

From Destruktion to Deconstruction: A Response to Moran

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Abstract:

As a response to Moran's (1994) recommendation that Heidegger's *Destruktion* be extensively elaborated and critiqued, this paper suggests a way in which Heidegger's thinking can be more clearly understood as a search for how better to 'say' the destruction. By briefly tracing how Heidegger's thinking on the *Destruktion* repeatedly turns against itself throughout his writings, it is demonstrated that Heidegger does indeed revise the notion by abandoning the term in his later writing; to replace it first with the concept of 'overcoming', and subsequently with the notion of *Verwindung*. This self-critical reworking of the *Destruktion* is evident in his turning towards these concepts; which is taken up by Derrida's deconstruction in its simultaneous turning towards and away from Heidegger's *Destruktion*.

...in turning to Heidegger's text itself, one must be attentive to the phantoms that haunt it and that reproduce within it precisely what the text would submit to *Destruktion* or commit to overturning. These spirits need to be exposed, not in order to reenclose Heidegger's text in itself, not in order to expose lacunae within it, but rather to let it say what it can, to let it echo language itself, to let its echoes resound, now, after Heidegger. (Sallis 1990:11)

In his article, 'The Destruction of the Destruction: Heidegger's Versions of the History of Philosophy' (1994), Dermot Moran claims that no clarification of the *Destruktion* concept has yet been undertaken in any general way; and recommends, given the importance of the term in the formation of Derrida's deconstruction¹, that the *Destruktion* be extensively elaborated and critiqued². As a response to Moran's recommendation, this paper returns to Heidegger's concept of the *Destruktion*, tracing how Heidegger's thinking turns against itself over and over again throughout his writings. It also briefly

¹ In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explains that Heidegger represents only one side of deconstruction, where he is deprived of any tendency to a metaphysics of Being; whilst the other side of deconstruction, as represented by Nietzsche, is deprived of any tendencies to a metaphysics of will. See Derrida (1976: 18-24). It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to directly discuss the role of Nietzsche's work or any of the other influences that Derrida acknowledges as playing a role in his formulation of deconstruction.

² See Moran (1994: 175, 196).

explores how the thesis of deconstruction is introduced by Derrida, not to oppose Heidegger, in my view, but to remedy the misreadings of the *Destruktion* that Heidegger had already anticipated³.

In the beginning of his article, which itself provides an analysis of Heidegger's concept of the *Destruktion*, as well as disentangling the 'strands of meaning and influence' of this concept with regard to Derrida's deconstruction, Moran claims that, Heidegger firstly never submits the concept of *Destruktion* to systematic critique; and secondly, that he never revokes or revises the notion in his later writing (Moran 1994: 175). It is these two interrelated claims that I aim to question in this paper, by demonstrating that Heidegger does indeed revise the notion of the *Destruktion* by abandoning the term in his later writing, replacing it first with the concept of 'overcoming', and subsequently with the notion of *Überwindung*⁴. In my view, Heidegger's self-critical reworking of the *Destruktion*⁵ is evident in his turning towards these concepts, which marks his attempt to escape misinterpretations of a word he increasingly deems insufficient (deficient) at expressing one aspect of his attempt at a recollection of Being.

More specifically, my claim is that Heidegger's work can be seen as a search for how better to 'say' the *Destruktion*, and consequently, that it can only be understood if placed against the background of the project of the fundamental ontology⁶; then in connection with the problematic of reduction and construction; and finally considering his later work, where the problematic of the *Destruktion* is wholly transformed into overcoming metaphysics⁷ (*Überwindung der Metaphysik*); the return into the ground of metaphysics (*Rückgang in den Grund der Metaphysik*); the step back (*Schritt*

3 Heidegger claims, for example, that '...the failure to reflect began already with the superficial misconstruction of the 'destruction' ['Destruktion'] discussed in *Being and Time* (1927), a destruction' that has no other intent than to reattain the originary experiences of being belonging to metaphysics by deconstructing [*Abbau*] representations that have become commonplace and empty (Heidegger 1998: 315).

4 Janicaud argues that three key words emerge in answering Heidegger's injunction to overcome metaphysics: *Destruktion*, *Überwindung* and *Verwindung*. See Janicaud (1995: 1). It must be pointed out that, although Moran admits that '...the motif of destruction continues through Heidegger's writings, although not always using the same terminology' (Moran 1994: 180, my emphasis), it seems to me that Moran fails to investigate why this change in terminology comes about, and its implications for his argument.

5 This, admittedly, may not be the 'systematic' critique that Moran requires. Moran, however, nowhere tells us precisely what this systematic critique must involve, excepting perhaps at the end of his article, where he refers to a rereading of Heidegger's basic claims as metaphysical claims; ones that must be understood from within the broader and healthier notion of competing metaphysical traditions. This points to an issue regarding Moran's critique of Heidegger's conception of history that I will raise later in the paper.

6 The effort to lay bare the foundations of ontology was called 'fundamental ontology' in the early years (See Heidegger (1996: 13). After 1929, the word disappeared completely, with a reason given in 1949: the word ontology, even characterised as fundamental, makes it too easy to understand grounding metaphysics as simply an ontology of a higher sort, whereas ontology, which is but another name for metaphysics, must be left behind completely (Richardson 1967: 15).

7 For Heidegger, metaphysical thinking is determined by the difference between Being and beings. The way in which metaphysics has sought the relation of Being and beings has given it the structure of both ontology and theology, regardless of whether it has made explicit use of these terms or not. Metaphysics is ontology, in that it thinks Being as the first and most universal ground common to all beings. It is theology in that it thinks Being as the highest ground above all beings – ultimately as the ground of itself, which is the metaphysical concept of God. Metaphysics is in its very nature onto-theo-logic (See Heidegger 2002: 42-75).

zurück) out of metaphysics into the essence (*Wesen*) of metaphysics' (Heidegger 2002: 48), and finally, the *Verwindung* thereof⁸.

I then turn to Moran's treatment of how Heidegger's *Destruktion* influences Derrida's formulation of deconstruction. Moran asserts that Derrida unthinkingly adopts Heidegger's word without subjecting it to a deconstruction. I will argue that Derrida's deconstruction is indeed precisely what Moran calls for: a '...re-read[ing] of Heidegger's basic claims as metaphysical claims' (Moran 1994: 192). This reveals an aspect of what I regard as Derrida's simultaneous turning towards and away from Heidegger.

In providing evidence of the pre-history and *Herkunft* of Heidegger's conception of the *Destruktion*, Moran offers a fascinating discussion of two related medieval meanings of *destruction* (Moran 1994: 176-177). Although he admits that Heidegger was probably unaware of the *Vorgeschichte* of his own term, Moran correctly claims that it is 'not wrong' to hear Heidegger's term as echoing these meanings⁹. Indeed, Moran points out a number of characteristics of both Ghazali's and Averroës' use of the *destructio*, which shows strong affinities with the way in which Heidegger first characterises the *Destruktion*¹⁰.

Moran then claims, however, that Heidegger has '...not thought out the inner meaning of the term *Destruktion*' by ignoring the appearance of the concept of destruction in Plato's thinking (Moran 1994: 179). Moran discusses how the Sophists and Socrates differ in their understanding of *apollumi* (which conveys a 'strong notion of destruction' (Moran 1994: 178)) in Plato's *Euthydemus* in this regard. It seems to me, however, that Moran's criticism misses the possibility that I wish to suggest - that Heidegger avoids adopting the Greek terms for a very specific reason.

It is known that Heidegger claims that the ontology underlying twentieth century continental philosophy is founded on a very particular view of the subject as 'transcendental' subject (Heidegger 1996: 294-295). His aim is to demonstrate how this ontology begins in the time of the ancient Greeks, and subsequently, that and how this ontology fails by overlooking the question of the meaning of Being (Heidegger 1996: 19). The Heidegger of *Being and Time* therefore endeavours to 'destructure'¹¹ the traditional content of the ancient ontology in order to retrieve those '...original experi-

8 I agree with Sallis that 'Heidegger's thinking is a thinking that always remains underway. Its remaining underway is not to be construed as simply a failure to provide answers to certain questions posed at the beginning of Heidegger's way - as though the path were only a bridge spanning the chasm between question and answer, as though it were not necessary entirely to rethink on the path of thinking our usual unquestioning manner of understanding the connection between question and answer'. See Sallis (1970: 1). Due to space constraints, I cannot discuss Heidegger's path of thinking on the *Destruktion* fully, but aim only to highlight what I consider pertinent with regard to Moran's argument.

9 I agree that Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion* was largely influenced by his early theological training, although this is a theme that is beyond the scope of this paper to address in full. In this context, as was kindly pointed out by Marius Odendaal, similarities can be seen in a comparison of the thinking of Qoheleth and Heidegger's conception of *Destruktion*. For a discussion on Qoheleth's conception, see Fox (1999). John van Buren (1994: 159-174) also points to the biblical texts glossed by Luther as a source of Heidegger's own sense of *destruere*, and most importantly, also see Crowe (2006).

10 More specifically, that the *destructio* is tied to a hermeneutical reinterpretation of the philosophical tradition; that it does not take place outside of philosophy, but rather within it; and that the concept is tied to the discovery of essential truth, within the ambit of the debate on the nature of faith and reason (Moran 1994: 177).

11 Although not explicitly mentioned in her Translator's Preface, I take it that the Stambaugh's translation of Heidegger's *Destruktion* as 'destructure' is executed in order to underline Heidegger's assertion that 'The destruction does not seek to bury the past in nothingness. It has, rather, a positive intention' The

ences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of Being were gained'¹². Is it not possible that Heidegger purposefully avoids reference to the Greek (or, more specifically, the Platonic¹³) words in order to underline the fact that his *Destruktion* is an attempt to reveal what is implicitly problematic in this thinking? Would not using Plato's words render Heidegger's critique impotent?

Whether or not one accepts this suggestion, it still remains problematic, however, that Heidegger chooses a Latin word as the root for the *Destruktion*, due to his view of the metaphysical problems inherent in Latin as a philosophical language¹⁴. Heidegger tells us, for example, that we should:

...consider the grave consequences of the transformation which Greek thought experienced when it was translated into Roman Latin. Indeed this today even *blocks the way to an adequate reflection on the fundamental words of Greek thought* (Heidegger, 1976: 282, my emphasis).

This problematic is diminished to some extent when we consider that Heidegger himself came to admit that his romantic assumption about the deterioration of speech from an original, pre-metaphysical purity among the early Greeks was 'untenable' (Heidegger 1972: 70). In addition, when we investigate Heidegger's understanding of the *Destruktion* more closely, it becomes evident that Heidegger's Germanisation of the *destruktio* involves a sharp move away from how the term is normally understood in the Latinate languages. Heidegger understands the term not in the sense of destruction or annihilation, as in the Latinate languages, but rather in the sense of a taking apart – the *de-struere* (*-struere* means to lay, pile or build) of the sediments that he claims to be accumulated in the course of Western intellectual history.

The term *Destruktion* already appears early in Heidegger's thinking, and as will be shown, undergoes significant metamorphoses throughout his writings. As Kisiel points out, the term appears in a course on a full-fledged 'destruction' of Natorp's concept of constitution, presented in the Summer of 1920 (Kisiel 2002: 30). It also appears in a letter to Karl Löwith during 1920, although this letter was only published in 1946 (Moran 1994: 183). Here the word is used in the context of the need for a *Destruktion* of culture, which living in the present upheaval (*Umsturz*) will result either in a new 'culture' or ruin (Barash 2003: 98). The term also appears in Heidegger's review of Jasper's *Psychology of World Views*, where Heidegger refers to a '*geistgeschichtliche Destruktion der Überlieferten*', underscored in an affirmative sense (Moran 1994: 183).

But what serves as the inspiration for Heidegger's early use of the term? According to John van Buren, Heidegger's first use of the term in GA 58:139 is made in connection with Luther's attack on Aristotle and scholasticism (Van Buren 1994: 167). As we

destruction is 'neither a negation of the tradition nor a condemnation of the tradition to nothingness. On the contrary, it is precisely a positive appropriation of this tradition' See Heidegger (1982b: 23).

12 See Heidegger (1996: 20). Stambaugh notes in her Translator's Preface that she does not capitalise *Sein* in order to avoid implying that it is some kind of 'Super Thing or transcendent being' (p. xiv). I have, however, altered her translation by capitalising Being (*Sein*), since although I agree with her motivation, the English translation of both *Sein* (Being) and *Seiendes* (Beings) as being invites confusion that can be avoided by means of capitalising the translation of *Sein*.

13 In Heidegger's view, the problem that arises with Plato's conception of being as idea (Heidegger 1982a: 170), is that it allows for thinking Being (*Sein*) as beings (*Seiendes*). Through Plato's characterisation of Being as the stable, visible presence of the idea of beings, presence becomes a determining category for the designation of Being in western philosophy (Heidegger 2000: 192).

14 This problem is pointed out by Moran (1994: 185).

now know from the publication of Heidegger's early studies on Luther¹⁵, the term is indeed taken from Luther's early writings (1515-1518) as an attempt to preserve the integrity and purity of vision needed for salvation against the self-certainty of the 'carnal' view of prudence that is encouraged, in Luther's view, by medieval neo-Aristotelian scholasticism.

It is therefore unsurprising to see that the term 'destruction' (*Destruktion*, but also the related *Abbau* and even *Zerstörung*) appears regularly in Heidegger's Freiburg lecture courses (1919-1923), where the activity of eliminating the metaphysical edifice encrusted on religious experience is referred to as a 'destruction'¹⁶. Where the term appears for the first time in the Winter semester course of 1919/1920, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger lists the levels of phenomenological understanding¹⁷. Later in the course he refers to the 'critical destructions of objectifications' (Heidegger 1993c: 255) needed to clarify phenomenological intuition. In the following year, in his 1920 lecture course, Heidegger articulates the notion of 'phenomenological *Destruktion*' (Heidegger 1993d: 35) or phenomenological-critical destruction' (Heidegger 1993d: 29-30), which should be thought of as not so much a demolition (*Zertrümmern*) or smashing to pieces, but rather as 'de-structuring' (*Abbau*) (Heidegger 1993d: 35). In his *Phenomenology of Religious Life* lectures, Heidegger also speaks of the need to subject the modern history of religion to a 'phenomenological destruction' to allow the evidence of its 'fore-conception' to manifest itself (Heidegger 1995: 78). Here Heidegger asserts that concepts such as 'life' and 'man' need to be submitted to this 'deconstructive' test, since life has a tendency to conceal itself and cover over its essential features (Heidegger 1995: 252) including most especially the eventuality of its own death.

The 'religious origins' of Heidegger's early use of the term *Destruktion* become less obvious when we investigate how the scope of the term is expanded in §6 of *Being and Time*, under the title 'The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology'. Here, Heidegger speaks in great detail of a need to 'destructure' *the tradition*, and the need for a repetition, a *Wiederholung*, which would allow a return to the primordial 'wellsprings' from which the concepts and categories of the Western philosophical tradition have *in part* been drawn¹⁸. The *Destruktion* can be seen as one side of a recollection process, '...as the rupture from the forgetfulness of Being, as the manifold probing that thought must perform in gaining access to each epoch and its configuration – over and beyond their contemporaneous subsistence in our memory' (Janicaud 1995: 4).

So, despite the apparent negativity implied by our usual understanding of *destruktio*, Heidegger is not endorsing a 'demolition' of metaphysics. On the contrary, the *Destruktion* aims to dissolve the sclerotic historical layers of metaphysics by revealing their concealed onto-theological structure and endeavouring to uncover the 'decisive experiences' responsible for this structure (Heidegger 1996: 20). In this way,

15 See Crowe (2006: 47-66) for a detailed analysis of Luther's theological use of the term 'destruction'.

16 *Destruktion*, and even *Zerstörung*, See Heidegger (1995: 311).

17 Here it is proposed that 'Destruction' is first, followed by 'pure understanding, interpretation and 're-construction'. See Heidegger (1993c: 139).

18 See Heidegger (1996: 19, my emphasis). It is important to note that Heidegger already accedes that these traditional categories and concepts are drawn only 'in part' from the original wellsprings, which provides support for my contention that, contrary to Moran's assertion, Heidegger's view of the history of Western thought is not conceived of and constructed as a homogeneous and systematic totality (See Moran 1994: 183).

Heidegger's *Destruktion* does not abandon the ontological tradition (*ibid.*). Rather, it attempts to reveal its positive possibilities by casting a critical eye on the prevailing approach to the history of ontology (Heidegger 1996: 19).

But why is the *destruktion* necessary? For Heidegger, *Dasein* '...is its past' (Heidegger 1996: 17). In other words, without our inherited interpretations of the world, we would not be *Dasein*, since we would be without culture, language or norms. This presence of the past in the present also applies to philosophy, since although he admits that there could be no philosophy *without* a tradition, Heidegger's problem is that we persist in taking our inherited interpretations as self-evident (Heidegger 1996: 19). In challenging this tradition, Heidegger is not advocating an attempt to escape from the past¹⁹, but rather claiming that instead of taking our tradition for granted, we can make the past our own in a positive way (Heidegger 1996: 21).

However, despite Heidegger's repeated emphases on the positive aspects of this 'productive appropriation' of the tradition, *Being and Time* does come across as particularly aggressive in its eagerness to dismantle the metaphysical tradition. Phrases like '... issuing the phenomenon with its birth certificate' (Heidegger 1996: 20) offer support to such a reading. It seems then as if Moran is justified in claiming that:

Heidegger's willing of the destructive question is not a phenomenological paying attention, a way of gaining sharper focus in the description of the phenomenon – rather it acts as a will to power over the phenomenon, wresting, rooting up the phenomenon from its historico-temporal bed, a breaking apart of the phenomenon's inner coherence in order to find what Heidegger regards as the essence of the phenomenon (Moran 1994: 190).

There are, however, two problems with this claim. Firstly, Moran alleges that what confirms his interpretation is Heidegger's reference to the *Bestand* of traditional philosophy²⁰ in *Being and Time*, a reference that is problematic, since the word is treated as belonging to the very essence of technological enframing (*Gestell*) (Moran 1994: 189) later in the *Question concerning Technology* (1955). Moran concludes that the *Destruktion* is, in fact, a modernist manipulation of the stock of philosophical concepts and stances, rather than a corrective to Western metaphysics. However, the full sentence Moran refers to in *Being and Time* reads:

The ontology that thus arises is ensnared by the tradition, which allows it to sink to the level of the obvious and become *mere material* for reworking (as it was for Hegel) (Heidegger 1996: 19).

I interpret Heidegger here as referring to his diagnosis of the way in which the *traditional ontology* (which Heidegger aims to re-collect) allows for the question of Being to be reduced to mere *Bestand*. In the *Destruktion*, it is a question of freeing oneself from the traditional stock of ontological concepts and words that dominate and determine our thinking, not by escaping them completely (which Heidegger admits is impossible), but by becoming aware of and recognising this domination.

The second, and more important problem is this: Is it not precisely because Heidegger later realises that *Destruktion* as characterised in *Being and Time* challenges philosophy in a manner of *herausfordern* (challenging forth) that he later abandons the word? It seems to me that Heidegger's turning from the *Destruktion* to

¹⁹ Since he admits that *Dasein* is essentially historical (Heidegger 1996: 20).

²⁰ Heidegger (1996: 19). Stambaugh translates *Bestand* here as 'material'.

Überwindung and then to *Verwindung* implicitly reveals his moving away from the wilfulness that he diagnoses as characteristic of Western philosophy, and that he perhaps also sees in his own early characterisation of the *Destruktion*. Heidegger indeed admits that *Being and Time*, in a certain sense, still had to speak the language of metaphysics²¹, and his later critique of Nietzsche is also motivated by a reflection on the very wilfulness of the desire to overcome. Heidegger's position becomes one where '...our task is to cease all overcoming' (Heidegger 1972: 24) since in his view, we do '...not want to get anywhere. We would like, only, for once to get to where we are already' (Heidegger 1971: 190).

In addition, it seems that Heidegger is perhaps implicitly aware of the wilfulness of the *Destruktion*²² as it is characterised in *Being and Time*, since already in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, he provides us with a synonym for the *Destruktion* to better convey the sense in which he intends it: *Abbau*²³ which can be translated as dismantling or decomposing. This word is later hyphenated to emphasise that *Destruktion* is not a negative act - a *Zerstörung*²⁴.

In the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger links the *Destruktion* to phenomenological reduction, which he does not do in *Being and Time*²⁵. He claims that there:

...necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of Being and its structures, that is, to the reductive construction of a Being, a destruction, that is, a critical dismantling of the concepts which have *been handed down to us and which we initially have to employ*, a dismantling which proceeds to the sources out of which such concepts have been drawn. Only by the way of destruction can ontology provide itself with full phenomenological assurance of the genuineness of its concepts (Heidegger 1982b: 22-23, my emphasis).

In other words, because philosophy is a *Konstruktion*, it is also subject to a *Destruktion*. The *Destruktion* is an attempt to become aware of the unthought (*das Unge-dachte*) in thinking and to the unsaid in saying. The unthought of the unsaid is always presupposed in philosophical thinking, which can be thought and said. This is the problem of the difference (*Differenz*) – the difference remains essentially unthought and unsaid, but remains simultaneously constitutive for every thinking and saying, or in Heidegger's words, for every understanding of Being.

21 See Heidegger (1993b: 231, 232).

22 This could possibly be related to Heidegger's later admission that *Being and Time*, in a certain sense still had to speak the language of metaphysics. See Heidegger (1993b: 231, 232). See also Krell (1986: 109).

23 See Derrida (1985: 86-7).

24 Heidegger does, in fact, use the word *Zerstörung* at a conference in 1929 rather than the word *Destruktion*. See Gasché (1986: 113).

25 *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982b) acknowledges that phenomenology involves reduction, but Heidegger alters the meaning of this word. For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is a method for altering the phenomenological viewpoint from the natural attitude of human being living in the world to transcendental consciousness and its noetico-noematic experiences (experiences in which the object is constituted as a correlate of consciousness). For Heidegger, the phenomenological reduction leads the phenomenological viewpoint back to the understanding of the Being of beings. So for Heidegger, the reduction can be seen as the leading of attention back from a being measured against the meaning of the Being of that being. When this happens, construction is involved, and this is inseparably linked with destruction as two indivisible movements in philosophy. *Destruktion* is here then a reduction of concepts from their tradition-bound contexts back to their original sources.

It seems to me, then, that by glossing the significance of these and other subsequent changes in Heidegger's characterisation of the *Destruktion*, Moran's critique misses the subtleties of Heidegger's path of thinking²⁶, even though he is correct, I think, in pointing to a certain 'violence' in how the project of the *Destruktion* is portrayed in *Being and Time*.

It could, however, still be objected that Moran's problem is that Heidegger works with the stock of concepts of traditional philosophy by uprooting them from their historical contexts and applying them at will. It is indeed true that Heidegger takes terms from other areas and uses them as he sees fit²⁷, but the question remains as to whether Heidegger's borrowing of concepts like the destruction is truly a subtle reworking of these concepts and not a mere utilisation of them as a 'stock' of concepts from which to draw, as it seems Moran is claiming. As already pointed out, Heidegger is clearly aware that one cannot simply create concepts that are unpolluted by the history of metaphysics, but that all concepts must involve a reworking of earlier insights, which themselves are reworkings. Even if one accepts this, however, there is in Heidegger, as in Husserl, the rhetoric of *Urstiftung* – of the primal foundation carried out by the Greeks²⁸. In part, it is this continued assumption of an origin that underpins Derrida's critique of Heidegger, and which it seems is Moran's point here. Despite, as was previously mentioned, Heidegger's later admission that this rhetoric was 'untenable', the persistence of this nostalgia throughout Heidegger's works does lend considerable strength to Moran's claim.

By the late 1930s, the word 'destruction' disappears almost entirely from Heidegger's writings, appearing only briefly in retrospective accounts of his work (Crowe 2006: 4). Heidegger gives us no explanation as to why the word is no longer used, but we do find traces of the concept appearing in new forms when we investigate later writings. The first trace appears, in my view, where, years after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that this book had only set out to prepare for 'overcoming' metaphysics (Heidegger 1956: 209). Similar to the *Destruktion*, the overcoming is here characterised *not* as setting oneself against metaphysics, nor a rejection of it as an opinion or dismissing it as a now obsolete discipline. In contrast to the *Destruktion*, however, overcoming is no longer the act of a thinker; but rather originates in Being itself²⁹.

However, in the essay 'Overcoming Metaphysics', Heidegger already indicates that such a title is only provisional – it is 'only used as an aid' (Heidegger 1992: 67). This first 're-visioning' of the *Destruktion* is simultaneously proposed and questioned. In Heidegger's view, metaphysics cannot mediate the Being-process, which is its ground,

26 Moran is not alone in this. Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, for example, quotes the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* when explaining the meaning of Heidegger's *Destruktion*, implicitly taking for granted that this text and *Being and Time* are so conceptually similar that they are interchangeable. However, I concur with Rapaport (1989: 5) that '...*Basic Problems* is a more cautious and far less ambitious text, perhaps because it is still very closely attached to the phenomenological method, whereas *Being and Time* has taken more distance from it'.

27 My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this important objection.

28 My thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this important objection.

29 The later Heidegger describes the decline into the oblivion of Being as a 'necessary consequence' that '...begins in the very essence of physis and logos, or more precisely, in a consequence of this essence' (Heidegger 2000: 189-191). The 'breakdown' does not '...spring from a mere deficiency, an inability to sustain this essence that was entrusted to historical man' (Heidegger 2000: 191), but rather since it is Being itself that '...releases itself into beingness and withdraws its dignity in concealment' (Heidegger 1984: 353), it is now viewed as being responsible for the history of metaphysics.

and so to 'overcome' metaphysics, we must pass beyond it. By overcoming metaphysics, however, we do not destroy it, since Heidegger explicitly does not wish to tear out the roots of philosophy – he will simply dress the ground, till the soil wherein it finds its strength (Heidegger 1993e: 9-10)³⁰.

Heidegger interprets the completion and self-overcoming of metaphysics as nihilism³¹. Nihilism is the sole response that completed metaphysics can make to the ontological question. Past its self-overcoming, which in Heidegger's view, Nietzsche precipitated³², metaphysics reveals its essence to thought and is eventually overcome by it. Yet Heidegger tells us that '... metaphysics overcome... does not disappear. It returns transformed, and remains in dominance...' (Heidegger 1992: 68).

Heidegger therefore later asserts that 'Thought cannot overcome (*überwinden*) metaphysics; it must try to incorporate (*verwinden*) it' (Pöggeler 1986: 244). In Heidegger's view, metaphysics is not something that can '...be abolished like an opinion. One can by no means leave it behind as a doctrine no longer believed and represented (Heidegger 1992: 67). Heidegger is, in other words, rejecting the overcoming because of its inherent wilfulness.

But what could this *Verwindung* mean? Heidegger articulates the notion of *Verwindung* in several of his later essays, most extensively in '*Die Satz der Identität*'³³. In it, the *Verwindung* is characterised as analogous to *Überwindung*, but free of any connotations of the 'leaving-behind' that overcoming entails³⁴. *Verwindung* describes a kind of overcoming of the metaphysical tradition, whereby it is not deactivated at all, but rather activated against itself³⁵.

Verwindung as well as *Überwindung* are related to Western history, but whereas overcoming lies close to the Hegelian conception of history³⁶, *Verwindung* points to another type of thinking of history – history as the history of being³⁷. Here again then, we witness a second attempt by Heidegger to better articulate the notion of the *Destruktion*.

The question still remains, however, as to why exactly Heidegger chooses these words for his new relationship to the texts and concepts of the tradition. Carnap, for example, explicitly uses the term 'overcoming' (*Überwindung*) precisely in terms of

30 As Richardson (1967) notes, in 1929 (when the text was written) it seems possible to ground metaphysics while remaining interior to it; yet in 1949 (when the introduction was added), it is clearly necessary to quit metaphysics entirely in order to meditate its ground. The transition from the early to the late Heidegger lies latent here.

31 See Heidegger (1943).

32 Heidegger's Nietzsche attempts to "overturn" the way metaphysics has lorded over the physical world from the "heights of the suprasensory." He appears to spur such an uprising by setting forth the value of "life" as will to power. But, Heidegger claims, even this "overturning" fails to "overcome" metaphysics, since every overturning of this kind remains only a self-deluding entanglement in the same that has become unknowable (Heidegger 1943: 162-163).

33 See Heidegger (1974).

34 See Vattimo (1993) for a discussion of the significance of Heidegger's shift from the active *Überwindung* to the more passive *Verwindung* in relation to metaphysics and technology.

35 Vattimo connects the Heideggerian notion of twisted overcoming (his translation of the *Verwindung*) with Nietzsche in order to produce 'a kind of thought that is oriented towards proximity rather than towards the origin or foundation.' This is a hermeneutical model of philosophical thinking that deconstructs rather than asserts, that unleashes the conditions of possibility of a text rather than trying to establish interpretation in terms of a determinate truth-value'. See Vattimo (1988: 71).

36 See Vattimo (1988: 71).

37 My discussion here is exceptionally brief due to space constraints. For an excellent discussion of *Verwindung* and its relation to the concept of Ereignis, see Vattimo (1988).

logical positivism, and so it can be asserted that Heidegger's adoption of the term is not philosophically or metaphysically neutral either³⁸. Whether Heidegger was aware of Carnap's usage of the term is uncertain, but as shown above, although Heidegger uses the term, his problematisation shows his awareness of its loaded nature³⁹.

As Moran points out, the term history (*Geschichte*)⁴⁰, is problematic in Heidegger's thinking. In Moran's view, the notion of philosophy's history is extremely reified in both the early and later formulations. In other words, he claims that Heidegger provides us with a totalisation of the history of metaphysics, since all thought and action in this history is essentially determined by metaphysics. Because of this, any attempt to escape metaphysics will have to be non-metaphysics, but since the past is totalised, no innovation is possible. The history of Western thought is thus conceived of as a homogeneous and systematic totality. Yet, as Driscoll points out:

Heidegger repudiates the notion that idea follows idea with Hegelian necessity. The thinking of an age is an outgrowth from that of past epochs, but only as a "free consequence," never as a determined resultant. Although every epoch of thought is a *destiny* of Being, it is not a *fated* destiny (Driscoll 1967: 32).

All the epochs in Heidegger's history of the understandings of Being do not lead to one another because of dialectical tensions or deficiencies in the earlier stages (Kolb 1986: 149). For Heidegger, even though the sequence of epochs in the destiny of Being are not accidental, 'neither can it be calculated as necessary' (Heidegger 1972: 9). A dialectical account of modernity misses the essence of our world just as much as a social scientific account and for the same reason - neither is aware of the basic meaning of Being that lets it be what it is.

The accusation of historical determinism is, according to Heim, a result of a confused distinction between the German *Geschichte* and *Historie* (Heim 1987: 18). In English, the words history and historical seem to be anchored semantically to the totality of facts studied by the historian. In German, *Geschichte* is the series of ongoing events that constitute history, which then become *Historie*, or the object of historical study. Heidegger's concern is not simply with *Geschichte*, but with *Urgeschichte*, or the latent history of reality as the background against which everyday history takes place (Heim 1987: 19). I believe that Heim, whom I now quote at length, is correct when he tells us that:

Like Hegel (and Ong), Heidegger takes seriously the epochal changes in cultural commitments. Such changes are of fundamental significance for the philosophical understanding of things. But to this awareness of the historical commitment of human energies Heidegger adds the concept of what I call historical drift and of cultural trade-offs, or gains and losses in reality apprehension. Rather than a developmental series of systematic improvements, epochal transformations can be understood to be sets of finite pathways which develop, lead

38 My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

39 The Hegelian notion of *aufheben*, which contains the notions of negating (or cancelling) and also of going beyond (surpassing) can be postulated as another prefiguring of Heidegger's concepts, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail. It is hoped that this theme can be expanded in a subsequent paper.

40 Moran admits that the term changes in meaning – in the earlier formulations influenced by Hegel; then the Nietzsche of *Geschichte* and *Historie*; then in the use of the verb *geschehen*; then in the concepts of *Geshick* (destiny), *Schicksal* (fate), or in the later formulations of *Ereignis*, or sending (*schicken*) or receiving of Being (metaphysics as History of Being).

onward, then trail off when new pathways are opened by considerably different techniques and skills. The pathways opened are finite in that human concerns project new and different directions for development while previous projects are dissolved or taken up in ways that are obscure or transform the original impulses of previous projects. Pathways are also finite in the sense that some larger ways become major throughfares through which alternate routes are opened and can branch out, but remain, as branches, attached and rooted to the larger highways; some choices create a new future but are dependent on a latent set of choices made in the past (Heim 1987: 7).

In other words, the fact that Heidegger identifies a specific comportment as decisive for an age, does not mean that he denies the existence of other movements within the dominant way of thinking. The fact that the technological comportment is dominant in our time, for example, does not deny the existence of other 'alternate paths'. Heidegger outlines broad currents of ideas that flow contingently through time, which happen to run together to shape the mainstream of contemporary thought. In addition, throughout his work, Heidegger refers to his ideas as a 'way', one fraught with danger and one that could lead to dead ends⁴¹. He does not posit his ideas as the final 'truth' on the matter, but rather sees them as a path among others that could be chosen. He considers his work '... a way and not a shelter. Whoever cannot walk should not take refuge in it. A way, not 'the' way, which never exists in philosophy' (Heidegger 1985: 64).

Derrida and Deconstruction

Moran claims that in Derrida, Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion* is not actually deconstructed or turned against itself – rather, the same assumptions are retained, although the procedure is linked with a relativism, or at least a dissemination of meanings, with an original founding meaning (Moran 1994: 191). This claim highlights what could perhaps be the major difference between Heidegger and Derrida – while Heidegger contends that in the abyss, there remains a mystery worthy of contemplation, Derrida insists that there is no mystery, but only the 'unpredictable and unending play of signifiers'⁴².

In Derrida, the re-evaluation of the metaphysical tradition continues through dismantling the metaphysical presuppositions of truth that Western thinking has assumed since Plato. In this sense, his project is very similar to Heidegger's, and he does admit that he owes a lot to the philosopher (Derrida 1997: 14). Yet Derrida also displays an opposition to the association of Heideggerian thinking with deconstruction in some of his texts⁴³.

In challenging the logocentric metaphysics that writing as inscription presupposes, Derrida challenges the conventional technological ordering of modern society, and in his criticism of technology shares much with Heidegger. Derrida does, however,

41 See for example Heidegger (1996: 398). 'Not "the" sole way', and Heidegger (1993a: 311) 'Questioning builds a way' (my emphasis).

42 See, for example, Chapter 7 'Cold Hermeneutics: Heidegger/Derrida' in Caputo (1987).

43 In *The Postcard*, for example, Derrida criticises French translators who identify Heidegger's idea of 'destruction' with his own formulation of the concept of 'deconstruction': '*Abbauen*: the word that certain French Heideggerians recently have translated as 'to deconstruct', as if all were in all, and always ahead of the caravan. It is true that this translation is not simply illegitimate once it has been envisaged (rather recently). Unless one manipulates an aftereffect precisely in order to assimilate and in order to reconstruct that which is difficult to assimilate' (Derrida 1987: 267).

launch an incisive critique of the 'early' Heidegger in that he asserts that Heidegger remains tied to the notion of a transcendental signified in his analysis of Dasein, and thus to the metaphysical tradition from which he wants to disentangle himself. The problem for Derrida is that Heidegger 'would reinstate rather than destroy' Being⁴⁴.

In asking 'What is Being?', the Heidegger of *Being and Time* establishes an 'ontological difference' between Being and beings. In order to speak of the Being of beings, Heidegger must assume Being in the first place, yet this is precisely what he questions to begin with. Heidegger is caught up in a circular argument – in assuming the very matter he sets out to question, he must use the signifier 'Being' to represent it. Yet, Heidegger constantly reminds us that Being is neither the word nor the concept of Being, and therefore the word 'Being' would seem to assume a hidden signified, Being itself, of which beings are the signifiers. Derrida rejects this line of thinking, and faults Heidegger for maintaining Being in the radically central position it has enjoyed in the history of metaphysics as the entity of entities. Derrida's deconstruction of the remnant of metaphysics in Heidegger is indicated by his adoption of Heidegger's own device – the cancellation of the word Being in the very course of using it (Heidegger indicated this by drawing crossed lines through the word Being). Heidegger explains:

The drawing of these crossed lines [through 'Being'] at first only repels, especially the almost ineradicable habit of conceiving 'Being' as something standing by itself and only coming at times face to face with man (Heidegger 1958: 80 – 83).

But for Heidegger, this device need not indicate the exclusion of being from the essence of the human:

Man in his essence is the memory of being...This means that the essence of man is a part of that which in the crossed intersected lines of Being puts thinking under the claim of an earlier demand (Heidegger 1958: 80-83).

Derrida goes even further, rejecting even this remnant of 'onto-theology'. The metaphysics of presence is rejected. There remains only the 'trace', not meant to be the master word for Derrida that he claims Being was for Heidegger, but the mark of the 'absence of a presence'⁴⁵.

Derrida's concern is the metaphysics of presence of Being that even Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche could not overthrow. Heidegger presupposes this metaphysics of presence in his understanding of *techne*, as calling into being that which lies hidden through meditative thinking. As a result of Derrida's deconstruction of the Heideggerian text, such notions are subverted, including the notion of truth as *aletheia*, or the revealing of Being. The metaphysical conditions for the possibility of expressing truth are rejected by Derrida, since the denial of a coherent unity of meaning is, to all intents and purposes, the denial of a truth that can be expressed in language. Instead, any number of arbitrarily assigned ideological slogans stands ready to fill the void. In the end, it would seem that technology continues to hold sway over language, even after the deconstruction of the foundations of both.

44 Yet both Derrida and Heidegger are accused of backhandedly recovering the very metaphysics they set out to dismantle. See Rapaport (1989: 261).

45 See Rapaport (1989: 58, 59).

But what exactly is deconstruction? It consists of 'deconstructing, dislocating, displacing, disarticulating, disjoining, putting "out of joint" the authority of the "is"' (Derrida 1995: 25). As Derrida points out:

I have often had occasion to define deconstruction as that which is – far from a theory, a school, a method, even a discourse, still less a technique that can be appropriated – at bottom what happens or comes to pass (Derrida 1995: 17).

In other words, 'Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed' (Derrida 1991: 274).

On the other hand, however, it seems that in places Derrida provides us with another meaning for deconstruction: 'Here or there I have used the word deconstruction. That is to say, it is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentations of the language which we use – and that is not destruction' (Derrida in Macksey & Donato 1970: 271). Here the sameness and difference between Heidegger and Derrida becomes clearer:

Derrida's pro-gram is not to offer biographies, critical studies, or analyses of texts. Rather his task is to offer readings of texts, to work through a text or network of texts such that the boundaries and limits are respected, the borders marked off, and the margins carefully delineated. Derridean readings mark edges, barriers, or obstructions to the smooth passage through the text(s) in question. They also highlight places of indecidability: hinge elements that separate off and bring together at the same time. In short, Derridean readings mark lines, membranes, hymens, bars and borders. There is no attempt to claim itself as an alternative philosophy, not is it an effort at analyzing or offering arguments implicit in what is read. Derridean deconstruction moves to the line between synthesis and analysis, between system-building and critical breaking-down, between construction and destruction (Silverman 1989: 165).

When the question of overcoming metaphysics is raised directly, Derrida's answers are negative. Derrida agrees with Heidegger, that any deconstruction of metaphysics is bound to the terms of metaphysics, since he equates metaphysics with 'our language' (Derrida 1982: 121). One possible answer that he does provide, however, lies in his concept of transgression. Derrida comments:

There is not a transgression, if one understands by that a pure and simple landing into a beyond of metaphysics, at a point which also would be, let us not forget, first of all a point of language or writing. Now, even in aggressions or transgressions, we are consorting with a code to which metaphysics is tied irreducibly, such that every transgressive gesture reencloses us – precisely by giving us a hold on the closure of metaphysics – within this closure. But by means of the work done on one side and the other of the limit the field inside is modified, and a transgression is produced that consequently is nowhere present as a *fait accompli*. One is never installed within transgression, one never lives elsewhere. Transgression implies that the limit is always at work (Derrida 1981: 12).

In his refusal to avoid replacing one kind of logocentric certainty with another, Derrida aims to place even his own deconstructive terms 'under erasure'. However, for Derrida, deconstruction is not simply a nihilistic reduction of meaning to non-meaning. It is proposed as a radical emancipation of meaning into a play of otherness – *alterity*. Most importantly, however, the fact that meaning always remains 'other' does not condemn us to non-sense⁴⁶.

Conclusion

Although Moran's point remains valid, that is, that Heidegger never *explicitly* takes up his reasons for using the term *destruktio*, nor for his subsequent abandonment thereof, I believe this paper, in tracing how Heidegger's thinking on the *Destruktion* turns against itself over and over again throughout his writings, suggests a way in which Heidegger's thinking can be more clearly understood as a search for how better to 'say' the *destruktio*. As I have demonstrated, Heidegger does indeed revise the notion by abandoning the term in his later writing, and replacing it with, first, the concept of 'overcoming' and then the notion of *Verwindung*. This self-critical reworking of the *Destruktion* is evident in his turning towards these concepts; a turning that I believe is taken up by Derrida's deconstruction in his simultaneous turning towards and away from Heidegger's *Destruktion*.

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⁴⁶ See Kearney (1995) for an excellent discussion.

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