# Review Essay

## Platonic Deconstruction

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*Neoplatonism after Derrida. Parallelograms.* By Stephen Gersh. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006. xvi, 223 pages.

*Neoplatonism after Derrida* is a significant study of the history of philosophy, covering ground rarely explored, in an extremely thorough, fruitful and persuasive manner. However, it poses serious interpretive problems for the reader. It presents a detailed and complex analysis of both Neoplatonism and Derridean deconstruction, and a reader approaching the text without good training in both these fields will have difficulty understanding the overall argument. The book is intended for specialists, but of course few scholars are specialists in both these fields. The reader trained in only one of the two will find the book fruitful if they bring to it a willingness to use the study itself to become educated in the area with which they are less familiar. In that sense, Gersh's text can be viewed both as a sustained analysis and comparison of Neoplatonism and deconstruction, and a sort of workbook on the basis of which the reader's comprehension of both may be enlarged. Given my own training in Neoplatonism, this review essay takes the perspective that the deconstructive elements in the text require the most elucidation. Because the overall argument of the book combines both fields, it will not be possible to present a critical discussion without also presenting a somewhat detailed account of Gersh's argument. The open-ended style of the book, as well as its complexity, dictate that what follows is a sort of guide through the book's four chapters, drawing conclusions that are often only implied, combined with an analysis of its philosophical importance.

The term 'Neoplatonism' is usually taken to refer to the Greek Platonism of the 3rd to 6th centuries. A.D. Gersh, however, argues persuasively for the continuity of the Platonic tradition beginning with Plato and running through Greek pagan, Christian Patristic, and Medieval incarnations. He includes the Platonic dialogues in the 'tradition' because he thinks it is hermeneutically

naïve to think we can distinguish adequately between what Plato thought and what his audience believed that he thought. As soon as one begins to think about the dialogues, one has entered the tradition of Platonic interpretation, a tradition which continues even today. Further, he thinks that the term 'Neoplatonism' reflects more of a historical than a philosophical distinction, because the "essentially transcendent and interiorizing character" of Platonism means that it "maintains a striking degree of consistency throughout time" (7). Plotinus and Augustine, for example, are far apart if one judges them with extra-philosophical criteria, such as a sociologically understood religious perspective, but in philosophical terms they are extremely close. This means that Gersh's study is not meant to be a comparison of deconstruction with an obscure part of the Western philosophical tradition, but with an essential component running from its beginning up to the Modern period. He points out that the period between Aristotle and Descartes is often ignored by historians of philosophy, so making it "the central object of analysis is to perform a major deconstruction in itself" (6).

Why compare Neoplatonism with Derrida? In his preface Gersh claims that Derrida supplies "a paradigm of writing compelling in the aftermath of Heideggerian thinking" (x) and that Derrida engaged continuously with Neoplatonic texts, either explicitly or implicitly. He points to the debate between Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion over the character of negative theology and its relation to ontotheology in the Pseudo-Dionysius. This debate at once situates itself in a post-Heideggerian philosophical and linguistic context, yet seeks to engage with and make use of Neoplatonic elements drawn from Dionysius. Gersh contends that this debate is not sufficiently contextualised, because the Neoplatonic context of Dionysius is not made clear enough by either party. One of Gersh's aims is to "set important discussions of this kind on a more secure basis" (xii).

It might occur to the reader to ask why Gersh thinks discussions of this sort are important. Deconstruction is not a method adopted by many scholars of Ancient philosophy, and is even likely to be viewed by them as antithetical to the search for truth that philosophy embodies. Without assimilating one to the other, Gersh's study aims to show that the Platonic tradition grapples with the status of language in a serious manner, especially in its later phase with the emergence of negative theology, and that the theoretical assumptions underlying the Platonic employment of language can be clarified in important ways by the explicit theory and practice of writing found in deconstruction. Deconstruction itself, conversely, can be demystified to a great extent by seeing in it structures and strategies which for a long time were central to Western philosophy.

Gersh carries out his aim by performing a deconstruction on both Neoplatonism and deconstruction, which involves finding Derridean elements in

Neoplatonism and Neoplatonic elements in Derrida. This is what he calls an "indirect deconstruction" (xiv) in that it is carried out on "the macro-structure of paragraphs and segments" rather than the "micro-structure of words and phrases," allowing the "coexistence of polysemy within a *ratiocinative* philosophical text" (xv, note 5). Because of this method, which involves the juxtaposition of various extended textual analyses and the juxtaposition of diverse conceptual analyses, Gersh claims that the four chapters of his study can be read in various orders (xiii), and that corresponding to this there is no "centered" thesis, but rather a plurality of "decentered" theses (xv). What he means by this is that his argument does not seek to establish a single conclusion. Rather, its method of juxtaposing texts in order to highlight points of contact and divergence suggests a plurality of conclusions of varying philosophical import. This multiplicity increases the difficulty of the book while also making it philosophically fertile. It also makes it difficult to evaluate the work in terms of success or failure. Rather, this aspect is what suggests that Gersh's study has somewhat the aspect of a workbook from which to begin one's own evaluation of the multitude of texts and positions to which it refers. This also means that my review falsifies the text to a certain extent, making the argument seem more singular and monosemous than it actually is. The book's argument itself will explain why this must be the case.

In his first chapter, "Derrida reads (Neo-) Platonism," Gersh gives what could be termed an example of his deconstructive reading rather than a full explanation of it. His theme is "deconstructing the text of philosophy or alternatively that of Derrida reading (Neo-) Platonism" (1). In other words, his examination will simultaneously be one of Derrida's reading of certain aspects of the history of philosophy, and that history itself. He begins within a Derridean understanding of language: the 'text' of philosophy to be deconstructed is more than the written word. Writing here is both that which is within the formalism of language and what exceeds it, and exhibits "the writer's simultaneous ability to control and inability to control language's semantic resources" (2). He means partly that in practice the interpretation of a text goes beyond simply finding the most plausible line through it. Interpreting a text in the traditional manner assumes that the locus of meaning is in the thoughts of the author, and the text is merely its expression. Therefore, alternate readings and ambiguities should be dealt with on the assumption that the author had a singular and internally coherent argument. Derrida's understanding is rather that language itself is the locus of meaning. Thus there will be more than one line or partial line through a text, depending on what the reader chooses to focus. Far from being flaws in the text, its ambiguities or untidy characteristics (from the traditional point of view) are on the Derridean reading ineliminable elements from which the various meanings of a text issue. It is important to realise that the exploitation of

ambiguity encouraged by this theory of language is not simply malicious play, as could be charged against Derrida, but rather a serious attention to what he considers to be a real play of meanings, informed by his own developments beginning from Saussurean semiotic theory.

The 'philosophy' to be deconstructed has variously been called "metaphysics," "logocentrism," and "ontotheology" (2). Derrida to a great extent follows Heidegger in holding that philosophy from Parmenides to Hegel and/or Nietzsche focuses primarily on the temporal dimension of the present, resulting in a 'metaphysics of presence' that is exhibited in various ways, most importantly in the priority of *being* over *becoming*, where being is understood as that which always is, while becoming comes from and passes away into future and past. Ultimately this is ontotheology, where Being is thought to be *a* being, God, whose eternal present indicates maximal being. Further characteristics of this philosophy are a "preoccupation with oppositional structures," understood as prior and posterior (atemporal/temporal, cause/effect), and the superiority of "constative discourse," discourse which "attempts to state certain truths without embodying those truths" (3). Constative discourse is opposed to performative discourse, which does attempt to embody the truths it utters. The status of performative discourse becomes an important element in the latter parts of Gersh's study. His connection between these two themes is that the emphasis in the West on the metaphysics of presence has been accompanied by a reduction in the status of writing, from what Derrida calls "arche-writing" to everyday writing (4), losing the important aspect of performativity. One of Gersh's aims is to clarify Derrida's concept of arche-writing, while demonstrating that it survives longer in the Western tradition than Derrida presumes.

In this first chapter, Gersh sets Neoplatonism and Derrida side by side by examining three philosophemes drawn from the Platonic tradition, along with their Derridean analogues. These are: 1) the eventual identification of matter, non-being, and evil, along with the gradual extension of these terms from a purely subordinate status, through concepts like intelligible matter, to every part of the hierarchy after the first principle. This is set beside Derrida's displacement of the word *khôra* (the Receptacle) in Plato's *Timaeus* from a subordinate metaphysical principle to an indeterminate linguistic principle; 2) the reversal of the identification of 'cause' and 'intellectual' as prior terms, through the elevation of the non-intellectual One over the hypostasis of Intellect. This is set beside Derrida's displacement of negative theology by deconstruction, where the former is understood by Derrida to favour the intellectual and the latter favours neither the intellectual nor the non-intellectual; 3) the gradual shift from an exclusively monosemous discourse in Platonism to polysemy, in the interpretations of texts in both literal and figurate senses. This is set beside Derrida's theory of writing presented through his analysis

of the term *pharmakon* in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where writing is conceived of as neither exclusively conceptual nor linguistic, neither exclusively monosemous nor polysemous (9–20).

Gersh points out that all three Derridean philosophemes have to do with the relation between being and writing, while only the third Platonic point does so explicitly. However, he finds implicit in the first and second Platonic philosophemes the essential traits of Derrida's notion of arche-writing, which has "a disruptive relation to metaphysics of presence and to oppositional structure" (22). What it comes down to is the status of the first principle in Neoplatonism as well as the Platonic *khôra*. Derrida thinks that the Good as beyond Being in Platonism does not move away from the metaphysics of presence, because he thinks that ultimately the Good is understood as maximal being. He also, according to Gersh, tentatively thinks that the Good does move away from the metaphysics of presence, in its kinship with *khôra* and the performative aspects of negative theology. *Khôra* itself, for Derrida, is neither Being nor beings, and so moves away from the metaphysics of presence. Gersh thinks the story in Platonism is more complicated, that the One/Good and the *khôra* both do and do not move away from the metaphysics of presence. They are both atemporal principles, one as prior to and one as posterior to time, and are both related to substantial being, as cause and 'effect' of an emanation of substantial being. The *khôra* becomes effect in the sense that the material principle below substantiality is for certain Neoplatonists the last trace of the power of the One. Atemporality and substantiality are understood here as the primary features of the metaphysics of presence as it appears in Platonism. However, both One/Good and *khôra* move away from this metaphysics, because both are also temporal and insubstantial. They are both temporal, because both are causes (in different senses) of the Demiurge's creation of time, and they are both insubstantial, the One as prior to substantial being and *khôra* as posterior to it (23–24).

I think that Gersh's detailed comparison here brings out the Derridean sense of arche-writing by showing that the Platonic texts themselves begin to have a polysemous understanding of their own terms, and an interpretation that travels solely within determinate categories of being and univocally understood oppositions such as intelligible/sensible, cannot capture what is going on in this tradition. Of course, the obvious objection to this point would be to deal with apparent polysemy by specifying exactly how many senses a word has in a given text or set of texts, and using different terms for each, or at least being aware of the different senses. The idea would be to reduce polysemy to a set of monosemous terms or understanding of terms. However, I think this would be a mistake with regard to Platonic texts, and in this I agree with Gersh's contention that there are important convergences between Neoplatonism and Derrida. What he has pointed out is that

Neoplatonic texts themselves begin to move towards a sort of Derridean arche-writing by positing metaphysical principles that necessarily cannot be captured in monosemous terms, most especially the One, which lies above determinate being, and a material quasi-principle that lies below it. In later chapters Gersh shows that in a very important sense the Neoplatonic hypostasis of Intellect is also such a principle. As an introduction to this, he finishes the first chapter by introducing a seventh philosopheme, that of the non-discursivity of the Plotinian Intellect, and Plotinus' representation of this non-discursivity through the analogy of Egyptian hieroglyphs. Derrida also refers to hieroglyphs and Chinese ideograms in referring to the non-phonetic. The connection to be drawn is that Plotinus' transcendent non-discursive is analogous Derrida's immanent non-phonetic (27–28).

In essence, the problem that Gersh lays out by the end of his first chapter is this: How can Neoplatonic texts write in what seems like monosemous propositional discourse about principles like the One and Intellect that they claim transcend propositional discourse? The answer he points to is that they must, implicitly or explicitly, be using language in a sophisticated manner thaat lays out a system of determinately related terms while undermining that system at the same time. Where Derrida comes in is that this is exactly his understanding of language. Further, as Gersh argues in chapter two, Derrida undermines overly determinate readings of texts by using a hermeneutical structure with striking similarity to the basic structure underlying Neoplatonic texts: remaining, procession, and reversion.

In chapter two, "What is called "'Negative Theology?'," Gersh presents an account of the quasi-method of deconstruction. He chooses the term "quasi-method" to indicate that deconstruction is simultaneously a theory and a practice, both disclosing and not disclosing definite truths (5). He presents his account through a detailed analysis of the Derridean essay, "Sauf le Nom, (Post-Scriptum)," whose topic is the interaction between deconstruction and negative theology. The topic of negative theology itself indicates that Derrida's essay is a sustained engagement with Neoplatonism, because negative theology has its origin in the reading of Plato's *Parmenides* by late-Neoplatonists such as Proclus. Gersh suggests that the other element here is Heidegger, pointing out many Heideggerian intertexts in "Sauf le Nom" (32–33). Derrida's text claims that negative theology is at the same time ontotheology *par excellence*, and a mode of discourse that calls ontotheology seriously into question. It is caught between faithfulness to the metaphysics of presence and the undermining of the same metaphysics (38), hence the Heideggerian connection.

We have to recall at this point that the locus of meaning for Derrida is language. Gersh points out that insight into Derrida's practice in this essay comes from his analysis of Husserl in Derrida's "La voix et le phénomène."

In that text, Gersh claims, Derrida deconstructs Husserl's account of the foundation of repeatability or repetition in ideality, reversing its priorities, and giving a linguistic account of the origin of ideality through repetition. This is extremely important for understanding Derrida's quasi-method, because it points both to the performative aspect of Derridean deconstruction and to its use of general structures. In short, it is the repetition of figures situated within certain general structures which both indicates and enacts the ideality which Derridean deconstruction reveals.

Gersh specifies the structure within which this enactment takes place, naming it an "(a)semiotic square" (49). The background to this is Saussure's semiotic theory, according to which language is a system of signs (where a sign is a signifier linked to a signified, in spoken language this is the sound linked to the concept), whose meaning comes from the linguistic system itself. Each unit within the system does not have meaning in itself. Rather it gets its meaning from a contrast with other units in the system. Derrida extends this analysis to any system of signs, not only linguistic signs. This is linked in Derrida, according to Gersh, with the tool of the semiotic square developed by A.J. Greimas (43). However, because Derrida goes beyond Saussure in applying Saussure's differential theory of meaning to any system of signs whatsoever, with regard to written texts he does not restrict his interpretation to the semiotic level, the level at which a word is linked with a concept, but also sees meaning emerging from the differences between the phonemes and morphemes, the sounds of the spoken word and the shapes or arrangement of the letters. This is why Gersh calls the structure which he thinks undoubtedly underlies Derridean deconstruction (43, 67–68) the (a)semiotic square. Gersh's language is ambiguous here, but it seems that he thinks this structure is present intentionally, but not explicitly, in Derridean texts. In other words, Derrida knows what he is doing, but does not come right out and tell the reader, and would likely deny that his practice is so structured. One of the virtues of Gersh's text is that he takes us behind the curtain hiding Derrida's quasi-method.

Very simply, the semiotic square is a structure of oppositions. If meaning comes from difference, the square is a tool by which a textual interpreter can find a full range of meanings by systematically relating a given term to its contraries and contradictories. Given an original term such as Life, one may construct a square where a second term is yielded by taking the contrary of Life, Death, and the final two terms are the contradictories of the first two terms, Not-Life and Not-Death. If one takes the basic structure of the square and applies it to the relation between two terms, one ends up with a tool laying out the various possibilities of relations between the terms. Gersh traces the origin of such a structure to Aristotle (44) and says it underlies analyses like that found in *Categories* chapter 2. There, a term

is either predicated of a subject but not present in a subject, present in but not predicated of a subject, or both, or neither. Gersh's contention is that this basic structure underlies Derridean deconstruction, with regard to what he calls "asymmetrical contradictories" (64). If one takes a term found in a philosophical text, such as atemporality, one can construct a first term in which atemporality is prior to temporality, and a second term which is its contrary, where the priority has shifted to temporality. A third term can be made in which both temporality and atemporality have priority at the same time, perhaps in an oscillating tension, and finally a fourth term in which neither have priority, either because their opposition itself or the terms in which it has been stated are called into question (66–68). Gersh follows Greimas in calling these positive, negative, combined, and neutral terms, respectively (43, note 52). It should be emphasised, as Gersh points out, that this structure is very flexible, and can serve as a basic ordering of relations between many sorts of terms with many sorts of oppositions, and between semantic, phonetic, or morphological terms (66–67).

After laying out the structure of the (a)semiotic square, Gersh gives a summary of the first part of "Sauf le Nom." In it the terms which are opposed are language and the questioning of language, or ontotheology and the questioning or undermining of ontotheology. Implicit in Derrida's analysis is a presentation of Neoplatonic negative theology as a combined term which is both language and the questioning of language, and which both reinforces and undermines ontotheology. Deconstruction itself enters in as an implicit neutral term, "the remainder to be thought subsequently to the exhaustion of negative theology's formalization" (61), i.e., something which escapes the opposition, either by coming before or after the opposition implied within negative theology. I am giving only a portion of Gersh's analysis here, because as becomes obvious, Derrida's use of such oppositions within the (a)semiotic square has the character of internal multiplication. One set of oppositions can itself be opposed to other sets, and so on.

Given that this structure can quickly give rise to a chaos of various opposed terms, the question arises whether or not there is a pattern or order within the Derridean use of the (a)semiotic square. This is exactly what Gersh turns to next (65). He gives a model of interpretation which uses the terms of the (a)semiotic square as its basic terms. However, rather than a simple setting out of possibilities, this model lays out three configurations that govern movement between the terms of the square: a) the figure of (semi-)circularity, which moves from positive, to negative, to combined terms; and the partial figures of b) transcendence, where the third term of the (semi-)circle is not the combined but the neutral term; and c) translation, where the third term is a different realization of the combined term. What this means will become clearer below.

We should recall that Derrida thinks ideality arises from repetition. Here we have the possibility of repetition, because interpretive movement takes place within certain general structures. Hence the reading of a text in terms of (semi-) circularity, transcendence, and translation are both the explanation of meaning and the enactment which gives rise to the meaning which is explained. This is indicated by Gersh's definition of deconstruction: "deconstruction is a method of explaining and modifying asymmetrical contradictories by associating them with quasi-general structures which are understood and enacted" (64). In other words, when Derrida reads a text, he typically focuses on one or more of its key terms, and by manipulating it in relation to its contradictory term or set of terms, he calls into question the original configuration, usually with regard to its priority or posteriority. The asymmetry here is usually an asymmetry of value. For example, "Sauf le Nom" begins with a priority of the term language, then calls its value into question, ending up with an oscillation by which negative theology is neither a language nor not a language. It is important to see that these manipulations are not considered by Derrida to be completely arbitrary. Going back to Saussure, he thinks that meaning is constituted by the difference between terms. By bringing forth differences which are present, but perhaps de-emphasized or buried in a text, Derrida is bringing forth more of a text's meaning. Gersh claims that the movements of (semi-) circularity, transcendence, and translation can be shown "to underlie the discursive procedure of almost any Derridean text" (67).

By this point Gersh has argued that the method Derrida uses to undermine overly determinate readings of texts itself falls into a set of quasi-general structures, where the 'quasi' indicates that these are not determinate oppositions such as form/matter, but rather what allows such oppositions. If we recall that one of the problematics of the book is to examine how Neoplatonism can use what seems like monosemous discourse to speak of what can't be captured in monosemous discourse, we can see why Gersh's next step is to demonstrate that the Derridean figures of (semi-) circularity, transcendence, and translation are closely parallel to Neoplatonic remaining, procession, and reversion. In other words, he finds the basic configuration which in deconstruction is disruptive of monosemous discourse at the heart of Neoplatonic ontology.

The figure of (semi-) circularity is parallel to the basic Neoplatonic structure of remaining, procession, and reversion, with the partial figures of transcendence and translation representing various alternate forms of reversion. The basic Neoplatonic metaphysical model is one in which the movement from cause to effect and back takes place through the shift in emphasis on terms like unity and multiplicity, same and other, atemporality and temporality. Gersh's argument that the Derridean figures are structurally

parallel to the Neoplatonic metaphysical movement is persuasive: the positive term is a priority of the character of the cause when the effect remains in it, the negative term is the shift in priority to the characteristic which emerges in the effect through procession, and the combined term is the link between cause and effect where the characteristics of cause and effect are combined in certain complex manners in reversion. This complexity is shown by various patterns of reversion, corresponding to the partial figures of transcendence and translation, where an effect can be said to revert on a cause higher than its proximate, or itself become a cause of subsequent effects (68). These connections are made most explicit in Gersh's fourth chapter.

There are of course differences between the Neoplatonic scheme and the deconstructive scheme, and Gersh points out many (69). The main difference is that in Neoplatonism ideality (or strictly speaking, unity) is the foundation of subsequent multiplicity, while in deconstruction the multiplicity of repeatability is the foundation of ideality. This is why Neoplatonism is explicitly conceptual, while deconstruction is discursive. However, in chapter four Gersh will show that this dichotomy does not hold absolutely, with the implication that something like the discursive is at the heart of Neoplatonism and something like the conceptual is at the heart of deconstruction. This is one of the ways in which his deconstruction shows Derridean elements in Neoplatonism and Neoplatonic elements in Derrida.

After giving a summary of particular deconstructive terms (Difference, Trace, Supplement, *Différance*, Re-Mark) and how they refer to various aspects of the figure of (semi-) circularity, Gersh summarises the second part of "Sauf le Nom," demonstrating concretely that the quasi-general structures of (semi-) circularity, transcendence, and translation govern Derrida's interpretation of that text.

Gersh's third chapter, "Margins of Augustine," may be thought of as parallel to his summary of the first part of "Sauf le Nom," in chapter two. He has stated in brief that the Derridean quasi-general structures correspond to the Neoplatonic remaining, procession, and reversion. Through an analysis of reversion in Augustine's *De Quantitate Animae* he displays a Neoplatonic text engaged in the same sort of manipulation of opposed contradictories which underlie the (a)semiotic square, and doing so by using the Neoplatonic triadic structure. As the first summary in chapter two is a sort of example which precedes the detailed analysis, this chapter precedes the detailed analysis of the Neoplatonic triadic figure found in chapter four.

Gersh's analysis of *De Quantitate Animae* is meant to be read alongside Derrida's *Circonfessions*, and John Caputo's commentary on that text, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, as well as Gersh's own reading in this book of "Sauf le Nom," and his readings elsewhere of Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus* (101). However, because Gersh leaves the reader to perform these

various juxtapositions, "Margins of Augustine" is probably both the most and the least self-contained of the chapters. It can be read on its own quite easily, but its wider implications will only come out if the reader himself goes to the other texts alongside of which it is meant to be read. Its self-containment is probably related to the fact that a shorter version of it appeared previously.

Gersh claims that of all the writers of Antiquity, Augustine employs the Neoplatonic structure of reversion "in the most inventive, flexible, and variegated way" (102). He demonstrates that Augustine's use of reversion is situated within a metaphysical structure of superior and inferior terms such as corporeal/incorporeal, divisible/indivisible, which clearly corresponds to the asymmetrical contradictories of deconstruction. Further, because these contradictories are ranked hierarchically, Augustine is able not only to delineate the levels of soul, but describe a reversion of the soul which is an ascent through its own levels, beginning from the most inferior and culminating in the most superior term (113).

An important characteristic of this ascent is that it is not purely descriptive, according to Gersh. Augustine uses the imperative, urging his interlocutor Evodius to ascend with him; the constative discourse in which the ascent is framed has as its aim to provoke Augustine's soul to ascend within itself, and so here the constative discourse has a performative aspect; and the grades of soul themselves are described by Augustine as actions, culminating in a sort of 'remaining' which is contemplation (115–16).

In terms of Gersh's overall argument, chapter three demonstrates that the movement through asymmetrical contradictories characteristic of deconstruction underlies Augustine's text, which from internal evidence is itself a clear example of Neoplatonic reversion. The more exact correspondences are given in chapter four. Chapter three also introduces the topic of performativity. Recall that one of the main interests of this study is the status of language in Neoplatonic texts. Gersh finds at the heart of a particularly clear Augustinian account of reversion the partial displacement of constative by performative discourse. In his final chapter, Gersh will argue that performative discourse and the source of performative discourse are central to both Neoplatonism and Deconstruction.

Chapter four of Gersh's study is the most complex, and is divided into three related parts. In the first part, he gives an analysis of Derrida's essay, "Khôra." In this essay, Gersh finds Derrida developing Plato's *khôra*, the Receptacle, through a reading of the *Timeaus*, into a sort of quasi-general structure underlying all other Derridean quasi-general structures, almost synonymous with writing itself. What he finds in the *khôra* is an oscillation between two types of oscillation, the double exclusion (neither/nor) and the participation (both/and) (129). What he means by this is that with regard to certain oppositions in the *Timeaus* (sensible/intelligible, *muthos*/*logos*), the

*khôra* can not be said to be neither of the terms and it can not be said to be both of the terms, and also that the *khôra* can be said to be neither of the terms and it can be said to be both of the terms. What Derrida is doing in this essay, according to Gersh, is converting the *khôra* from a metaphysical to a linguistic principle, which lies both between the oppositions found in the text and beyond them (134–35). The *khôra* becomes a structure which in a way underlies the other Derridean structures (132), the idea being that its oscillation between two types of oscillation underlies the movement within the various aspects of the figure of (semi-) circularity discussed in chapter two as Difference, Trace, Supplement, Différance, and Re-Mark. I think what means is that the movement between asymmetrical contradictories within the figure of (semi-) circularity and the partial figures of transcendence and translation exists because the arche-writing is the *khôra*, it is an oscillation between oscillations between contradictory terms.

This discussion of the *khôra* prepares the ground for what follows in the chapter, because it delineates a principle which underlies normal writing, probably identical with what Derrida calls arche-writing, but which cannot itself be captured in normal writing. In the light of this introduction of arche-writing, Gersh proceeds to examine the figure of (semi-) circularity and the partial figures of transcendence and translation in Neoplatonism itself, negative theology and its relation to predicative discourse, and the relation between these two topics.

In the second part of the chapter, Gersh begins by giving a detailed account of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, a work in which the Neoplatonic hierarchy is laid out in 211 propositions with attendant proofs. The first principle, the One, gives rise to a series of subordinate principles, where each principle is a sort of self-standing refraction of the power of its cause. Each effect becomes a cause in its own right, giving rise to subsequent effects, which become causes, and so on. Remaining, procession, and reversion are the motions by which this series comes about. Each effect remains in its cause insofar as it has its origin in its cause, proceeds insofar as it becomes a principle distinct from its cause, but preserves its kinship with its cause through reversion. Gersh argues persuasively that the manner in which these three moments are articulated by Proclus is parallel to deconstruction. The movement from remaining to procession, for example, always involves the sort of asymmetrical contradictories which Derrida uses, and which we saw before in Augustine, such as atemporal/temporal, unified/multiple, etc, and is a movement where priorities are reversed, just as from the positive to the negative terms of the (a)semiotic square. Moreover, the complex structure of reversion in Proclus exhibits all three resolutions of the figure of (semi-) circularity seen in Derridean texts: the completion of the (semi-) circle in a combined term parallels the basic characterisation of reversion, where the

effect in reverting exhibits both identity and difference from its cause; the partial figure of transcendence where the negative term is replaced with a neutral term which is a negation of both elements of the original dichotomy parallels a reversion of an effect upon a principle superior to its proximate cause, i.e. a term which cannot be named by either element of the dichotomy because preceding them; and the partial figure of translation where the negative term is a different realisation of the combined term parallels a reversion in which the effect becomes a principle in its own right exhibiting a new characteristic not found in any of its predecessors. This is my understanding of Gersh's point, at any rate. Further, just as in deconstruction the same text may exhibit combinations of the various figures and partial figures, in Neoplatonism, all of these descriptions of reversion describe in complementary ways something which is thought of as a single, self-articulating motion of power, and so they may all be found in the same text describing the same thing from different perspectives.

Gersh points out that the method used in the *Elements of Theology* is modelled after Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, a text on which Proclus himself wrote a commentary. He uses the same method in his *Elements of Physics*, indicating that he thought the geometrical mode of reasoning applicable in the three main parts of theoretical philosophy: physics, mathematics, and theology. However, here Gersh is approaching one of the main aims of his study, in pointing out that using this sort of propositional argumentation is problematic for a Neoplatonist, because in this system the relation of subject and predicate characteristic of a proposition only begins to exist on the level of Soul. Proclus is very aware of the limitations of the Soul's discursive thinking. However, in spite of this he is able to write a work like the *Elements of Theology*, which purports to use propositions to describe Intellect, a divine mind whose thoughts are not propositional, and so whose internal complexity cannot be captured in propositions, and which also purports to use propositions to describe the One, whose utter lack of complexity means that it cannot be captured in language at all (153).

There must be more going on in Proclus' texts than a simple presentation of propositional arguments if his philosophical method is to be coherent. Gersh turns at this point to negative theology and its relation to predicative discourse, in order to see what underlies the propositional structure of both the figure of (semi-) circularity in deconstruction and remaining, procession and reversion in Neoplatonism.

He uses the controversy between Richard Sorabji and A.C. Lloyd over non-propositional thought in Intellect in Plotinus to introduce his discussion. He argues persuasively that Sorabji's contention that the thoughts of Intellect are propositional is based on too small a selection of passages. However, he disagrees with Lloyd's suggestion that the thought of Intellect

is like a proposition interrupted in its enunciation. Rather, Gersh suggests, the thought of Intellect "is something ultimately inexpressible which can however be provisionally indicated by an analogy: namely, just as a metaphor is an elliptical version of a simile, so is this something an elliptical version of a proposition" (164). I think what Gersh means is something like the difference between the metaphor 'he is a man-mountain' and the simile 'the man is as big as a mountain'. In the first case the comparison is implied, and could possibly be interpreted in various ways, while in the second the comparison is specified.

Gersh qualifies his statement by noting that both an elliptical simile and an elliptical proposition are discoursive rather than conceptual, and so the effect of an elliptical proposition will differ in Neoplatonism and Deconstruction. I understand his point, however, to be that in both domains the formalised structure of a proposition serves to specify and hence to truncate the wider possibilities of what he calls an elliptical proposition. In Neoplatonism, "the elliptical proposition disrupts logico-syntactic connectors with respect to an *atemporal* sphere, producing the metaphysical idea of the "all together," whereas within the context of the deconstruction of ontology the same elliptical proposition disrupts the logico-syntactic connectors with respect to the *temporal* domain, producing the notion of parataxis-juxtaposition" (168). By this I understand the following. The Ideas in the Neoplatonic Intellect are thought to be mutually implicating. Plotinus states that each Idea remains itself, but all other Ideas can be seen in each (*Enn.*, V.8.4.). In other words, Plotinus does not deny propositions of Intellect because propositions exhibit complexity, but rather because any particular predication cannot capture all of what an Idea actually is. Lloyd's suggestion that a thought in Intellect is like a proposition halted before its complete enunciation is off the mark because it removes the relation of each Idea to all the others, while at the same time reinforcing the notion that intellectual relations are always propositional. Gersh's idea is instead of Intellect as the co-presence of all its thoughts/Ideas, presenting a fertile complexity which makes possible the particular predications characteristic of the propositional thought of Soul, but surpasses any particular one and even the totality of such propositions. In the mountain example, the simile specifies that the man is big, while the metaphor could suggest that he is big, strong, difficult to deal with, etc., or any combination of these. One must remember that the metaphor is not like a sum of all these specified connotations, but rather a relation which stands as the foundation of an indeterminate number of more specific statements. In the same manner Intellect is not something like a sum of propositions which indicate the 'total' number of relations between its Ideas. Unlike in the Saussurian differential theory of meaning, an Idea in Intellect is something in itself. But while being itself, each Idea also implies the rest of the intelligible world, severally and in

its entirety. This sort of thing simply doesn't exist on the propositional level. Proclus' way of indicating this is to describe Intellect as a triadic structure in which each moment is a triadic reflection of the entire structure, and so on. In modern terms, Proclus described Intellect as a fractal, and as a fractal is in principle infinitely extendable, so is Intellect an inexhaustible source of propositions like the previous sentence which try to specify its internal structure. At this point it should be obvious that while the analogy of a metaphor and the term elliptical proposition help us understand what Plotinus means by the thinking of Intellect, they are already on the propositional level, and so can be deceptive if we don't realise their limitations.

The relation of such an idea to deconstruction is that the Neoplatonic metaphysical idea of the 'all together' is replaced by parataxis-juxtaposition (168). Different signifiers, or even spaces between signifiers, are ranged next to each other in various manners without the precise relation between them being authoritatively specified. Such an activity is meant not to create ambiguity and undecidability but to discover it, demonstrating that linguistic terms placed alongside each other are already in a relation which is generative of but cannot be completely captured by any particular proposition which specifies their relation, nor in the totality of such propositions.

It is this specification of Intellect as an 'all-together' which demands an understanding of Neoplatonism which holds together both the non-propositional character of much of its subject matter and the decidedly propositional character of its texts. Therefore, Gersh's next move is to examine how a "formalized and propositional … [account] can be viewed as an activity of Intellect thinking Intellect, and of Intellect thinking the One, this formalized and propositional expression being rather what surpasses the formalized and propositional expression" (168). In other words, how can a text like the *Elements of Theology* be at the same time propositional and what surpasses propositions? The reader should be reminded here of Derrida's characterisation of negative theology as simultaneously language and what surpasses language.

His examination of Intellect thinking Intellect is by way of various Heideggerian and Derridean texts which associate a theory of calling with the practice of textual juxtaposition, and which seek to present a mode of discourse prior to the predicative. The example from Derrida is that of the three main essays under discussion in Gersh's study: "Passions," "Sauf le Nom," and "Khôra," published together as an *Essai sur le Nom*. The examples from Heidegger develop a notion of utterance in three steps, applicable not only to language, but also the phases of the development of Western philosophy. The most illuminating example Gersh gives is Heidegger's analysis of Parmenides in *Was Heisst Denken?* where the fragment *khrê to legein te noein t'eon emmenai* is placed on four successive lines, intending to break the structure

such that it is not longer read as a linear sentence, but rather as words which are paratactically related. Gersh explains his view of Heidegger's strategy here as follows: "The reader should imagine a vast semantic network where the connections are based upon predication and inference and where, since logic is privileged over semantics, monosemy and inhibition of connotations is the rule. Heidegger would have recognized this as a remnant of what he calls the *Ge-stell* ("Enframing"). The reader should next imagine the isolation of certain semantic areas through the disruption of the predicative and inferential connections: a process leading to the liberation of polysemy and connotations, the semiotic now gaining ascendancy over the logical. Heidegger would have seen this as an anticipation of what he calls the *Er-eignis* ("Event/Appropriation") (175).

This transition from the logical to the semiotic is demonstrated through Heidegger's account of the successive understandings of the principle of sufficient reason in *Der Satz vom Grund*, in which *nihil est sine ratione* ends up being interpreted as the Nothing is and it is without Reason, or a Gersh phrases it, "Being is ground or Being is Abyss" (177). The non predicative in Heidegger comes also from his exploitation of the *es gibt* formula, and iterative verbal forms. In the first, *es gibt Zeit*, for example, does not mean 'Time is,' but rather 'There is Time,' probably best rendered as 'There is/it gives Time.' In the second, we have phrases such as 'World worlds' or 'Temporality temporalizes.' Neither of these is, strictly speaking, a predicative formulation, because in the *es gibt* formula the 'it' as subject disappears into the predicate, and in the iterative formula the predicates vanishes into the subject, according to Gersh (177).

Gersh concludes: "In all these texts, Heidegger has proposed a departure from the normal modes of discourse by making certain linguistic prescriptions amounting to a reduction of logic. These linguistic prescriptions were somewhat analogous with those advanced by the Neoplatonists when discussing the hypostasis of Intellect. As we shall see, Derrida will propose a departure from the normal mode of discourse by making certain linguistic prescriptions amounting to a reduction of logic and reduction of syntax. These linguistic prescriptions will be roughly analogous with those which the Neoplatonists advance when discussing the hypostasis of the One or Good" (178).

What Gersh has done through his examination of Heidegger needs a little interpretation. He is not arguing that Neoplatonic texts exhibit the sort of non-predicative character of something like Heidegger's analysis of Parmenides. For that matter, even Heidegger's texts, though they sometimes come close to poetry, are largely written in propositional philosophical language. But where they overlap with the Neoplatonic texts is in their attempt to indicate something which lies before their predications, and which makes their predications possible. In both cases what is to be spoken about does

not exist in the same manner as propositional discourse, and it undergoes a truncation and even a sort of falsification by the specification of meaning inherent in propositional discourse. The difference is that Heidegger is more self-conscious of the limits of his language than is Proclus. If one reads the *Elements of Theology*, or for that matter any Neoplatonic text, in an inattentive manner, it is possible that the radically non-propositional character of much of the subject matter will escape you. Even attentive reading is made difficult by this disjunct between the style and content of the texts. Although he is an accomplished scholar, it is just possible that the propositional form of Plotinus' *Enneads* themselves persuaded Richard Sorabji that Plotinus agreed with the seemingly sensible position that all thinking is propositional. The conclusion which Gersh does not draw explicitly, but which I think his comparison with Heidegger implies, is that Neoplatonic texts often use propositional argumentation in a non-propositional manner. Heidegger might explicitly disrupt the connectors between terms, such as in his Parmenides analysis, in order to free up multiple connotations. A Neoplatonic author, on the other hand, will free up a multiplicity of connotations by discussing the same topic over and over in different manners and from different perspectives. Proclus is notorious, for example, for giving 'exhaustive' lists of the terms within a given hierarchy, and most often the various versions of the lists do not agree. Plotinus will often describe the same thing in contradictory terms, depending on the perspective from which it is described: so Intellect from Soul's position is god and is completely unified, but from its own perspective exhibits diversity and looks to the One as god. If a reader of these sorts of texts focuses on any one passage without the others, he can be fooled into thinking he is reading an unproblematically monosemous discourse. But if one in fact must juxtapose many different passages when reading Neoplatonism, following very much the method Gersh employs in the present study, the monosemy breaks down. No passage is absolutely authoritative on its own, because each passage is individually a monosemous propositional argument. Read together, however, the limitation of each passage comes to the fore, and one discovers a polysemous text which speaks about a subject which surpasses each individual statement. This character of Neoplatonic texts explains why they are often models of philosophical rigour, but while being so often describe various principles as *both* and *neither* of two contradictories.

An indication that Gersh would agree with this analysis is his brief discussion of hymns in Proclus. He points out that although the pagan Neoplatonists present the problematic of a non-propositional thinking, they do not pursue very far an explicit theory of language in this area. He says that the closest they come can be seen in Proclus' extant hymns, and certain passages in Proclus' *On the Hieratic Art*, which from the combination of prayer and praise, neither of which has as its form a strict attribution of predicate to subject,

give the "discursive form best adapted to the psycho-linguistic expression of Intellect thinking Intellect or Intellect thinking the One" (179–80). The fact that the enumeration of attributes in hymns is more important than a concrete attribute of predicate to subject seems to indicate more than his ubiquitous practice of using predicative philosophical language to urge the Soul towards the non-discursivity of Intellect. It indicates an awareness of a sort of language which differs from, and is superior to, the predicative. Another important locus is obviously the extreme negative theological conclusion of Proclus' *Parmenides* commentary, where the removal of all predicates from the One indicates that silence, rather than speech, is the way to bring to completion speculation about the One. From here it is not far to suppose that in practice he uses philosophical language in a manner exhibiting the polysemy of a hymn, even if he himself does not have a clearly worked out philosophy of language to explain his practice. In this connection, he does have a very clearly worked out theory of the Soul's discursive reason which posits just this sort of complementarity of discursive *logoi* in relation to Intellect, but this theory is of the *logos* in the Soul, not the written text.

Turning to Intellect's thought of the One, Gersh cites Derrida's comments on the poet Mallarmé. Derrida thinks that both Mallarmé's preoccupation with the spaces in his texts, and his term 'hymen', which he reads as various forms of 'between', break down the central place of the word as a locus of meaning. In this Derrida goes further than Heidegger, whom he considers to emphasise too much the word as a unit of meaning (181–83). Gersh develops this move from the word to something which precedes the word in the third and final part of the chapter, by turning to Derrida's essay "Passions." This text is divided into three related parts: the first being a description of a ceremony from various perspectives, the second an account of the response to a call, and the third a litany concerning a secret, consisting of six denials and one affirmation. Especially in this third part, description and enactment are one and the same. Gersh focuses on the performative aspects of the litany, which is itself a sort of ceremony, and its relation to negative theology, brought out by the repetitive reference to a secret (185).

What emerges from Derrida's text, according to Gersh, is a statement that there must be a performative *experience* which precedes both performative *utterance* and propositional argument (189). Gersh distinguishes two types of performative utterances here. In the normal (or Austinian) performative it is the case that description is identical with enactment, or signifier is identical with signified. For example, in saying 'I promise' the signifier 'promise' refers to itself, because the promise in question is itself the utterance of the phrase 'I promise.' This is a monosemous, non-predicative utterance. According to Gersh, however, the sort of performative Derrida is referring to is one where the description is parallel with the enactment, or signifier parallel with

signified. This refers to structures such as Trace and Re-Mark which describe various sorts of movements within the (a)semiotic square. For example, when Derrida makes a connection between *trace* and *écart* by rearranging letters, and so connects the meanings of 'trail' and 'deviation', this connection is made by the utterance itself. In this way the utterance is performative. However, the signified, the connection between trail and deviation, is not the signifier, because the anagram is not itself the connection between the terms, but rather through its enunciation brings about such a connection between the terms. The signified runs parallel to the signifier, because this connection only comes to be through the performative utterance itself. In its simplest term, the sentence 'I promise' is itself a promise, but the anagram *trace/écart* is not itself the connection between 'trail' and 'deviation' but rather brings about such an association for the reader. Further, because these structures are meant to release ambiguity (*trace* is also 'mark' and *écart* is also 'gap'), we have here a polysemous, non-predicative utterance.

Derrida does not explain what the performative experience which must precede performative utterance is, but Gersh thinks it is "a certain hypothetical dual-unitary basis of all non-predicative and polysemous linguistic applications and also of all predicative and monosemous applications" (191, 194). In a note he specifies that, "The basis is "hypothetical" in the sense that no extra-linguistic referent is assumed. The basis is "dual-unitary" in being *differential* and *referential*" (191, note 230). Gersh claims that the importance of this is that "without the distinction between the hypothetical basis and the applications of the basis and without the characterization of the hypothetical basis as dual-unitary, we would not be able to argue with Derrida that all performatives necessarily imply those possibilities of repetition and citation which are actualised when we rewrite an expression like "I call" in the form "Khôra calls us" and which retain the non-predicative connotation unmodified within that grammatical change" (191–92).

This is the most difficult part of his text, but I think that what Gersh means by this statement is the following. In Saussurian semiotic theory meaning comes from the differences between the terms in a system of signs. Derrida is positing a difference between terms prior to any *particular* linguistic utterance of difference. Meaning in language comes about through performances of repetition and citation, performances which are generative of ideality, and which fall within the general structure of the (a)semiotic square and which Derrida calls Trace, Re-Mark, etc. However, it is false to think that the relation between terms in any particular utterance could be based on nothing, as if one could simply utter *de novo*, "Socrates is the octopus of wisdom," and expect that this would mean something. Conversely, although ideality here is generated through repetition, an utterance does not acquire meaning simply from precedent utterances, understood as though these have been

completely under the control of previous speakers. Rather, the meaning of any particular utterance must be based on an experience of the relation between linguistic terms which falls outside of both the psychological intention of any speaker and a mere historical listing of particular utterances. To use an example from above, if I say 'man-mountain' or 'mountain-man' or any other manner of associating these two terms in any particular utterance, it must be because prior to my utterance I find an association that has been established between these two terms. This is what Derrida calls a performative experience. It is performative, because it does not posit a Platonic ideality in which relations precede the experience, and it is an experience because it is prior to my particular linguistic utterance. The experience is one both of the distinction and a relation between terms (dual-unitary), and while prior to my speaking it is not extra-linguistic, because it is a distinguishing/relating of linguistic terms (hypothetical). It should be noted that this experience will also outstrip my own psychological grasp as well as my present particular utterance of the relation/distinction between any two terms. So while the locus of meaning is still in the utterance, the utterance is based on an experience which makes it, and hence meaning, possible. The most difficult thing to grasp here is how the meaning of my particular utterance can arise from an experience which in a sense both precedes all individual utterances and arises out of them. This seems to be Derrida's attempt to give an account of language/writing which exhibits "the writer's simultaneous ability to control and inability to control language's semantic resources" (2) without appealing to a psychologising or Platonising of meaning. In other words, this performative experience both arises out of the repetition and citation implicit in the totality of individual utterances but cannot be reduced to any particular utterance or set of utterances.

Although Gersh does not make this completely explicit, at this point it should become clear to the reader why Derrida is interested in negative theology, and how this relates to Soul's expression of Intellect's thought of the One. Because this performative experience lies behind any particular utterance, it can't properly be named. As soon as the experience of a distinction/relation between terms is uttered, it has been specified and falls short of the fertility of the experience. Non-propositional utterances such as Heidegger's *es gibt* or 'World worlds' do not specify to the same extent as propositional argumentation, but they still fall short of the performative experience. The complex phrase which Gersh puts forward, like in Neoplatonic negative theology, names the experience from what it allows, not what it is: "a certain hypothetical dual-unitary basis of all non-predicative and polysemous linguistic applications and also of all predicative and monosemous applications" (191, 194).

Derrida's description of this basis as a secret exhibits the characteristics of negative theology, in that it is a combination of denials combined with a positive appellation drawn from what the secret is not. If such a basis does lie behind all particular utterances, it is only approachable in language through the techniques of negative theology. Obviously, this is a particularly deconstructive version of negative theology, because the denials take the form of continual deferral, translating the atemporal, metaphysical denials of Neoplatonic negative theology to a temporal, linguistic sphere (193). But what we have here, then, is an explicit theory of language and the basis of language which comes closest to describing how Intellect's thinking of the One can be expressed in language. There is obviously an important difference, and I will discuss this at greater length below. However, the difference in basic terms is that in Neoplatonism Intellect's experience of the One is not an *experience of* the connection between terms, prior to their particular expression, but rather an experience of a prior reality which is *generative of* the multiplicity of the Ideas. But in both cases, Derridean performative structures or the Neoplatonic 'all-together' of Intellect, the expression of the connection between terms must be preceded by an experience which is their basis. Further, in both cases the expression has an important performative aspect. In deconstruction this performative is the repetition and citation which gives rise to the experience of a connection between terms, and which is continued in each successive utterance, while in Neoplatonism this performative is Intellect's generation of its own Ideas in thinking about its source, along with the analogous activities of Soul's thinking about Intellect, and the writing of philosophical texts.

Note that this final chapter began with an examination of the *khôra*. At this point we can see that Gersh is arguing that Derrida's *khôra*, arche-writing, and other terms of this sort refer to the dual-unitary basis described negatively as the secret in "Passions," and which can plausibly be said Derrida thinks underlies all particular utterances.

Gersh finishes by considering a large footnote to Derrida's essay in which a further level is specified between performative experience and performative utterance, the performative expression, which is pragmatic rather than linguistic, and claims that Derrida is "clearly establishing the performative expression as the basis of general structures" (195). Derrida's example is the case of 'I' writing about myself. Gersh's discussion is very brief, but he sees in Derrida's comments a distinction between the action of writing and what is written, even if in another sense when I write about myself "the action and the referent are not distinct" (195) because I am writing about the process of writing about myself. In the end, Derrida's theory of language, according to Gersh, looks like the following:

1. The performative experience (archê experience)
2. The performative expression (pragmatic rather than linguistic)
3. The performative utterance (linguistic), both:
3.a. Austinian (monosemous)
3.b. Derridean General Structure (polysemous)
4. Predicative/propositional language

At this point we must step back and attempt to evaluate the arguments which Gersh puts forward. This evaluation will have an eye more to the philosophical consequences of Gersh's argument for the study of Ancient philosophy than for deconstruction itself. As is obvious from our overview, his argument is very complex, and any serious evaluation would have to be done on the micro-level almost of each paragraph. But some more general considerations are possible. The first thing to examine is why a scholar of Ancient philosophy, who most likely does not already inhabit the deconstructive perspective, would take this study seriously. The Saussurian differential theory of meaning seems to be in radical opposition to most earlier philosophical positions, most especially those in Ancient philosophy.

The most simple response to this objection is that deconstruction, as presented by Gersh, brings a serious attention to the fissures and oppositions in Ancient texts which may otherwise go unnoticed. It is easy to see that in a text like *De Quantitate Animae* Augustine is articulating an ascent of the soul. Seeing that this ascent is based on the opposition of asymmetrical contradictories cannot but help one's interpretation. Attention to the manner in which the linguistic terms are related, and perhaps determine the possibilities of the argument, can serve to counteract a perspective which approaches a text too charitably. In other words, the desire to find a philosophically consistent and plausible argument in such a text may in fact suppress actually present oppositions and tensions which are consciously or unconsciously put there by the author.

A more sophisticated response, however, may be drawn from the status of writing in Ancient texts themselves. Beginning obviously with Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Seventh Letter*, and culminating in the development of negative theology through the Neoplatonic reading of Plato's *Parmenides*, the ability of writing to express the highest philosophical truths is called seriously into question. This problematic status of writing is recognised more in the practice of Ancient texts, what is written, rather than in an explicit theory of language, but it is undeniably present. An author like Proclus is very aware of the limitations of discursive *thought* in capturing the content or Intellect of the One, but there is little discussion in his texts of how the next level down, writing itself, is able to embody even discursive thought, let alone Intellect or the One. As a contemporary theory of language which grapples with how writing can express the inexpressible, deconstruction allows us to

look with new eyes at those few ancient passages where an explicit theory of linguistic polysemy is given. Obvious notable examples are the theory of biblical polysemy given in the final books of Augustine's *Confessions*, and the negative theology of Dionysius' *Divine Names*, but it is likely that once we begin looking for them, other examples can be found. Proclus' extended discussion of Homer in his *Republic* commentary, which to date has received little attention, is one example of a possibly fruitful place to look. Such a renewed attention may allow us to integrate the more well-known theories of polysemy in authors like Augustine and Dionysius with the whole of the Ancient and Medieval practice of philosophical writing.

If deconstruction is self-consciously engaged in a similar practice of writing about what precedes and escapes particular acts of writing, and does so using interpretive structures parallel to Neoplatonic structuring principles, then the comparison cannot help but be fruitful. For scholars of Ancient philosophy, the attempt to specify exactly how the deconstructive and Neoplatonic treatments of language differ can shed a lot of light on the Neoplatonic construction of meaning. I can offer only a few preliminary remarks here.

What Gersh lays out is an account of deconstruction in which monosemous predicative writing is preceded by two levels. In approaching a monosemous text, deconstruction frees up polysemy and a play of meanings by moving from one term to another within the (a)semiotic square. However, the utterances by which an interpretation moves from term to term within the square are only possible on the basis of a performative experience of the difference and relation between the linguistic terms. From this it seems that Derridean deconstruction is ineliminably dyadic. By this I mean that, although the performative experience precedes any particular utterance it seems still to be an experience within language, because it is an experience of the distinction and relation of linguistic terms, and so is always dyadic in the sense of already connecting and distinguishing. The difference from Neoplatonism here is that, from the Neoplatonic point of view, deconstruction posits a paradoxical situation where meaning comes from the repeated utterance of a connection and distinction between terms which, before all utterance, have no meaning. The origin of this is in Saussure's differential theory of meaning. I call this paradoxical, because it would be hard for a Neoplatonist to see how the repetition and citation of what are individually meaningless linguistic terms can give rise to an experience through which the terms gain meaning when uttered. A way to think of this is that deconstruction attempts to generate ideality, while taking as its absolute beginning point the premise that there is no meaning outside of language.

The Neoplatonic account is the inverse of this inherently dyadic theory. It does not take as its beginning point two terms, linguistic or otherwise, whose distinction and connection are experienced. Rather, at each level of

the Neoplatonic system an 'utterance,' broadly understood, is preceded by a unity. Therefore the motion between terms of remaining, procession, and reversion is itself what gives rise to the multiplicity of terms which are uttered. This is possible because, unlike in deconstruction, the original unity and the uttered terms do not belong to the same ontological level. In a sense, I think that to understand what is going on in Neoplatonism one must combine both of Gersh's analyses, of Derrida's negative theological treatment of language, and of the non-predicative character of Intellect through Heidegger's quasi-metaphorical language. What I mean by this is that at each level of the Neoplatonic ontological/epistemological hierarchy, the source of the 'utterance' that is the emergent term on the next lower level (i.e., Intellect is the utterance of the One, and Soul of Intellect) is parallel to the deconstructive performative experience. But the relation of the utterance to this source is parallel to the relation of a proposition to what Gersh calls an elliptical proposition. What this means is that the ontologically prior source of each level considered as an 'utterance' cannot be an originally meaningless term like in deconstruction, but rather must have a content. In terms of the linguistic example above, the source is extra-linguistic, so that one's understanding of what a mountain itself is allows us to utter 'man-mountain' or 'the man is as big as a mountain.'

So the Neoplatonic One is not a bare simplicity, but rather a simplicity by excess. Parallel to the move from metaphor to simile, in thinking the One Intellect brings into existence its own Ideas through a truncation of the content which it experiences in the One. But because this content is unitary rather than dyadic, Intellect is not uttering pre-existent terms, but bringing the terms themselves which it utters into existence. It generates distinct Ideas by paring down or separating out what become aspects of its 'vision' of the One. Remaining, procession, and reversion are the stages by which each principle does this. In terms of the (a)semiotic square, in proceeding from the One Intellect constitutes itself as a negative term, falling short of the simplicity of the One. Yet that negative characterisation is turned into a combined term in reversion, where Intellect is at the same time not the simple One but a new manifestation of unity in its atemporal completeness. The movement from term to term in the (a)semiotic square of remaining, procession, and reversion generates both the distinction between terms (here unity/simplicity and non-unity) and their relation (here absolute unity and qualified unity). Further, because the One is before the terms which emerge in Intellect, the distinction/relation between the One and Intellect is expressed completely in terms which are on the level of Intellect, so in distinguishing itself from the One, Intellect also gives itself the terms by which it distinguishes itself from itself. It is for this reason that all of the Ideas in Intellect are mutually implicating. Intellect expresses both itself and its difference from its source

in its own terms, in Ideas, therefore they point to their own inadequacy and the need for Intellect to revert to its source. In other words, the multiplicity of Intellect which is the expression of the polysemy of its source is itself a result of its declension from its source. Because the identity of each Idea is bound up with the identity of all other Ideas, in this way there is a real point of contact between Neoplatonism and the differential theory of meaning. Further, on this understanding the Ideas in Intellect are both constative and performative, in that they attempt to express certain truths about the One while at the same time being identical with Intellect's own self-generative act of thinking. An Idea in Intellect is both about the One and is Intellect itself. Each Idea in Intellect embodies the truth (performative) it expresses about the One (constative). So there is an important linguistic aspect at the heart of Neoplatonism, but one which only goes so far.

I have been using the example of the One and Intellect, because I think the relevant aspects of remaining, procession, and reversion are the same for Intellect and for Soul, and that the structure of pre-linguistic source and utterance is analogously the same, so that Intellect is the expressed *logos* of the One, Soul the expressed *logos* of Intellect, and speech or writing the expressed *logos* of the Soul. In thinking discursively about an Idea or multiplicity of Ideas, Soul is met with an excess which it cannot capture in any particular act of thinking, and its activity is both the generation of distinct discursive terms which articulate an aspect of its noetic source and a connection between those terms. The status of writing is to be understood on the same analogy, because any written text is a discursive truncation of the relative excess of the discursive thought. So meaning is generated at each level by what could be called an 'utterance,' but that meaning has the status of a partial specification of what precedes the specification. The Ideas in Intellect, the *logoi* in Soul, and the written text have meaning as an articulation of a *look*. They are inherently vectorial in that they point back to a source which exceeds them. They do not have a meaning on their own, independent of their source, but rather have meaning as the terms through which each level sights its source. In other words, whereas the deconstructive theory derives meaning from terms which are before meaning by deficiency, the Neoplatonic theory derives meaning at each level from terms which point towards a source which is before meaning by excess, by being more than meaning. One obvious and important consequence of this is that Neoplatonic reversion is fundamentally erotic, in that any *eidos*, *logos*, or *graphê* which is produced strives to leave itself behind in order to reach its source, a source which is an existent reality before the terms which have emerged.

Gersh's study also has the virtue of going a long way towards demystifying Derridean deconstruction. If he is correct in his contention that the (a)semiotic square, and its derivative figures of (semi-) circularity, transcen-

dence and translation as an articulation of a pre-linguistic experience underlies deconstruction, then Derrida's strategies in particular deconstructions are clarified, no matter what we might think of those strategies. It should be noted that Gersh thinks Derrida would have resisted being parsed in terms of Greimas' semiotic square, so that Gersh's interpretation is itself a major deconstruction of Derrida.

But there is a much more serious philosophical import to this particular comparison of Neoplatonism and deconstruction. I personally think that if you can find at the heart of Neoplatonism a deployment of language akin to deconstruction then this calls into question in a radical way Heidegger's main criticism of the metaphysics of presence. It is correct to call Neoplatonism ontotheology, because the One is maximal being in the sense that it is before the determinate categories of being, and it is because of this that Christian Neoplatonists such as Augustine and Aquinas can refer to God as Being. But properly understood this does not amount to a reduction of Being to the status of an object, or a being among other beings, resulting in a rigid and static system of intelligible categories. Instead, we find an account of the creation of meaning, intelligible, psychic, and linguistic which is in principle inexhaustible and dynamic. And although Neoplatonic authors did not thematise the polysemic character of writing in the way that Derrida does, the sort of polysemy which Derrida finds in writing is incorporated theoretically at every level of the Neoplatonic hierarchy. If this is the case, then the account of the metaphysics of presence which justifes the radically anti-metaphysical character of much continental philosophy looks more and more like a straw-man. This is not to say that Ancient and Medieval philosophy does not at all have a metaphysics of presence. Rather, it is to say that the story is more complicated than it initially appears. If in Neoplatonism one finds simultaneously a metaphysics of presence and an account in which any philosophical text falls short of its inexhaustible source, then the tendency among continental thinkers to say that metaphysics inherently shuts down the fertility of thinking is too simplistic.

I will make one final point, about the style which Gersh employs in this study. Although within each of his analyses his study is written rather in the monosemous style of Neoplatonism rather than the polysemous style of deconstruction (xiv), he does employ the deconstructive technique of juxtaposition throughout. His text contains a great many short arguments and textual exegeses. And while he does often point out to his reader the connections between various arguments, more often he leaves the reader himself to connect the dots. Very common is the practice of stating at the beginning of a section what its aims are, but then leaving it up to the reader to see exactly how those aims have been fulfilled. For example, he introduces the final section by stating that his reading of "Passions" will clarify how the

Intellect's thought of the One can be expressed in the Soul's discourse, and then proceeds to give a detailed analysis of "Passions" in semiotic terms. At that point the text of the book ends, and the reader is left to think for himself how a hypothetical dual-unitary basis of polysemous non-predicative deconstructive discourse clarifies Neoplatonism.

This open-ended style of argument is an intentional employment of deconstructive parataxis-juxtaposition (xv, note 5), and in fact also parallels the manner in which I have said Neoplatonic texts are locally monosemous and globally polysemous. In other words, by leaving the reader to draw his own lines through the text, Gersh means to avoid a facile truncation of the subject. In the same manner in which any particular proposition specifies only one connection between signifiers, drawing conclusions too explicitly would specify only one way in which the texts and arguments presented can fruitfully be compared. It is for this reason both that a short analysis of this book is almost impossible, and that some sort of guide to the argument was called for, a guide which this article attempts to supply. It is also for this reason that the book is extremely difficult to read, especially if one expects a traditional, monosemous argument. Conversely, this also means that by drawing an easily comprehensible line through Gersh's book in this article I have committed a sort of falsification. I have passed over silently the vast majority of the philosophical and textual observations with which the book abounds, and while I think the line I have presented is a good one, I have had to leave aside a great many aspects of the relation between Neoplatonism and deconstruction which I have either not noticed, not understood, or deemed of less importance. However, what I am calling a sort of falsification is itself an enactment of the relation between ground and utterance which the book describes. Any exegesis, for that matter, stands in a similar relation to its source material. It is just a bit more obvious in this case.