

ONE



On the Overcoming of Metaphysics

We need at the very beginning of this book to meet and deal with a challenge to the very foundations of this project. Has not metaphysics, an enterprise attempting to think being and God in a comprehensive, systematic, and rigorous way, been undermined as impossible and illegitimate: impossible because it goes beyond the limits of what we can know, illegitimate because it is an attempt to incorporate, dominate, and repress the other? Kant, Heidegger, and Derrida represent three developing stages of this project of overcoming metaphysics.¹

The Dialectic of Overcoming Metaphysics

Kant

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the main source of modern and post-modern critiques of metaphysics. As is well known, this book is an inquiry into the limits of what we can know. Knowledge for Kant lies in the unity of concept and intuition. Intuitions are rooted in sensibility, concepts in understanding. Because science has access to both concepts and intuitions, scientific knowledge can be valid. I can have sensible intuitions that I organize into knowledge of "a chair" with the category of "substance." I can combine intuitions with the category of "cause" to understand the way fire cooks meat.²

If correct knowledge has two components, concept and intuition, then

metaphysical knowledge can be faulted for having only one, the concept or idea. The three basic metaphysical entities, the external thing, the subject or soul, and God, all reveal themselves to be unknowable noumena, for which we would need an intellectual intuition to know. Since such intuitions are lacking to us and the only intuitions are of sensible particulars rooted in space and time, we have to say that metaphysics as speculative knowledge of noumena is impossible. We are confined to having an objective knowledge of sensible appearances, not things in themselves.³

Reinforcing such reflections on knowledge is Kant's conception of the Copernican revolution. Formerly men and women were "realistic" in that knowledge was thought of as conformity to external reality in a passive, unmediated way. As a result of the Copernican revolution of modern science, however, we know now that knowledge occurs through active putting of questions to things. Since, however, it is presumptuous to think that reality should conform to and respond to our questions, we must say that we know only appearances, not reality. Reality would have to be an object of an unmediated, passive intuition, which is not available to us. Objective knowledge is mediated and dependent on us; objective knowledge of reality would have to be of an independent reality present to us in an unmediated way.⁴

What seems apparent, first of all, is an illegitimate dichotomy in Kant between unorganized, brute data and organizing intelligence. Phenomenologically what seems apparent is that I experience and perceive and organize wholes in a context: the brown table in the room, the television set in the corner, or the couch in the living room. Phenomenologically we can describe no such thing as bare, unmediated sense data. Even the "points" or "dots" are seen as "points" or "dots" *in a context*, for example, the white dots on a blackboard.⁵

If Kant's account of the relationship between sensible phenomena and universal categories were true, moreover, there would be nothing in our perceptual experience that could limit or constrain our interpretations of that experience. All interpretations would be equally arbitrary and equally valid. Yet reflection on our experience indicates that some interpretations of our experience are more valid than others. "Couch" is an appropriate designation for this object in my room, "broom" for this implement in the corner. Even Kant at times argues that some categories are applicable in some situations and not in others. "Cause," for example, is applicable in understanding a boat going down a river, not for interpreting a house.⁶

A second related point is that such perceptual wholes appear to us within our experience as distinct from us. The table is "there" in contrast to me "here," is thematic in contrast to my own prethematic awareness of myself as embodied, conscious, intelligent, and intending the object. Its content is independent of me, in the sense that whether I like it or not, choose it or not,

it is brown and not red, rectangular rather than circular, rough rather than smooth. The table is detachable from my experience in a way that my own lived body is not. I leave the room and thus leave the table behind, but I cannot leave my body behind. Finally, the table has objective content, verifiable by and accessible to other observers. If I were to say that it was red, circular, or smooth, they would immediately contest this claim.⁷

A further question is the following: is there any reason for distinguishing or separating the thing as present to our own experience, objective, verifiable, from a "thing in itself" as Kant does? If one takes Kant as saying that there are independent things outside experience that nonetheless exist, underlie, and cause phenomena, then the claim is self-contradictory. For I am claiming to know unknowable things in themselves, and I am using categories like "existence" or "substance" or "cause" supposedly applicable to appearances within experience to things outside experience. If we take "noumenon" or "thing in itself" as just limiting concepts, then we need to ask whether they are valid, whether they make sense. They do make a kind of sense, of course; otherwise we would not have been discussing them for three centuries. But is it not a self-contradictory sense? Does it make full, valid sense to talk about a reality totally outside and unrelated to our experience and to things within it? I think not. Moreover, as manifesting ideals of intuitive looking or taking a good look, they are invalid.⁸

Objectively perceivable things intersubjectively available in our experience are the true things in themselves. To say this is not to deny that I can make mistakes; the bent stick in the water turns out to be straight, and the beautiful woman in the department store turns out to be a dummy. But these mistakes are rectified within the course of conscious experience, and a new objectivity emerges, the "straight stick in the water" or the "department store dummy." If we wished, therefore, to save Kant's notion of thing in itself by modifying it to mean "the thing as known through a succession of perceptions that correct one another," exemplified by our corrected perceptions of the "straight stick in the water" and the "department store dummy," this emerges from within knowledge and experience, not outside them.

Where Kant seems to have erred is to have owned up to the fact that there is no unmediated knowledge, but to have held that up to an ideal of immediacy, an immediate, naked intuition of things in themselves. Rather than giving that ideal up in the light of his own quite subtle and enlightening account of human knowledge, he used that ideal to criticize mediated knowledge and find it wanting. But when we honestly, phenomenologically examine the way human beings know, the ideal is itself shown to be unfounded and arbitrary, not able to be grounded in a return to the things in Husserl's sense. Kant's ideal here shows itself to be an example of "philosophizing from on high" in Husserl's sense, using an unwarranted concept of validity that an ade-

quate account of knowledge should force us to renounce. Kant does not have the courage of his convictions and, therefore, remains a disillusioned naive realist or a half-hearted idealist.⁹

Similar reflections occur when we look at Kant's account of the second main noumenon, the soul or self. Rather than being some unknowable entity outside experience, the self is the experienced, conscious agency within experience. Here several points must be made. A) Kant's concept of experience is narrow. Experience is not only of data of sense but also of data of consciousness. When I experience, understand, and judge that the chair is in the room, I am aware not only of the sensible presence of the chair but also of myself as moving around it, looking at it, wondering about it, and using it.¹⁰

B) Intentionality is operative in at least three senses, empirical, intelligent, and rational. Intentionality includes the object intended, the act of intending, and the self as the agent intending. Correlative to the sensible gestalt are the empirical acts of seeing, touching, moving around, and lifting. Correlative to the meaning and purpose of the chair is the act of understanding it as a chair. Correlative to the reality of the chair is the act of judgment affirming it as real. Underlying and present in each of these acts is the self as their source. I see, I touch, I move around, I lift, I understand, and I judge. Not only is the self an agent and source of acts, but it also unifies them over time. Just as it is the same chair that is seen, touched, lifted, used, understood, and judged, it is the same self who sees, touches, lifts, uses, understands, and judges. This self unifies and synthesizes these activities and contents. Thus, the shape of the chair seen is integrated with the roughness of the chair touched, and they are both aspects of the same chair. Unity in the object presupposes unity in the subject, and this unity is not only thought but also experienced.¹¹

C) Just as the concept of the external thing is verified in external data of sense, so the concept of the self is verified in the experience of myself as an experiencing, understanding, and judging subject. Just as the thing is a mediated unity, experienced as given, understood as meaningful, judged as real, so the self is experienced, understood, and judged. I am aware of myself, first of all, or experience myself as experiencing, understanding, and judging. Next I explicitly thematize the meaning of these acts and their relationship to one another. Perceptual experience, for example, of the external thing as sensible gestalt leads into and is presupposed by understanding the intelligible unity understood as an answer to the questions "What is it," "Why is it," or "How is it?" Finally, I not only experience and understand the self, but I also affirm it as real. If I am an intelligible unity characterized by acts of experiencing, understanding, and judging, then I am real as subject. And this reality is verified by having recourse through reflection to data of consciousness.¹²

D) The self, therefore, is not some kind of mystical, transcendental

unity that must be thought in order to account for the unity of experience, but cannot itself be experienced and known. Nor is it an unknowable noumenon outside of experience, which can only be deduced as a presupposition of the categorical imperative. Nor is it an unverifiable soul. The self is a unifying and unified agent that is experienced, understood, and judged. It is not known through some kind of inward look or denied as knowable because this look is unavailable or conceptually deduced. E) Kant in his general account of knowledge does not distinguish between understanding as grasp of intelligible syntheses and judgment as positing syntheses to be real. Judgment as an activity is reduced too much to understanding.¹³

As with the external thing, therefore, knowledge of self emerges through experience, understanding, and judgment. What about the third of the problematic noumena, God? Here what has to be resisted is a kind of cryptopositivism in Kant, which I have already criticized and rejected. Reality is not given or presented simply or primarily through sensible experience, but through experience, understanding, and judgment. I experience not just data of sense, but also data of consciousness. Reality is given as known through the act of judgment positing a synthesis. The movement from experience to understanding to judgment, therefore, is a moving beyond the given to fuller and fuller intelligibility. Even within the empirical, constative domain, we affirm as real what is not given in the initial presented data of sense. When I see writing on a blackboard, for example, I can legitimately infer that some person wrote it, even if I never directly see the person to verify this inference.

Moreover, I have shown elsewhere that not only constative but also regulative claims in ethics and expressive claims about feelings are meaningful and valid. "Murder is wrong," for example, is a claim that does not refer to a state of affairs in the world, but it is nonetheless meaningful and valid. Furthermore, we can note a succession of ever higher viewpoints in scientific explanation and explanatory hermeneutics. In PCM I discussed a moment of psychoanalytic explanation concerning a psychological unconscious and a moment of critical sociological explanation concerning the political unconscious of capitalism. In CAL I argued for an explanatory hermeneutics of late capitalism that would flow from and complement immediate phenomenological description and hermeneutical understanding. I not only immediately experience capitalist alienation within the work place but understand and explain such alienation through accounts of surplus value and abstract labor time. Such an explanatory move is analogous to that of the scientist as he moves from experience of falling bodies to conceiving possible hypotheses to explain that experience to working out experiments that would validate or invalidate those hypotheses.¹⁴

The question that confronts us, therefore, is whether or not there is an explanatory dimension in my attempt to understand the life-world as a whole.

Is there an explanatory dimension in the domain of "absolute spirit" as there is in the domains of subjective and objective spirit? A "yes" answer seems coherent and valid since I am only following the natural bent of my mind to ask and answer all the relevant questions that arise in this domain such as "Why is there something rather than nothing?" or "Is there an intelligible ground for the concrete intelligible unities we experience and for the unity among these intelligibilities?"

A "no" answer, on the other hand, seems to be arbitrary, self-contradictory, or both. It is arbitrary because without reason I stop asking questions at a certain point and rule them out. I admit a legitimate hermeneutical-explanatory dimension in the domains of subjective spirit and objective spirit, but not in that of absolute spirit. Why? No good reason seems to be forthcoming. That the concept of God cannot be verified in data of sense is not an adequate reason for rejecting as invalid such a concept, since we have seen this criterion of meaning and validity to be false. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethics, and critical theory all make true valid claims that are not verified in data of sense.

The verifiability criterion seems to imply a reductionism of theory and explanation to the lowest level of physical science. What such reductionism misses is that any higher viewpoint as such has in it aspects that are not in lower viewpoints. Biology has notions of living things not present in physics; psychoanalysis has in it discussions of the psyche not present in biology; phenomenology has in it discussions of freedom and subjectivity not present in psychoanalysis. So also we would expect metaphysics to have a still higher viewpoint not present in phenomenology. One of these is that the notion of God is not present or verifiable directly in experience in the way either a perceived thing or the self is. Such a state of affairs is real and legitimate because that is what helps to constitute metaphysics in its distinctiveness as a higher viewpoint. That God is "transcendent" to the world and to experience means S/He is not present in the way other entities are.

The attempt to deny the legitimacy of the question of God is self-contradictory in the following way. If I posit an entity as really and intelligibly existing and then deny that the conditions and causes exist to explain it, then I am saying effectively that it exists and does not exist. If I see a drawing on the blackboard and deny that someone drew it, I am saying that on the one hand the drawing exists but on the other hand that the causes and conditions necessary to account for its existence do not. Since the causes and conditions do not exist, the drawing does not exist or should not exist; it is, as it were, hanging in mid air without adequate support for its intelligibility and existence. My affirmation of its existence and my unwillingness to affirm a complete explanation for its existence are at odds with one another. I am in contradiction with myself.¹⁵

As I will argue throughout this book, metaphysical arguments turn on this necessity of complete explanation. If, for example, the existence of things is a fact, and this fact does not find its complete explanation short of affirming God, then God must be affirmed. Metaphysics is simply the final, or if we consider faith and theology, the penultimate flowering of the mind's transcendently natural bent of questioning: what I describe as the desire to know, which we learn to take quite seriously in the areas of physics, chemistry, biology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and critical theory. Once we finish our inquiry in these areas, however, certain other questions arise: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" or "What explains the intelligibility of the world as a whole?" Again, in calling for the emergence of a higher viewpoint, these questions are analogous to those on other levels. Because data such as slips of the tongue or neurotic symptoms arise that biology cannot explain, psychoanalysis arises as a science.

Just as we do not rule out questions on these levels because they do not conform to the criteria or intelligibilities of previously attained science, so also we should not here. Why should metaphysical questions be reducible in meaning and validity to previous, more limited sciences, any more than critical theory to phenomenology, phenomenology to psychoanalysis, or psychoanalysis to biology? In a way analogous to questions and concepts on other levels, metaphysical questions and notions about being and God are not self-contradictory, are intelligible, and seem to be necessary to explain aspects of our experience that are otherwise inexplicable.

Why is complete explanation necessary? That is a legitimate question that I will not be able to answer fully until later in the book. What I wish to make at least plausible at this point is the claim that in all other domains of human inquiry we regard obscurantism and arbitrariness and self-contradictoriness as undesirable and inauthentic. My project will be to show that antipathy to metaphysics, the refusal to allow ourselves questions beyond this finite world, is similarly obscurantist, self-contradictory, and inauthentic. To take myself fully seriously as human being, knower, chooser, and doer, I need to affirm and choose and love being and God.

If metaphysical questions are legitimate, then attempts to rule them out are arbitrary, obscurantist, and self-contradictory. I arbitrarily cut the process of questioning short at a certain point. In this way I am unfaithful to the mind's and spirit's desire for total, nonarbitrary rigor and explanation. I refuse, in a way that contradicts the imperatives of intelligence and reasonableness, to be fully intelligent and reasonable. Metaphysics and religious belief, contrary to their modern and postmodern critics, are not the negation and sacrifice of reason and freedom but their final fulfillment and flowering.

Heidegger

Late Heidegger was, at least by the early 1930s, shifting from the project of grounding metaphysics to one of overcoming it in works like "What is Metaphysics?" Building on and drawing on Kant's critique of metaphysics, he criticizes not only the possibility but the desirability of metaphysics. Metaphysics is not possible nor desirable because it is a project tending to occlude being, cover it over, dominate it. Metaphysics can have three meanings: the systematic, evidential science of being as such culminating in the knowledge of God; a systematic articulation of the structures of finite being in the world (an example is Sartre's ontology of freedom and thingness in *Being and Nothingness*); and a rational orientation to comprehend the world systematically and evidentially, while rejecting metaphysics in the first and second senses. Habermas's work in *The Theory of Communicative Action* is an example of "metaphysical thinking" in this sense.¹⁶

I read later Heidegger's critique of metaphysics as focusing on metaphysics in the latter two senses. The legitimacy of Kant's critique is assumed, but what comes into question is the possibility and desirability of metaphysical thinking in the latter two senses. We might say that Heidegger broadens and deepens the critique inaugurated by Kant. The problem is not just with illegitimate "God-talk" or "soul-talk" taking us beyond the limits of reason, but with that reason itself as it operates in all spheres. Later postmodernists such as Derrida and Foucault will take up Heidegger's critique and attempt to bring it to completion. "Philosophy as . . . rigorous . . . science—the dream is over."¹⁷

In "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger pursues the question of being differently from his earlier work, in a way that points toward the overcoming of metaphysics. Modern science has forgotten the original task of revealing beings in their essence and has moved into a prediction and control based upon the will to will. In a manner akin to the objectivizing tendencies of modern science, metaphysics has attempted to describe being by reconceptualizing the "is-ness" of what is. In so doing, metaphysics moves everywhere in the truth of being without being able to think adequately or articulate that truth. Because metaphysics forgets its ground by attempting to objectify being, an inquiry into being must overcome metaphysics. Such a thinking, because it transcends the calculative orientation of science to what is expedient and inexpedient, is a sacrifice, an offering of the thinker to being that does not count the cost. The thinker, in trying to reveal being, becomes the guardian of the incalculable truth of being. In opening up to the truth of being, the thinker becomes aware of thinking as a kind of thanking. As Heidegger says in another work, because being is a gift that is most thought-provoking, the "supreme thanks would be thinking."¹⁸

The move to a thinking beyond metaphysics, then, occurs because later Heidegger begins to see clearly that the end of metaphysics is technology. As later Greek thinkers such as Plato move into a conceptual attempt to think being as form, essence, and structure, being as the incalculable, the mysterious, and ultimate context of contexts recedes. As modern philosophy and science emerge with Descartes and Galileo, this tendency toward thinking as system, as control, as domination increases. Thinking in science and philosophy becomes more and more an attempt to master being. Technology is the final fruit of the history of Western metaphysics. Being has degenerated into the calculable and thinking into mere calculation. "Most thought-provoking about this thought-provoking time is that we are still thinking."¹⁹ In so forgetting both being and thinking, we have moved into a calculative thinking that is murderous, that has killed the truth of being.

With the degeneration of thinking into calculative thinking, thought becomes a representing, an objectifying:

Here to represent (*vor-stellen*) means to bring what is present at hand (*das Vorhandene*) before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm.²⁰

The dominance of representing and the subject is the essence of modernity.

The fact that what presences—e.g. nature, man, history, language—sets itself forth as the real in its objectness, the fact that as a complement to this science is transformed into theory that entraps the real and secures it in its objectness, would have been as strange to medieval man as it would have been dismaying to Greek thought.²¹

As the dominance of representing emerges, the thinker is replaced by the scholar and the scholar by the researcher. Science as research organizes the world according to a division of labor within the sciences. Historiography, for example, turns history into an object and has more in common with physics than with humanistic science grounded in scholarship. The triumph of research creates a different kind of person, on the move, in a hurry, no longer needing a library at home, negotiating at meetings, collecting information at congresses, contracting for commissions with publishers, who now determine with him which books must be written. The thinker has given way to the academic entrepreneur; he wheels and deals like Donald Trump. Because research is ongoing activity (*Betrieb*), it is always in danger of degenerating into mere "busyness" (*des blossen Betriebs*). The business of America is business or "busyness." Because science as research needs to be organized, sys-

tematized, and administered, the modern university arises as the institutional home of research.²²

With the triumph of the representing subject, our relationship to nature is altered. Nature is no longer a presence to be revered but an object to be dominated, no longer a source of inspiration but a means of profit. The triumph of subjectivity leads to an instrumentalizing of nature, which becomes a mere object to be raped and plundered for profit. The hydroelectric plant on the Rhine makes even the Rhine itself appear as something at our command. The Rhine is set into a technological system of means and ends. The plant sets the Rhine to supplying hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning and generating the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge joining bank to bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. If someone were to object to these reflections that the Rhine is still a river that can be viewed contemplatively as part of the landscape, Heidegger's answer is succinct: "In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry."²³

Heidegger defines his own version of thinking in opposition to technocratic, metaphysical thinking. Metaphysical thinking is conceptual; Heidegger's thinking is nonconceptual. Technocratic thinking is ordered toward domination; *Denken* is inclined to reverent openness toward being. Whereas metaphysical thinking puts questions to the world in a way that allows the world to conform to it, Heidegger's thinking is a receptive listening. Whereas metaphysical thinking is objective, Heidegger's thinking is nonobjective. Metaphysical thinking is methodical and systematic; nonsystematic and nonmethodical approaches characterize thinking. Metaphysical thinking is oriented toward the thematic; the nonthematic context of being is the *telos* of Heidegger's thinking. If metaphysical thinking is so subjective that it does not allow being to reveal itself, Heidegger's thinking is permeated by a care that justice be done to what has presented itself for thinking. If metaphysical thinking is serious, *Denken* is playful, a play that responds in celebration and thankfulness to the world's play. If metaphysical, technocratic thinking is noisy and busy, postmetaphysical thinking is quiet and slow-moving, a saying that is "the ringing of stillness."²⁴

To conclude my exposition of Heidegger's thought, let us consider one more example of thinking in his sense. When we sit in a garden and take delight in a blossoming rose, he says, we do not make an object of it in the sense of representing it thematically. When in tacit saying we are enthralled with the lucid red of the rose, this redness is not an object nor even a thing like the blossoming rose. The rose stands in the garden and sways in the wind, but the redness of the rose neither stands in the garden nor sways in the wind.

Nonetheless we can think this "redness" and say it by naming it. "There is accordingly a thinking and a saying that in no manner objectifies or places-over-against."²⁵

What are we to think of this very powerful and illuminating attempt to overcome metaphysics and think being? Let us look, first of all, at three initial difficulties. Heidegger's claim about thinking in his sense is that it is non-conceptual. Yet he also claims that we think through language, and language is nothing if not conceptual. Indeed Heidegger's own language seems replete with concepts and universals, "concealment," "unconcealment," "presence," "technology," and so on. Part of the power of the later Heidegger lies in his developing a whole set of new concepts to help us understand our predicament. By "concept" here I mean an articulated, definite intelligible notion with universal applicability to many different situations and instances.

Furthermore, Heidegger's claim is that his own thinking is nonthematic. Yet the experience of thinking as we perform it seems to be one of moving from prethematic to thematic, implicit to explicit, empty to full, vague to definite. For example, the thinker, in contrast to one who does not think in Heidegger's sense, becomes explicitly aware of the danger of technology, the role of tradition and language in thought, and the way in which the rose is not an object. The thinker brings into explicit, thematic focus, perhaps for the first time, what we all experience but have not articulated to ourselves. The role of thinker in the modern era and in all eras, one that Heidegger fulfills preeminently, is to call us to explicit awareness of ourselves and of being. Heidegger's practice, then, and what we experience when we try to follow him on the path of thinking, seem to be in tension with his own account of thinking.

If Heidegger's attempt to think being, therefore, is conceptual and thematic, then his attempt to think being is itself metaphysical, in contradiction to his attempt to overcome metaphysics. Heidegger's is a determinate ontology, expressed in the key words of "es gibt," more oriented to the neutral than the personal, to the Greeks than to the Hebrews, to Nietzsche than to Kierkegaard. As such an ontology, however, it cannot assume the privilege of opposing all other ontologies by confining them inside the bounds of the metaphysical.²⁶

After these preliminary considerations, we are now prepared for a more direct phenomenological approach. My basic claim here is that one must distinguish among at least eight kinds of objectivity and objectification. Because these are logically and phenomenologically distinct, it is a mistake to confuse them or to lump them together. Heidegger's rejection of objective, metaphysical knowing rests upon such a confusion.²⁷

First, the most fundamental kind of objectivity is perceptual, because all others presume it. To perceive something is to perceive it as distinct from me, emerging from a background. To be aware of the table in my room, for exam-

ple, is to be aware of it as distinct from me, present in and emerging from the context of the rest of the room, apartment, and so on. I am aware of the table as distinct from me because of the experienced difference between myself and the table. As we saw in discussing Kant, in contrast to my own lived body, which is not detachable from me, the table is detachable from me. In contrast to my own presence "here," the table is over "there." I cannot leave the room without my body, but I can leave the room without the table. Indeed it makes good, ordinary language sense to say that I lost or misplaced or forgot an object such as my pen, but not to say that I lost or misplaced or forgot my body.²⁸

A second kind of objectivity is that of the universal known through such disciplines as science, mathematics, formal logic, and philosophy. In contrast to a particular, perceived object, the universal is nonparticular, applicable to many. For example, the particular triangular thing is not the same as the definition of a triangle. In contrast to the imaginableness of the perceived object, the universal is not imaginable. A perceived circle has width in its lines and points, but a conceived circle has no width in its lines and points.²⁹

A third kind of objectivity is factual objectivity, that which is present in the "yes" and "no" of judgment. In contrast to the objectivity of the universal, factual objectivity gets at facts. This kind of objectivity gets beyond what is merely true to what in fact is true. The mathematical definition of triangle is true, but that there are particular triangular things is a fact. Factual truth gets us beyond what is merely hypothetical or possible. When the scientist entertains the theory of relativity as a hypothesis, he is considering the merely possible. When he verifies such a hypothesis, then he knows a fact.³⁰

A fourth kind of objectivity is thematic. The most obvious example is perception, in which a thematically perceived thing is seen in an implicitly known context. But thematization is present on other levels as well, for example, when I imagine a beautiful woman or remember Velasquez's *Rokeby Venus* at the National Gallery in London or think about a mathematical problem. Indeed thematization is the most universal kind of objectification. Following Gurwitsch, we could say that all levels of conscious experience are characterized by a theme or figure emerging from a background.³¹

A fifth kind of objectivity is that of expression. When I put into words an idea of which I have had only a glimmering or put on canvas a picture only vaguely, inadequately conceived, or compose on the piano a piece of music that was merely inchoate in my mind, then I am objectifying through expression. In a real sense I only fully know what I want to say when I have said it.³²

A sixth kind of objectification is degradation. When I whistle at a beautiful woman walking down the street or gratuitously insult someone, I am engaging in an alienating kind of objectification. Alienating objectification is one that is inappropriate to the sphere in question. The attempt to quantify or

control being technically, objectification of which Heidegger is very critical, is a kind of inappropriate objectification.³³

A seventh kind of objectification is normative. When I tell a person who has been provoked to “be objective” or “be rational,” to give the voice of reason priority over other voices, I am asking that person to be objective in this sense. Normative objectivity is fidelity to the dictates of inquiring intelligence and reasonableness as they are present in different fields of inquiry, for example, consistency, comprehensiveness, and empirical fruitfulness in the physical sciences or emotional expressiveness in the arts. With normative objectivity, the disjunction between objectivity and value breaks down. Norms are values or criteria governing what is to count as true or false, good or bad, beautiful or ugly.³⁴

Finally, experiential objectivity is the last kind of objectivity. Experiential objectivity is the given set of data necessary for verifying hypotheses in different areas of inquiry, sensible data in the physical sciences, memories of childhood experience in psychoanalysis, and data of consciousness in phenomenology. If such data are lacking, the hypothesis or insight remains merely a bright idea, possibly true or possibly false.³⁵

What should be clear, first of all, is that these kinds of objectivity are distinct. Perceiving a thing is not the same as thinking about a thing scientifically or technically; thinking about a person scientifically or technically is not the same as thinking about or thematizing that person’s subjectivity philosophically. When I thematize the character of freedom as *nihilation* in the manner of Sartre, I am thematizing universally but I am not turning freedom into a scientific or perceived object. When I uncover through eidetic reflection the nature of consciousness as temporal, I am reflectively objectifying consciousness as “nothing,” but I am not turning it into a perceived or scientifically quantifiable object. Indeed such phenomenological reflection, moving from implicit to explicit, prethematic to thematic, enables us to see clearly and cogently for ourselves what distinguishes us from objects. Claims about freedom and dignity are not only edifying but verifiable.

Again, degrading or alienating consciousness is not the same as thematization. Such alienation, we might say, is a kind of thematization, but not all thematization is degradation. When I compliment a person on her character or work, I am thematizing her, but I am not degrading her nor does she experience it as such. Rather she experiences such a compliment as enhancing and liberating. Indeed at times we want to be objectified. When I go to a psychoanalyst, I wish him to articulate and help me articulate what my neuroses are. When I have a broken leg, I want the doctor to objectify my leg competently. I-thou interaction between doctor and patient nicely complements but is no substitute for such necessary objectification.

With the above points in mind, therefore, we can ask Heidegger whether

being is an object. As initially experienced contextually as that from which objects emerge, it is not. But as philosophically articulated in such notions as “the fourfold,” “presence,” and “unconcealment” arising from concealment, it certainly has to be. Such objectification, however, is not occluding but rather revealing, not alienating but liberating. In moving us from an implicit to an explicit awareness of being, Heidegger thematically helps us to move away from the false objectifications of technocracy present in late capitalism and state socialism.

Heidegger at the very least confuses perceptual, universally scientific, thematic, and alienating objectivity. In making such a point against Heidegger, however, I do not wish to deny that he has a valid critique of claims for total objectification. Because of our rootedness in the world and in language, no objectification can be total. Some partial objectifications, however, can be enlightening and liberating. For these reasons we have to deny Heidegger’s equation of alienation with objectification. It is wrong to equate as he does conceptual thinking with domination and metaphysical thinking with technocracy. Objectifying persons and the world is not only unavoidable but at times can reveal and illumine. If the identification of alienation with metaphysical objectification is false, then the way to metaphysics remains open.³⁶

This is not to say, however—and here I come to my second, main critical point—that much of later Heidegger’s discussion of thinking in relation to being should not be retained, somehow, by philosophy. My strategy here is to deny any sharp cleavage between objective, conceptual thought and *Denken* in the proper sense and to include within conceptual philosophy and metaphysics many of the traits that Heidegger ascribed to thinking. Any philosophical thought worthy of the name, I argue, will be concerned not to impose criteria on the evidence subjectively, to allow being to reveal itself to the thinker, to be passionately grateful for the gift of being vouchsafed to thought. Heidegger’s negation of conceptual philosophy enables us to recover certain essential dimensions of philosophy itself, too often left out in overly objectivistic, positivistic versions of philosophy.³⁷

Properly conceived, *Denken* is a part of philosophy, at least in the sense of philosophy containing meditative, receptive, and affective dimensions. *Denken* in the sense of a quasi-poetic practice of meditation and contemplation, which can take secular and religious forms, is not and should not be reduced to philosophy. But just by itself, apart from Heidegger’s metaphilosophical scaffolding, *Denken* does not imply rejection of philosophy and metaphysics as legitimate enterprises. *Denken* is just one more practice or activity, running alongside of and complementing our philosophical practice. Indeed *Denken* in this sense can aid philosophical reflection, moving it into the depths, helping it to be open and receptive to experience, and enabling it to avoid the superficial, conceptual wrangling that betrays philosophy.

I propose to include elements of *Denken* within philosophy by invoking four transcendental precepts. Corresponding to the level of a descriptive phenomenology attempting to be faithful to the evidence, there is the precept “be attentive.” Corresponding to an eidetic, reflective level attempting to rigorously, consistently think and define what it understands, Husserl’s distinctness, there is the precept “be intelligent.” Corresponding to the reflective marshaling and evaluating of evidence in order to arrive at true eidetic claims, Husserl’s clarity, there is the precept “be rational.” Corresponding to a chosen openness to being and to tradition exercising a claim over us to be responded to in dialogal openness, there is the precept “be responsible.” These transcendental precepts taken together map a movement of knowing from description to understanding to judgment to choice. They are transcendental in a traditional phenomenological sense, because they express an a priori structure of knowing and choosing that philosophy both reflects on and articulates. Because all of the precepts are implemented by and chosen by a freedom open to what is not itself, they are the work of subjectivity. But such subjectivity is not the one-sided, dominating kind of subjectivity rightly criticized by Heidegger but a subjectivity that chooses not to dominate, that wills not to will.³⁸

Transcendental method in phenomenology, therefore, is reflection on myself in relation to being as an experiencing, understanding, judging, and choosing subject. For this reason, and this is my third major critical point, I reject the dichotomy between truth and method, the transcendental and the ontological posited not only by Heidegger but Gadamer as well. Truth and being in philosophy become something arrived at through the method of description, eidetic understanding, judgment, and decision.³⁹

Fourth, we avoid the one-sidedness of an exclusive reliance either on belonging or on objectifying distanciation. Heidegger reminds us that prior to all explanation and critique is a primordial belonging to tradition and being that cannot and should not be totally conceptualized. It is this belonging that Heidegger refers to when he suggests that we do not objectify or thematize language, but rather that we think out of language. To objectify totally in this sense would be to run the risk of totalitarian arrogance toward experience that would be sheer folly. If I am correct, however, a distanciating objectification is possible that is not only compatible with such belonging but completes it and realizes it. When an author objectifies his meaning in a text, that objectification frees his text from the confining spatial and temporal limits of a merely oral presentation and makes his thought accessible to those in other places and other times.

Finally, my suggested alternative to Heidegger should not be interpreted as an uncritical acceptance of or merely reformist adaptation to modernity. Rather, sharing his critical disillusionment with modernity and desiring to overcome its pathological aspects, I advocate a critique and suspicion based

on legitimate objectification. Rather than a *Denken* turned toward the past, I advocate a suspicion oriented toward a present and future, theoretical and practical praxis. Rather than simply rejecting tradition, however, as some in the traditions of Marxism and critical theory are inclined to do, I use it as a source of enlightenment and inspiration, critique and praxis. Such a criticism is one that is redemptive, both critically and hermeneutically, relating to the past not only respectfully but eliciting its utopian potential for the present and the future. Recalling the Rhine the way it was before the onslaught of modern industry can not only enlighten us about the being covered over and destroyed by such industry, but points toward a practice that, by changing the social relations underlying such alienation, would allow being to reveal itself once again.⁴⁰

Part of the tradition that needs to be redeemed is the metaphysical tradition itself. Rather than seeing that as wholly or primarily all of a piece, as Heidegger does, especially in the form that it takes after Descartes, I would see the metaphysical tradition as dialectically at odds with itself. In it is not only the tendency toward a one-sided alienation, objectification, and domination but also a movement toward a critical, self-conscious recovery of self and world at odds with the tendency toward alienation. For these reasons, descriptive, eidetic phenomenology, itself the product of the Enlightenment as Husserl saw in the *Crisis*, can be used as critical fulcrum for transcending modernity in its pathological aspects. His discovery of the life-world, for example, can be used as a ground for criticizing positivism and scientism.⁴¹

Such transcendence, however, can only take place if eidetic phenomenology is wedded to hermeneutics and suspicion. Indeed if there is a turn toward history even for phenomenology itself, as Husserl saw in the *Crisis*, and a hermeneutics of suspicion must complement a hermeneutics of respect or retrieval, as Gadamer and Ricoeur have both seen, then suspicion and critique are essential for eidetic, descriptive phenomenology itself. Hermeneutics is the crucial middle term between eidetic, descriptive phenomenology and suspicion.⁴²

It might be appropriate to conclude my discussion of Heidegger by returning to his examples of nonobjective encounter mentioned in my text; the Rhine, language, and the rose. In contrast to Heidegger's accounts of the Rhine, rose, and jug, I would say that they are present to us objectively in various ways: as perceived, as thematized, as experienced, as judged, as normatively related to me. While agreeing with Heidegger that language is present to us nonobjectively as a sedimented context out of which we think and speak and write, I argue that there are also objective dimensions to language as well. Language is conceptual, is expressed in books and documents, and is thematized by philosophical reflection. Such thematization of the sphere of belonging that is initially preobjective or nonobjective, so important in an era that

tends not to recognize these aspects of being, is a task that Heidegger inspires us to take up and pursue, but also one that eventually leads us beyond Heidegger.

Derrida

Derrida sees himself as bringing to a completion Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics. Heidegger, because he thinks being in terms of presence and truth as a process of moving from concealment to unconcealment or presence, is still caught within the metaphysical tradition. "Heideggerian thought would reinstate rather than destroy the instance of the logos and of the truth of being as 'primum signatum,' the 'transcendental signified' . . ."

This tradition attempts to think being as presence in a way that is logocentric and phonocentric: logocentric in the sense that being manifests and gives rise to an intelligibility that is systematic and evidential, phonocentric in the sense that such a logos gives a priority to voice and speech as loci of full, present self-evidence. "The logos of being, 'Thought obeying the Voice of Being,' is the first and last resource of the sign, of the difference between *signans* and *signatum*."⁴³

While admitting that one cannot definitively do without metaphysical concepts, Derrida nonetheless attempts to think beyond them or point beyond them. He does this, first of all, by opposing the notion of *différance* to that of presence. *Différance* indicates that meaning differs from itself and is deferred, never fully present. The meaning of "red," for example, cannot be fully understood without relating to a whole system of color words such as "green," "black," "white," and so on. Moreover, meaning is deferred because of temporality. Any meaning in the present refers to a past that is no longer and a future that is yet to come. Thus, a scientific hypothesis emerges from a whole set of prior perceptions and ideas, and anticipates a future verification rendering it true or false. Because meaning is structured by *différance* in this sense, Derrida claims to have effectively undermined presence and, therefore, metaphysics.⁴⁴

To the concept of phonocentrism Derrida opposes the notion of writing. What he means by this notion is not writing in the normal sense, putting pen to paper in a way that leads to publishable script, but a system of structured significations that informs our speaking and acting in the world. Indeed through a grammatology one can discover a number of such structures as "*différance*" or "supplementarity" that remain more or less hidden from our ordinary consciousness and need to be thematized by postmetaphysical reflection.⁴⁵

To the concept of logocentrism Derrida contrasts the more legitimate notion and practice of deconstruction. Initially concepts in the metaphysical

tradition such as “speech” deemed to be central turn out to require apparently more marginal concepts and realities such as “writing.” Deconstruction, then, using such concepts as “*différance*” and “writing,” aims to subvert the centrality and dominance of the metaphysical tradition. Indeed there is an ethical thrust to Derrida’s work that moves to enlist deconstruction on behalf of the marginalized human other, woman, African-American, Latin American peasant, gay, or laborer, done violence to by an unjust socio-economic system. “Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.”⁴⁶

The first question that arises concerns the apparent self-contradictoriness of Derrida’s project. How can one use fruitfully the concepts from an allegedly bankrupt tradition to overcome that tradition? If these concepts are used, why is not this overcoming as bankrupt and invalid as the concepts used? Why is there here not something like the paradox of the broken ladder that Wittgenstein uses at the end of the *Tractatus*, using the ladder of metaphysics to overcome it and then throwing it away as broken, bankrupt, and invalid?⁴⁷

Much ink has been spilled on this issue in the philosophical literature. Many think Derrida gets himself off the self-referential hook by his admitting that he cannot avoid using metaphysical concepts in his enterprise. Why, I would ask, does not that move intensify the contradiction: “I am using the concepts of metaphysics to overcome it, and I admit that I am.” Elsewhere, he names the contradiction by talking about the double gesture of staying within the tradition and moving outside it. One way that that talk of double gesture would be noncontradictory would be that he intends the phrase in the dialectical sense of *Aufhebung*: preservation, retention, and transcendence of the tradition. Dialectic, however, is a concept and method of the metaphysical tradition, and most of the time Derrida refers to what he is doing as different from dialectic and is also quite negative about dialectic.⁴⁸

Other strategies of evasion, ways of avoiding the performative hook, are available, which I have considered elsewhere. One is the attempt to evade the charge of performative contradiction by saying that what Derrida’s argument amounts to is not an argument in the sense of a set of linked propositions but a gesture or series of gestures, and gestures cannot be self-contradictory. My first response is to say that even though gestures may be one strategy in Derrida’s arsenal, present more dominantly in literary works like *Glas* or *The Post Card*, he uses argument massively in more “philosophical” works like *Of Grammatology*, *Margins of Philosophy*, or *Writing and Difference*. It is this presence of a serious, conceptual, argumentative dimension that is insisted upon by some of his more reliable interpreters like Gasche or Norris, who wish to rescue him from the Yale literary critics stressing the more literary, aesthetic, gestural side. To the extent that such argument is present, the issue of performative contradiction remains.⁴⁹

My second response is to say that gesture as such can only manifest difference, not superiority. But the postmodernist means to assert the superiority of his stance over that of metaphysics. Metaphysical presence is inferior to “*différance*,” speech is inferior to that of writing, logocentrism is inferior to that of deconstruction. Gesturing, however, just manifests difference, not superiority. Oddly enough the postmodernist recourse to gesture leaves the doing of metaphysics quite in order.⁵⁰

Another common strategy of evasion is the charge of enlightenment blackmail. In accusing the postmodernist of performative self-contradiction, I am employing the standards of validity that he, as someone critical of the metaphysical tradition out of which such standards arise, would not accept. My response is to distinguish between explicit positing and implicit normative presupposing. To explicitly posit the principle of contradiction without argumentation would be an invalid begging of the question. To argue that the postmodernist implicitly presupposes it and other values of communicative rationality in making his claim is not. If postmodernists say to me that Western rationality is logocentric, they presumably mean that claim to be true, comprehensible, sincere, and right in the sense of not violently or manipulatively forcing me to accept it, and noncontradictory. They mean implicitly to deny the contradictory claim that Western rationality is not logocentric. There is an implicit, communicative presupposing of evidential rationality that is at odds with the postmodernist’s rejection of it. In other words, the postmodernist’s explicit rejection of Western, communicative rationality is performatively self-contradictory. I am not imposing my standards on them; they are using them themselves to make the argument and I am just describing a validity they are already presupposing. If they do not presuppose such validity, their argument falls to the ground.⁵¹

For this reason, many try to get off the performative hook by resorting to the nonargumentative or supraargumentative, gestural, or aesthetic; here is one reason for the appeal of the aesthetic in the postmodernist discourse as a whole. If this move is made, however, postmodernism has committed its own form of blackmail. It has to presuppose dogmatically the validity of the standpoint from which it speaks. From the point of view of postmodern being or *différance*, neither ontic nor logocentric reason is sufficient or adequate. But what if we denizens of the ontic want reasons, argument, evidence of some kind for moving beyond the mere ontic into the homeland of being and *différance*? Then postmodernism has the option of merely continuing to proclaim prophetically or poetically from on high that we should move to its exalted place, or beginning to discuss, argue, and convince us with reasons. At that point the issue of performative contradiction arises again.

The full dilemma for the postmodernist is one of self-contradiction versus arbitrariness: self-contradiction if one wishes communicatively and argu-

mentatively to redeem the claim that we should transcend Western rationality, arbitrariness if one wishes aesthetically or prophetically or gesturally to assert merely the truth or preferability of its position. In my experience of reading and discussing, there are argumentative and esoteric postmodernists, those who dominantly argue at the price of self-contradiction and those who dominantly assert or suggest at the price of arbitrariness. The postmodern text as a whole moves back and forth inconsistently between these positions, but individual postmodernist thinkers are temperamentally inclined to one or the other position as a general rule. Part of the difficulty in discussions between modernist and postmodernist is this moving back and forth between the terrain of argumentation and that of prophecy. One can learn much from the most insightful in both camps of postmodernism, but both are caught on the horns of a dilemma.⁵²

One final strategy of evasion available to Derrideans is the changed Derridean text of the 1980s and 1990s, which, in works like *The Other Heading*, *Limited Inc.*, and *Spectres of Marx*, has become much more positive about certain aspects of the Western tradition, especially in its attention to universal ethical rights, to justice, and to radical social critique indebted to the Marxist tradition. Indeed in *Limited Inc.* he describes himself as always having been a serious philosopher and never having rejected criteria of validity and interpretation and the laws of logic. If so, we are tempted to ask, what happens to the gestural defense of performative contradiction? Is not logical and performative inconsistency a more serious issue than the earlier Derrida and his followers were willing to admit?⁵³

Many issues arise here; the main one, I think, is the relationship of the later to the earlier Derridean text. I am inclined to think that there is a postmodern Derrida I of the 1960s and 1970s and a modernist Derrida II of the 1980s and 1990s, reversing Heidegger's trajectory from an early modernism to a later postmodernism. To the extent that the later Derrida is modernist or approximates modernism, uttering the Prufrockian, "That's not what I meant, that's not what I meant at all" to earlier, more extreme interpretations of him, we can ask further questions. If we accept the validity of the later stance, and I confess to finding a great deal of validity in a more obviously philosophical and radical Derrida out of his Marxist closet at last, is not the case against the legitimacy and possibility of metaphysics weakened? Or, if he wishes to be antimetaphysical in all three senses, is there not extreme tension between this position and his chastened Western universalism and radicalism? Are not these metaphysical also? Does not the emergence of a more "sane," "rational," and "responsible" Derrida, whatever be the relationship to his own earlier work, implicitly reopen the case for metaphysics in all three senses?⁵⁴

So the discussion goes! I hope I have done enough to show how difficult it is for the postmodernist to wiggle off the performative hook. Because