

The Destruction of Philosophy: Metaphoricity-History-Being

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“What I have attempted to do would not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger’s questions.”

Jacques Derrida [1][#N1]

In the present essay, I trace the way in which Derrida engages the theme of the destruction of philosophy [2][#N2] in his reading of Heidegger’s work in the 1964-65 seminar, Heidegger: The Question of Being and History. Specifically, I focus on a close reading of the first three sessions in order to show the way in which the theme of the destruction of philosophy appears in relation to the posing of three questions, namely, the questions of being, history, and metaphor. In all three sessions, I will show that the questions of being, history, and metaphor allow Heidegger, according to Derrida, to brush against the very limits of philosophy. However, Derrida’s own interpretation reveals an interesting emphasis on the destruction of philosophy that, while definitely inspired by Heidegger, slightly begins to go beyond him. For this reason, I will turn to his more critical appraisal of Heidegger’s trajectory in the final two sessions. In so doing, I claim that Derrida’s positions in these final sessions will show a critical distance vis-à-vis Heidegger that will foreshadow the very question that will remain decisive throughout his nearly 40 year engagement with Heidegger’s work, namely, the question of difference [3][#N3].

I. First Session: Philosophy and the Question of Being

The first session of the 1964-65 seminar can be perhaps best read through the following bold statement: “It is in the difference between Hegel and Heidegger that our problem is situated [4][#N4].” At the outset of the seminar, Derrida will point to the difference between them by distinguishing Hegel’s notion of refutation [*Widerlegung*] from Heidegger’s notion of destruction [*Destruktion*]. Although he does not give a specific definition of destruction, Derrida writes: “The concept of *refutation* belongs—implicitly—to an anti-historical metaphysics of truth [5][#N5].” While Derrida considers that “Refutation is futile in Heidegger’s view [6][#N6],” he mentions that “Hegel meditated a great deal on this difficulty of refutation (*Widerlegung*) in philosophy [7][#N7].” According to Derrida, Hegel was led to considering the notion of refutation vis-à-vis philosophy due to “his fully historical concept of truth and of philosophy [8][#N8].” While this might seem to exempt Hegel from the scathing remark that refutation belongs to an anti-historical metaphysics of truth, Derrida refers to a citation from Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* to show that Hegel considers philosophy to be intrinsically related to logic. Hence, as Derrida writes, “it is precisely because, for Hegel but not for Heidegger, philosophy

is, in a profound and radical sense of the word, a *logic*, that even while radically historicizing meaning, Hegel cannot purely and simply abandon the notion and value of “refutation” [9].” However, we arrive at the crux of the matter when Derrida introduces another citation from Hegel’s *Lectures* that displays the way in which refutation acts as a productive negativity that leads to the Hegelian notion of *last philosophy*.

As previously mentioned, once Derrida has signaled to Hegel’s notion of ‘last philosophy’, we are already at a crucial moment that will help us distinguish Heidegger from Hegel’s thought. While Hegel’s understanding of ‘last philosophy’ does not necessarily refer to the empirical concept of the most *recent* philosophy, Derrida notes, “The last philosophy, in the authentically Hegelian sense, is a philosophy that comprehends in itself the totality of its past and inquires after its origin or endlessly attempts to [10].” In this sense, the last philosophy is one in which “the horizon and the infinite opening of historicity has finally appeared *as such*, or finally been thought as such, that is, as infinite opening [11].” Through this clarification of the Hegelian understanding of the term ‘last philosophy’, Derrida returns to the productive role played by the concept of refutation in order to further elucidate the way in which it operates in Hegel’s discourse concerning philosophy. Hence, Derrida writes, “It is perhaps possible that the last philosophy is indeed the one that, not content to refute, tries to think the essence of refutation and the essence of the *last* [12].” By thinking the essence of the last in relation to philosophy, Hegel’s logic opens up to an *eschatological* point of view that is anchored in *ontology*.

It is at this point that we arrive at Derrida’s first decisive statement of the difference between Heidegger and Hegel: “The *Destruction* of the history of ontology is not a *refutation* even in the Hegelian sense [13].” In order to further demonstrate the strict difference separating Heidegger and Hegel, Derrida goes on to show why Hegel’s philosophy of refutation is incapable of raising the question of being. If we briefly return to the discussion concerning Hegel’s ‘last philosophy’, then we would easily see that Hegel is incapable of raising the question of being insofar as his attempt remains caught within an eschatology, that is to say, an ontology. Given that the question of being is *not* related to the question of ontology, it follows that *no* ontology can be related to the question of being. In this sense, Hegel’s thought is certainly the *last* philosophy, but last in the sense of still *belonging* to the tradition and, hence, incapable of taking a step back or beyond it, which is what Heidegger wants to do. Thus, it is no wonder, Derrida tells us, that “in paragraph 6, devoted precisely to the destruction of the history of ontology, Heidegger insists on this belonging of *Hegelianism* to the ontological tradition that he wishes, precisely, to *destroy* [14].”

Although Derrida seems to have established a firm difference between Heidegger and Hegel, he writes the following question in hesitation: “Why is Hegel’s enterprise, so close for that matter to Heidegger’s, still enclosed in the circle of classical ontology? This is a question that will not leave us in peace throughout these reflections [15].” Even though the answer to this question has already been demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the question still seems to disturb Derrida’s thought. Nevertheless, Derrida finds a resource in Heidegger’s “Anaximander’s Saying” in the concept of onto-theo-logy, which serves as a crucial resource for Heidegger’s reading of the history of philosophy. Derrida offers a description of the term and its operation in the following passage: “Because metaphysics is, for Heidegger, the name of the determination of the being in general or of the excellent eminent being par excellence, that is, God, metaphysics is onto-theology [16].” With this determination, Hegel’s thought, expressed perhaps most clearly in the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ends up occluding the question of being by taking the phenomenon of *spirit* [*Geist*] as an *ontotheological principle*, that is to say, as *the highest being*.

Although we have been noticing a gradual build-up to Derrida's characterization of the difference between Heidegger and Hegel, he offers a *decisive* description in the following passage, which I cite at length:

It [Heideggerian destruction] is distinguished from it [Hegel's "recollecting" refutation] by a nothing, a slight trembling of meaning that we must not overlook, for the whole seriousness of the enterprise sums up in this its fragility and its value. A slight trembling, for Heidegger says *nothing* else after the Hegelian—that is, Western—ontology that he is going to destroy. He says nothing else, he does not propose another ontology, another topic, another metaphysics, and his first gesture is to claim that he is not doing so [17].[#N17].

The radical difference between Hegel and Heidegger takes place in the space of a *nothing*—one that produces slight trembling of meaning in which the destruction takes place. There is no doubt that, despite the similarities between the two thinkers, the truly *decisive* moment appears in the light of this subtle difference. As we have been noting, the difference is brought to light by the manner in which one relates to the tradition of philosophical thought. For, if refutation involves establishing truth once and for all in a historical manner, then Heidegger's destruction distinguishes itself by letting refutation refute itself *precisely* by adding nothing to it. In this sense, as Derrida notes, Heidegger

Does confirm the Hegelian consciousness of the end of philosophy. But he confirms it by adding no other *proposition*, that is to say he surrounds it with an ontological silence in which this Hegelian consciousness will be put into question, will be *solicited* (i.e., shaken); will tremble and let be seen what it still dissimulates in that trembling, will let be heard that on the basis of which it can still be questioned from a place that is neither outside nor in it [18].[#N18].

In other words, and put simply, the difference between Heideggerian destruction and Hegelian refutation is this almost *nothing* that has no effect other than freeing or loosening the very space of thought. Although Derrida had put off the positive definition of the term 'destruction' for as long as he could throughout these opening pages, he finally offers a description that highly resembles the one that appears in §6 of *Being and Time*: "It is a destruction—that is, a deconstruction, a de-structuration, the shaking that is necessary to bring out the structures, the strata, the system of deposits [19].[#N19]."

With this decisive passage, we have reached a crucial insight into the between Hegel and Heidegger that reveals a fundamentally different approach to philosophy. While Hegel's approach is characterized by the concept of refutation and the productive negativity that this concept brings to the very movement of spirit in its becoming, Heidegger's destruction is characterized by a step back from the tradition that allows a shaking and loosening up that allows for the uncovering of that which had been covered over. Even though this difference introduces a "decisive displacement" as Derrida himself states, it is nonetheless "slight, flimsy, [and] almost immaterial" such that it will be a matter of continuing to clarify what is meant by the project of destruction in order to avoid potential misunderstandings. However, if we have achieved anything in this first session, according to Derrida, it will be a matter of having elucidated the way in which Heidegger's understanding of destruction puts into question the very possibility of ontology. The consequences of this

destruction, as Derrida is keen to note in the transition from the first session to the second one, will depend on the way in which *history* is introduced into the question of being or, better yet, *by* the question of being. In other words, it will be a matter of trying to understand the specific relation between being and history such as it appears in the title of the course, that is to say, being *and* history, which Derrida playfully suggests whether it might not be the case that this *and* indicates something like being *is* history.

II. Second Session: Philosophy and the Question of History

After having offered a summary of the discussion developed in the first session, Derrida truly begins the second session with a startlingly ambitious claim:

It would be easy to show, and I will not dwell on it, that never in the history of philosophy has there been a radical affirmation of an essential link between being and history. Ontology has always been constituted through a gesture of wrenching itself away from historicity and temporality [20][#N20].

We interrupt this citation only to mention that although there is no doubting that Derrida is, in one way or another, simply stating the guiding thesis of Division Two of *Being and Time*, the gesture with which he inaugurates the second session is meant to set up the *radicality* of the question of historicity as it appears tied to Heidegger's raising anew of the question of being. As was previously the case in the first session, Hegel again becomes the target of the debate. But, in raising the question of historicity and temporality, it could not be otherwise given the last couple of chapters of *Being and Time*, which deal specifically with Hegel. Hence, the Heideggerian critique appears through the voice of Derrida in the following manner: "even in Hegel, for whom history is the history of the *manifestation* of an absolute and eternal concept, of a divine subjectivity that, in its origin and in its end, seems to gather up its historicity infinitely—that is, to live it in the total presence of being with itself (i.e., in a non-historicity) [21][#N21]." Here we return to the fundamental difference that was brought up in the first session vis-à-vis Hegel and Heidegger: despite Hegel's insistent attempts at taking into consideration the historical dimension of truth in philosophy, his commitment to ontology and logic lead him to the obfuscation and avoidance of historicity. If we think of the fate of philosophical reflection after Hegel, then we can clearly see that, as the 'last philosophy', he set the contemporary precedent for the forgetting of history. In this sense, as Derrida rightly mentions, "After Hegel, philosophy's thematizing and taking history seriously took the form, precisely, of giving up on the problem of being [22][#N22]." Hence thinkers such as Marx, which, as Derrida keenly notes, Heidegger will consider as someone who truly attained an essential dimension of history in "Letter on Humanism," will remain all-too-attached to Hegelian metaphysics and, therefore, incapable of offering a decisive step forward.

Having diagnosed the way in which Hegel, as last philosophy, has recapitulated the forgetting of historicity in relation to the question of being, Derrida asks, in Heidegger's voice, "How then do matters stand between the question of being and history? [23][#N23]." Despite the simplicity of the question, Derrida points out that the difficulty of accessing this relation between being and history has to do with a thorny *methodological* concern that he formulates as follows: "In which *language* will it be possible for the question of being in its relation with history to be expounded and treated, to the degree of absolute radicality that Heidegger has chosen [i.e. destruction]? [24][#N24]." In other words, the difficulty of thinking the relationship between being and history is

essentially tied to the experience of running up against the barriers of language. While the ontological silence introduced into the structure of Western ontology serves the purpose of loosening up its sediments in order to access what had been covered over by the tradition, the silence remains a significant problem in the face of trying to move forward without falling back into the snares of ontology and logic. It is worth noting that we are arriving at a crucial moment in Derrida's reading of Heidegger. At this point in his reading, we can clearly see the way in which Derrida's own wrestling with the problem of language vis-à-vis Heidegger's destructive breakthrough will greatly resemble Derrida's own attempts to describe his own approach.

If we focus on the nature of Derrida's question, then we realize that the question has to do with the relation to *tradition*. As a point of comparison, let us return to Hegel. If Hegelian refutation remains more than content of maintaining the *language* of the system of thought that it refutes, then Heideggerian destruction, in trying to perform a step back from this history of philosophy, must seek *another* relation with language. Hence, Derrida reformulates his initial question in the following terms: "Whence are we to draw the concepts, the terms, the forms of linking necessary for the discourse of Destruction, for the destructive discourse? [25][#N25]." As we implied earlier, Heideggerian destruction is trying to find *another* relationship to language that will not simply be that of either simply borrowing the terms of the tradition it is trying to deconstruct or entirely dismissing them as useless. Despite the difficulty introduced by this problem, Derrida's attentive reading leads us out of this impasse by referring to an all-too-important notion that is intrinsically related to the destructive breakthrough: "Because *Destruktion* is in its gesture like a *Wiederholung*, a repetition, it can neither use, nor simply deprive itself of the traditional *logos* [26][#N26]." In other words, Heidegger has to maintain a complicated relationship to repetition—a double gesture, we might say—that maintains itself within the tension of this particular aporia. As Derrida rightly notes in his reading, the price Heidegger pays for trying to dismiss this problem of language would be a fall into an ahistorical radicalism that would try to argue for an absolute starting point outside of any historical conjuncture, which would mean nothing more and nothing less than an abandonment of both the question of being *and* history. Hence, this brief excursus into the problem of language and the relation to tradition serves as a demonstration that the question of being is *intrinsically and inextricably related* to the question of history. In other words, being is historical through and through or it is not. Without an account of historicity, we will inevitably lose the question of being.

While Heidegger certainly maintains himself within this difficult double gesture required by the destructive breakthrough, Derrida nonetheless recognizes that "the problem of language that he faces is thus formidable and it goes without saying that it has no general solution, no principial solution, no solution of principle [27][#N27]." In other words, there can be no ahistorical rule that will appear in order to justify the way in which one can or must articulate the destructive breakthrough. One could even go so far as saying that the destructive breakthrough exposes an originary an-archy that prohibits any kind of principial relation [28][#N28]. Given this incessantly an-archic displacement, Derrida rightly characterizes the path as one in which,

At every moment, uneasily but vigilantly, in the work of analysis, in the corrections and crossings out, the crossings out of crossings out, one will proceed slowly within the received *logos*, sometimes modifying it by itself, correcting itself by itself, and in this sense the destruction will always be an auto-destruction of the *logos* of ontology, and of philosophy by philosophy [29][#N29].

Returning to the imagery of solicitation brought forth by Derrida's initial definition of destruction, we notice that the destructive breakthrough takes place in a *liminal space* that is neither inside nor outside. The fact that destruction takes place in a liminal space is highly significant since it what allows for destruction to be an auto-destruction in the sense that it is not simply a matter of a simple exteriority that comes to disturb a pure interiority. Instead, destruction takes place in the sense of opening the space in which interiority and exteriority are contaminated. Destruction is not restricted to one space or another, but appears as an invading and invasive force that is felt everywhere.

At this point, we have arrived at another key moment in relationship to the destruction of philosophy since, as Derrida mentions, "it goes without saying that the destruction of ontology is for Heidegger the destruction of philosophy itself [30].[#N30]." As we saw in the first session, the proximity between ontology and philosophy is ever-present, especially when, like in the case of Hegel, philosophy is understood within the scope of metaphysics and onto-theology. Bringing us back to the problem of language revealed by the destructive breakthrough, Derrida writes, "Because of this problem of language, the destruction of philosophy will always be *surprised* in philosophy, surprised by philosophy, enveloped by philosophy at the very moment that it wants to destroy philosophy, if only because it is the philosophical *logos* that is undertaking its own destruction [31].[#N31]." In other words, the difficulty is that of figuring out how to *transform* philosophy's relation to its *logos*. For this reason, Derrida claims, "Sometimes, one will forge new words, new concepts, drawing on the resources of the language, on certain resources of the language that are, ought to be *younger* than philosophy, later arrivals on the scene than philosophy [32].[#N32]." Thus, one of the main consequences of this other relation to philosophy made possible by destruction is the call for a practice of forging new words and concepts that allow us to recognize what is younger or older than philosophy, that is to say, for all intents and purposes, *other* than philosophy.

Although it might seem that we have escaped the problem of language by appealing to this problem of creating concepts, Derrida reminds us: "this creation of new concepts, even when it is possible, will be quite insufficient to solve our problem of language [33].[#N33]." The reason for this is quite simple: the creation of new concepts—even radically new ones—does not avoid the risk of thinking that we have somehow gone beyond the tradition that is to say, that we can simply dismiss the concepts and words handed down to us by the tradition. Even though destruction allows us to shake and loosen the sediments of the tradition, it does not allow us to think that we have taken leave of this structure, as we noted earlier in the second session. For this reason, as Derrida correctly indicates, "It is not a problem of philosophical lexicology, but it is a problem of syntax which concerns the forms of linkage of concepts [34].[#N34]." Derrida's attempt to bring the question of language back to the problem of syntax provides us with an all-too-important intervention that already signals one of his main differences with Heidegger. As Derrida will go on to state in *Positions*, "I have never believed that there were *metaphysical* concepts *in and of themselves*. No concept is by itself, and consequently in and of itself, metaphysical, outside all the textual work in which it is inscribed [35].[#N35]." Although we could say that a similar nuance is at play in Heidegger's text, there are few doubts that Derrida inscribes this concern with greater force and emphasis. Derrida's emphasis on the pragmatics of language will recall the difficulty of maintaining to the double gesture required by the destructive breakthrough.

While it seems that we have arrived at the climax of the discussion concerning the problem of language, Derrida doubles up the ante by referring to the particular injunction announced by Heidegger in §2 of *Being and Time*, namely, the prohibition of telling stories. The radical nature of this injunction is that, following

Derrida's reading, the fact that, according to Heidegger, we are trying to do this for the *first time* in the history of philosophy. In other words, we are trying to achieve a *decisive break* from the entire history of Western philosophy by not telling stories. According to this point of view, "the philosophical novel, philosophical narration, is of course, but is not only, the history of philosophy as *doxography* that recounts, reports, gather and lays out the series of philosophical systems [36][#N36]." In this sense, Heidegger's approach to the problem of language requires the twisting free of philosophical *logos* from the obfuscating nature of narrativity. As we recall from §2 of *Being and Time*, the problem with "telling stories" is that it completely ignores the ontico-ontological difference by trying to trace the appearance of the meaning of being through beings. Hence, to tell stories is to miss the question of being entirely. Hence, as Derrida mentions, "The Novelesque from which we must awaken is philosophy itself as metaphysics and onto-theology [37][#N37]." We would be amiss if we failed to recognize the way in which the task of destroying philosophy comes back with greater force through the linguistic problem of narrativity.

In our reading of the second session of *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, we have been able to recognize the way in which Heidegger brushes against the limits of philosophy by trying to formulate a destructive relation vis-à-vis philosophical *logos*. The difficulty of the problem of language, we have noted, has to do with the double gesture implied by destruction. Hence, we saw that the question of language in relation to destruction is not a matter of simply dismissing the philosophical tradition with its figures, words, and concepts. If it *were* the case that we had to abandon tradition, then the entire enterprise would founder. Derrida develops this point even further by writing:

What one cannot imagine, what is impossible or would have no sense, is a question of being, a positing of the question of being that would happen before or independently of a destruction of ontology—that is, which essentially, in its essence, could do without historical reference to the past of philosophy. That means that the transgression of philosophy that happens with the question of being must find and maintain its support in philosophy [38][#N38].

In other words, the destructive relationship to philosophy involves a *working through* or *traversing* of the tradition that would allow us to free and pursue the question and thought of being. If we are able to maintain ourselves resolutely within this destructive double gesture vis-à-vis philosophy, then we are able to take seriously the question of being and history in its concrete appearance. The concreteness of the question of being and history will only appear once we are capable of not telling stories, that is, of getting away from the naturalized relationship between philosophy and narrativity.

Reaching the climax of the second session, Derrida reintroduces the polemic between Heidegger and Hegel in order to clarify what is at stake in the problem of language vis-à-vis the question of being and history. As noted earlier, one of the decisive breakthroughs introduced by Heideggerian destruction is the injunction to not tell stories. The destruction of narrativity allows for the question of being and history to resound and echo in its thought worthiness beyond the obfuscation involved in metaphysics and onto-theology. Now, given that Hegel's thought falls under the purview of metaphysics and onto-theology, there would be no difficulty in recognizing the way in which Hegel remains caught within the snares of narrativity. Derrida offers an incisive description of Hegel that is worth citing at length:

Historicizing the revelation of being within the borders of metaphysics understood in this way is thus in a certain way still to “tell stories.” And Hegel would in this sense have been one of the great storytellers, one of the greatest novelists of philosophy, the greatest no doubt, and you can see how *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* could come to illustrate this remark [39][#N39].

By telling stories, Hegel is incapable of even hearing the question of being due to the idle chatter of spirit [*Geist*]. For, as Derrida rightly points out, “To liberate the question of being and history, one must, then, stop telling stories, which is to say that one must take a step beyond ontic history [40][#N40].” Even though this step beyond ontic history might appear as a step out of history, it is, in fact, an attempt to dig deeper into the historicity of being. To remain on the surface of history as it appears in its ontic register is to risk a complacent historicism. In order to truly get at the core of historicity, we must be willing to risk this step beyond ontic history in order to plunge into its ontological depth. And there are few doubts, as Derrida mentions, that this immense step forward is constituted by the appearance of the historicity of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*.

III. Session Three: Philosophy and the Question of Metaphor

Turning to the third session reveals what is undoubtedly the thorniest issue in Derrida’s reading of Heidegger namely, the question of *metaphor*. As a way of radicalizing the problem of language, the whole discussion on metaphor will uncover the true difficulties facing Heidegger’s attempt to raise anew the question of being and history. The first thing we should note is that Derrida strategically shifts his attention from *Being and Time* to *Introduction to Metaphysics* in order to fully delve into the problem of language. The importance of this shift vis-à-vis the problem of language should not be underemphasized. For, as Derrida rightly notes, “The problem of the relations between the *meaning*, the *signification* and the *word* in the case of the word *be* is posed as such for the first time only in the *Einführung in die Metaphysik* [41][#N41].” Specifically, Derrida will focus on the second chapter of this text titled “On the Grammar and Etymology of the Word “Being”.”

As we noted earlier, the problem of language is tied to the breakthrough made possible by the destruction of ontology, that is to say, philosophy. The destructive breakthrough is aimed at loosening up and uncovering what was covered over by the tradition, namely, the question of being and history. Hence, the difficulty of language is nothing more and nothing less than being able to push forward in the saying of the question of being without falling into storytelling, which would lead us down the path of taking Being as a being and, therefore, entirely missing the question of being by obfuscating the ontico-ontological difference. And yet, as Derrida tells us, “the essence of language must be rethought in the light of the meaning of being [42][#N42].” It is only by thinking through the essence of language as what sustains an original relation with human beings that we are able to free the question of being from the risk of storytelling. However, it is precisely by thinking the essence of language in relation to the human being that Heidegger opens up the most difficult facet of the problem of language, namely, *metaphor*.

Perhaps the most definitive statement concerning the problem of metaphor appears about halfway through the third session. Let us cite the passage at length:

When we think we know what we’re saying when we say “house” every day in common and not

poetic language, we are in metaphor. Now the thinking of the truth of being is to come but to come as what was always already buried. It follows that metaphor is the forgetting of the proper and originary meaning. Metaphor does not occur in language as a rhetorical procedure; it is the beginning of language, of which the thinking of being is however he buried origin. One does not begin with the originary; that's the first word of (hi)story [43][#N43].

To speak is already to be in metaphor: this is the proposition we arrive at if, following Derrida's reading of Heidegger, we think through the essence of language. In this sense, metaphor is not simply referring to the rhetorical procedure used primarily in poetic language. Metaphor is not simply the stuff of poetry. Instead, it aims at the most fundamental structure through which language is made possible. The beginning of language is metaphorical in the sense that it forgets the proper and originary meaning of the words it uses to convey what is said. Hence, we can begin to see why the task of destroying the history of ontology and philosophy proves to be so important. Without this destructive breakthrough, we would have remained captivated by the metaphor in its originary forgetting of the question of being. Returning to the confrontation with Hegel, we could say that Heidegger's decisive contribution vis-à-vis the problem of language is to have shown that the basic problems of philosophy do not take place simply within the realm of logic or ontology. Rather, the problem of philosophical *logos* is tied to the way in which metaphoricity is always already at play in the saying of being.

Given that metaphoricity is at the origin of language itself, Derrida tells us, "there will never be any chance for those who might think of metaphor as a *disguise* of thought or the truth of being. There will never be any chance of undressing or stripping down this naked thinking of being which was never naked and never will be [44][#N44]." Although, as Derrida will show, Heidegger is often inconsistent on this point throughout his writings, the irreducibility of metaphoricity follows from its cooriginary status. Metaphor is not something arbitrarily introduced at some point within the history of being. Rather, the problem of metaphor is nothing more and nothing less than the problem of language *itself*. For this very reason, Derrida rightly claims, "We must not turn away from, but be wary of, the very opposition of proper meaning and metaphor if we are tempted to think them as the opposition of two terms [45][#N45]." The division between the proper and metaphorical only appears through the lens of an artificial device that would try to obfuscate their cooriginary nature at the heart of the phenomenon of language. In other words, "It is in rhetorical derivatives, in the deportation far away from the poetic or from thinking, it is in philosophy that this opposition hides its meaning by presenting itself as a bipolar operation (rhetorical and philosophical) [46][#N46]." Hence, the problem of metaphoricity and language is not aided by philosophy; rather, it is all the more *exacerbated* by it. At the climax of the third session, we notice the way in which the destruction of philosophy appears at the heart of Heidegger's concerns, this time in relation to the problem of metaphor. Philosophy appears as the site in which the questions of being, history, and metaphor appear in their interrelation and, subsequently, carry the significant risk of providing a false escape from the seriousness of Heidegger's question. Thus, as Derrida will go on to say in what signals the closing remarks in the context of the third session, which we cite at length

It will turn out in particular that our pre-comprehension of the meaning of being, in so far as already it escapes from the hold of historical or structural sciences of language, at this point where it resists them, is nonetheless already marked, limited by its already *historial* provenance,

a historial provenance from which one must not liberate oneself as from a simple metaphor, but that one must repeat and understand as such [47][#N47].

The problem of metaphoricity is as irreducible as the difficulties raised by the questions of being and history. At the end of our close reading, we can clearly appreciate the way in which Derrida's reading follows the theme of the destruction of philosophy in each of the first three sessions through the lens of these three basic questions. Perhaps the most shocking revelation we have discovered through our reading is the insight into the difficulty and fragility of Heidegger's project. And yet, despite this, Derrida seems to suggest, it is also the case that we have uncovered its relevance and importance.

Conclusion

In our reading of Derrida's 1964-65 seminar, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, we have uncovered the way in which the entire problematic of *Destruktion* appears in relation to philosophy by means of the three focal questions that inform the first three sessions, namely, the questions of being, history, and metaphor. Although Derrida's fascinating and rigorous discussion of the way in which philosophy comes to be tied to the metaphysics of presence will have to be addressed in another context, I want to turn to a highly important passage that appears in the eighth session, which will allow us to gather our concluding thoughts concerning the destruction of philosophy with a view towards the closing paragraphs of the seminar as such. Hence, I cite the aforementioned passage at length, which I think can readily be admitted as one of the more decisive passages in the entire text:

The work of philosophy in general, or rather, let's say, of thinking...is basically nothing other than, in what is called science or elsewhere, than this operation of destruction of metaphor, of determined and motivated reduction of metaphor, whenever and wherever it happens. Which does not mean that one leaves the metaphorical element of language behind, but that in a new metaphor the previous metaphor appears as such, is denounced in its origin and in its metaphorical functioning and in its necessity. It appears as such. One can perhaps call thinking and the thinking of being (the thinking of being as the horizon and the appeal of an impossible non-metaphorical thought) what calls for such a gesture of de-metaphorization [48][#N48].

The task of philosophy, in the aftermath of its destruction, is nothing more and nothing less than a renewed attention to the very problem of the language in which it takes place. Paraphrasing Derrida's ambitious remark on historicity, we could say: It would be easy to show that never in the history of philosophy has there been a radical recognition of the process of metaphoricity in relationship to discursive practice. In philosophy, the fantasm of a "proper meaning" always haunted the attempts at offering a greater nuance of metaphoricity. The consequence, as we have seen, was the impossibility of even perceiving the questions of being, history, and metaphor. By taking into account the complexities of Derrida's reading, we can clearly identify the question of metaphoricity as the companion to narrativity. This point could be made even more forcefully by saying that, in a certain sense, the stories told by philosophers can be considered one elaborate metaphor. While other thinkers in the history of philosophy have offered other stories and metaphor, there is no doubt that, after Heidegger announces the task of the destruction of philosophy via the destruction of ontology, the conditions

for thought are radically displaced, that is to say, they are *transformed*. The question no longer becomes whether our stories or metaphors are adequate or not. Instead, it becomes a matter of recognizing the essence of metaphoricity as such. Heidegger's repetition of the Hegelian last philosophy is made apparent in this final moment. Nevertheless, Heideggerian destruction is not Hegelian refutation. In other words, Heidegger adds no new proposition with the destructive breakthrough. It is not a matter of introducing another metaphor, which would give rise to another story, another ontology, and another metaphysics. Rather, Heidegger's decisive contribution is to have introduced a *non-metaphorical* cipher within the very structure of metaphoricity as such. This non-metaphorical cipher, which acts as a continuation of the destructive breakthrough, is nothing more and nothing less than the very question of *being*. And while this breakthrough takes place primarily in relation to philosophy, Derrida suggests that the non-metaphorical opening made possible by the thought of being is one that radically disseminates into other fields of thought such that "There is thinking every time that this gesture occurs, in what is called science, poetry, metaphysics or elsewhere [49] [50]."

Perhaps this radically non-metaphorical thought of being is strictly speaking impossible. Derrida seems to admit at the very least the possibility of this impossibility. However, and here we see the extreme proximity between Derrida and Heidegger, the call of this impossibility nonetheless motivates the very breakthrough of destruction. The final paragraphs of the last session of Derrida's 1964-65 seminar offer us a precise description of this very sentiment, which I cite at length:

If the signification *be* is still a metaphor and if the signification *history* is thinkable only as history of being, well, the signification *history* is also, like that of Being, a metaphor to be destroyed. This destruction will not be a philosophical gesture, of course, since it is in the destruction of philosophy that the question of being as history has been brought about. This destruction will not be a gesture decided and accomplished once and for all, by someone in a book, a course, in words or deeds. It is accomplished slowly, patiently, it patiently takes hold of the whole of language, of science, of the human, of the world [50] [51].

In other words, we must let the force of the destructive breakthrough move freely within the very structures that made possible the thought of being, that is to say, the very same questions that have concerned us throughout the entirety of this essay—being, history, and metaphor. Derrida's closing remarks offer us a sober description of the task that remains ahead of destruction, namely, a patient and continuous effort of thought to persist in the process of de-metaphorization that will allow us to truly engage in the matter of thinking. But what words, concepts, and language will we use in order to remain within this destruction? The answer will, in a sense, have to be invented in a sense, that is to say, brought forth by the thinking at hand. We cannot simply expect that the answer will appear as a set of rules—an *archē*—that will govern over our thought. Rather, it will be a matter of letting the an-archic sway of thought to take hold of us. It will be a matter, I might add, of thinking, as Derrida says with a force that we will see resonate throughout the entirety of his work, "What is hidden under this other metaphor is the opening of *the question* itself: that is, of difference [51] [52]."

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Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 9. [☛ \[#N1-ptri\]](#)
2. Although the theme of the destruction of philosophy does not appear as a *central* concern in Derrida’s 1964-65 seminar, I think our reading can offer an insight into Heidegger’s complicated relationship with philosophy. We are thinking of various citations that serve as implicit epigraphs for this text. For example, “It is time to break the habit of overestimating philosophy and of thereby asking too much of it. What is needed in the present world crisis is less philosophy, but more attentiveness in thinking,” “Letter on Humanism,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 1993), 265; or “Philosophy will not be able to effect any immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all human reflection and striving,” “Der Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger,” in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 326. [☛ \[#N2-ptri\]](#)
3. Of course, we are referring to Derrida’s seminar essay, “Différance,” in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). [☛ \[#N3-ptri\]](#)
4. Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 6. [☛ \[#N4-ptri\]](#)
5. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 2. [☛ \[#N5-ptri\]](#)
6. *Ibid.* [☛ \[#N6-ptri\]](#)
7. *Ibid.* [☛ \[#N7-ptri\]](#)
8. *Ibid.* [☛ \[#N8-ptri\]](#)
9. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 3. [☛ \[#N9-ptri\]](#)
10. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 4. [☛ \[#N10-ptri\]](#)
11. *Ibid.* [☛ \[#N11-ptri\]](#)
12. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 5. [☛ \[#N12-ptri\]](#)
13. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 6. [☛ \[#N13-ptri\]](#)
14. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 7. [☛ \[#N14-ptri\]](#)
15. *Ibid.* [☛ \[#N15-ptri\]](#)

16. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 8. [\[#N16-pt1\]](#)
17. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 9. [\[#N17-pt1\]](#)
18. *Ibid.* [\[#N18-pt1\]](#)
19. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 9. [\[#N19-pt1\]](#)
20. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 21. [\[#N20-pt1\]](#)
21. *Ibid.* [\[#N21-pt1\]](#)
22. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 21. [\[#N22-pt1\]](#)
23. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 23. [\[#N23-pt1\]](#)
24. *Ibid.* [\[#N24-pt1\]](#)
25. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 23-24. [\[#N25-pt1\]](#)
26. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 24. [\[#N26-pt1\]](#)
27. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 24. [\[#N27-pt1\]](#)
28. We are obviously thinking of the highly influential work of Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987). [\[#N28-pt1\]](#)
29. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 24. [\[#N29-pt1\]](#)
30. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 24. [\[#N30-pt1\]](#)
31. *Ibid.* [\[#N31-pt1\]](#)
32. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 24-25. [\[#N32-pt1\]](#)
33. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 25. [\[#N33-pt1\]](#)
34. *Ibid.* [\[#N34-pt1\]](#)
35. Derrida, *Positions*, 57. [\[#N35-pt1\]](#)
36. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 26. [\[#N36-pt1\]](#)
37. *Ibid.* [\[#N37-pt1\]](#)
38. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 27. [\[#N38-pt1\]](#)
39. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 39. [\[#N39-pt1\]](#)
40. *Ibid.* [\[#N40-pt1\]](#)
41. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 51. [\[#N41-pt1\]](#)
42. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 56. [\[#N42-pt1\]](#)
43. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 62. [\[#N43-pt1\]](#)
44. *Ibid.* [\[#N44-pt1\]](#)
45. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 63. [\[#N45-pt1\]](#)
46. *Ibid.* [\[#N46-pt1\]](#)
47. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 73. [\[#N47-pt1\]](#)
48. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 190. [\[#N48-pt1\]](#)
49. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 190. [\[#N49-pt1\]](#)
50. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 224. [\[#N50-pt1\]](#)
51. Derrida, *Heidegger*, 225. [\[#N51-pt1\]](#)

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