



The Movement of Thinking: Hegel – Heidegger – Derrida
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Summary

THE MOVEMENT OF THINKING

HEGEL – HEIDEGGER – DERRIDA

In this dissertation I read Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida as thinkers of *movement*. They explicitly locate the heart of their thinking in its development, movement or pathway, rather than in its results or conclusions. I give the name ‘indirect’ to such an attempt to exceed what can be *posited* in a theoretical *position*, what can be contained in a *proposition*, or of what can be determined or decided through *opposition* (pro or contra, yes or no).

The investigation’s initial question concerns Derrida: how to criticize such an indirect discourse that avoids commitment to an unequivocal position? In order to answer that question I ask what the sense of his indirectness is, and what necessitates it.

In CHAPTER ONE I identify Derrida’s writings as structurally indirect, by showing through a reading of *De la grammatologie* how even what is commonly taken to be his most unequivocal ‘position’ (his new ‘account’ or ‘theory’ of language as writing [*écriture*]) is in fact no ‘rival account’ to language’s traditional determination, but undermines the very possibility to form such an ‘account’.

That impossibility is not itself posited; Derrida’s writing suffers from the very ‘incompetence of science’ it attempts to explicate. That reflexive or performative complexity is characteristic of his attempt to explicate the limits of the ‘logocentric metaphysics’ that for Derrida permeates even the attempt to put it in question. Whereas Derrida’s writing has been seen as the attempt to find a *way out* of this metaphysics, I argue in CHAPTER TWO that *alterity is not externality*, and that Derrida is acutely aware of the fact that the idea of an ‘outside’ remains tributary to the very oppositionality it purports to exceed. This has consequences for the possibility of a critique of Derrida.

In CHAPTER THREE I show that critiques of Derrida have often centered around accusations of ‘empiricism’ (‘free play’ or lack of justification) and of skepticism (whether as self-refutation, ‘performative self-contradiction’ or relativism). Both ‘sides’ in this debate are problematic: as necessary as it has been to distinguish Derrida’s work from relativism, it is equally insufficient to point to Derrida’s assurance that deconstruction simply ‘is not’ skepticism. Instead, the question of critique must be elevated above the very oppositionality (here: of defense and refutation) that Derrida attempted to exceed. This shows Derrida’s intriguing entanglement with empiricism, skepticism and critique, precisely *in* his explicit opposition to them. That

ambiguity is the mark of the vulnerability of an indirect discourse that is no simple skepticism but that cannot *safeguard* itself against it either.

If Derrida does not form a counter-position to metaphysics, then (1) his critical relation to Hegel and Heidegger is not as oppositional as it may seem; (2) this enables a reading of Hegel and Heidegger as ‘indirect’ thinkers of *movement* in their own right. This is what I show in parts two and three.

PART TWO focuses on Hegel. In CHAPTER FOUR, I locate the origin of Hegel’s movement in an awareness analogous to Derrida’s: the attempt to exceed the oppositionality of the ‘understanding’ or of ‘reflection’ in the face of the impossibility of *opposing* (something to) it. This results in an inextricability of philosophical form and content: what ‘exceeds’ reflection is its own ‘movement’. That makes this movement *essentially implicit*, and its presentation [*Darstellung*] is primarily a *problem* for Hegel. I show how Hegel’s presentation does not finally *transform* the implicit *into* the explicit (by making it present or positive), but that it shows the movement of determinations (their ‘excess’) *in* and *through* those very determinations.

In CHAPTER FIVE I show through readings of Derrida’s *Tympan* and *Hors livre: Préfaces* how at the level of the *content* of his writings, Derrida maintains a structural ambiguity between a ‘Hegelianism’ (a merely ‘reappropriating dialectics’ or movement that reverts all negativity back to positivity) *against* which he defines his own project, and a different Hegel who exceeds this positivity. Derrida *enacts* this undecidability through ‘textual maneuvers’ with which he departs from Hegel without simply opposing him.

PART THREE focuses on Heidegger. The performativity of Heidegger’s indirectness reaches a high point in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* as it asks the question what language would be adequate to say the ‘withdrawal’ of being [*Seyn*]. That question is intimately connected to Heidegger’s diagnosis of the language in *Sein und Zeit* as having been ‘still too metaphysical’. In CHAPTER SIX I argue that with the *Beiträge*’s ‘poietic saying’ Heidegger does not target a ‘new’ language that would *overcome* such a failure, but a different (reticent) *attunement* to the ‘old’ language; which explains what Heidegger means by a saying of the ‘truth of being’ that, in ‘bearing silence’ [*Erschweigung*], recognizes and preserves being as ‘sheltered’ *in* beings.

In CHAPTER SEVEN I consider the ambiguity of Derrida’s relation to Heidegger in two ways. (1) The first is analogous to Derrida’s relation to Hegel. Through a reading of Derrida’s *Éperons. Les styles de Nietzsche*, I show how, on the level of its content, Derrida defines his own work against the constraints of Heidegger’s ‘onto-hermeneutics’ while also recognizing the potential of Heidegger’s *Ereignis* to disrupt the horizon of the ‘hermeneutic circle’. On the level of the text’s form, Derrida departs from that hermeneutic horizon without simply opposing it, through the enactment of a Nietzschean ‘plurality

of styles'. (2) Secondly, I show through a reading of *De l'esprit* that though Derrida criticizes Heidegger for *avoiding* certain themes (gender, politics, race, animality, the body) he simultaneously asserts that this underrepresentation cannot simply be *countered* or amended by making them 'present'. Derrida's critical relation now becomes a form of exceeding without being able to go 'beyond' Heidegger: he recognizes an unavoidable avoidance and a certain necessity to reaffirm Heidegger's 'privilege of the question' in the attempt to put it in question. In this inability to question the question or to avoid avoidance, Derrida recognizes an *affirmation* that is the expression of what he calls *responsibility*.

I end by showing that Derrida's affirmative responsibility does not contradict his indirectness: it is not the positivity of a position or a particular ethical stance. On the contrary: Derrida's affirmation is the intellectual responsibility, commitment or engagement that exceeds the positivity of a position (both the particularity of a special interest, goal or program and the generality of a rule). Where the entanglements of performativity are what *necessitate* his indirectness, this affirmative responsibility is what *motivates* it.