-hand, on the other hand, is defined thus: “The kind of Being which equipment possesses- in which it manifests itself in its own right- we call “readiness-to-hand” (Zuhandenheit). Only because equipment has this “Being-in-itself” and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense, and at our disposal.”⁸

Readiness-to-hand is thus how Dasein relates to the Being that surrounds himself, including Nature, it is how Dasein conceives its own worldhood by relating to the objects that surround himself, in terms of its equipmentmentality, function and utility.

Heidegger further discusses the distinction: “Similarly, when something ready-to-hand is found missing, though its every presence (Zugegenheit) has been so obvious that we have never taken notice of it, this makes a break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers. Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time what the missing article was ready-to-hand

⁵ Martin Heidegger.. *Being and time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. New York , Harper, 1962. 67

⁶ Ibid., 67

⁷ Ibid., 79

⁸ Ibid., 98

with, and what it was ready-to-hand for. The environment announces itself afresh. What is thus lit up is to not itself just one thing ready-to-hand among others, still less is it something present-at-hand upon which equipment ready-to-hand is somehow founded, it is in the 'there' before anyone has observed or ascertained it. It is itself inaccessible to circumspection, but in each case it has already been disclosed for circumspection.”⁹

The ready-to-hand is thus what the environment discloses itself to Dasein as being and equipment, it is separate from the present-at-hand which is not merely a concealed ready-to-hand but something which is alien to the worldhood of Dasein and his Being. The present-at-hand is what is not appropriated by Dasein to his sense of worldhood, it is alien to Dasein in terms of equipmentality. Further, “But if the world can, in a way, be lit up, it must assuredly be disclosed. And it has already been disclosed beforehand whenever what is ready-to-hand within-the-world is accessible for circumspective concern. The world is therefore something wherein Dasein as an entity already was, and if in any matter it explicitly comes away from anything, it can never do more than come back to the world. Being-in-the-world, according to our Interpretation hitherto, amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or arguments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment.”¹⁰

Dasein's fundamental comportment to the world is thus this disclosedness or unconcealing of objects as ready-to-hand and as equipment, rather than present-at-hand which describes objects that are alien to Dasein's being or character. These present-at-hand objects describe mere things which are beyond the everyday uses of Dasein and are not

appropriated by Dasein into his worldhood as equipment. Yet what is present-at-hand can become ready-to-hand if Dasein decides to appropriate it as such into his worldhood, the disclosure of ready-to-hand is essentially an act of interpretation in terms of equipmentality which changes according to the needs of Dasein. An inanimate stone thus, that might seem present-at-hand for a moment, will become ready-to-hand when Dasein wishes to use it, for example, to attack someone or as construction equipment.

Heidegger on phenomenology as destruction

Heidegger analyses the terms phenomenology to derive the terms 'phenomenon' and 'logos'. For Heidegger, the phenomenon is what an appearance reveals or discloses itself to be, combined with logos, which means truth. The Greeks have misinterpreted truth as a form of covering up or concealing in terms of ideas which remain inaccessible. Heidegger argues that phenomenology is not a privileged access to ideas which have been concealed, but an interpretation of appearances, and a disclosure of being as aleathia, truth discloses itself as being rather than as pure ideas as Husserl had argued. Dasein interprets appearances or phenomenon in terms of its equipmentality, as objects disclose themselves as ready-to-hand. Phenomenology is thus the hermeneutics and interpretive study of phenomena which disclose themselves as being present or being ready, Dasein appropriates objects and phenomena in terms of their relation to his worldhood.

Heidegger argues truth is not a concealing or a covering up, but an unconcealing, a disclosure of truth as aleathia, and this truth that is disclosed is the truth of Being. Truth at most remains a non-perception but is never a concealing or

⁹ Ibid., 105

¹⁰ Ibid., 106

covering up but always an unconcealing and a disclosure, or *aleathia*.

Heidegger argues truth is disclosure or *aleathia* rather than covering up, and further clarifies a misconception that a Greek conception of truth suffers from – it is only a ‘doctrine of ideas’ and a philosophical knowledge. It is not grounded in Being or facticity which is the authentic truth, Heidegger argues that truth is the disclosure of Being rather than a prism of ideas or pure knowledge which remains undisclosed or covered up.

Phenomenology is thus a hermeneutic, an interpretation of Dasein’s being, or an analytic of the existentiality of existence, it is thus an active interpretation of Being-in-the-world, thrown-ness and facticity rather than a knowledge of ideas which remain concealed. It is an interpretation of Dasein’s ontological historicity, and in every sense a hermeneutic which is not derived from the methodology of historiological sciences but an active interpretation of Being and existence.

The Nature of Being

Heidegger further argues that the fundamental nature of being, is temporality. Being is disclosed through its essential temporality and experience of care, or anxiety, for the future and being-towards-death. This sense of phenomenological disclosure through temporality is of course, a departure from Husserl who does not define the essence of being as time, but in terms of transcendental consciousness, and the purified transcendental ego which consciousness must be reduced to. Where Husserl and Heidegger converge, however, is their emphasis on the human subject and transcendental subjectivity. This is deemed by Derrida as an essential anthropocentrism and a privileging of being as presence.

To Husserl, this presence is intuition, given purely to itself, to Heidegger, this presence is the temporal notion of the present which is emphasized over the absences of past and the future which are actually the conditions of possibility for being. Heidegger’s emphasis on the historicity of being further emphasizes its facticity, and situated-ness; being is grounded in the world by its past and defined by its present comportment towards the future in terms of choices- its facticity. This is essentially an empirical situatedness, which is of a radically different emphasis from Husserl’s transcendental ego. Heidegger’s emphasis on ontology and the return to the things themselves in emphasizing being-in-the-world is a radicalization of Husserl’s notion of intentionality and an emphasis on empirical rather than transcendental constitution. As discussed above, Derrida’s notion of *différance* mediates between the two by discovering the neither transcendental nor empirical quasi-transcendental which is the condition of possibility for thinking both.

The meaning of Being is a hermeneutic, Dasein interprets the world around him in terms of its equipmentality or readiness to hand, phenomenology is thus an active interpretation and hermeneutics of Being rather than a static access to a prism of concealed ideas as metaphysics has had it.

The destruction of the history of ontology is essentially bound up with the way that the question of Being is formulated, and it is possible only within such a formulation. In the framework of our treatise, which aims at working out that question in principle, we can carry out this destruction only with regard to stages of that history which are in principle decisive.¹¹

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and time*, 44

The destruction of the history of ontology is thus a shift beyond metaphysics that has historically determined philosophical thought to move into a thinking of something which is more primordial than metaphysics – which is the question of Being, which Heidegger will argue is the ground of metaphysics and what precedes it ontologically as its condition of possibility.

Being becomes thus defined in terms of its potentiality for discourse, its possibilities in terms of choices in existence, defined in the present and the future. The “*nature of Being*” is defined in terms of its temporality. Being is conceived as a form of presence, it relates to past and future in terms of an absolute present which defines the past and future. Heidegger argues that ontology should move away from dialectic, which has become superfluous as in Being, subject and object are conflated, concept and exemplar are united. Being translates as the primordial structure of philosophy that precedes dialectic. Being appropriates possibilities in terms of making an object present to himself, this translates as the elevating of Being to presence which Derrida will eventually problematize as past and future are structurally necessary as absences or difference to the thinking of presence.

Aletheia

Moving on to Heidegger’s notion of truth as *aletheia*, reading from Heidegger:

What does the word about the untrembling heart of unconcealment mean? It means unconcealment itself in what is most its own, means the place of stillness which gathers in itself what grants unconcealment to begin with. That is the opening of what is open. We ask: openness for what? We have already reflected upon the fact that the path of thinking, speculative and intuitive, needs the traversable opening. But in that opening rests possible radiance, that

is, the possible presencing of presence itself.¹²

This unconcealment as a form of opening translates as the presencing of presence, a disclosure of presence, where it had previously remained hidden or concealed. Heidegger argues that this unconcealing is a radicalization of intentionality in returning to the things themselves.

Heidegger takes the call for a return “to the things themselves” as a call to move beyond metaphysics into ontology, to move beyond the thinking of idealism into the thinking of Being. Truth, which had been previously described as a form of concealment in Plato and Aristotle, becomes now reconfigured into *aletheia*, or unconcealing of Being, with Heidegger. *Aletheia* is not so much the disclosure of truth but what grants the very possibility of truth. The task of thinking becomes thus *aletheia*, to think that which grants the very possibility of truth as the unconcealing or disclosure of Being, an opening of presence to the outside rather than an imprisonment of it behind a veil of disclosure. The task of thinking as *aletheia* becomes thus a disclosure of Being, which opens presence to its outside, and thus to our ontological grasp of it. Being is thus disclosure rather than, as metaphysics has traditionally had it, a form of concealment and imprisonment in hidden ideal forms which remain inaccessible. This ontological grasp of Being as *aletheia* becomes thus the disclosure of truth, which renders accessible to us the primordial ways of Being mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Heidegger further discusses *aletheia* in “The Origin of the Work of Art”:

The artwork lets us know what the shoes are in truth. It would be the worst self-deception to think that our description, as a subjective action, had first depicted everything thus and then projected it into the painting. If

¹² Martin Heidegger. *On Time and Being*. Chicago, University Of Chicago Press. 2002, 68

anything is questionable here, it is rather that we experienced too little in the nearness of the work and that we expressed the experience too crudely and too literally. But above all, the work did not, as it might seem at first, serve merely for a better visualizing of what a piece of equipment is. Rather, the equipmentality of equipment first expressly comes to the fore through the work and only in the work.¹³

Heidegger thus discusses *aletheia* as the disclosure of the truth of Being through art in terms of its equipmentality, or readiness-to-hand. Art discloses the truth of Being in its relation to Dasein in terms of its function as equipment for Dasein, indeed this is how Dasein fundamentally relates to the world, through the experience of things as either ready or present to hand. However, Heidegger's notion of truth as *aletheia*, borrows its entire ontological framework of Being as presence from metaphysics. Heidegger describes this *aletheia* as an opening of presence to the outside the fundamental structure of presence as repetition, of essence and existence. Despite being conflated and unified in Heidegger's work, *aletheia* borrows and proceeds entirely from the language of metaphysics and thus repeats the metaphysics he attempts to destroy. Heidegger's unconcealing or *aletheia* does not alter the fundamental structures of metaphysics he sets out to destroy in the form of essence and existence which he conflates into Being but does not effect a change in the metaphysical or ontological structure by merely re-describing it as Being and its *aletheia*.

Heidegger radicalizes the notion of truth by describing it as unconcealing rather than concealing. In fact, what

Heidegger is describing is the simple mediation of truth- truth can be reduced to its appearance rather than relegated to an external and concealed realm. Heidegger performs a reverse bracketing of truth by reducing phenomenology to appearance which conceals nothing and discloses truth, as he discusses in "The Origin of the Work of Art". Phenomena reveals truth by disclosing its equipmental nature. Heidegger thus performs a negation of transcendental truth by reversing the nature of the phenomenon in describing it as not secondary and representative of the ideal but describes it as the fundamental principle of the ideal- phenomena discloses rather than conceals. There is no disjuncture or separation between signifier and signified, both are related in the principle of disclosure and revelation- the signifier is the signified, reality is ontological and a disclosure of equipmentality rather than a metaphysical reflection or representation of a transcendental signified. Truth is not representational. Rather, truth is disclosure of Being through the phenomenon. Truth is ontological rather than a metaphysical abstraction. Heidegger thus conflates signifier and signified in his conception of truth, but does nothing to alter the fundamental structure of metaphysics. Heidegger's notion of disclosure rather than concealing still presents truth as a dual entity- consisting of the phenomenon and its presentation of truth as *aletheia*, or the unconcealing of Being. Positing that truth is something to be disclosed still separates truth ontologically into two realms, pre-disclosure and post-disclosure of the phenomenon as the revelation of Being. Heidegger thus repeats metaphysics although he reverses and negates it, as Derrida points out, a negative repetition of metaphysics proceeds entirely from its vocabulary and ontological structure. Heidegger's radicalization of truth in describing it as unconcealing rather than concealing, is thus a negation or reversal

¹³ Martin Heidegger. "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. New York, Harper, 1977, 161

and thus a repetition of metaphysics rather than a destruction of it. Heidegger thus does not manage to escape metaphysics, as he sets out to do.

Derrida's questioning of Heidegger

What Heidegger fails to note however with his destruction of metaphysics and his task to move beyond it is that in the process he repeats metaphysics and thus reinscribes it in his very task of destruction. There is no thought that escapes structure, whether it involves building a system around an arche or a system that decenters it. There is no language outside metaphysics and the structures that determine it. All languages and thought affirm the structurality of structure. As Derrida puts it: "This event I call a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had begun to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said this disruption was repetition in every sense of the word."¹⁴ The rupture of metaphysics thus involved repetition and redoubling rather than being any simple decentering of metaphysics. Derrida argues that the event of a rupture that comes with the decentering of metaphysics involves a redoubling of metaphysics and an opening of metaphysics to think its Other. To quote Derrida, "What would this event be then? Its exterior form would be that of a rupture and a redoubling."¹⁵ Structure is something that has either been affirmed or deviated from, all the time

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 353

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 351

being re-inscribed in discourse. No discourse escapes structure and the metaphysical constraints it imposes in the form of the structurality of structure, whether the center is affirmed or negated. As Derrida argues: "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax or lexicon- which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest."¹⁶ Derrida thus argues that we have no language which is not already informed by metaphysical presuppositions, hence all destructions of metaphysics that proceed from within the confines of language repeat the metaphysics they seek to destroy.

Conclusion

In this paper I have examined Heidegger's move to set out the *task* of philosophy as the *destruction* of metaphysics to move into the realm of ontology, or an inquiry into the being of Being. I have traced this movement of destruction in various Heidegger texts and pointed out its problematic as suggested by Derrida, that every instance of the destruction of metaphysics is in fact a repetition of it as it borrows entirely from the structure of metaphysics it sets out to destroy. Derrida critiques Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics in suggesting a non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics remains a metaphysics, and thus ultimately a destruction of metaphysics is simply a repetition or reproduction of it and hence, the same as metaphysics. Derrida thus discovers that metaphysics is repeated even in its destruction and thus is no different or the same as non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics. The

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 354

impossibility of the distinction between the transcendental and empirical is its own possibility as difference between the transcendental and empirical distinguishes and separates nothing, hence Heidegger's anti-metaphysics and post-representation is no different from the transcendental idealism he destroys. In so doing Derrida democratizes phenomenology, by showing that a non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics is no different and not superior to metaphysics as Heidegger had envisioned. Where Heidegger had sought to show that metaphysics is a fallacy, Derrida demonstrates that Heidegger does not manage to escape metaphysics as he sets out to do and thus Heidegger's non-metaphysics does not differ essentially from metaphysics. As such, truth is neither representational nor post-representational, it is not a matter of choosing between transcendental or empirical, but quasi-transcendental; as the quasi-transcendental functions as the limit and spacing that enables the thinking of both transcendental and empirical through the distinguishing movement of difference and the trace. As transcendental-empirical difference is an illusion, then Derrida democratizes phenomenology in showing that metaphysics and post-metaphysics are paradoxically similar in their difference, identical in their non-identity. This space of the quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in a relation of sameness in difference, distinctions translate paradoxically into non-distinctions because the transcendental and empirical are distinguished by nothing. It is the aporia between the transcendental and empirical which enables the thinking of both as difference, the interval between transcendental and empirical translates as a non-difference or sameness. It is the quasi-transcendental or the written mark, functioning as if it was transcendental, which enables metaphysics as it is the conditionality of transcendental-empirical differentiation as well as the condition of

impossibility for designating an exclusive sphere of idealism or expressive signs, or empirical signs in converse. The quasi-transcendental relates the transcendental and empirical in simultaneous identity and difference, identity and non-identity. The necessity for the quasi-transcendental to distinguish the transcendental and empirical makes it impossible to separate transcendental and empirical as each separation depends on the other term for the distinction to be upheld. If there were no transcendental, then it would be impossible to distinguish, as Heidegger does, a pure empirical situatedness and idealism from it. The transcendental thus inhabits the empirical even as it is separated from it through the written mark or quasi-transcendental. Heidegger thus requires the transcendental in order to exclude it from his radical empirical situatedness and Being. Empirical thus exists only in relation to the transcendental through iterability and difference. Heidegger thus needs to acknowledge the quasi-transcendental in order for his phenomenology to be inscribed more powerfully through acknowledging the conditions that make it possible.

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