

SITUATING DERRIDA

BETWEEN KIERKEGAARD AND HEGEL

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This essay presents an interpretation of Derrida's project, and has two main goals. First, I argue that Derrida's work is best approached through the concepts of questioning, metaphysics, complication, trembling, and insecurity. Second, using these concepts I situate Derrida's work historically. In the literature, there are four main interpretations of Derrida's project: the literary (Rorty, Habermas), the Kantian (Gasché), the Nietzschean (Behler), and the Kierkegaardian (Caputo). I find myself in greatest agreement with the last, and argue that Derrida's anti-system is an articulated aporetic.¹ Of course there are other historical reference points for situating Derrida, the most obvious being Heidegger. In the course of my argument, I will discuss Derrida's proximity to Heidegger, but these references will lead back past Heidegger to Hegel. Thus, at the most general level of interpretation, at which this essay will deal, I argue that because Derrida pursues a more persistent and consistent aporetic than Kierkegaard, we find Derrida's project situated between Kierkegaard and Hegel.

My point in suggesting that Derrida's work can best be conceived as a Kierkegaardian meditation on Hegel is not in any way to dismiss Derrida as in some way out of date. On the contrary, I believe that Derrida provides an original and profound metaphilosophical position, one which offers a third possible response to philosophical questions. In addition to traditional attempts to provide answers (whether of a straightforward or transcendental kind) to philosophical questions and Wittgensteinian attempts to dissolve philosophical questions, deconstruction provides a completely new approach, that of complicating philosophical questioning.

Questions Without Answers

One of the most disconcerting aspects of Derrida's texts is that although they are rife with "questions" and "problems," mentioned and discussed as such, no answers or solutions are offered. One comes across "the question of the text," "the question of writing," "the question of language," "the problem of metaphor," "the question of the machine," "the question of the margin," "the question of ontological subordination," "the question of history," to name just a few. If one expects answers to these questions, then one becomes bewildered and frustrated.

To expect an answer to these questions is naive, and "naive" is one of Derrida's key pejorative terms. Derrida says in "The Pit and the Pyramid" with regard to questions which cannot be used to clarify the question of the (signification of the) relationship between signs and truth: "Formulated this way, the questions would be stated naively, presupposing or anticipating an answer. Here we are reaching a limit" (p. 81) Derrida does not mean that the questions presuppose a specific answer; rather, they presuppose that there is some answer, any answer at all. Derrida never answers the multitude of questions and problems he addresses because he believes that they cannot be answered.

This is an elementary point, perhaps too elementary to be mentioned. But it is absolutely crucial, so citations are in order. Only occasionally, but nevertheless distinctly, Derrida says that the questions he is posing can't be answered. In "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," he says: "The question of the possibility of the transcendental reduction cannot expect an answer" (p. 167). At the beginning of "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy," he says: "But I must forewarn you right now: the (hi)stories or enigmas of translation I

hear spoken of, that I intend to speak about, and that I shall get myself entangled in for reasons more serious than my incompetence, they are, I believe, without solution or exit" (p. 25). Each of these claims refers only to the questions under discussion in the particular essay at that point, but the point is generally true. Travel the length and breadth of Derrida's philosophical work and one never finds that the "questions" and "problematics" named and discussed as such are answered or solved (by, say, the propounding of theories), no doubt because Derrida believes that they cannot be solved or answered. To deconstruct a philosophical problem is thus not to solve that problem.

But if these questions cannot be solved, they cannot be dissolved either. A dissolution would allow us to see the question as a pseudo-question, and thus to avoid it altogether. But what Derrida says in the above quote about the questions he discusses in the "Apocalyptic Tone" essay holds for all of the other questions and problematics he engages: there is no exit from these questions. Derrida is relentlessly self-referential, and so also questions the questions,² but this questioning of the questions does not allow one to dissolve or refute the questions, as Hegel claimed at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he said that skeptics needed to be more skeptical of their own skepticism, or as the logical positivists thought that they were able to do in their attempts to show that metaphysical questions were meaningless. At the beginning of "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida raises a number of questions concerning the death of philosophy, and says that although these questions can't be answered, they must be "examined unrelentingly" (p. 79) by the community of philosophers, which he calls "a community of the question about the possibility of the question" (p. 80). Questioning one's questions does not allow one to escape them but only complicates them further.

By raising questions which can't be answered, but instead are "repeated," "elaborated," and complicated, deconstruction is a kind of questioning. In every text, from the earliest to the most recent, Derrida says that what he is doing is "putting into question" or

"interrogating" a concept, a word, a text, or a position. Just as a deconstruction of a philosophical problem neither solves it nor dissolves it, similarly, a deconstruction of a text or position is not a refutation of the text or position. Nor is a deconstruction of a concept or word an argument against the use of the word or concept, or a prescription of a new meaning for them.³ A deconstruction is a specific way (or set of ways) of questioning a problem, a question, a text, a position, a concept, or a word. But for Derrida, to "question" has a somewhat different sense from the usual one. Derrida questions texts, concepts, etc., by *complicating* them. These complications take the form of aporias, paradoxes, problematizations, antinomies, "displacements," and "undecidables." Each of Derrida's "quasi-transcendental" or "undecidable" concepts—such as difference, the supplement, the trace, the pharmakon, hymen, invagination, desterrance, remainder, to name just a few—marks such a complication.

Metaphysics

Not just any kind of complication counts as a deconstruction. A deconstruction shows how a text fits within a schema/project that Derrida calls "metaphysics." This schema/project (Derrida uses the word "program")⁴ contains these complications within it, because, according to Derrida, metaphysics is fundamentally aporetic. The point of deconstruction is thus not to complicate a problem or text according to personal inclination or idiosyncrasy, but to reveal how the problem or text fits within the schema by showing how these specific sorts of complications are already manifested within the problem or text. The texts deconstruct themselves, as Derrida repeatedly notes.

The word "metaphysics" raises difficulties. The word has numerous meanings, stretching back to its attachment to Aristotle's treatises on what he calls "first philosophy." Currently the term has a strongly pejorative sense, applied by any number of philosophers in many traditions to concepts, theories and arguments they believe to be meaningless or false. In its most debased form, "metaphysical" is applied to any view

that one disagrees with. Usually, however, its use is supported by a specific definition, criterion and/or theory of the metaphysical. But there are numerous such theories—Humean, logical positivist, Kantian, Hegelian, Wittgensteinian, Nietzschean, Heideggerian.⁵ Some of these provide more than one characterization of the “metaphysical.”

Derrida’s use of the term follows most closely that of Heidegger. The most important determination of metaphysics in Derrida is that metaphysics is always the “metaphysics of presence.” In “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” he says that the “matrix” of the history of metaphysics “is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth” (pp. 279–80). On this point, the word “metaphysics” is interchangeable with the word “philosophy”: in *Speech and Phenomena*, he says that philosophy “is always a philosophy of presence” (p. 63). Here he follows, to a certain extent, Heidegger’s claim in *Being and Time* that metaphysics turns around an interpretation of Being in terms of time, one which privileges one tense, the present, over the others.⁶ Derrida also follows Heidegger in arguing that metaphysics pervades philosophy (including ethics, philosophy of language, formal logic, and political philosophy) and, indeed, all of Western thought. In fact, Derrida has devoted a number of discussions to establishing that linguistics, psychoanalytic theory, literary theory, and anthropology are imbued with metaphysical thought. “Supplement of Copula” shows this for linguistics, “White Mythology” for literary theory, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” and “The Purveyor of Truth” for psychoanalytic theory, and “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” and *Of Grammatology* for anthropology.⁷

Neither does common sense offer any escape: “It is for us, in the Occident, the culture

of common sense that is marked by a powerful scientifico-philosophical tradition, metaphysics, technics, the opposition of subject/object (*sujet/objet*), and precisely a certain organization of the throw (*jet*). Through several differentiated relays, this culture goes back at least to Plato” (“My Chances,” pp. 24–25).

Derrida follows Heidegger in viewing metaphysics as so pervasive and intractable as to be not easily escaped, if it can be escaped at all, contrary to some of the other, more categorically negative views of metaphysics. Heidegger was less optimistic about the possibility of escaping metaphysics in his later writings than in the earlier, and Derrida here continues Heidegger’s trajectory. He frequently says that one cannot simply decide to leave metaphysics behind, since we have no other language with which to think (e.g., “SSPDHS,” 280–81; *Of Grammatology*, 99). He often seems to be saying that there is no escape from metaphysics, although deconstruction seems to be aimed at the other of metaphysics.⁸ As Ernst Behler says in characterizing this point: “The transgression occurring at the closure does not land somewhere beyond metaphysics; rather it persists endlessly in the unavoidable grasp of metaphysics” (*Confrontations*, 9). Rather than escape, Derrida’s goal is to chart moments that disrupt, subvert or problematize metaphysics. These moments can be found in the texts of metaphysics as they are “always already” at work.

Derrida also follows Heidegger’s belief in the “end of philosophy” with his belief in the “closure of metaphysics.” Both phrases refer to the exhaustion of philosophical possibilities and the raising to philosophical self-awareness of the nature of metaphysics—the discovery that metaphysics turns on the privileging of presence (and the facing of its own end). Derrida uses the “closure of metaphysics” to name what Heidegger calls the “end of philosophy,” but to name it better. The word “closure” avoids any suggestion that metaphysical thinking has disappeared, an implication of the word “end” that Heidegger disavowed. In addition, Derrida is able to connect the exhaustion of metaphysics

ics with its representation of itself as having a circular structure. Metaphysics is closed in the way a circle is closed—each part is connected to every other point.⁹ Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger all conceive of philosophy as having a circular structure, the circle for them being the form of completeness, harmony, and reconciliation. For Derrida, after the exhaustion of the possibilities of the metaphysical schema, this circle is the returning on itself of philosophy as it “goes around in circles”: “Parousia is thought within the systematic movement of all these concepts. To criticize the manipulation or determination of any one of these concepts from within the system *always amounts*, and let this expression be taken with its full charge of meaning here, *to going around in circles*: to reconstituting, according to another configuration, the same system” (“Ousia and Gramme,” 60). Derrida thus turns the traditional philosophical symbol of reconciliation and harmony into one of futility, pointlessness, and imprisonment.

Derrida also follows (the later) Heidegger in not finding metaphysical statements to be false or meaningless. According to Derrida, metaphysical thought is aporetic and naive. It is also dogmatic: unaware that it is intrinsically aporetic, it is assured, secure, and confident. It is this assurance that Derrida takes as his primary target.

How can one break out of this circle? At the end of “The Ends of Man,” Derrida notes that there are typically two strategies. One is to try to overcome metaphysics all at one go. He notes that those who have tried to do so have instead merely repeated metaphysics more naively and more dogmatically. The other strategy is Heidegger’s—to carefully work through or “repeat” the metaphysical texts from history showing how, because they are intrinsically aporetic, they fail to achieve the goals of the metaphysical project. However, in this attempt to use the tools of metaphysics against itself, one risks merely reinforcing the moves of metaphysics at a deeper level. Derrida’s texts on Heidegger attempt to show that Heidegger did just that.

Derrida is aware that his own text is caught up in the movements of metaphysics;

but he claims that his work is caught up in them in a different way. Through relentless reflexivity, and constant awareness of the various “others” repressed or devalued by metaphysics—writing, physicality, sexual difference, death, metaphor, plurivocity, historicity, context¹⁰—he tries to produce a different kind of discourse, one which points in a new direction. He produces texts that cannot be understood without taking this into account, because the texts embody/enact the suppressed others. The most obvious examples are his plays on words and appeals to etymology. Understanding Derrida’s texts therefore requires attention to the materiality of the signifier, rather than its dismissal in favor of some supposedly pure ideal signified.

Derrida’s approach to the problem of metaphysics relies on a reflection concerning these notions of the inside and the outside of metaphysics. To stick with the image of the circle, we can say that Derrida shows that the circle has a twist—that is, a complication. Specifically with regard to the inside and the outside, he says that “this is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*” (“SSPDHS,” 279).

Trembling

Not wishing to simply remain within metaphysics but unable to simply step outside, Derrida calls deconstruction a “solicitation,” or shaking, of metaphysics. In *Of Grammatology*, he says that “it is thus the idea of the sign that must be deconstructed through a meditation upon writing which would merge, as it must, with the undoing [*sollicitation*] of onto-theology, faithfully repeating in its *totality* and *making it insecure* in its most assured evidences” (73). In “Differance,” he claims that “one can delimit such a closure today only by soliciting the value of presence that Heidegger has shown to be the ontotheological determination of Being; and in thus soliciting the value of presence, by means of an interrogation whose status must be completely excep-

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tional" (16). "It is the domination of beings that *differance* everywhere comes to solicit, in that *sollicitare*, in old Latin, means to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety. Therefore, it is the determination of Being as presence or as beingness that is interrogated by the thought of *differance*" (*Margins*, 21). These passages encapsulate two points shown already to be central to Derrida's project: (1) Derrida follows Heidegger in taking "presence" to be the center of metaphysics; (2) Derrida does not claim to refute metaphysics; instead his project is an "interrogation." In addition, he connects these points to a third, no less crucial: the goal of solicitation is to make metaphysics "tremble" and "insecure."

A review of the other points where Derrida uses the word and concept¹¹ of *trembling* confirms its significance. On the one hand, when Derrida uses the term with regard to other philosophers—Levinas, Bataille, Heidegger—it is always in order to claim an affinity and an affiliation with their thought; in each case it is in carrying what Derrida calls in "Ousia and Gramme" the "generous repetition."¹² On the other hand, the term is inextricably bound up with themes and concepts no less important than the solicitation of presence and interrogation of presence, which has already been noted. First, trembling is the result of "solicitation" ("Differance"), "putting into question" ("Violence and Metaphysics" 141/208), and "deconstruction" (*Of Grammatology*, 24/38–39), the terms that Derrida uses for his own project. Second, trembling is at the juncture of Derrida's thinking of the most general question of method—the question of the "inside" and the "outside" of metaphysics (*Of Grammatology* 24/38–39; "The Ends of Man," 133/161, 134/162). Third, trembling is aligned with, or elucidates some of, the key positive (in the sense of "approved") concepts in Derrida's project: "displacement," "reinscription" ("From Restricted to General Economy," 260/382, 253/373), "difference," "decentering" ("Ousia and Gramme" 38/41).¹³ Fourth, trembling requires a distancing with respect to the "words" that undergo it. In his essay on Bataille, by making the word "science"

tremble, Derrida says that Bataille calls into question the use of the word "science." ("From Restricted to General Economy," 268/394) One can still use the word, and it "loses none of its proper norms" (this is important), but it requires a certain distancing signified by scare quotes, or any number of other tools used for the same purposes. In another context, Derrida calls this the placing of terms "under erasure." (I will return to this point later.) Fifth, "trembling" is Derrida's way of challenging that "security" which, most often under that name but also under others ("confidence," "assurance," "certainty," the safety of "harbors," "dogmatic," "tranquil") is always taken as enemy and target.

The elements of Derrida's project, at this very general level, which I have so far isolated, can be—and have been—interpreted within a historical perspective in different ways. Derrida's relentless attack on security, assurance, and confidence through "questioning" metaphysics might be read as a kind of Socratic questioning, demonstrating ignorance of that which one believes one knows. One problem with such a reading is that Derrida wishes to "shake" the concept of truth as much as any other, whereas Socrates, as he is presented in Plato's early dialogues, holds onto the equation of knowledge and well-being as the basis of his security.

Derrida, of course, is not the first philosopher to argue that metaphysical questions can't be answered. One can mention, again, Socrates, but the obvious point of reference here for understanding Derrida is Kant, since Kant very specifically claimed that metaphysical questions (for Kant, these are the questions of God, the soul, and the beginning of the world) can't be answered, and Derrida, like Kant, sets forth an account of why they can't be answered, an account that aims to mark out the limits of knowledge and its conditions of possibility. These notions of the meaningfulness, yet unanswerability of metaphysics, "limit" and, especially, "condition of possibility" are of crucial importance for understanding Derrida, and these are the concepts that are central to Gasché's interpretation—and there are many other Kantian themes and resonances in Derrida's work.

Nevertheless, one cannot rest with the interpretation of deconstruction as a Kantian project. For Kant, the attack on "dogmatism" was designed only to attack the security of traditional metaphysics. He did not aim for insecurity, but hoped that his theory would provide the security and assurance for which traditional philosophical theories had striven. Derrida's aim, however, is insecurity and "trembling," and this insecurity and "trembling" is built into the complexity and undecidability of his central concepts.¹⁴

Here is where I disagree with Gasché's pathbreaking interpretation of Derrida, presented in *The Tain of the Mirror*. Gasché recognizes that according to Derrida the philosophical problems can't be solved (79). But he claims that this does not leave aporias, only the appearance of such. He makes this point in the following two passages.¹⁵ In the first, he says that on Derrida's view, philosophy

must necessarily appear contradictory, even irreducibly aporetic. But these categories, born from philosophy and its logic of contradiction, do not apply here, because the syntheses in question are nothing less than the conditions of possibility and impossibility of such logic." (p. 104)

Hence

this inquiry . . . brings to light a whole new field of "contradictions" and "aporias," which instead of simply belying the philosophical enterprise, are rather constitutive of its successful completion." (p. 127)¹⁶

Gasché is quite right in saying that these aporias are for Derrida "conditions of possibility and impossibility" of philosophical thought. What is unclear is how this precludes them from *also* being true aporias and from "belying the philosophical enterprise." (They can't be constitutive of its *successful* completion because they are, after all, conditions of *impossibility*. Gasché must mean—and it would be correct to say—that they are conditions of whatever success philosophical thought is capable of.) It seems to me that these categories of contradiction and aporia do apply and do "simply belie" the philosophical enter-

prise, *and also* are "conditions of possibility and impossibility" of philosophy, "constitutive of" philosophy. It is quite important that the aporias and contradictions do not lose their aporetic character when they apply to themselves as conditions of possibility (which Gasché calls "infrastructures"), or else a Kantian "architectonic" security is provided and trembling ceases.

I can only speculate as to why Gasché thinks that Derrida's "questions" and "problems" are not genuine aporias. He interprets Derrida's project as a "general heterology."¹⁷ Following this line, he subsumes "conceptual aporias" within the broader category of "discursive heterogeneity" (133). Taking "difference" as his most general interpretive key leads him to overemphasize the difference between Derrida's project and traditional metaphysics. Hence his claim that Derrida's view "escapes from" the norms and expectations of classical philosophy (77–78), that "deconstruction is, so to speak, a hypercognition of truth beyond truth" (267).¹⁸ Gasché knows—and clearly says—that deconstruction is not an attempt to reach "a simple outside" of metaphysics on account of the complications Derrida shows in the relations of inside/outside (169). While this qualification could be supplied to the above claims, it is not explicitly made. Yet Gasché always qualifies any use of the term "aporia" with regard to Derrida's thought. It makes better sense of Derrida's texts to stress the complications in the attempt to reach the outside of metaphysics, and the ways in which Derrida recognizes that deconstruction remains within metaphysics. It is unclear that the words "aporia" or "contradiction"—which I would subsume under the category of "complication," rather than Gasché's category of "discursive heterogeneity"—need any qualification at all. Rather, any claims that Derrida's project differs from the project of metaphysics, must be qualified.

I noted above that Derrida's project of questioning is conceived of as a "solicitation," "to shake as a whole, to make tremble in entirety." Clearly, Derrida is very close here to the later Heidegger, who described his own project as a "path of questioning"

and as a shaking. In "Recollection in Metaphysics," Heidegger says that a glimpse of the history of Being "succeeds only in the form of an essential need which soundlessly and without consequences shakes everything true and real to the roots" (83).¹⁹ And as is well known, Derrida's term "deconstruction" was originally put forward as a translation of Heidegger's term "*destruktion*."²⁰ Furthermore, Derrida's work is shot through with a large number of Heideggerean themes, ideas, and approaches which are of enormous consequence for Derrida's thought. The two most significant of these—"metaphysics of presence" and "the closure of metaphysics"—I have already noted. The very close proximity of Derrida's metaphilosophical position to Heidegger's cannot be denied. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the late Heidegger's attitude toward the possibility of escaping metaphysics and Derrida's which is very significant. Heidegger was of course very pessimistic about the possibility of overcoming metaphysics, but it is not for him, as it is for Derrida, an impossibility.²¹ Derrida thus calls into question what he calls "Heideggerian hope" at the end of "Differance" (*Margins*, 27).²² It is not easy to see what sort of impossibility this is for Derrida (I take it to be a conceptual impossibility); nevertheless, it is this concept of impossibility, combined with the centrality of "trembling" noted above, reminiscent of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*,²³ that make me think that at the metaphilosophical level the best point of reference for understanding Derrida's overall project is Kierkegaard, rather than Heidegger, or Kant, or Socrates.

These points of reference for interpreting Derrida are not mutually exclusive, not only because of the possibility of multiple influences, but also because the ideas of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Kant, and Socrates interpenetrate. Kierkegaard considered his project as a recasting of what he took to be a Socratic project,²⁴ and on several crucial points (such as the "objective uncertainty" of God's existence) relied on Kant. Furthermore, Heidegger's early thought is through and through Kierkegaardian; in spite of

Heidegger's repeated denials of the asserted existentialism of his work, it is not too much of a distortion to call *Being and Time* a work with Kierkegaardian content in Husserlian form.²⁵ Thus the particular nexus of Socrates, Heidegger, and Kant at work in Derrida is drawn together in the figure of Kierkegaard.

One need only recall the aporetic structure of *Fear and Trembling* to see a parallel with Derrida. After a series of prefatory sections, the main section of the work is called "Problems." Three questions are raised as to the adequacy of conceptual thought to the story of Abraham and the question of faith. In each problem, the question is elaborated and the adequacy of various proposed solutions—Hegelian and common sense—is rejected. Nowhere in this section, nor in the book, are there solutions to the problems. The point of the work is that there are no solutions to these problems, but that they can only be resolved through a "leap" or "decision" (and, indeed, they must be so resolved because these problems are the fundamental questions of human existence, and as such are inescapable).²⁶ By showing that these questions have no intellectual solution, Kierkegaard attempts to shake the security of the three possible kinds of answers, as he sets them out—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious—by showing that each approach, which sees the others as wrong, lacks a fundamental basis and instead depends on an existential decision or leap. Unlike Kant, however, Kierkegaard does not try to construct a system which somehow escapes the metaphysical problems considered; instead through his textual artifice (e.g., the pseudonyms) and his concept of "indirect communication," he submits his texts to the paradoxical which he finds and generates in the conceptual.

There are three more parallels with Kierkegaard at the very high level of generality at which we have been considering. The first is the emotional state their texts aim at producing in the reader. Kierkegaard's texts aim, of course, at anxiety, which is one of his key concepts.²⁷ Anxiety is generated in three (inter-related) ways: first, in the recognition that the differences between the different ex-

istence-spheres cannot be superceded in a single intellectual system; second, that each existence-sphere has no intellectual foundation, but instead depends on an existential decision or "leap"; third, within the religious sphere, the paradoxes of existence reach their greatest absurdity, and thus their highest intensity, in the impossible stories of Abraham and of the incarnation of God in Jesus. It is this anxiety, generated by paradox and the belief in the absurd, that characterized the religious state, according to Kierkegaard.

Derrida's texts, through their complications of philosophical problems, also aim to generate a kind of anxiety in the reader. The word anxiety rarely appears in Derrida's works,²⁸ but he has said (in the Villanova Roundtable) that deconstruction is made of a "tension": "That is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break" (6). (The word "tension" appears six times in this brief text.) This anxiety or tension has two characteristics: it is a kind of disorientation and a kind of vertigo, which cause the "trembling" I have already discussed. There are three figures in Derrida's work that are illustrative of this: the abyss, the labyrinth, and the "mise-en-abyme." The abyss is not usually mentioned as such, but the undecidables are referred to as abyssal.²⁹ The idea is that they rest over no ground or foundation. The labyrinth is a figure of disorientation; it appears near the end of *Speech and Phenomena*, where it is mentioned in conjunction with "mise-en-abyme," which is frequently mentioned throughout Derrida's work and combines the aspects of labyrinth and abyss, disorientation and vertigo. *Mise-en-abyme* is a French heraldic term, referring to a coat of arms which contains its own image, reduced, within itself.³⁰ Since the reduced image would also contain an image of itself, one has a figure of infinite mirroring. Derrida is constantly on the lookout for the appearance of conceptual *mises-en-abyme*, as they illustrate self-reference not as a kind of harmony

or reintegration, but as a kind of infinite complication.

Another parallel is between Kierkegaard's key concepts of the "absurd" and "paradox" and Derrida's use of the "impossible" and "undecidable." Derrida's key concepts are undecidables—aporias that can't be conceptually resolved, just as are Kierkegaard's paradoxes. Now it is extremely difficult to see exactly what Derrida means by "the impossible," but I suggest that he means "conceptually impossible" and "impossible conceptually."³¹ This is what Kierkegaard means by the absurd: it is absurd for a timeless being to appear in time. It is absurd for the individual to place himself or herself in a higher position than that of the ethical. But the absurd can happen, according to Kierkegaard, at least one would believe so within the religious sphere. Similarly, the impossible can happen according to Derrida, who describes deconstruction as "an experience of the impossible" ("On the Name").

The last parallel involves Kierkegaard's concept of the "leap." According to Kierkegaard, the existential decision between the three spheres cannot be rationally grounded, nor can it be escaped. The decision is a non-rational "leap." This notion appears in Derrida's work in two places. First, in "Plato's Pharmacy" (111; cf. 126), Plato's conceptualization (*mneme, hypomnesis*) is described as the "decision" of philosophy, and although it is not explicitly stated, it is treated as a non-rational leap. In addition, in Derrida's later writing on ethics and politics, Derrida says that every decision (which would include the decision "of philosophy") is a leap (an invention). In "The Other Heading," Derrida says that a decision guided by knowledge is not really a decision, rather, it is the application of a program. A true decision—if there is one—can only follow an experience of the aporia (41), an aporia whose mediation is impossible.³² Thus we have not a single ("existential") leap among three choices, but a vast proliferation of "leaps." In this Derrida follows in the line of the development of existentialism from Kierkegaard through Heidegger to Sartre. Kierkegaard thought that every self would try to impose

complete unity on itself, and that there were only three ideals (or kinds of ideals) that could, at bottom, motivate one. The belief in the unity of the self (as fact and/or goal) and its ideals dissipated, partly due to self-referential problems in Kierkegaard's views that weaken his ability to maintain this schema, partly due to Nietzsche's critique of the unity of the self. In Sartre, every decision is a non-rational leap. (What differentiates Derrida from Sartre on this point is that Derrida believes that the ungroundedness of each decision precludes, in each and every case, at each and every moment, the attaining of a "good conscience."³³ Sartre thought that the same point resulted in the overcoming of traditional moral claims, and with them, the overcoming of a bad conscience—except of course in the one instance of "bad faith," when one fails to face up to this overcoming.)

Derrida's vocabulary, his themes and "motifs" are far more Kantian and Heideggerian, perhaps even Nietzschean, than Kierkegaardian.³⁴ The overriding reason for this is that Derrida's work strives to "de-anthropologize" Kierkegaard's (and Heidegger's early Kierkegaardian) work. Kierkegaard's trembling is the trembling of human beings; for Derrida it is this also, but first and foremost it is the trembling of concepts. For Kierkegaard, the decision is always a decision of human beings; for Derrida again it is primarily the decision of philosophy. Derrida, like Kierkegaard, is concerned with the problem of the beginning of Hegel's system. For Kierkegaard, this is the problem of how the human beings who are undertaking the project can begin (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*); for Derrida it is a cause to meditate on the concept of the preface ("Outwork"). This de-anthropologization of existentialism—pursuing Heidegger's program sketched in the "Letter on Humanism"—pushes Derrida toward the impersonal conceptuality of Hegel, and situates him between Kierkegaard and Hegel.

One might be tempted to see here the overcoming of subjectivity, in line with Nietzsche, Heidegger, and (ostensibly) the analysis of Derrida in "Differance," rather

than as the de-anthropologization of existentialism. Instead, it should be seen as a placing of human beings in a passive relation with language and thought, as in the later Heidegger, in line with Derrida's comments that we "inhabit" differance or "arche-writing." But this need not be a break with the concept of subjectivity, since the passive relation to thought can be found in Hegel, and Hegel holds onto the concept of the subject, although at a different level, the social level of *Geist*. In spite of what seems like a devastating attack on the subject in "Differance," Derrida does not wish to dispense with the concept of subjectivity the way Nietzsche does; he simply wishes to make it "tremble."

Counter-Dialectical Textualism

Following upon this comparison with Kierkegaard, we can get closer to Derrida's project by placing it in relief against Kierkegaard's chief target, Hegel. The more obvious choice is Heidegger, so I will say a few words about Derrida's relation to Heidegger in order to justify my choice of Hegel as the philosopher with whom it is most fruitful to compare Derrida.

We have already noted that two of the most important determinations of Derrida's thought are taken from Heidegger: the metaphysics of presence and the word "deconstruction." As Richard Rorty has noted, Heidegger is Derrida's "anxiety of influence" figure—the philosopher from whom he has learned the most, whom he worries most that he has not surpassed. This is apparent in many ways large and small throughout Derrida's writings, but the most obvious is Derrida's inclusion of long passages from "The Anaximander Fragment" at the end of "Differance." Of course, this has not kept Derrida from criticizing Heidegger, but the question always arises as to whether Derrida is merely deconstructing Heidegger with tools and insights he's learned from Heidegger.

We have also noted that Derrida follows Heidegger in attempting to think about the end of philosophy, or as he calls it, the closure of metaphysics. Since both Heidegger and Derrida accept Hegel at his word, as hav-

ing "completed" metaphysics, Derrida raises the question as to whether Heidegger had actually surpassed Hegel.³⁵ In "Tympan," Derrida suggests that Heidegger has not gone beyond Hegel in his discussion of two types of philosophical mastery: hierarchy and envelopment. "These two kinds of appropriating mastery, hierarchy and envelopment, communicate with each other according to complicities we shall define. If one of the two types is more powerful here (Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger) or there (Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel), they both follow the movement of the same wheel, whether it is a question, finally, of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle or of Hegel's ontotheological circle" (xx). In "Parergon," Derrida notes that in spite of the differences in their work, both Hegel and Heidegger privilege speech in their discussions of art, the characteristic of metaphysics which Derrida had uncovered and had been the focus in his early writings:

one of them, Hegel's, gives classical teleology its greatest deployment. He finishes off, as people say a little too easily, onto-theology. The other, Heidegger's, attempts, to go back behind all the oppositions that have commanded the history of aesthetics. For example, in passing, that of form and matter, with all its derivatives. Two discourses, then, as different as could be, on either side of a line whose tracing we imagine to be simple and nondecomposable. Yet how can it be that they have in common this: the subordination of all the arts to speech, and if not to poetry, at least to the poem, the said, language, speech, nomination (*Sage, Dichtung, Sprache, Nennen*)? (Reread here the third and final part of the *Origin...*, "Truth and Art.") (p. 23)

In "The Age of Hegel," Derrida claims a very close relation between Heidegger's "epochal" view of history and Hegel's view of history as reason coming to itself: "This *epochal* interpretation, with all its machinery, could be connected (either as proof or derivation) to the Hegelian, onto-teleological interpretation of the philosophical "age" as moment, form, or figure, totality or *pars totalis*, in the history of reason" (8-9). In sum, consideration of Heidegger inevitably leads back to Hegel.

Derrida tries to surpass Heidegger by not going as far.³⁶ That is, as previously pointed out, Derrida is even more cautious about the possibility of leaving metaphysics behind than Heidegger, so the specter of Hegel, as the culmination (or "greatest deployment") of metaphysics, arises in a more serious way for Derrida than for Heidegger. Indeed, Derrida gives enormous credit to Hegel. He describes the "extraordinary coherence" and "self-evidence" of Hegel. The essays which focus on Hegel are "From Restricted to General Economy," "Tympan," "The Pit and the Pyramid," "Outwork," *Glas*, and "The Age of Hegel." It is clear that Hegel has a special place in Derrida's project, as he does in Kierkegaard's. In "The Age of Hegel," Derrida describes the continuing importance of coming to grips with Hegel with regard to questions of education in this way:

the power of this discursive machine [Hegel's onto-encyclopedic system of University and State] and of the forces it serves no longer needs to be demonstrated. All the blows it has sustained—those inflicted by Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and everything for which these names stand—all these blows, as violent and as heterogeneous as they seem, compared to each other as well as in their relations to the Hegelian program, continue to reverberate with it, to justify themselves in its terms, to negotiate within its terms, to negotiate within its space, and to risk being overcoded (surcode)—even today—by the interchange into which it forces them. Even to the point, each time, of running the risk of merely reproducing it, with or without the "liberal" modifications we have observed in Hegel and Cousin. (p. 19)

It is thus not only Heidegger who fails to overcome Hegel, but all major post-Hegelian philosophical projects. This point can be generalized beyond the specific topic of education at issue in this essay.

With Hegel in mind, then, I would offer as a catch-phrase to describe Derrida's philosophy: counter-dialectical textualism. (Such a phrase would parallel "speculative idealism" as a label for Hegel's philosophy.) I will deal with each part of this phrase in turn.

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Deconstruction is counter-dialectical because it tries to circumvent Hegel's dialectic. Hegel thought that he could reconcile all divisions and aporias through the generation of a system—that is, an interconnected unity/totality of concepts. The system resolves these problems by developing dialectically: each concept is introduced to resolve previous problems (“contradictions” in a very wide sense) and its introduction in turn generates new problems. The meaning of each concept is fixed by its place in the system, in the way it develops out of the previous concepts. The dialectic works in a myriad of ways, but its most general structure is that of “*Aufhebung*” — Hegel's famous speculative concept of “sublation” or “supersession” in which each new element “lifts up” and retains what is valuable in what comes before at the same time that it surpasses it. Rather than proceeding indefinitely, in a “bad infinity,” the system fulfills itself in concepts of totality—the Absolute. Hegel's pride was the way in which, due to the *Aufhebung*, his Absolute retained all of the inadequate and partial perspectives and concepts rather than wiping them out, as he accused Schelling's Absolute of doing (“the night in which all cows are black”). At the end, the system connects to its beginning, giving itself the circular shape of reconciliation.

Derrida takes very seriously, and indeed, accepts Hegel's claim that the System is the fulfillment of philosophy. The question is whether there is some way to move beyond Hegel and philosophy to “thought.” Derrida's entire work, especially his papers on Hegel and *Glas*, constitute a meditation on this question. The worry is, as was noted above with respect to Heidegger's work, that the attempt to surpass will result in a mere repetition, “deeper” perhaps, but not essentially different. Hence, Derrida's worry in “Tympan” about Hegel's claim, in his reply to Kant, that the recognition of any limit is already a surpassing of that limit. Derrida consistently plays up the difficulty in surpassing Hegel.

Derrida's strategy, in sum, is to argue for differences, disjunctions, and aporias which cannot be reconciled through conceptual

thought. (In this regard, we have seen, he follows Kierkegaard.) Derrida translates Hegel's “*Aufhebung*” into French as “*la releve*,” which, according to Alan Bass, combines the senses of “to lift up” and to “relay” and “relieve,” as when one soldier on duty relieves another.³⁷ Derrida, then, hopes to show, contra Hegel, that there is no “relief”—here I use the term in its simplest sense of “easing” or “relaxation”—in philosophy. In order to demonstrate that these aporias cannot be reconciled within the system, he develops an “anti-system” of interconnected concepts which are at work in philosophy and the system as quasi-transcendental conditions of possibility. As conditions of possibility, these aporias are inescapable.

Derrida's “anti-system” shares some important structural features with Hegel's system. One of these is the need to see thought as a process. Hegel's system is dynamic (“Bacchanalian revel”) as is Derrida's anti-system (“economy”). In addition, each has a certain topology. We started by noting the proliferation of questions and problems named and discussed as such in Derrida, e.g., “the question of history,” “the problem of the example.” These questions and problems are almost exclusively referred to in the singular. One can't help but wonder, is there only one question of history? Is there only one problem of “the example”? These phrases “the question of . . .” and “the problem of . . .” function very much the way the phrase “the concept of . . .” might function in Hegel's system. They locate a specific place within the broader scheme, constituted by its surroundings, and thus can be referred to with a simple gesture. Furthermore, Hegel claimed that the dialectic was at work in logic, in life, in history and language. Derrida finds the movement of “differance” in all of these.³⁸ These structural similarities result, as noted earlier, from Derrida's de-anthropologization of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, which brings his discussions much closer to the impersonal character of Hegel's system.

Derrida's attempts to distance himself from metaphysics are manifested in his attempts to distance himself from metaphysical concepts, articulated in his idea of plac-

ing words "under erasure." As is well known, he borrows this idea most directly from Heidegger, who tried to overcome the metaphysical use of the word Being by "striking through" it, that is crossing it out in such a way that it is still visible. Derrida proliferates this strategy, claiming to put an entire array of concepts under erasure, or to keep them at a certain distance in some other way. (I count four strategies Derrida uses to distance himself from the words and concepts he uses: First is the use of some textual sign setting the word off, equivalent to crossing out [if not actually involving crossing out], such as the use of scare quotes or parentheses. Second, the hypothetical qualification after the use of the term ["if there is one"]. Third, the use of contradictory phrases, e.g., "non-originary origin." Fourth, the appeal to the question of paleonymy, which problematizes the use of old words in new contexts.) Derrida thus retains but supercedes these terms, in what seems analogous to the *Aufhebung*. Similarly, until the absolute is reached in the system, Hegel recognizes that each new concept which is introduced raises new problems and thus defers a unified resolution. In this regard, Derrida's movement of "differance," like his distancing techniques toward terms, might be seen as a repetition of Hegel's system with a change in emphasis or tone. Hence Derrida's concern with the "question of tone," by which he tries to show that what metaphysics tries to dismiss or denigrate as a mere difference in tone provides no relief but instead turns a new complication.

Derrida's philosophical view can be designated as "textualism," because "text" is for Derrida both ontologically and methodologically primary.³⁹ All of Derrida's writings are readings of texts. Everyone knows Derrida's famous phrase "there is no outside to the text." This comes up in the discussion of method in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida is discussing his focus on Rousseau's texts. We have already considered Derrida's complications of the distinctions of inside/outside for metaphysics, and analogous considerations are applicable here with respect to the inside/outside of a text.

"Text" is primary for Derrida because the word indicates something woven, hence not simple or homogeneous, but intrinsically complex. A text is the complication of word and meaning, ideal and real. As he says in a brief prefatory note to "Plato's Pharmacy," a text "cannot be booked in the present." Thus the primacy of the text places these complications at the origin rather than placing a pure presence at the origin.

It is only at this point that we can begin to understand what is most striking about Derrida's texts—what is usually called their style. Because of the complications inherent in the performative/constative distinction, Derrida produces his texts with their problematic relation to metaphysics on display. Derrida's plays on words and his playing with words (differance with an "a," to mention the most famous) is a way of exploiting these complications inherent in the text—any text—in his own texts. In order to understand Derrida's texts the reader must take into account the materiality of the signifier, usually conceived of as a falling away from presence, instead of attempting to hastily dispense with this in pursuit of the ideal signified. The latter strategy might be appropriately referred to as "idealism"—no matter where it crops up—and thus in opposition deconstruction can legitimately be labeled "textualism."

Conclusion

The reader may be wondering about certain aspects of Derrida's work which are usually taken as central or key, which are merely touched on, if mentioned at all, here. No discussion of the sign, or language, or phenomenology, or the relations of speech and writing? And what about those pesky binary oppositions we hear so much about in writings on Derrida? I haven't forgotten them, but believe they provide starting points of extremely limited usefulness. Indeed, they can only be understood against the background which I have only begun to sketch here.

It is only a beginning, because what is not presented here, although it is also essential for coming to grips with Derrida, is an account of what for Derrida's work is the crucial aporia: the aporia of temporality, and its

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Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed. enlarged, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, rev. ed., edited by David Farrell Krell (Harper & Row, 1993), pp. 139–212.

Martin Heidegger, "Recollection in Metaphysics," in *The End of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Renée Riese Hubert and Judd Hubert, "Introduction," to Louis Aragon, *The Adventures of Telemachus* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 5–29.

Stephen Melville, *Philosophy Beside Itself* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Dennis Schmidt, *The Ubiquity of the Finite* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 19xx).

ENDNOTES

1. There are some similarities between my account and Caputo's. Caputo also notes the parallels in regard to the impossible and undecidability (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, pp. 134, 137, 139); one difference is that Caputo's central concept of comparison between Derrida and Kierkegaard is "repetition" whereas mine is "trembling." (*Radical Hermeneutics—Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*) However, I disagree with Caputo on too many issues in the philosophy of time and on the interpretation of Kierkegaard to use his work as a starting place for this study.
2. "No answer, then. Perhaps in the long run, not even a question. The copulative correspondence, the opposition question/answer is already lodged in a structure..." ("Tympan," p. xvii); In "Differance," Derrida questions the form of his questions (pp. 14–15). And in *Of Spirit—Heidegger and the Question*, he questions Heidegger's privileging of questioning, as the subtitle indicates.
3. Occasionally, Derrida uses stronger terms in describing deconstruction which suggest this position. For example, in "Passe-Partout," he calls deconstruction an "attack" and a "dismantling" of conceptual oppositions, but even here his stated goal is to "disconcert" oppositions and "disturb" philosophy, not to defeat, refute, or do away with.
4. "Passe-Partout"; "Otobiographies."
5. Not all of these uses are unambiguously pejorative. In Kant's sense, "metaphysics" is an ambivalent designation, since it denotes philosophical problems which although unsolvable—God, the soul, the beginning of the world—are not meaningless. They are quite important and inescapable. A case can be made that Heidegger's use of the term is similarly ambivalent.
6. In *Of Grammatology*, the reliance of Heidegger on this point is explicit: it is "this vulgar and mundane concept of temporality (homogeneous, dominated by the form of the now and the ideal of continuous movement, straight and circular)" which "Heidegger shows to be the intrinsic determining concept of all ontology from Aristotle to Hegel" (p. 86).
7. Derrida also finds anti-metaphysical strands in the human sciences, and thus finds some of the results of psychology (family scene, mystic writing-pad, unconscious), linguistics (differential nature of the sign), literary theory (Mallarmé), and anthropology (Bataille) to be of philosophical import, and as such, are incorporated into his work.
8. Perhaps this is the impossible which deconstruction aims at.
9. Thus for Derrida, metaphysics is a system—in the Hegelian sense of "system"—an organic unity in which all parts are related, as opposed to the Kantian sense of "system"—a structure which relates to the three faculties of intuition, understanding, and reason.
10. According to Derrida, metaphysics takes these "others," to the extent that they cannot be suppressed, as detours via a return to presence.
11. I include the concept of trembling in order to include points at which Derrida uses the words "ébranlement" and "solicitation," which Bass quite properly translates as "trembling" or with some variant thereof. As I read the passage quoted above from "Differance," shaking and making tremble are not two different effects of soliciting but alternative words for the same effect. *Solliciter* is translated as "make tremble" at

- "Violence and Metaphysics," p. 141/208, and "Ousia and Gramme," p. 65-75. *Ébranlement* is translated as "trembling" at "Ousia and Gramme," p. 63/73, and in "The Ends of Man." In all other references "trembling" translates *tremblement*.
12. Bataille—"From Restricted to General Economy," pp. 253/373, 260/382, 268/394; Levinas—"Violence and Metaphysics," p. 82/122; Heidegger—"Ousia and Gramme," p. 63/73.
 13. Although it is not clear, *Archive Fever* may contain an exception to this approved use of "trembling."
 14. In this Derrida hopes to solve the problem of self-referentiality which bedeviled Kant, whose system, it was noticed very early on, could not account for its own knowledge claims. Derrida's concepts/writings tremble along with the rest.
 15. There are many others as well, e.g., *The Tain of the Mirror*, pp. 128, 174, 236.
 16. Special attention should be given to the word "simply" here and elsewhere in Gasché's work, and in Derrida's work as well. My impression is that it is only used to characterize a position from which Derrida denies or distances himself from. The contrast to the sentence could be a simple denial, or it could be that the sentence is true—"complicatedly."
 17. Gasché's is thus the most sophisticated reading which takes difference or otherness as Derrida's central concept.
 18. Of course, "truth beyond truth" is a paradoxical expression, but the word "hypercognition," along with the other aspects of Gasché's reading cited above, seems to drain it of all of the paradoxicality.
 19. The idea of shaking also appears in some of Heidegger's other writings. cf. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 88, and "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, p. 164.
 20. I use the term "deconstruction" in the sense used in "Resistances," where Derrida uses it as a catch-all for his project. Gasché claims that there was a change in the use of this term by Derrida. This may be, but it seems to me that already in "Freud and the Scene of Writing" deconstruction was used in this sense.
 21. For Derrida, history is a thoroughly metaphysical concept, whereas for Heidegger one kind of history might escape, or at least point the way out of, metaphysics, namely *Seinsgeschichte*.
 22. This hope which differentiates him from Derrida shows up not only in Heidegger's expectation for *Seinsgeschichte*, but also in his attitude to questioning and the possibility of attaining answers. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger says: "The answer to the question, like every genuine answer, is only the final result of the last step in a long series of questions. Each answer remains in force as an answer only as long as it is rooted in questioning" (*Basic Writings*, p. 195). The latter sentence shows that for Heidegger the answers to philosophical questioning differ from everyday answers and questions. Nevertheless, after all of the appropriate qualifications, this passage shows that for Heidegger answers are possible to philosophical questioning. This view differs strikingly from Derrida's view of philosophical questioning, discussed above.
 23. Derrida's use of the term "repetition" to refer to every commentary and interpretation also has a Kierkegaardian ring to it, as does his use of "decision" ("Plato's Pharmacy," p. 111), although, with these exceptions, his vocabulary is not typically Kierkegaardian.
 24. See especially the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and *The Concept of Irony*.
 25. Just a few of the many unattributed borrowings: use of the word "existence" to mean human existence, the crucial importance of anxiety, the contrast of "idle talk" with silence. Even Heidegger's analysis of being-toward-death draws on the Kierkegaard's discussion of the meaning of death in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.
 26. It is a tricky question as to what Kierkegaard or Kant or Derrida mean by their claims that these questions can't be answered. Kierkegaard claims that there are answers to these questions, but those answers can only be known from the perspective of eternity, which human beings are incapable of conceptualizing. Kant can be read in a similar way, or as saying that they are pseudo-questions without answers at all, depending on how one interprets his concept of the noumenal. Derrida limits himself to the claim that the answers to these questions cannot be conceptualized. I interpret

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- this as a more consistent version of Kierkegaard's view, since presumably whether there are answers from an eternal perspective is something which can't be known.
27. See *Fear and Trembling* and *The Concept of Anxiety*.
 28. It does appear in "Force and Signification," where Derrida refers to the "anguish of writing," and importantly, in "Structure, Sign & Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (p. 279).
 29. The French "*abyssal*" is rendered by some of Derrida's translators as "abyssal" and by some as "vertiginous."
 30. According to Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert, in the introduction to their translation of Louis Aragon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*, the "mise-en-abyme" was first used as a critical term by Gide (p. xi). Stephen Melville provides an excellent everyday example of the mise-en-abyme: the Morton Salt girl pictured on the Morton Salt can, pouring a can of Morton Salt, on which is pictured a girl pouring a can of Morton Salt, on which is pictured . . . (*Philosophy Beside Itself*, p. 96).
 31. What makes this so difficult is to figure out what conceptual impossibility means after the concept of "concept" trembles.
 32. This is also the upshot of the following passage from *The Gift of Death*: "He [Abraham] decides, but his absolute decision is neither guided or controlled by knowledge. Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every decision: it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would be the effect, conclusion, or explication. It structurally breaches and is thus destined to nonmanifestation; a decision is, in the end, always secret" (p. 77).
 33. "Good conscience" has a very strong derogatory meaning in Derrida's texts.

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34. This has misled commentators in their interpretations. With regard to Nietzsche, Ernst Behler does an excellent job of interpreting Derrida using Nietzsche as his point of reference. (*Confrontations—Derrida, Nietzsche, Heidegger*). His reading of the points of contact between Derrida and Nietzsche—which of course Derrida has never made any secret of—is thorough and persuasive until one considers the tremendous differences on points of the greatest importance between Derrida's thought and Nietzsche's.
35. For an excellent comparative study of Hegel and Heidegger, which shows some surprising parallels, see Dennis Schmidt's *The Ubiquity of the Finite*.
36. There is an echo here of Kierkegaard's response to Hegelian claims to go beyond faith.
37. Bass, translators note to "Differance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 20.
38. "Differance," combining senses of differing and deferring, can be seen as a counter to Hegel's *Aufhebung*. In contrast to the movement of *aufheben*, in which differences are reconciled in greater unities, in the movement of differance, unities are split into differences, the regaining of the original unity is continually deferred.
39. As is the word "idea" for philosophical idealists.
40. This essay owes a tremendous debt to John McCumber. Much of what I say about Hegel derives from what I learned from John, both in the classroom and from his published writings. Also, many, many thanks to Andrew Cutrofello for his acute comments on an earlier draft. Although I was only able to respond to a couple of his comments, the revisions thus prompted immeasurably improved the essay.