

Destruction, History of Ontology, and Factual Life: A Reconstruction of the Phenomenological Function of Heidegger's "Destruction" (1919–1927)

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I argue that Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology must be understood based on the task of the destruction of factual life. To do so, I will first reconstruct Heidegger's method of destruction with the help of the early Freiburg lecture courses: In this "phase" of Heidegger's thought, destruction not only arises from a phenomenological necessity, that is, from the fallenness of life or of Dasein, but also has the phenomenological function of de-objectifying the objectified phenomena of life by tracing them back to their primordial enacted experiences. Second, I will show that Heidegger maintains the same function of destruction in both *Being and Time* and the Marburg lecture courses. Thus, the destruction of the history of ontology can only be achieved through the destruction of factual life.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger, destruction, history of ontology, factual life, phenomenology

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INTRODUCTION

Before the publication of Heidegger's early lecture courses, destruction was read based on Heidegger's discussion of it in §6 of *Being and Time*, where destruction is related to the history of ontology.¹ Consequently, destruction was understood as Heidegger's way of interpreting the history of ontology, and its reference to the fundamental problems of the phenomenology of life, namely as a pre-theoretical yet philosophical analysis of life,² remained obscure. Because of this, Benjamin Crowe denounced the "deficiency" of a detailed account of "destruction,"³ which was also lamented by Robert Bernasconi, who traced the "confusion surrounding the notion of destructuring" (that is, "destruction") back to the fact that "Heidegger's readers have drawn solely on the programmatic statements located at the outset of *Being and Time*."⁴

The need for a more comprehensive understanding of "destruction" was addressed after the publication of Heidegger's early lecture courses.⁵ Jeffrey Barash⁶ provided a comprehensive illustration of how Heidegger's ideas on the sense of history, and therefore his concept of destruction, were rooted in debates from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. John van Buren⁷ and Crowe⁸ highlighted the Christian roots of destruction, which can be traced back to Luther's "*destruere*" and Heidegger's appropriation of it. Another decisive aspect of destruction, emphasized especially by Jean Grondin⁹ and István Fehér,¹⁰ is the connection between destruction and the hermeneutics of facticity. As Heidegger himself stated: "hermeneutics is destruction!" (GA 63: 105/81; cf. GA 63: 48/38–39). Finally, in Charles Bambach's¹¹ and Robert Scharff's¹² studies on the importance of Dilthey's philosophy in the development of Heidegger's thought, destruction was connected to Heidegger's appropriation of Dilthey's idea of understanding life in its own terms.

However, Heidegger's conceptual framework underwent a transformation around 1923, shifting from a life-oriented language to an ontological one. Consequently, Heidegger seems, at least at first glance, to have modified his account of destruction. Destruction is not directed

toward factical life anymore, as the early lecture courses stated; rather, it has the “history of ontology” as its object. As Theodore Kisiel aptly summarizes: “Heidegger’s project of historical destruction assumes a less religious orientation by 1925. [...] The destruction becomes more purely ontological and less anthropological, replete with historical figures other than Paul, Augustine, and Luther.”¹³

The interpretations of Heidegger’s destruction mirror this shift in his conceptuality and can, therefore, be divided into two main categories: On the one hand, destruction, although enriched by Heidegger’s early lecture courses, is said to be directed toward the “history of ontology.”¹⁴ On the other hand, destruction is a movement toward factical life.¹⁵ Although these aspects may intersect in some studies, no previous study has directly addressed their relation. In other words, what is missing in Heideggerian studies is a clear explanation of the relationship between Heidegger’s “first” account of destruction, where its focus is on factical life, and his “second” account, where the object of destruction shifts to the history of ontology.

This study addresses this issue and clarifies the development of the concept of destruction from 1919 to 1927, which – to my knowledge – has not as yet been carefully examined. I argue that there is essential continuity between these two accounts of destruction, since Heidegger’s destruction of the history of ontology must be understood on the basis of the task of the destruction of factical life. My aim here is not to suggest that reading destruction as a way of interpreting the history of ontology is false, but rather that the *sense* of this Heideggerian task must be specified using his early lecture courses, where he discusses the method of destruction much more extensively. I hold that during both the early Freiburg and the Marburg periods, Heidegger kept the essential feature of destruction unaltered. This is the phenomenological movement of going back to Dasein’s enactment.

Therefore, the destruction of the history of ontology is an attempt to retrieve its fundamental experiences – not primarily to open new perspectives on the interpretation of the history of ontology. Destruction is not the subjective imposition of a content (e.g., that of *Being and Time*)

on another content (e.g., Kant's first *Critique* or Paul's letters); rather, it traces the ontological concepts back to the enactment of Dasein so that Dasein itself – and not the content one is interpreting – ends up being radically transformed.

In the first section of the paper, with the help of Heidegger's early Freiburg lecture courses, I will illustrate that the method of destruction has a phenomenological motivation, that is, the fallenness of factual life, and a phenomenological function, that is, tracing words and concepts back to their origin in life experience, a truly Husserlian task, which Heidegger deepened and understood in a new way. Subsequently, in the second section, I will argue that this phenomenological task of destruction remains substantially the same in *Being and Time* and in some of his Marburg lecture courses, where Heidegger – albeit using different language – expresses the same idea with concepts like “appropriation” and “retrieval.”

DESTRUCTION IN HEIDEGGER'S EARLY LECTURE COURSES IN FREIBURG

In *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* in particular, Heidegger examines the method of destruction in depth. In this lecture course there are even two characterizations of destruction. First, destruction is defined as “word explanation [*Wörterklärung*]” (GA 59: 30/21–22, 33/23–24, 178/138). Second, Heidegger characterizes destruction as essentially connected to “factual life experience [*faktische Lebenserfahrung*]” (GA 59: 35–36/25–26, 39/28, 180–181/139–40, 187/144). At first glance, these two accounts of destruction seem to contradict each other, because it is not evident why explaining the meaning of a word should relate to concrete life. This is not the case, however, and in this lecture course Heidegger illustrates why destruction as word explanation is essentially related to factual life.

To do this, Heidegger is first concerned with excluding what destruction as word explanation is not. Having emphasized the importance of destruction for philosophy,¹⁶ he notes that “from the outside” destruction could “at first look like a critical poking-around at individual concepts

and word meanings” and, “if performed in isolation [...] it easily gives the impression that phenomenology is word explanation, detection and elimination of equivocations, determination and marking-off [*Ausgrenzen*] of fixed meanings” (GA 59: 30/21–22). In other words, Heidegger draws attention to the fact that destruction is not a matter of explaining word meanings by clarifying individual terms through their etymology or other concepts.

As is often the case with Heidegger’s arguments, after clarifying how the word explanation should not be understood, Heidegger turns to its positive meaning. Word explanation is directed to the “ambiguity [*Vieldeutigkeit*]” of words, that is, to their “multiplicity of directions of meaning” or “meaning-complexes” (GA 59: 33/24). The “multiplicity of directions of meaning” of a word is not simply the fact that a word can have two or more meanings. According to Heidegger, the “multiplicity of directions of meaning” of words, which constitutes their ambiguity, is the fact that words “carry within them an expressive sense-relation [*Sinnbezug*] to object areas” (GA 59: 33/24), that is, that a word presents not only a content but also a relation of the subject to that content. This difference between a word’s content and the relation of the subject to that content grounds the ambiguity of a word.

This point can be further clarified with Heidegger’s distinction between “content [*Gehalt*],” “relation [*Bezug*],” and “enactment [*Vollzug*],” which in the lecture course on Paul’s letters he uses to define the “phenomenon” of phenomenology (GA 60: 63/43). Heidegger explains that every phenomenon has an experienced content, a relation of the subject to that content, that is, the “how’ in which it is experienced,” and an enactment, that is, the “how’ in which the relational meaning is enacted” (GA 60: 63/43). These “directions of sense [*Sinnesrichtungen*]” do not simply “stay next to each other,” since the phenomenon “is the totality of sense in these three directions” (GA 60: 63/43, tm). According to Heidegger, however, ontology was “entirely dominate[d]” by the formal-logical determination of the phenomenon, thus prescribing a “theoretical relational meaning” to the phenomenon and hiding the “enactment-character [*das Vollzugsmäßige*]” (GA 60: 63/43). In other words, while a

concrete experience is enacted in a particular situation¹⁷ – for instance, in a historical context and mood – the process of concept formation conceals this situation by examining the content of that experience. This concealment is what Heidegger in these lecture courses calls the “objectification” or, alternatively, “reification” (GA 56/57: 53/63) of an experience.¹⁸

As illustrated by various scholars such as Dan Zahavi, Jean-François Courtine, and Jonathan O’Rourke,¹⁹ what motivates Heidegger’s analyses of the nature of objectification is Natorp’s position on the method for the investigation of subjectivity. According to Natorp, to describe what subjectivity is, one must use language; however, by doing so, a conceptual mediation occurs and the concrete life of subjectivity is lost.²⁰ Therefore, investigating the concrete life of subjectivity can only be done through what Natorp calls the method of “reconstruction.”²¹

Heidegger took Natorp’s arguments as a serious challenge for phenomenology, stating that “Natorp is the only person to have brought scientifically noteworthy objections against phenomenology” (GA 56/57: 101/85).²² According to Heidegger, however, Natorp’s objection rests on the “undemonstrated prejudice” that “all language is itself already objectifying, i.e., that living in meaning implies a theoretical grasping of what is meant” (GA 56/57: 111/93–94).²³ Against Natorp, Heidegger maintains that it is possible to scientifically account for the concrete phenomenon of life without objectifying it, but only through methodological tools – destruction and formal indication – that reverse the process of objectification by focusing on the enactment of the subject and not on the content.²⁴

Accordingly, in Heidegger’s early lecture courses, destruction is described as a movement against the constitutive decaying (*abfallend*) or falling (*verfallend*) tendency of life from which the theoretical attitude of philosophy and science arises. As Heidegger states in GA 58, destruction is a destruction “of the objectifications” (GA 58: 248/187; cf. also GA 58: 164/126, 240/181). In GA 59, Heidegger also calls this objectifying tendency a “fading of meaningfulness [Verblässen *der Bedeutsamkeit*]” (GA 59: 182/141), which consists in “the transition of the experience [...] into the mode of non-primordially where the genuineness of the enactment and of the renewal of the enactment [*Vollzugserneuerung*] drops out”

(GA 59: 182/141). This happens in concrete life as well as in theoretical life, where “scientific theories, propositions and concepts just like philosophical explicata (in the mode of usability) of the no longer primordially experienced are taken up, handed down, and further formed” (GA 59: 183/141-42).²⁵ Tradition thereby perpetrates a fading of meaningfulness by transmitting concepts without referring them to their living origin, that is, by handing down the content of concepts without referring to the enactment of factual life.

Heidegger characterizes the fading of meaningfulness as a “primordial character of factual life” that “prove[s] the primordial necessity of phenomenological destruction” (GA 59: 182/141).²⁶ Because this character is primordial, it is not something that can be overcome; therefore, destruction is not a task that can be performed once and for all.²⁷ Heidegger stresses, however, that “fading” does not mean “disappearing”²⁸ but rather “distance from the origin” (GA 59: 183/141). The primordial relation to a meaning is turned into an objectified non-primordial content. Nonetheless, this relation and its enactment remain in factual life, even if faded.²⁹ As Heidegger states, “there is a more primordial conceptuality already in factual life experience, from out of which the material conceptuality that is common to us first derives” (GA 60: 85/59).

To regain the faded meaning of a word, a “reversal in conceptuality must be enacted” (GA 60: 85/59). This reversal, which in GA 59 is performed by destruction as a word explanation, is called in GA 60 the true “concept formation” (*Begriffsbildung*), a task that, so understood, “has not been posed since Socrates” (GA 60: 85/59, 89/62). Tracing a word or concept back to life’s enactment is the authentic phenomenological function of destruction. As Heidegger affirms:

In the clarification of such words is thus implied, provided that it is genuinely enacted, the unitary over-viewing and co-viewing having-present of the directions of meaning. It means at the same time the having-present of different situations from which the directions of meaning depart and in which they become genuinely pursuable. From this still entirely initial understanding of the sense of

the clarification we have to go back to the philosophically primordial basis of enactment [*Vollzugsbasis*] from which such clarifying and determining must grow. (GA 59: 33-34/24, tm)⁵⁰

By performing a word explanation, destruction leads back to the totality of the directions of meaning, that is, not only to the content of a concept, but also to the enactment of the primordial experience from which that concept was formed. Only by going back to this “basis of enactment” can destruction achieve its de-objectifying task. Thus, destruction can be defined as follows: *Destruction is a movement against objectified and objectifying sense-relations because it traces a word back to its primordial enacted experience.* This unitary movement could be broken down into two different “moments”: (1) a movement against fallenness (that is, against the objectifying tendency of life) and (2) a movement toward life in its enactment. As Crowe correctly points out, however, this distinction between a “negative” and a “positive” moment of destruction “runs the risk of oversimplification.”⁵¹ Indeed, it must be emphasized that the movement of destruction is not a negative *and* a positive but only a positive one since it goes against the objectified meanings of words only by means of going back to the enactment. This separation is therefore just there to assist with explanation.

In this positive sense of word explanation, destruction is “not secondarily, but necessarily belonging to phenomenology” (GA 59: 186/144).⁵² In order for the explication of philosophy to be determined “as primordially enactmentally understanding [...], this explication necessarily always starts with the destruction” (GA 59: 183/142). Heidegger insists on the permeating nature of destruction by excluding the fact that it is a method that can be applied to some phenomena (e.g., the history of ontology) but not to others. Destruction is “no contingent means, to be employed in isolation for itself” and “dispensable from case to case, but rather it also belongs to its [philosophizing’s] enactment once one has understood that philosophizing moves within the field of factual life experience” (GA 59: 181/140, tm). Therefore, the task of destruction is, according to Heidegger, the final phenomenological task: “the reduction [*Zurückführung*] to the

genuine sense-complexes and the articulation of the genuine sense directions comprised in them is what is final in the phenomenological task [*das Endgültige der phänomenologischen Aufgabe*]” (GA 59: 74/56).⁵⁵

For anyone familiar with the genetic developments of Husserl’s phenomenology, it should be clear why Heidegger calls his destruction “phenomenological.” After World War I, Husserl began to deepen his own phenomenology through the concept of “genesis,” and although this is not the place to reconstruct these developments, the fundamental motif of Husserl’s new discoveries was precisely that of tracing logical concepts (e.g., that of logical negation) back to pre-predicative transcendental experience (perception of transcendental subjectivity).

Although some clarifications of Heidegger’s debt to Husserl should be made here, it seems evident that Heidegger takes the main idea of destruction from Husserl’s project of genetic phenomenology that wants to explain how theories that “become objective” have their origin in “living and streaming life.”⁵⁴ As Husserl states: “all theoretical knowledge in general ultimately leads back to an experience.”⁵⁵ Various scholars have accordingly stressed the continuity between Heidegger’s concept of destruction and Husserl’s phenomenology. For instance, O’Rourke notes that Heidegger’s endeavor to trace ontological concepts back to enacted factical experiences “is decidedly Husserlian.”⁵⁶ Renato Cristin also emphasizes the phenomenological roots of Heidegger’s destruction by defending the thesis that Heidegger’s destructive movement runs parallel to Husserl’s reduction.⁵⁷

However, the reference both to genetic phenomenology and to Husserl’s reduction should be taken with caution. Putting aside the problem that Husserlian studies still debate how to understand the sense of the transcendental reduction, Heidegger’s destruction does not lead back to the perception of transcendental subjectivity, but rather to Dasein’s enactment, which is always historically performed. Thus, destruction remains a critique of Husserl’s phenomenology, not in the form of a mere opposition, but instead in the form of a development with and against Husserl. As Heidegger states, “The radicalism of phenomenology needs to operate in the most radical way *against phenomenology itself*” (GA 58: 6/5).

Returning to our interpretation of *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*, we have seen why destruction as a word explanation is essentially directed to factual life. As Heidegger clearly states, word explanation does not consist in “securing a strict and unambiguously available conceptuality” (GA 59: 178/138) but is directed toward the sense-relation that is enacted in factual life and from which the meaning of a word arises. Destruction is word explanation because it refers to the covering meanings of a word in order to destroy them, that is, to regain the primordial enactional situation that underlies the formation of the meaning of a word.

Still, one central problem remains unclear. It could be that a concrete enacted situation would not be sufficient to counter the objectifying tendency of life, because the way in which that situation understands itself could be objectifying. One needs an enacted experience that is capable of countering the fallenness, and in this sense, one needs a direction toward precise experiences. Because of this problem, Heidegger specifies that destruction is not directionless but rather a “directed deconstruction [*Abbau*]”⁵⁸ (GA 59: 181/139) since it is “bounded to a pre-grasping⁵⁹ [*vorgriffsgebunden*]” (GA 59: 34-35/24-25, 180/139, 187/144).⁴⁰

This central character of destruction clarifies the boundedness of destruction with factual life and with another crucial concept in Heidegger’s thought, namely that of formal indication. For Heidegger, “bounded to a pre-grasping” means that destruction is “not ultimately primordial and ultimately decisive” but rather “presupposes philosophical fundamental experiences” (GA 59: 35/25, 187/144). In other words: “the so-called ‘mere word explanation’ [...] is a task and an aim that presupposes a rich and only quite specifically accessible situation” (GA 59: 34/24).

The “boundedness to a pre-grasping” of destruction is shown by the fact that destruction should refer itself to experiences in order to fulfill its task (for it must trace concepts back to their primordial experiences), but it must refer words not to “uncritical” experiences but to “philosophical” ones, i.e., to experiences that have already been appropriated in a certain way, “so that the entire philosophical problematic

intensifies towards the evidence of this fundamental experience and its genuine origin-character” (GA 59: 187/144) – in other words, so that the entire philosophical problematic can be guided by this fundamental appropriation of an experience. This preliminary grasp (*Vorgriff*) is crucial for destruction to be conceived not as a negative but as a positive function: Destruction must be understood through the “structure of the guiding pre-grasping” in order to “apprehend the *negative motives of understanding* [*Verstehensmotive*], which also are to be attained in the destruction, as *positive motives of understanding*” (GA 59: 192/148).⁴¹

GA 59 sees the use of the concept of “dijudication,” which should be such an appropriation of factical life experience. Dijudication “is the decision about the genealogical position which is assigned to the sense-complex seen from the origin [*Diese Dijudication ist die Entscheidung über die genealogische Stelle, die dem Sinnzusammenhang vom Ursprung her gesehen zukommt*]” (GA 59: 74/57, tm). In other words, dijudication is the decision to appropriate an ontic content that is then presupposed as a philosophically fundamental experience. In this sense, as Heidegger says, “the primordially or non-primordially” of the preliminary grasps “can be dijudicated [*steht zur Dijudication*]” (GA 59: 180/139).

Now, according to Heidegger, dijudication and destruction are in a certain continuity because destruction “runs out [*läuft aus*] into [...] the phenomenological dijudication” (GA 59: 74/57). If Heidegger explains this continuity on the basis that the Latin term “dijudication” should correspond to the term “destruction” (*de-struere*),⁴² the continuity between the two concepts is clearer if we remember that destruction is bounded to a pre-grasping. Destruction presupposes an experience that is already viewed from a certain perspective. Dijudication is the appropriation of that experience and, therefore, the decision on the “perspective” – primordial or not – of that experience.

Simultaneously, Heidegger connects dijudication with formal indication by placing dijudication under its methodological functions. First, dijudication remains undiscussed and undetermined in its “scope and type of validity.”⁴³ This function belongs to formal indication because it ensures that certain meanings (e.g., theoretical ones) are not attributed to a phenomenon at the beginning of a phenomenological analysis (GA

60: 63-64/43-44; GA 61: 141-42/105-6). Second, the decision requires a criterion by which the enactment can be characterized as “primordial” or “non-primordial,”⁴⁴ and this criterion cannot be taken from “the outside” but from a familiarity with the phenomena.⁴⁵ It is thus through formal indication that a “preliminary grasp” (*Vorgriff*) – or, which is the same thing, a criterion or a “starting point” (*Ansatz*)⁴⁶ – are given for the decision.

The relations among formal indication, dijudication, and destruction cannot be fully discussed in this paper. Here, it is sufficient to point out that dijudication stands under the functions of formal indication as a warning function through which pre-grasping arises and that formal indication and destruction are therefore essentially connected if destruction and dijudication are so interdependent, that is, if destruction is bounded to a pre-grasping (which, again, must be formally indicated and not assumed uncritically). By presupposing a preliminary grasp (*Vorgriff*), destruction must also presuppose formal indication.⁴⁷

The analysis elaborated in this section can be summarized as follows. First, destruction, as a phenomenological method, is a necessary movement against the falling tendency of life. Second, destruction is directed primarily to life – that is, to *Dasein*⁴⁸ – because its word explanatory task consists in tracing the objectified content of a word back to factual experience so that words can be understood in their primordial enactment, a function that is Heidegger’s appropriation of the genetic developments of Husserl’s phenomenology. Third, destruction is always bounded to a preliminary grasp, meaning that it presupposes a formally indicated criterion through which the primordially or non-primordially of an enactment can be decided.

DESTRUCTION IN THE MARBURG LECTURE COURSES AND IN *BEING AND TIME*

Between Heidegger’s “early Freiburg period” and his “Marburg period,” there is a shift in his conceptuality from a life-oriented one to an ontological one. But as Heidegger himself writes in a letter to Löwith dated August 20, 1927: “the problems of facticity persist for me with the same

intensity as they did in my Freiburg beginnings, only much more radically now, and still in the perspectives that were guiding me even in Freiburg.”⁴⁹ As I will illustrate in this section, this essential continuity between these two “phases” of Heidegger’s thought is also valid for the concept of destruction. Thus, I argue that the connection between destruction and the history of ontology should be understood in light of the connection between destruction and life (or *Dasein*).

Both “moments” of destruction that we analyzed in the first section are to be found in Heidegger’s Marburg lecture courses and in *Being and Time*. First, the reference of destruction to fallenness (*Verfallen*) is still present and central, and here as well is fallenness, which makes the method of destruction necessary. In GA 17, Heidegger connects fallenness with the historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of *Dasein*: Fallenness always takes place historically through a tradition and a “conceptual overgrowth” that *Dasein* “itself has developed” (GA 17: 117/85). The same motif can be found in *Being and Time*. In §6 of this work, the “existential” (*Existenzial*) of fallenness is related to the historicity of *Dasein*. *Dasein* falls (*verfällt*) because it interprets itself on the basis of a mode of being that is not its own, that is, it understands itself on the basis of the present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and not of existence (*Existenz*).⁵⁰ This falling movement is concretized both in the “taking care of” (*Besorgen*) and in relation to a tradition that relieves *Dasein* of its “own guidance, questioning and choosing” (GA 2: 28–29/SZ 21).

In *Being and Time*, tradition makes what has been handed down (*das Überlieferte*) something self-evident, and by doing so it “bars access to those primordial sources out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn. The tradition even makes us forget such a provenance altogether” (GA 2: 29/SZ 21). In other words, tradition hinders *Dasein* from reappropriating the experiences (i.e., the “primordial sources”) at the basis of ontological concepts because tradition hands over the ontological concepts as self-evident propositions, which, according to Heidegger, have constitutively already veiled the reference to living experience – a dynamic that we have already seen with the “fading of meaningfulness.” This is also evident in Heidegger’s analysis

of “assertion” (*Aussage*) in *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, through assertion, an experience is uprooted from the existential relation and becomes “self-evident” (*selbstverständlich*) because Dasein “believes itself exempt from a primordial re-enactment [*Nachvollzug*] of the act of discovering” (GA 2: 296/SZ 224, tm).⁵¹

Second, in this “phase” of Heidegger’s thought as well, destruction is a movement that leads back to primordial experiences. In GA 17 Heidegger says:

Dasein has obstructed itself from itself in the entire sphere of its being. Freeing Dasein up by way of deconstructing [*Abbauen*], of a destruction, occurs by tracing concepts back to their distinctive origin. What is accomplished at the same time on this path is the elucidation of the inadequacy of the concepts for Dasein, an elucidation of how Dasein’s self-obstructing is enacted in history. (GA 17: 117–18/85, tm)

This function of destruction is also present in the famous §6 of *Being and Time*. Destruction must dissolve the concealments produced by the “sclerotic tradition” (GA 2: 30/SZ 22). This task, however, “is based upon the primordial experiences in which the first and subsequently guiding determinations of Being were gained,” and Heidegger adds that “this demonstration [*Nachweis*] of the origin of the fundamental ontological concepts, as the investigation that displays their ‘birth certificate,’ has nothing to do with a pernicious relativizing of ontological standpoints” (GA 2: 30/SZ 22). In other words, destruction as “productive” or “positive appropriation” (GA 2: 29/SZ 21) is not a mere analysis of the history of ontology on the basis of a theory (for example that of *Being and Time*, if one were to take its results objectively), but the concrete attempt to retrieve the experiences at the basis of ontological concepts, thereby showing the “birth certificate” of these concepts.

The emphasis on showing the “birth certificate” of ontological concepts can also be found in GA 24, particularly in Heidegger’s destructive analysis of *essentia* and *existentia*. Heidegger wants to “obtain a clue to

the *origin* of these *concepts* of *essentia* and *existentia*,” that is “what their birth certificate is and whether it is genuine [*echt*]” (GA 24: 140/100). Moreover, Heidegger calls his analysis of *existentia* a “word explanation [*Wörterklärung*]” (GA 24: 143/101), establishing thereby a continuity between his analysis of destruction and phenomenology as word explanation in GA 59. In GA 24, as in GA 59, destruction is not a mere philological analysis of words or a more accurate reading of the history of ontology, but an appropriation of it through a retrieval of the conduct of *Dasein*, that is, “*by going back* [Rückgang] *to the producing* [herstellend] *conduct* [Verhalten] *of Dasein*” (GA 24: 143/102, tm). As Heidegger also explains: “we wish to revive neither Aristotle nor the ontology of the Middle Ages, neither Kant nor Hegel, but only ourselves” (GA 24: 142/101).⁵²

If one understands the destruction of the history of ontology on the basis of the destruction of factical life in the earlier lecture courses, one can better grasp some of Heidegger’s remarks about destruction, which have often been misunderstood in Heideggerian studies. According to Heidegger, destruction is a critique not of the past but of the present (GA 17: 119/86, 122/88; GA 2: 31/SZ 22–23). The critique of the present, however, is not primarily a critique of the present interpretations of the history of ontology but of the present *Dasein* itself. As Heidegger clearly states in GA 17:

What is criticized is not the past that is opened up by the destruction, but the *present*, our *present-day Dasein* [heutiges *Dasein*], as long as it is covered up by a *past that has become inauthentic*. It is not Aristotle or Augustine who is criticized, but the *present*. Far from dismissing the past, the critique has precisely the opposite tendency of bringing the object of the critique to light in its *primordial* past. (GA 17: 119/86, tm)

For Heidegger, the “primordial past” is nothing other than *Dasein*’s appropriation and retrieval of the primordial experiences that motivated Aristotle and Augustine, and not “what they really said” in contrast to the present interpretations of them. It is true that on some

occasions Heidegger criticizes present interpretations,⁵⁵ but he does so only in the context of tracing traditional concepts back to Dasein's experiences. In other words, destruction is destruction of the present since it is destruction of the "*heutiges Dasein*" in its fallenness, and a destruction of fallenness means at the same time (but only as a consequence of that) a destruction of the present interpretations of tradition, as long as these interpretations objectify philosophical ontological concepts.⁵⁴

Therefore, destruction is not a way to read a theory (that of Aristotle) through another theory (that of *Being and Time*)⁵⁵ but a method that must be performatively enacted. Heidegger expresses the performative enactment of destruction as a "battle with the past" through which "this past itself is brought to its *own Being*" (GA 17: 122/88). Heidegger also adds that reaching back into the past's "own" or "genuine Being" is a "redound [*Rückstoß*] on the present," that is, on Dasein or on "the situation of the interpretation" (GA 17: 122/88). In my view, such statements can only be properly understood through Heidegger's early account of destruction, where the task of destruction "is tantamount to explicating the primordial motive-giving [*motivgebend*] situations in which the fundamental experiences of philosophy have arisen" (GA 9: 3-4/3, tm).⁵⁶ From this perspective, only Dasein is the "own Being" of history, since a history of ontology is only possible on the basis of the historicity of Dasein – a position that Heidegger will criticize later.

As pointed out by scholars such as Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann and Bernasconi, the concept of "historicity" thematized in Chapter 5 of the second Division of *Being and Time* is fundamental to understanding the method of destruction.⁵⁷ Indeed, in this chapter, Heidegger expresses the phenomenological function of destruction through the concept of "retrieval" (*Wiederholung*). The concept of retrieval appears from the very beginning of *Being and Time* (§1) because of the "necessity of an explicit retrieval of the question of Being" (GA 2: 3/SZ 1), and in §6 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that the sense of the "retrieval of the question of Being" will be clear "only when we carry out the destruction of the ontological tradition" (GA 2: 36/SZ 26).

Only in §74, however, does Heidegger give us more precise insights into what “retrieval” really means: “*Retrieval is explicit handing down* [Überlieferung], that is, going back [Rückgang] to the possibilities of Dasein that has been there” (GA 2: 509/SZ 385). This “going back to the possibilities of Dasein” is the same movement of destruction that goes back to philosophical fundamental experiences, that is, experiences that have to be appropriated – it is “the possibility of fetching the existentiell potentiality-of-being [Seinkönnen] upon which it [Dasein] projects itself *explicitly* from the traditional understanding of Dasein [aus dem überlieferten Daseinsverständnis]” (GA 2: 509/SZ 385). Retrieval is, then, the authentic appropriation of an existentiell possibility of the past, the decision (dijudication) for a possibility through which Dasein will authentically understand itself, and not a mere repetition of the experience from which a concept arose: “the retrieval of what is possible neither brings back ‘what is past’, nor does it bind the ‘present’ back to what is ‘outdated’” (GA 2: 509-10/SZ 385-86).

The continuity of this problematic with Heidegger’s early thought is evident if one looks at Heidegger’s destructive interpretation of Paul’s letters, which attempts to appropriate Paul’s fundamental experience of distress (*Bedrängnis*). In §23 (“*Methodological Difficulties*”), Heidegger explains that one difficulty of the phenomenological interpretation (which, as we saw, is fundamentally both destructive and formally indicating) is that “one could say it is impossible – or possible only in a limited way – to transport oneself into Paul’s exact situation” (GA 60: 88/61). In other words, how can we put ourselves in Paul’s shoes and retrieve his experiences if Paul lived in a completely different historical context with different values? More deeply, one could say that retrieval appears impossible because of the problem of intersubjectivity: Ultimately, one cannot retrieve Paul’s experience because of the essential mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) of Dasein.

Heidegger specifies, however, that the problem of retrieving Paul’s situation is not one of a mere repetition or reconstruction of his “environment” (*Umwelt*): “we cannot at all [...] put ourselves in Paul’s place” (GA 60: 89/62). Such an attempt “is misguided because what is crucial

is not the material character of Paul's environment [*Umwelt*], but rather only his own situation" (GA 60: 89/62). Heidegger shifts the problem of retrieval "from the object-historical complex" of Paul to his "enactment-historical *situation*," but even here only through a "return to the original-historical" (GA 60: 90/63), that is, through one's own historical Dasein. In other words, Paul's enactment can only be understood from one's own Dasein; therefore, the retrieval of his experiences is not a mere repetition of what Paul did, but an appropriation of his situation on the basis of one's own Dasein.⁵⁸

With the concept of retrieval, one might finally fully appreciate what "reaching back to the enactment" means. Retrieval as "going back" to the possibilities of Dasein or its situation neither means mere repetition of, for instance, Paul's experience, nor that one's own situation is projected onto the past. As Gail Soffer rightly notes, "Heidegger frequently rejects the idea that history is to be interpreted by projecting one's own private or local *Weltanschauung* onto the past, characterizing this as willfulness and subjectivism"⁵⁹ – but how then do we understand retrieval concretely?

Again, I would suggest that Heidegger's early account of "destruction" can help us in answering this question. Retrieval is not a top-down determination of a content (Paul's letters) through a theory (temporality in *Being and Time*), but rather the opposite: The ontological project of *Being and Time* is only possible on the basis of the appropriation of an ontic ideal that transforms Dasein.⁶⁰ In other words, the fact that Dasein must enact Paul's primordial experience implies that Dasein is encountering Paul's experience through its pre-given historical situation; however, it is not Dasein that projects its situation onto Paul's experience. Rather, it is Dasein's life that has been transformed after such an encounter. To be more precise on this relevant point, Dasein's encounter with Paul's experience (or with other ontic content) is lived through Dasein's situation, but by doing so, if Dasein approaches Paul's situation non-objectively, it is Dasein's situation that ends up being radically transformed and not Paul's letters.

This reconstruction shows a profound continuity with the characterization of destruction in the earlier Freiburg lecture courses: There, dijudication was the decision on a sense or criterion (given through formal indication) according to which the basic experiences of faded words were then interpreted or brought into new light. Appropriation or retrieval seems to reflect this dynamic: Just as in *Being and Time* appropriation involves tracing ontological concepts back to the existence of Dasein, dijudication in GA 59 means that this tracing-back presupposes a decision on the sense of an ontic content that has to guide the whole analysis and then be confirmed by the phenomenological analysis itself. Only in this sense, if authenticity means going back to Dasein's existence (to one's own enactment), is the "real sense" of destruction an attempt to "foster authentic life," as suggested by Crowe.⁶¹

Thus, destruction as a destruction of the history of ontology is a destruction of traditional ontological concepts in the sense of the "word explanation" of GA 59. The traditional concept of Being is de-objectified from the coverings of tradition by tracing it back to Dasein's temporal experience. Now, as there was no contradiction in GA 59 between Heidegger's account of destruction as word explanation and his account of destruction as leading back to the enactment of the primordial experience – for word explanation in Heidegger's positive sense entails the phenomenological function of destruction – there is also continuity and no opposition between destruction as destruction of the history of ontology and the early account of destruction as destruction of factical life. More precisely, the destruction of the history of ontology can be fully understood only on the basis of its phenomenological functions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the present paper, Heidegger's method of destruction has been reconstructed with the help of the early Freiburg lecture courses, and its basic phenomenological function has been emphasized: Destruction not only arises from a phenomenological necessity, that is, from the fallenness of life or of Dasein, but also has the phenomenological function of de-objectifying the objectified phenomena of life by tracing them back

to their primordial enacted experiences. Moreover, it has been shown that Heidegger maintains the same fundamental function of destruction in both *Being and Time* and the Marburg lecture courses. Thus, Heidegger's destruction of the history of ontology must be understood on the basis of the task of the destruction of factual life.

NOTES

- 1 In three other passages of *Being and Time* in which the word “destruction” occurs, it is always related to the history of ontology (GA 2: 53, 120, 518/SZ 39, 89, 392).
- 2 In GA 59 Heidegger calls this problem “das Erlebnisproblem” (GA 59: 25/18).
- 3 Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 232.
- 4 Robert Bernasconi, “Repetition and Tradition: Heidegger’s Destructuring of the Distinction Between Essence and Existence in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*,” in: *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. by Theodore Kisiel and John Van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 133. In his contribution, however, Bernasconi limits himself to a discussion of “historicity” in *Being and Time* and GA 24. Although he associates destruction constantly with the history of ontology, he also sees that destruction goes back to the possibilities of Dasein and its historicity (Bernasconi, “Repetition and Tradition,” see especially p. 134). From our perspective, his contribution should be deepened through a reconstruction of the phenomenological function of destruction that Heidegger discusses extensively in his early lecture courses.
- 5 For a reconstruction of Heidegger’s philosophy before *Being and Time*, see Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), and John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).
- 6 Jeffrey A. Barash, “Heidegger’s Ontological ‘Destruction’ of Western Intellectual Traditions,” in: *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. by Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994),

- 111–21. Jeffrey A. Barash, *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).
- 7 Van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*.
- 8 Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*.
- 9 Jean Grondin, "Die Hermeneutik der Faktizität als ontologische Destruktion und Ideologiekritik," in: *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, Bd. 2, ed. by Dietrich Papenfuss and Otto Pöggeler (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1990), 163–78. Although he does not thematize destruction in its phenomenological function, Grondin sees the connection between Dasein and destruction because he highlights that for Heidegger destruction is hermeneutics, and the task of the latter is the destruction of the ordinary interpretation of human being (Grondin, "Die Hermeneutik der Faktizität," 169).
- 10 István M. Fehér, "Heidegger's Postwar Turn. The Emergence of the Hermeneutic Viewpoint of his Philosophy and the Idea of 'Destruktion' on the Way to *Being and Time*," *Philosophy Today* 40:1 (1996): 9–35.
- 11 Charles R. Bambach, "Phenomenological Research as *Destruktion*. The Early Heidegger's Reading of Dilthey," *Philosophy Today* 37:2 (1993): 115–32. Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- 12 Robert C. Scharff, "Heidegger's 'Appropriation' of Dilthey before *Being and Time*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35.1 (1997): 105–128. Robert C. Scharff, *Heidegger Becoming Phenomenological: Interpreting Husserl through Dilthey, 1916–1925* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).
- 13 Kisiel, *The Genesis*, 322. Cf. also Scharff, "Heidegger's 'Appropriation,'" 106, 124, 127.
- 14 Among others: Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Hermeneutische Phänomenologie des Daseins: eine Erläuterung von Sein und Zeit*. Bd. 1. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 202–12; Dermot Moran, "Die Destruktion der Destruktion: Heideggers Versionen der Geschichte der Philosophie," in: *Martin Heidegger: Kunst—Politik—Technik*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Karsten

- Harries (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1992), 295–318; Bambach, “Phenomenological Research as *Destruktion*,” 127; Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey*, e.g., 17, 31, 181, 197, 217, 248; van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, e.g., 137, 143 f., 147, 151, 157, 166, 189, 199, 201 f. 224, 226, 238; Bernasconi, “Repetition and Tradition”; William McNeill, “From *Destruktion* to the History of Being,” *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 2 (2012): 28; Francesco V. Tommasi, “Heidegger e la distruzione della storia della filosofia nei Quaderni Neri,” in: *I Quaderni Neri di Heidegger*, ed. by Donatella Di Cesare (Milano: Mimesis, 2016), 21–39.
- 15 Grondin, “Die Hermeneutik der Faktizität”; Fehér, “Heidegger’s Postwar Turn”; Scharff, “Heidegger’s ‘Appropriation’”; Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, 231–65; Scott M. Campbell, *The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life: Facticity, Being and Language* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 211–65; Hans Ruin, “Thinking in Ruins: Life, Death, and Destruction in Heidegger’s Early Writings,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 4.1 (2012): 15–33; Antonio Cimino, *Phänomenologie und Vollzug. Heideggers performative Philosophie des faktischen Lebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2013), 178–83; Jonathan O’Rourke, “Heidegger on Expression. Formal Indication and Destruction in the Early Freiburg Lectures,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 49.2 (2018): 109–25; Hongjian Wang, “Destruktion und formale Anzeige. Zur Erläuterung der methodischen Grundlage des frühen Heidegger am Beispiel der Bestimmungen von Geschichte und Philosophie,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* XVIII (2018): 255–75.
- 16 “The phenomenological-critical destruction” belongs “to the sense of philosophizing” (GA 59: 30/21).
- 17 The importance of the situation for phenomenological destruction and explication is clear in Heidegger’s interpretation of Paul. The “distress [*Bedrängnis*] articulates the authentic situation of Paul. It determines each moment of his life” and the philosophical-phenomenological explication of Paul “must proceed from his

distress” (GA 60: 98/67–69). With this example one has a concrete Heideggerian execution of destruction: The phenomenological destructive interpretation of Paul traces any interpretation of Paul’s historical-objective context back to his primordial situation of “distress.” On this topic, see also GA 9: 34/30.

- 18 It is important to stress that the adjectives “objectified” and “de-objectified” do not correspond to “theoretical” and “pre-theoretical.” The distinction between theoretical and pre-theoretical is not sufficient since, according to Heidegger, the objectifying tendency is a constitutive tendency of pre-theoretical life itself (and, only because of that and secondarily, a tendency of theoretical attitude). Therefore, there is, so to speak, a “degree” of objectification in a sense-relation: see, for example, Heidegger’s analysis of the different meanings of “history” in GA 59 (starting from p. 43/33), where the different meanings correspond to different degrees of enactment of the sense of history.
- 19 Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood. Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2005), 73–85; Jean-François Courtine, “Réduction, construction, destruction. D’un dialogue à trois: Natorp, Husserl, Heidegger,” *Philosophiques* 36.2 (2009): 559–77; O’Rourke, “Heidegger on Expression,” 110–11. On this, cf. also Steven G. Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning. Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 122–25, 136–37.
- 20 Cf. for instance: “If one were oneself to try, if it were at all possible, to somehow grasp the content of immediate experience purely as it is in itself [...] would one not be forced to artificially still and interrupt the continuous stream of becoming [...] to sterilize it, like the anatomist does with his specimen? [...] In the end, one apparently never grasps the subjective, as such, in itself. On the contrary, in order to grasp it scientifically, one is forced to strip it of its subjective character,” Paul Natorp, *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr), 102–3 (I have used the translation of Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 75).

- 21 On Natorp's method of reconstruction, see Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 73–76; Sebastian Luft, “Reconstruction and Reduction: Natorp and Husserl on Method and the Question of Subjectivity,” *META. Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*, 8.2 (2016): 326–70.
- 22 Moreover, in GA 59, Heidegger dedicates an entire section of his lecture course to a discussion of Natorp's position (cf. GA 59: 92–148/73–114).
- 23 On this, see also Heidegger's remarks in GA 58: 224–226/169–70.
- 24 Nonetheless, as Zahavi notes, Heidegger to some extent “seemed to accept” Natorp's criticism of Husserl's phenomenology (Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 76–77). Indeed, according to Heidegger, Husserl's “theoretical attitude” cannot overcome Natorp's objections: “also in phenomenology, the concept of description is still determined merely negatively [...]. Also here there is the danger of reifying consciousness, of dissolving it into thought-things and relationship connections” (GA 59: 194/149–50; cf. also GA 56/57: 111–12/94).
- 25 On this point, see also GA 59: 37/27: “Scientific and philosophical concepts, propositions and ways of consideration permeate factual life experience more or less comprehensively, however, they do not compose it; in fact, they permeate it in the character of the faded, i.e. they have fallen away from the primordial existence relation.”
- 26 On this necessity, see also GA 60: 252/189.
- 27 On this point I do not agree with McNeill, “From *Destruktion* to the History of Being,” 28, who holds that the concealment of tradition “is something that nevertheless both can and must be undone and dissolved.” According to McNeill, the concealment of tradition is not the concealment of Dasein's fallenness – which “would not be something that could be overcome” – but instead is “due to the force of tradition.” In this way, McNeill separates destruction and the objectifying tendency of life, directing destruction only toward ontological tradition. As I will illustrate in the

second section, the concealment of tradition is not something that can be separated from fallenness but is instead an aspect of it; therefore, they are essentially intertwined. On this point, I agree with Ruin, “Thinking in Ruins,” 29, who emphasizes the always persisting and inescapable “ruinance” of life and, therefore, the fact that the task of destruction must be a continuous one.

28 “Fading does not mean to say that the experienced disappears from memory, is forgotten or receives no more attention. On the contrary, the faded absorbs the entire interest and pulls this into alienation and non-primordially” (GA 59: 183/141).

29 On this point, see also GA 59: 37/26–27.

30 On this point, see also GA 58: 257/194.

31 Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, 256.

32 The reason for this identification is that destruction is a counter movement to the fallenness (*Verfallen*) of life and that, for Heidegger, philosophy itself must be a “counter-ruinant movedness” (GA 61: 153/113) to tackle its fundamental question (later the *Seinsfrage*).

33 This formulation means the same as this: “philosophy has the task of preserving the facticity of life and strengthening the facticity of Dasein” (GA 59: 174/133). On this point, see also *Being and Time*: “in the end it is the business of philosophy to protect the *power of the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself from being flattened by the common understanding to the point of unintelligibility” (GA 2: 291/SZ 220).

34 Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*. In *Husserliana*, Bd. xvii, ed. by Paul Janssen (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 373.

35 Edmund Husserl, *Formale und transzendente Logik*, 373. The project of genetic phenomenology as tracing “logical categories” back to the “pre-predicative synthesis” (Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, ed. by Ludwig Landgrebe, (Berlin: Claassen Verlag, 1964), 127) is described most importantly in *Erfahrung und Urteil* and in the

- lessons on the passive synthesis (see Volume XI of *Husserliana*, which contains material dated from 1918 to 1926).
- 36 O'Rourke, "Heidegger on Expression," 217. Crowell does not refer to genetic phenomenology but to Husserl's dynamic between signitive act and intuitive act of the *Logical Investigations*. Although he does not discuss the concept of destruction, he notes that the difference between the objectifying relation to a content and the enactment of that relation "corresponds to Husserl's distinction between intending something emptily and in an intuitively 'fulfilled' manner" (Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning*, 126).
- 37 Renato Cristin, "Reduktion und Konstruktion bei Heidegger," in: *Epoché und Reduktion*, ed. by Rolf Kühn and Michael Staudigl (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 51–63.
- 38 The concept of deconstruction sometimes appears as the right way to understand the method of destruction (for example, in GA 17: 117–18/85; GA 24: 31/23), which should not be understood as an "annihilation [*Vernichtung*]" (GA 60: 51/34), as an "*Abschüttelung*" (GA 2: 31/SZ 22) of the past, or as a "smashing and shattering" (GA 59: 181/139). It is quite the opposite: Destruction "does not wish to bury the past in nullity, it has a *positive* intent" (GA 2: 31/SZ 23; see also GA 24: 31/23). On this point, see Tommasi, "Heidegger e la distruzione," who also analyzes destruction in the *Schwarze Hefte*.
- 39 I do not like the English translation of *Vorgriff* as "preconception" because a preconception is something that is normally negatively understood as unconscious. In other words, a preconception is something that we already have passively and that determines our behavior to something. By contrast, the Heideggerian *Vorgriff* is a phenomenological operation that actively places an ontic content at the basis of the investigation and that therefore determines the analysis itself. As in the case of preconceptions, here, too, is the aspect of pre-determination of something. It seems to me, however, that the *Vorgriff* (which Heidegger will identify with the *Ansatz*, see footnote 46) is not at all something unconscious but a real choice. For these reasons, I provisionally translate the term as "pre-grasping."

- 40 In GA 60, destruction is connected to a “guiding preliminary grasp
[*der leitende Vorgriff*]” (GA 60: 78/54, cf. also GA 60: 269/202).
- 41 The passage here is complicated, and I modified the translation.
The German version is: “um die in der Destruktion mitzugewin-
nenden negativen als positive Verstehensmotive zu erfassen.”
- 42 “The Latin term is selected in order to have it correspond to destruc-
tion” (GA 59: 74/57). Moran, “Die Destruktion der Destruktion,”
297–99, 307, traces the philosophical use of the concept of destruc-
tion back to Ghazali, although Heidegger took the word “destruc-
tion” from Luther (Dermot Moran, “Destruction (*Destruktion*,
Zerstörung) and Deconstruction (*Abbau*),” in: *The Cambridge*
Heidegger Lexicon, ed. by Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2021), 224). On Luther’s concept of
destruction and its relevance to Heidegger, see van Buren, *The*
Young Heidegger, 157–202, and Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious*
Origins, 44–66.
- 43 “The scope and type of validity as well as the form of evidence
and conditions of evidence of such dijudication are left initially
undiscussed” (GA 59: 74/57, tm).
- 44 “Formally, it must be said that this decision always requires a cri-
terion (measure). In our concrete question of the *characterization*
of enactment, a criterion must be provided compared to which the
enactment can be characterized as primordial or non-primordial;
in fact, this can now only be carried out by way of formally in-
dicating and in the necessarily limited way of achievement of
formally indicating” (GA 59: 74/54).
- 45 “The criterion can obviously not be taken from the outside but
must co-result from the ultimate tendencies of the phenomeno-
logical problematic itself” (GA 59: 74–75/57). On this, see also GA
60: 82/57.
- 46 In GA 60: 82/57, “starting point” (*Ansatz*) and “preliminary
grasp” (*Vorgriff*) are the same for Heidegger. This is already clear
in GA 59: 39/28.
- 47 On the connection between destruction and formal indication,
see also GA 58: 248/187, as well as GA 59: 190/147. Even more

- relevant is GA 61: 141/105: “concretely, formal indication is to be clarified partially where it comes into play in each case but more fundamentally in connection with phenomenological destruction as a basic element of the interpretation of the history of the spirit from a phenomenological standpoint).”
- 48 The identification of Dasein and factical life is clear in particular in GA 63: 80/62. See also *Being and Time*, GA 2: 317/238.
- 49 Cited in Campbell, *The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life*, 211.
- 50 On this, see GA 2, 78–79/SZ 58.
- 51 See Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 200–22, for a reconstruction of the notion of assertion through Heidegger’s lecture courses. On the concealing power of *logos* in GA 17, see Scott M. Campbell, “Revelation and Concealment in the Early Heidegger’s Conception of Λόγος,” *Heidegger Studies* 3 (2007): 47–69.
- 52 In this lecture course Heidegger points out that even traditional ontology goes back to Dasein, since it presupposes a theoretical conduct toward concepts. But without having carried out the “fundamental ontology” (*Fundamentalontologie*), its interpretation of Dasein “does not get beyond a common conception of Dasein” (GA 24: 156/110): “ontology goes back to Dasein’s conducts in the same way in which it is acquainted with Dasein’s everyday and natural self-understanding” (GA 24: 156/110, tm). In this sense, ontology can be carried out only “if the ontology of Dasein is made secure” (GA 24: 165/117).
- 53 “Negatively, destruction is not even related to the past: its criticism concerns ‘today’ and the dominant way we treat the history of ontology” (GA 2: 31/SZ 22–23). On this, see also the similar point in GA 24: 142/101. Although this passage could be read as if destruction would be a critique of today *as* the dominant way to treat the history of ontology, I want to point out that it could also be read in another way if we take the “and” as a separation of two different (but interconnected) things. In this way, the passage would mean: Destruction is a critique of the present-day Dasein and – as

- a consequence of that – of the dominant way of treating the history of ontology.
- 54 This point is clear in the *Natorp-Bericht*, where the present interpretations are criticized only by means of the phenomenological function of destruction: “the phenomenological hermeneutics of facticity sees itself [...] called upon to loosen up today’s prevalent traditional interpretation in its hidden motives, its unexpressed tendencies and ways of interpreting, and, by way of a *deconstructive regress* [abbauender Rückgang], to press toward the original motive sources of the explication” (GA 62: 368/165; I have used the translation in *Becoming Heidegger. On the Trail of his Early Occasional Writings, 1910–1917*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan [Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007],).
- 55 “Destruction is not a consideration of history in the usual sense, above all, not in the sense of the history of a problem” (GA 17: 122/88).
- 56 On this point, see also GA 60: 124–25/89.
- 57 Von Herrmann, *Hermeneutische Phänomenologie des Daseins*, 202–12; Bernasconi, “Repetition and Tradition,” 133–36. According to McNeill, “From *Destruktion* to the History of Being,” 31, the historicity of Dasein is the key concept for understanding “the path that leads from the *Destruktion* to a precursory insight into the destining of the Being.”
- 58 The connection between retrieval and life is particularly clear in a passage of GA 61: “Retrieval: everything depends on its sense. Philosophy is a basic mode [*Grundwie*] of life itself, in such a way that it authentically retrieves [*wieder-holt*], brings life back from its decaying [*Abfall*], and this bringing back [*Zurücknahme*], as radical research [*Forschen*], is life itself” (GA 61: 80/62, tm).
- 59 Gail Soffer, “Heidegger, Humanism, and the Destruction of History,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 49.3 (1996): 570–71.
- 60 On this, see *Being and Time*, §63, and the end of §62.
- 61 Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, 232–33. In his outstanding study, Crowe defends the thesis according to which the concept of

destruction must be understood based on the concept of authenticity. Because of this, Crowe thinks that destruction “achieves full maturity in the years after 1920” (Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, 248). In my account, destruction is a phenomenological method that makes up the argumentative structure of Heidegger’s arguments and his own way of doing philosophy, and this crucial function of destruction is already described in detail in SS 1920. Now, one could say that authenticity is nothing other than going back to the enactment of Dasein and that this is exactly the function that I assign to destruction. If this is true, then Crowe is right in underlining the connection between destruction and authenticity. However, if destruction is not an extrinsic method that can be applied to some topics and not to others, but the “form” of Heidegger’s phenomenology, then it seems to me to be incorrect to say that destruction presupposes historicity and authenticity (Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, 250–56) because authenticity is this destructive movement of going back to Dasein’s existence. In this case, there would be a much deeper connection between destruction and authenticity, and authenticity would then not be something which is “after” (as Barash, “Heidegger’s Ontological ‘Destruction,’” and Bambach, *Heidegger; Dilthey*; want) or “before” destruction (as Crowe wants). Moreover, Crowe’s account of authenticity could be problematic, as Campbell, *The Early Heidegger’s Philosophy of Life*, 211–24, points out: The decision for authenticity does not imply that Dasein is then “outside” of inauthenticity since there is no “binary opposition” between these two possibilities; inauthenticity remains a constitutive moment of Dasein in the decision for authenticity. Consequently, I agree with Campbell on the point that destruction does not destroy inauthenticity to grasp authenticity: The de-objectification achieved through destruction cannot reach a pure manifestation.