ABSTRACT. This paper attempts to show that Robert Cumming's effort in a recent article to explain the work of Jacques Derrida to American philosophers fails to present an adequate account of Derrida's position because Cumming does not take Derrida's philosophical views (in this case, his critique of Heidegger) seriously enough. By returning to the Heideggerian and Derridian texts, three main points become clear: first, that Cumming fails to present an alternative interpretation of Heidegger on which to base his criticisms of Derrida's reading; second, that Cumming's specific criticisms of Derrida often fail because he engages the issues on a relatively superficial level; and, finally, that Cumming has not proven that Derrida's work does not present a substantial challenge to Heidegger's position. I conclude that the task of explaining Derrida's work to American philosophers has yet to be accomplished.

One who is used to such things fully expects to see a paper on Derrida titled "The Odd Quadruple" or "Any Odd Number Can Play", but Robert Cumming's title, "The Odd Couple: Heidegger and Derrida", could easily give the unwary reader the wrong idea. There is scarcely anything less Derridian than the concept of a couple—a point which Derrida makes abundantly clear in the article, "Restitutions", which Cumming discusses, and elsewhere. According to Cumming, Derrida himself was "slightly taken aback" by the title, as well he might be, considering that the fourth sentence in "Restitutions" is "But it would be necessary to wait until there are more than two to begin." To do no more than reassert the possibility of the couple without a great deal of explanation gives the appearance of a bad beginning, i.e., either of outright contradiction or of a less than complete understanding of Derrida. Probably neither of these alternatives really describes Mr. Cumming's position, but there do seem to be some problems with his article which undermine his attempt to make Derrida "available" to the analytically trained reader.

Copyright 1983 Philosophy Research Archives
To avoid limiting the discussion to the couple, Cumming/Derrida, and to emphasize the fact that the comparison between Heidegger and Derrida is both obvious and helpful, I will follow Cumming and draw on that comparison to clarify three main areas in which I think "The Odd Couple" uncouples itself. I will first discuss some problems with what Cumming has to say about Heidegger which I believe influence his interpretation of Derrida's reading of Heidegger. Then I will address Cumming's interpretation of Derrida more directly, with special emphasis on the continuity between Heidegger's thought and Derrida's. Finally, I will point out what I believe to be the evolution of some of Derrida's main areas of difference from Heidegger. While this may not serve to make Derrida any more "available" to those unfamiliar with Heidegger's work, it may at least acquit Derrida of the charge of "framing" Heidegger, and perhaps even free Heidegger from the burden of having written a "self-sufficient" and perfect work which requires no frame and so, presumably, has become a part of the wall.

As a matter of fact, Heidegger believes that neither his own work nor that Van Gogh painting he discusses in "The Origin of the Work of Art" are Works of Art in the full sense of the term. He himself "frames" "The Origin" twice: with an epilogue "written later" and an addendum written in 1956. One wants to ask Cumming why, if "The Origin" needs no "framing", it needed such further comment by Heidegger. Was it because the minds of Heidegger's readers/listeners were too limited and so required further guidance, or because the text itself, like any text, is open to further interpretation, even on the part of its author? What keeps us from getting a clear answer to this question is that Cumming, in rejecting Derrida's reading of Heidegger, really offers us no alternative reading of his own, except to say that "The Origin" is self-enclosed, like the poem "Roman Fountain" by C.F. Meyer which appears in it. Cumming acknowledges that "The Origin" is structurally open--"The gap we are left with in Heidegger is the unresolved relation between Art and Thing. . ."--but he does not really reconcile this with his claim about its self-enclosure. While it is, of course, dangerous to say that Derrida, by contrast, presents us with a unified interpretation of Heidegger, it is at least clear that he has a single strategy in the deconstruction of Heidegger's (or anyone's) work, i.e., to prove that, despite his efforts to evade it, Heidegger retains some complicity with traditional metaphysics. To this Cumming replies that some of Derrida's criticisms are individually off the mark, without proving either that there is no such overall complicity, or that such complicity would not be a fault in Heidegger. Were he to present a reading of Heidegger, however sketchy, which would support such claims, his comments on Derrida might seem less arbitrary.
TWO AS AN ODD NUMBER

One thing such an alternative reading might do would be to explain just why Heidegger’s claim in the “The Origin” that the shoes in Van Gogh’s painting were those of a peasant woman is not, as Derrida claims in “Restitutions”, “ridiculous and lamentable”9, “Dogmatically defining a minimal belonging which Heidegger was wrong to believe could be read, internally, on the painted object.”10 It is a passage which many Heidegger scholars find unsettling, yet Cumming says that “Shapiro interprets Heidegger as attributing the shoes to a peasant woman . . .” (emphasis added)11 without saying just what Heidegger does do, if not that. Cumming correctly asserts that both Heidegger and Derrida ultimately reject Shapiro’s “subjectivist” approach to art in which “. . . a work of art is true to the extent that it corresponds to what is most the artist’s own experience— that is, to the extent that the artist represents, not just some object but himself.”12 All the same, in “The Origin” Heidegger does say, “But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes. The peasant woman, on the other hand, simply wears them.”13 Wears what? Clearly not the shoes in the picture, but the shoes it is a picture of, i.e., the shoes Van Gogh supposedly meant to represent in the picture. It is not enough for Cumming to say in Heidegger’s defense that “What interests Heidegger, however, is that the painting only remains the painting which it is in its original context”14, because the discussion of the shoes is intimately tied up with the concepts of Earth and Reliability which carry so much weight later in “The Origin”. One of Derrida’s claims is that the “subjectivist” tendency of that original discussion of the shoes might well continue to taint (for reasons which Derrida considers absolutely compelling) those larger concepts. Cumming offers no argument to refute such a claim.

Cumming’s neglect of these larger issues in this instance is symptomatic of the most glaring omission in his interpretation of Heidegger. He never makes it clear that “The Origin of the Work of Art” is not “really” about art at all. Sometimes Cumming seems fully aware of this (he speaks of “The Origin” as “a return to the thing” via the work of art15), but in general he seems to regard the points about art as the essential feature of “The Origin”, whereas Derrida, more correctly, sees them as mere (tell-tale) indicators of what really concerns Heidegger, i.e., the nature of Truth and History. Cumming assures us that “The question which explicitly remains open at the end of “The Origin” is the Hegelian question of ‘the end of art’, which is not an ordinary historical issue but a teleological issue, inasmuch as ‘history’ is ‘destiny’.16 Yet he gives us no interpretation of this link between Heidegger and Hegel which would counter Derrida’s contention that, because of the compelling power of the metaphysical tradition, Heidegger represents only a minor improvement over Hegel. Rather, Cumming returns immediately to the issue of art per se by
TWO AS AN ODD NUMBER

saying, "In any case the orientation in Heidegger is not towards philosophy as 'the end of art', but towards the origin of the work of art." In fact, the true orientation of "The Origin" is precisely towards history as given form by a Work of Art, which is clearly not simply a work of art in the usual sense, since Heidegger's list of Works includes "the act that founds a political state" and "the essential sacrifice". The closest Cumming comes to acknowledging Heidegger's conclusion is to say that the question of the origin of the work of art "is in some sense liquidated by the fountain, as a work of art which is itself an origin". But Heidegger's own words at the end of "The Origin" convey a far better and richer sense of what he is about: "The origin of the work of art--that is, the origin of both the creators and the preservers, which is to say of a people's historical existence, is art. This is so because art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical."20

II

The point is that, without a unified interpretation of Heidegger's work to counter Derrida, and specifically without a justification for the claim that the poem "Roman Fountain" embodies the whole meaning of "The Origin", Cumming cannot just assume that Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger, or his neglect of the poem, is wrong. For instance, Cumming criticizes Derrida's translation or transformation of Heidegger's term "Bodenlosigkeit" (groundlessness) into an "abyss", but without offering an interpretation which would really refute such a translation. What is a lack of ground, if not an abyss or a void? Without an answer to that question, Cumming gives the appearance of begging the question by his insistence on the insufficiency of Derrida's translation. He is correct in thinking that Derrida uses the abyss to undermine the new ground for Western thought which Heidegger believes he has found in the Reliability of the Earth: "Thus the spatial metaphor--the "opening up" of "a lack of ground"--is launched against the continuity that is implicit in Heidegger's metaphor for his own procedure (demarche)--marcher." However, Heidegger's inability to walk the path he sets for himself is precisely Derrida's point and he cannot be refuted on the mere premise that Heidegger can/should not be undermined. Cumming even says that Derrida takes over the groundlessness metaphor from Heidegger and "may have" been encouraged in his use of the word abyss by the way in which Heidegger "plays up the ambiguity" of his own pronouncement. What Cumming then goes on to imply is that Derrida takes Heidegger's "play" too seriously, and finds an abyss where there is only a "discontinuity". Still, Cumming establishes no standard for what is "play" and what is serious mistranslation, and never explains why Heidegger could play with his own text and Derrida cannot.

386
What Derrida is engaged in here is a process of taking some of Heidegger's methods and doctrines and turning them against some of Heidegger's own conclusions. Both Derrida and Cumming acknowledge that Derrida begins with Heideggerian questions, but Cumming seems not to fully understand Derrida's further step. If you take Derrida's "play" seriously, on the other hand, it is easier to see, for instance, why "At the outset, however, Derrida seems to be merely abetting Heidegger's destruction of the correspondence doctrine of truth and the corresponding doctrine of art as representative. . ." without assuming that Derrida is pretending to do so "in order to reach truth in Heidegger's more fundamental sense of aletheia." Cumming believes that behind this pretense, Derrida (but presumably not Heidegger) is "really" "deconstructing too the philosophical concept of truth." Now, Derrida does have serious concerns about Heidegger's concept of aletheia, but he would not simply equate it with the usual philosophical concept of truth. Similarly, the same general strategy apparently motivates what Cumming sees as a "textual brutality" on Derrida's part in paying attention only to part of "The Origin" (although both Shapiro and Cumming himself also limit their discussions to only part of the text). It is not that Derrida does not share Heidegger's awareness of the importance of context effects: he says in Marges that "This does not suppose that the mark has value out of context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any absolute center to serve as an anchor." What Derrida does in "Restitutions", then, is to set part of "The Origin" in the context of Shapiro's response to it, not gratuitously, as Cumming suggests, but in order to show that Heidegger has not yet completely escaped "subjectivism".

Thus Cumming is right in saying that Derrida's commentary is "a more fundamental attack than Shapiro's." It would hardly be worth doing if it were not. However, Cumming then goes on to say that Derrida is "getting away" with something here--as he noted at the beginning of his article--although it is never really made clear what exactly is missing. It is almost as if an attack on Heidegger is, by definition, unjustified and deserves (psycho-)analysis more than refutation. The intellectual son turns on his intellectual father, but that is part of the philosophical tradition and the real question is who is "right", whose arguments prevail, not who is "original" and who "derivative". More is really needed by way of a criticism of Derrida than to simply say that "Derrida is guilty of treachery or at best tricherie, since his metaphors are implicated in the deconstruction of Heidegger's treatment of the work of art." Why treachery? Has Derrida denied that his work is a deconstruction of Heidegger's? Is such a deconstruction necessarily treachery? More importantly, can it be done? Are there perhaps some problems with "The Origin"? Some vestiges of the metaphysical? Heidegger's work may well be
TWO AS AN ODD NUMBER

Perfect and self-sufficient, like the Work of Art, but that cannot be proven by labelling any critical reading as trickery. Cumming gives no argument, persuasive or otherwise, to show why Derrida cannot apply Heidegger's questions to Heidegger himself.

III

Strangely, Cumming himself emphasizes the most general basis for Derrida's belief that Heidegger can and should be deconstructed. If, as Cumming says, Derrida practices two levels of deconstruction, and Heidegger only one, it should be at least probable that Derrida will believe that the Heideggerian questions which provide the basis for the first sort of deconstruction do not really go far enough or deep enough to keep Heidegger himself from occasional lapses into metaphysics and especially into metaphysical language. This is based on Derrida's belief that not just metaphor, as Cumming notes, but language in general is never "innocent": "It is the language of Western metaphysics." This is the first of three general lines of criticism which Derrida seems to direct against Heidegger. They are all attempts to prove that Heidegger has not yet escaped the metaphysical. This first, most general, criticism can be summarized as a claim that Heidegger's language (and Derrida's as well, of course) is still the language of metaphysics and so necessarily still embodies metaphysical claims about Truth, Art, Poetry, etc., which Heidegger at other times would seek to deny. Thus, when Derrida says in "Restitutions" that Heidegger's term "Verlässlichkeit" (reliability) "presupposes by its very performance the reliability of language and discourse", it is a substantive criticism of Heidegger. Cumming, however, chooses to answer by pointing out that Derrida's translation of Verlässlichkeit as fiabilité (trustworthiness) is itself untrustworthy and that the true meaning of reliability will be found in the poem "Roman Fountain", although he offers us no interpretation to support either claim.

The second, related set of criticisms Derrida directs against Heidegger has to do more specifically with the issue we have already raised with regard to remnants of "subjectivism" in Heidegger's discussion of the pair of shoes. This criticism relies heavily on an existentialist interpretation of Heidegger's concept of "Authenticity" in Being and Time, as an assertion of the individual subject's ability to give meaning to her own life. Cumming quite clearly points out this aspect of Derrida's method of deconstruction, but ignores its obvious application to Heidegger. Speaking of Plato, Cumming notes that "Derrida's deconstruction of the doctrine of "presence" is almost indistinguishably a deconstruction of the 'appropriate' as One's own (propre) of what is assumed to be 'present' to oneself, including one's self, so that one can become authentikos--author of what one
is.\textsuperscript{30} If Heidegger's concepts of Authenticity (\textit{Eigentlichkeit}) and Appropriation (\textit{Ereignis}) render some primacy to Presence to oneself or to the individual human subject, his lapse into "subjectivism" would seem to extend much further than a possibly careless passage in "The Origin", but Cumming ignores the whole issue. Similarly, the third line of criticism which Derrida applies against Heidegger is also hinted at, but then ignored, in Cumming's article. Cumming asks why Derrida chooses to focus on Heidegger's discussion of the transformation from the Greek to the Latin understanding of Being, the transformation which left our Western European understanding of the meaning of Being "bodenlos", groundless: "Why should he (Derrida) have picked out this historical 'transition'? He shows no further interest in "Restitutions" in restoring 'the fundamental Greek experience' or in differences between it and 'Roman thought' . . . . Derrida is in fact indifferent to this historical 'transition'.\textsuperscript{31} Cumming answers his own question. It is precisely because Derrida has no interest in this transition (he believes all ways of understanding Being are equally bodenlos) that he is led to believe that Heidegger has too much interest in it, that is, has fallen prey to the traditional metaphysical nostalgia for a time when there was a Ground rather than an abyss. Cumming attributes Derrida's attitude toward this historical transition to a preference for metaphor over substance, which scarcely constitutes an argument in Heidegger's defense.

It is not my intention here to say that Derrida's criticisms of Heidegger cannot themselves be criticized, but rather to point out that they can only validly be criticized on the basis of a clear alternative interpretation of Heidegger and/or clear arguments directed against them. In fact, as any follower of the literature knows, there is no shortage of criticisms of Derrida. Even Derrida himself makes a few, including one in "Restitutions" which marks the shift from the second to the third of the criticisms noted above. Cumming points out quite accurately that Derrida attempts "to transfer 'falling' and 'abandonment' (\textit{délaissement/Geworfenheit}) (letting go/throwness), which are traits of "being-there" (\textit{Dasein}) in \textit{Being and Time} to the shoes of 'The Origin'.\textsuperscript{32} What he does not further do is note that Derrida acknowledges in "Restitutions" that his criticism of Heidegger's supposed "subjectivism" based on concepts from \textit{Being and Time} (including Authenticity) might be misplaced in discussing "The Origin." "After it is established that the proceedings of 'The Origin' claim to lead us back to this side of, up to, or to the verge of the constitution of the 'subjectum' in the comprehension of the thing . . . then to ask about the 'subject', the subject of this pair of shoes would perhaps be to begin by a mistake, by a reading which was unreal, projective, or false."\textsuperscript{33} So, Derrida switches from this criticism to his more general scepticism about being able to say anything positive at all without being metaphysical, and to his belief in Heidegger's
nostalgia. "Heidegger does not reattach the shoes to . . . a subject, especially not as a real subject outside the picture. But he can only be acquitted of this accusation (Shapiro can't) because he has retied things even more closely and even more "profoundly", pre-originally: in the (corresponding) belonging to the silent discourse of the Earth."34 Heidegger is not necessarily falling into "subjectivism" in "The Origin", but he is falling into the metaphysical nostalgia for a Ground which is not undermined by an abyss.

As can be seen from all this, the relationship between Heidegger's work and Derrida's is very complex, and it is further complicated by Derrida's very conscious manipulation of it. Cumming has really, therefore, undertaken more than can easily be accomplished. To explain the relationship fully, it would be necessary first to make Derrida "available" to American philosophers, with all his Heideggerian underpinnings exposed, and then, in a separate process, to interpret Heidegger and do a systematic critique of Derrida's reading of Heidegger. What has happened in Cumming's admirable effort to do both at once is that he makes the connection between the two seem more obscure than it is, while at the same time he does not sufficiently explain why he rejects Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger. Cumming contrasts Heidegger's belief in the self-sufficiency of the work/Work of Art with Derrida's view, which Cumming says surrenders "the work, not to the authority of its author (as Shapiro does . . .), but to the unauthorized intervention of the interpreter, who can take advantage with his own choice of passageways the author never intended . . ."35 Derrida is no great lover of author-ity, as may be clear, but still one wants to ask Cumming how this statement relates to the interpretation Heidegger himself gives to Van Gogh's painting. Is it a passageway Van Gogh himself chose? If so, then we are back to Shapiro. If not, why is Heidegger's interpretation of Van Gogh (or Cumming's interpretation of Heidegger) any more author-ized than Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger? There is an answer to this question but by relying on the self-sufficiency of the Work and the self-enclosure of "The Origin", Cumming ends by seeming to deny the possibility of any interpretation at all.
FOOTNOTES


3. Cumming, 494 footnote.


7. Cumming, 507.


11. Cumming, 492.


13. Heidegger, 34.


15. Cumming, 495.


17. Cumming, 508.


20. Heidegger, 78.


23. See, for instance, Derrida, Positions, 9.
HOLLAND


27. Cumming, 514.


29. Derrida, Verité, 403.


31. Cumming, 496.

32. Cumming, 514.

33. Derrida, Verité, 326.

34. Derrida, Verité, 404.

35. Cumming, 519.