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HERMENEUTICS AS THE RECOVERY OF MAN

John D. Caputo

When Constantine Constantius — the Kierkegaardian pseudonym — undertook a return trip to Berlin, he made an experiment in “repetition” which was, I want to argue, of some consequence for hermeneutics.¹ I believe that what we nowadays call “hermeneutics” — Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian hermeneutics — defends the view that repetition is possible and indeed that everything in hermeneutics turns on its possibility. On this account, hermeneutics is always a work of retrieval (*Wiederholung*), a laying out (*aus-legen*) which fetches back (*wiederholen*), an explicating which retrieves what is latent and puts it into words for the first time, as Heidegger says (SZ, §63, 314-15/362).² Hermeneutics is set on restoring something which has remained withdrawn, on bringing out into the open something which has been closed off. And that is what I mean by speaking of hermeneutics as a philosophy of “recovery,” from the Latin *recuperare*, which means to recoup, to retrieve or restore, and also to recuperate. It means at once to get back something lost or latent, and also to get “better,” to get over an illness (in our case, of the spirit).³

Now I will devote my time in the present essay — which is part of a larger project — to the word “recovery” although I appreciate the fact that the word “man” in my title is not uncontroversial, especially today when we not only want to overcome humanism but even to be pitiless about the death of man. I will say here only this much about the word ‘man’ in my title. I stand with Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*, and I believe that Derrida is right to say that Heidegger’s treatise remains in a sense still a species of humanism, albeit of a higher sort. Derrida is right, I think, but I do not take that to be a criticism of Heidegger. I am worried more by the “end of man” than by remaining within a humanism of a higher sort.⁴

The point of the present essay then will be to thematize the project of recovery, to probe and unfold it, and to defend its role in an adequately conceived hermeneutics. I will argue as follows. There are two philosophies of recovery or retrieval which feed into the hermeneutic strategy of *Being and Time* — the Kierkegaardian notion of existential “repetition” and the phenomenological return to beginnings in Husserl. In *Being and Time* Heidegger demonstrates that these two versions of retrieval are of a piece, that they represent as it were twin circles. I will show that the one circle — existential repetition — belongs to what Kierkegaard calls the “foundering of metaphysics,” while Husserlian phenomenology, as Derrida shows so well, remains under the spell of the metaphysics of presence. I will argue that Kierkegaardian repetition controls and decisively modifies the phenomenological element in *Being and Time*,⁵ and hence that the hermeneutics which is at work in this book has broken with metaphysics. After Heidegger, hermeneutics means a recovery of origins, a return to the more primordial, which has nothing to do with the “nostalgia for presence” but on the contrary everything to do with what Kierkegaard calls the “courage” for repetition. Finally, without pretending to know what Derrida in the long run wants to say, and fully cognizant that I may be deconstructed on the spot, I want to conclude that Derrida’s critique of Heideggerian hermeneutics is misled by the Husserlian element in *Being and Time*. It is a mistake, I will contend, to make the critique of presence into a critique of the whole project of retrieval, and hence a mistake to think that hermeneutics is a matter of the free play of signs — even as it is a mistake for Rorty to think that hermeneutics has to do merely with keeping the lines of communication open between the diverse “language games.”⁶

Kierkegaard's Existential Repetition

The hermeneutic circle is the oldest official — if the office of philosophy was instituted with the Platonic Socrates — philosophical theory about man and knowledge. The Being of the soul is to return whence it came, to recover its origins in the sphere of primordial Being, to recover its lost home in the sphere of pure presence. The Being of the soul is circular, belonging primordially to the supersensible world, falling into the sensible things, and destined for return.⁷ And if the Being of the soul is circular, then knowledge too has a circular structure; knowledge is recollection, the reactivation of a former cognition which has somehow lost its life. Philosophy opened its doors with the doctrine of the circle.

But in Platonism the circle is through and through metaphysical; indeed Platonism inaugurated metaphysics and it is more or less what metaphysics has meant for over two thousand years. Aristotle made his reputation, in part, by showing what had gone wrong with the Platonic undertaking, but the price of the Aristotelian critique is high — the replacement of the circle with the hypothesis of the *tabula rasa*. What was needed was a thinker with Aristotelian instincts who understood the dynamics of the circle. That, I contend, is what we find in Kierkegaard, and if it is true that it is found in Heidegger, as I think it is, that is in no small measure due to Kierkegaard.⁸

Kierkegaard made a penetrating critique of the metaphysical version of the circle — “recollection” — and opposed it to the authentically Christian version, which was for him the opposite of metaphysics, and this he called “repetition.” In the book which bears the title, Constantine Constantius writes:

...*repetition* is a decisive expression for what “recollection” was for the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowledge is a recollection, so will modern philosophy teach that the whole of life is a repetition. ...Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards. Therefore repetition, if it is possible, makes a man happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy...

(*Rep.*, 33)⁹

The common problem to which both recollection and repetition are addressed is the transition from time to eternity, and that is why Constantine says that they are the same movement. How does the existing, temporal individual make his way from time to eternity? The Greek solution, Constantine says, is to move *backwards*, from time to an eternal pre-existence. Now there are two things to be emphasized about this characterization. In the first place, it holds that eternity is, or has been already, present and that its presence has been lost. Eternity is in the past; it is a lost actuality. Secondly, the backward movement signifies for Constantine the attempt to extricate oneself from time, to back oneself *out* of it. That is why in the *Postscript* Johannes Climacus says that Platonic recollection is the “temptation” to recollect oneself out of existence, and that it belongs to the greatness of (the historical) Socrates to have resisted this temptation.¹⁰ Recollection then is a nostalgia for a lost eternity which sees the temporal as copy, imperfection, transiency, and it wants to extricate itself from time by means of speculative thought. Recollection is metaphysics, and metaphysics wants to be disengaged speculation.

Repetition, on the other hand, is the way from time to eternity which is taken by existence itself. Eternity in this sense is not a metaphysical object but a religious goal, the whole point of Christian life. Now for the existing individual eternity is the *vita ventura*, the life which is to

come — in this *ventura* we already hear Heidegger's *Zukommen* — the life which is promised to those who fight the good fight, who set their hands to the plow without looking back. That is why Constantine calls repetition a movement forwards, not backwards. For it does not have to do with past actuality, with a presence lost, but with a presence which is yet to be realized, with the *possible*. It is not a matter of reawakening a recollection of a previous existence, but of bringing about a new life. In repetition what is to be repeated has not previously existed, has never enjoyed a prior presence, but remains something to be brought about. If the backwards movement of recollection signifies evasion, escape, disinterest, retreat, then repetition moves forwards, presses forth, engages the battle, pushes ahead, resolves upon the one thing necessary and clings to that resolve even unto death. In the Christian conception, time (temporality) is a trial and test which sorts out the wheat from the chaff. If metaphysics wants to think its way out of time, Christian life in time is a test in which every moment is urgent, every moment an occasion for a decisive action, for a decision upon which everything — that is to say, all eternity — hangs in the balance. Whence the Christian sees time in terms of futurity and decisiveness. Christian time is futural; the Christian labors each day for the *vita ventura*, the life which is to come. But in metaphysics time is an imperfection, an imitation, not something to be worked through; it lacks urgency, decisiveness. Nothing is decided in time; the point is rather to transcend time for the sake of eternity, to put it out of action.

Platonic recollection therefore belongs to — indeed inaugurates — the metaphysics of presence. Platonism remains for Kierkegaard under the spell of the Eleatics, whereas Kierkegaard bids us think in terms of *kinesis*, movement.¹¹ In an astonishing commentary on Aristotelian *kinesis*, Kierkegaard writes in his private papers:

...when even Aristotle said that the transition from possibility to actuality is *kinesis* he was not talking about logical possibility and actuality but about the possibility and actuality of freedom, and therefore he quite rightly posits motion.

(21)

Kierkegaard wants us to think not in terms of permanent presence but in terms of movement where movement means principally existence and freedom.

That is why Kierkegaard sees no essential difference between Platonic and Hegelian recollection, even though Hegel wants to think Being in terms of time and motion. The doctrine of *Aufhebung* does not constitute an essential improvement over *anamnesis*. For Hegelian time is not authentic, radical, Christian temporality, in which everything hinges on the moment, the decision; it is not a time in which we are exposed to the flux and contingency. Hegel's is a time made safe by eternity, underwritten by reason, regulated by necessity. It lacks what is uniquely proper to time: contingency, freedom, exposure to the future. It makes only a show of embracing *kinesis* while in fact subordinating it to a rational teleology of history. Hegel's time is a time reworked by metaphysics, made over into its image and likeness, and in which the groundlessness of radical freedom is covered up (*Rep.*, 52,20).

The proper element of repetition is time. Repetition moves through time, grapples with it, exposes itself to the flux. But if it cannot, like recollection, simply negate time and nullify the flux, neither can repetition merely submit to time and turn itself over to the flux. Its unique task is to persevere in time and to maintain its constancy, identity and continuity. What was a theoretical question for Hume and Kant concerning the "identity" of the epistemological subject, became for Kierkegaard the concrete problem of how the existing individual achieves identity as an ethico-religious agent. Hence if Kierkegaard wanted a philosophy of *kinesis* and not pure presence, this was to be a *kinesis* with constancy, with identity, with "repetition."¹² The

lack of repetition for Kierkegaard means momentariness, opportunism, the inconstancy which busies itself from moment to moment. Just as in Nietzsche's conception of eternal return, in repetition we fuse Being and becoming, not in the fraudulent manner of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, but existentially, by maintaining constancy within the flux of time.¹³

That also is why the love of repetition is happy, for it presses forward robustly to victory; the happiness of repetition is the exhilaration which comes of an earnest struggle. But the love of recollection is unhappy, for it is a melancholy longing for a lost paradise, dreamy will-lessness. The unhappiness of recollection lies in its nostalgia for a presence lost. Recollection is flaccid and voluptuous, while repetition is courage, reality, the seriousness of life (*Rep.*, 33-5).

Repetition, we said, has the courage to impose constancy on the flux, the constancy of the circle in which, the midst of change, we return to the same. It fuses Being and becoming, constancy and novelty. But what precisely is the constancy of the circle of repetition? Does it mean the return of the same, repetition in the *literal* sense? Not all, for literal repetition remains within the metaphysics of presence; literal repetition is re-presentation, making present again a presence lost. Indeed the point of Constantine's treatise is to show that the attempt to repeat the same, to reenact a moment which is over, is doomed to failure. That is why repetition is impossible on the aesthetic level. One can never repeat a pleasure that has flown by: there are too many contingencies, too many fortuitous contributions for us to be able to bring them all together again. Whence aesthetics must practice the rotation method, and it dreads repetition (*Rep.*, 23). Constantine Constantius' return visit to Berlin ends in failure; this whole whimsical tale, Kierkegaard writes, is a parody of true repetition (*Rep.*, 14)

Kierkegaard wants to show that true repetition is possible only in the religious sphere, in the sphere of the inner man, and that means that it belongs to the category of existence and freedom. It has an existential sense, and it has nothing to do with the recurrence of something present (*vorhanden*). The circle of repetition therefore is the circle in which freedom works itself out. It is the process by which freedom becomes what it already is, by which it becomes itself. Repetition does not mean that we get something external (*vorhanden*) back — that we are able to make present again a presence flown — but that "consciousness (is) raised to the second power" (*Rep.*, 135). It does not signify the repossession of lost goods or even, as Kierkegaard learned to his regret, that one gets one's fiancée back, but rather that one gets one's freedom back.¹⁴ But not precisely "back," for repetition does not move backwards; rather one acquires freedom for the first time. But then what is repeated? An innermost potentiality, the latent possibility to be or become oneself, which we have neglected, overlooked, "forgotten." In repetition the existing individual learns that, to regain his soul, he must suffer the loss of the whole world. Repetition is a growth in freedom, a shattering of worldly ambitions and selfish goals in order to be brought back to the one thing necessary, to one's innermost and utmost potentiality.

This is made clear in the young man's use of the story of Job in the second part of the book. Kierkegaard thinks that Job and Abraham — he uses Abraham of course in *Fear and Trembling* — as great as they are, are only fighting out border skirmishes on the outskirts of faith, and are not full-fledged "heroes" of faith (*Rep.*, 115). Their sufferings are only a temporary "trial," and hence a merely probationary period, after which their goods will be restored, made present again. Abraham and Job recuperate their losses — Abraham gets Isaac back, and Job's goods and reputation are also restored. But the condition of true repetition is the permanent loss of presence. Freedom must suffer shipwreck; it must undergo the agony of absence. The genuinely religious individual must be prepared to lose all. In this way he will learn that God, Who is the true teacher of repetition, is leading him back to himself, wondrously directing him on a wholly

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unsuspected course, by means of which he discovers what he did not realize he even sought — himself. He seeks the world but in losing it finds himself; he seeks to restore something external and in the process recovers his own inner freedom. In Kierkegaardian repetition there is neither a prior presence nor literal recurrence, but rather the emergence of the new from the possible. Repetition is not the re-presentation of a presence lost, as in Platonic *anamnesis*, nor the making explicit of what was necessarily and logically implicit, as in Hegelian *Aufhebung*. It is rather freedom's discovery of itself, a self which was latent, unknown, although it was known all along to God Who has mysteriously led us back to ourselves. We should neither have known it by ourselves, nor found it by ourselves. But it "is" there — where "is" does not mean "present" — all along, calling us, beckoning to us. God alone elicits it from us, prompts us, moves us, casting us down only to lift us up anew, reborn, remade in the new man who has all along stirred within us. Repetition is the self's recovery of itself.

It is clear then, and let us conclude our sketch of Kierkegaard on this point, that the movement of repetition eludes the metaphysics of presence, that it is an overcoming of metaphysics. This is pointed out by Constantine Constantius himself. He writes, "Repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics" — that is, that point in modern thought at which metaphysics realizes that it can no longer remain disinterested speculation — "and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders" — that is, the point at which metaphysics, which is necessarily speculative and necessarily a philosophy of presence, breaks down and gives way to the philosophy of concrete existence (*Rep.*, 53).¹⁵ Metaphysics looks on, with the detachment of the disinterested spectator, at the spectacle of presence. But repetition is not a speculative problem, and it cannot be resolved by speculative means. It does not have to do with restoring the fullness of presence but with the abyss of freedom. It has nothing to do with Greek *ousiology* but with saving oneself only by first losing oneself.¹⁶

When *Repetition* was translated into German in 1909 in the Diedrichs edition the Danish title *Gentagelse* was rendered *Wiederholung*, and it was that early German edition, which Heidegger knew, which stands behind in a decisive way the hermeneutic phenomenology of *Being and Time*.¹⁷ Now one cannot proceed directly from Kierkegaard to Heidegger without first passing through Husserl, to whom we turn now. But I have offered this reading of this Kierkegaardian text in order to underline something essential about Heidegger's hermeneutic strategy in *Being and Time*, something which is threatened today by those who, like Rorty and Derrida, often speak as though they were continuing what Heidegger has set in motion.

Husserl's Return to Beginnings

The work of retrieval in *Being and Time* is multi-layered. It has to do not only with existential retrieval — it is not only an existential hermeneutic — but also with phenomenological retrieval — it is also a hermeneutic phenomenology. As an existential hermeneutic it wants to recall us to ourselves, to restore our authentic selfhood and being — with others (*Selbstsein, Mit-sein*). As a hermeneutic phenomenology it invokes a new methodological consciousness which says that to philosophize is to recover an understanding in which we already stand. Now if the inspiration of Heidegger's existential hermeneutic is Kierkegaard's notion of repetition, the inspiration of his hermeneutic phenomenology is Husserl's phenomenology, on which account it is proper to regard Husserl's work as a proto-hermeneutics. We have said that the genius of *Being and Time* was to find a way of bringing these two levels of retrieval together and to make of them a single garment, for of themselves they are at odds with one another on the issue of the "metaphysics of presence." Hence we want to see, not only how Heidegger draws upon Husserlian phenomenology in constituting his new hermeneutics, but how the Husserlian element is controlled by the "foundering" or destruction of metaphysics.

Husserl had given an account of perceptual consciousness which maintained that everything in perception turns on the decisive role played by the "horizon" or field to which the perceptual object belongs. We are conscious of the orchestra playing, not of the silence in the rest of the hall; of the film we are viewing, not of the darkness in the theatre. The phone ringing in the stillness of the night is alarming even though it is commonplace for the same phone, with the same decibel level, to ring in the middle of a busy day. A word or a sentence taken out of context takes on a wholly new sense. A severed human hand is ghastly, even though it is well preserved and "looks no different" than a living member of a whole body. The facade of a building which is being levelled is no longer the same but stands as a mute testimony to the ravages of urban progress. We pay explicit attention to the object which appears within the bounds of the horizon while the horizon itself remains implicit, playing a decisive but mute role:

...the focal is girt about with a "zone" of the marginal; *the stream of experience can never consist wholly of focal actualities.*¹⁸

The stream of experience is thus a complex of actual (focal, thematic objects) and an inactual, non-thematic halo which surrounds but decisively affects the structure of the thematic object.

Now it is always possible to shift the arrow of intentional attention away from the focal to the non-focal, and to make the inactual actual. That is the task of reflection. Rays of attention, Husserl says, can be sent by the ego to penetrate the "dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality," piercing its vagueness and "fetching out" from it the hitherto inactual.¹⁹ And here, in this fetching out (*herausholen*) carried out by transcendental reflection, Heidegger encountered another form of that fetching back (*wiederholen*) which makes the implicit explicit, which turns the phenomenological look from the thematic entity to its implicit horizon. Here, in this Husserlian distinction between actual object and inactual horizon,²⁰ Heidegger found the housing for the ontological distinction between the entity and its Being which he had learned from his years of study of scholasticism and Aristotle.

Now it is clear that transcendental horizontal consciousness moves in a circle. It is only in virtue of the pre-thematic and implicitly grasped horizon that it is possible to grasp an object; yet it is only by scrutinizing our consciousness of the object that we find in it the lines which reach out to the horizon. The work of phenomenology is carried out by moving back and forth between horizon and object, between thematic and pre-thematic. Nor is there anything vicious in this circle, for the implicit horizon is the *causa essendi* of the thematic object, while our consciousness of the object is the *causa cognoscendi* of our discovery of the horizon. The viciousness of the circle is removed as soon as one takes into account the distinction between implicit and explicit.

Husserl himself considered the work of fetching objects back off the horizon as an infinite task, an idea in the Kantian sense. It is in principle possible, even if it is not so factually, to make the absent horizon present. Whence if the experienced object is a complex of actuality and inactuality, presence and absence, this is not to be conceived in opposition to the principle of all principles, the principle of self-giveness, but as a task imposed upon reflection to bring every component in our experience to explicit consciousness. Derrida would insist, and rightly in our opinion, that Husserl's argument actually worked against his own purposes, and that he had in fact established the opposite: that there is no pure presence, no purely self-giving object, and that presence is only possible on the horizon of absence.²¹ It is precisely the absence of the horizon, its implicit, pre-thematic status, which makes the presence of the object possible. What if, Heidegger would ask, our capacity for reflection, our capacity to convert absence into presence, is finite? What if the infinite task is not merely a dream but a misunderstanding of the facticity of Dasein?²²

Somewhere shortly after 1920 Husserl began to pay more attention to the “world” as the horizon of horizons, and at the same time to consider the genetic and historical dimensions of his theory of intentionality. The joint emphasis on world and history gave rise to the famous *Lebenswelt* phenomenology which has so decisively influence continental philosophers of this century. I want here to pull but one thread in the rich texture of Husserl’s later philosophy which is of special importance to the story we are presently telling, which seems to have decisively affected Heidegger’s hermeneutics of retrieval, and that is Husserl’s theory of predication.

Husserl had always held to the perceptual base of all knowledge, and defended a stratified theory in which higher order objects are founded (*fundiert*) upon the lower order, and ultimately perceptual objects. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, and especially in *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl traced with meticulous care the lineage of higher order judgments in perceptual experience. Perhaps because of renewed appreciation for Dilthey, Husserl came to realize that this perceptual base, after it is a perception of material objects, is also a cultural-perceptual world, and hence is historically qualified; the perceptual ground upon which higher order judgments is founded has an historical coefficient. Whence not only are the higher order predications of mathematical physics founded on perception — that had always been his position — but furthermore science has a history and the work of reduction cannot be separated from the history of the formation of scientific judgments. And so when he argued in the *Krisis* that the Galilean science had simply taken over naively and without transcendental reflection higher order mathematical cognitions, this constituted a failure in historical retrieval. What is missing in modern physicalist objectivism is a capacity to fetch back the historico-epistemic (a new alliance!) beginnings of its own cognitions. The failure to carry out the reduction now means a failure in historical sense, an incapacity for the historical reduction — which means retrieval, repetition, or as Husserl puts it, reactivation. Reactivation is Husserlian repetition. Our incapacity for this reduction allows the abstract constructions of modern physics to lead a life of their own, to acquire an autonomous voice, and to speak imperiously to modern man. We have forgotten to repeat to their beginnings, and that failure in repetition has precipitated the contemporary crisis.

And so everything in phenomenology turns on retrieval. From the very start, phenomenology meant for Husserl a search for beginnings, for forgotten origins, and the method it used, reduction, *re-ducere*, meant a leading back to beginnings. Reduction, reactivation — these are the Husserlian versions of recovery and repetition. What is reduction if not retrieval? And what is the naiveté of the natural attitude if not forgetfulness? The transcendental ego leads an anonymous life, forgotten in the midst of our preoccupation with the natural life which it makes possible. We live out our intentional life, inhabit our intentional acts, without heeding the transcendental activity which gives shape to our world. And transcendental phenomenology recalls us out of this oblivion, back to the hidden and forgotten origins of our world. If transcendental phenomenology always had a genetic sense, it was inevitable that it would finally take an historical turn; hence there could have been no more consistent outcome to Husserl’s development.²³ Transcendental reduction was all along destined to become historical retrieval.

But what is the character of this retrieval? Does it amount to a making-present-again, a literal representation, or is it a repetition which endures the loss of absence? I think it is to Derrida’s credit to have shown that this phenomenology remains a captive of the metaphysics of presence. We have already seen how this is was the case with the phenomenology of horizons; and it is also the case with the task of historical retrieval. This I take to have been ably demonstrated in Derrida’s commentary on “The Origin of Geometry.”²⁴ In the historical reduction, everything turns on leading the higher order structures back to their foundations in the living present, in the primordial perceptual experiences of the first geometers who first gave sense to our inherited

mathematical idealizations. At the beginning of our scientific tradition there lie rich and pregnant experiences which have nourished the whole subsequent history. It is all a matter of returning to this limpid moment — one which we can determine *a priori* without recourse to factual information; this is the way it “must have been” — in which a light dawned upon the first geometer and he was motivated to pass from a practical concern to an idealized reconstruction of it. Here was a moment of transcendental truth, now long forgotten and buried over by a history of neglect and naiveté. The transcendental-historical reduction breaks the spell of this naiveté and we reenter the region of pristine light.

The reduction turns out to be recollection in the Kierkegaardian sense, recapturing a lost world, moving backwards to a former presence, reinstating a past actuality. The circle moves from presence to absence, and from absence to presence restored. The work of phenomenology is to make present again what has lost its presence. Now on this point — which goes to the heart of the thesis of this paper — we must say that Kierkegaard was the more radical thinker who understood that repetition in the literal sense is impossible. One cannot restore a presence lost. That is the illusion of metaphysics. Kierkegaard understood the foundering of metaphysics; his “thunderstorm” had taught him the limitations of repetition. Constantine Constantius had undertaken repetition — if we may paraphrase Merleau Ponty’s famous remark about the reduction — precisely in order to discover the impossibility of carrying it out literally. He learned that repetition must become a more oblique recovery, one which instead of retrieving pure presence learns to endure the harshest absence.

Heidegger’s Hermeneutics of Retrieval

What Heidegger saw in *Being and Time* was that the two philosophies of retrieval by which he had been affected so deeply — Kierkegaard’s philosophy of repetition and Husserl’s return to beginnings — belonged together. He saw that the circle of repetition, the self’s recovery of itself, belonged together with the circle of understanding, the phenomenological recovery of the implicit and prethematic. He saw that the existential-ontological recovery, by which Dasein hands itself back to itself futurally, is of a piece with the hermeneutic-phenomenological recovery. The philosophy of retrieval provides a determination not only of the Being of man but also of the method of the investigation.²⁵ Whence there are always two tiers of retrieval at work in the existential analytic, two distinguishable but related circles — the one ontological, the other methodological; the one existential and other hermeneutic. And each mirrors the other. The ontological circle grounds the hermeneutic; and the hermeneutic circle befits a being with the Being of Dasein.

We have seen, however, that in their original and native settings — in Kierkegaard and in Husserl — these philosophies of retrieval are not of a kind. For the one, Kierkegaard’s, has made a breach with the metaphysics of presence, and the other, Husserl’s, wants to make present again the anonymous ego, the sedimented sense, the implicit horizon, to bring everything into the clarity of a philosophy of intuition and self-givennes. And so we want to interrogate *Being and Time* as to the sense of the retrieval which is at work there, as to the character of the hermeneutics which it practices and its relationship to metaphysics. Is this a retrieval in the traditional metaphysical sense which wants to reinstate a lost presence and bring it into the light of the day — as the word “phenomenology” indicates — or has it made its break with metaphysics so that it understands the loss of presence?

Now it has all along been our contention that the relationship of Heidegger to Kierkegaard is much more intimate than either Heidegger himself or his commentators have been prepared to admit. In our view, the genius of Kierkegaard, the academic renegade and tormented “except-

tion", is amplified by the genius of Heidegger, the German professor, a species about whom Kierkegaard had not a few things to say. Now we want to show that Heidegger's proximity to Kierkegaard is the controlling element on this question of retrieval and that his hermeneutics is not a philosophy of presence. In *Being and Time* there is, of course, no question of making one's way from time to eternity, but rather from fallenness and inauthentic time to authentic being-a-self. The *vita ventura* becomes authentic futurity. But structurally the positions are the same: the call of conscience is a call back to our thrown Being-in-the-world. The caller of the call of conscience is Dasein itself (in its authentic Being), and that which is called is also Dasein itself (in its inauthenticity), and what is said to Dasein in the call is to become itself, to be the being which it already is, to take up its authentic potentiality for Being. Here there is an existential circle: Dasein calls itself to become itself. Just as in Kierkegaard, Dasein is not Being but *kinesis*, and the structure of the movement is circular: from Dasein to Dasein; to become the being which we already are, to be (*wesen*, taken verbally) that which we have been all along (*gewesen*).

It is in virtue of this existential circularity of Dasein's Being that Heidegger can claim both that authenticity is a modification of inauthenticity, and also that inauthenticity is a modification of authenticity (cf. SZ, §27, 130/168 and §64, 317/365). Ontologically, in the order of Being, inauthenticity is a falling out of, and hence derivative from, authenticity: in its average day-to-day-ness Dasein fails to be true to its ontological make-up and falls in among things. But on the other hand, ontically and factually, authenticity is a modification of inauthenticity: finding itself factually dispersed among things, the transition to authenticity is a movement back to existential-ontological Being, a retrieval of its thrown-projection into the world.²⁶

Now the essential point here, for our purposes, is that this recovery is not to be construed as making-present-again of a lost presence; it is not the restoration of a past actuality. On the contrary, it does not recover presence but absence; it recovers Dasein's own absence from which it has all along been in flight. The call says "nothing;" precisely so: no-thing. It recalls Dasein to the brute contingency of its Being, the thrownness about the origin of which Dasein has nothing to say. It recalls Dasein to the nothingness of its potentiality for Being: Dasein is all along a null project, a project unto death, running forth (*vorlaufen*) into the end. This is a recovery which Dasein would just as soon forgo. This is no return ticket for a trip to Berlin but an invitation to take up the anxiety of Abraham and Job. It is more like the *memento mori* of Christianity, enjoining us to recall our finitude and death. This is a retrieval of absence, of the abyss. Inauthenticity on the other hand clings to the present, the actual, and it moves like the aesthete in Volume One of *Either/Or* from one actuality to the next, practicing the rotation method, avoiding true repetition in favor of the curiosity of the ever-new. But authentic Dasein, which has the courage for anxiety, the courage of repetition, recovers the absence which underlies this presence; it breaks the grip of the actual upon its Being and, in so doing, recovers its freedom. The freedom of Dasein is that it is no longer held fast by the actual; it is a transcendence beyond things which stretches out into the Nothing.²⁷

This is not to say that Dasein's freedom is an impotent brooding over finitude, that it is nihilism or Stoic freedom. On the contrary, freedom is a taking action which liberates the possible (SZ, §59, 294/340-1). Hence, in the breach with everyday Dasein's preoccupation with the actual (presence), in order to confront its own nothingness (absence), Dasein uncovers the true Being of the possible. The Being of Dasein is neither presence (*Vorhandensein*) nor absence but possibility (*Seinskönnen*). Dasein projects itself into a potentiality for Being, not a free-floating and wholly untrammled possibility, but a possibility into which it has been thrown. Dasein's recovery of itself, its self-retrieval (*Wiederholung*), is then not a recollection of a previous state as in Platonism, nor a reactivation in Husserl sense, which makes actual again. It is

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on the contrary discovers (uncovers, recovers) what it is capable of, what it has all along been "sent" to do. We must hear the *schicken* in Heidegger's use of the words *Schicksal* and *Geschick* in *Being and Time*. These words have nothing to do with fate and determinism, but with sending, *mittere*, mission. The authenticity of Dasein lies in retrieving what it has been sent or commissioned to do in this historical situation, in taking up that for which it has all along been sent. Recovery is the repetition of the possible (SZ, §74).

Just as in Kierkegaard repetition does not consist in restoring a lost possession — it does not mean we get the girl back. Rather, we are led by it into a new sphere, one which is unexpected, unforeseen, previously unknown, but yet somehow always mysteriously familiar, obliquely and darkly pre-understood. And we are brought into this sphere not solely by our own resources. For as in Kierkegaard, Dasein requires a teacher of repetition. If in Kierkegaard this teacher is God, in Heidegger it is the historical situation itself, the movement of history in which and by which we see the traces and hear the echoes of a forgotten possibility, a possibility which can indeed be felt only by those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear, that is, by resolute Dasein bent on recovering itself.²⁸

We are now in a position to situate Heidegger's hermeneutic method in *Being and Time*. I want now to show that Heidegger's hermeneutics is through and through a philosophy of retrieval, and hence that the methodology of *Being and Time* is a mirror image of its ontology. And I then want to argue that this means that the Kierkegaardian moment controls the Husserlian, that the ontology of finitude modifies the phenomenology of presence, reshapes it and gives it a new sense, which nowadays goes under the name of "hermeneutic phenomenology."

Ontologically, the call of conscience is a call *back* from inauthenticity and fallenness; methodologically, hermeneutic phenomenology reverses the movement of fallenness in order to make its way *back* to Dasein's authentic constitution. Dasein's Being is characterized by a certain drift or tendency to fall in among things, to de-generate in the literal sense of becoming more and more removed from its origins.²⁹ We tend to drift further and further from ourselves, ontologically, even though ontically we are this very being. But if fallenness is a certain *Zug* — drift, pull, tendency — then hermeneutics must be the *Gegen-zug*, the counter pull, the counter-tendency; any adequate interpretation of Dasein can come about only by countering this tendency, reversing this drift, wrenching Dasein in the opposite direction. That means that interpretation, *Aus-legung*, is a forceful setting free (*Freilegung*) of Dasein which checks its tendency to fall and makes its way back to its primordial or originary (*ursprünglich*) make-up:

The setting free of Dasein's primordial Being (*ursprünglichen Seins*) must rather be *wrested* from Dasein by following the *counter-tendency* (*im Gegen-zug*) from that taken by the falling ontico-ontological tendency of interpretation.

(SZ, 63, 311/359)

On the existential level authentically being oneself (*eigentliches Selbstsein*) is the counter-tendency to inauthentically being like everyone else (*das 'man'*). On the hermeneutic level — that is, on the level of a thematic interpretation such as is undertaken by the author of *Being and Time* — an authentic interpretation of Dasein in terms of existence and temporality is the counter-tendency to a falling interpretation of Dasein in terms of presence. Our pre-thematic fallenness (as existing beings) is mirrored in a fallen ontology. If on the pre-thematic level fallen Dasein takes refuge in the *actual* then on the level of an explicit hermeneutic thematization this results in a metaphysics of presence. Hence we need an interpretative moment which cor-

responds on the hermeneutic level to existential resoluteness, which cuts through the ontology of presence even as resoluteness breaks the grip of the actual. That is what Heidegger means by hermeneutics, and that is why hermeneutics is this counter-tendency (*Gegenzug*).

This mirroring of anticipatory resoluteness in hermeneutics also explains why hermeneutics proceeds by way of fore-structures.³⁰ The methodological fore-structure, the pre-understanding, reflects the existential-ontological being-ahead-of-itself; *Vorstruktur* reflects *Vorwegsein*. Hermeneutic fore-structures cut through the disguises of fallness and make their way back to Dasein's originary structure, even as resoluteness returns Dasein to itself. They are a movement *back* to Dasein's precisely because they are a projective movement *forward*. Inasmuch as they projectively sketch ahead the horizon within which Dasein (or whatever being is under interpretation) can appear, they are at the same time a movement back to Dasein's concealed Being. The forestructures carry out the regress. To mimic the later Heidegger: *Vorstruktur und Rückgang: dasselbe*. Here then is the dynamics of the circle: the fall into the dominant ontology of presence is a falling out, an *exitus*, an ontological de-generation, while the hermeneutic projection is a *reditus*, return, retrieval. Hermeneutics is the thematic recovery of Dasein, even as resoluteness is its pre-thematic recovery.³¹ Hermeneutics is methodological repetition, even as resoluteness is existential repetition.³²

But what guarantee is there that the projective forestructures effect the *reditus*, that they manage to recapture the being in its primordial Being, that they are drawn from the things themselves and are not arbitrary fancies? As Heidegger puts it:

But is not anything of this sort *guided* and *regulated* in a way of its own? Where are ontological projects to get the evidence that their 'findings' are phenomenally appropriate? Ontological interpretation projects the entity presented to it upon the Being which is that entity's own, so as to conceptualize it with regard to its structure. Where are the signposts to direct the projection, so that Being will be reached at all?

(SZ, 63, 312/359)

The only positive response to this question is to be found in Heidegger's notion of the pre-understanding,³³ and it is here that Heidegger's Husserlian strategy comes into play. The legitimacy of the fore-structures is secured only if the fore-structures, which are to be structures which reach forth beyond the being to its Being, also reach *back* and *link up* with our pre-understanding. *This linking up is the only possible control in hermeneutic phenomenology*. We can insure that the forestructural violence will be a wresting loose; a setting free, and not simply sheer caprice only by insisting that such forestructures effect a movement of return to or retrieval of a prior understanding, a preunderstanding which Heidegger simply takes to be constitutive of Dasein. That is what Dasein *is*: a being which always and already possessed of an understanding of Being — and hence of its own Being, of the Being of others, and the Being of things. If this pre-understanding is denied or undermined, the whole edifice of hermeneutic phenomenology collapses. This is not to say that this preunderstanding is not at times badly defaced or distorted; but even then it remains at work in everything which Dasein does:

No matter how far removed from an ontological concept the distinction between existence and reality may be, no matter even if Dasein proximally understands existence as reality, Dasein is not just present-at-hand but has already understood itself, however mythical or

magical the interpretation which it gives may be.

(SZ, §63, 313/361)

Here Heidegger invokes the dynamics of Husserl's phenomenology of horizons and the distinction between the implicit, prethematic horizon and the explicitly thematic object. We live and move about within a certain horizontal understanding, and these "forgotten" horizons make our explicit awareness possible. Heidegger takes over this Husserlian structure and gives it a more properly ontological cast. The horizon within which Dasein moves about is its understanding of its own Being (and of Being in general), an understanding (*Verstehen*) which does not get to be a concept (*Begriff*), which remains anonymous, even though its effects are felt in every corner of our experience. The hermeneutic forestructures then are "guided and regulated" by this pre-understanding. Their role is to explicate it, to bring it out into the open, to give it explicit, thematic shape where previously it remained anonymous and prethematic. The work of hermeneutics is *aus-legen, ex-ponere*, to lay out in the sense of drawing out into the open, to make explicit what we all already implicitly understand.

Notice then how Heidegger has redefined the traditional hermeneutic circle along Husserlian lines (and at the same time drawn Husserl into the hermeneutic circle). He has transformed the old circle of the whole and the parts into a phenomenological circle of implicit and explicit, of pre-thematic and thematic, of anonymous horizon and explicitly named object. And he saw that these phenomenological dynamics obey the laws of repetition and retrieval. That is why there is nothing vicious in hermeneutic circularity: it conforms to classical phenomenological science, and Derrida is certainly right to say that the hermeneutic circle in *Being and Time* is controlled by the logic of implicit and explicit.³⁴ Phenomenology is already a proto-hermeneutics, for its work of fetching out (*heraussholen*) what is only horizontally given, or pre-given, is a work of laying-out (*auslegen*) an understanding in which we already stand.

A primordial interpretation, Heidegger says, "will let that which is to be interpreted *put itself into words for the very first time...*" (SZ, §63, 314-5/362). Where understanding previously remained vague and inarticulate, in interpretation it becomes articulated and explicit. But that means that in hermeneutics everything comes down to recognition — *recognito, Wiedererkennung, Anerkennung* — a knowing which comes back to what we already know. A knowing again, renewing our primordial acquaintance with ourselves. Everything comes down to our capacity for retrieval and repetition; there is no proving and disproving in hermeneutics but only a self-examination, a self-discovery, in which we find ourselves in the account or fail to do so. Hermeneutics provides this prior understanding with the words with which to come into language. In so doing it brings us to stand in the place which we already occupy. It returns us to ourselves, bring us home. It is appropriation and homecoming: coming into our own again.

But we have said that the hermeneutic phenomenology is the mirror image of the existential ontology,³⁵ and hence that this Husserlian moment is controlled by the Kierkegaardian. Hence we must not make the mistake of thinking that in this hermeneutics we want to make everything present and explicit, to restore presence everywhere. For the ontology of existence culminates in resoluteness which is a readiness for anxiety, openness to the absence. And so that too is mirrored in the hermeneutics.

To see how this is so we must follow up the clue which is provided us by the ontology of existence. When resolute Dasein returns to itself from fallenness it does not seize again a lost presence, nor recapture a pure but hitherto concealed Being. On the contrary, it returns to the nothingness of its Being, and faces up to that from which it has all along been in flight, its own nullity (*Nichtigkeit*). By the same token, if hermeneutic phenomenology projects the Being of this being in terms of existence and temporality, and claims thereby that it has drawn this

projection from primordial sources, that it has thereby entered the circle “wholly and primordially” (*ganz und ursprünglich* SZ, §63, 315/363), it has not claimed to have made Dasein’s being *transparent*. It does not claim to have restored a lost presence and brought it into the light, but rather to have restored the mystery, the absence, “lethic” element in Dasein. Hence the effect of this hermeneutic retrieval is to have recovered our “openness for the mystery” (*Offenheit zum Geheimnis*)³⁶ of existence. Retrieval for Heidegger does not mean the retrieval of presence, the recovery of a lost actuality, but precisely the opposite. For his grievance with metaphysics has all along been that it turns Being into presence. It treats Dasein as a fully definable thing, a circumscribable presence, which, however much we qualify it with uplifting predicates (person, spirit, etc.), remains something present. But the Being of Dasein is finitude, contingency, nothingness, lacking a secure grasp of its whence and its whither, thrown and mortal. Whence what is brought to words for the first time in this projection of Dasein is a self-understanding of ourselves as mortals. Heidegger wants to recover the mystery of mortality; the retrieval is a *memento mori*, the recovery of the abyss. The *terminus ad quem* of this retrieval, of this phenomenological *Rückgang*, is no transcendental ego, no *res cogitans* or absolute spirit, but the being whose Being is a nullity. Heidegger’s hermeneutic is bent on restoring our finitude, mortality and humanity — if *homo* means *humus*.

In Husserl the recovery of origins is intended as a transcendental movement, as a movement out of pure freedom, in which the ego disengages itself from its situatedness within the horizon of the world. The movement from thematic to pre-thematic is made possible because of the ability of the reflecting ego (*das reflectierende ich*) to loosen the grip of any worldly horizon and thereby to secure for the ego reflective clarity. But in Heidegger there can be no question of loosening ourselves *from* our horizontal situatedness but rather of awakening ourselves *to* our situatedness, awakening our sense of *being* situated. In *What is Metaphysics?* he argues that we cannot thematize the world as such and as a whole by some pure effort of thought — for that would result in an unphenomenological and vacuous construction — but we can, through anxiety, become profoundly attuned to our situatedness *within* an encompassing (and hence non-bracketable) totality.³⁷ Husserl’s phenomenology of horizons is meant to be part of a presuppositionless science which would reduce every pre-thematic horizon (in principle, if not in fact) to thematic awareness. But Heidegger means instead to unfold and penetrate our horizons, not to entertain the illusion that we can disengage them. The task is not to deny our presuppositions, he said, but to penetrate them more deeply (SZ, §62, 310/358).

Heidegger stands with Kierkegaard on this point, not Husserl. And his critique of Husserl is an echo of Kierkegaard’s critique of Plato. Platonic recollection, Hegelian remembering (*Erinnerung*) of the forms through which the spirit has passed, Husserlian *epoché* — all of these are so many versions of what Kierkegaard called “disinterest,” which he regarded as a fantastic creation. The project of repetition and of retrieval is radically interested, and the metaphysics of presence founders on this interest:

...repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders.

(*Rep.*, 53)

As long as one remains on the level of interest — *inter-esse*, being betwixt and between, being caught up in the world, Being-in-the world, existence — there can be no illusion of transparency. Transparency and pure presence are illusions of distance, illusions induced by the impossible attempt to shut down the workings of existence, to disengage the existing self, to forget that one exists, as Johannes Climacus put it. And it is to this forgetting that retrieval and recovery are

opposed, so that one when one recalls existence, one has dismissed the illusion of presence and thereby restored the mystery of existence.

That is also why, I should add here, concrete and practicing hermeneutics — the hermeneutics of texts in the usual sense, as opposed to the exclusively ontological hermeneutics we have pursued here — must guard against the same illusion of objective presence. We have seen that existential retrieval means that Dasein recovers not a lost actuality but a possibility, and that hermeneutic retrieval recovers not a transparent presence but the enigma of a thrown project. But that implies that concrete, working hermeneutics must aim its interpretations not principally at restoring lost monuments and documents but at what is possible in a text. Its goal cannot be to reconstruct a past actuality, to restore it to its original condition, but, as Gadamer argues, to find out its possible sense for us today, to find out what it says to us, here and now.³⁸ We shall do this in any case, as Gadamer argues — or else interpretations would not have a history. As Nietzsche says in *The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, the strong one knows how to assimilate the past and to bring it into the service of the present and future, and he does so at the expense of pure objectivity.³⁹ Indeed pure objectivity, were it ever possible — and not instead an ontological folly which flies in the face of the facticity of Dasein — would be of no use at all. We would then have to learn how to wean ourselves away from such things as from a form of escapism. The perfect reconstruction of past actuality would leave us speechless and mute, insofar as we are existing beings, and would be of no use to life, as Nietzsche would say. This is not to say that the reading of a text is a capricious affair in which any reading is allowed. That is precisely what Heidegger rules out when he criticizes the notion of a free floating construction (SZ, §7, 28/50). We have seen that the one, decisive hermeneutic control is what we called the *linking* up of a projection with the pre-understanding. Unless the Being in terms of which a being is projected reaches back and articulates a pre-understanding then it is groundless and uprooted. And that means that in the labors of a concrete, working hermeneutics must be enlisted in the service of articulating our self-understanding. The interpretation of an a past historical epoch, of work of art, or of a scriptural text, must be governed by their ability to tell us who we are, to say something to us here and now about the beings which we ourselves are or, better, must become. All hermeneutics, on whatever level, is the recovery of man and is governed by the existential imperative to become oneself.

Derrida's Critique of Retrieval

We have made everything in the hermeneutic strategy initiated by *Being and Time* turn on the dynamics of retrieval. We have followed the complex interweaving of two levels of retrieval, the one existential the other phenomenological. And we have said that everything depends upon our ability to make the transition from fallenness — whether into the naivete of the natural attitude or the tranquility of everydayness — to Dasein's primordial Being. But Derrida wants to deconstruct this very distinction between the primordial and the fallen on the grounds that it too belongs to the metaphysics of presence:

Yet is not the contrast between primordial and derivative properly metaphysical? Is not a demand for an *arche* in general — whatever precautions are taken with this concept — the essential operation of metaphysics? Is there not at least some Platonism in the notion of *Verfallen*.⁴⁰

On Derrida's view, Heidegger's notions of authenticity and primoridality remain under the spell of the metaphysics of presence:

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The primordial and the authentic are determined as the proper (*eigentlich*) — i.e., as the *near* (*prope, proprius*), the present in the proximity of presence to self. It could be shown how this value of proximity and presence to self enters, at the beginning of *Being and Time* and elsewhere, into the decision to pose the question of the meaning of Being starting from the existential analytic of Dasein. The force of metaphysics in such a decision and in the credit accorded here to the value of presence to self could also be demonstrated.⁴¹

For Derrida the very structure of retrieval is metaphysical, for it implies a movement from a temporary absence to a permanent presence. Dasein is at first dissipated and dispersed among things, estranged from itself, then it returns to itself, gathers itself up into a unity and self-identity, a unity which is of course at the expense of difference, of differance.

That is what leads Derrida, at the conclusion of "The Ends of Man," to distinguish two different sorts of deconstruction. The first, Heidegger's, attempts deconstruction

...without changing ground, by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts and original problematics, by using against the edifice the instruments or the stones available in the house.

The second, Derrida's extension (and deconstruction) of Heidegger, goes further:

To decide to change ground, in a discontinuous and eruptive manner, by stepping abruptly outside and by affirming absolute rupture and difference.⁴²

Heideggerian deconstruction is at fault precisely because it is an attempt at retrieval, at repeating the primordial beginnings because it wants to go back and find what is primordial. Derrida's undertaking is however a more pitiless breaking with every possible form of metaphysics and humanism and stands altogether outside it. There is no question of repeating or retrieving its innermost sense, but of breaking with the very illusion of an innermost sense. Heidegger's overcoming befits the higher man, but not the *Übermensch* himself: it is not pitiless enough.⁴³

I should like to respond to this criticism by taking my point of departure from a text from *Vom Wesen des Grundes* which, in conjunction with the argument we have developed in this paper, throws Derrida's reading of Heidegger into doubt. Here Heidegger says that insofar as Dasein is characterized by "existence," "transcendence," and "possibility" — words drawn from metaphysics but which acquire a new and unmetaphysical sense in Heidegger — then, far from being a being of nearness, as Derrida would have it, Dasein is precisely a being of distance (*ein Wesen der Ferne*):

And so man, as an existing transcendence which bounds forth towards possibilities, is a *being of distance*. Only through the primordial distances he establishes in his transcendence towards all beings does true nearness to things arise in him. And only being able to hear into the distance, effects in Dasein as a self an awakening to the answer of Dasein — with, in being — with which Dasein can surrender its egoism (*Ichheit*) in order to win itself as an authentic self.⁴⁴

This text flatly contradicts the attempt to define authentic Dasein in terms of self-presence, self-nearness, self-identity. For authentic Dasein is characterized by transcendence: it is stretched out beyond itself — beyond its factual presence or present factuality — into the possible, into its uttermost potentiality for Being. And it is precisely this self-absence, its being held out into

Nothingness (*Gehaltensein in das Nichts*),⁴⁵ from which inauthentic Dasein is in flight. Inauthenticity is the flight from absence to presence. Inauthenticity is a refusal of transcendence, of that stretching forth into the possible which constitutes its genuine Being; is a flight into the actual. Authentic Dasein, on the other hand, has the courage for absence, for the uncanny; it is ready for anxiety, for the nullity of its ground and of its projects, for the possibility of its own nullity which it cultivates precisely as a possibility. In the language of metaphysics this ec-static stretching out of Dasein's Being is called transcendence, and that means, Heidegger says here in a language beyond metaphysics, self-distancing. Dasein is what it is only by staying open to the distance which constitutes its very Being. To be a self is to have the courage for self-distancing, to keep the wound of finitude open — whereas inauthenticity collapses upon itself, collapsing into the present and the actual. The controlling metaphor in all of Heidegger's diverse accounts of Dasein over the years is not nearness but openness, dis-closedness, and that always means keeping itself open or stretched out into the distance.⁴⁶ Authenticity is a matter of distance not of nearness. (And it is this same distance — *ec-stasis*, *Aus-stehen* — which constitutes the projectedness of Dasein upon which all Heideggerian hermeneutics turns.)

In my view Derrida has been misled by his critique of Husserl. He rightly — quite brilliantly, I think — saw in Husserl's phenomenology a metaphysics of presence, and he showed in his "Introduction" to *The Origin of Geometry* that Husserl wanted a metaphysical making-present-again, that he wanted to reactivate a lost meaning, to repeat it literally. Whence he says in the essay on Descartes and Foucault:

The attempt to write the history of the decision, division, difference runs the risk of construing the division as an event or a structure subsequent to the unity of an original presence, thereby confirming metaphysics in its fundamental operation.⁴⁷

But if this movement from presence to absence, and then from absence to presence restored, holds true of Husserl's teleology of reason, it cannot be said either of the retrieval of authenticity in *Being and Time*, or of the step back into the origin of metaphysics in the later writings. For the recovery of the primal and primordial of which Heidegger speaks — whether in his early writings or late — is never the recovery of a primal presence. It is the recovery of a primordial *experience* (*Erfahrung*), but this is always an experience of finitude and absence. In other words, and here one can put our counter-point to Derrida succinctly, in *Derrida the critique of presence tends to pass over surreptitiously into a critique of retrieval itself*. And that is what I deny. For the one is not the other. Retrieval can indeed take the metaphysical form of a retrieval of presence — that is what Platonic recollection, Hegelian *Erinnerung* and Husserlian *Reaktivierung* surely are. But a more radical doctrine of retrieval, such as we find in Heidegger, has given up this nostalgia for presence and has become instead a readiness for anxiety, an openness, a self-exposure to finitude, limit and negativity. It wants precisely to return us to the finitude from which we have all along been in flight and for which metaphysics is constantly seeking the cure. In Heidegger the movement of *return* means having the courage to face up to the nothingness which inhabits Being and the thought of Being. It is not nostalgia but courage for the hard and inhospitable. It is the acknowledgement of our finitude, fallibility and mortality. It is a recovery of man, for man, *homo*, means *humus*. This recovery is the call to remember, man, what you are: *memento homo, cineris est in cinerem reverteris*. It is the recovery of the *memento mori*. And that is a recovery which we would soon enough do without. If it is nostalgia, it is a pathological nostalgia.

Whence the critique of presence cannot be passed off as a critique of all return and all retrieval, not if retrieval, instead of meaning the restoration of presence, means the restoration

of the mystery, of the wholly other, of the nameless. Derrida thinks that repetition means you get the girl back.⁴⁸ But he has not taken adequately into account the Kierkegaardian element in repetition. He gets no further in the understanding of repetition than Constantine Constantius, who has an aesthetic theory, and not as far as the anxiety of Job and Abraham. Indeed even Job and Abraham remain only on the outskirts of true repetition: for their deferral and difference was only temporary; they got their goods back. Genuinely religious, genuinely non-metaphysical repetition means the agony of real and permanent loss, means that the recovery of the self is carried out only in the agony of absence.

If retrieval means the recovery of the abyss, of the mystery, of the absence which inhabits human experience, that is also what I take hermeneutics to be. Hermeneutics thinks — contrary to Derrida (and Rorty) — that there is something deeper to be sought, something more primal. Hermeneutics turns on this commitment to the primordial. The movement of its circle is always a circling back on something more essential. Hermeneutic violence is always practiced in the service of retrieval. If recovery is the life of hermeneutics, then deconstruction is but a moment through which it passes. And that is why I reject the disjunction which Derrida proposes:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned towards the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of otheology — in other words throughout his entire history — has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and end of play.⁴⁹

For in this dichotomy Derrida has fused the search for the originary with the nostalgia for presence, and that is precisely what I deny. We have seen in Heidegger the search for something originary which is not the fulness of presence but which has the courage for the abyss. In Heidegger, both early and late, the return to the primordial has nothing to do with escaping from the play in which Dasein (or Being) is caught up. On the contrary, it is an entering into that play and taking one's stand within it. As a readiness for anxiety it is precisely the acknowledgment that Dasein is the being whose Being is at stake, whose Being is not secured by an *essentia* or *natura*, not underwritten by *eidōs* or *ousia*, but it precisely an issue for Dasein.

And who can deny that this very confrontation with the abyss of Dasein is a return to origins, a recovery of that more primordial Being from which everyday Dasein is in constant flight? Here we have a breaking through to a concealed sense from which everyday Dasein is in flight which is at the same time a denial of presence, a readiness for the void.

And so everything comes down to the question with which we began, about whether repetition is possible. Hermeneutics has all along maintained that it is, and the point of hermeneutic violence has always been to wrest loose what tends of itself to remain concealed. Deconstruction belongs in the service of retrieval; active forgetting — as Nietzsche himself says⁵⁰ — belongs together with recalling. Whether it is taken on the ontological level which we have pursued here, or on the concrete level of the interpretation of texts, hermeneutics always means that there is a deeper sense, a latent understanding which needs to be brought to words. That means for example that the interpretation of a classical text, or of a work of art, of a moment in human history, is never finished, never exhausted. There is always a new and primordial way for these things to speak to us. And in each case they speak to us about ourselves; they tell us who we are

and recall us to our finitude. The texts of the great metaphysicians always address the question of our finitude, whether to embrace it or to find a way around it. The works of the great artists sing the song of our incarnation and mortality. The sacred texts recall us to our dependence upon an encompassing power. It is the task of hermeneutics, as I see it, to give words to this self-understanding, to bring it into language and that means into appearance. These are words which we sooner leave unsaid in favor of the public interpretation of our lives. Such words are neither a mere play of signs nor a monument to ageless presence and pure Being; they are words which hermeneutics enlists in the service of the *Sache selbst*, words of elemental power, words that have put themselves at the disposal of a primordial *hermeneuein*.

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NOTES

1 This paper is reprinted from *Man and World* 15 (1982), pp. 343-67, and is published here with permission of Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

2 SZ = Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 10. Aufl. (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1963); the pagination after the slash refers to the English translation, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

3 Hence one can connect this sense of *recuperare* with the Husserlian "crisis" which is an illness of the spirit.

4 Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30 (1969), pp. 31-57.

5 With the notable exception of Calvin Schrag, Heidegger commentators tend to keep a safe distance from acknowledging the Kierkegaardian element in Heidegger's work, for fear, no doubt, of being declared "ontic." That is a serious mistake, not because Heidegger's work is indeed ontic, but because a good deal of Heidegger's "ontological" revolution is prepared for by Kierkegaard. I might also recommend in this connection William Spanos, "Heidegger, Kierkegaard and the Hermeneutic Circle: Towards a Postmodern Theory of Interpretation as Disclosure," *Boundary 2*, IV (Winter, 1976), pp. 455-88, which is one of the few essays I know which has seen the connection between Kierkegaardian repetition and Heideggerian hermeneutics. The point of this essay, which is obscured by the highly opaque style in which it is written, is that "existential" hermeneutics means self-appropriation, a point we heartily endorse although it is not the point of the present essay.

6 See my "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: The Case of Heidegger and Rorty," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 36 (1983), pp. 661-85.

7 In the Middle Ages this became basis of a mystical circle of *exitus* and *reditus* — e.g. in Meister Eckhart. See my "Fundamental Themes in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Thomist*, 42 (1978), pp. 197-225.

8 This point has been pursued in a penetrating way in various essays by Thomas Sheehan; see his "Heidegger's Topic: Excess, Access, Recess," *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie*, XLI, 4 (December, 1979), pp. 615-35.

9 *Rep.* = Soren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. with introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper & Row, The Cloister Library, 1964).

10 Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Walter Lowrie and David Swenson (Princeton: University Press, 1941), pp. 184-5, including the "note."

11 See note 7, *supra*.

12 It is precisely this problematic which occupies Heidegger in SZ, § 64.

13 There is an important doctrine of repetition in Nietzsche, which goes under the name of eternal recurrence.

14 It is painfully obvious that Kierkegaard has in mind here his own loss of Regine. When he wrote *Repetition* he still entertained the hope that he would be reunited with her, only to find, shortly after he had completed the book, that she had married Schlegel. Whence Kierkegaard's unpleasant introduction to the shortcomings of the philosophy of presence. But here it seems to me is a classic case of having to kill the author and to forget Kierkegaard himself.

15 Interest for Kierkegaard means *inter-esse*, being in the midst of, and clearly anticipates Heidegger's *in-der-Welt-sein*. See Kierkegaard, *Johannes Climacus or De omnibus dubitandum est* and *A Sermon*, trans. T.H. Croxall (Stanford: University Press, 1958), pp. 151-2.

16 For more on Kierkegaard's notion of repetition, see the bibliography under the entry "Repetition" in *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, 5 vols., vol. 3, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), pp. 20-22.

17 See Soren Kierkegaard: *International Bibliografi*, ed. Jens Himmelsstrup (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag – Arnold Busck, 1962), No. 808, p. 26; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David Linge (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 214.

18 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 107.

19 Husserl, *Ideas*, p. 92.

20 For more on Husserl's discussion of horizon, see *Ideas*, § § 27-28, 44, 47, 63, 69 and 83; see also the distinction between attentional actuality and the wakeful ego, on the one hand, and implicit, non-attentional, potential consciousness of the horizon in § § 35 and 37.

21 This kind of argument runs throughout Derrida's Husserl interpretations; but see e.g., Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 81-83.

22 See Heidegger's letter to Husserl of Oct. 22, 1927 in Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, Husserliana IX (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 600-3. One should beware of overstating the opposition between Husserl and Heidegger, which is in part the point of the present discussion.

23 Derrida makes this point in "Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," *Writing and Difference*, trans. with an introduction by Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1978), pp. 154-68.

24 Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry;" An Introduction*, trans. John Leavey, ed. David Allison (Stony Brook: Nicolas Hays, 1978).

25 Heidegger does not censor the word "method," as Gadamer does. See *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), p. 111.

26 Thomas Sheehan, "On Movement and the Destruction of Ontology," *The Monist*, 64 (October, 1981), pp. 539-40.

27 See *What is Metaphysics?* in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 101.

28 Heidegger writes: "The resoluteness which comes back to itself and hands itself down, then becomes the repetition of a possibility of existence that has come down to us. Repeating is handing down explicitly – that is to say, going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there." SZ, § 74, 385, 437.

29 "...in the field of ontology, any 'springing-form' (*ent-springen*) is degeneration." SZ, § 67, 334, 383.

30 That of course is why Gadamer claims that in *Being and Time* hermeneutics is given an ontological foundation.

31 Actually, interpretation (*Auslegung*) may be either thematic or prethematic, but the work of the author of *Being and Time* is clearly meant to be a thematization.

32 That is why the word "*Wiederholung*" can be used to apply either to Dasein's own existential self-actualization (§ 74) or to the reading of the history of ontology – in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 211-2.

33 Part of the answer to this question is negative: if a conception has become popular, common (*völkisch*, SZ, § 32, 153, 195), then we may be sure that it is de-generate, diluted, commonplace, fallen out of its elemental power. But such a negative criterion will ensure only that our forestructures will be exotic, not necessarily recuperative, restorative of the things themselves. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

34 Derrida, "Ends of Man," pp. 47-8.

35 Whence either the ontology or the methodology may be called hermeneutic.

36 Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 55.

37 "What is Metaphysics?" p. 101.

38 Whence Gadamer's critique of historical objectivism is in the essential spirit of *Being and Time*.

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39 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 2, 6.

40 Jacques Derrida, "Ousia and gramme: A Note to a Footnote in *Being and Time*," trans. Edward Casey, in *Phenomenology in Perspective*, ed. Joseph Smith (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1970), p. 89.

41 Derrida, "Ousia," p. 90, n. 36.

42 Derrida, "Ends," p. 56.

43 In the same spirit Rorty speaks of Heidegger's "fatal attachment to the tradition," a "pathetic notion." See his "Overcoming the tradition: Heidegger and Dewey," in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 256.

44 Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, A Bilingual Edition, incorporating the German text of *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, trans. T. Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 130-31.

45 What is Metaphysics? p. 105.

46 There is a threefold distancing at work here: (1) Dasein stretches out towards its own potentiality for Being, which makes its *Selbstsein* possible; (2) towards the Being of others, which makes its *Mit-sein* possible, and (3) towards *Vorhandensein* and *Zuhandensein*, which makes its every day *in-sein* possible. All three of these ecstases are made possible by its primordial projection of Being itself.

47 *Writing and Difference*, p. 40.

48 There is to be sure a thematic of "repetition" in Derrida, but it is always in the sense of the supplement, trace or vestige, but not in the genuine sense of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. See the concluding pages of *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), especially p. 312.

49 Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 292.

50 Nietzsche, "Advantage and Disadvantage," I, p. 10.

