

Multilateral View of History: Gadamer's Reappropriation of Heidegger

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## **Abstract**

My aim in this thesis is to show how Heidegger's project of destruction and overcoming metaphysics is problematic. I show this through the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, who is much more keen on our historically and linguistically situated character. The main contrast takes place between Heidegger's orientation towards poetic language and Gadamer's effort to find a new meaning within the living language. I also explore the themes of technology, subjectivism, and history, though in a limited scope.

## Introduction

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is widely regarded as one of the most faithful followers of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and for many good reasons. He certainly did trail the trodden path of his master on many philosophical issues.<sup>i</sup> Yet it is rather curious that Gadamer diverges from the path which, having been blazed by Heidegger, his teacher considers to be the task of our age, namely, the overcoming of metaphysics. Although much has been said and written on Heidegger's philosophy and its aims surrounding this issue, I believe there have not been enough studies done from the perspective of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>ii</sup> I believe this is essential to understanding our relation to metaphysics especially when Gadamer's critical attitude towards Heidegger became more apparent in his later writings. Let me first begin, however, by providing the background for this discussion.

Heidegger's attitude towards and treatment of metaphysics, as the history of our understanding of Being, seems rather ambivalent. He seems to maintain, on the one hand, that his project of overcoming metaphysics (*Überwindung der Metaphysik*) is meant to serve as a critique and rejection of the metaphysical tradition in order to go beyond it. At the same time, however, he also emphasizes that the 'overcoming' (*Überwindung*) should not be understood in the sense of abandoning or rejecting the tradition but rather as 'recovering' or 'reappropriating' (*Verwindung*) it.<sup>1</sup> In the essay "Overcoming Metaphysics" ("*Überwindung der Metaphysik*"), Heidegger therefore writes that "we may not presume to stand outside of metaphysics because we surmise the ending of metaphysics. For metaphysics overcome in

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1 As Gianni Vattimo writes, "Heidegger told the French translators of *Vorträge und Aufsätze* [...] that it [recovery] indicates a going-beyond that is both an acceptance and a deepening" (Vattimo 1988, 172). As many other commentators have also pointed out, Heidegger therefore uses the term '*Überwindung*' in the sense of '*Verwindung*.' (See (Heidegger 2003, 84); (Gadamer 2007, 344) ; (Zabala 2009, 45-46); and (Pöggeler 1991, ).

this way does not disappear. It returns transformed, and remains in dominance as the continuing difference of Being and beings.”<sup>2</sup> Aside from the difficulty that arises from Heidegger’s abstruse writing style and expressions in attempting to follow the path of his thinking, I believe one of the additional reasons why his thinking appears ambivalent is due to the manner in which he uses certain words. That is to say, there seems to be a sense in which the words like *Destruktion* and *Überwindung* perhaps give a false impression of what Heidegger actually accomplishes in the texts.<sup>3</sup> Indeed Dermot Moran remarks that “It is one of his [Heidegger’s] typical phenomenological moves to introduce a term and then deny that the term has a derogatory or negative meaning.”<sup>4</sup> While Moran is here speaking in the context of the notion of ‘destruction,’ I believe the point is just as applicable to the idea of ‘overcoming’ as well. In this way, many of Heidegger’s terms appear to contain a meaning of accomplishing something radical and original, distancing himself from the tradition, his explanations and responses to accusations suggest that he is actually not attempting to abandon the history of philosophy. However, my aim here is not to discuss regardless of whether such a claim against Heidegger is warranted and legitimate or not. Rather, I wish to raise two fundamental questions in Heidegger’s thought.

As early as 1923, Heidegger recognized and paid attention to the situational character of our existence. The main tenet is that Dasein, as our mode of Being, is characterized by the situation in which it finds itself. In other words, Dasein’s situation is determined to a large extent by a number of various forces prior to its coming into existence, and Dasein continues to be shaped by its surroundings throughout its existence insofar as it is an existing entity which is thrust into the world of particular settings. In this sense, Heidegger designates Dasein

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2 Heidegger, Martin, *The End of Philosophy*, 85.

3 We must of course be careful so as not to discredit Heidegger’s thoughts where he deserves due credit, but I simply wish to emphasize at the same time the need to remain critical of the rhetorical moves he makes.

4 Moran, Dermot, “The Destruction of the Destruction,” 186, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

by its thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) whose mode of Being is fundamentally shaped by the conditions which are beyond Dasein's power and control. Nevertheless, this obviously does not imply that Dasein is wholly determined by its situation and the past. One of the fundamental characteristics of Dasein is to project its own possibilities out of its own determinations. Heidegger attempts to differentiate Dasein from a transcendental subject whose standpoint is pure and absolute (exemplary names are Descartes, Kant, and Husserl<sup>5</sup>). Dasein does not constitute the world but is already in-the-world (*in-der-Welt*). As such, Dasein's situation is what shapes Dasein in a fundamental way, but it is also that which discloses its possibilities. After all, such a situation is the only world which Dasein properly knows, and Dasein is well capable of understanding its world even if pre-ontologically. Hence, it is not simply that the situation limits Dasein in a certain way, but it also enables Dasein to see and project its possibilities so as to be able to exist in the world. Dasein's horizon is bounded by its situation but that very horizon also enables us to see and find possibilities within the world. This is the simpler analysis of Dasein's thrown relation to the world which Heidegger develops in the first division of *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*).

Heidegger observes that there is something yet deeper and more fundamental to our situation. By attending to our situation, he recognizes that we are the kind of entity whose ordinary relation to the world is characterized by falling (*Verfallen*). Just as most of us hardly spend much time contemplating our mortality and how we should go about living our lives, Dasein's everyday relation to the world is such that the world is disclosed as something familiar and meaningful. Dasein constantly falls into the They (*das Man*) and the world in everyday manner. Although such everydayness is necessary for Dasein, Heidegger believes that it conceals its fundamental character at the same time. As Being-towards-death, Dasein's

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5 While Husserl became much more critical of such a pure idealist standpoint in his later writings, this certainly applies to the writings in his early period up to the early 1920s.

everyday world and the familiarity it has with it collapses when it encounters the possibility of mortality and experiences the mood Angst that accompanies it. This is the revealing moment for Dasein where Dasein is faced with its own mortality and not merely treating mortality as that which belongs to someone else. But it is also an existentiell character of Dasein not to be able to remain troubled by its own mortality. Dasein falls into the everyday and ordinary world precisely because it would otherwise be paralyzed by the sheer scale of Angst it experiences at that fundamental moment and will not be able to act (for Dasein is worldless (*weltlos*) at this level). This dynamic and interplay between unconcealment and concealment is at the core of Heidegger's thought, and I would like to now discuss the relevant topic to this thesis.

Just as we do not remain contemplative about our own mortality, we similarly use our language without giving much thought on how the language we inherited and use shapes our thinking and how its concepts originated. When Heidegger seeks to carry out destruction and overcome metaphysics, he is essentially attempting to do the same: to reveal the underlying primordial phenomenon by trying to break free from the ordinary understanding. Thus when he speaks of the 'language of metaphysics,' he is using this expression to designate the philosophical concepts and languages which philosophers have used to do philosophy.

According to Heidegger, many of the concepts we inherited from the tradition and employ in our philosophical investigations do not illuminate the sort of primordial experiences which were available at the point of their origin in the ancient Greece. The purpose of destroying the metaphysical tradition therefore consists in bringing out such an experience by going back to the origin out of which our concepts developed. I understand and fully acknowledge the significance of carrying out *Destruktion* in order to overcome metaphysics, but I believe the manner in which Heidegger tries to accomplish it quite problematic for two reasons.

As Gadamer indicates on several occasions in his texts, Heidegger's radical critique of the metaphysical tradition does indeed provide us with new insights and understanding of the concepts we use. Again, I wish to raise a question not with *Destruktion* and overcoming of metaphysics as a method as such but strictly with the way in which Heidegger deploys such a method in order to carry out his critique. The first question I wish to raise is: how is Heidegger certain about *the singularity* of the origin of the philosophical concepts? In other words, how does he know that the origin he aims to uncover is not just another origin but actually *the* origin of our language? I believe there are two important reasons why this question should be taken seriously. First of all, as Heidegger argues, we as Dasein are thrown into the situation which limits our relation to the world even if it is also an enabling condition of our existence. Being limited by its own situation, how is Dasein supposed to reach out to and grasp the origin? Insofar as Heidegger assumes a single source from which Dasein is able to recover the primordial experience of the origin, he seems to be committed to an *unilateral* view of the history of Being.<sup>6</sup>

Another question I wish to raise is: granted that Being is unilateral, on what grounds can Dasein attain the perspective from which it is able to identify the place of its origin? In other words, how does Dasein know where to look provided that it is situated? Even if it discovers an origin, how does it know it is *the* origin and not just another origin? Does it not require an infinite perspective in order for Dasein to be able to discover the origin? To be sure, Heidegger does insist that Dasein marks the *ontological difference* between Being and entities, and Dasein is in this sense both infinite and finite, I believe there is a crucial difference between the phenomenon of mortality and of language.

I have stated above that Heidegger offers an account where Dasein falls into average

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6 In the interview with *Le Monde*, Gadamer accuses Heidegger of 'unilateralism.' Since he defends his own view elsewhere with such descriptions as 'multivocity' and 'multiplicity,' I believe we can rightly use 'multilateralism' to designate Gadamer's own view in contrast to his critical assessment of Heidegger's view which is 'unilateral.'



everydayness in its ordinary relation to the world, but there are moments where Dasein is brought to face with the possibility of its mortality, the possibility of its impossibility. For Heidegger, these rare moments are what provides Dasein with an infinite perspective where Dasein's horizon simply collapses. This is indeed what happens when Dasein contemplates mortality as its own. But this way of reaching an infinite perspective certainly does not work. For it makes perfect sense for Dasein to face its own mortality as it is Dasein's own mortality it needs to deal with, and thus its own mode of Being to do so, the languages we use to philosophize is definitely ours in the way mortality belongs to each of us. We do not own the language which we use. It is simply handed down to us and we use it. To suggest that the language of metaphysics is somehow inadequate to do philosophy seems to be a denial of our own situation and our relation to history. In this way, Heidegger seems to be committed to the *infinite* perspective in Dasein through which he is capable of assessing the history as a whole in order to pick out the origin.

# I. Heidegger's Interpretation of the History of Being as Metaphysics

## A. History, Destruction, and Origin

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Martin Heidegger develops three modes ('components') of phenomenological method which he considers are essential to carrying out fundamental ontology. He calls these modes: *reduction*, *construction*, and *destruction*.<sup>7</sup> While the first two can perhaps be understood in light of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (reduction and constitution respectively), it seems less clear, at least at the outset, what Heidegger means by the term 'destruction.' However, the significance of the role destruction plays for Heidegger cannot be understated. For the interpretation of the history of philosophy remains one of the few common themes that runs across his thought over the course of his life<sup>8</sup>, and, as Dermot Moran writes, destruction certainly plays an "integral part of his phenomenological ontology."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, while Heidegger hardly mentions the first two modes in *Being and Time*, he devotes a whole section to developing and explaining what destruction is and why such a task is called for. It is section 6 of *Being and Time*, which is titled "The Task of a Destruction of the History of Ontology,"<sup>10</sup> where Heidegger sketches out the manner in which the philosophical concepts get interpreted and reinterpreted historically. The purposes of this essay are twofold. I wish first to show what Heidegger means by 'destruction,' focusing particularly on its relation to history. This paves the way towards my second point, which is to raise an issue, as Hans-Georg Gadamer does, with the way in which Heidegger conceives of the history of philosophy. Due to Heidegger's dogmatic conception of the history of philosophy, his destruction is carried out in a problematic manner. The main

7 See Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 19-23.

8 As Dermot Moran writes, "the motif of destruction is fundamental [in *Being and Time*], and it continues through his life's writing although not always using the same terminology" (Harries and Jamme 1994, 180).

9 Ibid., 175.

10 Modified 'destruction' to 'a destruction' as suggested by Professor Weberman.

issue I wish to bring out is the problem concerning the source (*Quelle*)<sup>11</sup> and origin (*Herkunft*)<sup>12</sup> of the philosophical concepts, which are made historically inaccessible by tradition but are also to be reached through destruction.

As a mode of phenomenological method, destruction designates “a critical process in which the traditional concepts [...] are deconstructed down to the sources from which they were drawn.”<sup>13</sup> While such an explanation might not appear to be very helpful in clarifying what ‘destruction’ means insofar as it merely substitutes ‘destruction’ for ‘deconstruction,’ it does provide us with a key insight that destruction is a *process* by which we attain a *critical* attitude towards the concepts which have been handed down to us through the tradition. His view should become even clearer if we consider the function tradition serves in Heidegger’s thought. According to Heidegger, not only is Dasein “inclined to fall back upon its world (the world in which it is) and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light, but also that Dasein simultaneously falls prey to the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold.”<sup>14</sup> Since Dasein understands itself only through the concepts which were handed down by the tradition, it plainly accepts them and thereby masks their origin. Thus, for Heidegger, tradition contains a twofold function: on the one hand, it *enables* Dasein to understand itself through the tradition (as the tradition shapes Dasein’s experience of the world in some way), but, on the other hand, it also *limits* Dasein from freely understanding itself (since Dasein is not fully capable of transcending the tradition). Since the tradition can prevent our understanding, we need a *critical process* by means of which such limitation can be overcome. As it turns out then, it is the latter (limiting) function of tradition which needs to be deconstructed.

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11 Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, 21/43.

12 Ibid., 22/44.

13 Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 23.

14 Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, 21/42. I will assume that the reader understands what ‘Dasein’ means for Heidegger.

There is an important reason why Heidegger emphasizes on the *limiting* aspect of tradition rather than on the *enabling* aspect. As he sees it, the ‘hardened tradition’ can make our understanding of concepts obscure and we can thus become forgetful of their origin:

When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ [*Quellen*] from the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin [*Herkunft*], and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand. Dasein has had its [historicity] so thoroughly uprooted by tradition.<sup>15</sup>

In attempting to carry out a destruction of the tradition, what Heidegger seems to be implying is the idea that, in Moran’s words, “origin contains all the “essential possibilities” of later meaningfulness.”<sup>16</sup> According to Heidegger, our understanding of the concepts rests on what the origin can reveal us, that is to say, whether and to what extent we can retrieve the origin, insofar as the origin is ‘concealed’ and made ‘inaccessible’ to us by the tradition. The purpose of destruction is therefore to take a critical stance towards the tradition so as to try to recover the access to the origin of our concepts which has been covered up and obscured by the tradition over the course of history. The tradition, as a historical phenomenon, must be critically dismantled in such a way that we gain access to the origin. As our understanding is mostly confined to the historical situation, carrying out a destruction helps us go beyond that limitation and recover the ‘primordial experiences’ from which our concepts originally arose. It therefore becomes evident that, in Heidegger’s view, destruction is a method which brings to view an original understanding that is otherwise not accessible.

While what we have examined up to this point may not seem very problematic, the point of tension which I wish to bring out and scrutinize lies in Heidegger’s conception of

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21/43. I have replaced ‘historicality’ for ‘historicity,’

<sup>16</sup> Moran, Dermot, “The Destruction of the Destruction,” 176, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

origin (and source) and its relation to our historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*). As Heidegger explicitly states, “Because Dasein is historical in its own existence, possibilities of access and modes of interpretation of beings are themselves diverse, varying in different historical circumstances.”<sup>17</sup> He subsequently writes in the same section: “Even the ontological investigation which we are now conducting is determined by its historical situation and, therewith, by certain possibilities of approaching beings and by the preceding philosophical tradition.”<sup>18</sup> In considering what Heidegger propounds in these statements, is there not a tension between, on the one hand, his aim to seek out the origin of our concepts through destruction, and, on the other, his claim here that we are inherently historical and that our investigation is shaped by the historical situation to which we belong? For how can we identify and speak of an origin of our concepts, if our inquiry is always bounded and shaped by our place in history? In other words, in speaking of ‘origin,’ does it not entail that we can and do attain a perspective which transcends our historical limits? Supposing that transcendence is possible, such a task can only be accomplished by carrying out destruction. Whether Heidegger convincingly reconciles this tension is what I wish to discuss in the remaining part of this essay.

Let us continue our analysis by further explicating what Heidegger means by history, which is the same time, Dasein’s historicity. It is important to recognize that Heidegger does not treat history as a mere static phenomenon, to a period of which we belong. On the contrary, he makes the following remark:

The ownmost meaning of Being which belongs to the inquiry into Being as an historical inquiry, gives us the assignment of inquiring into the history of that inquiry itself, that is, of becoming historiological. In working out the question of Being, we must heed this assignment, so that by positively making the past our own, we may bring ourselves into full possession of the ownmost

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<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 22. I have omitted from the translation the ‘the’ in front of Dasein.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

possibilities of such inquiry.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, according to Heidegger, it is precisely due to the historical character of our inquiry that we can even work out and pose the question of Being. It is not only us who are historical, but the inquiries themselves can only be understood historically. In order to properly inquire into the meaning of Being, it becomes necessary to trace back the way in which such an inquiry evolved and unfolded over the course of history. We can rightly assert then that destruction involves taking a critical stance towards the historical character of the inquiry through which 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.”<sup>20</sup> The relevance of destruction therefore can at least be located in the historical nature of our inquiry where “Only by means of this destruction can ontology fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts.”<sup>21</sup> Just like the genealogical method developed by Frederick Nietzsche, Heidegger’s destruction is a historical critique which functions to bring out the sedimented and concealed characters of our inquiry. Such a critical method is called for since our inquiry itself is historical and thus can be properly understood only historically.

Yet the tension I originally raised was not about the historical character of our inquiry, but it was rather about our own historicity and the manner in which our thoughts and understanding are shaped historically. Now that we have seen at least one respect in which destruction is relevant to our investigation, let us now analyze whether it can be reconciled with our historicity. As misleading as it may be, Heidegger more than often insists that, while many of the philosophical turns he makes may appear purely negative and derogatory, he does not intend his points to be making an evaluative judgment in most cases. As Moran writes, “It

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19 Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, 20-21/42.

20 Ibid., 22/44.

21 Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 23.

is one of his [Heidegger's] typical phenomenological moves to introduce a term and then deny that the term has a derogatory or negative meaning."<sup>22</sup> He makes the same sort of remark in this case as well. Thus he is quick to point out that destruction, together with construction, is "not a negation of the tradition or condemnation of it as worthless."<sup>23</sup> He instead insists that "quite the reverse, it signifies precisely a positive appropriation of tradition. Because destruction belongs to construction, philosophical cognition is essentially at the same time, in a certain sense, historical cognition."<sup>24</sup> However, Heidegger does not make it very clear how such a positive appropriation can be accomplished when it comes to our own historical character. Let us take a look at another passage:

[T]his destruction is just as far from having the *negative* sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition, and this always means keeping it within its *limits*; these in turn are given factually in the way the question is formulated at the time, and in the way the possible field for investigation is thus bounded off.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, what Heidegger is not defending is a kind of 'vicious relativizing of ontological standpoints.' Insofar as he believes there is something positive to be extricated by carrying out a destruction implies that his method is at least not wholly negative and relativistic. Yet it is actually unclear exactly how Heidegger thinks that a positive feature can be captured through the historical critique.

It is perhaps worth considering one of the major contributions made by Heidegger, namely the ontological difference. Heidegger recognized that the philosophers have not drawn the distinction between Being and being, and they have always treated Being just as any other being. While it will require a considerable space to elaborate on what Heidegger means by this distinction, let us suffice to quote Heidegger where he expresses that "The distinction

22 Moran, Dermot, "The Destruction of the Destruction," 186, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

23 Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 23.

24 Ibid., 23.

25 Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, 22/44.

between Being and beings is *pre-ontologically* there, without an explicit concept of Being, *latent in the Dasein's existence*. As such it can become *an explicitly understood difference*.”<sup>26</sup>

Before any form of understanding of beings, we always already understand Being pre-ontologically. For otherwise, we would not be able to understand beings. Based on this distinction, Heidegger indicates that “Being does not become accessible like a being, We do not simply find it in front of us. As is to be shown, it must always be brought to view in a free projection. This projecting of the antecedently given Being upon its being and the structures of its being we call *phenomenological construction*.”<sup>27</sup> We witnessed earlier Heidegger emphasizing the intricate connection between destruction and construction. And if we recall, construction was one of the three modes of phenomenological method which I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. One way to interpret Heidegger's project therefore is to see the positive aspect as fulfilled by construction, while the negative aspect is accomplished by destruction. While Heidegger himself does not make it at all clear, he does emphasize their complex and dynamic link when he states that “Construction in philosophy is necessarily destruction, that is to say, a de-constructing of traditional concepts carried out in a historical recursion to the tradition.”<sup>28</sup> ‘*Deconstruction*’ might therefore be an appropriate term which combines the positive and negative roles played by construction and destruction respectively.

## B. Technological Age

In order to gain access to the origin of our concepts, Heidegger insists that “we need a transformation of language, a transformation we can neither compel or invent.”<sup>29</sup> Once again, as we saw with other concepts he employs such as ‘destruction’ and ‘overcome,’ Heidegger is

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26 Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 319. I have modified ‘being’ to ‘Being.’ Italics are also of my modification.

27 Ibid., 21-22.

28 Ibid., 23.

29 Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, 424.



quick to emphasize the positive aspect of the notion of ‘transformation’ as he points out that it “does not result from the fabrication of neologisms and novel phrases. The transformation touches on our relation to language.”<sup>30</sup> This brings us to one of the essential tenets in Heidegger’s thought, which is the idea that our thought is closely bound up with language. The manner in which we understand the world is through our relation to language. Only through such a relation to language does the world gets disclosed to us. As Heidegger famously put it, “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that it is a particular way of our relation to language which is preventing us from thinking beyond metaphysics. He thus writes in the famous passage in the “Letter on Humanism” that “The adequate execution and completion of thinking that abandons subjectivity [...] was held back” because “thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics.”<sup>32</sup> What is revealed by this passage is the idea that the ‘language of metaphysics’ is largely inadequate for and incapable of carrying out the ‘overcoming of metaphysics’ and rethinking Being in an entirely new light. Moreover, we may also observe from this passage the motive which led Heidegger to question our language, which he deems technological, and thus turns away from it in order to fully uncover the phenomenon of language through which we may establish a different relation to language. Heidegger’s critique of technology is shaped by such a view.<sup>33</sup>

Heidegger’s renowned essay “The Question Concerning Technology” [*Die Frage nach der Technik*], which was first presented as a series of lectures starting in 1949 and subsequently published in 1955, illustrates the manner in which Heidegger became increasingly critical of the technological era in which we find ourselves. In this essay, he

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30 Ibid., 424-425.

31 Ibid., 217.

32 Ibid., 231.

33 Due to the confinements of space, I shall make the discussion on technology brief and move to the discussion on language.

problematizes our pronounced tendency to treat beings as a whole in the technological fashion. One of the main problems in the modern era, as Heidegger sees it, is that our mode of thinking has become pervasively technological that we can only treat beings as an object of our scientific-technological practices. That is to say, we have become so accustomed to manipulating nature that we have essentially reduced the ways of understanding entities merely as an object, as a present-at-hand [*vorhanden*] entity. What follows from this is that our thinking thereby becomes confined to a particular mode of thought, without actually allowing other modes of thinking to have a say.

As a mode of revealing, technology brings out the world to us in a particular manner.<sup>34</sup> In an epoch such as ours in which technology is predominant, the relation which we form with the world becomes homogeneously mechanical. This should not come as a surprise, as it seems rather evident from the way we currently inhabit the Earth. Virtually every entity we encounter (perhaps arguably with the exception of us the human beings) is now seen and treated as an object of science and technology. The world now appears to us as a supply of ‘natural resources.’ As such, Heidegger contends that, through modern technology, “a tract of land is challenged in the hauling out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit.” Every piece of land, every drop of water, and every molecule of air are therefore presented to us as something of which we may make use. Indeed our technocratic civilization seems to encourage such manipulation of nature as it would mark a progress of human development. What subsequently follows is a society which turns nature into a controlled and highly mechanized production system. Heidegger designates such a condition with the expression ‘challenging’: “The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand

34 As Heidegger writes: “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth happens” (*Basic Writings* 1993, 319); “What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us.” (*Ibid.*, 320).

that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such.”<sup>35</sup> Modern technology thus subjugates nature to our manipulation in such a way that our demand on nature henceforth becomes ‘unreasonable.’

It is important to clarify, however, that the principal aim of Heidegger’s examination is not on the destruction of nature caused by human beings as a result of their industrialized forms of production and consumption. A more fundamental problem brought out by Heidegger is the problem of our relation to the world as such. Hence, what concerns Heidegger is not the actual damage done to nature, as that is merely a symptom or an effect, but the underlying manner of thinking which characterizes our relation to the world itself. As Heidegger remarks:

Modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. The reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way.<sup>36</sup>

As nature is now manifestly understood as a ‘calculable coherence of forces,’ the world is no longer understood in terms of other possible manners of thinking. The profound consequence of the technological thinking of our age therefore consists in the condition in which the world is understood only in terms of technology and experienced as a supply for our manipulation. To put it succinctly, our age allows Being to reveal itself only through technology, which, in turn, functions to conceal Being itself precisely because Being is understood only technologically. In fact, ‘nature’ in this sense is not even understood as an object but “as the chief storehouse of the standing energy reserve.”<sup>37</sup> Heidegger characterizes such a condition by the expression ‘standing-reserve’ (*Bestand*), and which, as Moran puts it, refers to “the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 326.

manner in which everything is set aside or standing by to be available for technological exploitation and appropriation.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Heidegger employs a particular expression to designate this process: ‘en-framing’ (*Ge-stell*).

Although enframing designates an essential characteristic of technology, according to which the world reveals itself merely as a ‘standing-reserve’ for our industrial machineries, it also contains the sense in which our we ourselves, who are supposed to be the governing subjects and masters of nature, are transformed by technology. Specifically, Heidegger is appealing to the sense in which the entire social control organized by machines and factories is more or less beyond our control.<sup>39</sup> Thus there is a sense in which we are also becoming objects, or rather a standing-reserve, of the industrial mechanism which we ourselves created. Heidegger thus makes the following remark:

As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectless-ness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.<sup>40</sup>

By construing nature in terms of technology, we simultaneously become alien to the world and to ourselves because the technological system organizes how we exist and as much as we consider it the other way around. Enframing therefore means that, in playing the game of technology, we are being played by technology as a piece of cog in the industrial machineries. For this reason, enframing “threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the ostensibly sole way of revealing and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence.”<sup>41</sup> And because enframing “drives out every other possibility of revealing,”<sup>42</sup> it “not only

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38 Moran, Dermot, “Destruction of Destruction,” 190, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

39 It is worth noting here that we are currently witnessing an exemplifying case in Japan, where the nuclear reactors in Fukushima prefecture exploded following the earthquake and tsunami. Nearly two months and a half have passed and the Tokyo electric company is hardly managing to contain the radiation and put the reactors under control.

40 Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, 332.

41 Ibid., 337.

42 Ibid., 332.

conceals a former way of revealing (bringing-forth) but also conceals revealing itself and with it that wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, [happens].”<sup>43</sup> Otto Poggeler explains in the following way:

Today technology has become a danger of mankind. Nonetheless, the threat does not come primarily from the possibly fatal activity of its machines and apparatus. It comes rather from its essence which has been long in preparation, enframing, and it concerns not only this or that man of this generation, but rather the essence of man.<sup>44</sup>

As we shall see, the implication of such a pervasive and immanent role played by technology in our epoch is that technology also forms our language.

### C. Towards Poetic Language

We now recognize why Heidegger considers it necessary to ‘transform’ our language. For Heidegger, the ‘language of metaphysics’ is the ‘language of enframing,’<sup>45</sup> at least insofar as the metaphysical thinking manifests is manifesting itself as enframing in our technological age. As he writes in the essay “The Way to Language” [“*Der Weg zur Sprache*”], which was first given as a lecture in 1959:

Enframing, the essence of modern technology that holds sway everywhere, ordains for itself a formalized language – that kind of informing by virtue of which man is molded and adjusted into the technical-calculative creature, a process by which step-by-step he surrenders his “natural language.”<sup>46</sup>

By turning the world into a standing-reserve, our language is likewise treated as mere information. As we saw, the world gets organized around technical-calculative attitude. Not only is the world objectified but it is rather seen as a standing-reserve. The world itself, including ourselves, becomes a material for technology. When technology attains, in a certain sense, autonomy, insofar as it is capable of organizing the universe solely by virtue of its own

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43 Ibid., 333. Translation slightly modified.

44 Poggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, 198.

45 Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, 420.

46 Ibid., 420-421.

power, technology forms our language. This should not be as puzzling as it may seem. Our language already reflects such an influence, as the world appears to us today as a ‘natural resource’ and ‘supply’ which is to be extracted, cultivated, harvested, stored, and so forth. Oil reserves, gold mines, coal mines, rivers, forests, wind, land, and countless other ‘resources’ are all available for exploitation by the industrial machineries. Heidegger therefore writes that “Speech is challenged to correspond to the ubiquitous orderability of what is present.”<sup>47</sup> He also writes, “language speaks after the manner of the given mode in which [appropriation] reveals itself as such or withdraws.” As that which reveals (‘speaks’ and ‘correspond to’) the world, language has also become ‘ubiquitously’ and uniformly technological.

The fundamental problem he is thus raising is the manner in which our language is no longer capable of thinking beyond the technological thinking.<sup>48</sup> Just as nature has been turned into a standing-reserve, our language likewise has been formalized and is regarded as a set of information. ‘Formalization,’ in this case, does not simply refer to the sense in which the physicists formalize the workings of nature by employing measurements and formulas, thus providing a set of formal tools to schematize nature, but rather refers to the sense in which language is understood as a means of transmitting information unambiguously and literally. The function of language is instrumental in that it merely serves as a means to achieving an exchange of information. Yet Heidegger detects that such a conception of language already reflects the technological thinking. For it is held that language is unambiguous and clearly definable rather than being perhaps more ambiguous and figurative. Like technology, language therefore becomes a medium which we are to manipulate and bring to our control.

This is evident from how we consider poetry a deviation from a more literal and today. In response to the growing attitude to take control of language through a more precise

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>48</sup> Language ‘thinks’ because it is in monologue with itself. As Heidegger writes, “language speaks solely and solitarily with itself” (Ibid., 397).

and ‘efficient’ language as exemplified by such languages as Esperanto, symbolic logic, and various computer programming languages, Polt rightly points out that “it is misguided to try to fixate language and turn it into an unambiguous tool for communicating information and representing beings. Representation – or in more Heideggerian terms, the unconcealment of beings – always occurs historically.”<sup>49</sup> Heidegger’s aim in stressing the poetic language is therefore to bring out our limited and narrow conception of language and how language may reveal the world in other ways than through transmission of information.

By attending to Heidegger’s views on technology, we now see why the language of metaphysics, which now manifests itself as the language of enframing, ‘held back’ “The adequate execution and completion of thinking that abandons subjectivity.” For, as we saw, what lies at the foundation of the language of enframing is control, control exercised by *subjectivity*. Our language is permeated with subjectivist-centered concepts which ‘hold back’ and prevent us from thinking beyond metaphysics. The analogy here then is that metaphysics involves subjectivity, just as enframing implies control. Again, similar to technology, the issue that worries Heidegger at the most fundamental level is the incapacity of metaphysical thinking to allow non-subjective thinking to emerge. To develop an alternative thinking is not something that can be accomplished with the recognition of this condition. For Heidegger recognizes that it is ultimately the history of the Western thought itself which is metaphysical. The entire philosophical thinking underlying the Western civilization is metaphysical, and hence subjectivistic. To ‘destroy’ the philosophical tradition and ‘overcome’ the metaphysical thinking therefore demands a fundamental reconceptualization of the philosophical concepts as such.

We now understand why destruction and overcoming of metaphysics is essential for Heidegger. By tracing back the kind of thinking which evolved over the course of history,

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49 Polt, Richard, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, 176. Italics added.

Heidegger is seeking to overcome the metaphysical thinking by recovering and encountering the original experience of Being. For, as Heidegger indicates, even the word ‘technology’ [*Technik*], which is derived from the Greek *techne*, has displaced and replaced the idea of *poiesis* as bringing-forth, which marks the notion of revealing, uncovering a way of understanding. Heidegger thus writes:

We must observe two things with respect to the meaning of this word [*Techne*]. One is that *techne* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic.<sup>50</sup>

While “Technology is a mode of revealing,”<sup>51</sup> as Heidegger himself admits, his point lies in the idea that technology has become *the only* mode of revealing in our present age. It therefore serves to conceal more than unconceal. Heidegger thus endorses poetic language in order to reveal a non-metaphysical thinking. Poetic language marks the ‘transformation’ of language Heidegger deems so necessary.

Given such a turn in his thought, Heidegger consequently comes to recognize poetry as offering a more perspective.<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that Heidegger does not choose poetic language merely based on the observation that *poiesis* has been overcast by technology in order to offset the dominant role played by the latter. Heidegger actually maintains that *poiesis*, poetry, is “the elementary emergence into words, becoming-uncovered, of existence as [B]eing-in-the-world.”<sup>53</sup>

If we recognize that Heidegger traces the source of enframing and its effect on language to the metaphysical thinking,<sup>54</sup> In this sense, Heidegger’s move to poetry is not simply for

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<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, 318.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>52</sup> As Richard Polt puts it, “The nature of poetry and language becomes a major question for Heidegger [...] He comes to view philosophy as closer to poetry than to science, although he never holds that philosophy and poetry are the same” (Polt 1999, 119-120).

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 171-172.

<sup>54</sup> Of course, it is never the case that technology is that which effects and shapes our language. As language gets effected by technology, it effects the technological thinking in return. The relation should therefore be understood as being circular rather than causal.



instrumental purposes of balancing the modes of revealing between *poiesis* and *techne*, but he considers poetic language to be more fundamental insofar as “language speaks solely and solitarily with itself.” Language is not something which we can cease and take hold, as the language of metaphysics assumes. Rather, “language *is* monologue” insofar as “it is language *alone* that properly speaks; and it speaks *in solitude*.”<sup>55</sup> Language always escapes and is beyond our control since we are the participants of it. Our thought which has essentially been determined by history is metaphysical, and the poetic language allows us to go beyond such conditions of history.

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<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Writings*, 423.

## II. Gadamer

### A. Language as a Living Language

There are several ways in which Gadamer departs from Heidegger's interpretation of the history of philosophy as metaphysics, which we have now expounded. I now wish to turn to Gadamer and bring out the moments where he resituates and reappropriates Heidegger. The natural place to begin is language, which, as we saw, Heidegger has much to say and which also lies at the center of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. The analysis of language will then guide us to Gadamer's contrasting view of history as metaphysics. In undertaking a critical analysis of Heidegger's view, I wish to note at the outset that Gadamer does not wholly reject or deny Heidegger's overall project. Rather, what Gadamer offers is a refiguration of Heidegger's view of history which understands history unilaterally.

Contrary to Heidegger, Gadamer does not subscribe to the idea that metaphysics necessarily conceals the phenomenon of Being. Gadamer's approach rather consists in locating the the moments where metaphysics can still *enable* us to understand Being as much as the moments where it may *limit* our understanding. To quote Gadamer, "All thinking is confined to language, as a limit as well as a possibility."<sup>56</sup> While this core difference is manifested in manifold ways, Gadamer's provocative and controversial claims that "there is no 'language of metaphysics'"<sup>57</sup> is certainly one of those instances. Instead of looking for another language to fundamentally shift our thinking, Gadamer espouses that the very language which we inherited and in which we live may already contain such a possibility. This is why he designates the one and only language as 'living language.' After all, what other

<sup>56</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 127.

<sup>57</sup> "Destruktion and Deconstruction" 107, "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism," 121 in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*. See also "Hegel and Heidegger," "The Heritage of Hegel," "Hermeneutics and the Ontological Difference" in *The Gadamer Reader*.

language are we left with if not the one we inherit from the tradition and we live with every day?

Yet it is important to emphasize that Gadamer is here not rejecting Heidegger's insight that the history of philosophy has been metaphysical, and thus subjectivistic and technocratic. As Gadamer himself admits, he fully acknowledges the significance of Heidegger's destruction of the metaphysical tradition and attempt at overcoming it:

Early on, Heidegger was to put forward as a rallying cry the task of a *Destruktion* of the alienated conceptuality of metaphysics: the ongoing task of contemporary thinking. With unbelievable freshness, he was able to trace in thinking the concepts of the tradition back to the Greek language, back to the natural sense of words and the hidden wisdom of language they contain, and in so doing, to give new life to Greek thought and its power to address us today. Such was Heidegger's genius. He had a penchant for restoring to words their hidden, no longer intended sense, and then from this so-called etymology to draw fundamental consequences for thinking.<sup>58</sup>

Accordingly, Gadamer embraces Heidegger's aim of destroying the history of metaphysics, and follows the latter in seeking a moment at which metaphysical concepts are rethought and recontextualized. This explains why Gadamer too develops a philosophy that attempts to avoid becoming subjectivist-centered through such ideas as play [*Spiel*] and discovers non-metaphysical qualities in the Greeks such notions as dialectic, dialogue, and *phronesis*.<sup>59</sup> By appropriating the negative aspect of Heidegger's destruction, Gadamer takes a critical stance against the tradition very much in the spirit of Heidegger, while also paving his own path when it comes to the positive aspect of destruction.

As we saw earlier, the significance of the positive aspect of deconstruction, that is construction, lies in the positive appropriation of the tradition. This is the task which is often called 'reappropriation' or 'recontextualization.' It is through such a task that, as Moran puts it, it becomes possible to transform the "context to renew the mode of access to the

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58 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "Destruktion and Deconstruction," 107-108, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

59 It is worth noting that Gadamer was initially trained as a scholar on Greek philosophy.

phenomenon.”<sup>60</sup> The basic idea behind this method is that when we destroy the traditional understanding of our concepts, we can gain insight into, recover, and come away with a positive understanding which we did not possess beforehand. Heidegger’s approach speaks for itself. He takes many of the concepts we use perhaps without giving much thought, and traces the roots of such words until he uncovers something original, an experience of which might have been lost over the history. Take for instance the concept of ‘technology.’ He argues that while the word itself is derived from *techne* (τέχνη), the Greek also included the notion of *poiesis* (ποιέω), poetic and artistic creation which involves something like our sensitivity and novelty. What remains in our use of the term ‘technology,’ however, is *techne*. In our technologically-oriented mode of thinking, we enframe nature so as to be able to comprehend it. It is a form of taking control of and mastering nature itself that is manifested in our fascination with technology. Regardless of what he says in “The Question Concerning Technology,” the critical stance Heidegger takes is not solely aimed at criticizing the previous philosophies, but it may just as well be used to critique our own understanding.

In spite of these elaborations, Heidegger’s phenomenological method appears to fall short especially when it comes to the positive aspect of deconstruction. For although he claims that “Knowledge of the history of philosophy is intrinsically unitary on its own account,” which is supposed to show that his deconstruction is not merely a negative task, it is not at all clear how such knowledge can be unitary and hence can be positively appropriated. In other words, the fundamental question remains unanswered: how we can speak of the origin of our concepts, which sustains the unitary character of the history of philosophy, when destruction seem to put into question all basis of judgment. In other words, granted the need for carrying out destruction, on what basis can we determine the origin of our concepts, the

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60 Dermot Moran, “The Destruction of the Destruction,” 191, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

unitary course, precisely when we are carrying out a destruction? Why stop our analysis of ‘technology’ with the Greeks? Did not Greek thought originate from the horizon of the previous civilizations? After all, a language is never static and self-sufficient, and it is continuously changing and evolving much like the evolutionary process in organisms. In tracing back the origin of our concepts, we can never claim our discovery to be the final and most definite point from which the concepts emerged. For every alleged origin already belongs to and is part of the ongoing evolutionary process of language. It is for this reason that we can never claim, contrary to Heidegger, to have discovered *the* origin, though it may amount to *an* origin in the sense of drawing the etymological connection and tracing back the roots. What is important, however, is the idea that I therefore wish to conclude this essay by making some critical remarks, mainly coming from Gadamer.

In “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” Gadamer makes some critical remarks against Heidegger, which are often not explicit in his writings. While the following criticism against Heidegger is not exactly the same as the one I just brought out, it is worth examining what Gadamer has to say:

Not only did Heidegger [...] propose to go beyond modern subjectivism through the *Destruktion* or de-structuring of its unproven concepts, but also – on the positive side – to recover the primordial Greek experience of Being by lighting up the idea of Being lying behind the rise and dominance of Western metaphysics. In actuality, though, Heidegger’s step back from Aristotle’s concept of Being as *physis* to the experience of Being in its Presocratic beginnings remained an adventurous journey into error. Granted, the distant goal, however vague, was always before his eyes: to think anew the beginning, the primal, the originary. *But to come closer to the beginning always means to become aware, in retracing the path from whence one came, of other open possibilities.*<sup>61</sup>

The important point here is that there is not only one way back from the origin. When positively appropriating the traditional concepts, we realize that we can go in all sorts of directions, since every edifice has been, as it were, dismantled by our destruction. As such, the

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61 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” 104, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

history of philosophy cannot be uniteral. Just as biological evolution could have developed in so many different ways, by chance or luck (if such terms are appropriate at all), things could have been dramatically different and there is not even a necessity that we as humans exist here and now. The same applies to our understanding, which is transmitted by language. Our language grows and evolves. We can make different references and observations, none of which, however, is permanent and necessary. As Gadamer says, things could have gone other ways. We recognize that when we carry out a destruction. To insist on a form of unilateral movement in the history of philosophy is nothing but doing violence to our mode of understanding. As Gadamer puts it, “Languages [...] are not easily circumventable. Indeed, even when tracing one’s own ancestry one can never reach back to its beginning. It always slips away into uncertainty.”<sup>62</sup>

It therefore turns out that both the positive and negative aspect of Heidegger’s phenomenological method are problematic. On the basis of the criticisms we just discussed, we can infer two vital points: the first is that a positive appropriation can be done in a number of different ways, and thus it is never retracing back the path that is exact and unilateral. This is a criticism directed against construction. The other point is that every inquiry into the origin remains an inquiry into any other origin insofar as there is never a determinate origin to our concepts. I have argued for this point by using the analogy with evolution, and it is directed against the limited scope of destruction. It does not yield us with the absolute beginning but merely an other beginning. We may appropriately claim that the human beings (*homo sapiens*) evolved from the apes, but that is just as much to say that we have evolved from the earlier stages of evolution as well. What we therefore find in Heidegger’s phenomenology is a narrow conception, which is perhaps violent imposition, of our relation to the concepts we inherit from the tradition, and thus appears rather problematic. As Gadamer rightly points out,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 105.

“Heidegger’s attempts at a half-poetic form of discourse are sometimes more expressive of a linguistic need than of its overcoming,”<sup>63</sup> these shortcomings led Heidegger into error:

The problem with understanding language in terms of it being subjectivistic or not is that it fails to account for our immanent relation to language as well as our finitude. The proper response to the condition in which we have ‘forgotten’ or are oblivious of the poetic characteristics of language can only be retrieved within the very same language. Searching something anew in this sense is not so much a confrontation with the situation but a withdrawal from it. As Gadamer writes:

Philosophizing does not begin at some zero point but must think and speak with the language we already possess. As in the days of the ancient Sophists, so today, this means leading a language, estranged from its native sense of saying something, back to the common way of saying things and to the communality that supports this way of saying.<sup>64</sup>

In speaking of ‘transforming’ our language to a more poetic one, Heidegger is basically looking for the origin which he finds ‘pure’ and ‘primary.’ Such an aim, however, implies a ‘zero point’ or infinite perspective in order for him to be able to interpret the history in its entirety. Otherwise, as Gadamer points out, we can never rule out other ways of recovering what was lost, the voice of Being. It is to these issues to which we will now turn.

## **B. Different Dialect**

In the essay “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” which Gadamer published in 1986 as a response to his encounter (or rather its failure) with Jacques Derrida five years earlier, Gadamer makes the following remark:

It [*Destruktion*] has to do with making concepts and their expressions speak once more, with taking them out of the merely functional context in which they are employed as overdetermined terms, and bringing them back to their original role within language. That was Heidegger’s great service: the *Destruktion* of the academic language of metaphysics. He has shown that Greek conceptual determinations were words in *living language* containing –

63 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *The Gadamer Reader*, 339-340.

64 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 181.

for all their conceptual precision – a multiplicity or, to put it as would modern poetic theory, a “*multivocity*” of semantic elements, which still go on speaking together in the background.<sup>65</sup>

Like the passage I quoted earlier, Gadamer certainly acknowledges Heidegger’s contribution when it comes to destruction and its role in examining language critically. At the same time, however, Gadamer also conveys here an indirect criticism of Heidegger in this passage. For Heidegger does not speak of ‘living language’ and ‘multivocity.’<sup>66</sup> What is revealed in this passage, particularly the latter half, is the manner in which Gadamer appropriates and resituates Heidegger. We shall closely examine Gadamer’s criticisms and bring to light the moments where Heidegger is problematic.

The aspect of Heidegger’s thought which Gadamer argues against most conspicuously concerns Heidegger’s unilateralism. When Heidegger destroys the metaphysical tradition and clears the field of desolate concepts, he wrongly assumes that there is only one correct way of ‘remembering’ or ‘retrieving’ from such a nihilistic state. This is why Heidegger goes back to the Greeks with a specific intention: “Heidegger reached back to the pre-Socratics, to figures like Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, to find possibilities for thought that might suggest a new beginning for human thinking.”<sup>67</sup> Yet, as Gadamer puts it eloquently: “Whoever stands at the very beginning must choose his path. If one gets back to the beginning, one becomes aware of the fact that from that starting point one could have gone other ways – perhaps just as Eastern thought has taken other ways.”<sup>68</sup> Heidegger thus neglects the manifold paths which we can take to return from the point of origin. He instead imposes his own view in speaking of the poetic language as that which lies in the closest proximity to the original experience of Being. As we saw with the analysis of technology and poetic language,

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65 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” 121 in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*. Italicized ‘living language’ and ‘multivocity.’

66 Heidegger does speak of ‘natural language’ in “The Way to Language,” but he still finds it inadequate and goes on to defend the poetic language.

67 Beyond Being, 37.

68 Gadamer, Hans-Georg, “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” 104-105 in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.



Heidegger's critique is certainly justified. But as Gadamer puts it:

We need to remember that we all no longer live back in the time of the Greek beginnings. The reencounter with Aristotle, and indeed with the whole of Greek thinking that has dominated Western history, does not in any way alter the fact that *we have been irrevocably stamped by our own complex Western heritage*. Certainly it now comes to our attention that in this tradition of thought are contained concealments of the original Greek beginnings. But every cover-up has its life-function.<sup>69</sup>

As explained quite clearly in the part which I have italicized, we are immanently part of the movement of history. To speak a poetic language today is not to speak the language in the manner of the ancient Greeks. We already belong to the civilization which is metaphysical. While imitating what the Greeks themselves might provide us with an important insight, which itself is already *our interpretation* of their culture, it does not follow that *only* by such an imitation can we ever overcome the mode of thinking which has been developed by them. Gadamer puts it succinctly, "we cannot escape the language of metaphysics because the grammar of our language binds our thought to it."<sup>70</sup> The history of the Western civilization may have been metaphysical up to the present, but we can also interpret it differently should a transformation occur in and within. At least Gadamer confronts by searching for such a possibility rather than taking flight from our own condition. Gadamer describes his own contribution as follows:

My [Gadamer's] own contribution, it seems to me, is the discovery that no conceptual language, not even what Heidegger called the 'language of metaphysics,' represents an unbreakable constraint upon thought if the thinker will allow himself or herself to trust language; that is to say, if he or she engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking.<sup>71</sup>

Gadamer is careful to not rule out possibilities of thinking in a more fundamental manner, remaining within the living language which we are all too familiar. To look elsewhere may not be thinking-beyond but thinking-away from the subject matter at hand.

<sup>69</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *The Gadamer Reader*, 369. Italicize added.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>71</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "Text and Interpretation," 160, in *The Gadamer Reader*.



## Conclusion: History as Multilateralism

In the end, Heidegger himself may be a victim of his own accusation. Because he neglected our finitude within the dynamics and movement of history, along which language evolves, he essentially failed to carry through the positive aspect of destruction, construction, in a satisfactory manner. Gadamer thus reflects on Heidegger's thought in the following way:

Certainly, in these early years, Heidegger never imagined that even to the end of his life he would lack the conceptuality he needed for his life task. He himself expressed this point later on when he spoke of the overcoming of metaphysics or of the "language of metaphysics" and spoke about the time of transition in which we found ourselves. For him, the language of metaphysics [of presence metaphysics] was something we fallback into over and over again – even he. Heidegger recognized this fact again and again in his writings, and he made us feel this all the more through his own audacious use of language. He knew that language was like an element that carried us within it, and yet he himself often had to use violence and turn language against itself!<sup>72</sup>

I wish to conclude by suggesting that the main factor which misguided Heidegger is his unilateral understanding of history.

Heidegger's positive thought is essentially unilateral because he sees history as being deterministic and lacking an alternative mode of thought unless we violently open for create for ourselves a new language. Yet, ironically, this highlights Heidegger's dogmatism in that his unilateral view is nothing but the very view which he condemned with technology. This is why Moran writes:

It seems odd that Heidegger does not see that his own transcendental language possesses an absoluteness and permanence that radically undercut his attempt to think the temporal and the historical in human experience in a mode proper to that temporality and [historicity].<sup>73</sup>

In other words, Heidegger is a victim of his own accusation. For Heidegger's account rules out other possibilities, other modes of thought, to our condition. His historical interpretation thus becomes the master and schematization which he decried against in case of technology

<sup>72</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *The Gadamer Reader*, 369-370.

<sup>73</sup> Moran, Dermot, "The Destruction of the Destruction," 187, in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*.

and metaphysics. This is in this sense that I argue that Heidegger's philosophy is committed to an infinite perspective and hence is metaphysical. He presents his own view as the all-encompassing narrative of the history of philosophy. On the contrary, Brice R. Wachterhauser rightly indicates the distinction Gadamer draws from Heidegger when he makes the following remark:

While Gadamer sees Heidegger's interpretation of Western thought as tracing *one* possibility latent in its beginnings, he distances himself from the inevitability of the trajectory. To make this point, Gadamer wants to show that there are elements in Plato, particularly the later dialogues, that show other philosophical possibilities, possibilities which in fact cast doubt on Heidegger's insistence that 'metaphysics' is inherently 'technological' and nihilistic.<sup>74</sup>

While I did not discuss Plato in my thesis, I have tried to establish the same point from a different perspective. In this sense, Gadamer's thought, as that which opposes Heidegger's, is multilateral insofar as he sees multiple possibilities for the phenomenon to speak. Being is multivocal for Gadamer. By letting history have its claims, Gadamer is faithful to our finite place in history.<sup>75</sup>

There is one point, in any case, at which I distance myself from Heidegger. It seems to me that his interpretation of the Greek heritage is too unilateral [*unilaterale*]. Certainly no one has shown better than him to what extent our Western culture is rooted in Greek thinking. But his conception of the forgetfulness of Being beginning with Plato that leads up to the age of planetary technology seems to me too exclusive. To my mind, Heidegger fails to see that the forgetfulness of Being goes together with a constant effort at the remembering of being that cuts across all Platonism. All mystic thinking is an illustration of this including that which in modern thought connects back to it.<sup>76</sup>

Gadamer, in this way, carefully treads a path that avoids the infinite perspective but is also capable of elevating us to a new mode of thought by critically destructing our own traditional forms of language.

<sup>74</sup> Wachterhauser, Brice R., *Beyond Being*, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Due to the confinements of time and space, I shall not go into the discussion of infinity and history here.

<sup>76</sup> Delacampagne, Christian, *Le Monde*, 238. Translated by Professor David Weberman.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> “In general our experience of reading Gadamer is the reverse; we constantly find ourselves forced to turn back to Heidegger to fill certain lacunae in his presentation, particularly in respect of the explication of concepts” (Bernasconi 1987, 3); “Gadamer’s work has, of course, gone a long way down the phenomenological path blazed by his mentor. This very disquisition could even be construed as further evidence of a seemingly umbilical relationship” (Coltman 2005, 1).
- <sup>ii</sup> “It is surprising that the question of Gadamer’s relation to Heidegger has not provoked more study than it has. It is well enough known that Gadamer was a student of Heidegger’s at Marburg in the 1920’s and that he has always littered his writings – whether they are on hereneutics, time or the interpretation of Plato – with references, both explicit and implicit, to his former teacher” (Bernasconi 1987, 1); “Habermas is not alone in thinking that one of Gadamer’s major contributions has been to present the work of the later Heidegger in a more accessible language than Heidegger was either prepared or able to do himself. It is an interpretation which is not without its merits, if one is ready to reserve one’s doubts about the conception of language which it appears to imply” (Ibid., 3).
- “[C]ertainly none of Heidegger’s many illustrious protégées has taken [his] advise more seriously than did Hans-Georg Gadamer. Unfortunately, heeding the call of one’s mentor can have its slight drawbacks. In the United States, for instance, the temptation to read Gadamer as a mere Heideggerian epigone explains to a large extent his rather tepid reception among Continental philosophers – at least when compared to such figures as Heidegger himself, Jürgen Habermas, and Jacques Derrida, whose works have spawned veritable industries of translation and scholarship” (Coltman 2005, 1).
- “The difference [between Heidegger and Gadamer] has led commentators to posit that Gadamer is in a sense domesticating Heidegger. Jürgen Habermas in a well-known *laudatio* to Gadamer describes the effect as “urbanizing the Heideggerian province.” In Habermas’s view, the extreme radicality of Heidegger’s thought creates a gulf between himself and his readers, an isolation that calls for a “bridge” to render his insights accessible. Gadamer’s great achievement, then, has been to effect a kind of taming that nonetheless succeeds in following Heidegger “far enough to promote his thought productively and on a sound basis” (Lammi 1991, 488).

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