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HEIDEGGER, THE PRESOCRATICS,
AND THE HISTORY OF BEING



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Στή χορική ποίηση,
ἀντίθετα μὲ τὴ μονωδία, τραγουδοῦσε ὁλόκληρη ὁμάδα ἀνδρῶν
καὶ γυναικῶν. Ἐδῶ πλάι: νέες χορεύουν κυκλικά τραγουδώντας ἕνα
«Παρθένειον» ὑπὸ τοὺς ἤχους αὐλοῦ. Ἀγγειογραφία τοῦ Ε' αἰῶνος π.Χ.
(Ρώμη, Μουσεῖο Βίλλα Τζούλια).

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tarafından hazırlanmıştır

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TO SEARCH FOR INFLUENCES AND DEPENDENCIES AMONG THINKERS IS TO MISUNDERSTAND THINKING. EVERY THINKER IS DEPENDENT UPON THE CLAIM OF BEING.¹

The conception of the history of being is of central importance in Heidegger's thought. In *Being and Time* the story is already foreshadowed as "the destruction of the history of ontology."² In Heidegger's later writings it is considerably recast and called the "history of being" (*Seinsgeschichte*). The beginning of this story, as told by Heidegger, especially in the Nietzsche lectures, is the end, the completion of philosophy by its dissolution into particular sciences and nihilism—the questionlessness of being—a dead end into which the West has run. Heidegger argues that the question of being would still provide a stimulus to researches of Plato and Aristotle, but it was precisely with them that the original experience of being of the Presocratics was covered over.

In this paper, I place Heidegger's interpretation of Presocratic thought in the wider context of his critique of metaphysics and his conception of the history of being.³ The task which Heidegger puts before himself, I argue, is to return to the original Presocratic experience of being and to *repeat* it. Yet the repetition is neither for the sake of some historical research nor for an advance of classical scholarship. Those are the Presocratics, the first western thinkers, to whom Heidegger ultimately

¹ Martin HEIDEGGER, "Der Spruch des Anaximander" in *Holzwege* (Tübingen, Klostermann, 1950), p. 340-1.

² In the Introduction to *Being and Time* Heidegger promises us the "destruction of the history of ontology," a story which was to be written backwards. Beginning the story at the end, with Kant, Heidegger planned to go back through the philosophical tradition and show what went wrong in it by subsequently dealing with Descartes and then with Aristotle. Yet, because of the "turn" in Heidegger's thought, *Being and Time* remains unfinished and the story consequently untold.

³ During his long, stretching over half a century engagement with philosophy, Heidegger's thought evolves and with it his readings of the Greek thinkers. In early Heidegger, especially in his lectures of 1926, we can find interpretations of the Presocratics which resemble traditional Presocratic scholarship and are not very original. Also, in his earlier works Heidegger gives more attention to Plato and Aristotle than to the Presocratic thinkers. In *Being and Time* (1927), there are thirty-three references to Aristotle, twelve to Plato, nine to Parmenides, and only one to Heraclitus. It is clear that in *Being and Time* Aristotle is of first importance. The turning point is Heidegger's essay *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) which can be seen as a bridge between earlier and later Heidegger. The work itself is not about early Greek thought; and yet the Presocratics become there the pivotal center of discussion. In this paper I concentrate on Heidegger's interpretations of the Presocratics from his later works.

turns for help in solving the problems of contemporary philosophy and reversing the course of modern history, so that the “dead end” can be replaced by a new beginning.

HEIDEGGER'S ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME METAPHYSICS

In his late essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” Heidegger writes a sentence which, I believe, can help us to better understand both his view of the Presocratics and his later thought. He says:

What characterizes metaphysical thinking which grounds the ground for beings is that metaphysical thinking while departing from what is present represents it in terms of its ground as something grounded.⁴

For later Heidegger, “western philosophy” is synonymous with “metaphysics.” Hence, even such a philosophical movement as positivism which is in opposition to metaphysics would be labelled “metaphysics” by him. Traditionally, metaphysics can be described by the phrase “the science of being as such” where both terms “being” and “science” are used in the classic, Aristotelian sense. The Greek word μετά means beyond something. Meta-physics, Heidegger explains, in Greek τὰ μετά τὰ φυσικά, is then the inquiry that looks beyond τὰ φυσικά, i.e. beyond beings.⁵ By contrast to positive sciences which deal with different domains of beings or particular entities such as plants, animals, space, history, language, etc., metaphysics makes an inquiry into what-is as such and as a whole. Yet, the question, asked for the first time in the ancient Greece, “What are beings as such as a whole?” concerns their being. A being is a being only because it “is.” Thus, in Heidegger’s usage of the term, metaphysics is the kind of inquiry which asks about what-is as a whole with respect to being.⁶ Consequently, he gives to the “science of being” a new meaning. It is for him an ontology. Positive sciences are ontical. They do not concern themselves with the problem of being. Philosophy-metaphysics is ontological. “It can be shown historically,” Heidegger claims in his 1927 lecture course on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, “that at bottom all the great philosophies since antiquity more or less explicitly took themselves to be, and as such sought to be, ontology. In a similar way, however, it can also be shown that these attempts failed over and over again and why they had to fail.”⁷

The statement that “at bottom all the great philosophies ... took themselves to be, and as such sought to be, ontology” must still be explained. Heidegger’s point is certainly not that all metaphysics resembles somehow the inquiry into the meaning of being which he sets before himself, for this obviously would be misjudgement. Rather, he believes that “since the outset of western thought the being of beings reveals itself as what is alone worthy of thought.”⁸ The question of the being of

⁴ Martin HEIDEGGER, “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens” in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1969), p. 62. All translations of Heidegger from German editions are my own, however, I often follow closely the English translations of him which are available.

⁵ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1958), p. 13.

⁶ “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 61.

⁷ Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, tr. by A. Hofstadter (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 12.

⁸ Martin HEIDEGGER, “Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Stuttgart, Neske, 1954), p. 219.

what-is as a whole is raised continuously either explicitly or implicitly throughout the philosophical history of the West. Further, since its very beginning in Plato and Aristotle philosophy asks for the being of beings, but in a such a way that being itself is precisely hidden from it and remains gradually forgotten.⁹ Attempts to think being as being fail over and over again. The being of beings is interpreted as a being. The ontological distinction between being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*) is blurred. Plato's answer to the question of being is ἰδέα, Aristotele's is ἐνέργεια, whereas Descartes' is objectivity and Nietzsche's is will to power.

Metaphysics inquires about beings with respect to being, but in it the question of being as such is disregarded and being itself is obliterated. *The Heideggerian history of being can then be seen as the history of metaphysics which is the history of being's oblivion.* However, looked at from a different angle, metaphysics is also for Heidegger the way of thinking which looks beyond beings toward their ground. The main metaphysical question is how must beings be, so that they can be known, handled and worked upon.¹⁰ Each metaphysics aims at the *fundamentum absolutum*, the ground of such a metaphysics which presents itself indubitably and brings beings to their actual presencing (*Anwesen*). This ground is the presence (*Anwesenheit*), "the constant lingering that approaches man, reaches him and is offered to him."¹¹ In Plato, the *constant presence* is the to which beings relate by the way of participation. In medieval scholasticism, where beings are defined as *entia creatum*, it is the God, *ens perfectissimum*. Then, as soon as the relationship between creation and the creator is relaxed, human reason makes itself predominant. In the Cartesian philosophy, the constant presence is the self-certain subject. Beings are interpreted as objects and become thinkable in calculative thought.

The *fundamentum absolutum* in Descartes is attained with the *ego cogito*. The Cartesian metaphysics is characterised by subjectivity because it has its ground in the self-certain subject. The subject is manifest—and thus a complete presence—only when it becomes present as such for itself.¹² Further, as that which is present for itself, the subject brings the actual presence of beings as objects. Subjectivity is thus necessarily bound up with objectivity. The ground in the subject gives the possibility of grounding the objectivity of all beings. This has a direct bearing on human life. In our age, founded on Cartesian thought, truth ceases to depend upon the authority of revelation and the human being takes himself as subject to be the standard for all beings.¹³ Only that truly is which can be measured by him. "Consequently, human life can no longer be founded upon claims of divine or traditional right...."¹⁴ On the other hand, the discovery of the self as the basis of truth "has as its necessary component the development of modern science, which establishes an objective criterion for all natural and historical being."¹⁵

Nevertheless, metaphysics as understood by the later Heidegger is not just the philosophy which asks the question of the being of beings and of their ground. At the end of philosophy, i.e. in our present age where there occurs the dissolution of

⁹ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 15.

¹⁰ "Das Ende der Philosophie...", p. 62.

¹¹ Martin HEIDEGGER, "Seminar in Zähringen 1973" in *Seminare* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1986), p.13.

¹² "Das Ende der Philosophie...", p. 68.

¹³ As a supplementary comment, see my article "Before Truth Should Die," in *Dialogue and Humanism*, 1 (1) 1991, pp. 149-56.

¹⁴ Michael Allen GILLESPIE, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

philosophy into specialized sciences, the sciences still speak of the being of what-is as a whole. The modern sciences, Heidegger claims, can try to conceal or deny their philosophical origin, but they cannot dispense with it.¹⁶ In the wider sense of this term, metaphysics is thus for him any discipline which whether explicitly or not, provides humans with an answer to the question of the being of beings. In medieval times such a discipline was scholastic philosophy which defined beings as *entia creatum* and provided them with the ground in *ens perfectissimum*, God; whereas today it is science and technology, which Heidegger mentions so often in his late works, by which contemporary humans establish themselves in the world “by working on it in the manifold modes of making and shaping.”¹⁷ In modern technology there speaks the claim of being.

That modern technology has furnished its spreading out and lordship over the whole world does not follow from just the human-made satellites and their offshoots which circle around the planet; it is rather that being as presencing in the sense of calculable endurance addresses equally all inhabitants of earth, without the residents of non-European countries explicitly knowing this or even being able to or wanting to know about the origin of this determination of being.¹⁸

Technology forms and controls human position in today’s world. It masters and dominates beings in various ways. But its dominance does not follow simply from its technological achievements, but from the operational and model character of calculative thinking which becomes dominant.¹⁹ It has its source in the Cartesian philosophy of the subject and the Nietzschean idea of the unconditioned will.²⁰

“In distinction from mastering beings, the thinking of thinkers is the thinking of being.”²¹

Heidegger maintains that early Greek thinking is not yet metaphysics. Presocratic thinkers think being. They ask the question of the being of beings, but in such a way that being itself is laid open. They experience the being of beings as the *presencing* (*Anwesen*) of *what is present* (*Anwesende*).²² Being as presencing means enduring in unconcealment. To be a being means to emerge, to come forth into unconcealment, to appear by coming out, to stand there, to be present.²³ Throughout his works Heidegger uses several words in order rightly to convey this Greek experience. What-is, what is present, the unconcealed, is “what appears from out of itself, in appear-

¹⁶ “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 65.

¹⁷ See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, 7th ed. (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1953), p. 92 and “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 64.

¹⁸ *Sein und Zeit*, p. 7.

¹⁹ “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 65.

²⁰ See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Heraklit* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1979), p. 386. “With the turning of the essence of being to subjectivity is the essence of being as will fully developed.” For Heidegger the contemporary world is both Cartesian and Nietzschean. It is Cartesian because with the Cartesian revolution all beings become mere objects of the self-certain subject. It is Nietzschean because today humans find value only in themselves. Their will to arrange and conquer things is no longer limited by any traditional or religious claim.

²¹ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Parmenides* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1982), p. 10.

²² According to Heidegger, the Presocratic experience of the being of beings is the presencing of what is present. By contrast to that which is claimed by some Heideggerian scholars, the fundamental meaning of being for the Greeks is not presence (*Anwesenheit*), but presencing (*Anwesen*, *Anwesung*)—enduring in unconcealment. See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Grundfragen der Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), p.110.

²³ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 78.

ing shows itself, and in this self-showing manifests.”²⁴ It is the emerging arising, the unfolding that lingers.²⁵ Moreover, the unconcealment of what is present, the experience of beings in being that astonished the Greeks, is not simply given. “Unconcealment occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the word in thought, the work of the *polis*, as the historical place in which all this is grounded and preserved.”²⁶ The work for the sake of unconcealment, sustained by creators, poets, thinkers and statesmen, is at the same time the battle of the Greek Dasein against concealment, distortion, disguise and false appearance. For Heidegger, the great age of the Greeks is “a unique creative assertion amid the confused, intricate struggle between powers of being and semblance.”²⁷ The Greek effort to let beings hold sway in their disclosure brings about their gods and the state, the temples and the tragedy, the games and the philosophy.

Now, the basic point which is expressed in the sentence cited at the beginning of this section is that metaphysics, which begins with Plato and Aristotle and looks for the ground of beings, departs from the early Greek experience of beings in being. The pure beholding of what is present in its unconcealment and the attempt to let it hold sway in its radiance and disclosure is replaced by a kind of representational thinking whereby beings are represented in terms of their ground. In Plato beings become the sensible particulars which relate to ἰδέα by the way of participation; in scholastic philosophy they turn out to be *entia creatum* grounded in *ens perfectissimum*; in modern philosophy they are objects whose objectivity is constituted in the subject. The early Greeks do not “objectify” beings (they do not reduce them to an object for the thinking subject), but they let them be as they are, as self-showing rising into unconcealment. They experience the *phenomenality* of what is present, its radiant self-showing.²⁸ The departure of western philosophical tradition from what is present in presencing, from the unique experience that astonished the Greeks, has thus profound both theoretical and practical consequences.

Firstly, according to Heidegger, the experience of what is present in presencing signifies the true, unmediated experience of “the things themselves” (*die Sache selbst*).²⁹ We may recall that the call to “the things themselves” is included in the Husserlian program of phenomenology. By means of phenomenological description Husserl attempted to arrive at pure phenomena and to describe beings just as they were given independently of any presuppositions. For Heidegger, the Husserlian attempt has however a serious draw-back. Like the tradition of modern philosophy preceding him, Husserl stood at the ground of subjectivity. The transcendental subjectivity or consciousness was for him “the sole absolute being.”³⁰ It was the presupposition that had not been accounted for in his program which aimed to be presuppositionless. Consequently, in Heidegger’s view, the Husserlian attempt to arrive at pure, unmediated phenomena fails. Husserl’s phenomenology departs from the original phenomenality of beings and represents them in terms of the thinking subject as

²⁴ *Parmenides*, pp. 202-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁶ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 146.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁸ See John CAPUTO, “Demythologizing Heidegger: Aletheia and the History of Being,” in *Review of Metaphysics*, 41 (March 1988), p. 527. Caputo provides a sound analysis of the history of being in reference to ἀλήθεια.

²⁹ See Martin HEIDEGGER, “Mein Weg in die Phänomenologie,” in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1988), p. 87.

³⁰ “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 70.

their presupposed ground. As objects, beings are grounded in a being—the subject. By contrast, for the Presocratics beings are grounded in being as presencing. “Being, however, is not a ground [for them] but it is groundless.”³¹ It neither requires nor has any ground (*Grund*). As ἀπειρον, the unlimited in its dis-closure, being appears as an abyss (*Ab-grund*), the source of thought and wonder. It casts the human being out of any habitual ground, calls everything into question and opens before him or her the mystery of existence.

The departure from what is present in presencing, from the original experience of beings in being which astonished the early Greeks, results in metaphysics. According to Heidegger, today’s metaphysics, in the form of technology and calculative thinking related to it, becomes so pervasive that there is no realm of life that is not subjected to its dominance. It imposes on human being its technological-scientific-industrial character and makes it the sole criterion of their sojourn on the earth.³² Rooted in the thought of modernity, it provides an answer to the question of the being of beings for contemporary men and women, but skilfully removes from their field of view the problem of existence. Further, because of its powerful sway over man, metaphysics cannot be simply cast aside or rejected. Any attempt to do so can only fortify its power over human life.³³ If we should, for example, criticize metaphysics in the form of modern technology from a point of view of values that prevailed in medieval or ancient view of life, we would only attempt to replace one metaphysics by another one. Therefore, metaphysics can neither be rejected, cancelled or denied, but it can be overcome by the way of demonstration that it is nihilism. In Heidegger’s usage the term “nihilism” has a very specific meaning. What remains unthought and forgotten in metaphysics is being; and hence, it is nihilistic.

Heidegger maintains that western humankind in all its relations with beings is in every aspect sustained by metaphysics. Every age, every human epoch, however different they are—Greece after Plato, Rome, the middle ages, modernity, the age of technology—is established in some metaphysics and is placed thereby in a definite relationship to what-is as a whole. But metaphysics as metaphysics is a nihilism proper and the metaphysics of Plato is no less nihilistic than that of Nietzsche.³⁴ Metaphysics does not think being itself. Inasmuch as metaphysics thinks the being of beings, it reduces being to a being; it does not think being as being. Heidegger demonstrates the nihilism of metaphysics in his philosophy of history—the history of being, which is the history of being’s oblivion. His attempt to overcome metaphysics is not a common-sense based positing of some different values or an alternative world-view, but is related to his concept of repetition developed in *Being and Time*.³⁵

³¹ *Parmenides*, p. 223.

³² “Das Ende der Philosophie...,” p. 67.

³³ See GILLESPIE, p. 134.

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2 (Pfullingen, Neske, 1961), p. 343.

³⁵ “Repetition” (*Wiederholung*) is a word of everyday use. However, it is used by Heidegger as a technical, philosophical term which indispensable for grasping his concept of history from *Being and Time* and his later works. A comparison can be drawn between Heidegger’s “repetition” and Collingwood’s “re-enactment of past experience.” In *The Idea of History*, Collingwood argues that because the historian cannot know the past directly as an eyewitness nor rely uncritically on testimony, he must re-enact the past in his mind. Thus the historian brings back to actuality something that was formerly actual, be it a historical event or an earlier idea, so that he can fully understand it and present it to the contemporary reader. In contrast to Collingwood, by introducing his notion of repetition, Heidegger does not wish to engage in an analysis of the nature of the historian’s craft. For him, repetition is not a procedure of reconstructing the past like Collingwood’s re-enactment. If it is, nevertheless, for him an enact-

It consists in thinking back being to the primordial beginning of the West- the early Greek experience of what is present in presencing—and in repeating this beginning, so that the western world could begin anew.

FROM THE FIRST BEGINNING TO THE NEW BEGINNING

Heidegger's story has some mythical flavour. In the beginning there was being, "one brief shining moment" and that was all.³⁶ In the beginning the Presocratics ask: "What are beings?," and they answer: unconcealment. The early Greek experience of beings in being, of what is present in its unconcealment, is a unique one. It does not occur anywhere else and at any other time, and it brings about the western world.

History begins only when beings themselves are expressly drawn up into their unconcealment and preserved in it, only when this preservation is conceived on the basis of question concerning beings as such. The primordial disclosure of beings as a whole, the question concerning beings as such, and the beginning of the western history are the same ...³⁷

Many scholars perceive something unique in the Greek beginning of philosophy. It is commonly acknowledged that Thales and his successors asked generalized questions concerning what is as a whole and proposed general, rational answers which were no longer based on a theological ground. The rationality and generality of both questions and answers would traditionally be seen as a sign of a theoretical attitude toward the world, the foundations of sciences.³⁸ However, Heidegger does not associate the unique beginning with the alleged discovery of rationality and science. In fact, he claims that both rationality and science are later developments, so that they cannot apply to Presocratic thought. In his view, the Presocratic thinkers cannot be seen as some primitive scientists whose thought for a long time has already been overridden by modern science. The Presocratics ask: "What are beings as such as a whole?" and they answer: ἀλήθεια — unconcealment. They have an unmediated experience of beings. They experience them in their phenomenality: what is present in presencing. But the later thought which begins with Plato and Aristotle is unable to keep up with the beginning. With Plato and Aristotle metaphysics begins and the history of being's oblivion originates.

It cannot be denied, Heidegger argues, that the later interpretations of being as ἰδέα, ἐνέργεια, or even as objectivity, result from the experience of being as presencing. The source of the departure from this original experience lies in the experience

ment of a return to the past, it is so in the sense that the past is viewed by Heidegger as a resource of possibilities for our own being. According to Heidegger, by an act of repetition we do not merely bring something that was formerly actual, so that it may occur again in the present. Repetition, as "going back to the possibilities of Dasein that have been there," is for the sake of Dasein's future, for the sake of Dasein's "coming towards" possibilities for its own being. See R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1946), pp. 282-3 and Martin HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 385-6.

³⁶ Caputo, p. 535.

³⁷ Martin HEIDEGGER, "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit" in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1967), p. 190.

³⁸ See Edmund HUSSERL, "The Vienna Lecture" in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. by David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: North Western University Press, 1970), pp. 280-2.

itself. While reading Heidegger's later works, and particularly "Time and Being," we may get an impression that the being of Heidegger in its fateful sending throughout the history of the West resembles the Will of Schopenhauer which aims at its realization and objectification or the Absolute Spirit of Hegel. Like the Schopenhauerian individual who is unable to control the Will and the Hegelian individual for whom the Absolute Spirit in its unfolding is beyond his reach, the Heideggerian individual finds himself or herself in history as subject of the "irrational force" of the destiny of being. Nevertheless, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, and partially in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger tries to explain the movement that leads from φύσις to ἰδέα and other historical determinations of being in more rational terms.

To begin with the ἰδέα, Heidegger argues that Plato's interpretation of being is a consequence of a more original experience of being.³⁹ His argument proceeds as follows. First he attempts to show that for the Greeks appearing is not opposed but belongs to being as presencing.⁴⁰ Beings are what is present, what emerges and appears from itself. But since the being of beings manifests in appearing (standing-out-of-concealment), a being can show itself as this or that. It can thus offer an aspect or a look. The word ἰδέα means precisely that: what is seen, the outward look, an aspect something shows of itself.⁴¹ The essential point, Heidegger claims, is not that beings in their phenomenality can be characterized in terms of their look (ἰδέα), but that on the basis of the original interpretation of being as φύσις and ἀλήθεια, ἰδέα becomes in Plato the sole and the most influential interpretation of the being of beings. It is no longer understood on the basis of beings, but as their image and the counterpart.⁴² It becomes a mere representation, a generalization from the particular, but at the same time a model and an ideal. It constitutes the true being, while what is present in presencing, previously dominant, is lowered to what Plato calls μὴ ὄν, what really is not because it deforms ἰδέα, the pure look. A cleft suddenly opens between being as ἰδέα and actual beings. Beings as copies of ideas are "not truly" for they are merely related to ἰδέα by the way of participation. Also, appearing takes now a completely new meaning.

What appears, the phenomenon, is no longer , the emerging dominance, nor the self-manifestation of what is seen, but it is the coming forth of the copy. Since the copy never equals the archetype, what appears is a mere phenomenon, and actually a semblance, i.e. a deficiency.⁴³

According to Heidegger, in Plato appearing is no longer a variety of being, but is degraded. Being becomes separated from *phainomenon*. There is a departure from the primordial experience of what is present in unconcealment. "Unconcealment, the space created for the appearing of beings, breaks down."⁴⁴

At the same time there occur changes from the original phenomenon of truth as unconcealment to truth as correctness and from λόγος to statement.

Originally, λόγος is "the happening of unconcealment," of truth in its original

³⁹ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, pp. 137-141.

⁴⁰ Parmenides is usually seen as one who sharply opposes being to all change, appearance and becoming. Heidegger contest this traditional interpretation. See *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, pp. 75-93.

⁴¹ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 62.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.

⁴³ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 141.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

sense as the unconcealment of beings.⁴⁵ The Greeks attempt to let beings hold sway in their disclosure and struggle against concealment, distortion, disguise and false appearance. The work for the sake of unconcealment takes place in the arts, but primarily in speech. Language preserves disclosed beings as what has been said and can be said again. This way what has once been said can be repeated and passed on. However, in transmission, Heidegger argues, the truth can detach itself, as it were, from the originally disclosed being. This can go so far that speech becomes a mere babbling, γλῶσσα. Consequently, the decision concerning truth has to be made. Λόγος, in the derived sense of speech and assertion, becomes the realm in which the truth will be decided. If in the original sense the truth signifies the unconcealment of beings, in Plato and Aristotle, truth becomes the property of a proposition, its correctness. The locus of truth switches from being to statement which can be either true or false. Statement becomes an arbiter over beings.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in order to acquire and secure the truth as correctness logic is developed and fashioned into a tool. Since then it holds a powerful sway over being and determines our view of language.⁴⁷ What is contradictory cannot be. What is not contradictory has at least a possibility of being.

In the primordial beginning φύσις, ἀλήθεια and λόγος are united. The fundamental characteristic of φύσις (emerging coming-forth) which describes the being of beings is ἀλήθεια (unconcealment). The human being is defined as the being that in the midst of beings lets them hold sway in unconcealment; one who is the custodian of the unconcealment of beings.⁴⁸ In λόγος as gathering there happens the disclosure of beings and their preservation against concealment. But with the changes of φύσις to ἰδέα, ἀλήθεια to correctness, and λόγος to statement, the original disclosure ceases. In the gradual progression away from the beginning the human being becomes the *animal rationale* (animal equipped with reason). Λόγος becomes separated from φύσις. The decision about the truth, and hence about what-is, is now made with a view to λόγος as statement. The transformation of φύσις, ἀλήθεια and λόγος, by which the foundations of the tradition of western philosophy are established, is a decline from the primordial beginning. However, the cause of the decline is not just a mere deficiency, an inability to keep up with the beginning, but lies in the beginning itself.

A beginning cannot, and particularly never immediately as it begins, preserve what begins as it can be; namely, so that it will be repeated more originally in its originality. Therefore, it is only by a thoughtful repetition that we can deal appropriately with the beginning and the breakdown of truth [unconcealment].⁴⁹

If there is a decline from the primordial beginning and the departure from what is present in its presencing, the original disclosure of beings, it is because without being looked to as a heritage and thoughtfully repeated, the beginning cannot preserve its original force. When Plato and Aristotle say that ἀλήθεια is correctness,

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 142. The Greek word for truth ἀλήθεια is a compound of the privative prefix ἀ- ('not') and the verbal stem -λαθ- ('to be concealed'). Thus, ἀ-λήθεια means literally "unconcealment" [die Un-verborgenheit]. By describing the original meaning of truth as the unconcealment of beings, Heidegger refers to this literal meaning of ἀλήθεια.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

⁴⁸ *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 189.

⁴⁹ *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, p. 146.

the Presocratic experience of ἀλήθεια as the unconcealment of beings is not just left behind, but it is covered over. It remains concealed even more in subsequent thought.

The task which Heidegger sets before himself is precisely to recover and repeat the original experience of beings in being that stands at the beginning of western thought. This unmediated experience of beings in their phenomenality can be variously described: what is present in presencing, the unconcealment of what is present, the original disclosure of beings. To repeat the primordial beginning more originally in its originality means to bring us back to the Presocratic experiences, to dis-close them and to let them be as they originally are. But the repetition is not for the sake of the Presocratics themselves. Heidegger's work is not a mere antiquarian, scholarly study of early Greek thinking nor an affirmation of the long lost Greek way of life. It occurs within the perspective of nihilism and being's forgetfulness, both unknown to the Greeks, and has as the goal the future possibilities for existence. It happens as the listening that opens itself out to the words of the Presocratics from our contemporary age, from the age of the world picture and representation, the world which is marked by the domination of technology and the oblivion of being. In the first beginning, the task of the Greeks was to ask the question "What are beings?," and hence to bring beings as such to the first recognition and the most simple interpretation. In the end, the task is to make questionable what at the end of a long tradition of philosophy-metaphysics has been forgotten. The new beginning begins thus with the question of being.

In the first beginning, being is presencing in the sense of enduring in unconcealment, radiant self-showing, unmediated disclosure of what-is. In the new, Heideggerian beginning, being is also presencing, but in the sense of disclosing itself in self-concealment. Being "is" not. It is no thing. "Being gives itself (*Es gibt Sein*)."⁵⁰ Although unreflected in its givenness (its destiny) by both early Greek thought and the tradition of western philosophy, it gives itself, dispenses itself, or rather discloses itself throughout history of the West. But as it discloses itself, being withdraws. Its disclosure, the gift which it gives, is always limited, but it as ἄπειρον refuses all limits.⁵¹ Being shows itself to the early Greeks as φύσις, ἀλήθεια and λόγος, and later as ἰδέα, ἐνέργεια, *substantia*, *actualitas*, objectivity and the will to power. In each case it conceals itself in favour of its gift.⁵² It is emerging self-concealing Φύσις. Further, since in its emerging, it brings beings as a whole to their actual manifestation—as what is present, *ens creatum*, objects—being is both Μοῖρα, the allotment which allots by bestowing and Χρεών, the compelling need as handing over of beings into their while in unconcealment. Finally, as it in its first sending initiates the essential history of the West, being is Ἀρχή, the being as ordering. All Greek terms: Φύσις, Μοῖρα, Χρεών, Ἀρχή, ἄπειρον, but also Ἀρμονία ἀφανής, Κόσμος, Πῦρ, Κεραυνός, Ἐν Ἀλήθεια and Λόγος, about which we learn from Heidegger's later interpretations of the Presocratic thinkers, are capitalized.⁵³ They are used in a no longer Greek, but in a Heideggerian sense. His interpretations take now place in the "echo" of the Presocratics, within the framework of his history of being. Heidegger's

⁵⁰ Martin HEIDEGGER, "Zeit und Sein" in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1988), p. 10.

⁵¹ Heidegger's discussion of being as , , and can be found in "Der Spruch des Anaximander."

⁵² "Zeit und Sein," p. 9.

⁵³ See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Heraklit*. Heidegger discusses most of these Greek terms in his lecture courses: "Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens" and "Logik. Heraklits Lehre von Logos," which he gave in summer semesters of 1943 and 1944 respectively.

inquiry into early Greek thought brings him beyond the Presocratic experience of beings in unconcealment to the openness of being.

The Presocratics experience beings in phenomenality, in their radiant self-showing. They have an unmediated experience of what is present in unconcealment. But the unconcealment is not simply given. It is achieved by work. It is wrested from concealment (distortion, semblance) in a struggle with it. *The Greek Dasein is the custodian of the unconcealment of beings*. Heidegger's repetition of the first beginning is neither a scholarly study of early Greek thinking nor an affirmation of the long lost Greek way of life. It occurs within the perspective of nihilism and being's forgetfulness, both unknown to the Greeks, and has as a goal the future possibilities for existence. It brings him to the openness of being, being in its disclosing withdrawal and clearing, which takes place in history.⁵⁴ *Heidegger's future Dasein "is not only the preserver of the unconcealed beings, but is precisely the custodian of the openness of being."*⁵⁵ He or she is the one who stands in the truth of being, which standing defines the essence of being human.

CONCLUSION

From *Being and Time* (1927) where Heidegger's fundamental question of the meaning of being is first developed, but still expressed in the traditional language of philosophy-metaphysics, to "Time and Being" (1962) where an attempt to think being without regard to metaphysics is made, Heidegger goes full circle. Heidegger begins by asking about the multiple meanings of being, and ends up conceding its multiplicity and acknowledging that there are multiple determinations or meanings of being in which it gives itself in history.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in neither of these meanings does being give itself fully. "As it discloses itself in beings, being withdraws."⁵⁷ There is an essential withdrawal of being. Therefore, the truth of being is none of the particular meanings or determinations—φύσις, ἰδέα, ἐνέργεια, *substantia, actualitas*, objectivity or the will to power—of that which "since the beginning of the interrupted sequence of changes that constitute the history of philosophy dispenses itself as being."⁵⁸ The truth of being can be defined as the openness, the free region which always out of sight provides the space of play for different destinies of being and human epochs established in them. It is that which is before actual things and grants them a possibility of manifestation as what is present, *ens creatum*, or objects.

⁵⁴ *Lichtung*, the word which I translate after Joan Stambaugh by both "opening" and "clearing," is one of the most important Heideggerian terms of the later period of his thought. It relates to the concept of the openness of being. In order to better elucidate this word, Heidegger gives an example that relates to physical vision. Vision presupposes opening. Without the opening, an open area, which for an eye blink is created at a dark night by the lightning, things would not be visible at all. But *Lichtung* does not just refer to physical vision, but has a grave ontological meaning. It is the clearing, which is created by disclosing self-concealment of being, that first grants multiple determinations or meanings of being in which it gives itself in history and brings beings as a whole to their actual manifestation. It grants also a possibility of truth. "For truth itself, just as being and thinking, can only be what it is in the element of clearing" ("Das Ende der Philosophie," p. 76).

⁵⁵ *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, p. 190. My emphasis.

⁵⁶ CAPUTO, p. 538.

⁵⁷ "Der Spruch des Anaximander," p. 310.

⁵⁸ "Seminar in Zähringen 1973," p. 395.

The truth of being, its openness, Ἀλήθεια, is for Heidegger not something which we can merely consider or think of. It is not our own production. It is where we always come to stand. We find ourselves thrown in a historically conditioned environment, in an epoch in which the decision concerning the prevailing interpretation of the being of being is already made for us. Yet, by asking the question of being we can at least attempt to free ourselves from our historical conditioning. The Heidegger's program expressed in the "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (1964) consists solely in the character of thinking which does not attempt to dominate, but engages in disclosing and opening up what emerges, comes forth into unconcealment, shows itself, and is manifest. When Heidegger urges us to "stand in being," he does not merely ask us to acknowledge our own place in being's history, but to be future-oriented and see the future in a unity with the past as "having been" and the present.⁵⁹ He asks us to turn ourselves and open out into being in its disclosing withdrawal—to think being from ek-sistence.⁶⁰ Ἀλήθεια, disclosure in self-concealment, describes being as the fateful sending which in its giving throughout history holds itself back and withdraws. However, at the same time, ἀλήθεια is the basic characteristic of the way in which someone relates to being when he or she is not closed to it but open.

Heidegger claims that the human being as Da-sein can be understood as the site, "Da," which being requires in order to disclose itself. The human being is the unique being whose being has the character of openness toward being. But men and women can also turn away from being, forget their true selves, and thus deprive themselves of their humanity. This is, in Heidegger's view, the situation of contemporary humans who have replaced authentic questioning concerning their own existence by ready-made answers served by ideologies, mass media and overwhelming technology. Consequently, Heidegger attempts to bring contemporary men and women back to the question of being. At the beginning of the tradition of western philosophy the human being was defined as *animal rationale*, the animal endowed with reason. Since then reason has become an absolute value which through education brings a gradual transformation of all spheres of human life. It is not more reason, especially in its calculative form, Heidegger believes, that we today need, but more openness toward and more reflection upon that which is our nearest—being.

⁵⁹ The "going back" to the possibilities for being that have been (the past) and their projection in the resolute movement "coming towards" (the future) which both take place in "being with" others (the present) provide for the original unity of the future, the past, and the present which constitutes for Heidegger authentic temporality of human Dasein. See *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 231-235, 382-397.

⁶⁰ See Martin HEIDEGGER, "Brief über Humanismus" in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1967), pp. 325-6. "The ecstatic essence of man consists in ek-sistence...." Ek-sistence means standing out into truth (openness) of being.

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