

# Derrida's Deconstruction Of The Heideggerian End Of Metaphysics

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## Abstract

This paper is a search for the philosophical underpinnings of what has now come to be known as post-modernism. The word designates the change - a shift that has been seen in the culture of what we call the First World. The concept of post-modernism is used to differentiate the historical period that precedes it. The term post-modern was first used in 1870 by John Watkins. John Watkins Chapman first coined a 'post-modern way of painting' to describe the style of painting that departed from French Impressionism.

The word is used mainly in a sociological sense. Nevertheless, it has its theoretical as well as philosophical underpinnings. The paper is an attempt to trace its origin in the thought and works of the German thinker Martin Heidegger.

The choice of the thinker is not entirely arbitrary. Heidegger is one of the first thinkers of the post-war generation. To be precise, his first major work was published in 1927. The concepts used and propounded by Heidegger were later used by many influential thinkers, who, with the help of these concepts, defined what we now understand by post-modernism.

Heidegger, in this context, becomes the creator of these concepts, though certainly not directly. It becomes imperative to discuss his works and the concepts he propounded.

In the same vein, we discuss Derrida, the pioneer of post-structuralism - the name given to the current of thought in philosophy, from which almost all the concepts that constitute post-modernity are derived.

The paper is in two parts. The first part will be a bit lengthy discussion of the word post-modernism and its conceptual ramifications. The second part will be a brief discussion of Heidegger as read by Derrida.

**Keywords:** post-modernism, Heidegger, Derrida, origin

**Research Paper**

Post-modernism, in its epistemological sense, doubts the certainty that we have in knowledge. It takes an attitude of skepticism towards such claims and goes so far as to question the stability of the meaning or meanings.

### **Part-I**

What is the meaning of the word post-modern? Is it a new concept, a style of writing that anyone can take up? Or does this signify a completely new period in economics and culture?

If it is any of the things mentioned above, how is one to recognize it, locate it and, in the end, make sense of the world through this concept and its ramifications in all the other fields of science, art and culture?

These are some of the questions or inquiries which will be taken up in the first part of the paper, and the second part will take up one of the possible originators, at least in thinking of this new word which is bandied about everywhere in the contemporary academia and discussions surrounding any of the fields.

Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp define or associate it generally with the field of aesthetics and specifically with modernist aesthetics. Post-modernism is a break with the modernist aesthetics. One of the consequences of this definition is absolute breaking away from Modernism. Gregory Ulmer and Edward Said discuss the object of post-criticism. The historical reference in their case is the intellectual movement known as critical philosophy, which in turn has its reference to Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment?' Another aspect in their case is the politics of interpretation which is primarily a philosophical interpretation. So one could even formulate it as the politics of philosophy. Frederic James and Jean Baudrillard see it as the modes of Space and Time. They further determine this mode of space and time and describe it as the schizophrenic space and time. This definition is in direct contrast to Kant's conception of space and time. For Kant, these were a priori categories that ground our empirical experience or, in other words, without which one cannot even experience the objects scattered in space and time or rather even empirical spaces as such. Craig Owens and Kenneth Frampton see it more directly.

In terms of the promises of Modernity, there are basically two, namely 'progress' and 'mastery'. These two determinations directly resonate with the industrial revolution that engulfed the whole of Europe and later the entire world. In summary, all of the critics mentioned above, except Jurgen Habermas, agree that Modernity as a concept is deeply problematic. Attacked and assailed by almost all the leading scholars, the project or modernity's concept, contrary to all appearances, hasn't been defeated yet, but it has been absorbed. One example is the dominance of the objects of Modernity which are made essential to our day-to-day experience. Be it in the field of sciences or culture. In order to make this argument more precise, we will have to specify Modernity or Modernism. To save it, it has to be taken out of its absorption or, in other words, it has to be exceeded. As indicated above and with Habermas, we state that the project of Modernity coincides with that of the project of Enlightenment. What Kant laid down in this essay reverberates in Hegel and up to even Marx. We read in Marx's introduction to Capital that the reader is to consult himself or herself alone in making a judgment of the conclusions he reached in his research. One can define

this sort of subjectivity as scientific subjectivity. Obviously, it assumes a general acquaintance with the scientific method. This is the central or essential point regarding Enlightenment and its resonance in other fields of art and culture. As Habermas writes, its project is one with that of Enlightenment: to develop the spheres of science, morality and art "according to their inner logic". This project is still at work in post-war society or what has come to be known as late Modernism. In the sphere of art: surrealism and dadaism. These two forms take primary positions in the post-modernist culture as well. However, for Habermas, these art forms do not create an emancipatory effect on the reader or the audience. So he opposes them to that of the early modernist works.

As stated above, surrealism and dadaism return in the form of revolt against the classical works of Modernity and the post-modernists employ them fully in their attack against Modernism as one of their mandates is "change the object itself". This obviously results in a different interpretation that serves them fully. By showing these conclusions, they affirm the multicultural or proliferation of difference as opposed to Modernism's meta-narrative.

Thus Krauss writes, post-modernist practice "is not defined in relation to a given medium... but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms." Following these lines of thought or conclusions, one can survey these in terms of their effects in the various spheres of sciences, art and culture. Class politics or Marxist politics dominant in the preceding century gives way to identity politics, which at times is even opposed to class politics. Despite all that, one must not forget the point mentioned above. All these post-modernist practices still have not been able to defeat Modernism. This becomes very clear even in a cursory survey of the field of politics. All identity politics rests on the democratic rights won through the French revolution, which can be considered as the political context of the intellectual upheavals that were taking place in the preceding century. One can go on to illustrate this by taking examples from all the other fields.

Another important field is the epistemological field. The conclusions made in this field even had more profound reverberations in the other fields, and one cannot discuss them without referring to Foucault, Derrida and other french thinkers of the times. One of them is the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. The intellectual context is that of structuralism and post-structuralism. So what do these have to say or how do they respond to Modernism? Or how does one place them or in what light is their work to be seen.

Where would Michel Foucault be placed, in the sense of disciplines or subject? Is he a historian, philosopher, sociologist or political scientist? The same can be said of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. The work of Derrida will be discussed in detail with reference to Heidegger in the second part of this paper.

As seen earlier, both or all of these thinkers cannot be discussed without reference to the Continental theory or philosophy. The conclusions that Levi-Strauss or Foucault drew or reached emphasize the objects' multiplicity. Thus reducing a privileged object from its place and assigning it with all the others or elevating the marginalized objects to this privileged place or space.

Post-modernism thus could be defined as the philosophy of the multiple as opposed to the One. In the next section, we will come to the discussion of this One. In philosophy, this One is the concept

of Being. Heidegger is one of the first thinkers to problematize this One while simultaneously trying to answer the age-old question of Being.

The work of Heidegger becomes specifically interested in this conundrum which pulls on both sides. On the one hand, it is the Deconstruction of the old Metaphysics, but simultaneously, it is the construction of a new Metaphysics. We will see how Derrida identified as the post-modernist philosopher resolves the question. In the first place, showing us clearly the project that Heidegger had taken, its subsequent failure and his new solution to the problem. This solution he articulates with the help of the concept of repetition.

## **Part - II**

This part of the paper discusses Heidegger. To be more precise, Heidegger destroying metaphysics (this is the sense one gets while reading Heidegger) and Derrida's critique of the same in his Deconstruction. It reads the concept of Deconstruction in various texts of Heidegger and subsequently looks at Derrida's critique of destruction in his theory of Deconstruction.

In his writings, Heidegger states that metaphysics is declining and much closer to its end, as the ground supported by metaphysics has become barren, which can be seen from the last century's history. This regression marks the forgetting of Being thought or conceived as metaphysics; he argues that it from the beginning is an illusion that sustains reality and is precipitated towards its end. Instead, Truth has again to be thought of in terms of the uncovering of Being as Aletheia. This supposed overcoming of metaphysics, however, is repeating the same metaphysics in whatever sense one conceives it, keeping the same metaphysics in the horizon, something which has to be done away with and something which has to be overcome. Thus, it circles completely within itself rather than outside metaphysics. Heidegger, instead of destroying metaphysics, is repeating the same metaphysics.

For Heidegger, philosophy has to destroy the history of ontology. In his texts *Being and Time* (1927), and *The End of Philosophy* (1964), he aims to rethink philosophy by pronouncing an end of traditional metaphysics and to rethink the act of thinking that takes the form of Aletheia, or unconcealing, of Truth. The first question relates to the destruction of ancient ontology. What does it mean to destroy the ancient content of Ontology? It means primarily to overcome metaphysics. This entails going beyond philosophical realism and idealism, both of which are deeply rooted in epistemology. One must think of philosophy in terms of Ontology. It means a primordial handling of philosophy as the uncovering of Being. Destruction, therefore, entails dismantling assumptions about philosophy that are merely historical. Taking Being and its question as the clue, Heidegger's interest transcends the mere metaphysical claims about philosophy to go into ontology. In place of metaphysics as representation or logos, he writes that philosophy should be an inquiry into the being of Being, thus moving philosophy beyond metaphysics into the realm of ontology. One obvious question is why does Heidegger want this destruction? It is because, according to Heidegger, first of all, it creates divisions that, in the least, are inaccurate. We can think of the division between ideal and real; another couple is subject and object. Heidegger argues that these divisions are combined in Being whereas Being serves the ground for them. In the sense that one

cannot discuss these concepts if there is no concept of Being. Alternatively, Being is the condition and the rest are conditioned by Being.

Hence the end of this philosophy or ancient ontology indicates the end of metaphysics which gives the perfect correlation between essence and existence, concept and reality, etc., as they are combined in Being, in contrast to Being as the ground, which makes the thinking of them possible. Still, Heidegger remains in the discourse or ground of metaphysics, as is clearly evident. Even to destroy metaphysics, one remains in metaphysics. This is what Derrida shows in his writings. Heidegger failed to get out of metaphysics while destroying. Heidegger, while destroying metaphysics, is in fact repeating metaphysics. The destruction of metaphysics becomes the repetition of it.

Derrida intervenes with the argument that one cannot escape the structure, echoing Hegel in the argument. The reason is language. We are bound to remain in language whether one builds a system around a principle or center. The opposite act of trying to de-center the system still refers to the center. No language can escape it and the structures that determine it. All languages and thoughts affirm the structurality of structure. The rupture of metaphysics thus involved repetition and redoubling rather than any simple de-centering of metaphysics. No discourse escapes structure and the metaphysical constraints it imposes in the form of the structurality of structure, whether the center is affirmed or negated. This is the maxim, observation or thesis which grounds all the discourse generated by the post-modernists. The discourse of the identities is one example that can be understood by understanding Derrida's observation quoted above. The point is to get out of the meta-narratives of class and other such discourses and start from the identities in which one is born.

Derrida's solution to the transcendental-empirical conundrum differs from Heidegger's in that he does not dispute the transcendental but finds a mid-point and meeting ground between the transcendental and empirical. This he does through his positing of the quasi-transcendental, or the repetition of the transcendental in the empirical, and the relationship between the transcendental and the empirical is coined as *différance*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that both realism and idealism fall short of Truth, which rather than being located in either realism or idealism, is defined as *Aletheia* or the unveiling of Truth through the disclosure of Being. (Heidegger, 1962:57). Heidegger's phenomenology, in place of intuition, privileges corporeality, embodiment, or being-in-the-world. In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, he reinforces his notion of philosophy as ontology, or destruction of ancient ontology and a movement towards philosophy as the being of Being, by defining philosophy as a philosophy of extant being-in-the-world...Heidegger's phenomenology marks a fundamental shift in its emphasis on the situated-ness of perception or being-in-the-world; this thrown-ness is at direct odds with idealism as it is a swing to the other end of the intentional scale in prioritizing the empirical object and its situated-ness. Thus, he disputes the transcendental and seeks what Derrida, in *The Ends of Man*, sees as an anthropological solution in positing Being or the Human as absolute. Heidegger takes the phenomenological call for a return "to the things themselves" as a call to move beyond metaphysics into ontology, beyond the thinking of idealism into the thinking of Being.

Truth, which had been previously described as a form of concealment in Plato and Aristotle, becomes now reconfigured into Aletheia, or unconcealing of Being, with Heidegger. Aletheia is not so much the disclosure of Truth but what grants the very possibility of Truth. Heidegger's notion of disclosure rather than concealing still presents Truth as a dual entity consisting of the phenomenon and its presentation of Truth as Aletheia, or the unconcealing of Being.

Heidegger thus repeats metaphysics, although he reverses and negates it. Derrida indicates that a negative repetition of metaphysics proceeds entirely from its vocabulary and ontological structure. In describing it as unconcealing rather than concealing, Heidegger's radicalization of Truth is a negation or reversal and thus a repetition of metaphysics rather than a destruction of it. He thus does not manage to escape metaphysics as he sets out to do.

### **Conclusion**

In this part of the paper, I have examined Heidegger's move to set out the task of philosophy as the destruction of metaphysics to move into the realm of ontology, or an inquiry into the being of Being. I have traced this movement of destruction as evidenced in some of his texts briefly and pointed out its problem as suggested by Derrida that every instance of the destruction of metaphysics is, in fact, a repetition of it as it borrows entirely from the structure of metaphysics it sets out to destroy. Derrida critiques Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics by suggesting that non- metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics remains metaphysics, and thus ultimately, destruction of metaphysics is simply a repetition or reproduction of it and hence, the same as metaphysics. He thus discovers that metaphysics is repeated even in its destruction and is no different or the same as non-metaphysics or destroyed metaphysics.

To sum up. Through the discussion of post-modernity, the paper tries to search for the origins of post-modernity at least in the thinking of the time as articulated by various thinkers. This course takes us to the German thinker Heidegger. He is considered the last philosopher, if philosophy is the discipline that thinks Being or the One, then he certainly was the one to problematize it but at the same time his one orientation was to construct a new Metaphysics. Then comes Derrida, who once and for all claims to have succeeded in going out of Metaphysics and thus ending philosophy as a subject. From now on, one will have a specific object (empirical) and a subject that is in the pursuit of this object.

This paper is not an exhaustive account of the ramifications of the concept of post-modernity. It is rather an attempt to locate its origins. To trace out the movements of thought which always originate from a single source and then ramify itself as it conquers for itself new yet undiscovered spaces and times. The influence of Heidegger, though not directly, can be traced out and it will be a work compared to cataloging of a library or such other thing. One thing is for sure what Heidegger attempts to do in his work had not been done before him. The last philosopher before him was Hegel and Heidegger's work is directly opposed to Hegel's. In some senses, it even challenges Hegelian philosophy. Though he failed in the attempt but taking cues or concepts from him, other thinkers achieved what he had set up for himself to achieve but he could not.

These are reasons why the thinker's choice is not arbitrary and far-fetched in time. In appearance, Heidegger is not associated with post-modernism at all but the kernel of his thought provides the material necessary to set the discourse of post-modernity in motion.

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