

## NON-BEING AND TIME

(*The prehistory of the concept of time*)

### 1. THE CIRCLE AND THE SPHERE

Φησὶ δὲ [Ξενοφάνης] οὐσίαν θεοῦ σφαιροειδῆ [εἶναι]

Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* IX 19.

Whatever one may say about Heidegger's philosophy and whatever one thinks about it, there can be absolutely no doubt that today's philosophy is, one way or another, a "philosophy after Heidegger." Today's philosophical thinking cannot ignore a strange and, at first sight, pretentious "philosophical myth," stating that it is being<sup>1</sup> itself, that in a given epoch and historical time reveals itself in a certain way — thus and not otherwise — and simultaneously conceals itself, illuminates itself and hides itself. According to this mythologeme the occurrence of self-giving does not obey definite *a priori* laws (disclosed and established laws are only posterior glimpses of the primordial self-illumination of being). Perhaps, it is the arbitrariness of the will or incomprehensibility of fate (*Geschick*), rather than *a priori* laws, that should be considered as the analogy of this self-giving (*Sich-schicken*) of being in history (*Geschichte*). Here lies the essential character of history as the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*), and here the word "epoch" (ἐποχή) lays bare its original meaning of "a stop," "a pause," "a suspension," "a retention." Actually, the deep sense of the "historical" and of the "epochal" is determined by the way being reveals itself during one of its many successive stops, residences, pres-ences.

<sup>1</sup> A great difficulty one encounters time and again when interpreting and analyzing Heidegger (as well as Aristotle or medieval thinkers) in English is the formal impossibility to distinguish between *das Sein* (τὸ εἶναι, *esse*), on the one hand, and *das Seiende* (τὸ ὄν, *ens*), on the other hand. According to the tradition, which has already taken shape, I render as a general rule Heidegger's *Seiendes* as "entity," and *das Sein* as "being." But sometimes, when it seems to be justified, and especially in this section, I write "a being," or even "what-is," for *ein Seiendes*, or "(the) beings" for *das Seiende* in the sense of τὰ ὄντα, *entia*. In the latter case Heidegger's expressions referring to the *ontological difference*: "das Sein des Seienden," "das Sein ist kein Seiendes" are translated respectively as "the being of beings," "being is not a being." Parmenides' τὸ εἶναι is rendered in sect. 2 of this chapter as "being."

Heidegger has taught us not to neglect the opacity of the hidden backgrounds of this revelation, which means to be attentive to the erased traces of the fateful (*das Geschickliche*), to learn to abide by the *totality* of the historical (*das Geschichtliche*),<sup>2</sup> to stop searching within it for a kind of central point, a kind of spiritual ἀκμή where the closest proximity to the a-historical “eternal truth” has been achieved, in order to position oneself in that point and to take up residence there.

Hegel’s philosophical task, “to comprehend and to express the truth not as a substance only, but as a subject as well,”<sup>3</sup> implies all the same that the “living substance,” in the movement of self-assertion, may outlive itself, become closed in itself, fulfill its cycle; restore, through a sequence of necessary steps of speculative thinking, the original unity with itself and, after absorbing everything, become, in its totality, Parmenides’ *well-rounded globe* (fr. 8DK, l. 43). This unity is “becoming itself (*das Werden seiner selbst*), a closed cycle which implies its own end as its goal and has it as its beginning, and which is actual only in its completion and its end.”<sup>4</sup> The word “end,” repeated twice, refers to *spirit* or *mind*<sup>5</sup> as to a form existing in itself and which has to become, through a kind of internal movement, existing for itself. Parmenides’ globe, the perfectly contented *sphairos*, is exactly a prototype of such a spirit, which exists within and for itself.

The self-willingness of being just mentioned implies that the spirit “breathes where it wills” and gives itself in the “occurrence” (*Ereignis*) of a gift when it wills, not because it has been compelled (or has compelled itself) and forced to regulate its steps according to the “necessity of the matter which proceeds coolly on her way,”<sup>6</sup> i.e., to subject itself once and forever to itself,<sup>7</sup> to its own pre-eternal morphology. For Heidegger, there exists a “giver” (*das Es, das gibt*)<sup>8</sup> behind all “givenness” (*es gibt*), and this “giver” eludes our vision and our desire to name it; like a really generous giver, it hides its face from us.

<sup>2</sup> As we have mentioned, history, according to Heidegger, is not only and perhaps not so much the history of disclosure as the history of concealing and hiding; history is *der Irrtum*. The main formula of being’s concealment reads as follows: “Das Sein entzieht sich, indem es sich in das Seiende entbirgt.” See “Der Spruch des Anaximander,” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 1957), p. 310. “Dergestalt beirrt das Sein, es lichtend, das Seiende mit der Irre. Das Seiende ist in die Irre ereignet, in der es das Sein umirrt und so den Irrtum (zu sagen wie Fürsten- und Dichtertum) stiftet” (*ibid.*). The concealment is at the same time the *oblivion* of being, and “the oblivion of being is oblivion of the distinction between being and beings.” It follows that the restoration of the un-concealment, of the *alētheia*, the *truth* of being, is connected with unveiling and thematizing the *ontological difference*. The ontological difference, the distinction between being and beings, will be one of the most important subjects of our research.

<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, hrsg. v. J. Hoffmeister (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), p. 19. Hereafter cited as PhG.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Neither word is a wholly satisfactory translation of Hegel’s *Geist*. Cf. E. Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 174, fn. 2: “Mind is not theological enough in its overtones, spirit not intellectual enough...”

<sup>6</sup> “kalt fortschreitende Notwendigkeit der Sache” (PhG 13).

<sup>7</sup> Like the god of the Stoics. As Seneca says: “Ipse creator et conditor mundi semel iussit, semper pareat.”

<sup>8</sup> M. Heidegger, “Zeit und Sein” in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1969), pp. 1–25.

Yet the “self-willingness” of the truth cannot by any means justify our arbitrariness regarding the truth; Hegel’s demand to bear the burden of the concept cannot be ignored — but do we understand what a concept is and *how* it is? Has Hegel laid down the ultimate rules concerning the concept (*der Begriff*) as such?

In one of Heidegger’s later works, *The Anaximander Fragment* (1946),<sup>9</sup> “eschatology” of thought is the subject matter. Such is the self-perception of today’s epoch of philosophizing: this epoch is τὸ ἔσχατον, a term, an ending, a temporal limit, a sunset before the coming night.<sup>10</sup> Of course, a limit does not exclude the existence of something “beyond.” “The later philosophy” is just a term testifying to the long distance separating us from the Greek starting point, if not to an expectation (for expectation implies a different mood), at least to the acceptance of the possibility of a new start.<sup>11</sup>

It is impossible not to take into account such a self-definition of philosophy. Perhaps such an eschatological departure from classical philosophy allows us, “the late philosophers” (*den Spätlingen der Philosophie*), to better hear the message of its dawn. In some surprising way the latest comes up with the earliest. “The early philosopher” Heraclitus says (fr. 103): ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας — “on the border of a circle the beginning and the end (limit) coincide (literally: ‘are common’).” *Qua* “the late philosopher” Heidegger defines the eschatological philosophical thinking as coming together, merging, gathering together (λέγεσθαι, λόγος) its limits (τὰ ἔσχατα).

The attempt to perceive the earliest message, a movement towards the philosophical dawning and into the depth of chronology is, undoubtedly, a movement “away from the light and towards the darkness.”<sup>12</sup> Yet this movement is not a lapse into a confusion of notions and indistinctness. It is rather an attempt to trace back the origin and motive of distinction, the *morphogenesis* of the distinct. This task of tracing is precisely what is termed “late philosophical thinking.” It differs drastically from the intelligent tracing in contemplation of mutual participation or communication of the *ideas* or genera. Such is Plato’s way of philosophizing, called “*di-*

<sup>9</sup> See fn. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger alludes to Hölderlin’s “holy night,” where the last poets, the “priests of Dionysus” are wandering: “Aber sie sind, sagst du, wie Weingottes heilige Priester, / welche von Lande zu Land zogen in heiliger Nacht.” (*Brot und Wein*, 7)

<sup>11</sup> I would like to quote one passage from J. Derrida as evidence of such a self-consciousness of the “later philosophy.” “That philosophy died yesterday, since Hegel or Marx, Nietzsche, or Heidegger — and philosophy should still wander toward the meaning of its death — [...]; that philosophy died *one day*, *within* history, or that it has always fed on its own agony, on the violent way it opens to history by opposing itself to non-philosophy, which is its past and its concern, its death and wellspring; that beyond the death, or dying nature, of philosophy, perhaps even because of it, thought still has a future, or even, as is said today, is still entirely to come because of what philosophy has held in store; or, more strangely still, that future itself has future — all these are unanswerable questions. By right of birth, and for one time at least, these are problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve.” See J. Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics. An Essay on the Thought of Emanuel Levinas” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> M. Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (Marburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1924/25), Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 19 (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 1992), p. 10.

*alectics*” in *The Sophist*. The late philosophical thinking means: *Das bisherige Wesen des Seins geht in seine noch verhüllte Wahrheit unter*. The setting sun is here the old “essence” of being which was secretly prevailing, the being-ness of being which was disclosing itself as presence, as a permission-to-be-exposed to intelligent vision. The setting sun is Plato’s idea of the good that allows the other ideas — i. e., εἶδη, the intelligible *species* — to be present to in-spection and speculation of the intellect. This essence goes down into its as yet hidden truth.

“The midday philosopher” Hegel says: “In spirit (*im Geiste*) it is otherwise [as opposed to the ‘realm of nature’ — *A.Ch.*]; it (sc. *der Geist*) is consciousness, it is free because in it *the beginning and the end coincide*.”<sup>13</sup> Hegel understands the eschatology of thinking as a *fulfillment* of time, as a coming of spirit to itself — from its embodied state in history to its disembodiment in its own element of speculative thinking. The history of philosophy, the existing, self-writing historical text of philosophy, is just an absolute form of movement, i. e., correlation of facets of the “one and self-identical idea,” which recognizes itself in the “dim mirror” of accidental historical circumstances while yet transgressing them (in the sense of Hegel’s *aufheben*). This “achronous” movement, which only takes on a shape of self-explication within time for a finite “individual” consciousness, is realized in its own element by speculative dialectics. “Philosophy has now become for itself the apprehension of this development and as conceiving thought, is itself this development in thought. The more progress made in this development, the more perfect is the philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the perfection, the complete fulfillment of the form of philosophical thinking (the midday sun of the Idea, one could say, standing still at its zenith) removes the historical and frees the spirit from “lapsing into history.” To be more precise, according to this picture, it is genuine history itself that lapses into time, for the spirit’s pre-eternal history is indistinguishable from its morphology.<sup>15</sup> For Hegel, “gathering together the limits” meant nothing but identifying the beginning of the speculative development of the Concept with its end, the fulfillment of “being-for-itself” what it already was in itself. This Gnostic myth, turned into a project of philosophical speculation, was worded as follows: “This being-at-home-with self, or coming-to-self of spirit may be described as its complete and highest end: it is this alone that it desires and nothing else. Everything that from eternity has happened in heaven and earth, the life of God and all the deeds of time are simply the struggles of spirit to know itself, to make itself objective to itself, to find itself, be for itself, and finally unite itself to itself. It is alienated and divided, but only so as to be able to find itself and *return to itself*.”<sup>16</sup> Thus instead of searching for the erased traces of original thinking, to which we all are heirs in philosophy’s historical text, a mind loyal to this goal must rather be able to see in itself (such as it was created from

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Book I, trans. E. S. Haldane (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 22. (The translation is modified.) “Im Geiste ist es anders. Er ist Bewußtsein, frei, darum, daß in ihm Anfang und Ende zusammenfällt.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> “...die Entwicklung der Geschichte fällt in die Zeit.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. v. G. Lasson, Bd. 8 (Leipzig: F. Meiner Verlag, 1923), p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 23, italics mine.

the very beginning, not “made” by the historical *poiesis*), footprints of the “necessity of the matter which proceeds coolly on her way” and to fix what is happening by means of the only fitting word (the proper name of the thing itself — *der Sache selbst*), provided to thought by the ready-to-hand variety of the (German) language. Yet the “late philosophy” sees itself differently..

ὁ ἄναξ οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.

The lord whose oracle is in Delphi does not speak nor conceal, but signifies.<sup>17</sup>

In these words of Heraclitus, Heidegger sees a reference to the nature of philosophical discourse. Even when trying to be as clear and explicit as possible, philosophy does not tell all. It does not hide or conceal, for it is possible to conceal only what is already in one's possession, what has been somehow discovered and is (or can be) in the well-lit circle of the meaning-ful. Unsaid remains what is by no means known, but borders on what is. Unsaid remains what is not questioned, what has not become (and this means in most cases: has not *yet* become) a matter of inquiry. This area of silence and non-manifestation surrounds and delimits philosophical discourse. The phenomenon of opening and disclosing meaning, which takes place in discourse, always remains within a limited, finite horizon, though the boundaries are not perceived from within the scope of already acquired and stored meanings. There is no external prohibition and no pious self-discipline, not even recognition of the inability to cope with what has *already* become an object to work on. The matter is rather the self-consciousness of “late philosophy” and the acceptance of *precisely such* a vision of the truth.

In a way late philosophy has no claims of its own, since it is heir to the tradition, and so accepts to bear the burden of unfulfilled promises. For it, the true is τὸ ἀληθές, i. e., un-concealed, un-forgotten, un-forgettable. Un-concealed does not mean manifest, open, publicly available. The true, as un-concealed, responds to the effort of discourse, to the attempt at telling, but remains unsaid, is retained (ἐπέχει) in expectation, postpones its revelation, limits the discourse, locates the discourse in the sense of Aristotelian physics where “location” or “place” (τόπος) is defined as “the limiting surface of the containing [or surrounding] body.”<sup>18</sup> A late philosopher understands that an “epoch” (i.e., a retention of time, a retardation) is always defined not so much by what is expressed (for every new attempt at and every new outline of philosophical thinking appears unlimited to itself) as by what remains unsaid, by what will be articulated later. The logic of such a *logos*, which has renounced claim to the totality of meaning, which picks up and collects (λέγει) what has been given by being itself, while never turning it into a completed system, presupposes *sigetic*<sup>19</sup> thinking.

<sup>17</sup> Heraclitus, fr. 93DK.

<sup>18</sup> *Phys.* IV 4, 212a6f: πέρας τοῦ περιέχοντος σώματος.

<sup>19</sup> The adjective is derived from the Greek σιγᾶω — “I do not say,” “I am silent.” Cf. M. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, GA 65 (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 1994), p. 58: “das *anfängliche* Denken ist in sich *sigetisch*.”

The Ontology of Time

Being and Time in the Philosophies of Aristotle, Husserl  
and Heidegger

Chernyakov, A.

2002, X, 230 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0682-1